



# *Catullus*

SELECTIONS



## 1. The Dedication: to Cornelius

To whom do I send this fresh little book  
of wit, just polished off with dry pumice?  
To you, Cornelius: since you were accustomed  
to consider my trifles worth something  
even then, when you alone of Italians  
dared to explain all the ages, in three learned  
works, by Jupiter, and with the greatest labor.  
Then take this little book for your own: whatever  
it is, and is worth: virgin Muse, patroness,  
let it last, for more lives than one.

## 2. Tears for Lesbia's<sup>o</sup> Sparrow

Sparrow, my sweet girl's delight,  
whom she plays with, holds to her breast,  
whom, greedy, she gives her little finger to,  
often provoking you to a sharp bite,  
whenever my shining desire wishes  
to play with something she loves,  
I suppose, while strong passion abates,  
it might be a small relief from her pain:  
might I toy with you as she does  
and ease the cares of a sad mind!

<sup>o</sup> Lesbia is often identified as Clodia Metelli (ca. 94 BCE - ?). Clodia had a reputation for having affairs... and for poisoning her husband.

## 2b. Atalanta<sup>o</sup>

It's as pleasing to me as, they say,  
that golden apple was to the swift girl,  
that loosed her belt, too long tied.

<sup>o</sup> Atalanta was a lovely maiden  
who agreed to marry any man  
who could beat her in a foot race  
— but she was faster than all her  
suitors; she was eventually  
tricked by Hippomenes, who  
distracted her with golden apples  
and won the race.

## 3. The Death of Lesbia's Sparrow

Mourn, O you Loves and Cupids  
and such of you as love beauty:  
my girl's sparrow is dead,  
sparrow, the girl's delight,  
whom she loved more than her eyes.  
For he was sweet as honey, and knew her  
as well as the girl her own mother,  
he never moved from her lap,  
but, hopping about here and there,  
chirped to his mistress alone.  
Now he goes down the shadowy road  
from which they say no one returns.  
Now let evil be yours, evil shadows of Orcus<sup>o</sup>,  
that devour everything of beauty:  
you've stolen lovely sparrow from me.  
O evil deed! O poor little sparrow!  
Now, by your efforts, my girl's eyes  
are swollen and red with weeping.

<sup>o</sup> A name for the god of the underworld

## 5. Let's Live and Love: to Lesbia

Let us live, my Lesbia, let us love,  
and all the words of the old, and so moral,  
may they be worth less than nothing to us!  
Suns may set, and suns may rise again:  
but when our brief light has set,  
night is one long everlasting sleep.  
Give me a thousand kisses, a hundred more,  
another thousand, and another hundred,  
and, when we've counted up the many thousands,  
confuse them so as not to know them all,  
so that no enemy may cast an evil eye,  
by knowing that there were so many kisses.

## 6. Flavius's Girl: to Flavius

Flavius, unless your delights  
were tasteless and inelegant,  
you'd want to tell, and couldn't be silent.  
Surely you're in love with some feverish  
little whore: you're ashamed to confess it.  
Now, pointlessly silent, you don't seem to be  
idle of nights, it's proclaimed by your bed  
garlanded, fragrant with Syrian perfume,  
squashed cushions and pillows, here and there,  
and the trembling frame shaken,  
quivering and wandering about.  
But being silent does nothing for you.  
Why? Spread thighs blab it's not so,

if not quite what foolishness you commit.  
How and whatever you've got, good or bad,  
tell us. I want to name you and your loves  
to the heavens in charming verse.

#### 7. How Many Kisses: to Lesbia

Lesbia, you ask how many kisses of yours  
would be enough and more to satisfy me.  
As many as the grains of Libyan sand  
that lie between hot Jupiter's oracle,  
at Ammon<sup>o</sup>, in resin-producing Cyrene<sup>o</sup>,  
and old Battiades<sup>o</sup> sacred tomb:  
or as many as the stars, when night is still,  
gazing down on secret human desires:  
as many of your kisses kissed  
are enough, and more, for mad Catullus,  
as can't be counted by spies  
nor an evil tongue bewitch us.

