

Quintus Remus



# A CORPSE

*in the*

# CALDARIUM

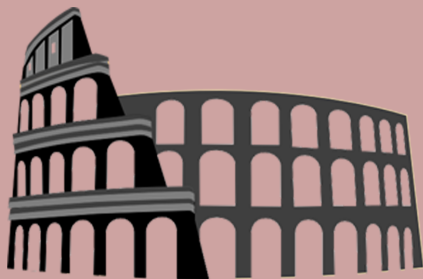
A VINICIUS PUSILLI NOVEL



THE IMPERIAL ROME  
MYSTERIES IV

# THE IMPERIAL ROME MYSTERIES

Quintus Remus



Universal praise for the *Imperial Rome Mysteries Series*

*"Quintus Remus has created a cast of characters that stay in the memory long after the bread and circuses have ceased"*

THE INDEPENDENT

*"Three cheers for The Imperial Rome Mysteries: at last a believable classical whodunnit for the barely educated"*

THE CHILFROME ECHO

*"Give me a Vinicius Pusilli Mystery and I am a happy woman. Give me an umbrella and I'll brain that Jermyn Street"*

THE DHRA MONTHLY BULLETIN



*Quintus Remus is the nom de plume of would-be amateur sleuth and former Threadbone Digital Laboratories technologist - Effigies Denudator - who, in addition to writing novels, is also an internationally famed exponent (and co-developer) of the Post synchronic chromic lateral denudation™ technique designed to precision scratch images through advanced digital technology to reveal hitherto undiscovered layers of interest and (sometimes) meaning beneath the surface materials.*

*She is also a renowned zither player and has appeared on at least one occasion with the Thrupiece Philharmonic Orchestra under charismatic Russian maestra Olga Legova. Writing as Quintus Remus she has received critical acclaim from a number of organisations and was briefly Chair of the Silver Pugio Awards Panel - Dorset's premier prize for Historical Detective Fiction. She lives in Piddlehinton with Trucious, her beloved pomeranian.*



QUINTUS REMUS

A CORPSE *in the*  
CALDARIUM



# The Roman Empire at its peak 117 A.D.

Sarmatia



## CHAPTER ONE

*“Marcus Tullus in tablino Sedet. Epistolam...”* “*Stercore defricatus et urina*”, the short, fat and prematurely balding man exclaimed, laying down his stylus and reaching for the discarded strigil which he generally deployed to scratch the otherwise unreachable itch which frequently erupted half way down his hairy lower back. Plagerising the great authors and turning them into Latin Primers for posterity was all well and good - it certainly paid the bath house subscription with a little left over for “*a slippery Livia special*” on alternate Tuesdays - but it was hardly proper work for a man who aspired to being the greatest playwright of his generation and the pride of Imperial Rome. Worse still, Latin Primers would not become the chosen instrument of torture for northern grammar school headmasters for another 1900 years and he doubted he would live long enough to derive satisfaction from that.

The short, fat, prematurely balding would-be playwright stirred in his seat and, unclenching his left buttock emitted a gaseous cloud. Too much *garum* on his boiled veal, he reflected. It was definitely not good for his constitution and fouled his breath in a way which made even the accommodating (and very well rewarded) Livia wince. But at least that meant she concentrated her attentions elsewhere and kept her mind properly focused on lower things.

Noises from beyond the open window indicated that the children had been released from the *schola militum* that adjoined the aspiring writer's house. Soon they would be busy graffitiiing his walls with obscene pictures of giant phalluses and correspondingly accommodating ladies' parts. Such was the way with VI year olds nowadays, ever since Emperor Stultus had decided that infant strangulation could no longer be considered justifiable culling.

Still there was a bright side to everything; the little morons were out of class: *ergo* it must be XII o' clock and *mutatis mutandis* time for a little something from the kitchen. The fat man moved uneasily from his chair, easing himself into the large and somewhat stained depression on the couch on which he usually took his mid-day repast.

He clapped his hands and wrestled his testicles into their proper place, sniffing his fingers with pre-digestive concern. They would "*do*". Such co-ordination was no mean feat for a man of his size and infamous inactivity.

