

Roman Blood Study Guide

Roman Blood by Steven Saylor

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Roman Blood Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part 1, High and Low: Chapters 1 -15.....	4
Part 2, Portents: Chapters 16 - 26.....	10
Part 3, Justice: Chapters 27 - 34.....	16
Characters.....	21
Objects/Places.....	26
Themes.....	28
Style.....	31
Quotes.....	34
Topics for Discussion.....	36



Plot Summary

Marcus Tullius Cicero, a fledgling advocate in Rome, sends his slave Tiro to the home of Gordianus the Finder in chapter one of Steven Saylor's historical murder mystery *Roman Blood*. Cicero retains Gordianus to help solve a mystery. Cicero's client Sextus Roscius (filius) is accused of killing his father, a wealthy landowner. There are conflicting stories circulating about the reasons for the murder of Sextus Roscius (pater), and it is Gordianus's responsibility to untangle the details before the murder trial.

Gordianus, who is neither of high nor low birth, is well aware of the rigid class system which exists in Rome, but as a result of his tenacity and Cicero's connections in high Roman society, Gordianus finds a way to ferret out the truth. Through his business relationship with Cicero, Gordianus makes the acquaintance of a young nobleman named Marcus Valerius Messalla, called Rufus because of his red hair. Gordianus is also introduced to Caecilia Metella, an eccentric member of Rome's ruling elite. Metella is the former lover of Sextus Roscius (pater). Sextus Roscius (filius) is under house arrest in Caecilia's home and his wife and two daughters live with him. Sextus Roscius (filius) is said to have plotted his father's death out of greed and jealousy. Before his murder, Sextus Roscius (pater) threatened to disinherit his son in favor of the unborn child of a prostitute named Elena. The older man had supposedly fallen in love with Elena. Sextus Roscius (pater) also blamed his son for the death of his younger son, Gaius.

Gordianus comes in contact with all strata of Roman society in his pursuit of the truth. No stranger to the lower elements of Rome, he questions a prostitute at a brothel called the House of Swans and visits a young widow named Polia and her mute son, Eco, in their tenement apartment. After learning of the bad blood between Sextus Roscius (pater) and his cousins Magnus and Capito, Gordianus travels to Ameria, the seat of the Roscius family's thirteen farms. In the nearby community of Narnia, he meets and befriends a local farmer named Titus Megarus, who tells Gordianus a story which could help Sextus Roscius (filius) go free. However, the story could also serve to implicate Sulla, Rome's dictator, in the death of Sextus Roscius (pater). In the true fashion of detective fiction, it is not long before Gordianus's troubles begin. His house is vandalized, his slave Bethesda is attacked, and on more than one occasion, someone tries to kill him. The closer Gordianus comes to solving the murder of Sextus Roscius (pater), the more secrets are revealed. Those in power as well as those at the mercy of the powerful are revealed to be very similar, regardless of the trappings of their social position.



Part 1, High and Low: Chapters 1 -15

Part 1, High and Low: Chapters 1 -15 Summary

Gordianus the Finder, a citizen of Rome, is called upon to investigate a murder. Cicero the advocate has been enlisted to defend Sextus Roscius (filius) in the matter of parricide. Roscius (filius), the son of a wealthy landowner from Ameria, is accused of devising a plot to kill his father in order to inherit the family's farms and substantial wealth. Gordianus goes in search of answers. His investigation brings him in contact with some of the most powerful people in the Roman empire. With each question Gordianus answers, two more are asked. Ancient Rome becomes a place of intrigue, secrets and lies before justice is finally served.

In chapter one, Marcus Tullius Cicero sends his slave, Tiro, to the home of Gordianus the Finder. Gordianus is a detective of sorts and Cicero has a case for the Finder. There has been a murder and Cicero has his own reasons for wanting to get to the bottom of the matter. Tiro (Marcus Tullius Tiro) is Cicero's closest confidant, and the two men, although slave and master, respectively, enjoy a close bond.

Chapter two follows Gordianus and the slave Tiro across Rome toward the home of Marcus Tullius Cicero. It is mid-morning and the streets of Rome are crowded and alive. On the way to Cicero's house, Gordianus and Tiro encounter drunken gladiators, countless slaves running errands for their masters, and embalmers transporting a body through the streets. One of the gladiators strikes the head embalmer and is subsequently stabbed. The body being transported on a cart is that of a young woman. During the scuffle in which the gladiator is wounded and possibly killed, the young woman's corpse rolls off the cart, coming to rest face-up at Gordianus's feet. One of the dead young woman's breasts is exposed when her shroud comes loose. Tiro stares at the corpse in both amazement and disgust. Tiro attempts to convince Gordianus to return to the spot where the gladiator is stabbed but Gordianus refuses, saying it is best not get involved. Tiro refrains from speaking out against Sulla, the dictator of Rome, for fear of being overheard.

Gordianus the Finder finally meets Cicero face-to-face in chapter three. Cicero's home is situated in a rather upscale Roman neighborhood. There are no outward trappings of wealth. One would hardly know the house was inhabited. Gordianus also meets young Tiro's grandfather, Marcus Tullius Tiro. Tiro's grandfather was granted his freedom by Cicero five years ago. The old man wears a "ring of manumission", which attests to his status as a freeman and a citizen of Rome. Gordianus finds Cicero's voice "high and grating," and he thinks Cicero looks quite a bit older than twenty-six. Nonetheless, Cicero welcomes Gordianus into his library/study and the two men, with Tiro in attendance, begin to get to know one another. Cicero asks Gordianus if Gordianus has ever considered killing his own father. Gordianus notices something mischievous about the look in Cicero's eyes. Gordianus can tell right away that Cicero enjoys challenging conversations with people the man considers intellectual peers.



In chapter four, Cicero and Gordianus exchange verbal banter for quite awhile before getting to the details of the case. Cicero has been hired to defend Sextus Roscius in a murder trial. Roscius, the son of a well-to-do landowner from the town of Ameria, is accused of plotting and arranging his father's murder. The father's name is also Sextus Roscius. Roscius the elder was retired, having left his son in charge of the family's financial concerns. The old man was fond of food and drink and had been known to frequent the baths and brothels of Rome. Prior to his demise, the elder Roscius had aligned himself with the powerful Metelli family, most notably with Caecilia Metella.

In chapter five Cicero says that he wants Gordianus, who cannot resist a mystery, to find out who murdered Sextus Roscius the elder, as well as how and why. The man prosecuting the case is named Gaius Eruscus, a former slave and the ancient Roman equivalent of an ambulance chaser. Eruscus, in Cicero's opinion, is only prosecuting Sextus Roscius for the money and possibly for notoriety. Cicero, Tiro and Gordianus the Finder leave Cicero's home. The three men are going to pay a call on Caecilia Metella, one of Sextus Roscius's oldest and dearest friends.

In chapter six, Gordianus, Tiro and Cicero arrive at the home of Caecilia Metella, a rich and very powerful woman. While there, the men also meet Rufus Messalla. Rufus is a nobleman and the half-brother of Hortensius, a well-known Roman advocate. Rufus Messalla is also the younger brother of Valeria, the fifth wife of Roman dictator Sulla. Gordianus learns that Caecilia Metella's sister was Sulla's fourth wife. Sulla divorced Metella's sister while the sister was ill, and it is no secret that the Metelli were displeased with Sulla for his decision. Gordianus also learns that Sextus Roscius (pater) had a son from his second marriage named Gaius who was his father's favorite. Gaius and Sextus Roscius (filius) are half-brothers. Gaius died unexpectedly of food poisoning. Roscius (pater) blames his older son for Gaius's death. Metella tells Gordianus and the others that on the night he was murdered, Roscius (pater) received an urgent message from Elena, one of the prostitutes at the House of Swans.

In chapter seven, Gordianus, Cicero and Tiro finally meet Sextus Roscius (filius) in a back room at Caecilia Metella's house, somewhere near the indoor toilets. Roscius (filius) is under house arrest awaiting his trial for the murder of his father. Roscius (filius) flatly denies having anything to do with his father's death. Gordianus learns the exact location of the murder. It is also revealed that Felix and Chrestus, the old man's most trusted slaves, were with Roscius (pater) when he died. As Gordianus and Cicero are leaving, Gordianus sees Tiro and Roscius's oldest daughter having sex in a small storeroom.

In chapter eight, Gordianus and Bethesda discuss Tiro's clandestine meeting with Roscius's daughter at Caecilia Metella's house.

In chapter nine, Gordianus the Finder and Cicero's slave Tiro set out to find the spot where Sextus Roscius (pater) was killed. Arriving at the narrow street where the House of Swans is located, the two men see a large pool of dried blood. A little further along, Gordianus notices a bloody hand print on the wall of a small sundry shop. The hand print is at approximately knee-level, and cannot be seen (Gordianus surmises) when the



shop door is open. Inside the dusty, dimly-lit shop, Gordianus asks the shopkeeper and his wife about the night of the murder. The old couple tell Gordianus that they neither heard nor saw what went on but that a young woman named Polia claimed to have witnessed the entire episode. Polia is a young widow who lives with her son in the tenement across the street from the sundry shop. When the two men depart, Gordianus does not mention seeing Tiro with Roscius's daughter.

