

**TERENTIUS  
PUBLIUS SCIURUS  
AND HIS FRIEND  
MARCUS AURELIUS**

**BY**

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**History,** I had never thought that the good squirrels had a sense of it, but of late, I have been listening to the tales from Antnee and his various squirrel tales, those of Saint Francis and then the time in the Manger. Tales of valor and great acts, past times, and

with details that can only be achieved by an oral tradition, well preserved.

## 1 ANTNEE AND THE SNOW

January has been a cold and snowy month. I managed to keep the Squirrel feeder well stocked and continued to place the corncobs for their consumption well on the top of the frozen surface. And in thanks, from time to time Antnee and his friends would return a half eaten cob to my door step, not that I had a compelling interest in consuming the reaming kernels but their hearts were in the right place.

I shook some of the sunflower seed on the ground and was ready to return when Antnee popped his head from behind a branch. He startled me and then said:

"Sir, well good morning Sir, I am sorry if I startled you. Many thanks from all Sir for the seed, we do appreciate it Sir, we do indeed. Did you enjoy the corn Sir, we enjoyed it and we thought it best to share it, we share Sir, it is our code, save and share."

I looked at the furry little face, which I now recognized from our many conversations and replied:

"Cold day today Antnee, is it not."

I suddenly realized that I was picking up his cadence of speech, I was talking like a squirrel, and I wondered if he would notice, I just did.

Antnee just kept talking, as was his way but the direction truly amazed me.

"Sir, cold, no Sir, this is not really cold, why Sir, I remember the tales of one of our famous ancestors, Terentius Publius Scuirus, Sir, yes old Terentius Publius, Sir, his tales are tales of true cold Sir, indeed they are."

I stood back and was amazed. I asked him:

"Antnee, and just who is this Terentius Publius, another one of your historical tales?"

He sat there, ruffled up his whiskers, and looked at me with a slight bit of disdain for my ignorance. I guess somehow I should have known of this squirrel. In addition, my ignorance of

squirrel history was vast, so I continued:

"Sorry Antnee, but could you refresh me on Terentius Publius, I just am unaware."

That clearly was unnecessary for he was ready to regale me with this spot of history. He started:

"Well Sir, Terentius Publius was the confidant of the good Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Yes Sir, the personal confidant of a true Roman Emperor."

I was again a bit taken aback and said:

"You mean the Marcus Aurelius who wrote the Meditations, that Marcus Aurelius?"

He again ruffled his nose and whisker and stared right at me with that side slanting squirrel eyes and said:

"That very Emperor, Sir, that very Emperor. And Sir, he had great help on those Meditations from Terentius Publius."

I knew I was in for another Antnee tale so I rushed aside the snow on one of the planting planks and sat down. Antnee jumped atop a large pot, whisking the snow away with his tale, for he too knew this would take a while, and he sat upright, his hands in a teaching manner pointing at me as he began to speak.

## **2 TERENCE PUBLIUS MEETS MARCUS AURELIUS**

The tale begins at the encampment called Carnuntum on the Danube

River. Carnuntum is a bit east of where present day Vienna is. It was built by the Emperor Tiberius and the Danube marked the border to the Roman Empire. Tribes from the north, the Macromanni and the Quadi were just two of the German tribes who were pushing across the Danube in search of land. These German tribes were highly aggressive and warlike and the Roman Legions had battled them for over a hundred years at this time. They were excellent fighters and the tall pine, oak forests along the Danube allowed them to fight in unconventional ways, and as such, they often overcame the Romans, which was unheard of. The reason was that the advantage the Roman Legions had in weaponry and organization played little role in this deep forests.

The Danube had many small tributaries and its flow created islands

and strips of land, which were excellent as barriers for any attack from the Germani tribes. At Carnuntum the Legions had settled on the south side of the Danube, across from a wide portion of the Danube which had split from the main River, and between the main body of the Danube and the small stream was an island covered in grasses and other weeds, difficult to cross but a protection from frontal attack. The Legions fortress was a large wooden structure, which abutted this small stream and was covered on the three land sides by strong log walls. There were roads on the south side of the Danube, which the Legion used for patrolling the border between Roma and the Germani.

I sat there not feeling the cold, listening to every word from the mouth of Antnee, for he was telling a

tale in a manner only a world class story teller could do. I knew that region of the Danube but his telling drew me back almost two thousand years, before Vienna and before Budapest, to the time of the wandering Germani tribes.

