



THE SLAVE

by Lucia Cox

THE SLAVE:

Quick, quick! We don't have time to stand around chatting. The master and mistress are coming home and they'll be here soon! There's such a lot to do get the villa clean and tidy - and it's up to me to make sure everything is done in time!

My name is Nicia and I am thirty years old. I was the eldest of four children but I was sold by my father when I was little because the family had no money. He made sure I could read and write, though, so that I'd have a better life than the poor slaves without an education.

So I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm treated well - most of the time anyway - and I want to keep it that way. All the other slaves have been busy cleaning, tidying and cooking. And now it's time to inspect the house and see what they've been up to. You can come along too. Come on...

Here we are, first stop, the *atrium* - which is the very centre of the house, with a fountain in the middle. You hear the tap, tap, tapping? The master has employed a well-known craftsman and he's making a mosaic on the floor. Tapping away with a chisel. A mosaic is a picture made with tiny squares of coloured tiles. It's a picture of a big party with people dancing and feasting.

The master and mistress are going to have a big 'welcome home' party when they return so the picture has to be finished in time. He's been working on it for a month. It looks like he's just finishing the last little section. Well, if it's not finished on time, we'll just have to put a plant pot over it, won't we!

Come on, we can't stop here. There's so much to do...

Here we are. Next stop, the kitchen!

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The master and mistress will be back for the *cena* – the main evening meal. We're making wild boar stew with homemade bread and seafood with lots of liquamen, which is my favourite. It's the fish sauce that we get delivered in huge jars - because the master eats so much of it. There'll be cheese and plenty of fruit from the garden and, of course, *calda* - which is warm wine mixed with water and spices...as the weather's getting colder now.

Slaves who can cook are highly valuable and are well looked after. Some poor slaves have a very hard life though: the ones without a skill - the ones who can't read and write. All they get is back-breaking work, ten hours a day. Some poor slaves die very young...

Right, everything looks in order in the kitchen. Onwards!

Here we are – the bathroom!

We're preparing a bath for the mistress – she'll have been travelling for hours and she may want to bathe immediately. So I've made sure that the fires are stoked so that there is plenty of under-floor heating and hot water running through the pipes. It is only a very small bath, just big enough for one. But only the wealthy have them.

The master will go to the public baths. He will bathe with other local men and talk very loudly of his adventures in Londinium – which is where they've been on their travels.

The mistress will be cross if there isn't warm water and I'll be punished - which doesn't bear thinking about. I remember one time I was punished – a few years ago now. I'd only just been bought by the master and one morning I forgot to lay out clean clothes for him. Because I was so new, the master was kind to me – I might have been beaten but instead he made me wear the *furca* around my neck. The *furca* is a piece of wood and it's very uncomfortable. It's embarrassing to wear the *furca* as well...and I had to wear it for whole week. I learned my lesson after that and now I'm very organised.



Right, off we go. Next stop, the nursery!

Here we are – the nursery. This is where the children - Sabina and Rufus – spend their time. But oh, look at the mess in here! The dolls' house is tipped up and all the furniture is thrown on the floor. The board game pieces are all mixed up and some of the poor dolls' arms and legs have come off their bodies. I'll have to call one of the other slaves to get it tidy.

Well, no wonder everything's in a mess. The children have let their pet monkey run about off its lead. They know they're supposed to keep it tied up. I suppose they are misbehaving because their mother and father are away. They're good children, really. Just a little spoiled. But if they're still misbehaving when the master and mistress get home, I may be punished - which will not be good. Off we go again!

Here we are outside the front of the house. We're here to place some amulets – they're good luck charms - and to check that rose petals have been spread on the path leading to the house.

The amulets are little carved wooden creatures with precious stones for eyes. I'll place some in the gardens and throughout the home to ward off any evil spirits. Once that's done, all that's left is to pick flowers and sprinkle the rose petals along the path...

Oh! Listen. Can you hear the horse and carriage? The master and mistress! They're coming! They're nearly here! Quickly everyone! Quickly! Quickly!

