

## **Tibullus and Sulpicia : The Poems**

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## Tibullus Book I: Delia

### **I. The True Life**

Let other men gather bright gold to themselves  
and own many acres of well-ploughed soil,  
let endless worry trouble them, with enemies nearby,  
and the peals of the war-trumpets driving away sleep:  
let my moderate means lead me to a quiet life,  
as long as my fireside glows with endless flame.  
If only I might now be happy to live with little,  
and not always be addicted to distant journeys,  
but avoid the rising Dog-star's summer heat  
in the shade of a tree by a stream of running water.  
Nor be ashamed to take up the hoe at times  
or rebuke the lazy oxen with a goad:  
or object to carrying a ewe-lamb home  
or a young kid deserted by its mother.  
Let me plant the tender vines at the proper time,  
tall fruit-trees, myself a rustic, with skilled hands:  
nor let hope fail, but deliver the piled-up fruits,  
and the rich vintage in overflowing vats,  
since I worship wherever there's a stump left in the fields,  
or an old stone at the crossroads, wreathed with flowers:  
and whatever fruit of mine the new season brings  
I set as an offering before the god of the fields.  
Golden Ceres, a spiked crown is yours from my estate,  
one that is hung before the doors to your temple:  
and blushing Priapus is set as a guard on the orchards  
to terrorise the birds with his cruel hook.  
You too, accept your gifts, Lares, guardians  
of impoverished fields that once were fruitful.  
Then a slaughtered calf purified countless heifers:  
now a lamb's the poor sacrifice of my meagre land.  
A lamb shall fall to you, round which the rustic youths  
will shout: "Hurrah, give us good crops and wine!"

But you, wolves and thieves, spare my meagre flocks:  
you must take your pillage from greater herds.  
This is what I have to purify my herdsmen  
and sprinkle gentle Pales with milk.  
Gods, be with me, and do not scorn what's given  
from a humble table in pure earthenware.  
The cups were earthenware the ancients made,  
at first, themselves, from ductile clay.  
I don't need the wealth of my forefathers,  
that the harvest brought my distant ancestors:  
a little field's enough: enough to sleep in peace,  
and rest my limbs on the accustomed bed  
What joy to hear the raging winds as I lie there  
holding my girl to my tender breast,  
or when a wintry Southerly pours its icy showers,  
sleep soundly helped by an accompanying fire!  
Let this be mine: let him be rich, of right,  
who can stand the raging sea and the mournful rain.  
O, let as much gold, and emeralds more, be lost  
as the tears any girl might weep for my travels.  
It's right for you to war by land and sea, Messalla,  
so that your house might display the enemy spoils:  
the ties of a lovely girl bind me captive,  
and I sit a doorman before her harsh entrance.  
I don't care for praise, my Delia: only let me be  
with you, and pray let me be called idle and lazy.  
Let me gaze on you, when my last hour has come,  
hold you, as I die, in my failing grasp.  
You'll weep for me, laid on my pyre, Delia,  
and grant me kisses mixed with your sad tears.  
You'll weep: your mind's not bound with cold steel,  
nor is there flint within your tender heart.  
No young man or young girl will return home  
with dry eyes from that funeral.  
Don't wound my ghost, Delia, but spare  
your tender cheeks and your loosened hair.  
Meanwhile, while fate allows, let's join in love:

soon Death comes with his dark shrouded head:  
soon weakened age steals on, and love's not fitting  
nor speaking flatteries when your hair is white.  
Now's the time for sweet love, while there's no shame  
in breaking doors down, while it's joy to pick a fight.  
Here I'm a general and brave soldier both: away  
standards and trumpets, bear wounds to greedy men,  
and take them wealth: I safe with my gathered store  
will despise their riches, and despise all hunger too.

## II. A Plea to Delia

More wine: and let new pain be lessened  
by the grape, so that sleep might quell my weary eyes:  
and let no one stir my mind numbed with drink  
while wretched love is fast asleep.  
For a savage guard's been set upon my girl  
and the harsh door shut fast with a solid bolt.  
Door, of a surly master, may the rain beat on you,  
and lightning hurled on Jupiter's orders find you out.  
Door, open now, conquered by my complaints alone,  
and no sound as you open, turned on a stealthy hinge.  
And if my mad passion has ever spoken ill of you  
forgive: I pray it might fall on my own head.  
It's fitting you should remember what I said many times,  
as a suppliant, setting flowery garlands on your posts.  
You too, Delia, don't be shy at deceiving the guard.  
Be daring: Venus herself assists the brave.  
She favours the youth who tries out a new threshold  
or the girl who unfastens the door, with the piercing prong:  
She teaches how one creeps secretly from a soft bed,  
she teaches how to place a foot without a sound,  
she assigns speaking gestures in a husband's presence,  
and hides words of flattery in unassuming signs.  
Not teaching all, but those whom no idleness delays  
and whom no fear inhibits from rising at dead of night.  
Look, as I wander anxiously through the city in the dark,  
Venus ensures my safety in the darkness,  
she lets no one attack me who might wound my body,  
with his blade, or try and make a prize of my clothes.  
Whoever's possessed by love goes safe and holy  
wherever he will: he should fear no ambush at all.  
The numbing cold of a winter's night brings me no harm  
nor the rain showering its vast waters on me.  
This labour won't hurt me, if only Delia unlocks the door  
and calls me silently with the sound of her tapping.  
Hide your eyes, man or woman whom we meet with:

Venus wants her thefts to be concealed.  
Don't startle us with clattering feet or ask our names,  
nor bring the light of glowing torches near us.  
If anyone has seen us unawares, let him hide it,  
and deny by all the gods that he remembers.  
Since if any turns informer, he'll find Venus  
is the child of blood and angry seas.  
Still, your husband won't believe them, the truthful witch  
promised me that, with her magic rites.  
I've seen her drawing stars down from the sky:  
her chant turns back the course of the flowing river.  
her spells split the ground, conjure ghosts from the tomb  
and summon dead bones from the glowing funeral pyre:  
now she holds the infernal crew with magic hissing,  
now sprinkling milk orders them to retreat.  
As she wishes, she dispels the cloud from the sombre sky:  
as she wishes, calls up snows to a summer world.  
They say she alone possesses Medea's fatal herbs,  
only she has fully tamed the savage hounds of Hecate.  
She composed a spell for me, that you can deceive with:  
chant it three times, spit three times when you've done.  
Then he'll not be able to believe anyone about us,  
not even himself if he saw us in your soft bed.  
Still you must keep away from others: since he'll see  
all the rest: it's only me he'll see nothing of!  
What? Do I believe? Surely she's the same who said  
she could dissolve my love with herbs or charms,  
and purified me with torches, and in the calm of night  
a mournful sacrifice fell to the gods of sorcery.  
I didn't pray that my love should wholly vanish, but that  
it might be shared, I'd not wish to be without you if I could.  
That man was iron, who when he could have had you,  
stupidly preferred to chase after war and prizes.  
Let him drive Cilicia's conquered crew before him,  
and pitch his camp of war on captured soil,  
let him sit his swift horse, to be gazed at,  
covered all in silver, covered all in gold:



if only I might yoke the oxen with you Delia,  
and feed the flocks on the usual mount,  
and while I may hold you in my tender arms,  
let soft sleep indeed be mine on the harsh earth.  
What use to lie on a Tyrian bed, without love's favours,  
if night comes with wakefulness and weeping?  
Since then no feather pillows, no embroidered covers,  
no sound of soothing waters brings repose.  
Have I wronged the divinity of mighty Venus with words,  
and does my impious tongue now pay the penalty?  
Can they say now I've sinfully entered the divine sanctuary  
and snatched the garland from the holy altar?  
I won't hesitate, if I'm guilty, to kneel in her temple,  
and grant her kisses on her sacred threshold,  
to crawl on my knees, a suppliant, over the ground  
and beat my wretched head against the sacred door.  
But you, who laugh indifferent to my suffering, must soon  
take care yourself: gods do not rage at one alone, forever.  
I have seen one who ridiculed the miseries of young love  
bow his aged neck later in Venus's harness,  
and compose blandishments himself in a quavering voice,  
and seek to dress his white hair with his own hands:  
and not be ashamed to stand before his dear girl's door,  
and stop her maid in the middle of the forum.  
Around him young men and boys crowded closely,  
and each one spat in his own tender breast.  
But spare me, Venus: my devoted heart always serves you:  
why in your bitterness burn your own harvest?