Marcus Aurelius arrived from Rome at Carnuntum to take up the battle against the Germani tribes. His wife Faustina had died a short while earlier and his counterpart as Emperor Lucius Verus had died. He was tired, he was aging and he knew he had to battle on. Marcus Aurelius settled in his quarters at Carnuntum, a quiet and private man, not one for false praise, a fighter respected by his men but a man of justice. He was it was said a true Stoic.

On his second day at the fortress, he went out in the afternoon, on the south side of the Danube to look at the

land and regain a feel for this tall tree forested terrain. It was then that the great Marcus Aurelius met Terentius Publius.

Marcus Aurelius walked amongst the oak and pine. The air was crisp and cold, and winter was soon to arrive. The acorns were falling at his feet and the pine cones dropped from the tall trees as the strong wind twisted their tops. Then suddenly as Marcus Aurelius turned a great oak, he ran smack into Terentius Publius, who smashed into Marcus Aurelius' leg shins and bounced off. Stunned, Terentius Publius looked up in amazement for he had never seen an Emperor before. And there before him was a tall bearded man with black and gray curled hair, his beard also speckled, his face rough and lined from being in the field and his eyes a

penetrating blue. A strong face but one of kindness. Then the Emperor spoke:

"Ah my little friend, I hope you are unhurt, it must be a fright to smash your little head into the shin of an Emperor."

Without thinking, Terentius Publius replied:

"Good Emperor Sir, it was my fault, for I did not see you there Sir, no I did not, my humble apologies, Sir, my humble apologies."

Marcus Aurelius was taken aback, a talking squirrel! He had never seen one before. Terentius Publius was also shaken for he forgot the main credo of squirrels, keep quiet in front of humans. But alas, the mouse, in this case the squirrel, was out of the bag.

Then Marcus Aurelius said:

"Squirrel, who are you and how is it that you speak and indeed speak quite well, using our finest Latin."

Terentius Publius at this point not thinking at all, for he was a very flustered squirrel replied in a manner to even make things worse:

"Emperor Sir, I also speak Greek and several of the Germani dialects. You do not want to eat me Sir, for I fear that all we are for the Germani is a meal please Sir, let me not be a meal."

Marcus Aurelius smiled and said:

"Young friend, I need someone of your talents, you not only will not be eaten but I shall feed and care for you. We can talk, you can provide me with information, we can be of great mutual



benefit. For all people and all animals are one with nature and a friend like you will be of great comfort to me."

Thus, off they went back to the fortress with Terentius Publius following at the feet of the Emperor. After a short walk the Emperor turned and said,

"What shall I call you small friend, do you have a name?"

Then Terentius Publius replied:

"My name is Terentius Publius Sciurus, and I have been here and I have travelled once to Rome with my uncle, Julius Lucius Sciurus."

The Emperor laughed and looked down at Terentius Publius and asked with the laughed still coming out:

"My little friend, who decided to call you Terentius Publius?"

He replied:

"Oh Sir, my mother loved the plays by Terentius Publius Afer, the comedies Sir, they bring joy, and we squirrels are bearers of joy Sir. Thus my mother, I miss her so Sir, she named me after the great comic playwright Sir, that I may always be reminded to bring joy Sir."

And Marcus Aurelius lifted him upon his shoulder and walked into the fortress at the amazement of all the men in the Legion and he whispered to Terentius Publius:

"Then my good friend let us bring joy to each other."

### 3 THE BATTLE WITH THE GERMANI

The winter settled in and the snows had begun. Terentius Publius had grown his heavy winter coat and if necessary, he had his large tail to wrap about himself to protect from the biting winds. Along the edge of the Danube, looking up and down river, it was now a mass of ice, ice covered in drifting snows as the winter winds blew it in dancing swirls, twisting and spiraling as if performing some dance of nature, blowing up funnels that collapsed again and formed new swirls. The river was strangely alive with currents of snow flakes, and it gave a strange sense with the rest of nature so much at its winter rest.

Marcus Aurelius looked from his window and turned to Terentius Publius and said:

"We have battled the Marcomanni and the Quadi, and yet we have invited the Naristae, their neighbors to join us in the Roman territories. We need people, peaceful peoples to settle our many lands, to be farmers and producers, yet the Germani, with some small exceptions, want to do battle. The Marcomanni especially are forever in battle."

