

The Oracle Paths

Volume 2: The First Ordeal

Chapter 87 – Farewell my hair

The young woman, with whom Cassius seemed to be madly in love, and who was no less than twenty years younger, was not yet in her thirties. Probably Jake's age, but not much older.

She was a beautiful short brunette with long wavy hair. She had curves where it was needed and slightly luscious lips inviting to kiss them. She was barefoot and wore a short dress revealing much of her long legs. Her capricious pouting and her extremely suggestive, but falsely innocent postures were extremely arousing for the Throsgenian slaves with reduced intelligence.

Like Cassius, she did not have the olive skin and blond Venetian hair that most Myrmidians were known to have. Probably a former slave, a descendant of a slave, or a citizen from abroad who had settled in the vicinity of Heliodas.

Everything in her gestures and facial expressions suggested that she worshipped and venerated Cassius, but Jake read something different. Instead, she inspired a certain falsehood in him. Not particularly dangerous, but more subtle than she let on.

Remembering Cassius' change of temperament towards the old priest, he doubted that the lanista was fooled by her little game. In any case, he didn't let it show, and his expression of love was genuine.

‘Well, it seems my wife is in dire need of her husband’s attention, so allow me to take my leave... Priscus, I’ll let you take them to their new quarters. ‘Cassius commanded the lame gladiator as best he could, his wife sensually licking and biting his neck and then his ears as if they were the only ones around. They might as well have been part of the furniture.

‘ All right. ‘ The veteran gladiator with the grayish blond hair answered stoically without changing his expression, clearly accustomed to the young woman’s mannerisms.

‘Follow me. ‘ The veteran barked at them rudely, startling many.

Jake’s eyes popped out as the brunette, who was doing everything she could to excite her husband, suddenly winked at him as he walked by. The beautifully built, though taciturn, slave from the Middle East was also given a teasing wink. She was definitely a maneater.

The gladiator led them along the building through the long corridors along the patio to another wing of the ludus. From the outside, this wing looked as luxurious as the rest of the building, but once inside, they found out to their own detriment that this was not the case.

Farewell to the wide, well-lit, ornate hall, and hello to the rows of dormitories and stone-walled cells. Most of these rooms had no windows, and the beds, when they did have windows, looked particularly uncomfortable. Most of the time they were just simple straw mattresses.

Lighting was provided by bronze lamps with palmette reflectors, whose circular containers were filled with oil, with a lit wick of oakum dipped in it. But more often it was simple, rudimentary wall torches that provided a faint, subdued light.

Further down the corridor, the cells seemed to be of better quality, the furniture more luxurious, and with their own windows. Judging from the personal belongings, clothes and other unique decorations lying around, they were already occupied by someone.

A Inazfi lomru lofazhflu iut om movuz zmmql mr ovu pnnuz dimmzl. Ao ovu laevo md ovu lpriaevo daiouzare ar dzmq ovu pnnuz dimmz, ovuw juzu hiufziw md f vaevuz lofrtfzt.

Once at the foot of the stairs, Priscus stopped abruptly and turned towards them, his hands clasped behind his back. His jaded face betrayed his boredom at having to take on this ungrateful task, but at least he refrained from shifting his bad temper onto them. Sure that he had their full attention, he spoke up.

‘The rooms you glimpsed at the beginning of the corridor will be your new home. I leave it to you to decide who will have their own cell and who will have to share a dormitory. Other groups of slaves have been brought here before you. So you’ll have to make do with them...’

The lame gladiator began to explain the rules of life in the ludus. Which he seemed to have repeated dozens of times in the past, given his monotonous tone.

‘If no one is present at the ludus, it is because in the late afternoon after training, the passage in the thermal baths for your ablutions is obligatory. AS for newcomers like you, you will have to comply with Myrmidian hygiene norms.