A downtrodden woman whose pervasive odour suggested either long acquaintance with the innards of pelagic fish or else a recent visit to the local market appeared and bowed ungraciously. "*You clapped?*" she inquired with no great enthusiasm. "*I did but not by way of applause*", mocked the short, fat and prematurely balding wannabe stage writer. "*It was more in the way of a summons which had you applied a priori and not post fortiori reasoning you would have known signalled my desire to partake of a little prandium. Perhaps a small thrush or a couple of dormice?*" "*Suit yourself*", the woman replied giving little hint of the malicious intent she bore towards her indigent malodorous and currently supine employer. "*There's a bit of fig-pecker in rancid olive oil left over from yesterday if you like. Otherwise I'll have to nip to the agora and you know what it's like on a Tuesday.*"

The short, fat and prematurely balding aspiring playwright suddenly sat bolt upright as though pricked by a particularly sharp *ferrum*, all thoughts of rancid fig-pecker banished from his mind. "*By Jupiter, Demeter and all the Gods*", he exploded. "*Tuesday and alternate Tuesday too. Livia. A hot tub and a firm grip. And IV past XII o'clock already. By Jove I must be off*" And wasting no time (which is to say no more than it took to grab his *sacculus*, throw off his wax spattered toga and fit a clean Marcellus Armani underpouch to his scrotum) he left the old



woman and all thoughts of small tortured schoolboys, not to say Marcus Tullius and his blasted epistle, a good distance behind him.



*“You just can’t get decent slaves these days”, said Gaius Maximus Anus, leaning back against the cool mosaics having recently emerged from the frigidarium and already beginning to sweat like a Gallic boar. “I bought IV last week and had to take II back; Number I wouldn’t fit down the latrine pipe and the other - ex Hispaniam - broke his leg servicing my mini chariot. Fortunately they were on sale or return at Os Filosubtegminis in the Via Thrupiece but I got no compensation for my tempus or my tribulatio.”*

*“Typical”, snorted Quintus Vox Populus. “And I should know. You don’t get to be the voice of the people without listening to the people. It’s the same everywhere. You used to see made in Brittanicus stamped on their arses and you knew it was quality. Now they’re just churning them out for the market. There’s no quality control at all. And as for the Gallicians - well don’t ask me - all fart and no grunt that lot - even if you feed them weekly. “*

Amulius Impactus Minimus nodded in unnoticed agreement. *“Where’s that short, fat and prematurely balding chap who wants to be a playwright”, Quirinus Anulus Saturnicus asked, breaking the momentary silence which had descended on the now thoughtful occupants of the chamber-like tepidarium. “He’s usually here on alternate Tuesdays and its well past XII.XV.”, he added. Being a follower (despite his name) of the cult of Mars, Quirinus Anulus Saturnicus believed in routine and the injunction regularly to “work, rest and play”. Irregularity whether of bowel or habit was his nigrum bestia. “And what is his name?” No one seemed to know. “I believe he’s known to Livia as Foetus Colem but I doubt that’s his real name,”* Just then the man himself appeared - red in the face

and clearly in a hurry. “*Make way. Make way*”, he shouted as he barged past the lounging citizens holding his *pila sacci* and leaving a trail of gas behind him. “*Well he’s certainly here now*”, reflected Sextus Satanicus, deftly waving a copy of *The Times (New Roman)* “*Notitia for the novi hominem*” under his nose. “*Is that the late morning edition?*” asked Gaius Maximus Anus, noticing for the first time the marvellously lifelike portrait of a naked woman on Page III. At first glance, she looked much like his wife. Dammit it was his wife! “*What news from the forum*”, he asked in the hope of diverting attention from the all too accurate portrait. “*Well*”, Sextus Satanicus replied, staring intently at the exceptionally well-endowed woman “*apparently a funny thing happened on the way there and they are thinking of turning it into an entertainment at the Odeon, Quadratum Ratae Corieltauvorum. I do hope the author isn’t that short, fat and prematurely balding man with the hideous breath and the aspiration to be a playwright*”, he added. “*That would be the cisternam veterem dicemusque*”.

