DINNER ON THE ROAD TO PARIS

“December 27: at the gates of the Parisii.” 51 B.C. -- as such is counted today.

“The day never dawned. There was no descent into twilight. This was the day of the year feared by all people. The more primitive, the greater the fear that the sun would never return. Wailing was believed to reach the sun-god and turn him back. – I wonder?” so Caesar would, much later, finish this diary entry.

At a twilight that was little differentiated from the whole dark day, while wailing grew, Caesar crossed the river *Sequana ,* over hastily constructed bridges, onto the Island home of new-made *socii*, The *Parisii*.

Side-by-side with wailing mourners for the death of light, torch bearers from these recently-sworn allies of Rome were lined for miles, lighting his way.

Though blinded by the flickering lights, the great General, a steadying hand on his tuned horse, continued an even pace toward the highlighted black blur across his path.

Behind him, and in front of him, and alongside him, when given space by the mourners, his trenching cohorts had begun preparing, making a secure and familiar setting for his legions to spend three full, restorative nights after months of siege. They trusted their General to offer them the best. Thus, they gave their best. Caesar glimpsed hundreds of cooks’ wagons setting hearths and lighting fires in preparation for the darkest-of-day’s main meal. His expert *chasseurs* had brought word of the splendors available, and he had dictated tonight’s menu. Rarely were such perfect gastronomic conditions for spoiling hard-working men available on winter campaign.

“Rarely does one cross the river Sequana.*”* Caesar smacked his lips.

All this dark day, hundreds of assistants had seined this great river to gather succulent trout and tiny gray shrimp, so fragrantly fresh they popped in the mouth like candy.

Caesar also made note of the wine-wagons unloading their huge amphorae at campsites. “Every drop of those Campanian wines will be well appreciated, and brimming cups will do restorative work, healing spirits and underscoring fealty to Rome.”

Snowflakes blew in the wind as the Chief Priest of the Parisii advanced. He and his Druids had begun this never-ending day importuning the sun. And finally, approaching them was the awaited General. Firelight burnished his armor to gold, blazing the crest of the rising sun. The Proconsul’s hair seemed on fire, and his smiling face and outstretched arms abated fears. Instinctively the Priest knelt at the feet of his conqueror, feeling he was welcoming the Sun-god more than their overlord.

Caesar behaved like a god offering the welcoming light of life. Wines in abundance resulted in conquered and conqueror sharing childhood-hunting and first-campaign stories like long-lost brothers, turning this fearful time into a topping-up celebration. Many were the toasts to unity by the fires. Snugly cradled among soft pillows on comfortable chairs in the General’s tent, Caesar reined over the feast as if in reality they were new-found kith and kin.

What an interesting piece for the theme! It flows nicely. This is like the telling of a story around a fire. You have sensory details, especially about Caesar and how he’s observed. You might think of adding a few more sensory details. You have light and dark, but what of the smell of the road, the food, the mourners? What are they wearing in contrast to his men? How does the horse feel under Caesar? Is he tired after battle? Choose a few specific details. You could intersperse a little dialogue to take the place of some of the description in addition to his diary entries to add variety and keep the reader present in the action. Good job!