

3. 14

14. To *Publius* (?) *Actius*

This horrible affair demands more publicity than a letter - Larcus Macedo, a senator and ex-praetor, has fallen a victim to his own slaves. Admittedly he was a cruel and overbearing master, too ready to forget that his father had been a slave, or perhaps too keenly conscious of it. He was taking a bath in his house at Formiae when suddenly he found himself surrounded; one slave seized him by the throat while the others struck his face and hit him in the chest and stomach and - shocking to say - in his private parts. When they thought he was dead they threw him on to the hot pavement, to make sure he was not still alive. Whether unconscious or feigning to be so, he lay there motionless, thus making them believe that he was quite dead. Only then was he carried out, as if he had fainted with the heat, and received by his slaves who had remained faithful while his concubines ran up, screaming frantically. Roused by their cries and revived by the cooler air he opened his eyes and made some movement to show that he was alive, it being now safe to do so. The guilty slaves fled, but most of them have been arrested and a search is being made for the others.

Macedo was brought back to life with difficulty, but only for a few days; at least he died with the satisfaction of having revenged himself, for he lived to see the same punishment meted out as for murder. There you see the dangers, outrages, and insults to which we are exposed. No master can feel safe because he is kind and considerate; for it is their brutality, not their reasoning capacity, which leads slaves to murder masters.

But let us change the subject. What news is there? None, or I would give you it, for I still have space, and today's holiday gives me time to continue. I will only put in a detail in connexion with Macedo which I have fortunately just remembered. He was in one of the public baths in Rome when a remarkable incident occurred which events have proved to be an omen. One of Macedo's slaves lightly touched a Roman knight to ask him to let them pass; the man turned round and struck not the slave who had touched him, but Macedo himself such a violent blow that he nearly knocked him down. So the baths have been the scene successively of insult to Macedo and then of his death.

8. 16

16. To *Plinius Paternus*

I have been much distressed by illness amongst my servants, the deaths, too, of some of the younger men. Two facts console me somewhat, though inadequately in trouble like this: I am always ready to grant my slaves their freedom, so I don't feel their death is so untimely when they die free men, and I allow even those who remain slaves to make a sort of will which I treat as legally binding. They set out their instructions and requests as they think fit, and I carry them out as if acting under orders. They can distribute their possessions and make any gifts and bequests they like, within the limits of the household; for the house provides a slave with a country and a sort of citizenship.

But though I can take comfort from these thoughts, I still find my powers of resistance weakened by the very feelings of humanity which led me to grant this privilege. Not that I would wish to be harder of heart; and I am well aware that some people look upon misfortunes of this kind as no more than a monetary loss, and think themselves fine men and philosophers for doing so. Whether they are in fact fine and philosophic I can't say, but they are certainly not men. A true man is affected by grief and has feelings, though he may fight them; he allows himself to be consoled, but is not above the need of consolation. I may perhaps have said more on this subject than I ought, but not so much as I would like. Even grief has its pleasure, especially if you can weep in the arms of a friend who is ready with approval or sympathy for your tears.