

# PETRONIUS

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# SATYRICON

Translated,  
with Notes and Topical Commentaries, by  
Sarah Ruden

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### Part 3

## Trimalchio's Dinner Party

It was the third day now, and we were expecting our farewell dinner,<sup>46</sup> but we were dug through with so many holes that we preferred to flee rather than wait and see. While we were glumly and nervously debating which tack would get us out of the looming storm, a slave of Agamemnon's broke in. He said, "Say, you don't know where it's happening today? Trimalchio,<sup>47</sup> who is one high-living individual . . . keeps a water clock in his dining room, and a trumpeter in a sort of uniform, so that the master can always tell how much of his life he's wasted." We forgot all about our troubles and got dressed in our best. Giton was happy to play our slave for the occasion, and we told him to come along to the baths<sup>48</sup> to help us get ready . . .

§27 Then we wandered around, still in our clothes, making jokes and mingling with the circles of ballplayers. But suddenly we saw a bald old man, dressed in a dark red tunic, tossing a ball among long-haired boys. These boys were worth looking at, but they weren't what drew us to the performance. It was the head of the household in his slippers, working out with a chartreuse ball. He didn't even retrieve the balls that fell to the ground—an attendant slave had a full bag of them with which to keep supplying the players. Another innovative feature of the scene

46. A ceremonial dinner given to gladiators who were about to face wild beasts in the arena. This may be a joke about an entertainment that Quartilla and her household are set to offer the young men as a short relief.

47. A Semitic name based on the word for "prince."

48. These would be public baths, which filled most of the functions of a modern health club. A daily trip to the baths was usual for Romans, especially before a dinner party. See Commentary 6: Roman Dinner Parties.

was the two eunuchs on the side of the circle facing the master. One was holding a silver chamber pot, and the other was counting the balls—not the number whizzing in the air, but those that fell to the ground. While I was gaping at these fripperies, Menelaus<sup>49</sup> ran up to me and said, "This is where you're propping up your head tonight. What you're seeing now is the way a dinner party starts for him." Menelaus was still talking when Trimalchio snapped his fingers and the one eunuch held the chamber pot for him. He emptied his bladder, asked for water, sprinkled his fingers lightly and dried them on a slave's hair . . .

§28 We didn't have time to take everything in. We went in to bathe, took a sauna, and leapt into the cold water. Trimalchio, soaked in scented oil, was already being patted down, not with the usual linen towels, but with cloths of the finest wool. In the meantime, three masseurs were guzzling Falernian wine in front of him. They even squabbled and spilled a lot of it. Trimalchio laughed and said they were making a funeral libation for him.<sup>50</sup> Then they wrapped him up in a scarlet bathrobe, put him on a litter, and carried him down the street. There were four attendants ahead of him, dressed in uniforms with badges, and a little cart carried his pet slave,<sup>51</sup> a wizened little boy with cruddy eyes, uglier than Trimalchio himself. The whole of the old man's way home, a musician walked along beside him and played tiny pipes right in his ear, as if he were telling a secret.

We were already sated with wonder. But we followed, along with Agamemnon, and came to a door with this notice nailed to the frame: ANY SLAVE WHO GOES OUT WITHOUT THE MASTER'S PERMISSION WILL RECEIVE A HUNDRED LASHES.<sup>52</sup> Inside the entrance there was a doorkeeper dressed in a chartreuse tunic and a cherry-colored belt, shelling peas on a silver tray. A gold cage hung over the threshold, and the spotted magpie inside greeted us.

§29 While I was casting my eyes about in amazement, I saw something that nearly made me fall on my back and break my legs. To the left as you came in, near the doorkeeper's cubicle, was a wall painting of an enormous chained dog, above an inscription: BEWARE OF DOG. My

49. An assistant to Agamemnon. In Greek myth, Menelaus is Agamemnon's younger brother.

50. Wine was poured onto the ground to appease the spirits of the underworld.

51. "Pet" slaves were treated somewhat as we might treat a dog or cat, but also commonly filled a sexual function. See Commentary 5: The Roman Household.

52. A death sentence. The word for "lashes" indicates the kind that laid open the skin.

partners in this dining venture thought my reaction was hilarious, but I ignored them. Catching my breath, I looked along the whole wall. There was a slave market, with the slaves all carrying signs describing themselves, and Trimalchio as a long-haired boy was entering the city. Minerva led him, and he held a herald's wand like the one Mercury carries.<sup>53</sup> Then you saw him learning how to keep accounts, then becoming manager—the conscientious painter had shown it all and put captions everywhere. At the end of the portico Mercury took Trimalchio by the chin and lifted him up to the magistrates' platform.<sup>54</sup> The goddess Fortune was present at the scene, holding a horn of plenty, and the three Fates were spinning golden threads.<sup>55</sup> There was more to see in the portico: a group of runners was exercising with their trainer, and a large cabinet stood in a corner, with a miniature shrine containing silver Lares, a marble statue of Venus, and a gold box of no petty size. Somebody told me that the hairs from the first shave of Himself were stored there . . .<sup>56</sup>

I ventured to ask the steward what the other paintings on display depicted. "The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*,"<sup>57</sup> he said, "and those gladiator games Laenas sponsored." §30 I didn't have time to look at everything in detail . . .

Now we came to the dining room, in front of which a bookkeeper was checking accounts. What looked really strange to me was a bundle of rods and axes on the door post, with a sort of ship's beak coming out of the bottom of the bundle. On this was inscribed, "For Gaius Pompeius Trimalchio,"<sup>58</sup> a sevir of Augustus, from Cinna his man-

53. Minerva here represents astuteness and the skilled trades. Mercury (Hermes in Greece) was the patron god of businessmen.

54. Trimalchio has been a public official on the Board of Six responsible for the local worship of the emperor. This office was open to former slaves and in fact had been created to increase their patriotism and participation in public life.

55. The threads the Fates spun governed the length and quality of a mortal life.

56. The Lares (household gods), the statue of a patron deity, and the souvenir of the ceremonial first shave would all be normal objects in a domestic shrine—but for an aristocratic Roman, not for a freedman like Trimalchio.

57. The Homeric epic poems that were the basis of Greek literary culture.

58. Slaves had a single name; Trimalchio's was probably simply "Trimalchio." As a freedman he has assumed a version of the traditional three-part Roman name—in §71 he uses a fourth name, Maecenatianus ("Freedmen of Maecenas"). Freedmen were often said to delight in their first names, apparently a particular mark of free status.

ager."<sup>59</sup> There was also a two-branched lamp with the same inscription, hanging from the ceiling. A plaque hung on each side of the door. One said, "On December 30 and 31, our Gaius<sup>60</sup> is dining out"; the other had the phases of the moon and the movements of the sun and the six planets painted on it, and the lucky and unlucky days had markers of different colors.

We were simply stuffed full of delights. When we tried to go into the dining room, a slave yelled, "Right feet first!" Evidently, that was his job. Of course, we were alarmed at the thought of breaking the rule.<sup>61</sup> But as we lifted our right feet in tandem, a stripped slave collapsed before us and launched into a plea for us to deliver him from a whipping. He hadn't sinned greatly, he claimed, or not in proportion to the punishment threatened. He had been left to watch the manager's clothes in the public baths—scarcely ten thousand sesterces' worth of clothes—and someone had stolen them. We drew back our feet and went to find the manager. Locating him in a little office counting gold coins, we delivered our entreaties on the slave's behalf. Haughtily, he lifted his face to us and said, "It isn't the material loss that troubles me, as much as the carelessness of that worthless chattel. He lost my evening clothes, which a client of mine gave me for my birthday—Tyrian-dyed fabric and all, you know—but they'd already been washed once. Oh well. I'll let him off as a favor to you."<sup>62</sup>

§31 We felt ourselves bound by such a substantial service. Now we went back to the dining room. There, our beneficiary ran up and nailed a dense series of kisses on us before we could think of resisting. He was

59. Trimalchio's symbolism verges on the illegal. Bundles of rods and axes were carried by lictors, official attendants of higher magistrates, but certainly not of sevirs (members of the Board of Six—see note 54). Ships' beaks, to commemorate naval victories, adorned the rostrum or speakers' platform at Rome. Trimalchio has received replicas of these sacred and exclusive objects not from the state but from his own slave! The idiosyncratic joining of a ship's beak to the rods and axes may be an attempt to curtail objections through the creation of a new, hybrid object.

60. See note 58.

61. See Commentary 7: Roman Religion.

62. In strict legality, slaves could not own anything, let alone a garment colored with the most expensive dye available, Tyrian purple. Nor would it be conceivable under normal circumstances for a slave to be part of the client system (see Commentary 5: The Roman Household), which is based on a series of social, political, and economic favors. Whether the steward's version of events is true or not, his pretensions are outrageous.

full of praise for our kindness and remarked, "You're going to find out soon that I'm a person who knows how to return a favor. It's the master's wine, but that doesn't matter as long as the waiter's your friend."

We lay down, and slave boys from Alexandria poured water cooled with snow over our hands. Others came along and gave us pedicures with a good deal of skill. They weren't silent even in such a disgusting task—they sang the whole time. I wanted to find out if the whole household sang, so I asked for a drink. The waiter answered me most readily with a shrill musical comedy number. Anyone who was asked for anything responded in the same way, so that it sounded like a stage chorus, not the staff of a respectable dining room.

In any case, they brought us really swell hors d'oeuvres. (Everybody had taken his place but Trimalchio; the place of honor was saved for him, a practice I had never seen before.)<sup>63</sup> On the relish platter was a donkey made of Corinthian bronze,<sup>64</sup> and he was wearing little dishes in the form of saddlebags containing black olives on the one side, white on the other. Two other platters (with Trimalchio's name and the weight of the silver inscribed on the rim) flanked the donkey. On one were welded little bridges, receptacles for cooked dormice that were dipped in honey and sprinkled with sesame seed.<sup>65</sup> On the opposite platter was a toy silver grill, sausages on top and Syrian plums and pomegranate seeds underneath standing for hot coals.

§32 We were deep in this luxury when they carried in Trimalchio—to musical accompaniment—and placed him among a lot of minuscule pillows. Those of us who hadn't known what to expect burst out laughing. The host had on a tightly clasped scarlet cloak that squished his closely shaven head out the top and weighed on his neck in massive folds. He had a napkin, with a senatorial stripe and tassels on it, shoved in there too. On the little finger of his left hand he wore a big gilded ring. The ring on the knuckle of the next finger looked like solid gold—

63. In a traditional Roman dining room, the couches formed three sides of a square, with tables inside, in front of the couches. On each side were three places for lying down and dining. The three couches and also the three places on each were classed as "high," "medium," and "low" and allotted according to the social standing of the diners. Trimalchio has given himself the "high" place on the "high" couch (directly at the right of the open end of the arrangement, where service of food and drink would begin)—honoring himself as host above all of his guests. See Commentary 6: Roman Dinner Parties.

64. See §50.

65. Dormice were not a delicacy unique to Trimalchio's dining room. We know about their preparation from other sources as well.

except for the iron star shapes welded onto it.<sup>66</sup> As a further display, he bared his right arm, on which he wore a gold bracelet and a circlet of ivory fastened with a glittering metal plate.

§33 He picked his teeth with a silver toothpick and said, "Friends, it didn't suit me to come in yet, but to keep from holding you up I gave up all my own pleasure. But I hope you'll let me finish my game here." A slave came up to him with a board made of rare terebinth wood, and crystal tiles, and then I saw the daintiest thing of all: instead of black and white counters, he was using gold and silver Greek coins. As he played, he munched on a lot of crude language—the sort of thing blacksmiths and weavers say over their work.

While we were still busy with the hors d'oeuvres, they brought in a stand that had on it a wooden hen holding her wings out in a circle, as if she were brooding. Two slaves came up quickly. At a blast from the musicians, they rooted in the straw for peacock eggs and distributed them to the guests. Trimalchio turned his face to this tableau and said, "Friends, I ordered them to put peacock eggs under the chicken, and, by Hercules, I think they may be already turning into chicks. But let's check and see if they're still suckable." We got egg spoons that weighed at least half a pound each, so we could pierce the shortbread outer layer. I almost threw away my egg, because it looked as if the chick was already formed. But then I heard a veteran guest of Trimalchio's say, "This ought to be something good." I broke the shell with my hand and found a fat fig-pecker bird cooked in a peppered yolk.