### III. Illness In Phaecia

Will you cross the Aegean Sea without me, Messalla,  
oh I hope you and your company remember me!  
Phaecia holds me, ill, in a foreign country:  
Death, black one, keep your hands away from me, I beg,  
black Death, I beg you keep away: my mother is not here  
to gather the charred bones to her grieving breast,  
no sister to pour Assyrian perfumes on my ashes  
and weep with loosened hair before my tomb.  
No Delia at all, who when she sent me from the city,  
took counsel, they say, before every god.  
She took the sacred lots three times from the acolyte:  
and the boy ascribed good omens to all three.  
All promised my return: yet nothing deterred her  
from weeping and brooding on my journey.  
I myself, the comforter, when I'd given my parting orders,  
searched endlessly, anxiously, for slow delay.  
The flight of birds or evil omens were my excuses  
or Saturn's inauspicious day held me back.  
Oh, how many times I said, starting off, that my feet  
stumbling at the threshold gave me sad warning!  
When Love's unwilling let no man depart,  
or he'll find that the god himself forbade his going.  
What use is your Isis, to me now Delia, what use  
the bronze that you rattled so often in your hand,  
or, while you worshipped with holy rite, I remember,  
your bathing in pure water, sleeping in a pure bed?  
Now, goddess, help me now (since the many pictures  
in your temples witness that you can heal)  
so my Delia fulfilling her midnight vows  
might sit before your sacred doors, shrouded in linen  
and twice a day be bound to speak your praise, conspicuous  
with loosened hair among the Pharian crowd.  
And may I be able to worship my home's Penates  
and offer the monthly incense to the ancient Lar.  
How well they lived in the reign of Saturn,

before the world was opened up to foreign travel!  
The pine had not yet scorned the blue waves,  
or offered spreading sails to the wind,  
nor had the wandering mariner seeking profit  
in unknown lands loaded his boat with alien wares.  
In those days the strong ox had not submitted to the yoke,  
the horse did not champ the bit with tame mouth,  
no house had doors, no stone was fixed in the earth  
to determine a fixed boundary to the field.  
The oaks themselves dripped honey, and, uncalled,  
ewes with full udders came to their carefree owner.  
There was no army, anger, war, the cruel maker  
had not forged the sword with his harsh craft.  
Now under Jove's rule always wounds and gore,  
sudden death, now by sea, now by a thousand ways.  
Pardon, Father. Don't make me fear oaths in my timidity,  
or impious words spoken against the sacred gods.  
But if I've now fulfilled my allotted years, let a stone  
inscribed with these words be set up above my bones:

**HERE LIES TIBULLUS WASTED BY INEXORABLE DEATH,  
WHILE FOLLOWING MESSALLA BY LAND AND SEA.**

But I, since I'm fitted ever for tender Love,  
I'll lead Venus through the Elysian Fields.  
There the dance and song flourish, and here and there,  
the birds fly, singing sweet songs from slender throats:  
the fields, untilled, bear cassia, and over all the land  
the kindly earth flowers with perfumed roses:  
and ranks of young men and girls mix in play,  
and Love stirs his warfare endlessly.  
There are the lovers to whom came greedy Death,  
and their hair bears myrtle wreaths for all to see.  
But the place of the wicked, who are passed, lies deep  
in darkness, round which black rivers sound:  
and wild Tisiphone rages, with savage snakes for hair,  
and the impious crowd runs here and there.  
Then there is black Cerberus carrying a snake in his mouth

hissing and keeping guard of the bronze doors.  
Ixion is there who dared to attempt Juno  
his guilty limbs whirling on the swift wheel:  
and Tityos stretched over nine acres of ground  
vultures feeding forever on his dark liver.  
Tantalus is there, pools of water round him: but it  
flies from his raging thirst before he can drink:  
and Danaus's daughters, who offended the power of Venus,  
carry the waters of Lethe in leaking buckets.  
Let whoever who has violated my love be there,  
who wished me long services abroad.  
But I beg you stay true, let the old woman who protects  
sacred honour, always sit with you diligently.  
She will tell you tales and when the lamp is lit  
draw long threads from the full distaff:  
while the girls all round work at their heavy task,  
till little by little, wearied, the work sends them to sleep.  
Then let me come suddenly, no one bring news before,  
but let me appear to have dropped from the sky.  
Then run to meet me, Delia, just as you are,  
with naked feet, with your long hair disordered.  
This I pray for: with her rose-red horses,  
let bright Dawn bring me that shining Morning-Star.

#### IV The Love of Boys

“So the protective shadows might be yours,  
and your head not be harmed by sun or snow,  
Priapus, what skill of yours captivates lovely lads?  
For sure, you’ve no shining beard, or well-groomed hair:  
naked you fulfil your role in the cold of cloudy winter,  
naked too in the dry time of the Dog-Star’s heat.”  
So I: then the rustic child of Bacchus answered me, so,  
the god who’s armed with the curving hook.  
“Oh beware of trusting the crowd of tender boys:  
since they always offer a true cause for love.  
This one pleases, that keeps a tight rein on his horse:  
that one breaks the still waters with his snowy breast:  
this one for his audacious bravery: while that one’s  
virgin modesty mantles his tender cheeks.  
But don’t let boredom seize you, if at first he denies you  
fiercely: gradually his neck will yield to the yoke.  
Length of time has taught lions to comply with man,  
with length of time soft water wears away rock:  
time ripens the grapes on the sunny slopes,  
time drives the bright constellations on their sure course.  
Don’t be afraid to swear: the winds bear vain oaths of love  
over the lands and over the surface of the sea.  
Huge thanks to Jove: the Father himself denied their power,  
so that foolish Love might swear anything in passion:  
and Diana lets you swear by her arrows with impunity  
and Minerva lets you swear by her hair.  
But if you linger you’re lost: how swift time flies!  
The day does not stand idle or return.  
How quickly the earth loses its rich purple hues,  
how quickly the high poplar its lovely leaves.  
How the horse is despised when weak old age’s fate  
arrives, he who once shot from the starting gate at Elis.  
I’ve seen a young man on whom later years now pressed  
mourning his foolishness in days gone by.

Cruel gods! The snake renewed sheds his years:  
but fate grants no delays to beauty.  
Only for Bacchus and Phoebus is youth eternal:  
and unshorn hair is fitting for both those gods.  
You'll yield to your boy in whatever he wants to try:  
love always wins the most by deference.  
You'll not refuse to go, though he intends long journeys,  
and the Dog-Star bakes the earth with parching drought,  
though the brimming rainbow, threatens coming storm,  
painting the heavens with its purple hues.  
If he wants to sail the blue waves in a boat, with the oar  
drive the light vessel through the waves yourself.  
Don't complain at submitting yourself to hard labour  
or roughening your hands unused to work:  
while you still please, if he wants to trap deep valleys,  
don't let your shoulders refuse to bear the hunting nets.  
If he wants to fight, try to play at it with a light hand:  
often leave your flank exposed so he can win.  
Then he'll be gentle with you, then you may snatch  
that precious kiss: he'll struggle but let you take it.  
At first he'll let you snatch it, later he'll bring it himself  
when asked, and then even want to hang about your neck.  
Sadly alas these times now produce wretched arts:  
now tender boys are accustomed to wanting gifts.  
You, whoever you are, who first taught the sale of love  
may a fateful stone press down on your bones.  
Boys, love the Muses and the learned poets,  
let no golden gifts outweigh the Muses.  
Through poetry Nisus's lock of hair's still purple,  
without verse no ivory gleams on Pelop's shoulder.  
He the Muses name, shall live, while earth bears oaks,  
while heaven bears stars, while rivers carry water.  
But he who cannot hear the Muses, he who sells love,  
let him follow the chariot of Idaean Ops, and traverse  
three hundred cities with his wanderings,  
and cut at his worthless limbs, in the Phrygian way.  
Venus wants room for blandishments: she favours

complaining suppliants and wretched weeping.”  
These things the god’s mouth told me, to sing to Titius:  
but Titius’s wife forbids him to remember them.  
Let him listen to her: but you praise me as master,  
you whom sadly a wily boy possesses, by wicked art.  
Each has his own glory: let despised lovers consult me:  
my doors are open wide to everyone.  
A time will come when a loyal crowd of young men  
shall lead my aged self along, carrying the laws of Venus.  
Alas how Marathus torments me with love’s delay!  
My art is useless, and useless all my guile.  
Spare me boy, I beg you, lest I become an unworthy tale,  
and they all laugh at my idle teaching.

