

PROCUA

Marion H. Youngquist



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PROCUA

Second Printing

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for Ted

teacher, pastor, husband

Preface

Since childhood, I've been intrigued by the singular Bible verse in Matthew's gospel which mentions Pilate's wife. With a twinkle in her eyes, my mother said, "Pilate should have listened to his wife. He would have saved himself a lot of trouble!"

Several novels have been written about Pilate, but few – that I could find – about his wife. Through the years, I pursued other stories, but postponed writing about Procula (so named from apocryphal sources).

On September 11, 2001 my life – like many – changed because of the Twin Towers disaster. Two days later, my husband Ted and I were in New York City, staying near Union Square where poignant vigils and stark memorials mourned the victims. Acrid ash hung heavy in the air. Picture flyers of missing persons haunted us. We realized that many people would never fulfill their dreams.

That weekend, we sailed to Bermuda – a somber cruise. From the ship's library, I read *Desire of the Everlasting Hills* by Thomas Cahill, a historian's view of Jesus. When I returned home, I read a fine historical study of *Pontius Pilate* by Ann Wroe, a London author and editor. These two books rekindled my desire to write about Pilate's wife. I still had time to fulfill my dream. I began her story.

The interest of family and friends encouraged me. Valuable critiques were made by: Mary Mulroy, Director of the Wauwatosa, Wisconsin Public Library; Dr Tim Crain, Professor of History, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee;

and Dr. Lucille Rosenberg, a Milwaukee child psychiatrist (retired) and poet.

Manuscript help came from Grace Gunnlaugsson and Knute Jacobson. Readers included Sue and Bill Romo, LaVerne Wuebben and her son Robert, Becky Ramirez, Dorothea Winek, Sue Jacobson, Eleanor “Ellie” Ellison, Mary Smith, Dr. Karl Barth, Ted and our children – Eric and wife Barbara, Marcia and Ed (Hunter), Margaret and Steve (Fleming), Mary Ellen (Karalis), and our Mexican daughter, Alma Vera. Technical assistance was provided by Susan Klopfer and Justin Kutka. I’m very grateful that Gary Drury and staff of Drury’s Publishing, Hodgenville, KY wanted to see my manuscript.

When we lived in Glen Ellyn, IL, my dear friend Sara Hill (now deceased) critiqued my stories when I began writing fiction. My pursuit and fulfillment stems from her many hours of encouragement.

To all I can only say *Thank you, Thank you, Thank you.*

Marion Neal Horn Youngquist
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Time Line

EASTERN TERRITORY--Rulers and Divisions

6 B.C.E. - Birth of Christ

37 B.C. E. - 4 B.C.E. Herod the Great rules

At his death, the Eastern Territory was divided between three sons:

4 B.C.E. - 34 C.E. Philip, the Tetrarch

(Batanea-northeastern area, 1/4)

4 B.C.E. - 39 C.E. Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch

(Galilee-north and Peraea, east. 1/4th)

4 B.C.E. - 6 C.E. Herod Archelaus, the Ethnarch

(Judaea, Samaritis, Idumaea, 1/2)

6 C.E. Province of Judaea, Samaritis and Idumaea established.

Prefects:

Coponius 6 C.E. - 9 C.E.

Ambivius 9 C.E. - 12 C.E.

Annius Rufus 12 C.E. - 15 C.E.

14 C.E. Emperor Augustus dies

Emperor Tiberius (Augustus' stepson) rules

Prefects:

Valerius Gratus 15 C.E. - 26 C.E.

Pontius Pilate 26 C.E. - 36 C.E.

29 C.E. John the Baptist is beheaded in Peraea.

33 C.E. Jesus of Nazareth is crucified in Judaea.

36 C.E. Pontius Pilate is recalled to Roma.

37 C.E. Emperor Tiberius dies

ROMAN EMPIRE - PRINCIPATES

27 B.C.E. - 14 C.E. Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus
(Augustus)

14 C.E. - 37 C.E. Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar

37 C.E. - 41 C.E. Gaius Caesar Germanicus
(Caligula)

PROCULA occurs primarily during the reign of
Tiberius.

