Dear Young Marcus,

Greetings from your brother! I hope everything is going well for you and the rest of the family. I can’t remember how long it has been since they have disowned me for choosing my life as an actor. I understand that it was not best for our father, a senator, to have a son who was living a life of *infamis*. After all, who wants people to know that their son has relinquished all of his rights as a citizen of Rome for a profession of entertaining people?

I hope you understand why I made the decision I did. I just couldn’t handle the possibility of dying as I served in the army. The thought of death has literally scared me. I was willing to endure any other form of pain besides death. There was more than just the avoidance of my duty to the army that led me to pursuing a life of an actor. Ever since I was your age, mother and father had taken me to the *ludus* or circus whenever it was occurring. Father would go in order to keep up his appearances as a senator and to spend time with the emperor. Mother and I would watch a theatre performance in the midday before the afternoon gladiator fights. I couldn’t help but be entertained by the talented performers on the stage each time I saw them. And the applause and cheers they received after each performance, I desired to have that applause to be for me.

In the months since I have left you and Portia at home, I have experienced so much. I was able to be hired by a troupe of performers to put on performances with them. I’m quite new to the profession so I often get the worse picks of parts. I don’t complain because I could be out on the streets with no place to go if I wasn’t in this troupe. Because I am new to this, I usually am asked to portray a female on stage. I have spent quite a long time observing women so that I can put on the best portrayal of them in each part I play. I usually enjoy playing the woman, but it’s
those scenes where I must have a love interest that makes me wish I could play the male character once. I don’t think I need to go into detail the things that I am asked to do onstage. Many of the elite don’t approve of me playing a woman on the stage. They think that what I do as an actor is disturbing and should not be recognized as acting. If only they understood that this was just my job.

On the topic of women, I have found that being an actor comes with great perks. Whether or not I agree with taking part in these perks is whole different story. Many of my fellow actors in the troupe often have affairs with other men’s wives. The women just seem to love us for entertaining them. I don’t know if it’s our humor that they like or the fact that we often bare a majority of our bodies on stage. Many of the women have wanted me to join them after each performance but I kindly said no. I’d rather not accidentally have a rendezvous with the emperor’s wife or daughter. One of the men in my troupe, Mnester, would often have affairs with Claudius’s wife Messalina. He, like me, originally ignored her advances, but eventually gave in. Currently, he is stuck at the palace until she releases him. I hope to never become like him.

I wish you could come out and see one of my performances. I have been traveling all about to many places in Rome. As an actor you go where the audience is, and that all depends on the place where the ludus or munera is taking place. I find myself performing in temporary theatres and then some more permanent ones. My next stop is going to be the Theater of Pompey. Most performance days are the same. I am told which venue to show up to and where. I bring all of my costumes with me and props. These are usually early mornings because we have a lot of setting up to do before the performances. We get into costume, practice any scenes that need work, and wait until the people fill up the front of the stage. As soon as it’s the appropriate
time, we begin the show. Sometimes we even put on multiple shows a day. If you can escape from Father, you should come see me. It’s not too far from the home. Maybe Portia might wish to join you. She used to never get out of the house that much. It might be good for her to get away too. Also, if you are lucky, we might be doing something with the masks we recently made. It’s really different from what we have done before.

One last thing I should share with you: I have gotten quite the attention from Emperor Claudius. I think he recognizes that I am my father’s son, whether my father agrees with it or not. Besides that, Claudius has asked me to come perform some of my comedy privately in his palace. I have yet to take him up on his offer because I have been so busy with the performances by the troupe. However, if I can get some time away I might go and make an appearance. It always helps to have someone of his status on my side.

I’m afraid that I have no idea when I will be able to write to you next. My life as an actor can get pretty demanding from all the traveling I do to the rehearsal of new material. I hope that I can do so soon. Please send my love to Portia for me. I miss that little girl so much. Now that you are the oldest in the house, it is up to you to take extra care of her and Mother. If she is willing to listen, please also tell Mother that I miss her and hope to see her at one of the performances at the next ludi. Despite my departure from the home, I’m sure she’ll be out for a good play every now and then.

Much love,

Paelignus