In search of the young widow Polia, Gordianus and Tiro enter the tenement across the way from the sundry shop in chapter ten. After bribing the first-floor doorkeeper, they climb the stairs to Polia's one-room apartment. Polia is less than enthusiastic about their arrival but invites them in anyway. Apparently, someone else had already been there, asking Polia questions about the night of the murder. Polia's mute son, Eco, becomes increasingly agitated about Gordianus questioning his mother and the young boy pulls a knife on Gordianus. Polia denies seeing what happened to Sextus Roscius (pater). She refuses to discuss the matter any further and Gordianus and Tiro leave the apartment. Upon reaching the street, Gordianus accidentally runs into Eco. Through an intricate series of pantomimes, Gordianus and Tiro learn that it was Eco, not Polia, who witnessed the killing of Sextus Roscius (pater). Roscius was attacked by three men. The person who actually stabbed the old man is very tall, left-handed, and walks with a limp. Gordianus then learns that the shopkeeper's wife saw all three assailants the day after Roscius's murder. Polia had told people in the neighborhood that she saw the killing in an effort to protect Eco from possible repercussions. Eco then "tells" Gordianus that the men who came to the apartment to question Polia had raped her.

Gordianus and Tiro leave the narrow street and make their way toward home in chapter eleven. In the sweltering heat, they stop at a small tavern and order water and wine. For a short while, Gordianus listens to Tiro talk animatedly about the day's events. Relaxed and drowsy with wine, they both fall asleep. Gordianus has a terrible dream in which Sextus Roscius (filius) takes on the physical characteristics of his father's murderer. Eco, the widow Polia's mute son, appears in the dream as well. Armed with a knife, Eco stabs Roscius (filius) and his older daughter while the two are having intercourse. Gordianus awakens from the dream, disoriented and unnerved by the heat. He and Tiro leave the tavern and walk to the House of Swans brothel.

In chapter twelve, Tiro and Gordianus the Finder are greeted by the owner of the House of Swans. Gordianus, posing as a potential customer, asks the owner about Elena. The owner informs him that Elena was sold and tries to convince Gordianus to spend his money on Talia, one of the other prostitutes. Gordianus then requests that the owner bring him the most experienced prostitute in the brothel. Electra is then ushered in and, after Gordianus pays the owner in advance, she, Gordianus, and Tiro retire to the woman's room. Gordianus finds out that Elena was a very beautiful young woman who, like many of the prostitutes working at the House of Swans, fantasized about being "rescued" by a man and eventually settling down to start a family. Electra knows all about Elena's relationship with Roscius (pater). She tells Gordianus that the old man would often visit Elena at the House of Swans several times a week. Elena was pregnant, Electra says, and she believed Roscius (pater) was the father of her unborn child. Electra then confirms that Elena had been sold around the time of Roscius's death.



and she was never heard from again. With time still remaining, Gordianus makes Tiro a present of Electra's services.

In chapter thirteen, after leaving the House of Swans, Tiro and Gordianus stop at the scene of a raging tenement fire not far from the Circus Flaminius. A crowd of onlookers has gathered and volunteers try to help put out the blaze, as there are other buildings close by. The owner of one of the adjacent buildings begins offering money to anyone willing to lend a hand in fighting the fire. Meanwhile, Marcus Licinius Crassus, a wealthy and very greedy nobleman, offers the tenement owner a paltry sum of money for his as of yet unburned building. The owner is tempted to refuse. However, with the flames from the building next door threatening to engulf his tenement, he relents and accepts Crassus's money. Gordianus learns from Tiro that Crassus had an innocent man's name added to the proscription list out of greed. After the man's death, Crassus bought all of his property in a rigged auction. As a result, Sulla prohibited Crassus from ever running for public office. Once the fire is contained, Gordianus and Tiro set out for their respective homes.

In chapter fourteen, Gordianus stops at the stables before returning to his house. He arranges for a mount for early the next morning. Upon arriving at his own front door, Gordianus is surprised to find the front door wide open and the house in total darkness. Remembering the knife Eco gave him, Gordianus prepares to defend himself from possible intruders. In the hallway, he comes across the corpse of Bast, Bethesda's cat. There is blood on the floor leading up to Bethesda's room. Gordianus also notices that someone has written something on the wall in blood. After a brief encounter during which Bethesda bites his arm, Gordianus learns that two men broke into the house and vandalized the place. According to Bethesda, the men came into the house a second time as well. A funeral ritual is performed at Bethesda's insistence and Bast's body is placed on a pyre. Gordianus spends a sleepless night wondering who the intruders could be and what they might want from him.

In chapter fifteen, Gordianus, not wanting to leave Bethesda alone in the house, decides to leave her with the stable-master. Bethesda is on loan to the stable-master's household, and she will remain there until Gordianus comes back from Ameria. Also, Gordianus hires one of the stable-master's slaves, Scaldus, to guard his home while he is away. Gordianus sets out alone on horseback just before dawn. He is going to Ameria, where Sextus Roscius (pater) is from, in hopes of gathering more information about the elderly man and his family.

Part 1, High and Low: Chapters 1 -15 Analysis

In this opening section, the main protagonists are introduced. Gordianus the Finder, Marcus Tullius Cicero and Marcus Tullius Tiro his slave, are established as the primary players. Aptly titled "High and Low" Gordianus, Cicero and Tiro are representative of three social classes to be found in ancient Rome. Such stratification was essential to life during the time as there were strict codes of behavior to which one was expected to adhere.



To begin, Gordianus is a citizen, although not high-born. Since no allusion is made to his surname, one can only assume that his origins are somewhat dubious. In addition, it is clear that Gordianus is what readers these days would refer to as "middle class" because he is referred to according to his profession. Cicero, on the other hand, is one rank below a nobleman. This is well-established in the narrative, as the reader is given information concerning Cicero's family background. In addition, one can gauge Cicero's social class by the location of his home. Also, Cicero owns several slaves, whereas Gordianus owns only Bethesda. Marcus Tullius Tiro is the most trusted slave of Cicero, and although he is especially handsome and quite educated, his place in society is clear. Once a slave in Rome, always a slave in Rome. However, Tiro's grandfather is a freedman, which seems to complicate the younger Tiro's relationship with Cicero. Cicero and Tiro are close companions, but only up to a point. Although it is clear to Gordianus that Cicero has devoted time and care to the intellectual and moral development of his young slave, Cicero has no qualms about putting Tiro in his place. "High and Low" also becomes significant in reference to Cicero's sending Tiro to Gordianus's house. Cicero, because he is new to his profession as an advocate, has not yet learned the finer points of doing business with a man such as Gordianus. Had Cicero been more familiar with the ins and outs of hiring a "Finder," he would have sent a less important slave to call on Gordianus.

The other characters introduced in this section also belong to distinct social classes. Sextus Roscius (pater), for example, is a wealthy landowner. And because of his wealth, he is able to socialize with those born above him on the social ladder. In addition, Roscius (pater) is also able to access the lower elements of society as a form of recreation. He frequents brothels and bathhouses and, as such, is able to experience and enjoy these places as momentary diversions while maintaining his status in polite Roman society. He breeches the strict code of association by falling in love with a prostitute.

Caecilia Metella and Rufus Messalla are members of the high-born Roman nobility. Their place in society is the upper echelon of Rome. They are both from well-known Roman families and they possess great wealth and power. In addition, because of their high standing, they command deference from those below them. Rufus is connected to the dictator by marriage, which increases his social cache. In modern terms, both Caecilia Metella and Rufus Messalla would be referred to as "old money." And while their wealth, like that of Sextus Roscius (pater), guarantees them access to all segments of Roman society, it behooves them to associate primarily with those on equal footing.

The introduction of the widow Polia and her son Eco further attests to the fact of social stratification in ancient Rome. As a widow, Polia is without resources and lives in poverty. The supposition here is that were her husband still alive, Polia might well be living better than she is. Also, having lost her husband, Polia has also lost her surname. Without the protection and support of a spouse, Polia is considered a nonentity in Roman society.



It should also be noted here that there was also stratification in the slave class. Bethesda, as Gordianus's slave, cooks, cleans and oversees the daily business of her master's household. Tiro, on the other hand, is one step above Bethesda on the slave continuum because he is male and educated. Other slaves, such as Scaldus, are positioned one step below a house slave like Bethesda.

A proscription list is a list containing the names of those considered to be enemies of the state (or in this case, enemies of Sulla). To be placed on the proscription list is to have one's death warrant issued. Those on the list were summarily executed then decapitated. Subsequently, their lands and properties were seized and sold to the highest bidder at auction. In some cases, a name would be added to the proscription list for personal reasons rather than political ones.



Part 2, Portents: Chapters 16 - 26

Part 2, Portents: Chapters 16 - 26 Summary

In chapter sixteen, Gordianus the Finder stops at a tavern called the Bleating Lamb in the small town of Narnia. There, Gordianus has a conversation with the innkeeper, "an enormously fat Etruscan man with dark yellow teeth" (p. 155). The innkeeper tells Gordianus that Roscius (pater) has family in the area and that there is bad blood between them. Gordianus learns from the innkeeper that Roscius's cousins, Magnus and Capito, hated Sextus Roscius (pater) and that the feeling was mutual. The tavern owner is convinced of Roscius's son's guilt. The younger man hated his father for loving his half-brother, Gaius, more.