. . . Besides, while Pilate was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream.

Matthew 27:19

This novel is fiction based on historical personalities and events.

An asterisk indicates further explanation under Notes.

Chapter I

When Pilate, Tuum and I sailed from Caesarea last week, I hoped my nightmares were left behind. Not so. Even here in Alexandria within the safe walls of Lucius' compound, one of my most disturbing dreams haunted me again last night.

Noise – the noise is incredible. Then I remember my father's house in far-off Arretium where we sat at the table in midsummer, sipping sweet wine and eating olives, goat cheese and crusty bread. How I long for a summer like that. Instead, I'm here in a banquet hall with the guests half-drunk, tossing bread sticks in mock fights and weaving unsteadily across the room. My husband will come later and make a grand entrance with his entourage – an entrance that will impress everyone with his prestige and position as Prefect of Judaea. To think that I've ended up here, beyond the Great Sea.

*Antipas, the Tetrarch, (who would like to call himself King) is bleary-eyed and paunchy. His speech is garbled. He claps his hands.

“Shplay!” he signals the musicians. The drummer taps a rhythmic beat as a flute and lyre join in harmony.

From a side room, his step-daughter *Salome enters,

swaying to the music. She is pudgy. Perhaps she has seen thirteen summers. Swathed in filmy red silk, she begins to dance – if that is what you call it. She is not graceful, but woodenly goes through the motions. She raises a hand above her head, making jerky circles while she twirls awkwardly.

I watch her mother *Herodias who was once married to the Tetrarch's brother. The woman has a sly smile on her face. She moves her shoulders, nods her head as if signaling young Salome to dance more seductively. I find the girl's performance more sad than suggestive. I slip away, out onto a cool marble balcony. I feel so alone. I am glad to be away from the raucous laughter and poor entertainment.

I came to the party as a good-will gesture. My husband, *Pilate, will join me later. He doesn't trust the Tetrarch and avoids eating at his table. But I, a loyal wife and of less importance, can toy with my food and chance the wine. Dare I ask – would it matter if I died? A wife is easily replaced. Perhaps Antipas would offer his clumsy stepdaughter to remain in Roma's favor.

The music stops. I must return to my place. As I slip into the room, I find the mood of the party has suddenly shifted. Something has happened. I hesitate to speak to people, lest I give some oblique signal or favor to a particular group. Roma rules because it stands above the petty factions that vie for power here, so I wait for Pilate to come striding in with a confident air, superior to Antipas and his fiefdom.

Guests are whispering. I can't understand this dialect very well. I depend on dear Tuum, my maid who never went to school as I did, but speaks a half-dozen languages. She leaves to refill my wine glass. The evening wears on. Finally, the

servants come in with plates of stuffed dates, honeyed pastries, spicy nuts and sweet grapes. I eat a handful – watching, waiting for whatever will happen.

Trumpet notes announce a grand entrance. I expect to see Pilate enter with his royal guard. I half-rise to meet him. Instead, a servant hobbles in bearing the bloodied head of some prisoner on a silver platter – wild eyes staring into this final death-trap.

I scream.

I awaken with Tuum shaking me. “Bibi! Bibi! Wake up! It’s the bad dream again.”

Although she is a bit younger than I, she holds me against her breast like a loving mother. In a few moments, I grow quiet, accustom my eyes to the darkness that lingers just before dawn.

“Oh, Tuum, you are so good to me.”

“You are the one who is good. You rescued me.”

I smile with a memory better than the dream. Once, Tuum – so dear to me – was owned by a rug merchant in Roma. I, also, know what it is to be indebted to another. When I recall my story, I understand why Tuum and I have such a close relationship. We have been together for over twenty years.

Tuum pads over the cool stone floor. She pours a goblet of water. I take small sips. She wipes my brow with a damp towel. I close my eyes with a deep sigh. I will feign sleep, so Tuum can get her rest. These early hours will be spent mulling over my life – how I happen to be here and what the future may bring when we leave tomorrow. Then I will pray to *Yahveh – the One who can be trusted – and sleep.