§34 Trimalchio interrupted his game to demand a helping of everything for himself, and was yelling that if anybody wanted a mulled drink, he gave permission for one. Then suddenly the band gave a blast, and a trilling chorus took away all of the hors d'oeuvres at once. In the uproar, a dish happened to fall. A slave picked it up. Trimalchio noticed, and ordered an ear-boxing for the boy and a re-dropping of the dish. The slave in charge of furnishings came in and proceeded to sweep the pieces of silver to the side along with the other rubbish.

Then two long-haired Ethiopian slaves came in with tiny bottles (like the ones used for sprinkling the sand in amphitheaters to keep the dust

66. Again, Trimalchio is on thin ice in his use of symbols regulated by ancient law and custom. The purple senatorial stripe was for Roman high officials. For a freedman ineligible for nearly all public offices, wearing the stripe on a garment would be unwise. Trimalchio fudges by wearing a napkin with the stripe on it. Gold rings could be worn by no one lower than Roman knights, the second highest Roman social and political class, immediately below the senators. Trimalchio's ambiguous rings are a side-stepping of this regulation.

down), from which they poured wine onto our hands. Nobody offered water.

Praised for these elegant touches, the master said, "Mars<sup>67</sup> likes a fair fight—everything equal. That's why I had everybody assigned his own table. It also means that these stinking slaves won't crowd around and get us in a sweat."

Right then, they brought wine bottles tightly sealed with gypsum. Labels were stuck on the necks saying, "Falernian Wine Bottled in the Consulship of Opimius. One Hundred Years Old."<sup>68</sup> While we were reading this, Trimalchio clapped his hands and said, "Too bad! Wine lives longer than we do—it's pitiful. So down the hatch with this, huh? Drink some wine, life is fine. This is real Opimian I'm giving you. I served worse stuff yesterday, and the guests were much more substantial people." We guzzled, and rendered some carefully calibrated praise of the host's taste.

A slave brought a silver skeleton, put together in such a way that the joints and the backbone could be bent in any direction. He tossed it onto the table and moved the limbs in order to form different sexual positions. Trimalchio provided the commentary:

"Woe is us!

This is what happens, for all our fuss.

When Orcus<sup>69</sup> comes to get us, this is what we'll all become.

So while we're still alive, let's have some fun!"

§35 Following our praises, there came a dish more modest in size than the previous one had led us to expect. But its novelty drew everyone's attention. It was a round platter with the twelve signs of the zodiac on it, above each of which the architect of the thing had placed an appropriate food.<sup>70</sup> Above the Ram there were "ram's head" chickpeas, above the Bull a piece of beef, above the Twins a pair of testicles and a pair of kidneys, above the Crab a crown,<sup>71</sup> above the Lion an African

67. The war god (Ares in Greece).

68. The notation of the Roman year was according to who had held the consulship, or highest executive office, which changed hands annually. These bottles have a suspicious retrospective dating as well.

69. A god of the dead.

70. We know the signs of the zodiac by their Latin names, which I translate in this passage.

71. Note Trimalchio's high opinion of himself, a Cancer, in his exegesis in the next paragraph.

fig, above the Virgin the uterus of a barren sow, above the Scales a set of scales with a different kind of cake in each tray, above the Scorpion . . . a stinging fish, above the Archer a crow,<sup>72</sup> above the Goat a lobster,<sup>73</sup> above the Water Carrier a goose, and above the Fish two mullets. In the middle was a chunk of sod with a honeycomb sitting on the grass. An Egyptian slave carried around bread in a silver basket . . . while the master mutilated a song from the mime called "The Silphium Gatherer."<sup>74</sup> As we glumly approached this crude repast, Trimalchio said, "C'mon, let's dine. It's fine to dine."<sup>75</sup>

§36 No sooner was this said than there was a honk of music and four Mars dancers<sup>76</sup> rushed out and snatched away the top layer of the platter. This revealed fattened fowls and sows' udders and a hare that had been fitted with wings to make it look like a tiny, furry Pegasus. There were also four Marsyas figures, and out of little wineskins they were pouring a peppery garum sauce.<sup>77</sup> It flowed down into a sort of channel, where there were cooked fish arranged as if they were swimming. The slaves started the applause, and we took it up before we approached in mirth these most select substances.

Trimalchio's delight at the device was no less than ours. "Carver!" he said. A carver strode forward and, moving to music, sliced the food in such a way that he looked like a gladiator fighting from a chariot to the rhythm of a water organ. Softly, Trimalchio kept piling on the word "carver." Suspecting that so much repetition had to mean another piece of wit, I did not hesitate to ask my neighbor in the place above mine about this very matter. He had often witnessed things of this kind, and he said to me, "See the guy who's carving? He's called Carver. Whenever you say his name, you're giving him an order too. 'Carver, carve 'er.' Get it?"

§37 I couldn't swallow any more of the first course, so I turned in my naïveté to my previous informant and tried to get the whole story. I

72. Text perhaps corrupt. The Greek-derived word suggests something with sharp eyes like the archer's, but the word never occurs except here.

73. Lobsters have "horns."

74. Silphium was an aromatic plant from the Middle East.

75. My substitute for an untranslatable pun, based on the same Latin word meaning "sauce" and "custom": "This is the sauce/custom of dining."

76. In a special rite, Mars was honored by a dance done in triple time. The connection to dinner service is probably meant to seem gratuitous or absurd.

77. Marsyas was a satyr (part goat, part man), a member of a mythical species with a strong association with the wine god Bacchus, or Liber (Dionysus in Greece). The delicacy garum sauce had a base of rotten fish.

asked him who the woman was running back and forth. "She's Trimalchio's wife," he said, "called Fortunata,<sup>78</sup> don't count her money, measures it in bushel baskets. And what was she a little bit ago? Your guardian spirit is gonna have to forgive me for saying this: you wouldn't of wanted to take bread from her hand.<sup>79</sup> Now she's on top of the world, somehow or other—she's Trimalchio's all or nothing. Anyway, if it was high noon and she told him it was midnight, he'd believe her.

"Himself doesn't know what he's got: he's that loaded. But that whore takes care of everything, she's everywhere—you wouldn't believe it. She's dry sober, knows exactly what she's talking about. You can see where all this gold comes from. But she's got a nasty mouth on her, like a pet magpie sitting on your bed and squawking at you. She likes you—great. She doesn't like you—ouch.

"Himself has got property as far as hawks can fly, plus cash on top of cash. He's got more silver lying in his doorkeeper's office than anybody else ever inherited. His slaves—hell's bells—I don't think a tenth of 'em know their master by sight. He could toss any of these rich bastards into a pan and braise 'em. §38 Don't you think he buys stuff. Everything's homegrown: wool, cedar resin, pepper. Looking for chicken's milk? You'll find it. Anyway, he wasn't happy with the wool from his estates, so he brought rams from Tarentum and had them ball his herd. He wanted his own Attic honey, so he had bees imported from Athens. Some are gonna breed into his stock and make his own little boys a little better. Just a couple days ago he ordered mushroom spoor from India. Hasn't got a single mule that a wild ass didn't sire. All these pillows here: they got purple or scarlet stuffing. This is a guy who's found true inner peace.

"But don't put down them other freedmen. They're loaded. The one in the lowest place on the lowest couch<sup>80</sup>—eight hundred thousand at the moment. Grew from nothing. Not long ago used to carry wood on his back. They say—I don't know a thing about it, I've just heard—he stole a gnome's hat and found a treasure.<sup>81</sup> But he's kind of a blowhard,

78. "Lucky," or "Rich." The names given to slave women or freedwomen echo those for pets. Scintilla is "Sparky," and Chrysis is "Goldie."

79. As a prostitute, she would have been ritually unclean to eat with. Jewish ritual concerning food, and the fear of association with prostitutes evidenced in the New Testament, make for interesting points of comparison.

80. See note 63.

81. This looks like a folk tale common in Europe later: taking something from a magical creature can force the creature to give valuable information in exchange for his property back.

wants to show how good he's doing. Just lately, when he had to advertise for a tenant, he put up a sign that said, 'Gaius Pompeius Diogenes is letting his apartment from the first of July. He's buying a house for himself.' The one in the 'freedman's place'<sup>82</sup> had it great. I got nothing against him. He saw a million sesterces in his day, but then it all started to sway. I bet he's mortgaged his own hair. Not his fault, of course. There's no better man than him, but some asshole freedmen took over everything. Listen: even water don't boil worth a damn if the cooks are a committee, and when your business starts to slip, there go your friends. Look at him. He had such a respectable profession too: undertaker. He used to dine like a king: boars in blankets, cakes like works of art, birds, . . . cooks, bakers. More wine got spilled under his table than other people have in their cellars altogether. He wasn't a man, just a piece of theater. When his business started to slide, and he was afraid his creditors would find out he was about to go belly-up, he advertised an auction with a sign like this: 'Proculus is holding an auction of his spare possessions.'"

§39 Trimalchio interrupted these winning tales. The dish had been removed, by the way, and the lighthearted guests were investing all their efforts in wine and gossip. So Trimalchio propped himself and said,

"This wine—it's all I got, but I hope you enjoy it. Fish gotta swim. Hey, did you think I'd be happy with the food on the top of the dish? 'Is this the Ulysses you know?'<sup>83</sup> How come I did it? Well, you've gotta know a little literature, even if it's only for the dinner table. God bless my master—rest his bones!—who wanted me to be as good as the next man. There's nothing that's new to me—as you can see from that dish. The sky here, where the twelve gods live,<sup>84</sup> turns itself into twelve pictures: same number, hey? First you get the Ram. Whoever's born under that sign has lots of herds and lots of wool. But he's got a hard head and a face that shoves in where it's not wanted, and a sharp horn. A lot of mutton-headed schoolteachers were born under this sign."

We praised his astrological sophistication, and he continued: "Then the whole sky becomes a Bull-y boy, where you get people who kick out at you, and plowmen, and people grazing in green pastures. In the Twins are yokes of horses and yokes of oxen and people with big balls and people who play both sides of the fence. I was born in the Crab. I've

82. The middle place on the lowest couch. See note 63.

83. A quotation from Vergil's *Aeneid* (Book 2, line 44). Trimalchio's point is that Ulysses is notoriously clever, and that everything he does must be a trick.

84. The twelve Olympian gods: their Roman names were Juno, Vesta, Minerva, Ceres, Venus, Diana, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Neptune, Vulcan, and Apollo.

got a lot of things propping me up, and I own a lot of stuff both on land and sea—a crab fits in both places. So I don't never put anything over the Crab, 'cause I don't wanna crowd my sign. In the Lion, you get gluttons and bosses; in the Virgin, skirt chasers and runaway slaves and slaves in chains.<sup>85</sup> In the Scales, there are butchers and perfume dealers and anybody else who weighs anything; in the Scorpion, poisoners and assassins; in the Archer, wall-eyed people—in the marketplace you see them looking at the vegetables and picking up the lard; in the Goat, those poor bastards who grow horns on their heads from worrying so much. In the Water Carrier, you get innkeepers who water the wine, and people with water on the brain; in the Fish, caterers and fish-faced rhetoricians. The world turns like a grindstone, and there's always something iffy going on, people getting born, people dying, you name it. Okay, the sod in the middle and the honeycomb on the sod? I don't do nothing for no reason. Mother Earth is the sod, round like a big egg, and she's got everything good in her like a honeycomb."

§40 "Brilliant!" we all yelled, lifting our hands up toward the ceiling, and we swore that, compared to Trimalchio, Hipparchus and Aratus<sup>86</sup> were practically subhuman. Then servants came in and hung valances on the couches—backdrops that showed nets, and hunters lying in wait with spears, and everything else you would associate with hunting. We didn't know yet where our suspicions should be headed, but soon an immense racket came from outside the dining room, and now there were Spartan hounds running around the tables. A platter followed, with a gigantic boar on it—a freedman's cap on its head, no less. From its teeth hung little baskets woven from palm leaves, the one full of Syrian dates, the other of Egyptian ones. Set up to look as if they were pressed to the udders were little piglets made of biscuit dough; obviously, it was a mother sow. These piglets turned out to be party favors. Carpus, who had hacked up the fat fowls, was not the one to carve the boar; instead, it was an immense man with a beard and leggings and a multicolored short cape. He drew a hunting knife and slashed the side of the boar passionately, and thrushes flew out of the gash. As these fluttered around the dining room, bird catchers with limed reeds<sup>87</sup> caught them in no time. Trimalchio had one bird brought to each of us, and added, "You see what juicy acorns that oinker was eating in the forest."