## V The Separation

I was harsh, and said I could bear separation well:  
but now that brave boast's beyond my reach.  
Now I'm driven, as a swift top's whipped over flat ground  
one that an agile boy spins with practised skill.  
Scorch the wild beast and torment him, so after this,  
he won't talk so mightily: tame his savage speech.  
Yet spare me, by the bond of our secret couch,  
by our love, I beg, and the head that lay by mine.  
They say it was me, with my prayers, who snatched you  
from gloomy sickness, when you were lying there:  
I myself cleansed you, with pure sulphur round you,  
once the old woman had chanted her magic spell.  
I myself expiated wild nightmares, lest they harm you,  
three times averting them with sacred grain:  
I myself in woollen headband and loose tunic  
offered nine vows to Trivia in the silent night.  
I've paid for all: now another enjoys my love,  
and, happy man, he benefits from my prayers.  
If you were saved, I imagined in my madness  
a happy life would be mine, but the gods denied me.  
"I'll live in the country, and while the harvest's threshed  
in the hot sun, my Delia, will be there, guarding the crop,  
or she'll watch over the grapes in the brimming troughs  
when agile feet trample the gleaming must.  
She'll be used to counting flocks: she'll be used to a child  
babbling, a slave's, lovingly playing in its mistress's lap.  
She'll know to offer the country god grapes for the vines  
wheat ears for the harvest, food for the flocks.  
She'll rule everyone, all things will be in her care:  
and I'll joy in being nothing in that house.  
Here my Messalla will come, for whom Delia  
will pull down sweetest fruit from chosen trees:  
and, in homage to his greatness, show great care,  
and, herself his servant, prepare and serve his meals."  
I imagined these things, prayers, that the Southerlies



and Easterlies now blow through scented Armenia.  
Often I've tried to dispel troubles with wine:  
but grief turned all the wine to tears.  
Often I've held others: but just as delight was near,  
Venus warned me of my love, and left me.  
Then the woman, leaving, called me accursed,  
ah, shame, and said my love knew wicked arts.  
My girl does it not with words, but beauty and tender arms,  
by those she bewitched me, and her golden hair.  
So Thetis, the sea-green Nereid, once was, carried  
to Thessalian Peleus by a bridled dolphin.  
These things harmed me. A cunning bawd comes  
to ruin me, in that a rich lover's now appeared.  
May she eat blood-soaked food, and with gory lips  
drink from the bitter cup filled with gall:  
let ghosts always flit round her, wailing their fate,  
and the loud screech-owl call from her rooftop:  
maddened by hunger's goad, let her search graves  
for grass, and bones left by savage wolves:  
and run with bare crotch and howl, through the town.  
with a fierce crowd of crossroad-dogs behind her.  
It shall be: a god gives the sign: there are divinities  
for lovers, and Venus, deserted through injustice, rages.  
But you, first abandon the teachings of the greedy witch:  
since love is defeated by endless gifts.  
The poor man will always be there for you: he  
will come to you first, and be glued to your side.  
The poor man's a faithful friend in the crush of the crowd,  
he'll stir his hands and forge a way for you.  
The poor man will lead you stealthily to secret friends,  
and himself undo the sandals from your white feet.  
Alas, I sing in vain, and her door won't open  
won by words, a full hand must do the knocking.  
But you, who are master now, fear my fate:  
Fortune turns lightly on the track of her swift wheel.  
Even now, someone stands, purposefully, at the threshold,  
watches closely and often, then runs away,

pretends to pass the house, then soon runs back again,  
alone, and is always coughing in front of the door.  
Furtive love is readying something. Enjoy it while you can  
I beg you: the boat's in the water, sailing towards you.

## VI Faithlessness

Always you meet me with seductive looks, Love,  
to lead me on, but later you're wretchedly sad and bitter.  
Cruel power, what have you to do with me? What glory is it  
for a god to set out snares for a man?  
For the net's spread for me: now cunning Delia  
fondles someone secretly in the dead of night.  
Of course she denies it, swears it, but it's hard to believe:  
she's always denying me in that way to her husband.  
I myself, wretch, taught her, the means of eluding  
her guards: alas, now I'm crushed by my own art.  
Then she learnt how to make excuses for sleeping alone,  
then how to turn the door on its hinges silently:  
then I gave her juices and herbs to erase the bruises  
that mutual lovemaking makes out of teeth-marks.  
But you, deceived husband of a faithless wife,  
watching me too, that she might never sin,  
be careful she doesn't sit talking much with young men  
or recline with loose dress and throat bared,  
or deceive you with nods, or wet her finger with wine  
and trace messages over the table's surface.  
Fear, when she goes out often, or says she'll go see  
the rites of the Good Goddess that no man can go near.  
But trust her to me, I'll follow her to that altar alone:  
then I'll have no reason to fear for my sight.  
Often, I remember touching her hand, as if I were  
examining her jewel's design, an excuse.  
Often, I sent you to sleep with wine, while I, the winner,  
drank from a sober glass of counterfeit water.  
I'm not aware I harmed you: forgive, now I confess,  
Love told me to. Who takes up weapons against a god?  
It was me, and I'm not ashamed to tell the truth now,  
at whom your dog barked the whole night through.  
What use is a tender wife to you? If you don't know  
how to guard your goods, the key for the lock's in vain.  
She holds you, she sighs for other absent lovers

and suddenly she pretends to a raging headache.  
But trust her to my keeping: then I'll not refuse  
blows, or shrink from chains on my ankles.  
Away from me then, you who dress your hair with skill,  
and whose roomy togas flow with loosened folds:  
and whoever meets us, so that he might be sinless,  
let him stand far off, or go by on another road.  
The god himself orders it done, this the great priestess  
prophesied to me, with a voice divine.  
She, when she's inspired by Bellona's power, fears  
no fierce flames, in her madness, nor the twisted lash:  
she slashes her arms fiercely with the double-axe  
and, unharmed, sprinkles the goddess with flowing blood,  
stands there with a spear in her side, wounds on her breast,  
and chants the fate that the great goddess proclaims:  
"Beware lest you harm the girl whom Love protects,  
and regret being taught a harsh lesson afterwards.  
Who touches her, his wealth will drain away, like blood  
from a wound, as these ashes are scattered by the wind."  
And she named a punishment for you, my Delia:  
if you still sin, I beg she'll be merciful.  
I don't spare you for yourself, but your old mother  
moves me and her lovely old-age overcomes anger.  
She brings me to you in the darkness, and fearfully  
joins our hands together, secretly, silently:  
she waits for me, glued to the door, at night  
and knows the sound of my nearing feet far off.  
Live long for me, sweet lady: I'd give you my years  
to add to your own if that were allowed.  
I'll love you always, and your daughter for your sake:  
whatever she does, she's still of your blood.  
Teach her to be chaste, though no headband tied there  
constrains her hair, nor a long robe her feet.  
And for me let the rules be harsh, let me never be able  
to praise anyone without the girl going for my eyes:  
and if I'm thought to have sinned, let me be led by the hair  
and dragged face down in the middle of the street.

I wouldn't wish to strike you Delia, and if such a madness  
came to me, I'd rather choose to have no hands.  
Don't be chaste from cruel fear, but a loyal mind:  
let mutual love guard you for me in my absence.  
But she who was loyal to none, when age has conquered,  
helpless, draws out the twisted thread with trembling hand  
and ties the fastenings tight to the loom, for hire,  
and counts what's pulled and drawn from the snowy fleece.  
The crowd of youths see her with joyful hearts,  
and say her old age deserves to bear such suffering.  
Venus, sublime, looks down from high Olympus  
at her weeping, and warns how fierce she is to the faithless.  
Let these curses fall on others, Delia: let us two  
be a pattern for lovers when our hair is white.

