**THE ROMAN CENTURION'S SONG**

by Rudyard Kipling

Legate, I had the news last night -- my cohort order home

By ship to Portus Itius and thence by road to Rome.

I've marched the companies abroad, The arms are stowed below.

Now let another take my sword. Command me not to go!

I've served in Britain for forty years, from Vectis to the Wall.

I have none other home than this, nor any life at all.

Last night I did not understand, But now the hour draws near

That calls me to my native land,I feel that land is here.

Here where men say my name was made,

Her where my work was done,

Here where my dearest dead are laid,

My wife -- my wife and son.

Here where time, custom, greif and toil, Age, memory, service, love,

Have rooted me in British soil. Ah, how can I remove?

For me this land, that sea, these air, those folk and field suffice.

What purple Southern pomp can match our changeful Northern skies,

Black with December snows unshed or pearled with August haze,

The clanging arch of steel-grey March or June's long-lighted days?

You'll follow widening Rhodanus till vine and olive lean

Aslant before the sunny breeze that sweeps Nemausus clean

To Arelate's triple gate, but let me linger on,

Here where our stiff-necked British oaks confront Euroclydon!

You'll take the old Aurelian Road through shore-descending pines,

Where, blue as any peacock's neck, the Tyrrhene Ocean shines.

You'll go where laurel crowns are won, But will you e'er forget

The scent of hawthorn in the sun Or bracken in the wet?

Let me work here for Britain's sake -- At any task you will --

A marsh to drain, a road to make Or native troops to drill.

Some Western camp (I know the Pict.) Or granite border keep,

Mid seas of heather derelict, Where our old messmates sleep.

Legate, I come to you in tears. My cohort order home!

I've served in Britain forty years. What should I do in Rome?

Here is my heart, my soul, my mind -- The only life I know.

I cannot leave it all behind. Command me not to go!