Gordianus learns that Mallius Glaucia, a slave once owned by Magnus Roscius (and now his right-hand man), was drinking in the Bleating Lamb the day after Sextus Roscius (pater) was killed. Glaucia, it seemed, had in his possession the knife used to murder Sextus Roscius (pater). The innkeeper also informs Gordianus that on the day he came into the Bleating Lamb, Mallius Glaucia denied killing the older Roscius. He then tells Gordianus of rumors circulating that Roscius (pater) was killed by the dictator's men for being an enemy of Sulla's. It also happens that Roscius's thirteen farms were auctioned off immediately following his demise. Capito, one of the dead man's cousins, purchased three of Roscius's most profitable farms, including the family's original homestead in Ameria. Gordianus's informative visit to the Bleating Lamb ends with a strange conversation between Gordianus and the fat innkeeper's blind father.

Having left Narnia, Gordianus continues on to Ameria in chapter seventeen. On the road, Gordianus meets young Lucius Megarus, the son of a local landowner. Hearing that Lucius's father and Sextus Roscius (pater) had been friends at one time, Gordianus asks Lucius Megarus to have his father invite him to dinner. Lucius Megarus agrees to do as Gordianus asks, and the two part company.

Gordianus continues on the road to Ameria, eventually arriving at the home of Sextus Roscius (pater). Gordianus sees Capito yelling at his slaves in the field but decides not to approach Capito at that time. Instead, Gordianus goes to the front door of the villa and has a conversation with Carus, one of the slaves. Carus is not very forthcoming when Gordianus attempts to question him about the Roscius family. Carus does, however, tell Gordianus that Felix and Chrestus, the slaves who were with Sextus Roscius (pater) the night he was killed, were sold to Chrysogonus, one of Magnus's partners. Chrysogonus, a former slave, also happens to be the dictator's deputy. Gordianus then leaves the Roscius farm and heads for the home of Titus Megarus, Lucius's father. On the road, he passes two men on horseback. Gordianus notices cat scratches on one of the men's faces and surmises that these were the men who broke into his house, attacked Bethesda and killed Bast the cat.



After dinner and wine, Titus Megarus tells Gordianus what he knows of the Roscius family's troubles in Chapter 18. Titus tells Gordianus that Roscius (pater), being the oldest son of his grandfather's sons, inherited the bulk of the family's wealth when the grandfather died. Magnus and Capito, Roscius's cousins, also inherited property, but not nearly as much as Sextus. Of course, this caused envy and resentment to build and Magnus and Capito searched for ways to get even with Sextus Roscius (pater).

Titus confirms that the two men Gordianus passed on the road were Magnus and his former slave, Mallius Glaucia. Titus then tells Gordianus that he and the other farmers in the area had heard that Sextus Roscius (pater) had been assassinated for being Sulla's enemy. Titus says that all of Roscius's property had been bought at auction by Magnus, Capito, and Chrysogonus. After Roscius's property was auctioned off, Titus Megarus and several other landowners in the region went to Sulla personally in hopes of having Roscius's good name restored and his land and wealth returned to his son, Sextus Roscius (filius). According to Titus, Capito was also a member of the delegation and he agreed to return his portion of the family's wealth to his cousin's son. The delegation never met with Sulla himself. Instead, Sulla's associate, Chrysogonus, assured the men that their request would be granted. Some months later, Sextus Roscius (filius) was turned out of his father's house and indicted for his father's murder.

In chapter nineteen, Gordianus the Finder, well rested but sore from hours of riding the day before, leaves the home of Titus Megarus just before midday. Before his departure, however, Gordianus finds out that earlier that same day, Lucius had encountered Magnus, Capito, and Mallius Glaucia heading toward Rome. Gordianus then learns from Titus that since Magnus and Capito were on their way to Rome, no one but the slaves would be at the Roscius farm - in case Gordianus wanted to talk to the slave Carus once more.

On a whim, Gordianus returns to the Roscius homestead and he and Carus talk more in depth about Magnus, Capito, and Sextus Roscius (pater). Carus tells Gordianus that the prostitute Elena was brought to Ameria shortly after Roscius (pater) was murdered and that she was pregnant when she arrived. After the child was born, Carus says, Elena disappeared altogether. Carus then shows Gordianus an unmarked grave which could be Elena's. Finally, Carus makes a somewhat cryptic remark to Gordianus, saying, "And if Sextus Roscius (filius) was a terrible father to his daughters, what business was that of mine?" (p. 195). Staying overnight with a cousin of Titus Megarus, Gordianus the Finder ponders Carus's curious declaration.

In chapter twenty, Gordianus immediately stops at Cicero's house upon returning to Rome. Cicero is pleased with the work Gordianus has done. Tiro, Gordianus and Rufus all go to Caecilia Metella's house to talk with Sextus Roscius (filius) once more. Roscius (filius) is aware of the circumstances surrounding his father's death. He is also aware that Magnus and Capito have a powerful ally in Chrysogonus, Sulla's deputy. Roscius (filius) is convinced that even if Cicero is able to successfully defend him, Magnus, Capito, and Glaucia would stop at nothing to kill him as well. Roscius knows about his father's relationship with Elena, but admits no concern for the young woman or her



child. Believing his cause to be futile, Roscius (filius) strikes out at Gordianus and the others.

Rufus, Caecilia, Gordianus and Tiro leave Roscius (filius) and return to the garden. Tiro makes up an excuse in order to look for Roscius's older daughter. Caecilia returns to her room, exhausted by the interview with Roscius (filius), leaving Gordianus and Rufus alone. While the two men sit in the shade sipping wine, Rufus agrees to attend a party in Sulla's honor given by Chrysogonus the following evening. Rufus knows that Sulla, his brother-in-law, is attracted to him, but is willing to bear the discomfort because he and Gordianus have a plan to sneak Gordianus into Chrysogonus's house. Gordianus wants to learn more about Chrysogonus and his role in the death of Sextus Roscius (pater). During the course of their conversation, Rufus admits, much to Gordianus's surprise, that he is infatuated with Cicero.

Gordianus returns his mount, Vespa, to the stables in chapter twenty-one. He and Bethesda return home. While Bethesda prepares the evening meal, Gordianus goes in search of a bodyguard. In a tavern in the Subura, Gordianus meets Varus the Go-Between, a man of dubious integrity, who arranges for Zoticus to serve as a house guard for a period of four days. Zoticus accompanies Gordianus home. Upon their arrival, they discover that Cicero had already sent another bodyguard to the house. Gordianus, however, distinctly remembers Cicero instructing Gordianus to hire his own guard. Gordianus and Bethesda agree that two bodyguards are better than one. Zoticus positions himself outside the house to keep watch and Cicero's man sits in the vestibule, guarding the entrance from the inside.

After a meal of fish and wine, Gordianus and Bethesda retire for the night. A few hours later, Gordianus awakens, looking for a chamber pot. Finding none, he goes into the garden to relieve himself. Upon reentering the house, Gordianus sees the bodyguard (supposedly hired by Cicero) writing another message on the wall with a blood-soaked cloth. From his vantage point, Gordianus sees Zoticus, with his throat slashed, slumped against the open front door. Gordianus and the other bodyguard begin to struggle. Bethesda hits the bodyguard over the head with a heavy truncheon, but this does little to deter the man. Eventually, Gordianus is able to turn the bodyguard's dagger against him and the bodyguard is killed. Gordianus then realizes that he is in more danger than he first believed.

In chapter twenty-two, Gordianus meets with Tiro, Cicero and Rufus Messalla at Cicero's home. Gordianus tells Cicero about the fake bodyguard. He also informs Cicero that whomever sent the bodyguard to Gordianus's house meant to send a message to Cicero. It comes out that whoever did send the bodyguard knew of the arrangement Cicero and Gordianus had. Finally, Tiro admits that he told the older Roscia girl of Cicero and Gordianus's conversation. Tiro has been inadvertently feeding information to the girl all along. This leaves Gordianus wondering who Sextus Roscius's daughter told. Tiro tells Cicero and the others that he is to meet the girl near Caecilia Metella's house the following day. It also happens that the next evening Chrysogonus is to host a party in Sulla's honor.



In chapter twenty-three, Rufus learns that it was Chrysogonus, not Capito, who purchased the lands of the murdered Sextus Roscius (pater) at auction. However, Rufus is unable to find a written record of the transaction. If Cicero can prove that Roscius (pater) was really on the proscription list, Sextus Roscius (filius) would be innocent. If the elder Roscius's name is not on the list, Chrysogonus and Capito would be unable to justify buying the old man's property at auction. In turn, Sulla would be implicated in the crime as well, given that Chrysogonus is Sulla's deputy and close associate. Cicero ponders the implications of mentioning Sulla's name in connection with the murder of Sextus Roscius (pater).