"We seem to be winning these battles, why now we even are getting deserters from the Germani tribes, yet, I feel uncertain. What do you see in these Germani Terentius Publius?"

Terentius Publius jumped up on the window, which opened upon the river, it was covered by large curtains to block to cold winds, as well as some strange substance, which was hard but permitted light to flow through, yet no wind, and he looked at the cold and

then turned to Marcus Aurelius and commenced:

"Good Sir, this is a complex question you put to me. As you know, we do not treat territory as so sacred as you humans, we also do not battle to the death in such a brutal manner. Perhaps because we have our own dangers, such as hawks and wolves in winter, and others who see us more as food than as an enemy. But good Sir, you have vast lands, vast spaces, and many mouths to feed. I know Sir, in my trip to Rome, Sir, many people, many mouths, and few workers Sir. I gather that it is through your kindness that they eat, grain is given free to the people. For us Sir, we must find our own food, and thus Sir we travel great distances, for we do not farm as you do, we gather from what the gods have provided us. But you Sir, have great needs, especially in Rome, and these

people out here may become good farmers and meet that need."

Marcus Aurelius looked at the blowing snow and contemplated what Terentius Publius had been saying. It had merit he thought but these were Germani, not Gauls, not even Britons, they were by nature warlike and uncontrollable. Yet Terentius Publius did make a point for indeed, if they had lands and were farmers then he could get grain and reduce the burden on a dwindling treasury in Rome.

#### **4 THE FIRST OF THE MEDITATIONS**

Late at night, in the light of oil lamps, Marcus Aurelius would sit at a long wooden table, he would read some of the Greek authors and think of the meaning of their words in the context of his life as Emperor. Since he was

joined by Terentius Publius, he would now talk with him regarding some of his thoughts.

Marcus Aurelius started one night by asking Terentius Publius:

"Terentius Publius, do you believe in god, or the gods, what is it that you hold a key to your life?"

Terentius Publius replied:

"Good Sir, we manage day by day. We lack any long term vision of where we are going and we have very few philosophers. Our worries are finding some new nuts, some seeds, a warm place at night, we play with our friends, we do not fight, we do not war with one another. We are at one with most of what we live with. Yes Sir, we do indeed have enemies, but those enemies look at us from the viewpoint

of their survival not as an enemy Sir, we are their food so to say, as horrific as that may sound. We do not hunt, we just gather, we take what nature has delivered to us, we are one with nature."

Marcus Aurelius replied:

"I have studied many philosophies, and the one that keeps resonating in my heart is that of the Stoics. The god of the Stoics is in all of nature, in me and you. In fact Terentius Publius, the mere fact that we are such good friends is in a way an affirmation of that belief, for in us is the same god, a manifestation of our oneness."

Terentius Publius replied:

"A weighty observation Sir, and then is your task as a Stoic one who seeks wisdom, as for example I seek nuts

and seeds, or is it more, say as I seek joy, the pleasure of every moment?"

Marcus Aurelius replied:

"Terentius Publius, you have an interesting conundrum. You speak as one seeking wisdom, but your words, even your actions in seeking joy as you say make you look like an Epicurean rather than a Stoic. Yet your sense of oneness with nature again brings you back to the Stoic. Our beliefs as a Stoic have three avenues which we pursue; first is knowledge, which we gather through the many impressions which we perceive from the world and then which we compare to the many other realities and finally we are able to reach a true but critical knowledge of what nature truly is. This we call the logic of our ways. Second is the physical and mental existence we all share, the tension between the mind

and the body, the very physics of the physical and metaphysical. It is in this context that we have souls, souls which reason and those souls which do not. Third, we have the fact is that the true end of man is happiness and that happiness is achieved by living according to nature. This is the ethics of our lives."

Terentius Publius moved slowly across the large wooden table and placed himself between two warm lamps and looked up at Marcus Aurelius. He then replied:

"Sir, you have just told me what you think you should think. But Sir, perhaps you should tell me what you yourself think. Your thoughts Sir, your Meditations on life and its meaning and what for you is goodness. That Sir would be important. Perhaps Sir we

could help each other through this understanding."

Marcus Aurelius pushed his chair back, and a smile came to his face. He replied:

"Terentius Publius, that is a wonderful idea, I shall prepare my thoughts, we can discuss them, they will become my Meditations, my private notes on living a good life. Let us begin now my little friend. Let us begin and write them down, help me through this and I will be ever so grateful."

