

9 At this time, then, he feasted the populace as described; and on another occasion he entertained the foremost men among the senators and knights in the following fashion. He prepared a room that was pitch black on every side, ceiling, walls and floor, and had made ready bare couches of the same colour resting on the uncovered floor; then he invited ^{p337}in his guests alone at night without their attendants. ² And first he set beside each of them a slab shaped like a gravestone, bearing the guest's name and also a small lamp, such as hang in tombs. Next comely naked boys, likewise painted black, entered like phantoms, and after encircling the guests in an awe-inspiring dance took up their stations at their feet. ³ After this all the things that are commonly offered at the sacrifices to departed spirits were likewise set before the guests, all of them black and in dishes of a similar colour. Consequently, every single one of the guests feared and trembled and was kept in constant expectation of having his throat cut the next moment, the more so as on the part of everybody but Domitian there was dead silence, as if they were already in the realms of the dead, and the emperor himself conversed only upon topics relating to death and slaughter. ⁴ Finally he dismissed them; but he had first removed their slaves, who had stood in the vestibule, and now gave his guests in charge of other slaves, whom they did not know, to be conveyed either in carriages or litters, and by this procedure he filled them with far greater fear. And scarcely had each guest reached his home and was beginning to get his breath again, as one might say, when word was brought him that a messenger from the Augustus had come. ⁵ While they were accordingly expecting to perish this time in any case, one person brought in the slab, which was of silver, and then others in turn brought in various articles, including the dishes that had been set before them at the dinner, which were constructed of very costly material; and last of all came that particular boy ^{p339}who had been each guest's familiar spirit, now washed and adorned. Thus, after having passed the entire night in terror, they received the gifts.