‘Next step, you will join the new recruits at the ludus barber and you will be shown how to wash and groom yourself the Myrmidian way. Men will have their heads shaved, short hair for women is

tolerated. Both men and women must have perfectly shaved and hairless bodies at all times. »

'Fuck!'

Jake wasn't the only one insulting the gimp of every name in his head. Before he came into this world, his original body had a decent, but not excessive amount of hair. Unfortunately, after being turned into a Throsgenian, even the Asian had a silvery fleece of hair on his chest. Others, already hairy to begin with, looked like grizzly bears now.

For someone like Jake who was able to let his hair situation become purely catastrophic through sheer laziness, the discipline demanded by the veteran was a horrible strain.

Despite all their resentment, no slaves dared to show their disagreement. As long as it was limited to shaving and not full hair removal, he should be fine.

'When your skulls will be polished and shiny as a mirror, you will be taken to the thermal baths. Once you're clean, you can join the other gladiators and recruits in training at the cantina, where your meal will be distributed.

'More information will be given to you tomorrow morning in the arena on your first day of training. Be alert at all times. Never let your guard down. The competition is extremely tough in this ludus, and constant. Your position among your peers will determine your resources, the quality of your food, your equipment and the luxury of your home. So try to do your best.

'Any questions? Then let's get going. »

Without giving them time to prevaricate on the choice of their rooms, he branched off into a narrower corridor to the right of the spiral staircase, leading them to another section. After a few more turns and corridors, they reached the thermal baths.

Or rather a large adjacent chamber nearby, where hundreds of new, somewhat lost slaves were waiting for their turn at the barber shop. Several servants were regularly sweeping away the huge piles of tufts of hair that formed in one corner a pile as high as a grown up man.

Avoiding making waves, they joined one of the queues in good order, deciding to wait patiently for the inevitable. The young Asian woman looked visibly anxious, repeatedly biting her lips with concern. The thought of losing her long hair seemed to give her terrible anxiety. Even though her brother wanted to console her, he chose to keep quiet. No matter what he said, it would only aggravate her distress.

As for Priscus, he hadn't even bothered to say goodbye. No sooner had they joined one of the queues than he abandoned them to go to the thermal baths in a private section with much more luxurious facilities.

The afternoon was already well advanced when they had started lining up. The sun was almost down when it was finally their turn to have their heads shaved. The barbers were of rare efficiency, depriving them of their precious hair with a few skillful strokes of scissors and the use of a bronze razor with curved blades.

The young woman closed her eyes all the way through the procedure and could not help but breathe a long sigh of relief when she saw in the bronze mirror that the barber had left her a few inches of hair.

Jake didn't flinch when he lost his hair, but refrained from hitting the old barber when the latter dry-shaven his head without bothering to

use any softener or oil. The bronze razor had lost its sharpness as the day went on, and even with his high constitution he had a pretty red head when he left the room.

Hu jfl ovur easur f lozaeaiu frt f gzmrxu zfxmz gudmzu guare epatut om ovu gfovl. Tval oaqu ovu gfovl juzu prqakut frt ovuzu juzu qpioaniu zmmql, tunurtare mr jvuovuz mru bplo jfrouT om lvfsu mdd ovu ljufo, lvfsu, jflv mz zuifk.

After the first rinse, he managed to get rid of his hair at the cost of a few cuts. Unlike the barber, who did not respect them at all, containers full of an oil smelling of olive had been made available to them.

By repeatedly observing the skincare routine of the regular gladiators, he came to understand how to use these instruments of torture.

First, he smeared his body with oil, feeling perfectly ridiculous. Then he scraped the dust and sweat off his body with the strigile, an object with a long, unsharpened blade. Finally, he used the rudimentary bronze razor to shave himself, abandoning the idea of bringing this thing near his genitals, at the risk of injuring his precious family jewels.

When he finally came out of the bathroom, he was completely exhausted, feeling as if he had performed a millimetric heart surgery. He was now hungry. It was about time to find that damn cantina.