<sup>o</sup> Ammon was an oasis in Libya  
where Ammon was worshipped;  
Cyrene is a town North Africa;  
Battiades was the poet Calli-  
machus, a descendent of King  
Battus of Cyrene

#### 8. Advice: to himself

Sad Catullus, stop playing the fool,  
and let what you know leads you to ruin, end.  
Once, bright days shone for you,  
when you came often drawn to the girl  
loved as no other will be loved by you.  
Then there were many pleasures with her,  
that you wished, and the girl not unwilling,

truly the bright days shone for you.  
And now she no longer wants you: and you  
weak man, be unwilling to chase what flees,  
or live in misery: be strong-minded, stand firm.  
Goodbye girl, now Catullus is firm,  
he doesn't search for you, won't ask unwillingly.  
But you'll grieve, when nobody asks.  
Woe to you, wicked girl, what life's left for you?  
Who'll submit to you now? Who'll see your beauty?  
Who now will you love? Whose will they say you'll be?  
Who will you kiss? Whose lips will you bite?  
But you, Catullus, be resolved to be firm.

#### 9. Back from Spain: to Veranius

Veranius, first to me of all  
my three hundred thousand friends,  
have you come home to your own house  
your harmonious brothers, and old mother?  
You're back. O happy news for me!  
I'll see you safe and sound and listen  
to your tales of Spanish places that you've done,  
and tribes, as is your custom, and  
hang about your neck, and kiss  
your lovely mouth and eyes.  
O who of all men is happier  
than I the gladdest and happiest?

12. Stop Stealing the Napkins! : to Asinius Marrucinus

Asinius Marrucinus, you don't employ  
your left hand too well: in wine and jest,  
you take neglected table-linen.  
Do you think that's witty? Get lost, you fool:  
it's such a sordid and such an unattractive thing.  
Don't you believe me? Believe Pollionus  
your brother, who wishes your thefts  
could be fixed by money: he's a boy  
truly stuffed with wit and humor.  
So expect three hundred hendecasyllables<sup>o</sup>  
or return my napkin, whose value  
doesn't disturb me, truly,  
it's a remembrance of my friends.  
Fabullus and Veranius sent me the gift,  
napkins from Spain: they must be cherished  
as my Veranius and Fabullus must be.

<sup>o</sup> A line of 11 syllables, a typical line of poetry. Here Catullus suggests he'll write a lot of insulting poetry about Asinius if he doesn't return the stolen napkins.

13. Invitation: to Fabullus

You'll dine well, in a few days, with me,  
if the gods are kind to you, my dear Fabullus,  
and if you bring lots of good food with you,  
and don't come without a pretty girl  
and wine and wit and all your laughter.  
I say you'll dine well, and charmingly,  
if you bring all that: since your Catullus's  
purse alas is full of cobwebs.  
But accept endearments in return for the wine

or whatever's sweeter and finer:  
since I'll give you a perfume my girl  
was given by the Loves and Cupids,  
and when you've smelt it, you'll ask the gods  
to make you, Fabullus, all nose.

15. A Warning: to Aurelius

I commend myself and my love to you,  
Aurelius. I ask for modest indulgence,  
so, if you've ever had a desire in your mind  
you've pursued chastely and purely,  
keep this boy of mine modestly safe,  
I don't speak to the masses – nothing to fear  
from those who pass to and fro in the streets  
occupied with their business –  
truly the fear's of you and your cock  
dangerous to both good and bad boys.  
Shake it about as you please, and with as much  
force as you please, wherever you choose, outside:  
I except him from that, with modesty, I think.  
But if tempests of mind, and mad passion  
impel you to too much sin, you wretch,  
so you fill my boy's head with deceptions,  
then let misery, and evil fate, be yours!  
Of him whom, with feet dragged apart, an open door,  
radishes and mullets pass through.