In the afternoon, Tiro and Gordianus meet with the daughter of Sextus Roscius (filius). The girl tells Gordianus that her father began molesting her when she was much younger. She hates her father, and will stop at nothing to see that he is put to death. She has been giving information to an unknown man who is working for her father's enemies. In addition, the girl admits to using her body to manipulate men and that her trysts with Tiro were simply a means to an end. Tiro and Gordianus hide in the bushes while the girl waits for the unidentified man to whom she has been passing on information. When he finally arrives, Roscius's daughter warns him off and Gordianus and Tiro chase the man out of the park. Gordianus recognizes the man as an associate of Gaius Eruscus, the man prosecuting Sextus Roscius (filius) for parricide.

In chapter twenty-four, Gordianus tells Cicero what he has learned about Sextus Roscius (filius) and his daughter. Cicero seems unconcerned, telling Gordianus that his main priority is seeing to it that Roscius (filius) is acquitted. Later that evening, Gordianus and Tiro position themselves in the bushes just outside the entrance of Chrysogonus's house where the party for Sulla is being held. Gordianus wants to question Felix and Chrestus, the slaves who were with Sextus Roscius (pater) when he was murdered. Felix and Chrestus are now slaves of Chrysogonus. The plan is that Rufus Messalla will sneak away from the festivities at some point and sneak Gordianus and Tiro into the house through the servants' entrance. Shortly, Rufus arrives at Chrysogonus's house in the company of his older half-brother, the advocate Hortensius. Moments later, Sulla also arrives. Rufus and a young slave girl take Gordianus and Tiro into an upstairs pantry. Gordianus and Tiro hide in the shadows when they hear someone open the pantry door. Chrysogonus is not surprised to find Rufus kissing the slave girl. He has come to remind Rufus that Sulla would like Rufus to join him to watch a dance performance. Finally, Chrysogonus leaves.

Felix and Chrestus answer Gordianus's questions in chapter twenty-five. Both men agree that Magnus had been there the night of the murder and that it was Magnus who had prevented Felix and Chrestus from being murdered with their master, Sextus Roscius (pater). Felix and Chrestus identify Magnus's accomplices as Mallius Glaucia (Magnus's former slave) and "Redbeard," the man who posed as the bodyguard sent to Gordianus's home by Cicero. The two slaves go on to tell Gordianus what transpired after Roscius (pater) was killed.

After being returned to their master's house in Ameria, Felix and Chrestus saw Sextus Roscius (filius) on more than one occasion. It seemed strange to them that Roscius



(filius) never asked them for the details concerning his father's murder. The men then tell Gordianus what became of the prostitute Elena after Capito and Magnus took possession of their cousin's lands. Having brought her to Ameria from Rome, Capito and his men had raped Elena repeatedly in an unsuccessful attempt to abort her unborn child. The baby was born, however, just before Felix and Chrestus were sent to Chrysogonus's household in Rome. They had heard that someone (they did not know who) snatched the child soon after birth and threw it into a quarry. Felix and Chrestus assume that it was Capito who killed Elena's baby. Elena, who was also being returned to Rome with Felix and Chrestus, did not survive the journey.

In chapter twenty-six, Gordianus the Finder and Tiro leave Felix and Chrestus and attempt to leave Chrysogonus's house. The two men have difficulty finding a way out, however, and end up watching the party from an indoor balcony. Metrobius, a famous female impersonator and Sulla's first lover, gives a bawdy performance for the dictator and other Roman nobles. Rufus, however, takes offense when Metrobius makes an off-color reference to his sister (and Sulla's fifth wife) Valeria. Sulla chides Rufus for overreacting and not having a sense of humor. Magnus and his henchman Mallius Glaucia discover Gordianus and Tiro spying on Chrysogonus and the others. Gordianus lies, telling Magnus and Glaucia that he and Tiro are Rufus Messalla's slaves. Glaucia suddenly remembers seeing Gordianus on the road to Ameria. Magnus and Glaucia attempt to kill Gordianus and Tiro. Tiro hits Glaucia over the head with a brick that has come loose from the wall and Gordianus manages to knee Magnus in the groin. Tiro and Gordianus escape from Chrysogonus's house by leaping from a balcony. Tiro twists his ankle and Gordianus carries the slave on his back as Magnus and Glaucia chase after them.

Part 2, Portents: Chapters 16 - 26 Analysis

This section, entitled "Portents," contains the bulk of Gordianus's detective work. The word portent means an omen or sign of something to come. The title is an obvious reference to foreshadowing. In a manner of speaking, Gordianus works backwards in this chapter in an effort to piece together the life of Sextus Roscius (pater). His visit to the Bleating Lamb tavern in Narnia and his stay at the home of Titus Megarus as well as a chance sighting of Mallius Glaucia and Magnus serve to further the trajectory of the mystery. "Portents" is also a reference to the ambiguity of the information Gordianus is able to collect. For instance, Gordianus learns of the proscription of Sextus Roscius (pater), which serves to call into question his son's role in the murder. By introducing the feud between Roscius (pater) and his cousins, Magnus and Capito, the author manages to send the reader a signal that things are never what they seem.

Gordianus's encounter with Lucius Megarus foreshadows the revelation of Big Roscia's true character. Meeting Titus Megarus also foreshadows Titus's appearance in Rome at the trial of Sextus Roscius (filius). At this juncture in the narrative, Gordianus feels certain that Megarus is a man of strong morals and integrity who is not afraid to speak up when something goes awry.



Also at this point in the story, Chrysogonus (Sulla's deputy) is introduced. Chrysogonus is a most unusual character, in that he is a former slave of the dictator who is now the dictator's deputy. Since this kind of upward mobility was almost unheard of in Roman society, one is left to wonder about the true nature of Chrysogonus's character. By connecting Chrysogonus to Magnus and Capito, however, the reader is left with a loose narrative thread. By the same token, it is also well-established that Chrysogonus's loyalty to Sulla is questionable. At the same time, it seems as though Sextus Roscius (filius) may well be innocent.

Further foreshadowing occurs at the end of Gordianus's conversation with the slave Crassus. The slave's remark in reference to Sextus Roscius (filius) and his relationship with his two daughters signals that more will be revealed. Cicero's reaction to the news that Roscius (filius) is a child molester is hardly surprising. As a man born into a higher social class, Cicero does not concern himself with such petty details. Cicero is thus established as a man given to selfish single-mindedness. He admits that preparing for his case at the Rostra is of more importance to him. In addition, this foreshadows Cicero's attitude toward the (eventual) acquittal of his client who is, in fact, guilty. True to his profession, Cicero is completely unconcerned with guilt or innocence. To him, the trial itself and his part as advocate is what matters most.

Big Roscia's lack of scruples is confirmed when Gordianus learns that she has been passing information to her father's enemies. It is clear that her negative attitude toward men is a direct result of being molested by her own father. However, her cruelty is also exposed when she admits that Tiro means nothing to her.



Part 3, Justice: Chapters 27 - 34

Part 3, Justice: Chapters 27 - 34 Summary

Magnus and his enforcer Mallius Glaucia chase Gordianus the Finder and Tiro to Caecilia Metella's front door in chapter twenty-seven. Ahausarus the eunuch refuses to let Gordianus and Tiro spend the night in safety at Metella's house, but he does allow Caecilia's litter bearers to transport them to Cicero's home. Ahausarus also dispatches Caecilia's personal staff of gladiators to accompany Gordianus and Tiro for protection.

The next day, Cicero is in the final stages of preparing his defense of Sextus Roscius (filius). The entire household is humming with activity. Gordianus awakens around noon, and he and Bethesda retire to the garden. Tiro, having twisted his ankle while escaping Magnus and Glaucia the night before, walks with the aid of a crudely made wooden crutch. In the garden, Tiro tells Gordianus that Cicero would like Gordianus to remain in the house that day, as Gordianus has caused Cicero enough trouble. Tiro also tells Gordianus that Cicero's guards have been instructed to use force if Gordianus refuses to stay put. Tiro leaves and Gordianus notices that Bethesda seems pleased to learn of Cicero's instructions to Gordianus. She, too, is afraid that Gordianus has had more than his fair share of close calls. Gordianus sends Bethesda to the library, ostensibly to find him something to read. Gordianus then climbs onto the roof of Cicero's house and makes his way down into the street unnoticed.

In chapter twenty-eight, Gordianus wanders the streets of Rome by himself. Eventually, he arrives at the burned-down tenement where he and Tiro first saw Marcus Crassus - the wealthiest man in Rome. Gordianus watches as Crassus's men evict the tenants from the adjoining building. Gordianus leaves the scene quickly and returns to the place where the elder Roscius was killed. The blood stain he noticed on his first visit to the narrow street is still there, although it appears as though someone has attempted to scrub it away. Gordianus then goes to the tenement building where the widow Polia lives with her son Eco. He is surprised to see that a young girl answers the door. Thinking he has come to the wrong apartment, Gordianus begins to walk away. Moments later, he finds out that Polia was two months behind on her rent. The girl's grandmother informs Gordianus that Polia moved away. It also seems that Polia abandoned Eco, something which Gordianus finds it difficult to believe.