85. These last two items involve obscure references to mythology and astronomy.

86. Famous Greek astronomers.

87. Bird lime was a kind of glue, used for catching birds.

As soon as they heard this, slaves ran up to the baskets hanging from the tusks and divided the different figs among the guests by careful count. §41 Meanwhile, in the privacy of my mind, I was pulled apart by various speculations concerning why the boar had come in with a freedman's cap on. After I had internally used up all of my stupid guesses, I steeled myself to ask my informant about this matter that was torturing me. He said, "Even your slave could tell you this: it's not a riddle, just common sense. This boar was supposed to be the high point of the dinner yesterday, but the guests *let it go*. That's why it comes back to our party today as a freedman." I cursed my thick-headedness and didn't ask any more questions, afraid that it would look as if I had no experience of decent society.

During this interchange, a comely boy came in, crowned with vines and ivy leaves. He called himself Bromius, then Lyaeus, then Euhius.<sup>88</sup> He carried bunches of grapes around in a little basket and travestied his master's poems in a squealing voice. Trimalchio faced this sound head-on and said, "Dionysus, have your Liber-ty!" The boy took the cap of freedom off the boar and placed it on his own head. Then Trimalchio added, "You're not gonna be able to say I don't have Father Liber, which means 'a free father,' ya know!"<sup>89</sup> We praised this pun, and when the boy came around for congratulations, we kissed him thoroughly.

After this course, Trimalchio got up to go to the toilet. Seizing our own liberty in the absence of our tyrant, we tried to get the other guests to talk some more . . . Dama, after asking for a bigger wine cup, sighed, "A day's nothing. Turn around, and it's night. There's nothing better than goin' straight from bed to the dining room. It's a helluva cold day we've had here too. The baff—*bath*—barely warmed me up. But a hot drink's a clothes dealer who sells you a good thick cloak. I've poured whole jars down me, and I'm really pissed. The vine—*wine*—went straight to my head."

§42 Seleucus took up the tale in turn. "I don't take a bath every day. In the bath, you're like a cloth at the laundry—the water's got teeth in it. Your heart melts a little every day. But when I drink a pot of mulled wine, I tell the cold to go screw itself. But today I couldn't wash nohow. Had to go to a funeral."<sup>90</sup> That fine man, decent man, Chrysanthus, gave up the ghost and is no more. Just a few days ago he was there in the

88. Cult names of Bacchus, or Liber, the wine god.

89. The pun is on the Latin words *Liber Pater*. A free father was something no former slave like Trimalchio could claim.

90. It was a Semitic, not a Roman custom to avoid bathing during periods of mourning.



street, said hi to me. It's like he's still here now. It's just too damn bad: we're walking around, but there's nothing more inside us than if we was them blown-up bladders. We're worth the same as flies—no, flies've got something to them. We're like bubbles. If he just hadn't gone on that diet. For five days he didn't put a drop of water in his mouth, and not a crumb of bread neither. Well, he's gone off where most people have gone already. The doctors did him in—no, it was bad fates or somethin', 'cause a doctor's good for nothin' but to make you think you're gonna feel better. But he had good rites, proper couch, nice blankets on it. Got a fine show of breast-beating from the guests, too—bunch of them were former slaves he set free—though his wife barely bothered to cry. Okay, so he didn't treat her as good as he might of. But women—you know women—they're like a flock of vultures. It don't help to do no good to nobody. It's like throwing it down a well. But love's a festering sore under your skin."

§43 He was being a pain, and Phileros shouted him down. "Let's talk about the living, huh? He got what was owing to him. Decent life, decent death. What has he got to complain about? He had it made, started from nothing, and he would have taken a penny out of a manure pile with his teeth. Everything he touched grew like a honeycomb. By Hercules, I think he left a good hundred thousand, all in cash. But I'll tell you the truth, and I wouldn't lie to you any more than a dog would:<sup>91</sup> he was a mean bastard, had a real mouth on him—he was a walking fight. His brother was a straightforward kind of guy, treated his friends right, what was his was theirs, knew how to throw a party. But when Chrysanthus was getting started the bluebird of happiness crapped on him; still, he wiped himself off, and with his first vintage he was walking tall: he could sell as much wine as he had. And what really gave him a lift was that he got an inheritance that gave him a chance to swipe more than he got left. But he got mad at his brother and willed his money away out of the family, to somebody with no more background than a weed growing out of the dirt. It's a long trip when you leave your own people behind. But he had these slaves he listened to as if they had a direct link to the gods, and they did him down. If you believe what people tell you, you'll never get it right, at least if you're a businessman. But he had a good time, long as he lived. No justice in this world. He was Lady Luck's fair-haired boy, lead turned to gold in his hand. It's easy, when all

91. Literally, "I have eaten a dog's tongue." Dogs were associated with the Cynic philosophy, which rejected social convention and received ideas. See note 38. Phileros is saying that he is being perfectly frank and not tactful or polite.

your blocks of stone roll along like wheels. And how old do you think he was when he went? More than seventy. But he was hard as horn, aged well, hair black as a crow. I knew the man from way back, and he was as randy as ever. I don't think he left the dog alone. He was mostly one for the boys, but a jack of all trades, I guess. I've got nothing against it. That's the only thing you take with you."

§44 Thus spake Phileros. Ganymedes answered him thus: "What you're talking about has got nothing to do with anything. Nobody seems to care how the cost of bread gets you. Today I couldn't find a mouthful I could afford. And the way this drought is keeping up—for a whole year now it's pure starvation. I hope the aediles<sup>92</sup> get what they deserve for playing the bakers' game. 'You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.' That's why the little people are having such a hard time, and the big-wigs have Saturnalia<sup>93</sup> all year round. If we just had those lions I found here when I first came from Asia. That was living. If the high-grade flour from Sicily went downhill, the magistrates used to pound them sellers on the heads like the wrath of the gods. I remember Safinius; when I was a boy he used to live by the old arch. He was a peppercorn, not a man. He used to sear the ground when he walked. But he was upright, reliable, a loyal friend if you treated him right. You could have played guess-how-many-fingers in the dark with him. When he was in the Senate house blasting away at people one by one, he didn't do any of those rhetorical dances, just talked straight. When he was arguing a case in court, his voice blared like a horn. And he never sweated or spat. I think the gods blessed him with a real solid-like constitution. And he was so civil in answering your greeting, remembered everybody's name, just like one of us. Back then, bread was dirt cheap. The loaf you could buy for a penny, you couldn't gobble up with a friend's help. I've seen bull's-eyes bigger than what you get now. Damn it, it's worse every day. The town's growing backwards like a calf's tail. How come? Well, we've got this two-bit aedile who'd sell us all for a penny. He's sittin' all cozy at home, makes more money in a day than anybody else has got in the family. And now I know where he got that thousand gold denarii, though I'm not sayin'. If we had any balls, we'd wipe that grin off his face. But the people are lions at home and foxes in public. As for me, I've sold every rag I owned just to feed myself, and if prices don't go down I'm going to have to let that little shack of mine go. What's going to happen if nobody, god or man, takes pity on this town? I'll bet

92. These officials were responsible for the regulation of marketplaces.

93. The Saturnalia was a five-day festival in December of which the most striking feature was role reversal between masters and slaves.

anything that this is all a judgment on us. Nobody thinks the gods are real, nobody observes the fast,<sup>94</sup> nobody gives a damn about Jupiter. They pretend to be praying, but while their eyes are closed they're figuring out how rich they are right now. Before, the matrons in their long dresses went up the hill, barefoot, hair loose, pure in their thoughts, and asked Jupiter to send rain. And right away it started pouring by the pitcher like it was never gonna get another chance. And they all went back looking like drowned rats. But we're not observant anymore, so the gods have turned their backs on us. The fields are lying—"

§45 "Hey!" said Echion the rag dealer. "Watch what you're saying! The gods can hear it. 'Some black, some white, some shades of gray,' like the farmer described his lost spotted hog. Wait till tomorrow if you're not happy with today. That's how life lumbers along. By Hercules, we'd have a perfect town if it weren't full of these pesky human beings. These are hard times, but there're hard times everywhere. We shouldn't be picky: we all stand under the same sky. If you were somewhere else, you'd say that here the pigs walk around already roasted."

"Anyway, we're gonna have a great show in three days, on the holiday. It's not some pack of slaves from a gladiator school,<sup>95</sup> but mostly freedmen. Titus's got big ideas, and he really goes for it. One thing or another, there'll always be something. I'm in and out of that house all the time, and, believe me, he don't do things by halves. It's gonna be pure steel, no mercy, a butcher's shop in that amphitheater, plenty for the crowd to see. He's got the wherewithal. He got left thirty million sesterces when his father died. Too bad! If he spends four hundred thousand his inheritance isn't gonna feel it, and people will be talking about him forever. He's got some dwarves, and a woman who fights from a chariot, and Glyco's steward, who got caught entertaining his mistress. You're gonna see the people slugging it out in the stands over this guy, the jealous husbands against the lover-poops. But Glyco's a two-bit character for giving his steward to the wild animals. He's just making a fool of himself. The poor slave only did as she ordered him. That piss pot of a woman is the one the bulls ought to be tossing. But if you can't beat the donkey, you beat the saddle. How did Glyco think Hermogenes' brat would turn out, anyway? That guy could have trimmed the nails of a hawk flyin' past him, and she's the same. A cobra don't sire a rope. Glyco—I mean it—Glyco's had it. As long as he lives, he'll have the

94. Traditional Roman religion did not include fasts. Ironically, a speech in favor of old Roman ways reveals Middle Eastern influences.

95. To get some idea of the atmosphere of a gladiator school, imagine a rugby team made up of felons serving life sentences.

mark of what he's done, and nothing but Hades will take it off. But everybody's got their own sins to worry about.

"At any rate, I'm getting a whiff of the banquet Mammea's gonna give us soon, with a gift of two denarii each for me and mine. If that's what he does, he's gonna get all of the votes and beat Norbanus. Full speed ahead, he's gonna win. I mean, what did Norbanus ever do for us? Two-bit, broken-down gladiators—blow on them and they fall over. I've seen people thrown to the animals who did better. He killed us a bunch of toy horsemen, who put up the same kind of fight chickens would. The one was thin as a stick, the one *he* fought was bandy-legged, and the challenger of the winner was a hamstrung wreck as dead as the loser. The Thracian<sup>96</sup> was the only one with any spirit, and he just fought by the rules, and that's no fun. They all got whipped in the end, there was so many people yelling, 'Give it to them!' It was like a rout. 'Well,' he said, 'I gave you a show.' Good for you. Add it up, and I give you more than I got. One hand washes the other."

§46 "I know what you're thinking, Agamemnon: 'What's that boob blabbing about now?' Well, you could conversicate, but you don't. You're not our sort, so you look down on the talk of people with a lower so-so economic status. We know you're off your head from reading—but what are we gonna do? Am I gonna talk you into coming out to the farm someday to see my little house? We'll find something to get our teeth into, a chicken, eggs, whatever. It'll be nice, even if the weather this year has shot everything to hell: we'll find something to fill up on."

"That little squirt of mine's growing up. He'll be a student for you soon. He can already recite his times table up to four. If he lives, you'll have a little servant at your side. Any time he's free, he's got his head bent over his writing tablet. He's bright, he's good stuff, but he's crazy about birds. I killed three of his finches and said that a weasel ate them. He's found other hobbies, though, and mostly he likes to paint. He's done with the Greeks now, and he's coming at Latin literature,<sup>97</sup> not doing so bad neither, even if his teacher thinks the world of himself and never sticks to the point. There's another one, though, who doesn't know much but takes some trouble, and he teaches more than he knows himself. He spends holidays at the farm, and he's happy with any tip you give him."

"Now I've bought the boy a bunch of them law books, 'cause I want him to learn a little law to use in the family business. That kind of thing

96. "Thracians" were a category of light-armed gladiators.

97. The study of Greek literature came first, even for native Latin speakers. See §5.

buys groceries. He's already had more literature than's good for him. If he doesn't cooperate, I've decided to get him trained in a trade: barber or herald or at least advocate. Nothing but death can take your trade away. Every day, I yell at him, 'Primigenius, believe me, whatever you learn, you're learning it for yourself. You've heard of Philero the advocate? If he hadn't learned a trade, he'd be hungry every day. He used to carry peddler's goods around on his back. Now he's squaring up against Norbanus. Books is a treasure, and a trade don't die.'"

