**Book I.1:1-38 Love’s madness**

Cynthia was the first, to my cost, to trap me with her eyes: I was untouched by love before then. Amor it was who lowered my gaze of endless disdain, and, feet planted, bowed my head, till he taught me, recklessly, to scorn pure girls and live without sense, and this madness has not left me for one whole year now, though I do attract divine hostility.

Milanion, did not shirk hard labour, Tullus, my friend, in crushing fierce Atalanta, Iasus’s daughter. Then he lingered lovesick in Parthenium’s caves, and faced wild beasts there: thrashed, what is more, by the club of Hylaeus, the Centaur, he moaned, wounded, among Arcadia’s stones. So he was able to overcome the swift-footed girl: such is the value of entreaty and effort in love. Dulled Amor, in me, has lost his wits, and forgets the familiar paths he once travelled.

But you whose trickeries draw down the moon, whose task it is to seek revenge, through sacrifice on magic fires, go change my mistress’s mind, and make her cheeks grow paler than my own! Then I’ll believe you’ve power to lead rivers and stars wherever you wish, with Colchian charms.

Or you, my friends who, too late, would draw me back from error, search out the cure for a sick heart. I will suffer the heat and the knife bravely, if only freedom might speak as indignation wishes. Lift me through furthest nations and seas, where never a woman can follow my track. You, to whom gods grant an easy hearing, who live forever secure in mutual love, you stay behind. Venus, our mistress, turns nights of bitterness against me, and Amor never fails to be found wanting. Avoid this evil I beg you: let each cling to his own love, and never alter the site of familiar desire. But if any hears my warning too late, O with what agony he will remember my words!

**Book II.12:1-24 A portrait of Amor**

Whoever he was who first depicted Amor as a boy, don’t you think it was a wonderful touch? He was the first to see that lovers live without sense, and that great good is lost in trivial cares. Also, with meaning, he added the wings of the wind, and made the god hover in the human heart: true, since we’re thrown about on shifting winds, and the breeze never lingers in one place.

And it’s right that his hand should grip barbed arrows, and the Cretan quiver hang across his shoulders, since he hits us before we safely see the enemy, and no one escapes unwounded from his hurt.
His darts remain with me, and his form, a boy, but surely he must have lost his wings, since he never stirs anywhere but in my heart, and, oh, wages endless war in my blood.

What joy is it for you, Amor, to inhabit my thirsty heart? If you know shame, transfer your war elsewhere: better to try those innocent of your poison. It's not me you hit: it's only my tenuous shadow.

If you destroy me, who'll be left to sing like this? (This slender Muse of mine is your great glory.) Who will sing the face, the hands, or the dark eyes of my girl, or how sweetly her footsteps are accustomed to fall.

**Book II.17:1-18 His faithfulness, though ignored**

To lie about the night, to lead a lover on with promises, that’s to own hands dyed with his blood! I’m the poet of these things, so often whiling away bitter nights alone, tossing from side to side in bed.

Whether you’re moved by Tantalus’s fate beside the water, parched as the liquid ebbs from his thirsty mouth, or whether you admire Sisyphus’s labour, rolling his awkward burden up all the mountain side: nothing in the world lives more harshly than a lover, nor, if you’re at all wise, is there anything that you’d wish less to be.

I whom envious admiration once considered happy, I too am hardly allowed entrance, now, one day in ten. Now by comparison, impious girl, I’d enjoy hurling my body from some hard rock, or taking powdered drugs in my fingers. I can’t even sleep at the crossroads under the clear moon, or send my words through the crack in the door.

But though it’s fact I’ll take care not to change my mistress: then she’ll cry, when she senses loyalty, in me.

**Book II.19:1-32 Cynthia is off to the country**

Even though you’re leaving Rome against my wish, I’m glad, Cynthia, since you’re without me, you’re in the country, off the beaten track. There’ll be no young seducer in those chaste fields, one whose flatteries stop you being true; no fights will begin beneath your window; your sleep won’t be troubled by being called aloud.

You’ll be alone, and you’ll gaze, alone, Cynthia, at mountains, herds, the fields of poor farmers. No games will have power to corrupt you there, no sanctuary temples giving you countless opportunities for sin. There you’ll watch the oxen’s endless ploughing, vines losing leaves to the pruning-hook’s skill: and you’ll carry a little offering of incense to some crude shrine, where a goat
will die in front of the rustic altar: and you'll imitate their choral dance bare-legged: but only if all is safe from strange men.

I'll go hunting: I'll take pleasure now, at once, in accepting the rites of fair Diana, and dropping my former vows to Venus. I'll start chasing wild creatures, and fasten horns to fir trees, and control the audacious dogs myself. Yet I'll not try great lions, or hurry to meet wild boar face to face. It’s daring enough to take the gentle hare, or pierce a bird with a trim rod, where Clitumnus clothes the beautiful stream with woodland tangles, and his wave bathes the snow-white heifers.

You, mea vita, if you venture anything, remember I'll be coming there for you, in a few days time. So, solitary woods and vagrant streams, in mossy hills, won't stop me trying your name on my tireless tongue. Everyone wishes to hurt those who are absent.

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**Book III.23:1-24 The lost writing tablets**

So, my cunning writing-tablets are lost, then, and so are many good texts too! They were worn away by my hand’s former usage, and they sought good faith by not being sealed. Moreover they knew how to pacify girls, without me, and how without me to utter eloquent words. No gold fittings made them precious: they were dingy wax on ordinary boxwood. Such as they were they stayed ever-faithful to me, and always produced a good effect.

Perhaps the tablets were entrusted with these words: ‘I am angry because you were late yesterday, you laggard. Or did someone else seem lovelier to you? Or did you spread some unkind slander about me?’ Or she said: ‘Come today, we’ll rest together: all night, Love has been preparing a welcome.’ And whatever else a willing and talkative girl invents when she sets a time, with flattering wiles.

Oh well, now some miser writes his accounts on them, and places them with his dire ledgers! Whoever gives me them back can have gold: who would keep pieces of wood and not have money? Go boy, and quickly stick these words on some column, and write that your master lives on the Esquiline.
1.1 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.

3.13 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 want to order any of 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 opinion: let them declare worth meets worth.

3.14 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 the chilly river that runs through Arretium’s fields?
Peace now, Messalla, from over-zealous care of me:
journeys, dear relative, aren’t always welcome.
Snatched away, I leave my mind and feelings here,
she whom coercion won’t allow to make her own decisions.

3.15 The Journey Abandoned

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

3.16 Her Reproach

Be grateful I’d 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.

3.17 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
can endure my trouble with indifferent heart?

3.18 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
which I've owned to regretting more
than leaving you, alone, last night
wishing to hide the desire inside me.