## VII Messalla's Triumph

The Fates sang of this day as they wove the thread,  
one that can't be unwound by any of the gods:  
this would be the day that would scatter the Gauls,  
when Adour would shiver conquered by brave soldiers.  
It has come: the people of Rome have seen new triumphs  
and chieftains fettered by their captive arms:  
and you Messalla, crowned with the conqueror's laurels,  
drawn in an ivory chariot by snow-white horses.  
The birth of honour was not without war: you're witness  
Tarbellian Pyrenees, and Saintonge's ocean shore:  
a witness Saône, and swift Rhône, and great Garonne,  
and Loire, the blue stream of the blonde tribes of Chartres.  
Or shall I sing you, Cydnus, who gently, with silent waves,  
spread blue through your sea of placid waters,  
or how chill Taurus feeds the unshorn Cilicians  
touching the clouds at his ethereal source?  
Why tell how the white dove sacred to the Syrians  
flies unharmed through the crowded cities of Palestine?  
How Tyre looks out from its towers over the vast sea-roads,  
the first that learned to trust her ships to the winds,  
or how when Sirius cracks the parched fields,  
fertile Nile overflows with summer waters?  
Father Nile, in what lands or for what reason  
can I say you have hidden your source?  
No earth of yours needs showers because of you,  
parched grass begs nothing from Jove the rain-maker.  
The barbarian peoples taught to bewail the Memphite heifer  
sing of you and marvel at you as their own Osiris.  
Osiris first made the plough with skilful hand  
and stirred the fresh soil with iron blade,  
he first planted seed in the untried earth  
and gathered fruits from unknown trees.  
He showed how to tie the young vine to a stake,  
how to prune its green leaves with the iron hook:  
to him the ripe grapes crushed by rough feet

first gave their pleasing flavours.  
Their juice taught men to modulate voice in song,  
and move untaught limbs in true rhythms:  
When the labourer's breast is crushed by heavy toil  
Bacchus grants the relaxations of joy:  
Bacchus brings peace to suffering beings  
though harsh shackles ring with fettered blows.  
Sad cares and grief are not for you Osiris,  
but dance and song and sweet, fitting, love,  
varied flowers, and brows crowned with ivy-berries,  
and saffron robes flowing over youthful feet,  
and Tyrian garments, and the sweet, singing flute,  
and the light basket that shares its hidden sacredness.  
Come, celebrate the guardian spirit with play and dance  
and bathe his brow with wine in plenty:  
let the perfumes drip from his glistening hair,  
and let sweet garlands circle neck and head.  
So let this day come: I'll honour you with incense,  
and bring from Mopsopus cakes sweetened with honey.  
And let a child spring from you who'll add fresh deeds  
to the parent's and stand by his elder with respect.  
Let him whom the soil of Tusculum or white Alba's  
ancient hearth detains not be silent about your mighty Way,  
since, heaped by your wealth, hard gravel's laid here,  
and here flint slabs are joined together deftly.  
Let the farmer sing you, come late from the great City,  
returning home safely without stumbling.  
And you, birth day, come to be celebrated  
for many a year, ever brighter and brighter.

## VIII Marathus In Love With Pholoe

No one can hide that lover's nod from me  
those soft words spoken with a gentle sound.  
Yet I've no lots or entrails that show gods' will,  
birdsongs don't call to me of things to come:  
Venus herself tied my arms with magic knots  
and taught it me, and not without many blows.  
Stop your pretence: the god inflames more fiercely  
those he sees have succumbed to him unwillingly.  
What use now to groom your soft tresses  
and alter the shape of your hair continually,  
beautify your cheeks with shining rouge,  
have your nails cut by an artist's skilled hand?  
Now your dresses, your clothes are changed in vain  
and in vain the tight strap squeezes the narrow feet.  
She pleases him, though she comes with face untouched,  
hasn't dressed her shining hair with lingering art.  
Has some old woman bewitched you with her chants,  
or pallid herbs, in the silent hours of night?  
Spells draw the harvest from a neighbour's fields,  
spells stop the path of the angry snake,  
spells try to draw the moon down from her course,  
and would, were it not for the sound of echoing bronze.  
Why do I, in misery, complain that chanting harms,  
alas, or herbs? Beauty needs no help from magic:  
but touching of bodies hurts us, and giving  
drawn-out kisses, and thigh twining with thigh.  
Yet remember not to be harsh with the boy:  
Venus follows sad deeds with punishment.  
Don't ask for gifts: let an ageing lover give gifts,  
so that tender arms might fondle his frozen limbs.  
A young man's dearer than gold, whose bright face shines  
and no harsh beard to prickle in your embrace.  
Place your shining arms beneath his shoulders,  
and look down on all the treasures of a king.  
Venus has contrived your sleeping secretly with the boy



while he fears, and ceaselessly entwines your tender breasts,  
giving wet kisses with panting breath and writhing tongues,  
and printing marks on his neck with your teeth.  
No stones or gems delight the girl who sleeps cold  
and alone, and who's desirable to no one.  
Ah, we call back love too late and call back youth  
when white-haired old age has bleached our head.  
Then looks are studied: then the hair's altered  
dyes hide the years, stains from the nut's green shell:  
then we're careful to pluck out white hairs by the root  
and take away a new face with old skin removed.  
Then use your time of youth while it's in flower:  
the feet aren't slow on which it slips away.  
Don't torment Marathus: what glory in power over a boy?  
Girl, be hard on the old, on the aged.  
Spare the tender lad, I beg you: he's no grave illness,  
but excess of passion makes his complexion muddy.  
Or, wretched, he often directs mournful complaints  
at the absent one, and moistens all round with tears!  
"Why scorn me? The guard could have been evaded"  
he says, "the god himself gives lovers the power to deceive.  
Secret love's known to me, how to breathe quietly,  
how stolen kisses are snatched without a sound:  
and I can steal in, though its midnight,  
and open the door noiselessly, unknown.  
What use is art, if she scorns her wretched lover  
and, cruel girl, flees from the bed itself?  
Or if she promises, but suddenly deceives faithlessly,  
and night to me is a vigil of many sorrows.  
While I imagine she's coming to me, whatever stirs  
I credit with being the sound of her footfall."  
Cease to weep, boy: she's unmoved,  
and your weary eyes are swollen now with weeping.  
I warn you, Pholoe, the gods hate pride,  
and it's useless feeding incense to their holy fires.  
This Marathus once jeered at wretched lovers,  
not knowing the god of vengeance was at his back:

they even say he often laughed at tears of grief,  
and kept his lover waiting with false delays.  
Now he hates all disdain, now it displeases him  
whenever the door is bolted shut against him.  
And you'll be punished too, girl, unless you forsake pride.  
Then how you'll wish prayers could recall the day!

## IX Treacherous Love

If you were to wound my wretched love, why did you give  
me your word before the gods, only to break it secretly?  
Ah sadly, even if perjury is hidden at first,  
punishment will come later, on silent feet.  
Spare him, gods: it's right that beauty should offend  
your divinity, once, and go unpunished.  
The farmer yokes his bulls to the useful plough  
and works the land hard in search of profit:  
fixed stars guide the swaying ships, through seas  
obedient to the winds, in search of profit.  
My lad's captivated by gifts. But may the god  
turn those gifts to ashes or running water.  
Soon he'll make amends: dust will take his beauty  
and his hair will be entangled by the winds:  
his face will be burned, his tresses burned by the sun,  
and the long road will blister his tender feet.  
How many times have I warned him: "Don't let gold  
sully your beauty: many evils often lurk beneath the gold.  
Venus is bitter and difficult with anyone  
who violates love, captivated by wealth.  
Scorch my head with fire instead, attack my body  
with steel, and scar my back with the twisted lash.  
Don't hope to conceal it when you're planning sin:  
the god knows, who forbids wrongs to be hidden.  
The god himself has often allowed a silent servant  
to babble freely due to strong drink.  
The god himself has ordered a voice subdued by sleep  
to speak and tell unwillingly of things better buried."  
This I said to you: now I'm ashamed that I wept  
as I spoke, and stretched myself out at your tender feet.  
Then you swore to me you'd not sell your loyalty  
for measures of rich gold nor for jewels,  
not if Campania's land was given you as a prize,  
or the Falernian fields that Bacchus cares for.  
Those words could have robbed me of thinking the stars

shine in the sky, and rivers flow down to the sea.  
You even wept: but I unskilled in deceit, fondly  
wiped the wetness continually from your cheeks.  
What might I do if you were not yourself in love  
with a girl: I beg she might be fickle, given your example.  
Oh how often, your friend indeed, I carried the bright light  
at night, so no one should be aware of your words.  
Often, through my doing, she came when unexpected  
and hid herself, veiled, behind the closed doors.  
Then I was lost, sad wretch, foolishly trusting in love:  
now I might be wariest of your snares.  
My stunned heart even sang your praises:  
but now I'm ashamed for myself and the Muses.  
May Vulcan scorch those songs now, with swift fire,  
and the river wash them away in its clear waters.  
Go far off from here, you whose aim is to sell your beauty  
and to return with a great handful of gifts.  
And you who dare to corrupt the boy with rewards,  
let your wife, unpunished, mock with her constant intrigues,  
and when she's tired her lover with their secret doings,  
let her lie sleepily with you, with the sheet between.  
Let there always be strange traces in your bed  
and your house always be wide open to lovers:  
don't let it be said her wanton sister drinks more  
in her cups, or wears out more men.  
They say she often leads on the party with wine  
till the wheels of Lucifer rise to call up the day:  
no one spends the night better than she does,  
or better arranges the various modes of leisure.  
And your wife has learnt it all: and you don't notice,  
idiot, when she moves her body with unusual art.  
Do you think she dresses her hair for you,  
combs her fine tresses with the thin-toothed steel?  
Is it your beauty persuades her to circle her arms with gold  
and appear abroad dressed in Tyrian robes?  
She wants to seem beautiful for a certain boy, not you:  
she'd give up all your house and things for him.