§47 These were the sort of monologues fluttering around when Trimalchio came back in. He wiped his forehead, washed his hands with perfume, and after a brief pause said, "Friends, forgive me. For days now my stomach hasn't answered the summons. The doctors don't know what to do. I got some help from pomegranate rind and pine resin in vinegar, though, and I hope my tum's gonna behave again. But for right now it's roaring like a bull. So if any of you wants to take some pressure off yourself, I understand. There's no reason to be ashamed. We're not born solid inside. I don't know of any torture that's so bad as holding it in. Even Jupiter can't hold it in.<sup>98</sup> What are you laughing at, Fortunata? You're the one who keeps me up at night with your noises. In my dining room, I never kept nobody from doing what they needed to, and the doctors tell you not to keep it in. If you get the urge to do a bit more, everything's ready outside: water, pots, all the other odds and ends. Believe me, you can have the noxious vapors going to your brain and spreading through your whole body. I've known lots of people to die that way, not wanting to say what was going on, even to themselves."

We thanked him for his kindness and generosity and hurried to repress our laughter with uninterrupted gulps of wine. But we didn't know yet that we had toiled only halfway up the slope, as they say. After the tables were cleared—more music for this—three white pigs, with harnesses and bells on, were brought into the room. The announcer said that the one was two years old, the second three, and the third six. I thought it was going to be an acrobat show, that the pigs were going to do tricks, as in street performances. But Trimalchio banished this expectation. "Which one do you want to have for dinner right away? Yokels serve chicken, casseroles, all that nonsense. My cooks know how to boil calves whole in a pot." Right away he called a cook, and without waiting for our choice, ordered the oldest pig cooked. "Wait!" he shouted. "What division are you in?"

"The fortieth."

"Were you bought or born in the household?"

98. Thunder as divine farting?

"Neither. Pansa left me to you in his will."

"Do a good job, then, or I'll have you put in the messengers' squad."

The cook, admonished of his master's power, trailed the victual into the kitchen. §48 Trimalchio turned to us with a gentle mien. "If you don't like the wine, I'll change it. It's crap, I know, but that don't matter if you're enjoying yourself generally. By the favor of the gods, I don't buy it, or anything else. Everything to make your mouth water grows on my country estate, which I've never seen myself. They say it borders on Tarracina on one side and Tarentum on the other.<sup>99</sup> I want to add Sicily to my property now, so that when I feel like going to Africa, I can go through my own territory.

"But Agamemnon: what controversia did you do in declamation today?<sup>100</sup> I don't argue cases, but I've learned to read and write for business. I'm not one to put down book learning: I've got two bookcases, one Greek, one Latin. So go on and give me a précis (hey!) of your declamation."

"A rich man and a poor man had a dispute —"

"What's a poor man?"

"Very witty," said Agamemnon, and outlined some controversia or other. Immediately, Trimalchio said, "If that actually happened, there's nothing *controversial* about it. If it didn't happen, then why bring it up at all?"

We followed up all of this with drooling eulogies, and he continued. "Agamemnon, I'm crazy about you. Tell me if you remember the twelve labors of Hercules?<sup>101</sup> Or that story about Ulysses and how the Cyclops tore his thumb out with a pair of pliers?<sup>102</sup> I used to read that in Homer when I was a boy. I saw the Sibyl at Cumae with my own eyes. She was hanging in a bottle, and when the guys asked her, 'What do you want, Sibyl?' she said, 'I want to die.'<sup>103</sup>

99. These Italian towns are a hundred kilometers apart.

100. See Commentary 3: Roman Oratory.

101. Hercules fought monsters and performed other tasks to aid humankind and earn himself immortality on Olympus.

102. This is a garbling of Homer. Ulysses put out the Cyclops' one eye with a stake. (See *Odyssey*, Book 9.)

103. T. S. Eliot quotes this passage of Petronius at the beginning of *The Waste-land*. The Sibyl at Cumae (near Naples) was a legendary prophetess. Apollo offered to grant her any favor she chose: she asked to live as many years as the number of grains of sand she held in her hand, but neglected to ask for eternal youth. Therefore, she aged continually, and was finally reduced to a sort of tiny mummy.

§49 Before all of the intellectual world had succumbed to the disease of his conversation, a platter with an immense pig on it took over the table. We were struck by the speed of the cooking, and we swore that even a chicken couldn't be done in so short a time. We were even more suspicious in that the pig looked bigger than before. Trimalchio inspected it more and more closely, and burst out, "What the—? This pig isn't gutted! By Hercules, it really isn't!"

The cook stood in front of the table and cringed and said he'd forgotten to gut the pig. "What?! You forgot?! He says it like he just forgot to put in pepper and cumin. Strip him."

In a moment, the cook was stripped and standing between two of the punishment crew. We started to beg him off. "It happens. Please, let him go. If he does it again, none of us will say a word for him." But I, as usual, was feeling intolerant and punitive. I couldn't hold myself back from leaning over to whisper in Agamemnon's ear, "I've never seen such a worthless slave in my life. How could somebody forget to gut a pig? By Hercules, I wouldn't pardon him if it had been a fish he'd forgotten to gut." But Trimalchio's face relaxed into a grin.

"Okay. Since you can't remember nothin', gut it in front of us."

The cook got his tunic back on, snatched a knife, and jabbed cautiously at the pig's stomach here and there. In no time, the weight of the flesh widened the cuts, and sausages and black puddings began to pour out.

§50 The slaves applauded this trick and shouted, "Long live Gaius!"<sup>104</sup> The cook got a drink and a silver crown as a reward, and the cup came to him on a tray of Corinthian bronze.<sup>105</sup> When Agamemnon moved up for a closer look at this, Trimalchio said, "I'm the only one in the world who's got real Corinthian ware." I thought that, in line with his other bragging, he would say that he imported tableware directly from Corinth, but he outdid himself.

"Maybe you want to know why I'm the only one who's got real Corinthian ware. The dealer I buy from's called Corinthus, that's why. It's Corinthian because it comes from Corinthus—see? But I don't want you to think I'm a diddle-head. I know exactly where Corinthian bronze first came from. When Ilium was captured, Hannibal, that sly bastard, piled up all of the bronze and gold and silver statues in one pile and lit a fire under them.<sup>106</sup> They turned into a sort of mixed bronze; out of

104. See note 58.

105. Antique Corinthian bronze objects were highly prized.

106. This is a garbling of the story of the sacking of Troy (or Ilium), to which the story of Homer's *Iliad* is a prelude. Troy is a city in Asia Minor (present-day

this glob the craftsmen took chunks and made plates and dishes and figurines. That's where Corinthian comes from—it's everything together, not one thing or another, but one big glob. If you'll pardon my saying so, I like glass better—doesn't smell, anyway. If it didn't break, it would be better than gold, but like it is, it's not worth havin'.

§51 "But did you know that there was a smith who made a glass bottle that didn't break? They let him in to see Caesar with his gift . . . He made like he was gonna take it back from Caesar, but instead he threw it on the tiles. Caesar just about shit. But the smith picked up the bottle from the floor. It had a dent in it, like a bronze vase. Then he pulled a little hammer out of his pocket and took his sweet time mending the vase. When he was done, he thought he had Jupiter by the balls—he sure thought that after the emperor asked, 'Nobody else knows about this glass-making technique, right?' And get this: when the smith said no, the emperor had his head cut off, 'cause if word got out, gold would be the price of mud. I admit I'm a fan of silver. §52 I got three-gallon goblets . . . that show how Cassandra kills her sons, and the kids are lying there so real you'd think they were alive. I got a bowl King Minos left my old master, where Daedalus is shutting Niobe up in the Trojan horse.<sup>107</sup> Plus I've got all of the fights of Hermeros and Pe-traites<sup>108</sup> on cups, they weigh a ton. I wouldn't sell my taste for no money."

While Trimalchio was lecturing to us, a slave dropped a cup. The master gave him a look. "Go kill yourself, you useless piece of trash."

The slave pouted and begged for mercy.

"Why're you asking me? I'm not the one who's a pain in the ass. Go tell yourself not to be so useless."

We extracted a pardon for the slave, who then began to run around the table in his relief . . .

Turkey) destroyed around 1200 B.C.E. and remembered in the legend of the Trojan War. Hannibal was a general from Carthage, in North Africa, who laid siege to and captured the Roman-allied town Saguntum in Spain in 219 B.C.E.

107. It was Medea who killed her sons, in revenge for her husband's unfaithfulness. Cassandra was a Trojan princess who died young and childless. King Minos is also a figure in mythology. Trimalchio's mention is either a bizarre error or results from a corrupt text. The Trojan horse was a hollow wooden statue in which Greek warriors hid while it was hauled into Troy (see §89). Daedalus was a mythical Athenian inventor, and Niobe was a queen punished for boasting about her fertility by the death of all of her children.

108. These gladiators were mentioned elsewhere during the first century C.E., which encourages scholars to date the *Satyricon* to this period.

Trimalchio was yelling, "Water out, wine in!" That was so hilariously clever that we had to show our appreciation—especially Agamemnon, who knew how to qualify for a repeat invitation. Encouraged by our praises, Trimalchio soused cheerfully. When he was close to flat-out drunk, he said, "Nobody's asked Fortunata to dance. Believe me, nobody beats her at the cordax."<sup>109</sup> Then he himself raised his hands above his head and imitated the actor Syrus. The slaves all sang along with a fake incantation from some play. He would have gone to the center of the room to dance where we could see him better, but Fortunata came up to whisper in his ear, probably saying that such trifling behavior did not befit his position. I never saw anyone so unpredictable. Sometimes—now, for example—he listened to Fortunata, and sometimes he went his own way.

§53 In any case, he was distracted from his lust for dancing by an accountant, who read what sounded like the daily news at Rome. "July 26: On the estate at Cumae thirty boys and forty girls were born. Forty thousand bushels of grain were transferred from the threshing floor into storage. Five hundred oxen were broken to the yoke. The slave Mithridates<sup>110</sup> was crucified for cursing the guardian spirit of our Gaius. On the same day, ten million sesterces were returned to the treasury, for lack of investment opportunities. Also, there was a fire in the Gardens of Pompey; it broke out in the mansion of the overseer Nasta."

"What?" said Trimalchio. "When did I buy the gardens of Pompey?"

"Last year," said the accountant. "This is the first time they've figured in the accounts."

Trimalchio was furious. "If I buy a piece of land and I don't hear about it within six months, then I don't want it in the accounts at all."

Now the aediles<sup>111</sup> read their reports. A couple of foresters' wills gratefully acknowledged that Trimalchio had declined to be one of the heirs.<sup>112</sup> Then came the reports of bailiffs, and an account of a comptroller's separation from his freedwoman partner, who had been caught

109. An erotic dance.

110. Also the name of several Middle Eastern potentates.

111. Normally a public office. In many respects, especially as revealed by this passage, Trimalchio's household has a government of its own.

112. The practice of making one's friends and family "co-heirs" with the emperor arose during the more abusive imperial regimes. The emperor was in effect bribed with a large portion of an estate, in the hope that he would allow the other heirs to keep the remainder. Trimalchio has graciously declined the perk of a tyrant.

with a bath attendant. Finally, we learned that a steward had been banished to Baiae,<sup>113</sup> a manager had been indicted, and a dispute between two valets had gone to court.

At last that was all over, and acrobats came onto the scene. Some big lunk held up a ladder so that a boy could climb it and dance to music on the top rung. There was jumping through flaming hoops and lifting of a six-gallon jug with teeth, and that sort of thing. Trimalchio was the only one impressed. He said that this art form was sadly unappreciated. Acrobats and trumpet players—that's what he liked. Other entertainments were pure crap. "I bought some slaves who knew Greek comedy, but I had them do Atellan farce."<sup>114</sup> And I made my Greek flute player play pop tunes."

§54 He hadn't finished this critical summary when the boy . . . fell on top of him. The slaves made an uproar—we guests did too, but not because of the low-life acrobat. He could break his neck for all we cared. We just didn't want the dinner party to end with us going into mourning for someone we didn't give a damn about.