27. Falernian Wine

Serving-boy, fill for me stronger cups  
of old Falernian, since Postumia,  
the mistress's, laws demand it,  
she who's juicier than the juicy grape.  
But you water, fatal to wine, away with you:  
far off, wherever, be off to the strict.  
This wine is Bacchus's own.

38. A Word Please: to Cornificius

He's ill, Cornificius, your Catullus,  
he's ill, by Hercules, and it's bad,  
and worse and worse by the hour.  
Where are you, for whom it's the least and easiest thing,  
to bring consolation with chatter?  
I'm cross with you. So much for my friendship?  
Even a little might comfort me,  
sadder than Simonides's tears.

39. Your Teeth! : to Egnatius

Egnatius, because he has snow-white teeth,  
smiles all the time. If you're a defendant  
in court, when the counsel draws tears,  
he smiles: if you're in grief at the pyre  
of pious sons, the lone lorn mother weeping,  
he smiles. Whatever it is, wherever it is,

whatever he's doing, he smiles: he's got a disease,  
neither polite, I would say, nor charming.  
So a reminder to you, from me, good Egnatius.  
If you were a Sabine<sup>o</sup> or Tiburtine  
or a fat Umbrian, or plump Etruscan,  
or dark toothy Lanuvian, or from north of the Po,  
and I'll mention my own Veronese too,  
or whoever else clean their teeth religiously,  
I'd still not want you to smile all the time:  
there's nothing more foolish than foolishly smiling.  
Now you're Spanish: in the country of Spain  
what each man pisses, he's used to brushing  
his teeth and red gums with, every morning,  
so the fact that your teeth are so polished  
just shows you're the more full of piss.

<sup>o</sup> Sabine, Tiburtine,  
Umbrian, Etruscan,  
Lanuvian, Veronese—all  
different cities, tribes  
and peoples who live in  
the region we call Italy  
today.

42. The Writing Tablets: to the Hendecasyllables

Come, hendecasyllables, all that there are  
and from every side, as many as are.  
A base adulteress thinks I'm a joke,  
and refuses to give me my tablets  
once more, if you'd believe it.  
We'll follow her: ask for them back.  
Which one, you may ask? The one you can see  
strutting disgracefully, laughing ridiculously,  
maddening, with the jaws of a Gaulish bitch.  
Surround her: ask for them back:  
'Stinking adulteress, give back my letters,  
give back, stinking adulteress, my letters!'

You won't? O to the mire, the brothel,  
or if anything can be more ruinous, then that!  
But still don't think that's enough.  
Call her again in a louder voice:  
'Stinking adulteress, give back my letters,  
give back, stinking adulteress, my letters!  
But it's no use: nothing disturbs her.  
We'd better change methods and tactics,  
if we want them to be of more use to us:  
let's see if we can't get a blush  
from that bitch's brazen face:  
'Honest and chaste one, give back my letters.'

#### 43. No Comparison: to Ameana

Greetings, girl with a nose not the shortest,  
feet not so lovely, eyes not of the darkest,  
fingers not slender, mouth never healed,  
and a not excessively charming tongue,  
bankrupt Formianus's 'little friend'.  
And the Province pronounces you beautiful?  
To be compared to my Lesbia?  
O witless and ignorant age!

#### 45. A Pastoral: to Septimius

Septimius holding his beloved Acme  
in his lap, said: 'Acme, mine, if I  
don't love you desperately, and love forever,

continually through all the years,  
as much as he who loves the most,  
in empty Libya and scorched India,  
I'll fight against some green-eyed lion.'  
As he spoke, Love, to left and right,  
sneezed his approbation.  
But Acme lifted her head slightly  
and her charming red lips spoke  
to her sweet boy's intoxicated eyes:  
'So, Septimius, mea vita,  
let us always serve this one lord,  
that more deeply and more fiercely  
the fire will burn my tender marrow.'  
As she spoke, Love, to left and right  
sneezed his approbation.  
Now profiting from these good omens  
their mutual spirits love and are loved.  
Septimius sets his little Acme,  
above the Syrians or Britons:  
faithful Acme makes Septimius  
her one darling and desire.  
Who might see more blessed creatures  
who a love more fortunate?