She does it not from vice, but the sensitive girl shrinks  
from a body marred by gout and an old man's arms.  
Yet my boy has slept with him: now I'll believe  
the lad could join in union with a savage beast.  
Mad boy, did you dare to sell my caresses to others,  
and carry my kisses to other men as well?  
Weep then when another lad has captivated me  
and spends his proud reign in your kingdom.  
I'll joy then in your punishment. And to deserving Venus  
a golden-palm tree shall be raised, marking my fate:

**TIBULLUS WHOM THE GODDESS FREED FROM FAITHLESS LOVE  
OFFERS THIS AND ASKS HER TO BE GRATEFUL TO HIM IN SPIRIT**

## **X Make Peace Not War**

Who was he, who first forged the fearful sword?  
How iron-willed and truly made of iron he was!  
Then slaughter was created, war was born to men.  
then a quicker road was opened to dread death.  
But perhaps it's not the wretch's fault we turn to evil  
what he gave us to use on savage beasts?  
That's the curse of rich gold: there were no wars  
when the beech-wood cup stood beside men's plates.  
There were no fortresses or fences, and the flock's leader  
sought sleep securely among the diverse sheep.  
I might have lived then, Valgius, and not known  
sad arms, or heard the trumpet with beating heart.  
Now I'm dragged to war, and perhaps some enemy  
already carries the spear that will pierce my side.  
Lares of my fathers, save me: you are the same  
that reared me, a little child running before your feet.  
Don't be ashamed that you're made from ancient wood:  
so you were when you lived in my grandfather's house.  
Then faith was better kept, when a wooden god  
poorly dressed, stood in a narrow shrine.  
He was placated, if someone offered the first grapes  
or placed the garland of wheat-ears on his sacred head:  
and whoever gained his wish brought the honey-cakes  
himself, his little daughter behind, with the pure comb.  
Turn the bronze spears away from me, Lares,  
.....  
and (*accept*) a sacrifice of a hog from the full sty.  
I will follow in pure clothing, carrying the basket  
bound with myrtle, myrtle binding my own head.  
So I may please you: let another be brave in war,  
and topple hostile generals with Mars' help,  
then he can tell me his military deeds while I drink,  
and draw his camp on the table with wine.  
What madness to summon up dark Death by war!

It menaces us, and comes secretly on silent feet.  
There are no cornfields down there, no trim vineyards,  
only bold Cerberus, and the foul ferryman of Styx's stream.  
There, with eyeless sockets and scorched hair,  
a pallid crowd wanders by the lakes of darkness.  
No he's more to be praised whom, blessed with children,  
a long old age keeps occupied in his humble cottage.  
He tends the sheep, and his son the lambs,  
and his wife provides hot water for weary limbs.  
So let me be, and may my head whiten with snowy temples,  
and recall old things from ancient deeds.  
Meanwhile let peace tend the fields. Bright peace first  
bowed the oxen for ploughing under the curved yoke.  
Peace nurtured the vines and laid up the juice of the grape  
so the son's wine might pour from the father's jar.  
Hoe and ploughshare gleam in peace, but rust seizes  
the grim weapons of the cruel soldier in darkness.  
The countryman drives home from the wood,  
himself half-sober, with wife and children in his cart,  
but then they summon love's war, and the woman  
bewails her torn hair and the broken doors.  
The bruised girl weeps for her tender cheeks, but the victor  
weeps himself that his hands were so strong in his madness.  
And impudent Love supplies evil words to the quarrel,  
and sits indifferent between the angry pair.  
Ah, he's stone and iron, whoever would strike his girl:  
that action draws down the gods from the heavens.  
let it be enough to have torn the thin cloth from her limbs,  
enough to have disordered the arrangement of her hair,  
enough to have caused her tears: he's four times blessed  
whose anger can make a tender girl weep.  
But he whose hands are cruel, should carry shield and pike,  
and stay far away from gentle Venus.  
Then come, kindly Peace, hold the wheat-ear in your hand,  
and let your radiant breast pour out fruits before us.

## Tibullus Book II: Nemesis

### **I The Country Festival (The *Ambarvalia*)**

Whoever is here, attend: we purify crops and fields,  
in the rite handed down by our ancestors of old.  
Come, Bacchus, let the sweet grapes hang from your horns,  
and Ceres, wreath your brow with ears of corn.  
Let the earth rest, on this sacred day, the farmer too,  
and the heavy work of the lifted plough cease.  
Loose the straps from the yokes: the oxen must stand  
near the full manger, now, with garlanded heads.  
Let all things wait on the god: let no  
spinner's hand dare set to work.  
You too I command, stand away, leave the altar,  
you whom Venus allowed pleasure last night.  
Purity pleases the gods: come with pure robes  
and draw the fountain's water with pure hands.  
See how the sacred lamb goes to the shining altar  
behind it the crowd, in white, heads crowned with olive.  
Gods of our fathers, we purify worker and field:  
drive evil far away from our boundaries,  
let the fields not cheat us of harvest, failed in the shoot,  
let our slow lambs not be in fear of swifter wolves.  
Then let the glowing farmer sure of full fields  
pile huge logs up, on his blazing hearth,  
and a crowd of young slaves, true signs of wealth  
play, and build little huts of sticks before it.  
I pray, with success: see how the favourable entrails  
show that the gods are pleased, by the liver's markings.  
Now bring out the smoky Falernian from old consulships,  
and loosen the bindings from the Chian jar.  
Let wine celebrate the day: no shame to be drunk  
on a day of festival, and weave about on unsteady feet.  
But let each say over their wine-cup: Health to Messalla!"  
and the name of the absent one be echoed in every word.  
Messalla, celebrated for your triumphs over Aquitaine,



great victor, glory of your unshorn ancestors,  
come to me, favour me, while I give thanks  
with my verse to the gods of the fields.  
I sing the country and the rural gods. With them  
as guides, men stopped chasing hunger away with acorns,  
they first taught him to build with wooden beams,  
and cover his meagre house with green leaves:  
they also say they first taught bulls to be servants,  
and set the wheels underneath the wagon.  
Then savage ways vanished, then the fruit tree was planted,  
and the fertile garden drank irrigating water,  
then the golden grapes gave up their juice to trampling feet,  
and sober water was mingled with carefree wine.  
The country bears the harvest, when, each year,  
the earth sheds its yellow hair, in the sky's fiery heat.  
The swift bee heaps the springtime hive with pollen,  
busily filling the combs with sweet honey.  
Then the farmer sated with constant ploughing  
first sang rural words to sure melodies,  
replete, first made a tune on a dried reed,  
to play before the gods he'd decorated:  
Bacchus, it was a farmer first dyed himself with red  
and led the dancing with unskilled art.  
He too who, offering a he-goat, the leader of his flock,  
prime gift from the full fold, increased his scant wealth.  
In the country, a boy first made a wreath of spring flowers  
and garlanded the ancient Lares with it.  
In the country, too, there's the sheep, work for young girls  
in the soft fleece it wears on its gleaming back.  
Women's labour comes from it, the weight of wool,  
distaff, and spindle's work, turned in the fingers:  
and the girl who's spinning sings, in Minerva's endless toil,  
and the loom vibrates to the rhythm of her body.  
They say that Cupid himself was born in the fields  
and among the flocks and the wild mares.  
There he first practised with the untrained bow:  
ah, what skilful hands he has now!