Trimalchio sobbed and groaned and nursed his arm, which really didn't look badly injured to me. Doctors came running from all directions, and Fortunata was in the first wave of them, tearing her hair and bringing a basin. Woe was her, what had she done to deserve this? she exclaimed. The acrobat who had fallen wasted no time in making the rounds, throwing himself at all of the guests' feet and asking us to intervene on his behalf. I had an irritable suspicion that these pleas were the prelude to some new trick. I still had in mind the cook who had "forgotten" to gut the pig. I peered around the dining room, half expecting some stage machinery to burst out of the walls. I was even more on my guard when somebody began to beat a slave for wrapping the master's arm in a bandage that was plain white rather than purple. I wasn't far wrong about what was to come: Trimalchio ordered the acrobat who had fallen on him to be set free rather than punished. That way, no one could ever say that so great a man had been injured by a slave.

§55 We voiced our approval of this decision, and began to natter about the propensity of good fortune to take a tumble. "Right," said Trimalchio. "And I wanna commemorate this downfall with a couple of lines." He asked for a writing tablet and, without racking his brains too long, recited:

113. A resort town on the Bay of Naples—not a very harsh punishment.

114. A subliterary Roman genre of drama.

"The unexpected always hits you from behind.  
And Fortune has her own agenda in mind.  
Waiter, bring us more Falernian wine!"

This epigram opened up the subject of poets. Mopsus the Thracian<sup>115</sup> seemed to be held in the highest favor generally. But Trimalchio said to Agamemnon, "You're a teacher: how does Cicero stack up against Publilius?"<sup>116</sup> Cicero's more sort of 'eloquent,' but I think Publilius has got solidier values. Ever hear anything finer than this?

"The citadel of Mars<sup>117</sup> is pining away,  
Caught in the massive maw of luxury.  
The peacock, clad in Babylonian tapestry  
Of plumage, fattens in captivity  
To sate your appetite. Numidian hens  
And eunuch capons serve you. Even the stork,  
Sweet, welcome foreign guest with slender legs  
And castanet bill—so gentle with its young—  
Avian avatar of spring, exile from frost,  
Has nested in your cooking pot of greed!  
What use the costly pearl, white berry grown  
In India? Should matrons wearing these  
Insignia of the seas lie on strange beds  
And spread their legs with overwhelming lust?  
What good are emeralds, prized virid glass,  
Or carbuncles, those stones of crimson fire?  
Does virtue shine more brightly clad in gems?  
Should brides put on a fabric made of wind,  
And naked walk the streets in linen clouds?

§56 "Okay, being a scholar is the hardest, but what's the second hardest? I think it's being a doctor or a money changer. A doctor's gotta be able to guess what's going on in people's guts. He's gotta predict when a fever's gonna start. But I hate doctors. They put me on a diet of nothing but duck meat. Your money changer's got it hard because he has to see through the silver coating to the worthless copper. If we're talking about animals, then the hardest working ones are oxes and sheep. The oxes

115. There is no historical evidence for the existence of such a person. Is the name a mistake or an absurdity on the freedman's part?

116. Cicero was the greatest Roman orator, Publilius a writer of mimes, which were a popular subliterate form of entertainment. The following lines are probably a satire of Publilius rather than a quotation from his work.

117. That is, Rome with its warlike glory. Mars was the Roman god of war.

feed us all by pulling them plows, and we owe it to the sheep that we can strut around in good clothes. I think it's outrageous that some people wear clothes and eat lamb at the same time. In my opinion, bees are magic animals, barfing up honey that way—even though they're supposed to be getting it from Jove.<sup>118</sup> They sting, but where there's something sweet there's gotta be something that hurts too."

On he went, putting the philosophers out of work, but he was interrupted by a slave coming around with a jar full of cards and reciting the names of party favors as the cards were drawn.<sup>119</sup>

"Hamstrung": the prize was a ham tied up with string.

"Headrest": a joint of neck meat

"Too soon old and too late smart": some wilted parsley and musty stinging nettles

"Contumely": a sow's vulva and some ground meal

"Fig-pecker and fly-catcher": a fig tied to a dildo and some Attic honey

"All dressed up for dinner or the forum": a piece of meat and a writing tablet

"Dog treat and a house for feet": a hare and a shoe

"Parrot fish": a dead parrot and fish tied together

"The letter Beta": a beet

§57 Ascyrtos never did bother to hold back. He threw his hands up in sarcastic wonder and laughed himself to tears. This angered one of Trimalchio's fellow freedmen—the one next to me, in fact—who demanded, "What are you laughing at, you dumb ox? Ain't the gentleman our host elegant enough for you? Sure, you've got more money than he's got. Your parties are lots better. The gods of this place help me: if I were lying next to that guy I'd shut his bleating mouth up. Nice job, laughing at other people, when you're nothing but a runaway, not worth your own piss! If I let that dumb-ass have it, he wouldn't know which way to turn. By Hercules, it takes me a while to get worked up, but he's asking for it. Like they say, if the meat's rotten the worms are gonna breed. He's laughing. What's he got to laugh at? Yeah, I bet his father vowed heaps of money to the gods, to get a son as fine as him. You're a

118. This praise of bees is stereotyped but rather sketchy. Bees were esteemed not only for their production of honey, but for their allegedly asexual reproduction.

119. Some of the following puns are untranslatable, so in places I have had to substitute similar jokes; a literal treatment of this section can be found in Walsh's translation and notes.

Roman knight?<sup>120</sup> Sure, and I'm a king's son. So why was I a slave? I volunteered. I thought it was better to become a Roman citizen someday than stay a provincial just payin' the taxes. And I hope I live a life that don't make me nobody's joke. I'm a man good as any other, walk with my head high and don't hide from nobody. I don't owe a red cent. Nobody hauls me into court, nobody stops me in the forum and says, 'Pay up!' I've bought a bit of land and some precious metals. I feed ten stomachs and the dog as well. I bought my partner out of slavery, to keep her master's dirty hands off her. I paid a thousand denarii for my own freedom. I was voted onto the board in charge of the emperor's worship,<sup>121</sup> and they waived the usual fee. When I'm dead, I won't blush about the life I led. You're busy passing judgment on other people? Why don't you watch your own ass? You see a louse on someone else, but there's a tick on you. You're the only person here who thinks we're funny. Look at your teacher, he likes us—and you oughta take your cue from somebody like him, who's been around. You're still nursing, haven't said your first words. I could break you like a clay jar, rip you like a piece of leather that's rotted in the water. So you've got more money than we do? You can have two lunches and two dinners every day, for all I care. My good name is worth more to me than piles of money. Here's the bottom line: I pay when the bill comes. I was a slave for forty years, but nobody knew whether I was a slave or free. I was a little boy with long hair when I came here. The town hall wasn't even built yet. But I took care to live up to my master's expectations. He was the finest man that ever was—his little pinkie was worth more than all of you is. There were people in that house who tried to trip me up—the usual stuff—but my master's guardian spirit looked out for me, and I came out smelling like a rose. That was a real workout, because, I'm telling you, being born free is as easy as ordering lunch. What are you staring at? You look like a goat that's stuffed himself on vetch and's just standing there waiting to fart."

§58 At this trenchant observation, Giton (who was standing in attendance) let out his long-suppressed laughter in loud snort—rather un-

120. The second highest class of Romans, after the senatorial class. The designation was originally a military one; the "knights" were those wealthy enough to equip themselves to serve in the cavalry: that is, to provide their own horses and the required armor. The property qualification for knights was thus high. Knights, when no longer needed as horsemen, performed other special functions, such as leadership of certain military divisions, government financial administration, and jury duty. By the time of the late Republic, there was little to distinguish knights from senators in status and privilege.

121. The Board of Six. See note 54.

seemly. Ascyrtos' adversary turned to the boy, redirecting his harangue. "You too? *You're* laughing, you curly-haired little prick? Happy Saturnalia, hey? It's December already?<sup>122</sup> When'd you pay your freedom tax? . . .<sup>123</sup> You're not good for nothing but to get nailed on a cross and feed the crows with your body while it rots.<sup>124</sup> I'm so mad you're gonna think it's Jove himself coming down on you—and on that guy too, who don't bother to control you. I swear by the bread that fills my belly, I'd make short work of you right now if it wasn't for the gentleman our host, who's a freedman like me.

"We were all having a nice time, but then you worthless—like master, like slave. I can barely keep my hands off you—not that I'm mean by nature, but once I get started I wouldn't give two cents for my own mother. I'm gonna meet you afterwards, out in public, you little piece of shit. I'm gonna put your master in a damn tight place, and I won't forget about you either, by Hercules. You can scream to Jupiter on Olympus if you want, but it's not gonna do you no good. If I don't keep my word, then I'm not alive and sitting here in front of you. Lot of help that two-bit wig and your two-bit master's gonna be then. Just let me get my teeth into you. Either I don't know myself or you're not gonna be laughing for long, even if you put on a gold beard like a god's statue. I'm gonna bring Athena down on you like a ton of bricks—you and that guy, bet he's in your pants. I never studied geometry, or critical theory, or any of that crap, but I can read block letters, and I know my times table, which is good for small change or weights and measures or big cash amounts, doesn't matter. Let's settle this with a bet. Come on, put down a wager. I'll show you your daddy wasted his money, even if you do know rhetoric.

"What part of the body comes from all over? Or this one: What darts around but never changes place? What part keeps growing but keeps getting shorter?<sup>125</sup> I've got you now, I can see. You're stumped, you're scurrying around for a way out, like a mouse in a piss pot. So you can shut up now and leave your betters alone. They don't even know you exist. Unless you think I'm impressed by that fake gold ring<sup>126</sup>—I can

122. See note 93.

123. A tax of 5 percent was levied on the market value of freed slaves. See Commentary 5: The Roman Household.

124. Concerning the shame of crucifixion, see the story of the Widow of Ephesus, §111 and 112.

125. Possible answers: the foot, the eye, hair.

126. The accusation is of false display of social status. See note 66.



see it's made out of boxwood. Did you steal it from your girlfriend? I swear, by the god of getting ahead—let's go to the forum and do some business. You'll find out what my iron ring can do.<sup>127</sup> You'd look about as good as a fox soaked in the rain. I'm your executioner; I'm gonna chase you down. If I don't, the gods can make it so I don't make money and die like a gentleman, and nobody in town says, "Gods, I wanna die like that." The guy who taught you to behave like you do isn't a teacher, he's a turd. When we were young, we learned what we had to know. Our teacher said, 'Have you got your things together? Go straight home. No looking around. No back talk to your elders.' Now it's pure crap. Nobody grows up worth a damn. If I'm the man that's sitting in front of you, I owe it to my training."

§59 Ascylos was poised to respond to this abuse. However, Trimalchio thought that the choice eloquence of his fellow freedman had charmed us long enough. "Come on, no more squabbling," he said. "Let's all calm down. Hermeros, let the boy alone. He's young and hot-blooded. You should set an example for him. There's one way to win a fight like this: you back down. When you were a kid—hell, you didn't have no brains either. Let's start over and enjoy ourselves. Look, it's my Homer reciters."

A gaggle of them came in, slamming their shields and spears together. Trimalchio took a seat next to them on a big pillow and read aloud in Latin, with a singsong voice, while the reciters went through their usual pretentious exchanges of Greek verse. Well, it did end after a while.

Then Trimalchio said, "Ya know what myth they're doing? Diomedes and Ganymede were two brothers. Helen was their sister. Agamemnon kidnapped her and left a doe so Diana wouldn't know the difference. So Homer tells us how the Trojans and the Tarentines had this big war. Agamemnon won, of course, and had Achilles marry his daughter. So Ajax went crazy—but he'll tell you about it himself."<sup>128</sup>

127. Signet rings were used to sign contracts (an imprint was made in the document's wax seal).

128. A massive garbling of myth. Helen's brothers were Castor and Pollux. Diomedes and Ganymede were, respectively, a Greek warrior who fought in the Trojan War and a young Trojan prince raped by Jupiter (Zeus) and then made the cupbearer of the gods. Paris, a Trojan prince, kidnapped Helen. Agamemnon led the Greek forces in a war to retrieve her. Agamemnon was required to sacrifice his own daughter Iphigeneia to revive the winds at Aulis and bring the assembled Greek fleet to Troy to fight the war. There are in fact tales of a substitution being made for Iphigeneia as a sacrifice, so that the young girl could be spirited away to safety, but the agency was supposed to be divine. It was the

The Homer reciters started yelling, the slaves rushed out of the way, and, on a tray that must have weighed two hundred pounds, an entire boiled calf was brought in. It had a helmet on its head. Ajax came in next, with a drawn sword to signify that he was indeed insane. He hacked up the calf and with forehand and backhand motions gathered up the pieces and shared them out among the startled guests.