#### 46. Spring Parting

Now Spring returns mild and temperate,  
now the wild equinoctial skies  
are calmed by Zephyr's happier breezes.  
The fields of Phrygia will be forsaken,

Catullus, rich farms of hot Nicaea:  
we'll flee to Asia's bright cities.  
Now restless minds long for travel,  
now the glad feet stir with pleasure.  
O sweet crowd of friends farewell,  
who came together from far places,  
whom divergent roads must carry.

48. Passion: to Iuventius

Iuventius, if I were always allowed  
to kiss your honey-sweet eyes,  
I might kiss you three hundred  
thousand times, and never be sated,  
not even if my kisses were more  
than the crop's ripe ears of wheat.

49. A Compliment: to Marcus Tullius Cicero

Most fluent of Romulus's descendants,  
that are, that have been, that will be  
through all the years, Marcus Tullius,  
Catullus, the least of all the poets,  
sends you the warmest thanks—  
as much the least of all the poets,  
as you are the greatest of all lawyers.

51. An Imitation of Sappho: to Lesbia

He seems equal to the gods, to me, that man,  
if it's possible more than just divine,  
who sitting over against you, endlessly  
sees you and hears you  
laughing so sweetly, that with fierce pain I'm robbed  
of all of my senses: because that moment  
I see you, Lesbia, nothing's left of me....  
but my tongue is numbed, and through my poor limbs  
fires are raging, the echo of your voice  
rings in both ears, my eyes are covered  
with the dark of night.

'Your idleness is loathsome, Catullus:  
you delight in idleness, and too much posturing:  
idleness ruined the kings and the cities  
of former times.'

58. Lament for Lesbia: to Marcus Caelius Rufus

Caelius<sup>o</sup>, our Lesbia, that Lesbia,  
that Lesbia, Catullus alone loved  
more than himself, and all of his own—  
now at crossroads, and down alleyways,  
jerks off the brave sons of Rome.

<sup>o</sup> Marcus Caelius Rufus was  
another of Clodia's  
("Lesbia's") lovers

70. Woman's Faithfulness

My girl says she'd rather marry no one but me,  
not if Jupiter himself were to ask her.  
She says: but what a girl says to her eager lover,  
should be written on the wind and in running water.

72. Familiarity: to Lesbia

Once you said you preferred Catullus alone,  
Lesbia: would not have Jupiter before me.  
I prized you then not like an ordinary lover,  
but as a father prizes his children, his family.  
Now I know you: so, though I burn more fiercely,  
yet you're worth much less to me, and slighter.  
How is that, you ask? The pain of such love  
makes a lover love more, but like less.

75. Chained: to Lesbia

My mind's reduced to this, by your faults, Lesbia,  
and has ruined itself so in your service,  
that now it couldn't wish you well,  
were you to become what's best,  
or stop loving you if you do what's worst.

85. Love-Hate

I hate and love. And why, perhaps you'll ask.  
I don't know: but I feel, and I'm tormented.

86. True Beauty: to Lesbia

Quintia's lovely to many. To me she's white, long,  
and straight: I acknowledge that's so.  
But I don't agree that's beauty: there's no charm,  
there's not a speck of good taste in all of that long body.  
Lesbia's lovely, possessed of all that's most beautiful,  
besides, she alone's stolen all charm from all other women.

87. Incomparable: to Lesbia

No woman can say she's been loved so much,  
as my Lesbia in truth's been loved by me.  
No faith in any tie was ever so great,  
as has been found, on my part, in love of you.

92. Sign of Love: to Lesbia

Lesbia always speaks ill of me, never shuts up  
about me: damn me if she doesn't love me.  
What's the sign? Because it's the same with me: I'm  
continually complaining, but damn me if I don't love her.

—Trans. A. S. Kline