He doesn't aim at creatures as before, it's piercing girls  
excites him, and subjugating proud men.  
He robs the young of their wealth, commands old men  
to speak shameful words at an angry girl's threshold.  
He guides the girl who, passing the sleeping guards,  
secret, alone, comes to her lover in the darkness,  
feeling her way with her feet, in fear's suspense,  
and exploring the shadows before her with her hand.  
Ah wretched ones, whom the god bears down on fiercely!  
But he's happy whom gentle Love breathes softly on.  
Sacred One, come to our festive meal: but set aside  
your arrows I beg, leave your burning torch far from here.  
All sing the god we glorify, and call him by your voices  
to the herd: call for the herd aloud, for yourselves in silence.  
Or perhaps aloud for yourselves: since the happy crowd  
will drown it, and the curved pipe's Phrygian note.  
Play: now Night yokes her team, and the golden stars  
follow their mother's chariot, playful dancers,  
and after them silent Sleep comes, furred in dark wings  
and ill-omened Dream with wandering steps.

## II Cornutus's Birthday

Let us only speak good: the birth day comes to the altar:  
whoever is here, man or woman, be silent.  
Let fire burn the sacred incense, burn the resins  
which the gentle Arab sends from his rich land.  
Let the Guardian Spirit come to see his honours,  
and let soft garlands wreath his sacred head.  
Let his temples drip with pure balsam,  
let him be filled with cake, and soaked with wine.  
Whatever you ask for, Cornutus, he will nod.  
Look, ask, come on (Why stop? He nods).  
I prophesy you'll wish for your wife's true love:  
I think the gods themselves have learnt that by now.  
You'd not prefer to have all the land in the world  
that sturdy farmers plough with strong oxen,  
nor all the pearls produced by happy India,  
where the waves of Eastern Seas redden.  
Your prayers are fulfilled: see how Love flies to you  
on whirring wings, brings yellow ribbons to your wife,  
ties that last forever, while slow age  
brings wrinkles and whitens your hair.  
Let it be so, birth day, and show an omen of children to be,  
and let a crowd of young ones play around your feet.

### III Nemesis In The Country

Cornutus, my girl's in the country, at a villa:  
ah, he's made of iron who can stay in the city.  
Venus herself has gone now to open fields,  
and Love's learning the farmer's rustic words.  
Oh, if I could only gaze at my girl, how firmly  
I'd turn the rich soil there with my strong hoe,  
and follow the curving blade as a ploughman,  
while the bullocks carved clods for the sowing!  
I wouldn't complain if the sun burnt my slender limbs  
or broken blisters wounded my sensitive hands.  
Apollo, the beautiful, fed the bulls of Admetus:  
his lyre and his uncut hair did him no good,  
nor could he cure his illness with health-giving herbs:  
love conquered whatever of his art might heal.  
They say the god himself used to drive cows  
from the byre.....  
and taught how to mix rennet in with fresh milk,  
and curdled the milky liquid as it was stirred.  
Then the basket was woven from light stems of rushes,  
and thin passages made, through the lattice, for the whey.  
Oh how often his sister blushed at meeting him  
as he carried a young calf through the fields!  
Oh how often the lowing cattle dared to disturb  
his skilled song as he sang, deep in the valley!  
Often leaders sought oracles on matters of note,  
a disappointed company came home from his temple:  
often Latona lamented the roughness of his sacred hair  
which had been a wonder to his stepmother before.  
Whoever saw his head undressed, his loosened hair,  
would have asked where the locks of Phoebus were.  
Where is your Delos now, Phoebus, and Delphian Pytho?  
Love indeed commands you to a humble shed.  
Happy those, once, when, they say, the eternal gods  
were not ashamed openly to be slaves of Venus.

Now he's a myth: but he who cares for his girl  
would rather be talked of than be a god without love.  
But you, whoever you are, whom frowning Cupid  
orders to set up camp in my house.....  
(...*you too may be replaced by a richer lover.....*)  
this age of iron praises profit not passion,  
and yet profit's involved in many evils.  
Profit equips the fierce soldiers with weapons of war:  
from that blood and slaughter, and death come nearer.  
Profit doubles the danger of the fickle sea,  
giving war-rams to precarious ships.  
The profiteer longs to occupy vast plains  
to graze his innumerable sheep on their many acres:  
he fancies foreign marble, and the columns are carried  
through the trembling city, by a thousand strong pairs:  
dams enclose the ungovernable sea, so that, in their calm,  
the fish can ignore the approach of threatening storms.  
But let my joyous feast attract only Samian ware,  
and the smooth clay that Cumae's wheels have formed.  
Ah, I see that young girls delight in the rich:  
then let profit appear if Venus wishes for wealth:  
so that my Nemesis might flow with luxury, and walk,  
conspicuous by my gifts, through the city.  
Let her wear the thin silks, that some women of Cos  
has woven, laying the fabric out in golden bands:  
let dusky followers be hers, whom India scorched,  
and the sun darkened as his horses drove so near:  
let Africa with its crimsons, Tyre with its purples  
compete to offer her the choicest dyes.  
I say what's known: he holds a kingdom who was forced,  
often, on the cruel slave platform to endure chalked feet.  
May Earth pay nothing of faithful seed to you,  
cruel fields that steal Nemesis from the city.  
And you, tender Bacchus, who plant the pleasing vine,  
relinquish the vats on which we've placed a curse.  
No one's allowed to hide lovely girls among gloomy fields  
with impunity: father, your new wine's not worth that.

Oh let the fruits of the earth prevail, let there be no girls  
in the country: eat acorns, and drink water in the old way.  
Acorns fed the ancients, and they made love everywhere:  
what harm was it to them to have no sown furrows?  
Then gentle Venus brought joy, openly, in the shadows  
of valleys, to those whom Love breathed kindly on.  
No watchman there, no door to be shut on the man  
who lamented. If it be right, I pray those ways return.

.....  
Let coarse limbs be clothed in shaggy garments.  
Now if my love's shut in, if I can see her seldom,  
ah me, what joy is there in a flowing toga?  
Lead me away: I'll plough the fields on my lady's orders:  
I'll not deny myself the chains and lash.

#### IV Her Greed

Here I see mistress and slavery ready for me:  
farewell now to the freedom of my fathers.  
I'm given to sad slavery, held by chains,  
and Love never slackens my wretched bonds,  
but burns me whether I merit it or I'm sinless.  
Oh, I burn: cruel girl remove the flame.  
O not to be able to feel such pain,  
how much better to be a stone on the frozen hills,  
or stand, a rock, exposed to the void of winds,  
on which the shipwrecked wave of the vast sea breaks.  
Now the day is bitter, the shadows of night more bitter:  
now every moment's soaked in acerbic gall.  
Verse is no help, nor Apollo who inspires my song:  
her hollow palm is always demanding gifts.  
Vanish Muses, if you'll give no help to lovers:  
I don't cultivate you so warfare can be sung,  
nor do I tell the journeys of the Sun, nor how the Moon  
wheels her horses and returns, her circuit done.  
I seek by song to gain easy access to my mistress:  
Vanish, Muses, if the thing is of no use.  
I need to acquire gifts for you by crimes and slaughter,  
so as not to lie weeping before your closed house:  
or snatch the ornaments that hang in sacred temples:  
But Venus's before all others is for me to pillage.  
She urges me on to wicked crimes and grants me  
a greedy mistress: let her feel my sacrilegious hands.  
Oh let whoever gathers the deep green emeralds perish,  
or dyes the snowy fleece with Tyrian purples.  
Silks of Cos and bright pearls from the Red Sea  
are the cause of greed in girls.  
They make them wicked: because of them the door  
knows the key, and the dog's set to guard the threshold.  
But if you bear great gifts the watchman's conquered,  
keys don't prevent it, the very dog is silent.  
Ah, whichever god gave beauty to the greedy girl,

what good he brought wholly to grief!  
From it weeping and squabbling rises, in short it's why  
the God of Love wanders now in infamy.  
And you, who shut out lovers, beaten by gifts,  
may wind and flame snatch away your wealth.  
May the young men delight in seeing the blaze,  
and no one busy themselves throwing water on the fire.  
Or if death comes to you, let there be none to weep,  
or bring gifts to your mournful funeral.  
But she who's kind, not greedy, let her live  
a hundred years, to be wept for by the burning pyre:  
And some aged man in homage to his past love  
will yearly set a garland on her heaped tomb,  
and, as he leaves, will say: "Sleep well, and sleep in peace,  
and on your untroubled ashes may the earth lie light."  
I give true warning, but what use is truth to me?  
My love's to be cherished as she ordains.  
Why, even if she ordered me to sell my ancestral home,  
you Lares must go under the hammer, at her command.  
Let Nemesis mix whatever drugs Circe or Medea possess,  
and whatever herbs the earth of Thessaly bears,  
that fluid that drips from the vulva of a mare on heat  
when Venus breathes passion into the wild herd,  
and a thousand other herbs, if only she'll look  
with kindness on me, I will drink.