After leaving the tenement, Gordianus walks to the House of Swans. He tells Electra what he has learned about Elena and the baby. Electra is upset when she learns that both Elena and her child have died. Later, Gordianus visits a bathhouse and nearly kills a man who he thinks intends to harm him.

Gordianus the Finder makes his way back to Cicero's house in chapter twenty-nine. With the trial only one day away, Cicero is beginning to feel the strain. He is furious with Gordianus for not following his instructions not to leave the house. In the meantime,



Rufus Messalla and Tiro continue to help Cicero with his opening remarks. Sextus Roscius (filius) will go before the judges on the Ides of May (the 15th day of the month).

In chapter thirty, the day of the trial of Sextus Roscius (filius) arrives. After being awakened by Bethesda, Gordianus learns that Cicero, Tiro, and Rufus have already left for the Rostra. Upon his arrival at the Rostra, Gordianus encounters Titus Megarus and his son Lucius. Gordianus is disappointed to learn that Megarus never made it to Cicero's house to be interviewed about the events in Ameria and the landowners' meeting with Chrysogonus. Tiro finds Gordianus in the crowd and the two enter the Rostra to take their seats. Tiro sits at the defense table with Cicero. Gordianus is seated in the gallery, two rows behind Capito and Mallius Glaucia. The trial begins with Gaius Eruscus, the prosecutor, delivering an impressive, impassioned statement.

Cicero's opening oration in chapter thirty-one is just as impressive as Eruscus's. Cicero shocks the judges in the Rostra by directly linking Chrysogonus (and by extension, Sulla) to the murder of Sextus Roscius (pater). Gordianus leaves the gallery to look for the restroom. Mallius Glaucia surprises Gordianus in the restroom and attempts to kill Gordianus. The two men engage in a struggle and Gordianus's knife is knocked out of his hand. Just at the moment when Mallius Glaucia is about to stab Gordianus, Tiro enters the restroom and hits Mallius Glaucia in the back of the head with a brick. Mallius Glaucia collapses, pinning Gordianus to the urine-soaked floor. Tiro, angry at having missed Cicero's summation, leaves Gordianus in the restroom with Mallius Glaucia dead on top of him.

Cicero wins the case and Sextus Roscius (filius) is acquitted in chapter thirty-two. And even though Roscius (filius) is declared innocent in the matter of his father's murder, Gordianus remains concerned for the family's future. That evening, Caecilia Metella hosts a celebration feast at her home in honor of Cicero's victory. Cicero is in good spirits, and even drinks wine to celebrate. After the party at Metella's house, Gordianus the Finder escorts Marcus Tullius Cicero back to Cicero's home near the Capitoline. A few minutes after Cicero and Gordianus arrive, they find Sulla waiting for Cicero out front in a litter, attended by his slaves and his guards. The dictator of Rome has come to discuss Cicero's performance at the Rostra. After all, Cicero did mention Sulla's name in connection with the killing of Roscius (pater) and the treachery which followed.

During the course of Sulla's conversation with Cicero, Gordianus and Tiro learn that Sextus Roscius (filius) did, indeed, murder his half-brother Gaius. Roscius (filius), it seems, was extremely jealous of Gaius and felt threatened by his half-brother's close relationship with their father. When he learned the truth about Gaius's death, Roscius (pater) wrote Roscius (filius) a letter, threatening to disinherit him in favor of Elena's (as yet) unborn child. Sextus Roscius (filius), having been estranged from his father for so long, did not have "easy access" to the old man and so decided to enlist the help of his father's cousins, Capito and Magnus, in eliminating Roscius (pater). In exchange for their assistance, Roscius (filius) promised to give Magnus and Capito a share of the wealth he stood to inherit upon his father's death. The three men put their signatures on a written document, outlining their agreement. Shortly thereafter, Roscius (pater) was killed.



Having inherited his father's property, Sextus (filius) attempted to double-cross his cousins by not sharing the spoils of their crime. In retaliation, Capito manufactured the lie that Sextus Roscius (pater) was killed for being on the proscription list as an enemy of Sulla. With the lie solidly in circulation, Roscius (filius) was forced to forgo his claim to his father's wealth. This enabled Chrysogonus to buy the Roscius family lands and possessions at auction and share the wealth with Magnus and Capito. Once this was accomplished, Capito and Magnus (possibly with the help of Chrysogonus) then completed the ruin of Sextus Roscius (filius) by seeing to it that Roscius (filius) was subsequently charged with his father's murder. Gordianus then learns that it was Sextus Roscius (filius), not Capito, who was responsible for the death of Elena's newborn child. Sulla then informs Cicero and the others that even though Roscius (filius) will go free, only a portion of his family's wealth will be returned to him. In exchange for his safety, Cicero agrees not to pursue any legal action against Magnus, Capito, or Chrysogonus.

After Sulla tells the men of his plan to retire, Rufus Messalla arrives at Cicero's house with the news that Sextus Roscius (filius) is dead.

In chapter thirty-three, Rufus Messalla tells Cicero and the others that Sextus Roscius (filius) fell off of a balcony at the rear of Caecilia Metella's house and died instantly. Sulla believes the younger Roscius's death to be suicide. Cicero, however, is not entirely certain that Roscius (filius) would kill himself. Before Sulla leaves Cicero's house, Gordianus requests that Sulla give his word that the wife and daughters of Sextus Roscius (filius) will be taken care of financially. Sulla agrees.

After the dictator's departure, Gordianus, Tiro and Rufus make their way to Caecilia Metella's house to further investigate Roscius's death. Rufus tells his companions that he discovered Roscius (filius) was dead just moments after he fell from the balcony. Rufus saw Roscius's oldest daughter standing on the spot from which her father fell. It was the girl's scream which alerted Rufus that something terrible had happened. Tiro believes it was she who killed Roscius (filius). Upon further investigation, however, Gordianus discovers that it was Caecilia Metella who committed the crime. Metella confesses to killing her former lover's son after hearing his drunken admission to having planned his father's murder. Caecilia adds that when she encountered Sextus Roscius (filius) in the hallway, he was on his way to his daughters' bedchamber, although she could not understand why. Later, Roscius (filius) admits his crime to Caecilia on the balcony.

In chapter thirty-four, Gordianus and Bethesda prepare to return home the day after the trial. Before they leave, however, Cicero admits to Gordianus that he knew the truth about Sextus Roscius (filius) and his plot to kill his father from the beginning. Gordianus and Bethesda arrive home safely. Later on, Gordianus goes out alone to take a walk. On his way back to the house, Gordianus notices a commotion and sees a group of boys chasing another boy who is dirty and dressed in rags. The boy runs to Gordianus for protection and Gordianus realizes that the dirty child is Eco, the widow Polia's mute son. Gordianus returns Eco's knife to him, still bearing the blood of Mallius Glaucia, one of the men who had raped Eco's mother. Gordianus tells Eco that his mother's rape was



avenged. Eco then accompanies Gordianus the Finder home to Bethesda and the house on the Esquiline Hill.

Part 3, Justice: Chapters 27 - 34 Analysis

In the final section, "Justice", things come full circle for Gordianus and his investigation. The first resolution which takes place in this section occurs when Gordianus once again encounters Marcus Licinius Crassus. Gordianus, who mistrusts those belonging to the upper classes, is vindicated in his belief when he witnesses Crassus's men evicting the tenants from a building recently purchased by Crassus. For Gordianus, some things never change in Rome. Crassus's act of willfully oppressing the poor only serves to confirm Gordianus's resentment of the rich and powerful. Conversely, Gordianus experiences something of the ruling class's largesse when he and Tiro are escorted home by Caecilia Metella's staff of gladiators.

Gordianus's escape from Cicero's house reaffirms his position as a citizen of Rome. He is free to come and go as he pleases and refuses to be "imprisoned," albeit informally, by another citizen. Also, his escape allows Gordianus to tie up a few narrative loose ends. The first narrative thread Gordianus manages to resolve is the matter of the widow Polia and her young son Eco. It is obvious that the woman and her son have moved away; however, the information that Polia has abandoned Eco opens the door for another meeting.

Visiting Electra at the House of Swans serves two purposes. First of all, Electra's sadness upon learning of Elena's death portrays her as a sentient character. That is to say, this beautiful woman, whose job it is to play a certain role, becomes more human when she shows genuine emotion. Rather than just another prostitute, Electra is a woman capable of deep emotional attachment, and therefore she becomes more sympathetic in the reader's eyes. Gordianus's subsequent visit to the bathhouse signals his vulnerability. He escapes from Cicero's house, thinking he will return unscathed. His experience with the man who makes a pass at him proves that Gordianus has been adversely affected by his involvement in the Sextus Roscius (filius) affair. This is also a signal to the reader the possibility of more difficulty to come.

Interestingly enough, the character of Gaius Eruscus proves not to be much of a factor in terms of the narrative as a whole. What serves to further the plot is the revelation that Eruscus is somehow in cahoots with Magnus, Mallius Glaucia, and Capito. The trial scenes also serve to establish Eruscus and Cicero as intellectual and moral opposites.

The plot line involving Mallius Glaucia's part in Polia's rape is resolved when Tiro kills him in the restroom. This incident also marks the second time that Tiro uses a brick to defend Gordianus's life.