§60 But we didn't have long to gape at this tasteful turn of events. The ceiling panels began to groan, and the whole dining room shook. Alarmed, I got up—for all I knew, an acrobat was about to climb down through the roof. No less stunned than I was, the other guests looked up to see what divine portent was on its way. But the ceiling tiles merely swung aside, and a giant hoop was lowered down into the room. All around it hung gold garlands and alabaster bottles of unguent. These, we were told, were our party favors to take home. Looking at the table . . .

Now there was a tray covered with cakes. In the middle stood a pastry Priapus,<sup>129</sup> and from his ample appendage hung a sling full of different fruits, in the usual way it's pictured. We laid our greedy hands on this new display and found—imagine!—that it was another joke. At the slightest touch, every single cake and piece of fruit spewed out saffron—damp, messy stuff all over our faces, quite disgusting. We thought that a dish perfumed with this ritual substance was probably part of some important rite, so we jumped up and yelled, "Hail, Augustus, father of our country!"<sup>130</sup> But we noticed that other people were grabbing fruit during our display of reverence; so we went ahead and got as much as we could tie up in our handkerchiefs—and I was particularly efficient at loading Giton's pockets: I thought that nothing was too much or too good for the boy.

Meanwhile, in came three boys with gleaming white tunics hiked way up. Two of the boys placed on the table a collection of household gods with amulets hanging around their necks. The third carried a dish of wine around, shouting, "May the gods be gracious to us!" . . .

Greeks and Trojans, of course, who fought at Troy. Agamemnon did win the war, but did not marry his remaining daughter, Electra, to Achilles, who was at any rate now dead. Agamemnon had, however, tricked his wife into sending Iphigeneia to Aulis on the pretext that she was to marry Achilles. The Greek warrior Ajax went mad and hacked up livestock, but from humiliation when he was refused the dead Achilles' armor.

129. See note 39.

130. Augustus, the first emperor, was worshipped as a god after his death. However, "Augustus, father of our country" is here a title that refers to the reigning emperor.



He said that the three were called Handy, Lucky, and Moneymaker. An image of Trimalchio himself—ugh, a good likeness too—appeared as well. The others kissed it, so we more or less had to.

§61 After all of the usual prayers for health and steadiness of mind, Trimalchio turned to Niceros and said, “You used to be more fun at a party. Don’t know why, but I don’t hear a mumble out of you now. Come on—if you care about me at all, you’ll tell about that thing that happened to you.”

Niceros was thrilled at the kind words. “May I never make no money no more if I’m not bustin’ to pieces with happiness, ’cause I see you’re doin’ so well. So I’ll tell you a real funny story—even if I’m scared of them scholars laughin’ at me. Well, I’ll just go ahead, and they can think what they want. They can laugh too—it won’t hurt me none. It’s better to get laughed at than to have somebody spit in your face or somethin’.” Thus he spoke, and began the following tale.

“When I was still a slave, we lived in this narrow alley. It’s Gavilla’s house now. It must of been the will of the gods, ’cause when I was there I fell in love with the wife of Terentius who had the inn. You guys all knew Melissa from Tarentum, what kind of gorgeous little dumplin’ she was. But Hercules is my witness, I didn’t love her because of her body. It wasn’t no physical thing at all, but because she was such a decent woman. Anything I asked for, she gave me, never said no . . . If she made a penny, that meant I had half a penny. I dumped everything I made into her lap, and she never done me wrong.

“Well, wouldn’t you know, her partner out there in the country died. So I was frantic, tried to rig things every which way so I could go out and be with her. When you’re in a tight spot, you find out who your friends are, so I wasn’t gonna let her down. §62 It just so happened that the master was out at his estate at Capua to check up on some dumb thing or other. I grabbed the chance and persuaded a guest of ours to go with me as far as the fifth milestone. He was a soldier, strong as hell. We get our butts moving when the cocks are starting to crow, but the moon was shining bright as noon. We came to a graveyard, and this pal of mine went off to the tombstones to take a piss while I say a spell or two to keep off evil and count how many stones there are. But when I turned back to him, he’d taken off all his clothes and put ’em in a pile beside the road. That sure knocked the wind outta me. I stood there like I was dead. He pissed around his clothes, and all of a sudden he turned into a wolf. I’m not joking. I wouldn’t lie for all the money in the world. But like I was saying, once he was a wolf he started howling and ran off to the woods.

“First I was so scared I didn’t even know where I was. Then I went up to get his clothes, but they’d turned to stone. I was just about ready to

fall over dead. But I drew my sword and jumped on every little shadow, and I finally got to my girlfriend’s place. By that time I looked like a ghost myself, I was practically takin’ my last breath, sweat runnin’ down through my crotch, blank eyes. The people there had some hard work bringin’ me around.

“But my Melissa was amazed that I was out so late. She said, ‘If you’d come a little earlier, you could of helped us out. There was this wolf that got into the stock . . . It looked like a butcher’d been here. Well, he got away, but at least he don’t have nothin’ to laugh about. Our slave stuck his neck through with a spear.’

“When I heard that, I wasn’t gonna sleep that night, that’s for damn sure. But when the sun was up I ran home fast as an innkeeper runs after the guy that’s gone without paying the bill. When I got back to the place where the clothes turned into rocks, I didn’t find nothing but blood. Then when I got home the soldier was lying in bed helpless like a sick ox, and a doctor was looking at his neck. I knew then that he was a werewolf, and I wouldn’t of sat down at the table with him if you’d killed me. You can have any opinion you want about what I’ve said. If I’m lying, your guardian spirits can get me for it.”

§63 We were all struck with wonder and admiration. Trimalchio said, “I don’t mean to say nothin’ against your story—but believe me, my hair was standin’ straight up, ’cause I know Niceros don’t talk nonsense. No, you can count on him, he don’t jabber for its own sake. But I can tell you a scary story too, amazing thing, like a donkey getting up on a roof.

“When I was a long-haired little boy—’cause I lived a pampered life the whole time—our master’s favorite slave boy<sup>131</sup> died. By Hercules, he was a pearl of a kid, sexy little number, nothing wrong with *him*. Well, his poor little mother was beating her breast, and a bunch of us were in mourning too, when all of a sudden the witches began to howl. It sounded like a dog running down a hare. We had this guy from Capadocia<sup>132</sup> in the household—tall, not afraid of anything, and strong like you wouldn’t believe! He could of gone against a bull that was in a bad mood. Doesn’t hesitate, draws his sword and runs out the door. But first he’s careful to wrap up his left hand. He sticks one of the women clear through, right here in the middle—may the gods protect what I’m touching now. We heard a groan, and then all the women disappeared. Weird, huh? But if I was lying, you could tell. Then that big lug of ours came back in and threw hisself down on the bed. He was bruised all

131. See note 51.

132. Producing a reputedly bold and hardy race.

over like he'd been whipped—it had to be 'cause them witches touched him. We closed the door and went back to keep mourning the little boy. But when his mother picked up the body to give it a hug, it was just a dummy full of straw. Didn't have no heart, no guts, nothing. The witches had taken the corpse and left this stuffed decoy.

"Listen, you better believe that there are these sorceress women. They go around at night turning everything upside down. The big guy, though—he never did look normal again. He went crazy, and a couple of days later he died."

§64 We were as amazed as we were credulous. We kissed the table and prayed to the creatures of the night to keep to themselves when we went home from the party . . .

By this time, I was gazing at a single lamp and seeing several. The whole dining room looked different. Trimalchio said, "Hey, Plocamos, no stories? Nothing to entertain us? You used to be more fun, with the great stuff from plays you used to recite and sing and all. Too bad, all gone, like figs from last year."

"I've got the gout now," he said. "I'm a wreck. But when I was young I used to sing till I practically got TB from the strain—and that's sayin' nothin' of the way I used to dance and recite scenes, and do imitations of the talk in a barbershop. Apelles<sup>133</sup> was the only one who was ever half as good as me." He put his hand to his mouth and whistled out some garbage, which afterward he said was Greek.

Trimalchio himself was imitating the sound of a trumpet, but then he looked at his pet slave, who was called Croesus.<sup>134</sup> This was a cruddy-eyed little boy with teeth covered in scum. He had a black puppy, obscenely fat, that he was wrapping in a chartreuse scarf. He also put a half-eaten hunk of bread on the couch in front of the animal and forced the poor thing to eat, making it gag and heave.

§65 This scene of thoughtful husbandry reminded Trimalchio to have Scylax,<sup>135</sup> "the protector of hearth and home," brought into the room. In no time, the doorkeeper fetched an immense dog on a chain and kicked it into a sitting position beside the table. Trimalchio took some of the white bread and tossed it to the beast, remarking, "Nobody in this house loves me more."

133. The name of a tragic actor associated with the court of Caligula, in the late 30s C.E.

134. Croesus, the name of a fabulously rich Lydian tyrant, is a ridiculously overblown designation for the child, but in a certain way appropriate for a representative of Trimalchio's household.

135. "Puppy Dog."

The boy was upset at such lavish praise directed toward the brute. He placed the puppy on the floor and urged it to fight. As a dog will do, Scylax filled the dining room with ear-splitting barking and lunged forward, nearly dismembering Croesus' little Pearlie. The tumult spread beyond the dogfight when a lamp on the table was tipped over, breaking all the crystal dishes and spattering some of the guests with hot oil.

Trimalchio, however, was chiefly concerned with appearing indifferent to the destruction of his treasures. He kissed the boy and offered him a piggyback ride. The little slave did not hesitate to mount his master and slap him again and again on the shoulder blades, laughing and shrieking the whole time, "Come on, horsy, how many fingers am I holding up?" This quieted Trimalchio down for a while, but then he ordered punch mixed in a giant bowl and divided among all of the slaves who sat at our feet. He stipulated one thing, though: "If there's anybody who won't take it, pour it over his head. The day's for work. Let's have some fun now."

After this gracious gesture came a plate of snacks. Even the memory of them annoys me. Fattened chickens were passed around instead of the traditional thrushes. There were also garnished goose eggs. Trimalchio ordered us to eat up, adding the joke that the eggs were "boneless hens."

During this course a lictor came banging on the double doors. In came a reveler, who was dressed in white and had an immense number of attendants. I was terrified at this display of authority and thought I must be facing the local praetor.<sup>136</sup> I started to rise and set my bare feet on the floor, but Agamemnon laughed at my trepidation. "Calm down. You must be the dumbest man on earth. That's Habinnas, a sevir.<sup>137</sup> Also a stone mason. Makes nice tombs, I've heard."

Relieved, I put my elbow back on the couch, and, greatly impressed, observed Habinnas' entrance. He was already drunk, and dragged himself along by his wife's shoulders. A number of garlands weighed him down, and unguent dripped from his forehead into his eyes. He lowered himself into the place customarily reserved for the praetor<sup>138</sup> and called for wine and hot water.

Trimalchio was charmed by this witty performance, called for a bigger cup himself, and asked how the previous party had turned out.

"We had everything but you," his friend answered. "My heart was here. By Hercules, though, it was nice. Scissa was having a memorial

136. The praetor's role in law enforcement causes Encolpius the fugitive's fears. See note 59.

137. See note 54.

138. The "lowest" place on the "middle" couch.

service for that poor slave of hers, the one she set free after he was dead. But now I guess she's having a big fight with the collectors of the five percent tax. They valued him at fifty thousand, just as a corpse.<sup>139</sup> It was swell, though, even if we had to pour half our drinks over his bones."

§66 "But what'd you have at dinner?" Trimalchio asked.

"Let me see if I can tell you. Great memory I've got nowadays—for get my own name sometimes. The first course was a roast pig with a sausage garnish, plus blood pudding and chicken gizzards cooked just right, and—I know: beets and whole-wheat bread, which I think is better than white; it's nutritious, and I don't moan and groan when I do my business. The next course was a cold cheesecake, and warm honey with this great Spanish wine. I had a big gob of the cake, and honey up to my neck. On the side we got chickpeas and lupines, as many hazelnuts as we wanted, and an apple apiece. I sneaked two, though. Got 'em here in my handkerchief, 'cause if I don't bring a present to that little tyke of mine, I'll have trouble. Oh, my dearest here reminds me: we had a hunk of bear meat on the menu. Scintilla<sup>140</sup> was stupid enough to try some, and she almost heaved her guts up. But I ate more than a pound. Tasted like boar. If bears eat up us poor people, then I don't know why people shouldn't eat bears. To finish off, we had soft cheese in wine sauce, and one snail each, and a piece of tripe, and chopped liver in little portions, and garnished eggs and turnips and mustard and a dish in that sauce that looks like poop—the recipe's called 'That's Plenty, Palamedes.'<sup>141</sup> Also we got served pickled olives in a big trough. Some of those bastards took three handfuls. We sent the ham back. §67 But tell me, Trimalchio: why doesn't Fortunata come lie down?"

