

## DAY XVI OF MAIUS

Tomorrow we shall visit the baths. Though we have a bathroom here, with a small tub, Cytheris tells me we are going somewhere altogether more grand – the baths of Nero, who ruled Rome fifty years ago. A cruel man hated by all Romans, Cytheris says, his reputation earned him a saying: “What could be worse than Nero, or better than his baths?”

## DAY XVII

How can I begin to describe Nero’s baths? They are more like a palace. The huge building towers above the neighborhood; a gurgling “aqueduct” (a river on legs) brings water from the distant hills, and steam pours from the windows. The baths are so cheap they are almost free. Anyone who has a *quadrans* – Rome’s smallest coin – can soak all afternoon.

It seemed that a visit to the baths was a chance for my mistress to show off how many slaves she can afford,

for she insisted that every one of us come with her. We set off in the afternoon: two carried her in a litter, one walked ahead, and the rest of us followed.

Once we were inside and had changed into our *subligari* and *mamillares*, my mistress set one of us to guard our clothes, and took two more to wash, oil and massage her. The rest of us could do as we pleased for the afternoon.

Cytheris took me from room to room, until we came to the hot bath, the steamy *caldarium*. Here we lounged, pampering each other until we met some friends of Cytheris’. When she introduced me as newly enslaved, they were all very sorry for me.

As we talked, each revealed how they had become slaves. Most had been born of slave parents, but one blonde girl, from Germany, had been taken by Roman soldiers when they crushed a revolt there.