The fact that Sextus Roscius (filius) is found not guilty of murdering his father does not exactly equate justice for this character. Justice in the matter of Roscius (pater) is finally served when Caecilia Metella kills Roscius (filius) on the balcony of her home. However,



Metella remains unaware of the molestation, thinking that Roscius (filius) deserves to die for plotting to kill her former lover. In addition, the fact that Caecilia kills for love counteracts Gordianus's feelings toward the nobility.

Caecilia is a woman of feeling and her loyalty to Roscius (pater) is well-served. That she is never prosecuted for killing Roscius (filius) is a testament to her position in society. Caecilia's killing of Roscius (filius) also functions as a kind of justice for Big Roscia. Justice is doubly served because of Sulla's agreement to restore a portion of the family's wealth.

Sulla's visit to the home of Marcus Tullius Cicero functions to reveal the definitive truth surrounding the murder of Sextus Roscius (pater). Sulla's retirement signals an end to his dictatorship as well as his willingness to relinquish the power and prestige that accompanies his title.

Finally, Gordianus's meeting with Eco in the street closes the narrative loop of Polia and her son. In addition, Eco's joining the household establishes Gordianus, Bethesda and Eco as a kind of impromptu family.



Characters

Gordianus the Finder

Gordianus the Finder is approximately thirty years old. He is rather tall and somewhat thick around the middle. Gordianus has a flat nose, curly dark hair, and brown eyes. He is a citizen of Rome and comes from a working-class background. Gordianus is unmarried and has no children. He owns one female slave by the name of Bethesda. Gordianus purchased Bethesda in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, when Bethesda was a young girl. Gordianus and Bethesda enjoy a marriage-type relationship in private. However, they are careful not to demonstrate their feelings for one another when they are in public. It is implied that showing tender feelings for a slave is antithetical to the Roman code of decorum. At one time, Gordianus had quite a few slaves but allowed himself to be convinced to sell them off.

His nickname "the Finder" denotes that Gordianus is something of a sleuth. Professionally, however, most often Gordianus deals primarily with the lower elements of society. He is familiar with the workings of Rome's underbelly - the brothels, gambling halls, and taverns. It is for this reason that people often consult Gordianus as a last resort. Gordianus is more interested in truth than justice. That is to say, Gordianus has a strict sense of right and wrong and he possess a strong moral compass. He is also extremely aware of the significant social and economic gap which separates the wealthy from the poor. Gordianus has an innate mistrust of the Roman nobility, believing them to be greedy and self-serving.

Marcus Tullius Cicero

Cicero (whose surname means "chickpea") comes from a family of some means, although he is not a member of the nobility. Cicero was born in Arpinum and moved to Rome with his family when he was eight years old. At the time of the narrative, Cicero is twenty-six years old, although Gordianus thinks he looks slightly older. Not an especially handsome young man, Cicero is of medium height, with thinning hair, a large forehead and a fleshy nose. Gordianus points out that Cicero's neck is quite long and that he has a very prominent Adam's apple. His chest is described as "thin" and his shoulders are narrow. Cicero has a very delicate digestive system and often forgoes food altogether. Temperamentally, he is somewhat high-strung and he has a tendency to anger quickly. Cicero, a man of great personal discipline and decorum, is unmarried. He neither carouses nor gambles and he encourages moderation in all things. A brilliant orator and fearless advocate, Cicero's speaking voice nonetheless leaves much to be desired.

Although he is not high-born, Cicero nevertheless enjoys social relationships with many upper-crust Romans, such as Caecilia Metella and Rufus Messalla. Like many Romans, Cicero does own slaves. Marcus Tullius Tiro and his grandfather (who bears the same name) are lifelong servants of the Cicero family. Cicero's relationship with young Tiro



goes somewhat beyond that of the more typical master/slave arrangement. Cicero is Tiro's teacher and mentor and as such, Cicero takes an interest in Tiro's education and comportment.

Marcus Tullius Tiro

Tiro is a slave in the household of Marcus Tullius Cicero. As was customary in ancient Rome, he bears his master's name. Tiro is a handsome young man, roughly twenty-three years old. With exquisite facial features, a slim build and beautiful lavender eyes, Tiro looks more like a young refined gentleman than an ordinary house slave. Tiro is exceptionally well-educated for a slave and his intellect serves to set him apart from other servants.

Tiro's primary duties center around his attendance on Cicero. He functions in a secretarial capacity and is known to look down his nose on the more menial aspects of being a slave. In some ways, Tiro is nearly Cicero's equal. Tiro's admiration of his master borders on hero-worship and he defends Cicero vehemently when he perceives his master as being under attack. Tiro willingly adopts Cicero's moderate, even austere lifestyle although he is known to periodically enjoy a cup or two of wine. Tiro differs from Cicero, however, in his fascination with women, most notably the eldest daughter of Sextus Roscius (filius). Also, Tiro has an adventurous spirit, unlike Cicero, and he finds his association with Gordianus the Finder to be both enlightening, dangerous and stimulating. Aside from the occasional foray into Rome's seedier locations, however, Tiro remains something of an innocent.

Caecilia Metella

Wealthy, aging Roman socialite and member of the Metella family, Caecilia is extremely eccentric. Known for her lavish parties and sense of style, Caecilia is nonetheless a lonely, aging spinster. Caecilia Metella is a large woman with fiery red hair (hennaed, no doubt) who wears too much makeup reeks of incense. She is fond of bold jewelry and dresses very expensively. Metella is a devotee of an unspecified Eastern goddess. Caecilia Metella and Sextus Roscius (pater) were once lovers. In old age, the two remained very close friends. Metella, as she is known, was one of the last people to see Sextus Roscius (pater) alive. She allows Sextus Roscius (filius) and his family to live with her out of a sense of obligation to her former lover. Caecilia Metella does not think very highly of Sextus Roscius (filius).

Bethesda

Gordianus the Finder's housekeeper and slave. Bethesda is from Alexandria in Egypt. She and Gordianus are lovers. Bethesda was bought by Gordianus when she was just a girl. The supposition is that Gordianus is the only master Bethesda has ever had. Bethesda has a dark complexion and long, dark hair. She is a beautiful, sensual woman with a fiery temperament. From their interactions, it is clear that Bethesda loves



Gordianus very much. Somewhat petulant and slightly sarcastic, Bethesda is fiercely loyal to Gordianus. And although she is a slave, Bethesda has no qualms about serving Gordianus and caring for his home and comfort.

Marcus Valerius Messalla (Rufus)

Known as Rufus because of his red hair, Marcus Valerius Messalla is a young Roman nobleman. As a member of Rome's ruling class, Rufus has the bearing and demeanor of someone much older than his sixteen years would suggest. As brother-in-law of the dictator Sulla, Rufus has access to people, places and things that other nobles do not. Rufus is infatuated with Cicero, which comes as a complete shock to Gordianus. Physically, Rufus is quite tall and has a ruddy complexion, brown eyes and a freckled nose.

Sextus Roscius (pater)

Sextus Roscius (pater) is a wealthy landowner from the Ameria region. Twice married, Roscius (pater) never recovered from the death of his favorite younger son, Gaius. And although Gaius's death from food poisoning was believed to be an accident, the old man never ceased blaming his older son, Sextus, for the boy's death. Following Gaius's death, Roscius (pater) left his older son to oversee his extensive land holdings in and around Ameria and moved to a fashionable section of Rome. He was intent on living the high life, and spent his money freely. Roscius (pater) was known to frequent the brothels in the Subura. He had a relationship with a young prostitute named Elena and fathered a child with her.

Sextus Roscius (filius)

The oldest son and sole surviving heir of Sextus Roscius (pater). Roscius (filius) has a wife and two daughters. It is revealed in the narrative that Roscius (filius) began molesting his older daughter when she was just a small girl. In addition to planning his father's murder, Roscius (filius) is responsible for the death of his younger half-brother Gaius and the death of Elena's newborn. Roscius (filius) is middle-aged. A large, muscular man, he appears uncouth and "rough-hewn," which implies a certain lack of gentility and a countrified demeanor. When Gordianus meets him at Metella's house, Roscius (filius) is stooped and seems rather frail for a man of his size. His hair and beard are scraggly and unkempt and there are dark circles under his eyes. There is nothing in the narrative to suggest that his appearances changes in any significant way either before or after his trial.

Sulla, Dictator of Rome

Sulla is a man who was born into impoverished circumstances and managed to work his way up the military ladder. He is the brother-in-law of Rufus Messalla. Sulla's current



spouse, his fifth, is Valeria Messalla. It is also well-known that Sulla is bisexual. This is evidenced in his attraction to young Rufus and his longstanding affair with Metrobius, a famous female impersonator. Of indeterminate age, Sulla was once known for his "leonine mane" which now is faded, coarse and dull. Gordianus remarks that Sulla's skin is blemished and splotchy, discolored "and etched all over with red veins as fine as bee's hair", which would imply that Sulla has a fondness for wine. His lips are dry and he has hair growing out of one nostril. It is clear from Gordianus's description of him that Sulla's private and public lives have taken their toll on him. His eyes, however, still bear the passion and ruthlessness of a much younger man.