For almost a decade, I've been troubled by that ghastly experience. Sometimes another bloodied face also haunts my dreams. Often I relive both experiences. However, I wasn't the only one affected that night. Women fainted. Men rushed from the room, covering their mouths, only to hang retching over a marble balustrade. The guests quickly dispersed as Antipas stumbled away, steadied by two servants. Even Herodias, head haughtily held high, left the room pale and shaken.

When our group left *Machaerus, I vowed never to be in Herod Antipas' presence again. Then I wished to be back in Roma! We had soothsayers and holy men there, but we didn't kill them. We let them shake their fists and utter dire warnings in the name of Apollo or Diabolus. We Romans had various kinds of gods. We borrowed many from the Greeks. Zeus became our Jupiter and Ares was changed to our Mars. This multiplicity of gods amused Pilate. He scorned them all.

"The gods claim Absolute Truth. . . or so their faithful followers believe. I bow to all and none!" he laughed. "I only believe in Roma's power. Hail to the Emperor!"

However, when Pilate took his eastern post, he discovered the Judaeans believed differently. Truth only came from their deity, Yahveh, who claimed them as a chosen people through his divine will. Yahveh was an unseen, yet living god. No statue existed of him. A person could not bargain with Yahveh like we Romans did with our gods. This mysterious deity demanded their devotion, yet cared for his people. If I were a Judaeans, would Yahveh erase that awful night at Machaerus from my memory? Or was I always doomed to

live with that bloody scene? I pondered about that evening for a long time.

Dreams often haunted me. Maybe my mother's death caused them. As a child, I struggled with curious dreams. Always, there was a barrier. I would discover a heavy wooden door that wouldn't open, although I fiercely pounded on it. Only once, I pushed it open and went into blinding light. When I looked back, the door was still there – shut tight. I pounded to get back outside again. I woke up, flailing the air with my fists.

In another dream I carefully crossed a river, bridged by a heavy log. When I reached the center – over the rushing current – the log began to roll. I danced little steps to keep my balance. I felt myself falling into the cold water.

If I told Cook about my dreams, she'd say that I had too many sweets after my supper. Next day she'd feed me a nourishing vegetable soup to restore my health. She thought her thick peasant mixture cured everything. That was many years ago. When I still have vivid nightmares, I secretly wish for a bowl of that wonderful soup to restore my health. It remains a pleasant memory of Arretium, my birthplace.

In Caesarea, Tuum calmed my fears. When Pilate was away or working late, Tuum would suggest that we climb to the palace rooftop. We watched many colorful sunsets streak the evening sky with pale peach and aqua tints. We played board games, or I practiced my flute (playing rather badly). Tuum always clapped her hands for more. She was my slave and knew how slaves gained approval from their owners.

I encouraged Tuum to draw pictures, which she did quite well – intricate stylized flowers and birds, reminiscent of rug patterns in her former master’s shop. When we grew quiet, I looked at the first evening star and thought about my life. How did I end up in Judaea, so far from Italia – from Roma – from Arretium?

Perhaps it was my destiny from birth. I was named *Procula*, from the word *procul*, meaning far, distant, remote. Did my parents give me that odd name because both were so far from their childhood homes – my mother, Roma, and my father, the Alpes region?

Now I, too, have wandered across the Roman Empire – so faraway that my name matches my life.

Chapter II

Arretium, where I was born, was located north of Roma in the center of Italia. It was one of the twelve communities of the historic Etruscan Federation, founded centuries ago. It ruled Roma for a hundred years. Artifacts show that the Etruscans were more cultured than their conquerors. Their artisans created the famed buccero nero, black ware, some six centuries ago.

When the empire expanded, tile was needed everywhere. Clay was plentiful so bricks, pipes and conduits were produced for continual projects like long aqueducts, tunnels and roads. So Arretium always prospered. Although Roma liked to ignore this, the late great statesman *Caius Maecenas – one of Emperor Augustus’ most trusted advisers – came from Arretium. I was proud of my birthplace.

Arretium was also noted for red-glazed tableware, an export that the Roman government encouraged. Many potters were freedmen, but even slaves who copied Greek designs were considered prized artisans. Some had their own distinctive stamps and proudly marked their work. My father laughed that Arretium tilemakers would always have work because Romans built so many bathhouses.

