

Villa dei Volusii

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The light is full of life today...Nature speaks to me with distant sounds and enchanted images, and I am inside all this...

What a sense of emptiness...my eyes see, they fill with surprise, they search...
Who knows if I, one day, will have a house, land and slaves of my own.
And maybe I could marry a freewoman and relocate to the city...

But one thing at a time. Yesterday I accomplished the first major step. I am now a freedman.
“Mena servus libero esto” said the Empress Livia Drusilla.
Having crossed the threshold of thirty years, I finally became a man.” A man who looks to the future. I deserved it, after many years of devoted servitude in the gardens of the villa, up upon the hill.

2.

She asked me what else I desired. I replied: to be lent a few days to Consul Lucio Volusio Saturnino, in his family, at his home. There’s talk of a grand reception, a banquet, entertainments...I could easily be admitted to help with the preparations and entertainment of the guests: my instruction and my grace will be working in harmony.

3.

My answer left her curious and hesitant, as if she couldn’t have...why should I be introduced into the house of one of their most faithful?
In the name of the trust I have in his discretion, I confessed the truth.
My mistress the Empress was moved, after hearing the story.
And now I am here, in the house of Consul Lucio Volusio.

4.

The party will be here...but...there’s still everything to get ready...
The mosaics should be well glazed with water, brooms and sawdust. No pumice stones on the coloured ones, they are too delicate...they are also the oldest, because we hardly ever see them these days...the decorations still have to arrive...

5.

I am worried. It is so difficult to get over the image of myself that the others have always given me. I must find little Cesia and let the flowers of a new life spring forth.

For the Volulsi it’s easy, the line is clearly demarcated: they show their social position and reinforce even further their political alliances...but their power certainly has no need of demonstrations: rich men of the province, rewarded by Ottavianus Augustus with large estates and inordinate wealth, here and in Rome, for having followed him from Piceno.

The colony of Lucus is practically in their hands, they have rebuilt the forum, the basilica...now the Egnazi are but a fading memory.

no, she can't be here, there are no places to hide here...

6.

The Baths, wine, women, this is the life!

And this garden! A perfect place for leisure and contemplation: to walk in the shade, to sit in the cool of the humid and fresh water-lily pools, and among the statues.

When I am in the gardens, like this, I hear nothing that displeases me for having heard it, I say nothing that I repent for having said: no anxiety disturbs me, only dreams which harmoniously, delicately and subtly intertwine.

She could be down there, I should do down and have a look...

7.

I confessed the truth, with a pure soul, and the Empress Livia was moved...

What mixed feelings I felt towards her: strangeness, ambiguity, coincidence, union...

A few days ago, in the house up on the hill, I heard the Emperor Augustus tell of a tragic occurrence. It was in the afternoon, and he was here, guest of the Consul Lucio Volusio. One of his slaves, Eunoos, had inadvertently broken a crystal vase, and the hostess had condemned him to be thrown to the Mureno eels. Eunoos, managed to break free, and threw himself at the feet of the Emperor, begging him to inflict a different type of death. He did not want to become food. Augustus, shaken, let him go, and ordered that all the crystal objects should be broken in his presence, so as to fill the entire pool of the big garden. A good way to punish the unprecedented cruelty of the wife of his friend.

Well, that slave, Eunoos, is my brother. His daughter Cesia, a little girl, born as a slave in this house, 6 or 7 years ago, had seen everything, and terrified, ran away. I don't know where. I have never met her, but it as if she were my daughter. They say she is a little girl with much imagination...If the Volussi realize this, they will be ruthless. The reason why I'm here, is that I must absolutely find her, in the storehouses, in the garden, or out in the fields near the river, or maybe at Lucus Feroniae.

8.

The place of worship of the Lares, the protectors of the domestic hearth. And the genius of the Emperor. But it is to Feronia who I will return tonight. I have secretly carried this out for all these years. I will go to Lucus, in the place of its (his) most ancient shrine, and I will invoke his help for Cesia

"Venerable Feronia, ancient and divine mother, lady of the night and of the spring waters, fecund goddess of the harvest and fertility, starry, shining, mother of the sick, and of the freed slaves...still today the silent traces of your feet are perpetuated with inexhaustible power in what was once your lucus, the forest consecrated to you. Accept the humble thanks of this freed slave and give him that for which he prays to you now"

9.

Servant, women, children and men of every description from every region of the empire. They were free in their countries, with the misfortune of having been taken in war, or prisoners of the Romans. Beings who had lost their identity, with their bodies branded by fire.

There will be thousands here in the villa and in the surrounding estates, farmers, livestock farmers, carpenters, gardeners like me, servants, cooks, accountants, massage therapists, mime artists,

singers, tutors....

10.

I have anxiety and fear to see my broche Eunoos after so many years...how will he be?...how will he take the news of my rebirth? I imagine him stooped in the fields. Life here in the country is much tougher than in the city. This is the largest estate in the area: huge expanses of land on which to raise cattle and grow crops, for the Roman market. Because the life of this land, near the river and roads, is inextricably linked to Rome, to its markets and its politics.

11.

[Dreaming]:

Livius Andronicus, Pompey, Publius Terenzio Afro, Polibius...all freed slaves ascended to wealth and fame...the same Horace...who knows if one day I too could do the same...

But enough of these vain dreams. There is a second step to complete towards freedom: go to Lucus and find Cesia.

[FINE]