## V Messalinus As Custodian of the Sybilline Books

Phoebus, show favour: a new priest enters your temple.  
Come to us, come now, with lyre and song.  
Now I pray let your fingers pluck the sounding strings,  
now harmonise my words to modes of praise.  
Come to your rites, yourself, while they heap the altar,  
your brow wreathed with triumphal laurel.  
Come, shining, beautiful: put on your choicest garments,  
now comb your flowing hair carefully,  
be as they say you were when Saturn fled his throne,  
and you sang in praise of victorious Jove.  
You see the future from afar, your sworn augur knows,  
in truth, what the prophetic bird of fate is singing:  
you control the lots: through you the seer reads  
the glistening entrails where the god has set his mark:  
with you as guide, the Sibyl, who sings hidden fate  
in six-beat measure, has never failed the Romans.  
Let Messallinus touch the prophetess's sacred scroll,  
and teach him yourself, Phoebus, I beg you, what she sings.  
She told Aeneas his fate, they say, after he'd carried  
his father on his shoulders, taken the Lares in his arms:  
not believing Rome would be, as he looked back,  
in sorrow, on Troy and its gods in flames.  
(Romulus has not yet laid out the walls  
of the eternal City, no place for his brother Remus:  
but the cattle grazed then on a grassy Palatine,  
and humble huts stood on the heights of Jove.  
There Pan was drenched with milk in the holm oak's shade,  
and Pales was cut from wood by a rural knife,  
and the garrulous pipes, sacred to the woodland god,  
hung on a tree, an offering from the wandering shepherd,  
pipes with their ever shortening row of reeds,  
since wax joins each hollow stem to a lesser one.  
But where the district of Velabrum stretches,  
small boats used to send a wave through the shallows.  
Often a girl, pleasing to some rich owner of a herd,

was ferried across on holidays to her lover,  
returning with the gifts of a thriving farm,  
cheese, and a white lamb from a snowy ewe.)  
“Un-resting Aeneas, brother of winged Cupid,  
whose exiled ships carry the sacred relics of Troy,  
now Jupiter grants you the fields of Laurentum,  
now a friendly land calls to your wandering Lares.  
There you’ll become a local god, when the waves  
of revered Numicius send you heaven-wards.  
See Victory flies above your weary fleet:  
the proud goddess comes at last to the Trojans.  
See fire shines towards me from the Rutule camp:  
now savage Turnus I predict your death.  
Before my eyes are Laurentum’s fort, Lavinium’s wall,  
and Alba Longa, founded by Ascanius, as leader.  
Now I see you also, Ilia, priestess pleasing to Mars,  
deserting the Vestal Virgin’s flame:  
your secret union, your headband discarded,  
the passionate god’s weapons abandoned on the bank.  
Browse, bulls, while you can on the grass  
of the seven hills: here soon a great city will be sited.  
Rome, your name is fated to rule the earth,  
wherever Ceres sees her fields from heaven,  
where dawn appears, and where in flowing waves  
the river of Ocean bathes the Sun’s panting team.  
Then past Troy will be a wonder to herself, and say  
you’ve truly consoled her, by your long journey.  
I sing the truth: so may I always chew the sacred laurel  
without harm, and eternal chastity always be mine.”  
So the prophetess sang, and called you to her, Phoebus,  
and tossed her flowing hair before her face.  
All that Amalthea told, and Herophile of Marpessos,  
all the warnings of Phoeto of Greece,  
and all the sacred words that the Sibyl of Tibur carried  
through Anio’s stream, brought back in her dry breast,  
all spoke of a comet to come, an evil sign of war,  
and that many stones would shower onto the earth.

And they say the trumpets and clash of weapons were heard  
in heaven, and the sacred groves chanted the coming rout:  
and the statues of the gods poured out hot tears,  
and the cries of the cattle foreshadowed fate.  
The clouded year even saw the Sun himself eclipsed  
by day, yoking pale horses to his chariot.  
So once it was, but at last, you, kind Apollo,  
submerge monstrous things in the savage depths:  
let the kindling laurel crackle loud in the sacred flames,  
omen that it will be a happy and fruitful year.  
When the laurel has given its auspicious sign, farmers  
be joyful, Ceres will fill your barns with rich harvest,  
and stained with the vintage the countryman will press  
grapes with his feet, till he runs short of big jars and vats:  
and the shepherd, drenched with wine, will celebrate  
the feast of Pales: then, wolves be far from the fold.  
Drunk he'll fire the light heaps of straw as appointed  
and leap through the sacred flames.  
And the mother will bear him a child,  
the child grab his father's ears to snatch a kiss:  
and the grandfather won't be bored with watching  
his little grandson, the old man babbling with the young.  
Then people serving the god will recline on the grass,  
where the light shadows of an ancient tree fall,  
or spread out canopies from cloths crowned with garlands,  
and wreath the wine-cups themselves where they stand.  
Then each, for himself, will heap up the banquet  
and make a feast, the tables and couches of turf.  
Here the young lad in drink will heap curses on his girl,  
which he'll soon wish to render vain with prayers.  
That same man, whose savage with her, will weep  
when he's sober, and swear he was out of his mind.  
Phoebus, if you will, let arrows and bows vanish  
so that Love might wander the earth unarmed.  
It's a skilled art, but since Cupid took up archery  
how many, alas, has that art inflicted sorrow on!  
And me above all: I've been wounded for a year now,

and I add to my sickness, since the pain itself delights,  
I sing endlessly of Nemesis, without whom my poetry  
can't even devise the proper words or measure.  
But you, I warn, spare your sacred poet, girl,  
since there's a guardian god watches over poets,  
so that I may tell of Messalinus, when he carries  
the conquered towns, prizes of war, before his chariot,  
wearing the laurel himself: the soldiers, wreathed  
with wild bay, singing: "*Io, Triumphe*" in loud voices.  
Then let my Messalla grant the crowd the pious sight  
of a father applauding his son's chariot as it goes by.  
Grant this, Phoebus: so let your hair be ever unshorn,  
so let your sister be forever pure.

## VI Love's Compulsion

Macer is off to the camp: what will happen to tender Love?  
Will he go too, and bravely carry weapons round his neck?  
And will he go, with his sword, by the warrior's side,  
whether the way leads over distant lands or restless seas?  
Boy, brand the savage, I beg, who's broken your peace  
and call the straggler back to your standard again.  
But if you spare soldiers, well then, here's a soldier too,  
who'd carry sweet water for himself in his helmet.  
I'm off to camp, goodbye Venus, goodbye girls:  
I'm tough too, for me too the trumpet was created.  
Brave speech, but when I've uttered the proud boast  
the door closing dashes the bold words from my lips.  
How often have I sworn never to return to her threshold?  
For all the fine oaths, my feet return themselves.  
Fierce Love, I wish, if were it possible, your weapons  
could be broken, your arrows destroyed, torches quenched.  
You torment the wretched, you force me to curse myself,  
and utter wickedness from my maddened spirit.  
I'd already have ended my ills in death, but hope,  
believing, fuels life, saying, ever, tomorrow will be better.  
Hope nourishes the farmer, hope entrusts the seed  
to the ploughed furrows to be returned with interest:  
it takes the bird in the noose, the fish with the rod,  
after the slender hook's first hidden by the bait:  
hope even consoles the slave bound with strong chains:  
his legs are struck by the iron, but he sings at his labour:  
hope promises Nemesis will be kind: but she declines.  
Ah me, harsh girl don't deny the goddess. Spare me,  
I pray, by the bones of your sister dead before her time:  
so may the little one sleep in peace beneath the gentle earth.  
To me she's sacred: I'll bring gifts and garlands  
wet with my tears, to her grave. I'll hurry  
to her tomb, and sitting there as a suppliant  
I'll lament my fate to her silent dust.  
She won't always suffer your follower to weep near you:

in her name, don't be cold towards me,  
lest her spirit slighted sends you evil dreams, and, in sleep,  
your sorrowful sister stands before your bed,  
such as she was when falling from that high window  
she went headlong, blood-spattered, to the lakes below.  
I'll say no more, lest I stir my lady's bitter grief,  
I'm not worthy enough that she should ever weep.  
Nor should tears disfigure those speaking eyes:  
the go-between harms me, the girl herself is good.  
Phryne, the bawd, denies me, alas, as she comes and goes  
secretly hiding the letters she carries in her bosom.  
Often when I recognise my lady's sweet voice  
from the cruel threshold, the go-between denies she's home:  
often, when the night's been promised me, she declares  
the girl is ill or has been frightened by some warning.  
Then I die with anxiety, then my wild mind imagines  
who embraces my love, and in what ways:  
then I call curses down on you, procuress: you'll live  
anxiously enough if any part of my prayer stirs the gods.