He continued:

"What shall we discuss first, my friend?"

Terentius Publius then asked:

"Sir, you rest on reason, your ability to think through the details, so why not say that, write that down Sir."

So Marcus Aurelius wrote:

*"Do you have reason? I have reason" Thus use it. If reason functions as it should, what else should you do."*

Terentius Publius then said:

"Sir, very well said Sir, use reason and then rely upon its results, very good Sir."

Marcus Aurelius smiled as he started his writings. His small friend was quite supportive. Then Terentius Publius said:

"Sir, perhaps this is of a private nature, and you know how people look at your words to seek an advantage,

Perhaps Sir you should put this in Greek. In addition Sir, in Greek it tends to take an air of true reason."

Marcus Aurelius then said:

"Terentius Publius, a fine idea, my Greek is somewhat good, can you help me on this?"

Terentius Publius agreed and they wrote together:

"λογον εχεις εχω τι ουν ου χρα τουτου γαρ το εαυτου παιουντος τι αλλο θελεις"

"Very good Sir!" said Terentius Publius. The Greek flowed well, simple and direct.

They spoke through the night, idea after idea flowed, was translated into Greek as they were discussed.

Then Terentius Publius said:

"Sir, remember your words about the arrogant, they are often looked upon as bearers of truth, they by their pressing and influence look down on others and seek the truth they only are holders of. How would you phrase that Sir."

Marcus Aurelius then wrote:

*"Do not copy the ideas of the arrogant or let them lead you, always look at things as they truly are."*

"Again very well said Sir!" replied Terentius Publius. Late into the night they worked, night after night, writing about how to deal with neighbors, impulses of the body, the pleasure of work, the complexity of the words of philosophers. They spoke of the

transitory nature of this life, that today they work and live and think and reason and that in battle on the morrow all may end, or a tree may fall, but that each day one must live with righteousness and goodness.

After several months, Marcus Aurelius had amassed many such observations with the help of Terentius Publius, all in a very simple and readable Greek. At night, they would discuss both old ones and add new ones. Terentius Publius could see a calm coming upon Marcus Aurelius, he had begun to understand life, in fact, Terentius Publius too had come to understand Humans. What a difficult existence he thought these humans have, they reason but reason so complexly. They reason at times with so much of their emotions and they are not directed towards the simple things.

## 5 DISCUSSIONS ON OFFSPRING

Then one night Marcus Aurelius was stricken with pain, it was after a meal even though the food was consumed sparingly. He knew that this might be the beginning of his end. His physicians recommended a poultice and some warm herb broth to expel the poisons, but Marcus Aurelius thought it to be much more, for he had begun to achieve what he was searching for, knowledge and understanding. He knew he was human and mortal and he understood he was nearing that time.

That evening he and Terentius Publius sat at his table and instead of talking about philosophy, they spoke of the future, a future without either of them.

Marcus Aurelius started:



"Terentius Publius, one of the things we humans have to do, especially an emperor, is to plan for when he is no longer here. He must choose his successor, the person who follows him after his demise. I have thought well of my son Commodus, I have selected him to follow me after my passing. Yet there are times I see that he may not be the best choice. You have met him, you see him in a way I do not, what say you of him?"

Terentius Publius then said:

"Sir, good friend, one is always kind to one's children, we let them loose quite early. You humans on the other hand overlook their shortcomings and keep them about for long periods. This good Sir about that which we spoke, of reason, and arrogance, of friendship, and knowledge. I know Commodus, he in all respect to you my good friend he

is not your true heir. It is not that he is not your son, Sir, it is that he does not have the values one seeks in such a person. In fact my good friend I feel he will do your name a grave disservice."

Marcus Aurelius replied:

"He is my offspring, the son of my lovely departed wife the Lady Faustina. It is in her memory that I keep him, he reminds me of her, he is Faustina who still lives on."

Terentius Publius then asked:

"What of the good Tiberius Claudius, Sir, your fine son in law, a fine pick Sir, a fine man. And if I say so myself, mature and with good judgment, like you yourself say Sir."

Marcus Aurelius then replied:

"I agree Terentius Publius, but then with him as a choice there would be a great deal of civil unrest, it must be my son Commodus. I see no other choice."

Terentius Publius then said:

"Sir, I suggest then you think of Valerius Maximianus, for he won many victories for you this year alone, Sir, a fine and well seasoned man Sir."