As a young man, my father traveled from the northern Alps region to learn about tile production. I absorbed some of his adventurous spirit through his old tales of kings and

ogres in the great dark forest where his ancestors had lived. After he met my mother, he decided to stay in Arretium. When some kiln owners formed a guild, they asked his advice. Eventually, he became manager for their expanding exports. Once, I found some unique red-glazed cups from Arretium in a Jerusalem marketplace. I bought a dozen just to enjoy looking at something from my hometown.

My mother was never well. She met my father when she was sent by her wealthy family to the northern hill country to escape Roma's summer heat. She became ill on the journey and stopped at Arretium. There, she stayed with a banker's family. By the time summer had passed, she was in love with my father. She married and stayed there. At least, that was the story she told me. Now I believe there was another reason – an earlier relationship – so that her parents discouraged her return to Roma.

Usually, my mother was silent about her past. Sometimes she mentioned a beautiful domus in Roma. Her imperial blood came from the Claudii ancestral line. No doubt, she married beneath her social class. We never visited relatives, nor did any come to see us.

My mother died when I was seven. I remember her lying in a darkened room, holding my face in her hands and kissing my forehead. She let me hold my new-born sister, at first so pink and warm. Then both closed their eyes forever. Each spring my father and I placed lilia at the underground tomb where they were buried. A local artist did a small fresco on the tomb's walls. It depicted a musician with his double flute and a swaying dancer. The music and dance that illuminated

the walls also provided me some solace. Still, the face of my dead sister haunted me for a long time.

My father never spoke about his loss, but hugged me daily before I went to school. Girls were better educated in Arretium than in Roma – a fact ignored by my Roman relatives. My father always stopped his work to quiz me when I returned from classes. We were devoted to each other and the household slaves were devoted to our needs. I remember my childhood as an untroubled life.

One early memory remains of my first love. When I was five years old, I watched Guiseppi, a fine young potter, work at his wheel with the easy grace of an athlete. He shaped the wet gray clay with his agile hands as his foot moved the spinning wheel. Smooth shapely vases and bowls emerged from his stand. A lock of black curly hair fell over his forehead as he concentrated on his work. I thought he was as handsome as a Caesar's son although I had no idea of how a Caesar's son looked.

Guiseppi would hand me small pieces of clay which I formed into little animals like odd-shaped zebras even if I had never seen any. My cows were complete with udders. Dogs and cats had elongated tails. One day, I announced that when I grew up, I would marry him.

“Of course, I will marry you, Procula,” Guiseppi laughed, “and we will live in a castle-by-the-sea.”

However, in spring – when the birds were flying – Guiseppi married his dark-haired sweetheart. I was heartbroken. His bride said that I could come to supper with them the very next week.

Guisseppi swept me up in his arms and added, “I am only a poor potter. Someday, Procula, you’ll live in a castle-by-the-sea with a real prince.”

At least half of his prediction came true.

I was eleven on that fateful day when I came home from school and found our servants weeping. My father had been killed as he checked the inventory on an outgoing shipment. A wagon, too heavily loaded, toppled over and he was caught in the chaos. He died instantly.

The next days were a blur. My father was buried beside my mother in the family tomb. I didn’t know what would happen to me. Our Cook comforted me as best she could. Three days later, a tall stranger arrived and told me he was my *avunculus* – Zio Ammonius, my mother’s brother.

He and his assistant, Lucius, had arrived in an impressive carriage. How the neighbors gawked and whispered! The curtains were drawn, so rumors spread about golden cups and damask pillows inside. Indeed, the pillows were soft to cushion our ride, but I didn’t see any golden cups until we reached Roma.

“Procula,” my uncle announced abruptly, “you will return with us to Roma. You will live with your aunt, Zia Terentia, and me at Domum Fontana.” He added in a stern voice, “You’re a very fortunate young girl that we are willing to give you a home.”