Chrysogonus

Sulla's former slave, Chrysogonus is Sulla's deputy and an extremely powerful man in Rome. Chrysogonus, whose name is Greek for "Golden-Born" is every bit as handsome as his name would suggest. He is tall and golden-haired, with a "broad jaw and glittering blue eyes". He is a tall man and Gordianus describes him as "strongly built". Chrysogonus is also a criminal of sorts, who is known to add the names of wealthy citizens to Sulla's proscription lists in order to loot their estates by purchasing their treasures at auction.

Polia

A young widow who lives in a tenement with her son, Eco. Not much is revealed about Polia's past or how she came to be living in poverty in Rome. Once attractive, the stress of poverty and caring for her son alone have aged Polia prematurely. Polia eventually abandons her son and disappears.

Eco

The mute son of the widow Polia, Eco stopped speaking when his father died. Eco is perhaps eight or nine years old. After his mother abandons him, Eco becomes part of Gordianus's household.

Magnus Roscius

First cousin to Sextus Roscius (pater), Magnus Roscius is a large, left-handed man who walks with a limp. Magnus is a brawler, a ruffian with a violent streak.

Mallius Glaucia

Former slave and current henchman of Magnus Roscius.



Capito Roscius

Capito is also a first cousin to Sextus Roscius (pater) who moves into the villa in Ameria after his cousin is murdered. Capito is married and has children. No physical description of him is given.

Electra

Electra is a beautiful, mature prostitute who works at the House of Swans. She and Elena were close friends.

Titus Megarus

Titus Megarus is a reasonably well-off farmer in the Ameria region. Titus was also a friend of the Roscius family. A likable man with a large, loving family, Titus Megarus impresses Gordianus with his forthright demeanor and his generous hospitality. However, when Gordianus meets Titus outside the Rostra on the day of the trial, Gordianus realizes that Titus is something of a bumpkin compared to those he knows in Rome. Titus is completely out of his element in the city. Titus also disappoints Gordianus by not coming forward to tell Cicero what happened after Roscius (pater) is killed.

Lucius Megarus

The son of Titus Megarus. Lucius is a friendly, affable young man. Lucius also makes no secret of having been intimate with the older daughter of Sextus Roscius (filius).

Big Roscia

The older daughter of Sextus Roscius (filius). Her first name is never mentioned, hence "Big" is used to distinguish the girl from her younger sister. Big Roscia is a beautiful girl of an undetermined age. She is a victim of incest at the hands of her father; consequently, she will do anything in her power to see her father destroyed. Big Roscia is extremely sexual and she uses her body to manipulate men into giving her what she wants.

Ahausarus

Ahausarus is a eunuch in the household of Caecilia Metella. Nothing is known of his age or appearance. However, it is known that he is sometimes forgetful and Metella views him as particularly sensitive.



Objects/Places

Esquiline Hill

Location of Gordianus the Finder's home. One of the seven hills of Rome.

Capitoline

One of the seven hills of Rome. The home of Marcus Tullius Cicero is located near the Capitoline.

Subura

A section of Rome located at the foot of the Esquiline Hill. Many of ancient Rome's brothels, gambling houses and taverns are located in the Subura.

The Tiber River

The river that runs through the city of Rome. The Tiber is one of Italy's longest rivers.

Narnia

A small farming community in Italy, located approximately a day's ride north of Rome. The location of the Bleating Lamb tavern.

Ameria

Another farming community just north of Rome. Ameria is situated close to the village of Narnia.

Circus Maximus

An ancient stadium located in Rome. The Circus Maximus was used for large public gatherings such as competitive games, gladiator matches and chariot races.

Circus Flaminius

Another large circular arena located in ancient Rome. The Circus Flaminius was used for similar purposes as the Circus Maximus, but on a smaller scale.



The Rostra

A large platform built in Rome from which people often gave speeches. Also, the Rostra is the site of the murder trial of Sextus Roscius (filius). Sulla's statue, which overlooks the Rostra, serves as a reminder of the dictator's omnipresence.

The Senate

A political body of ancient Rome.



Themes

Appetite

Material greed, is pervasive in Steven Saylor's *Roman Blood*.

In Saylor's ancient Rome, it would seem that greed affects those born into the nobility just as significantly as those who are not high-born. Sulla, the Roman dictator in power at the time the narrative takes place, is a prime example of an individual driven by insatiable greed. With dreams of expanding the wealth of the Roman empire, Sulla becomes a successful military logistician and a formidable opponent on the battlefield. As dictator of Rome, Sulla enjoys wealth and near-absolute power as the ruler of the most far-reaching empire of the time. In addition, during the campaigns in which Sulla adds slaves, land, and countless treasures to Rome's coffers, Sulla satisfies his own greed by simultaneously increasing his personal fortunes as well. In addition, Sulla's supporters, by virtue of their association with the dictator, also manage to live in luxury and opulent debauchery. One such person is Chrysogonus ("the Golden-Born"), Sulla's deputy and a former slave. Sulla and Chrysogonus (along with the other powerful men in Rome) are unapologetic about their wealth and the manner in which it is acquired.

At the other end of the spectrum sit Capito and Magnus, cousins of Sextus Roscius (pater). Because of their fathers' lack of industriousness and business savvy, Magnus and Capito stand by and watch their cousin Sextus grow wealthier and more prosperous over the years. Greed and resentment grow until Magnus and Capito hatch a plan with Sextus Roscius's son to murder their cousin and steal his land. Their desire for more and more land and money overtakes their sense of family loyalty, and eventually Capito and Magnus double-cross their cousin's son, hoping to see him executed and out of the way as well.

Slavery

The concept of slavery in ancient Rome was decidedly more complex, and in some ways more sophisticated, than slavery in the United States. First of all, many slaves in Rome were captives brought to the empire's capitol from lands far and near. Slaves were captured during Roman conquests and returned to serve there, most often as part of the spoils of battle. In addition, the relationship between Roman masters and their slaves was, in some cases, one of companionship as well as labor exchange. For instance, in the case of Marcus Tullius Cicero's household, young Tiro serves as his master's secretary and confidante. That is to say, the two men share a close bond which, in some way, transcends more traditional notions of master and slave. Also, Tiro enjoys the benefit of an education by way of his relationship with Cicero. By virtue of this fact, it becomes obvious that young Tiro is better educated and more socially adept than many Roman citizens and freedmen with whom he comes in contact.



Another master/slave relationship in the narrative bearing mention is the relationship between Gordianus the Finder and his slave Bethesda. Even though Gordianus purchased Bethesda in Alexandria (Egypt) when she was a girl, the two are more like husband and wife. Bethesda cooks for Gordianus, mends his clothes and oversees the daily workings of Gordianus's household. Bethesda and Gordianus are also involved in a consensual sexual relationship. The two are careful not to exhibit affection for one another in front of others, however, which attests to a complex unwritten code of acceptable behavior governing such relationships. Bethesda is Gordianus's lover because she chooses to be. The woman does not seem dissatisfied with her place in Gordianus's life. In fact, she, too, enjoys a certain amount of freedom relative to her status as property of a Roman citizen.

Slave owners in ancient Rome had the option of freeing their slaves at any time, allowing them some of the privileges afforded to citizens of Rome. Of course, this would apply only to male slaves, not to females. In addition, slaves who were granted freedom also had the option of remaining in the employ of their former masters, as is the case with Marcus Tullius Tiro (old Tiro). In cases such as these, it was customary for the newly-freed slave to take his master's name.

What's in a Name?

The question of names is an interesting one in terms of Saylor's novel. In keeping with tradition, men of high-born and/or noble status were most often referred to by their last name. Cicero and Sulla are examples of this phenomenon. Also, the majority of male characters have three names, as is the case with Marcus Licinius Crassus and Marcus Valerius Messalla (Rufus).

The matter of naming as it concerns the story's women is somewhat different, however. The lower-born women in the narrative are identified by their first names only as is the case with Bethesda (a slave) and the young widow Polia. In the case of the daughters of Sextus Roscius (filius), the girls are given identifiers which pertain solely to their ages: "Big Roscia" and "Little Roscia." Roscia is the feminine form of Roscius. From a certain perspective, it can be said that the girls are the property of the house of Roscius (meaning, of course, their father). This assertion also proves ironic, given the fact that Sextus Roscius (filius) molests his older daughter from the time she is relatively young up until his death. The plural of Roscius is Roscii. This feminine form of the word also occurs with Caecilia Metella, whose (singular) family name would have been Metellus, the plural being Metelli. It should also be noted that because Metella is a noblewoman, she is alternately known by her given name. In all likelihood, Caecilia Metella would have been the name of all of the other woman in her family, which was a common practice.

In some cases, it was customary for male Roman slaves to assume their masters' first and middle names. For instance, Cicero's slave and his grandfather both bear their master's names Marcus and Tullius while maintaining the family name of Tiro.

In ancient Rome, the identifiers "pater" (father) and "filius" (son) were used instead of Sr. and Jr., respectively. Hence, the use of Sextus Roscius (pater) and Sextus Roscius (filius) in the narrative.

