

School # 7803  
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Age 16

## Of Greed and Love: The Story of Gordian III and Tranquillina

Tranquillina sat staring into the pool, and let emptiness fill her, let it seep into every part of her body and soul, for she was nothing now. She remembered the boy emperor elevated to throne at the age of thirteen, after becoming a Caesar under Balbinus and Pupienius. She remembered the fateful night when the Praetorian Guard murdered the *Augusti* and declared her future husband emperor, remembered hearing the Senate's decision agreeing to raise him to the throne of Rome.

The people loved him, the heir of the Gordian house, the son and grandson of the men who declared war against Maximinus, the hated and unwanted emperor of Rome. Yet, father and grandfather could not stand up to the strength of Maximinus and the Third Legion, the father died in battle and the grandfather took his life in despair, leaving the grandson in the hands of his mother, her eunuchs and the senate.

The Senate put Balbinus and Pupienius as the rulers of Rome in place of Maximinus, angering the masses. To appease their people, the Senate, made the grandson a Caesar and heir to throne of Rome. Yet, the masses could not be so easily settled; they rioted, scaring the Praetorian Guard into killing the *Augusti*, and declaring the Caesar emperor of Rome. The Senate followed their lead and formally raised the grandson, her future husband, her father's adopted son, Gordian III to the throne.

She stood, enveloped in thought, and made her way outside, stopping at the doorway; she allowed her *palla* to float in the breeze. Ancilla came up behind and took her arm, her ebony skin making her mistress appear as white as a new lamb. They walked together towards the grass; their golden jewelry rattling in the wind was the only sound either of them heard. Once the grass touched her sandals Tranquillina threw herself to the ground and began to weep. Ancilla bent down to her side, but found herself tossed away by a jeweled fist. Tranquillina stood, blades of grass and dirt clinging to her emerald *stola*, her eyes swollen and red from her tears.

"Why me Juno, why me?" she yelled into the heavens "*I* had power once, my family had power! Now it's gone." She whispered as she lowered her face towards Ancilla, who lay in fear on the ground. "My father, Timesitheus had power; he was the leader of the Praetorian Guard, chosen by Gordian III to become his prefect. He adopted Gordian as a son, taught him how to rule, allowed him to be loved by the people. Gordian admired and loved *my* father so much that he married *me*, Sabina Tranquillina, to seal their relation. But then came war. My husband opened the doors to the temple of *Ianus*, and with my father rode to fight the Persians."

She collapsed crying again, and lay there allowing the tremors of her sadness to take control of her body. Ancilla scurried forward and put her unadorned hand on her mistress' shoulder, Tranquillina stilled beneath her touch, allowing herself to be helped up. Ancilla led Tranquillina inside and passed her off to other slaves to get her a new *stola*. She knew her mistress would not finish her tale today, but she had no need to, there were rumors enough to do that for her. She had heard them when picking up the emerald

*stola*, which her mistress had just ruined, after all a bustling market allowed rumors to spread faster than a plague.

The fact that Gordian and Timesitheus led the Roman army after the Persians, defeating them in Mesopotamia, was true, and that their luck had run out was even truer. For the romours said that Timesitheus had died, most say he was poisoned, but no matter how he died his death was a blow from which Gordian would not recover. The ambitious Philip I took his place, a man with a great desire for power and who, by many, is believed to have killed Timesitheus.

Ancilla walked without making a noise down the marble hallways, her robe of crimson trailing behind like a shadow of blood. She came to her young mistress's room, from which weeping could no longer be heard. She opened the door, worry appearing on her sun beaten face, but when the door opened her mistress sat staring blankly, as if a body without a soul. She took Tranquillina's hair and began to comb it, until it shone like a winter night, she wove her fingers through it, curling, twisting and bending it into the current style. Tranquillina was to greet Philip, home from his battles; she was to look the man who killed her husband and father in the face.

After Philip took his position he began planting seeds that would allow him to become emperor. He stopped the flow of supplies to the army camp, causing the troops to go hungry and blamed it on Gordian; he caused them to lose battles and blamed it on the inexperience of the emperor, not the army's commander, who was Philip himself. Philip managed to slowly turn the army away from Gordian and towards himself, until the troops so angered and deceived by the lies Philip told them, murdered the young Emperor and raised up Philip in his stead.

Tranquillina had left her room to greet the man whom rumors claimed killed her father and husband, and Ancilla followed a safe distance behind, for she desired to hear what this traitor would say to her mistress. She crept up to the corner and pressed herself against the cold marble wall and waited for the conversation to begin.

"Greetings Prefect." said her mistress; her voice was still stiff from her recent attack of grief.

"It's Emperor now, or have you been too busy weeping over the tragic loss of your husband to have heard the news", stated Philip.

Ancilla heard the tone in his voice and immediately fled down the hall, her *stola* waving like the river of blood that Philip would turn her mistress's estate into. She reached Tranquillina's room and hastily began to gather anything of worth that would aid her and her mistress on their flight away from Philip.

"Ahhhhh!"

Her mistress's scream stopped Ancilla's hand from picking up a ruby bracelet, she dropped the bag of preciose items and ran into the hallway, Tranquillina crashed into her and the two tumbled to the ground. Ancilla quickly stood up and saw her mistress was bleeding. The cut looked shallow, so she quickly covered it with a piece of her *stola* and dragged her petrified mistress down another hallway, and then, once her mistress had come to her senses, helped her up and they hurried on towards the back of the estate. Ancilla knew from the tone of Philip's voice that he would kill her mistress, she had just not expected him try so soon. She had hoped that they could flee that night, and pay their way with what treasures they could gather. But they had no time to gather anything now; they would have to flee with only the clothes on their backs.

Ancilla and Tranquillina reached the back of the *villa*, and made their way into the stables. But when they got there they found all the horses had been cut lose, and the slaves who guarded them gone, either killed or captured to be resold. Ancilla took her mistress by the hand and led her out back, watching for any of the troops Philip had hired to eliminate the Gordian estate. Their only chance now was to escape through the vineyard, and hope the vines would hide them from sight.

They reached the back of the house, which faced the vineyard, but a good twenty yards of open grass lay between them and the plants. Ancilla turned and saw the terror plastered to Tranquillina's face, she gripped her hand tighter and the two of them sprinted out towards the vines, knowing only the gods could save them now.

#### Sources

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