## Sulpicia's Garland

### **I Sulpicia on the First of March**

Sulpicia's dressed for you, great Mars, on your Calends:  
come from the sky yourself, to see her, if you're wise.  
Venus will forgive you: but you, violent one, beware  
lest your weapons fall, shamefully, in wonder.  
Cruel Love lights his twin torches from her eyes,  
when he would set fire to the gods themselves.  
Whatever she does, wherever she turns her steps,  
Grace follows her secretly to prepare everything.  
If she loosens her hair, flowing tresses become her:  
if she arranges it, the curls she's arranged are divine.  
She inflames, if she chooses to walk in a Tyrian gown:  
she inflames, if she comes gleaming in white robes.  
So, pleasing Vertumnus wears a thousand fashions  
on eternal Olympus, and wears them gracefully.  
Sole among girls she's worthy that Tyre grants her  
soft wool twice dipped in costly dyes,  
and she possess whatever the rich Arab, the farmer  
of perfumed fields, reaps from his fragrant lands,  
and whatever gems the dark Indian gathers  
from the red shores of the waters near to the Dawn.  
You Muses, sing of her, on the festive Calends,  
and you, proud Phoebus, to the tortoiseshell lyre.  
She'll carry out this sacred rite for many a year:  
no girl is more worthy of your choir.

## II Cerinthus Hunting

Whether you live on the plain's rich pastures  
or deep among shaded hills, wild boar, spare my boy,  
don't let your strong tusks be sharpened for attack:  
let guardian Love keep him safe for me.  
But Diana leads him on with love of hunting.  
O, let the woods die, and the dogs be lost!  
What madness, to want to wound soft hands  
encircling the wooded hill, in your drive?  
What pleasure is it to creep into wild beasts' lairs  
and scratch your gleaming legs with sharp briars?  
And yet, Cerinthus, if I might wander with you  
I'd carry the tangled nets over the hills myself,  
chase the tracks of the quick deer myself  
and loose the swift hound's iron chain.  
Then the woods would please me, my love,  
when it's known I've lain with you, beside your nets:  
Though the wild boar comes to the snare, then,  
he'll go safe, lest he disturb the joy of eager passion.  
Now let there be no love without me, by Diana's law  
chaste boy, lay chaste hands on the nets:  
and whoever steals secretly into my place,  
let her fall to the wild beasts, and be torn apart.  
And you leave the study of hunting to your father,  
and hurry back quickly to my breast.



### III A Prayer For Sulpicia In Her Illness

Phoebus, come, drive away the gentle girl's illness,  
come, proud, with your unshorn curls.  
Trust me, and hurry: Phoebus, you won't regret  
having laid healing hands on her beauty.  
See that no wasting disease grips her pale body,  
no unpleasant marks stain her weak limbs,  
and whatever ills exist, whatever sadness we fear,  
let the swift river-waters carry them to the sea.  
Come, sacred one, bring delicacies with you,  
and whatever songs ease the weary body:  
Don't torment the youth, who fears for the girl's fate,  
and offers countless prayers for his mistress.  
Sometimes he prays, sometimes, because she's ill,  
he speaks bitter words to the eternal gods.  
Fear not, Cerinthus: the god won't harm lovers.  
Only love always: and your girl is well.  
No need to weep: tears will be more fitting,  
if she's ever more severe towards you.  
But now she's all yours: the lovely girl  
thinks only of you, and a hopeful crowd wait in vain.  
Phoebus, be gracious. Great praise will be due to you  
in saving one life you'll have restored the two.  
Soon you'll be honoured, delighted, when both, safe,  
compete to repay the debt at your sacred altar.  
Then the holy company of gods will call you happy,  
and each desire your own art for themselves.

#### **IV Cerinthus's Birthday**

That day that gave you to me, Cerinthus, will be sacred  
to me, and will always be among the days of joy.  
When you were born the Fates sang out new slavery  
for girls, and gave you proud sovereignty.  
I burn more fiercely than the others. It's joy to burn,  
Cerinthus, if from my fire shared fire enters you.  
Let love be shared, I ask it, by your sweetest theft,  
by your eyes, by your guardian spirit.  
Stay spirit, take this glad incense, and favour my prayers:  
if only he's inflamed when he thinks of me.  
But if even now he sighs deeply for another,  
then leave your faithless altar, sacred one.  
And don't you be unjust, Venus, let both serve you,  
equally as slaves, or lighten my chains.  
Rather let us both be held by heavy shackles,  
that no day after this might ever loosen.  
The boy wants the same as me, but hides his longing:  
he's ashamed as yet to say the words aloud.  
But you, birth spirit, since you're an all-seeing god,  
assent: what matter if he asks it silently or aloud?

## V Sulpicia's Birthday

Juno, birth-spirit, accept the sacred heaps of incense  
that the learned girl's gentle hand offers you.  
She's bathed for you, today, dressed herself so gladly,  
to stand before your altar, visible to all.  
She ascribes the cause to you, goddess, it's true:  
yet there's one she secretly desires to please.  
Then be gracious, sacred one, let no one separate  
the lovers, but, I beg you, forge the same fetters for the boy.  
You'll do well to join them: there's no girl he  
might more fittingly serve, and no man her.  
And may no wakeful guard surprise their passion,  
and Love provide a thousand pathways of deceit.  
Assent, Juno, and come, bright in your purple robes:  
three times they offer cake, chaste goddess, three times  
wine, and the mother tells the daughter what to wish for:  
while she in the silence of her heart asks something other.  
She burns as the altar burns with swift flames,  
and would not wish to be unscathed, even if she could.  
Juno, be gracious, so that when next year comes  
this same love, that is, will still be in their prayers.

## Sulpicia's Verses

### **I Love Proclaimed**

Love has come at last, such love that to hide it in shame  
would be worse than being spoken of for showing it.  
Won over by my Muse, Venus of Cythera,  
brought him, and placed him here in my arms.  
Venus fulfils what she promised: let my joy be told,  
spoken by him who has no joy of his own.  
I wouldn't wish at all to command my letters sealed  
so that none can read them before my lover does.  
I delight in my sin: I loathe composing my looks  
for public approval: let them declare worth meets worth.

## **II The Hateful Journey**

My hateful birthday's here, to be spent in sadness,  
in the wretched country, and without Cerinthus.  
What's sweeter than the city? Is a villa fit for a girl  
or that chilly river that runs through Arretium's fields?  
Peace now, Messalla, no over-zealous care of me:  
journeys, dear relative, aren't always welcome.  
Snatched away, I leave my mind and feelings here,  
she coercion won't allow to make her own decisions.

### **III The Journey Abandoned**

Did you know the threat of that wretched journey's  
been lifted from your girl's spirit? Now I can be in Rome  
for my birthday. Let's all celebrate this birthday  
that comes to you, now, by unexpected chance.

#### **IV Her Reproach**

Be grateful I'll not suddenly fall into evil foolishness,  
now you allow yourself free reign, and are careless of me.  
Any toga, any whore loaded down by a basket of wool  
is dearer to you than Sulpicia, Servius's daughter.  
But they're anxious for me, those for whom the greatest  
reason for grief is lest I give myself to an unworthy bed.

## **V In Sickness**

Have you any kind thought for your girl, Cerinthus,  
now that fever wastes my weary body?

Ah, otherwise, I would not want to conquer  
sad illness, if I thought you did not wish it too.

And what use is it to me to conquer illness, if you  
endure my trouble with an indifferent heart?



## **VI Her Apology**

Let me not be such a feverish passion to you, my love,  
as I seem to have been a few days ago,  
if I've done anything in my foolish youth  
I've owned to regretting more  
than leaving you, alone, last night  
wanting to hide the desire inside me.

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