I tried not to be fearful since he was my only uncle, but from the beginning I felt a certain wariness. For one thing, he seldom looked directly at me. He always gazed above my

head or out of the window, as if he didn't want to see me. He tilted back his large head with a slight gesture to suggest his hawk-like nose smelled an offending odor. Did he suspect that I would interfere with his well-ordered life? It was a fleeting thought that I would use later. I could irritate him with a feigned innocence. I knew I was smarter than he suspected.

Zio Ammonius stood erect. His height and manner made him an impressive figure, easily recognized as a member of the aristocratic *honestiores* class. That meant he had a million sesterces and provided some public service by sponsoring a few arena games. His firm jaw jutted out from a long neck. His gray hair was cropped close. His mouth remained firm and serious. Later, I realized that he seldom smiled at his family. I saw from his narrowed eyelids and piercing black eyes a resentment over my presence. However, he always acted as a genial host, greeting anyone else with a warm *Ave amicus!*

Zio's cloak was of finest gray wool. A golden band encircled his upper arm. On one hand, he wore a large cameo of Emperor Caesar Augustus. A second golden ring bore his own insignia to imprint documents. His large hands quickly grasped my father's will even before it was offered. He stroked his head as if deep in thought.

"Procula will return with us to Roma in the morning!" he announced. "My word is law!"

Cook protested, "Are you sure it's the right. . . ?" and then stopped.

So my trunk was packed with clothes, an inlaid box of my mother's jewelry, a few scrolls, and my father's Mithras god,

a terra cotta statue. My father never celebrated Mithras Day on December twenty-fifth. Probably, the little idol was some potter's sample that he viewed as an art object. My father really followed the Greek practice of a Stoic, accepting whatever came without complaint. Usually, I followed his example. No more. With luck and cunning I would change my uncle's plans for me. I would stay in Arretium.

Early that morning, Cook came to my uncle. "Sir," she said with a respectful nod, "now that my husband and I have been granted our freedom, we could keep the house and take care of Procula until she marries . . ."

Zio Ammonius raised his eyebrows in disdain. "Stay here? In Arretium? Never! As the only child of my late sister, I am her legal guardian. Her future is secure with me."

Cook stood her ground. "Don't take her away from the only home she's known."

"She will have advantages in Roma that will benefit everyone," he sniffed. "My sister married beneath her class. I'll see that doesn't happen to Procula."

That ended the conversation. Lucius took my hand and guided me to the carriage. As two sleek steeds responded to the driver's whip, I turned to wave to the servants. Cook wiped her eyes and, trembling, I waved back.

"What will happen to them?" I asked.

Zio Ammonius frowned at me. In an irritated voice, he grumbled, "Your father decreed in his will that they should be set free. Such foolishness! When I think what they would bring in Roma . . ."

Lucius gave me a sympathetic look. During negotiations with the tile management, I wondered about Lucius who was

not a slave, yet always a step behind my uncle. He accommodated Zio Ammonius with stylus and ink as my uncle signed documents and wrapped up my father's business affairs.

Lucius had a regal bearing, an inner self-assurance that gave him dignity and authority when he walked into a room. He was of medium height, dark-skinned, and wore a flowing saffron robe marked by a jet-black geometric design. His black and tan striped turban was centered with a topaz stone that glistened in the sunlight. Exotic as a foreign prince, it was hard not to stare at him. His quick brown eyes measured every movement, every word. Occasionally, my uncle depended on Lucius' knowledge. Lucius also carried a leather pouch with the diploma, a passport which allowed my uncle certain privileges in travel. It also conveyed to others that my uncle was someone of great importance. Lucius' hands were smooth and soft. I felt comforted by his gentle touch.

When the carriage pulled away, I didn't look back. My father's servants were fortunate to stay in Arretium. Even at eleven, I knew that while I was not a slave, I certainly was not free. In my head, I formed a plan to return to Arretium. I would scheme. I would be victorious.

Zio Ammonius was seated so he could view the passing scenery. Lucius and I sat together with our backs against the driver's rack. Moved with emotion and the swaying carriage, I felt queasy. I wiped away a few tears with the back of my hand while Zio Ammonius avoided looking at me.

Lucius put a cushion in his lap. He arranged the folds of his robe and then motioned to me. "If you're tired, you can rest here."