"Oh, you know what she's like. She's gotta know where all the silver is, divide up the scraps among the slaves. She won't even have a drop of water till that's done."

"If she doesn't take her place on the couch right now, then my ass is out of here." He started to get up and was stopped only by all the slaves calling four or five times, on Trimalchio's cue, "Fortunata!" She arrived with her clothes hiked up by a bright yellow belt, so that underneath you could see her cherry-colored tunic, her anklets in a twisted shape, and her gilded slippers. She was wiping her hands on a towel

139. See note 123.

140. See note 78.

141. The name of the recipe carries a mythological reference, although its exact point is obscure. Palamedes was an important leader in the Greek campaign against Troy.

that hung around her neck. She arranged herself on the couch on which Habinnas' wife Scintilla was lying. "Is it really you, honey?" Fortunata asked, bestowing a kiss, while Scintilla clapped her hands in glee.

It quickly got excessive. Fortunata pulled the bracelets off her hideously fat upper arms to give her admiring friend a better look. She finally unsnapped her anklets and took from her hair a net that she boasted was made of refined gold. Trimalchio noticed, and ordered all of this brought to him. "You see the shackles our women wear," he announced. "This is what we lunkheads get stripped bare for. This stuff must weight six and a half pounds. But I've got an armband that weighs ten pounds, myself. It's made out of Mercury's thousandth share of my profits."<sup>142</sup> He didn't want us to think that he was lying, so he had a set of scales fetched and taken around to each of us, so that we could check the weight for ourselves.

Scintilla did not rise above these proceedings. She took from her neck a little gold locket—she even had a name for it: "Lucky." From this, she extracted dangly earrings and presented them for Fortunata's examination. "My man is so good to me," she said. "No woman's got a better pair than this."

"What are you talking about?" Habinnas interrupted. "You cleaned me out for a couple of glass beads. If I had a daughter, I'd just cut her ears off. Everything would be dirt cheap if it weren't for you women. You use up everything good: ice for your drinks, but plain hot piss comin' out of you."<sup>143</sup>

But the women were already the worse for the wine and occupied with private laughter and sloppy kisses. The one was braggingly complaining about how much work it took to run a household; the other was loudly sharing her opinion about her husband's neglect of her and his preference for his pet slave. While they were clinging together, Habinnas sneaked off his couch and over to theirs. Seizing Fortunata's feet, he tossed her upside down. She shrieked, and we could see her dress go up over her knees. After putting herself back together, she huddled with Scintilla and hid her blazing blushes in a napkin.

§68 After a while, Trimalchio ordered the second course. The slaves took away all of the tables and brought new ones, and scattered sawdust tinged with saffron and vermilion—also powdered mica, which I had never seen used this way. Trimalchio was not slow in commenting. "You think I'd be happy with an ordinary second course? Of *course* not.

142. Trimalchio has apparently used for jewelry an offering owed to a god.

143. Ice was a luxury in the ancient world.

Get it? Of *course* not.<sup>144</sup> Okay, if you've got anything good, boy, let us have it."

The Alexandrian slave boy in charge of the hot water started an imitation of nightingales, but Trimalchio snarled, "Not that!" The slave who sat at Habinnas' feet—suddenly, under orders from his master, it appeared—struck up a chant:

"Meanwhile, Aeneas, with his fleet on the high seas . . ." <sup>145</sup>

It was the shrillest, sourest sound that had ever struck my ears; the voice veered up and down in a barbaric version of meter—and there were lines from Atellan farce mixed in!<sup>146</sup> For the first time in my life, Vergil was painful to me. Finally, the boy grew tired and stopped, and Habinnas remarked, "He does that naturally—never went to school. But I educated him by having him follow the hawkers around. Nobody's as good as him at imitating them hawkers, plus mule drivers too. Incredibly talented kid: he's a tailor, a cook, a pastry chef at the same time. Sometimes the Muses just smile on a slave, you know? He'd be perfect if he didn't have two faults: he's circumcised and he snores. Okay, he's got a squint, but I don't care: so does the goddess Venus. He's always lookin' around, and he never keeps quiet. I paid just three hundred denarii for him."

§69 Scintilla interrupted. "You don't know all of that shit's tricks. I'm going to have him branded one of these days, the little pimp."

"I know what your husband's like," Trimalchio laughed. "He's a Cappadocean,<sup>147</sup> damn sure to do right by himself. But I like that. You sure can't get it after you're dead. But don't be jealous, Scintilla. Believe me, we know what you get up to. So help me, I used to bang my own mistress. The master actually suspected, so he sent me off to run one of his farms. But there goes my mouth again. I'll give it some bread and make it shut up."

The slave was really abominably spoiled: he thought what he'd heard was to his credit. He took a clay lamp out of his pocket and spent more than half an hour imitating the sound of a trumpet on it. Habinnas hummed along, pressing down his lower lip. The slave even stepped to the center and mimed a flute player by brandishing a couple of reeds

144. The pun in Latin is untranslatable. *Secundae menses* means both "dessert" and "second tables."

145. Vergil, *Aeneid*, Book 5, line 1.

146. See §53.

147. Compare the hearty Cappadocean in §63.

around. Then he wrapped himself up in a cloak, took a whip, and enacted the adventures of a mule driver. Habinnas called him over, kissed him, gave him a drink, and said, "You get better all the time, Massa. I'll give you a pair of boots for this."

There would have been no relief from all of this if another dessert hadn't been brought, pastry doves stuffed with raisins and nuts. Quinces followed; they were stuck full of spines, to look like sea urchins. We could have put up with this, but there was a dish that was simply horrific, and we would have died of hunger rather than touch it. When it was set before us, it looked like a fattened goose, with fish and all kinds of smaller birds around it. But Trimalchio said, "My friends, everything you see here is made out of just one thing."

I thought I was pretty smart, as right away I had a guess as to what the stuff was. Turning to Agamemnon, I said, "I wouldn't be surprised if the whole thing were made out of wax or clay. I've seen artificial meals like this during the Saturnalia<sup>148</sup> at Rome, and—"

§70 Trimalchio cut me off. "I swear—and if I'm lying, then let my belly get bigger, instead of my investments, ha, ha!—my cook made all of that outta pork. He's the most valuable slave I have. If you want, he'll make a fish from a sow's belly, a pigeon from lard, a dove from ham, a chicken from pork knuckles, you name it. I had this amazing inspiration and called him Daedalus.<sup>149</sup> He's never put his foot wrong, neither, so I ordered him steel knives from Rome. They were made at Noricum."<sup>150</sup> He had these brought so that he could inspect and admire them. He also gave us permission to test the points against our cheeks for sharpness.

Two slaves came in, looking as if they had just had a fight at a well. They had the requisite jars balanced on their shoulders, at any rate. Trimalchio passed his judgment, but neither of them liked his decision, and there was a mutual bashing of jars with walking sticks. We were horrified at this drunken misbehavior, but as we gaped at their brawling we saw oysters and clams falling out of the jars. A slave gathered them onto a tray and handed them around. But the genius of a cook offered some competition for this elegant show. He served snails on a silver grill and sang in a hideous, trembling voice the whole time.

I almost hesitate to say what happened next. It was so tasteless and unheard of. Long-haired boys brought unguent in a silver dish and

148. See note 93.

149. This mythical character constructed, among other things, wings that allowed a human being to fly.

150. A town apparently famous for steel manufacture.

smeared our feet as we lay there. That was after they wrapped garlands around our legs and ankles. Some of this same unguent was dumped into the wine bowl and the lamp.

Now Fortunata showed signs of wanting to dance, and Scintilla was applauding more often than she spoke. Trimalchio spoke up: "Philargyrus, you can come join us, even if you're a damn Green and everybody knows it.<sup>151</sup> Tell your partner Menophila that she can take a flop here too."

To be brief, we were almost thrown off our couches by all the slaves who came crowding into the dining room like some sort of victorious army. Right beside me—toward the more prestigious end of the couch, in fact—was the cook who had made goose out of pork. He stank of brine and spicy sauces. He wasn't happy just to lie down: right away, he started imitating the tragic actor Ephesus<sup>152</sup> and offered to bet his master that the Greens would win first place at the next races.

§71 Trimalchio enjoyed this sparring. "Friends," he said, turning to us, "slaves are people too. They drank mother's milk the same way we all did. It's just that an evil fate got 'em down.<sup>153</sup> But if I've got anything to do with it, they're gonna feel how different a cup of water tastes if you're free. What I mean is, I'm settin' 'em all free in my will. I'm also gonna leave Philargyrus a farm and his partner, and Cario's gettin' an apartment block and his five percent tax<sup>154</sup> and a bed with pillows and blankets. You see, I'm makin' Fortunata my heir so she'll take care of all my friends. I'm saying this now so that everybody loves me as much as if I'm dead."

They all started to thank the master for his kindness. Wanting to do nothing by halves, he ordered a copy of his will brought, and read it aloud from beginning to end while the entire household groaned in chorus.

Trimalchio turned to Habinnas. "You're my best buddy, you know? So are you building my tomb the way I ordered? At the base of my statue you've gotta paint a puppy and garlands and bottles of perfume and all the fights of Petraites.<sup>155</sup> It'll feel like I'm still alive, and I'll owe it all to you. Make the building a hundred feet across the front and two

151. The various teams of Roman chariot racers, and their fans, were classed by color.

152. No other record of him exists.

153. See Commentary 10: Roman Philosophy in the *Satyricon*, for Seneca's thoughts on slaves.

154. See note 123.

155. See §51.

hundred feet back. Lots of fruit trees all over and plenty of grapevines, okay? It's a pile of crap to have gorgeous houses when we're alive and not worry about where we're gonna stay a lot longer. So first of all put up a sign: "This property shall not pass to the heir." And I'm gonna make sure in my will that nobody does me dirty after I'm dead. One of my freedmen's gonna be on guard duty, or the whole town'll be running to crap on my tomb. Do a ship sailing with the sails full of wind, and do me sitting up on a dais in a senator's robe. Give me *five* gold rings,<sup>156</sup> and have me pouring money out of a bag to give away. You know the banquet I gave, with a handout of two denarii a head. Do some dining rooms, too, with the whole town having a great time. Put Fortunata on my right, and have her holding a dove. And give her a little dog tied to her belt. Don't forget that kid who's my favorite. And big jars, and seal 'em with gypsum so the wine won't run out. One of them should be broken, with a boy standing above it and bawling.<sup>157</sup> In the middle put a sundial, so that anybody who wants to know the time has to look at my name. And see what you think of this inscription: 'Here lies Gaius Pompeius Trimalchio, Freedman of Maecenas.'<sup>158</sup> He was elected sevir, though he was not even here to campaign. He could have been in all of the guilds at Rome, but he said no. He had old-fashioned values, he was brave, faithful, and he started small and made it big. He left a fortune of thirty million sesterces. He never in his life paid any attention to a philosopher. Farewell to him. And to you, stranger."

§72 As Trimalchio finished, he burst out richly in tears. Fortunata was crying too, and Habinnas—then the whole household, like a pack of funeral guests, filled the dining room with lamentation. Actually, even I was crying at this point.

"Okay," said Trimalchio, "since we know that we've gotta die, why don't we do some living? I just wanna make you all happy: let's jump in for a bath. Count on it, you won't be sorry. It's as hot as a furnace."

"Sure," said Habinnas. "I don't like nothin' more than makin' two days outta one." He got up barefoot and followed the gleefully exiting Trimalchio.

I looked at Ascylos. "What do you think?" I asked. "As for me, if I take one look at a bath, I'll die on the spot."<sup>159</sup>

156. See note 59.

157. A typical funerary symbol of the fragility of life.

158. Maecenas, an associate of the first emperor, Augustus, was notorious for his effeminate luxury. It seems appropriate that Trimalchio's master also had this name.

159. A hot bath after a rich meal was considered dangerous.

"Let's pretend to go along with it," he said. "While the rest are headed there, we can get out under cover of the crowd."