But the conversation was continuing to go nowhere, the heart and not the mind was playing the tune. In the end, Marcus Aurelius stayed with Commodus, which in his eyes was a link to Faustina.

## 6 DEATH OF MARCUS AURELIUS

Towards the end of the third winter together, having finished the

Meditations, and still at the Danube, Marcus Aurelius had clearly weakened. He ate little, and drank little. His face was worn and he was tired in the evenings. Instead of discussing philosophy each night, which challenged the brain, they spoke of the past, of battles, of victories, of defeats and of old friends. So many friends but so many no longer with the world.

Marcus Aurelius' face was turning a deep orange-yellow. His pain increased and his physicians treated him with herbs that Terentius Publius knew well but he also knew that they were of no benefit and indeed all squirrels were warned to avoid them, for they were poisonous. But the good Marcus Aurelius was in his final days.

The night of the 17th of March of 933 Ab Urbe Condita, the good Marcus Aurelius took to his bed for the last

time. His physicians continued to treat him but to no avail. He quietly asked all of them to leave, for he wanted to be by himself.

Then he softly called out:

"Terentius Publius, are you here?"

And thereupon the good friend, Terentius Publius, jumped from the rafter in the Emperor's quarters and ran to the bed of the good Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius then said:

"Terentius Publius, good friend, my time is close, the new Emperor will arrive shortly. I want to thank you my good friend for helping me make this life somewhat worthwhile. You have brought me some great joy, the joy of a friendship, which was so enlightening. I am afraid that there is nothing I can truly do for you, but my

friend, remember that I was truly your friend indeed."

At that moment, Marcus Aurelius patted the head of Terentius Publius and his gray tail folded up into a large ball. Terentius Publius went to the cheek of the Emperor and licked it kindly. He then said:

"Sir, you too were a great friend indeed. I shall go forth and tell all I know what a great man you were. Indeed, your Mediations Sir, they must find great acceptance, for your insights are truly insights of a wise man."

Marcus Aurelius then said:

"There, there Terentius Publius, take the copy of our writings, for they are indeed the work of us two, and do with them what you will. Fare well good friend."

At that moment, Marcus Aurelius let out one final breath and he succumbed to that great rest.

For a moment, there was a tear in the eyes of Terentius Publius. Here was a friend of the like he had never had. A true friend of mind and spirit. Then he heard the others returning and he grabbed the Meditations and off he ran.

## **7 RETURN TO THE FORESTS**

Then Antnee moved in a more somber way and repositioned himself on the largest pot. The day was getting late and I was enthralled by this tale, the detail was magnificent. He looked more closely at me and I at him and I said:

"Then Antnee, what happened?"

He replied:

"Then Sir, the good and generous Terentius Publius saw that he must leave. The new Emperor Commodus, Sir, an evil and cruel man Sir, truly an evil and cruel man, for we squirrels can see that type immediately Sir, not like you or like Marcus Aurelius Sir, but a man who seeks true evil, that was Commodus Sir. So, Terentius Publius saw it was time for him to leave, and he went one more time to the place where the ashes of the good Marcus Aurelius were spread, the edge of the Danube, and he could see the beginning of Spring arrive, the flowers just appearing, and he sat upon a tree stump, and he recalled the good Emperor, their time discussing his Stoic beliefs, and the times they shared with true questions of import, a man Sir, a true and kindly man, who loved

the trees and rivers, the ferns and flowers, who was at peace with himself. It was that man he would remember and tell his story for generations to come. Then Terentius Publius knew what his mission would be. He would be the chronicler of the good Emperor Marcus Aurelius, he would set out, as all good squirrel chroniclers do, and go from tree to tree, trunk to trunk, valley to valley and tell all he met of this kind man and his ways."

"It was by this path Sir that I today tell you and others have told others for many springs and winters. I hope Sir that you too can tell many of your kind the story also."

I looked at Antnee in amazement and replied:

"Indeed Antnee, this is a story worthy of great merit, and I will be honored to convey it to many more. Well good night my friend, sleep well in your nest."

Antnee smiled and looked at me and said as only a close friend can to another:

"Sir, you know that your warm seed beds are on in your basement Sir, do you not, well Sir I will sleep there this evening."

I replied without skipping a heartbeat:

"Well Antnee, let's go into the house for the night, you can use the backdoor with me."

Thus, we both walked in, I went upstairs and he down to the basement.

Sleep came refreshingly with visions of the great Marcus Aurelius.