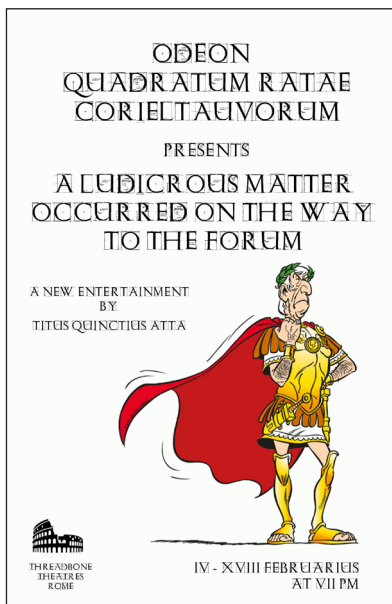
Subtractus Mathematicus, a local teacher, adjusted his *alba*, summoned a passing *unctores* and slapped him vigorously about the face. “*Just practicing for when I get home*”, he explained to his curious companions; “*I’m breaking one in later*”. But his spirited determination to maintain discipline received less appreciation than it deserved for, from the *laconium* deep inside the bath house, came a sudden noise followed by a piercing scream, rapidly followed by the appearance of a blood spattered Livia who even now was trying to remember to which particular god or goddess you were supposed to pray when you were the prime suspect in a murder case, had no alibi and were (to some) inexplicably stark bollock naked with large *plumbata* in you hand. [*The goddess in question is Spes (Ed)*]. “*Holy crap*”, she ventured, in Latin.

To the puzzlement of the assembled crowd, Sextus Satanicus suddenly let out a deep sigh of relief. The others looked puzzled.

*“That new entertainment”*, he said. The others looked more puzzled still. *“Well at least we know who won’t be writing it”*, he chuckled, reaching for a goblet, but finding it empty.

*“Might I borrow your newspaper”*, Gaius Maximus Anus asked Sextus Satanicus innocently, hoping that in the ensuing confusion he might just be able to sneak it out through the *atrium* unnoticed. Just wait until he got home. Balbina Domitia, he reflected, might be a wife, but not one in the least like Caesar’s. As of a few moments ago, she was very much under suspicion.

*Now read on ....*



Published by Threadbone Crime Shelf  
A Division of The Threadbone Press  
Great Heaving, Dorset, England

Set in Adobe Garamond Pro

Printed in The West Country  
© Quintus Remus 2018

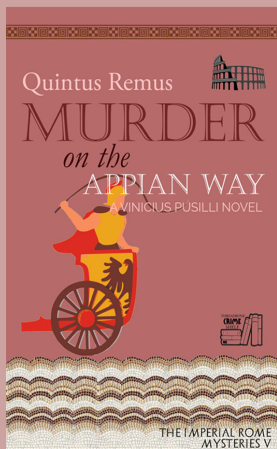
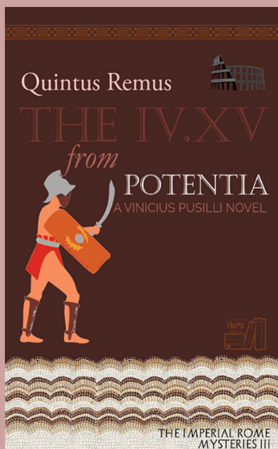
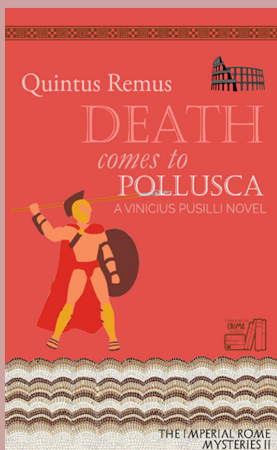
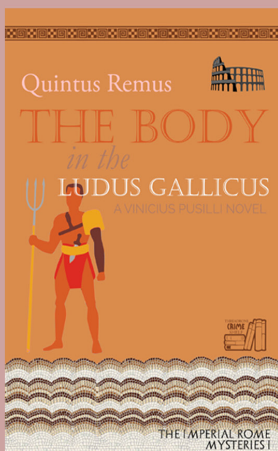
All rights reserved. The author has asserted her right to be  
regarded as the sole author and copyright holder of this book

First Edition 2018



# THE IMPERIAL ROME MYSTERIES

Quintus Remus



# THE IMPERIAL ROME MYSTERIES

Quintus Remus

## MURDER

*on the*

APPIAN WAY

A VINICIUS PUSILLI NOVEL



Universal praise for the *Imperial Roman Mysteries Series*

*"Vinicius Pucilli is a fine character and his detections are a real treat"*

THE GUARDIAN

*"At last a series to btake on holiday"*

THE SUNDAY TIMES

*"The perfect antidote to a dreary day in England. Quintus Remus has created a character of real interest and substance."*

THE LYME REGIS GAZETTE