Accordingly, we set out, and Giton led us along the portico to the door. But the dog chained up there greeted us with so much noise that Ascylos fell into a fish pool. And I, who was just as drunk, and who had been afraid of a painted dog—as I went to the aid of the poor overboard sailor, I was dragged into the same abyss. The steward saved us, intervening to quiet the dog and pull us onto dry land. But Giton had ransomed himself from the dog from the start: everything we had given to him from dinner, he scattered before the baying beast, whose rage was eased by the distraction. Then, wet and shivering, we asked the steward to let us out the door, but he refused.

"You're mistaken if you think you can go out the way you came in. No guest is ever dismissed through the same door. One is an entrance, another an exit."

§73 We were the most wretched of mortals. What were we going to do now, shut up as we were in a new version of the labyrinth?<sup>160</sup> Actually, we *were* wanting to bathe now. We came right out and asked to be taken to the baths. Once there, we threw off our clothes, which Giton undertook to dry for us in the entranceway, and we approached the pool, a narrow one like a cold water tank.

Trimalchio was standing in the water, and even under these circumstances it was impossible to get away from his disgusting boasting. He claimed that nothing was better than to bathe without a crowd around, and that there had been a bakery on this very spot. In a while he sat down, tired. Under the lure of the room's acoustics, he leaned back, opened his drunken mouth to the vaulted ceiling, and proceeded to dismember some songs of Menecrates<sup>161</sup>—or that's what they were according to those who could understand Trimalchio's utterances.

Other guests ran around the rim of the pool, hand in hand, and through the room came an enormous echo of their giggling. Some were trying the stunt of lifting a ring from the floor while their hands were tied behind their backs; or, from a kneeling position, bending back to touch the tips of their toes. We shunned these games and went down into the pool, which had been heated to Trimalchio's specifications.

When our drunkenness evaporated we were led into another dining

160. The original "labyrinth" was attributed to the mythical King Minos. He had a maze built under his palace to house the monstrous Minotaur, who devoured prisoners wandering lost there.

161. A harpist at Nero's court—another possible indication of the date of the *Satyricon*.

room, where Fortunata had laid out a collection of amenities . . . We took note of lamps with bronze fishermen decorating them, solid silver tables set with gilded earthenware cups—and wine being strained through a cloth right out in the open.

Trimalchio said, "Friends, today a slave of mine had his first shave—damn good guy, doesn't waste a crumb. So let's throw a few back and keep the party going till dawn."

§74 While he was still speaking, a cock crowed. Trimalchio was upset and ordered libations poured under the table and unmixed wine sprinkled on a lamp. He even moved a ring to his left hand. "There's some reason for that," he said. "It's like the trumpet before a battle. There's gonna be a fire, or somebody in the neighborhood is gonna croak. The gods spare us! Anybody who brings me that bad-omened little bastard gets a tip."<sup>162</sup>

Before he could finish, the cock was brought, and Trimalchio ordered it stewed in wine. Daedalus, that same expert cook who had made fish and birds out of pork a little while ago, hacked up the cock and tossed the pieces into a pot. While he drained off the boiling broth, Fortunata ground pepper in a little boxwood mill.

When we had consumed this tasty dish, Trimalchio took a look at the contingent of slaves around us. "Huh? You still haven't eaten? Get out, and let the others do their shift." Another squadron accordingly came as a replacement, shouting, "Greetings, Gaius!," whereas from those on the way out it was "Farewell, Gaius!"<sup>163</sup>

At this point came the first real disruption of our good times. Among the new batch of waiters was a boy particularly easy on the eyes. Trimalchio descended on him and kissed him rather persistently. Fortunata, in a forthright and principled assertion of her rights, began to take Trimalchio apart, calling him a piece of filth and a disgrace, with no control over his libido. At last she used the word "dog." Trimalchio, offended, launched a drinking cup into Fortunata's face. She screamed as if she had lost an eye, and moved her shaking hands to her cheek. Scintilla was upset and sheltered her trembling friend in her bosom. An officious slave also applied to her cheek a chilled jug. She leaned against it, weeping and moaning.

"Terrific," said Trimalchio. "The slut's forgotten everything. I took her off the auction block and made a human being out of her. But now she's all puffed up like a frog, thinks her luck's endless. She's got no more sense than a block of wood. Maybe somebody born in a hut

162. See Commentary 7: Roman Religion.

163. See note 58.

shouldn't dream about a mansion. So help me, I'm gonna put her in her place—she's nothin' but a bitch in army boots. Back when I was worth two bits, I could of married a dowry of ten million. You know I'm not lying. And Agatho the perfume dealer took me aside just the other day and said, 'C'mon, don't let your family end with you.' But I'm trying to be a good guy, don't wanna seem like a jerk, so I ram an axe in my own leg. You wanna scratch me in the face? I'll give you a reason. I'm not gonna make you wait to find out how much damage you've done yourself: Habinnas, don't put her statue in my tomb. I at least want some peace after I'm dead. And wait a second, I can give as good as I get: she's not allowed to kiss my corpse."

§75 This thunderbolt roused Habinnas to plead for an end to Trimalchio's anger. "There's none of us who's never done nothing wrong. We're just people, not gods." Scintilla wept and appealed to Trimalchio's guardian spirit, called the man by his first name, Gaius,<sup>164</sup> and begged him to relent. Trimalchio himself no longer held back his tears. "Habinnas, c'mon, be an honest judge, and the gods will let you enjoy your savings. If I did anything wrong, you can spit in my face. That boy is the decentest slave I've got, and I didn't kiss him because he's pretty, but because he's so decent. He can say his times-ten table, he reads straight off just by looking at the words, bought himself a gladiator suit out of his allowance, plus an armchair and two wine dippers. I think a lot of him, yeah, but he's earned it. But Fortunata says no way. So I get this decided for me by you, a bitch who's spent her life with her legs in the air? You damn buzzard, you better think about what's good for you. And don't make me show my teeth, sweetie. You don't wanna be in the way when I'm really angry. You know what I'm like: once I decide something, it's nailed in with a three-inch nail.

"But let's not let this spoil our good time. Life's short. Go on, you people, enjoy yourselves. I was like you once, but I got to where I am because of my character. Guts is what makes a man what he is. Everything else is crap. Buy low, sell high, is what I say, but maybe that's just me. But I'm doing so well that I'm gonna explode or something. Hey, are you still sniveling and crying? I'll give you something to cry about.

"But as I was saying, my character got me where I am today. When I first come out of Asia, I was as tall as that lamp stand. Used to measure myself by it every day. And so as to get a beard on my beak here quicker, I'd rub the lamp oil all around my mouth. Still, I was the master's favorite for fourteen years. It's not wrong if the master makes you do it.

164. See note 58.

Anyway, I managed to do okay by the mistress as well. You know what I'm talking about. But I won't talk about it, 'cause I don't like to brag.

§76 "At any rate, the gods must of been okay with it, 'cause I got in charge of the whole place, and the master was crazy about me. To make a long story short, he made me his heir (along with the emperor, of course), and I got a senator's fortune.<sup>165</sup> But nobody's ever got enough of nothing. I had this itch to go into business. I don't want to bore you with the story, but I built five ships and got a cargo of wine—like solid gold at the time—and I sent them off to Rome. You would of thought I gave orders for the ships to get wrecked, 'cause every one got wrecked. It's the truth I'm telling you; I didn't make this up. Neptune ate up thirty million sesterces in one day. You think I gave up? I'll be damned if I did. I didn't give a shit, it was like I didn't lose a thing. I built more ships, that was bigger and better and luckier. You know, a big ship's not afraid of nothin'. I loaded up more wine, plus lard, and beans, and ointment, and slaves. Nobody was gonna say that I didn't have any balls. And Fortunata did a real loyal thing: she sold all her jewelry and all her clothes and put a hundred gold coins in my hand. That was the yeast that started my fortune rising.

"Well, what the gods want to happen happens fast. On that one trip I piled up ten million sesterces. Then I got out of hock all the property that'd belonged to my master. I built a house, bought myself some slaves, some stock. Everything I touched grew like a honeycomb. As soon as I owned more than the whole town put together, I got out, stopped trading, and started loaning money with freedmen as agents. When I was thinking about getting out, this astrologer comes to town, Greek guy called Serapa, who was so good he could of given the gods advice, and he told me what to do. Shit, he told me stuff that I'd forgot myself. From the ground up, he said everything that was goin' on with me, even in my guts—everything but what I ate the day before. You'd think he'd lived with me my whole life.

§77 "You were there, Habinnas, right? Didn't he say, 'We all know how you got your lady. You've been unlucky in your friends. Nobody is grateful enough toward you. You have large estates. You're sheltering a viper under your wing?' I probably shouldn't tell you this, but I've still got thirty years, four months, and two days to live. And I'm going to get an inheritance real soon. That's what's in store for me, according to the soothsayer. But if I get my property to go as far as Apulia,<sup>166</sup> then I'll

165. See note 112 on joint inheritance with the emperor. The property qualification for becoming a Roman senator was a million sesterces.

166. In southeastern Italy.



have done enough with this life of mine. But while Mercury was watching over my business,<sup>167</sup> I built this house. It was a shack, and now it's a temple. It's got four rooms for eating, twenty bedrooms, two marble porticoes, a bunch of rooms upstairs, the room where I sleep, a sitting room for this viper here, a real good doorkeeper's lodge, and a guest house for a hundred. Just to show you: when Scaurus came here, this was the place he wanted to stay, and his family always stayed at their place by the sea. There's a lot of other stuff, too, that I'll show you just now. Believe me, if a penny's all you've got, it's all you're worth. You have something, you'll get respect. Yours truly here was a frog, but now he's a king. Stichus, bring out the grave clothes I wanna wear at my funeral. And bring me a gob of that unguent, and some of the wine from the jar I ordered set aside for cleaning my remains."

§78 Stichus didn't hesitate, but brought into the dining room a white winding sheet and a toga with a senatorial stripe on it . . .<sup>168</sup>

Trimalchio ordered us to feel them to check the quality of the wool. Smirking, he added, "Stichus, see that the mice and the moths don't get at them, or I'll burn you alive. I wanna look snazzy at my funeral, so that the whole town heaps blessings on me."

Then he opened a jar of spikenard, smeared a little on each of us, and said, "I hope that when I'm dead I enjoy this just as much as when I'm alive." He had wine dumped into a bowl and said, "Okay, pretend that you're my guests at the remembrance day for the dead."

Things were reaching a sickening climax. Trimalchio was weighed down with a loathsome drunkenness. He summoned a new kind of entertainment, trumpeters, into the dining room, and stretched himself out on numerous pillows over his couch. "Pretend I'm dead," he said. "Play something pretty." The trumpeters gave the traditional funerary blast all together. The loudest was the slave of the undertaker, who was the most respectable man there; that noise woke the neighborhood. The sentinels keeping watch in the area must have thought that Trimalchio's house was on fire, as they broke down the door and created pandemonium with axes and water in their usual way. This was a perfect opportunity for us to give Agamemnon the slip, and we rushed out with no more hesitation than if there *had* been a fire.

167. Compare the wall painting in §29.

168. See note 66.

## Part 4

### *Eumolpus*

§79 We didn't have a torch at our service to open up our wandering way. It was the middle of the night already, and no passersby with lights were likely to meet us. Also, we were drunk and didn't know the town: we would have had trouble in the daylight. When we had spent almost a whole hour dragging our feet bloody over the sharp cobblestones and pieces of broken pottery, we finally untangled our problem through a device of Giton's. With great foresight, the boy had been afraid even during the daytime that we would get lost, and had marked every pillar and column with chalk. These tracings broke through the black of night with their glittering significance and showed us lost souls where to go. But we didn't have any less of a sweat once we got to our lair. The old landlady had been drinking for a considerable while with her lodgers and wouldn't have felt a naked flame against her skin. We would have had to spend the night on the threshold had not Trimalchio's accountant come along with his whole entourage. He caused a brief uproar, broke the door down . . . and let us in.

\*

Ah, what a night that was. Ah, gods and goddesses!  
How soft the bed! We clung so warm and tight,  
And poured our souls in kisses back and forth.  
Farewell, life's cares! My death began that night.

I had no reason to congratulate myself. Dissolved in undiluted wine, I let slip my tipsy hands, allowing Ascylos, the genius behind every crime, to steal the boy away from me in the night and transfer him to his own bed. He rolled about there excessively freely with a little pal who