Style

Point of View

The entire novel is narrated from the point of view of Gordianus the Finder. Given that Roman Blood's primary generic designation would be "murder mystery", this fact is unsurprising. Aside from the historical backdrop, the novel is a fairly standard detective story. In modern terms, Gordianus the Finder is actually a private investigator and his first-person perspective allows the reader to follow his progress, learning what Gordianus learns at each step of the case. As a narrator, Gordianus the Finder is more than reliable. What is interesting in the case of this work of historical fiction is "seeing" ancient Rome through the eyes of one who is neither a noble nor a slave. From his vantage point in the middle of Roman social strata, Gordianus is an observer with more mobility than would have been afforded someone born higher or lower than himself.

The only exception to the first-person narration could be the section in chapter twenty-six, which chronicles the life of the dictator Sulla. It is the reader's responsibility to determine who is speaking. If Gordianus is indeed the narrator here, one could surmise that most, if not all, Roman citizens were familiar with Sulla's rise to power. This would reinforce the view of "the mythology of Sulla" as something necessary to distinguish Sulla from other lesser mortals. If Gordianus is not the narrative, this departure could be interpreted as a device employed by the author to ground a fictional work in factual history.

Also, the statements given in the Rostra by Marcus Tullius Cicero and Gaius Eruscus can be seen as reasonable departures from Gordianus's personal narration.

Setting

The setting is ancient Rome. As such, the fiction of Roman Blood is enhanced by the inclusion of real people and real places within the city. By identifying certain key landmarks and locations in and around Rome, the author gives the reader an opportunity for further study into this mighty civilization. Locations such as the Subura can still be found and visited today. Saylor's fictionalization of life in Rome brings history to life in a way which renders the time period somewhat more accessible to his readers.

As with much historical fiction, many of the characters mentioned in the narrative are actual figures from Roman history. Marcus Tullius Cicero was, in fact, one of the most well-known Roman orators of all time. He was a lawyer, philosopher, and statesman. His works are still widely read and studied today. Likewise, Lucius Cornelius Sulla was, indeed, one of the dictators of Rome. Marcus Valerius Messalla Rufus was also a person of some notoriety, as was his sister Valeria. Blending ancient facts with a modern mystery is a difficult task to undertake and belies a good deal of secondary knowledge on the author's part. In addition, it should be noted that although certain



characters in Roman Blood did live in ancient Rome, the only character whose historical personage is not fictionalized, aside from his role in the narrative, is Lucius Cornelius Sulla.

Language and Meaning

The language used in Roman Blood is neither extremely difficult nor overly simple. It is assumed that since the characters live in Rome, they are speaking to one another in Latin, which was the language of the empire. On at least one occasion, Gordianus the Finder comments on the quality of someone's Latin - usually in comparison to his own use of the language as a citizen of Rome.

Language becomes important, however, in the case of Marcus Tullius Cicero, the advocate. Pleading a case is a matter of choosing the proper words that will have the desired effect. In Cicero's case, the right words are able to secure an acquittal for his client. Similarly, the words of Cicero's adversary, Gaius Eruscus, are just as eloquent and convincing. But Cicero is Cicero, and to do justice to his historical personage, it was imperative for the author to write in such a way that mirrors Cicero's actual style and prose structure.

Language is most important in the narrative because it is through language, words, that Gordianus is able to learn what happened the night Sextus Roscius (pater) was killed. It is necessary for Gordianus to listen to the words being said and then synthesize them into timelines, story lines and hard fact. Gordianus "interviews" quite a few individuals during the course of the novel. His initial conversation with the slave Tiro leads Gordianus to the conclusion that Tiro is an educated man who is unquestioningly loyal to his master. Words also have a privileged place in Gordianus's first interaction with Cicero. The two men joust verbally and each is able, through their conversation, to judge the wisdom, sincerity, and intellect of the other.

Also at play in the narrative is language in forms other than face-to-face conversation. For example, on a stroll through the streets of Rome, Gordianus reads political graffiti. In another instance, the reader learns of a petition taken to Chrysogonus by Titus Megarus and the delegation of farmers from Ameria. Furthermore, Sextus Roscius (filius) and his cousins Magnus and Capito draw up a contract outlining the murder of Sextus Roscius (pater). Next, the female impersonator Metrobius performs a raunchy version of a song written to honor Sulla. Someone also writes a threatening verse on the wall of Gordianus's house in blood. Finally, nonverbal language is used by the young mute boy Eco. The boy pantomimes the murder of Sextus Roscius (pater) for Gordianus. This is how Gordianus learns that it is Eco, and not the boy's mother, who witnessed the killing.

Structure

Structurally, the novel takes a standard form. Roman Blood is divided into three main sections, each containing between eight and sixteen chapters. Chapter eight is the



shortest chapter in the novel. There are thirty-four chapters in all. In terms of narrative structure, Part 1, High and Low serves to establish the mystery and introduce the reader to the primary characters. Also, the title of the section refers to the class structure of ancient Rome. It is established that Gordianus the Finder, like many in Rome, is fully aware of the rigid class distinctions which existed at the time. Part 2, Portents, is the portion of the novel in which the arc of action steadily progresses and the tension increases significantly. "Portents" refers specifically to signs and omens of things to come. It is in this section that Gordianus begins putting together the pieces of the murder puzzle. Part 3, Justice, features the resolution of the mystery and completes the Eco/Gordianus subplot which is established in the first part of the narrative. The plot progression is linear, each chapter takes up where the preceding one ends. The action continues along a straight line, with the only narrative departure being the chronicle of Sulla's life featured in chapter twenty-six.



Quotes

"There is nothing that thrills a Roman like a trial, especially when it promises to end in someone's ruin." Chap. 30, p. 320

"In an unjust state, any act of decency is by its nature dangerous." Chap. 17, p. 315

"Fortune is the only true protection against death." Chap. 28, p. 298

"Such sleep is like eternity; with nothing to measure the passage of time and no markings to show the volume of space, an instant is no different from an aeon and an atom is as large as the universe." Chap. 27, p. 292

"It's a former slave who makes the cruelest master." Chap. 24, p. 248

"Chrysogonus was famous for surrounding himself with pretty decorations and toys." Chap. 24, p. 248

"Sometimes even a slave may possess a secret, though the world allows him to possess nothing else." Chap. 23, p. 233

"I stared into my eyes and with a shock I came to my senses, and finally knew that I was not in a nightmare but in the very heart of the great, slumbering city of Rome." Chap. 21, p. 218

"The laws of man strive for balance, but the laws of love are pure caprice." Chap. 20, p. 209

"[T]here's no way to pick the fleas without wrestling the dog." Chap. 20, p. 203

"The slaves leaned upon their shovels and fingered their spades, wearing on their dirt-streaked faces the bored, humiliated expression of men who have been yelled at for a very long time." Chap. 17, p. 171

"But the man who travels alone - so runs that proverb as old as the Etruscans - has a fool for a companion." Chap. 16, p. 151

"It is one thing, so I am told, to join fortunes in marriage to a free woman. It is something else to own a woman as a slave, and I have often wondered which is more bitter and which more sweet." Chap. 15, p. 146

"The nature of time changes while the world sleeps. Moments congeal, moments attenuate, like lumps in thin cheese." Chap. 15, p. 145

"When the Romans attempt to mimic the East, they seldom succeed. Grace and true luxury cannot be so easily copied, or purchased wholesale." Chap. 12, p. 116



"I looked over my shoulder at the doorkeeper, who sat on a stool beside the portal busying himself with some sort of handicraft, his foot attached to the wall by a chain just long enough to allow him to reach the door." Chap. 6, p. 53

"[Caecilia Metella is] given to strange ways - such as happens when a woman is left to her own devices too long, without a husband and children to occupy her with wholesome pursuits." Chap. 6, p. 52

"Rome is like a woman of fabulous wealth and beauty, draped in gold and festooned with jewels, her belly big with a fetus named Empire - and infested from head to foot by a million scampering lice." Chap. 4, p. 41

"The beautiful all look alike, but the plain man is plain according to his own peculiarity." Chap. 3, p. 31



Topics for Discussion

Explain why Gordianus of Rome is known as "The Finder". In modern day terms, what would Gordianus's occupation be?

Why does Tiro's grandfather call himself "Marcus Tullius Tiro"? Why does the old man continue to work in Cicero's household even after he is granted his freedom?

What nickname does the dictator Sulla give himself and why? Use textual examples to reinforce the points being made.

What reason does Caecilia Metella give for killing Sextus Roscius (filius)? Will she be prosecuted for the murder? Why or why not?

In your estimation, why is "big" Roscia unsuccessful in her attempt to seduce Titus Megarus?

Explain the significance of Sulla's statue in the Rostra.

What, exactly, complicates the relationship between Gordianus the Finder and his slave Bethesda?

"I stared into the face of Marcus Licinius Crassus, and I saw the future of Rome" (p. 133). Identify the speaker and discuss the significance of the quote.

What does Gordianus the Finder mean when he says, "Every powerful man must have omens of greatness attached to his legend"? Which powerful man is Gordianus talking about? Who are Romulus and Remus?

Throughout the narrative, reference is made to the day of the month known as "the Ides". Specifically, which day of the month is this?