

EX PONTO I

I

A long-time dweller in Tomitan land,
I send this to you from the Getan shore.
Take in these alien verses, Brutus, and
Conceal them where you will among your store.
The public libraries they won't go near
Lest I, their bard, have closed to them that way.
"You give no base advice, that's surely clear,"
I've often said. "There modest verses may
Pass through. Go then!" however, they may not
But, as you see, believe that they must hide 10
In someone's home for safety. In what spot,
You ask, may they to no-one's harm abide?
Where once my *Art* has stood, a space is free.
While they're still fresh, you ask why they are there.
Well, it's not love – whatever it may be
Take them. Its title may imply no care –
You'll find, though, that it's no less sad than those
I sent before. The theme is still the same
Under a different head. Each letter shows
Each addressee, not covering up each name. 20
My Muse gives homage to you, though you might
Demur. Yet add it to my verse. The seed
Of those who are in exile may delight,
If to observe the laws they are agreed,
In Rome. Fear not. Antony is perused,
The learned Brutus, too. I won't compete
With men as great as they; I've not abused
The gods, though. All my writings are replete
With honour for Augustus, although he
Has no need of it. If you have some doubt 30
About me, hear me praise divinity
In song (once you have rubbed "by Naso" out).
The peaceful olive branch has use in war:
For writing of the author of accord
Shall I gain nought? A pathway was made for
Aeneas when he transported the lord
Anchises, his own father, so they say:

Shall not a book with his descendant shown
 Have open to its passage every way?
 Augustus is his country's very own 40
 Father, the other merely of that man
 Who bore him. Is there anyone so brash
 As to oust him who plays the Pharian
Sistrum? Who would deny a little cash
 To him who at the shrine of Cybele
 Plays on the crooked horn? Although we learn
 Diana won't allow gratuity,
 The prophet nonetheless can surely earn
 Enough to live, Gods' power stirs one's heart
 (To credit this is no disgrace). Now, see, 50
 I take the hollowed Phrygian boxwood's part
 And the *sistrum*'s – the holy ancestry
 Of Claudian names I bring. I prophesy,
 I warn! Give place to him who now has brought
 These holy things. A mighty god, not I,
 Demands that place. Because I've earned and caught
 The emperor's wrath, don't think I'd not adore
 The man himself. I saw a man confess
 Outrage to Isis as he sat before
 Her altar. For a similar sinfulness 60
 Another was struck blind and publicly
 Proclaimed he'd earned it. All divinities
 Enjoy such heralds so that all may see
 Their power. They will lighten penalties
 Often, restoring sight, once they've perceived
 Honest repentance. Truly I repent,
 If any wretch may ever be believed,
 Wracked by my deed. My exile I lament
 But, more, my sin! To bear the penalty
 Is harsher than to merit it. Indeed, 70
 The gods may favour me (our Majesty
 Is clearer), for all time remains my deed,
 Though punishment may be removed. It's sure
 That, on arrival, death will extirpate
 My exile state and, further, he'll ensure
 I'll sin no more. As snows evaporate,
 My heart is softened (this is no bombshell!),
 Gnawed as a sip is by that hidden beast
 Made weak, or as the ocean's briny swell
 Scoops crags, as books on which a worm's teeth feast, 80
 Or as by rust stored iron is corroded,
 My heart is gnawed by constant misery
 (Nor will it ever end). My mind is goaded

By stings which will not, till I cease to be,
 Make their departure. He who feels this woe
 Will die before the woe itself will die.
 Then if the gods believe that this is so,
 The gods to whom in everything do I
 Belong, perhaps I'll merit in their view
 Sme little succour, that they may divert
 Me from this hostile place to somewhere new. 90
 My begging more would render me too pert.

II

O Maximus, who have a mighty name,
 Made double by your soul's nobility,
 For your birth, though three hundred people came
 To a slaughtered death, not all the Fabii
 Were killed that day – perhaps you ask who sent
 This note and who I am who speak to you
 And, at my name, are stern and won't relent
 When reading what ensues. What must I do?
 I'll venture this confession: I confess
 I have deserved my fate, though scarcely may 10
 I suffer worse. Here is unfriendliness
 And peril, as if peace were snatched away
 From me, along with Rome: my enemies
 Double the cause of death most cruelly
 By smearing darts with poison, and with these
 A horseman circles the periphery
 Of the frightened wall like wolves encircling
 The pent-up sheep: once that the lightweight bow
 Has been retracted with its horsehair string
 It keeps the fetters tense, not letting go. 20
 The roofs are fixed with darts that seem like veils,
 The gates' firm locks scarce keep the enemy
 From entering. Nor leaf nor tree avails
 To give protection, and continually
 Dead winter follows winter. Here am I,
 In my fourth winter, fighting, cold, darts, fate,
 And but when I'm too comatose to cry,
 My years are endless: my heart's in a state
 Of deathlike lethargy. Though she perceived
 So many deaths, happy Niobe, who 30
 Turned, in her grief, to stone, has been relieved
 Of any feeling. Happy, too, are you

Whom, crying for Phaëthon, the poplar tree
 Veiled with new bark! In vain I wish that I
 Could turn to stone, no wood may cover me.
 Medusa, if she were to catch my eye,
 Would lose her strength. I must, while here I stay,
 Feel every bitter thing: my penalty
 Grows worse by long delay. In the same way
 Tityus' liver never ceased to be, 40
 Ever reborn, uneaten, thus to de cease
 Over and over. But when sleep I find,
 That common medicine, and a restful peace,
 I think that night leaves all my woes behind.
 Dreams frighten me, mimicking actual woes,
 I wake to my distresses or believe
 I'm ducking arrows of Sarmatian foes
 Or being rudely bound. When I receive
 A nicer dream, Rome's domiciles I view.
 And now with you, my friends, whom I revered, 50
 I have long chats, now, dearest wife, with you.
 Once has this brief and bogus joy appeared,
 I'm worsened by this hint of gaiety,
 So whether day beholds my wretched frame
 Or Night's chill steeds are heading straight for me,
 Just as new wax is wont to melt in flame,
 My heart still melts with cares that won't retreat.
 I often pray for death, yet, lest I be
 Sepulchred here, for that heart still to beat
 I pray. I think of Caesar's clemency 60
 And trust my wreck will find a shore that's mild.
 But when I see how obdurate my fate,
 Slight hope is by a mighty fear beguiled
 And I am crushed. Yet I don't contemplate
 Or pray for more than that, however slight
 The change, I may of this vicinity
 Be rid. It's this or nothing that you might
 Apply your favour modestly for me.
 Use, Maximus, your Latin eloquence,
 Appealing gently in this thorny case: 70
 A bad one, I confess, and yet from hence,
 You pleading it, a good one takes its place.
 A god knows all, yet Caesar doesn't know
 The nature of this godforsaken land.
 Divine minds to such things don't stoop so low:
 His godhead weighty matters has in hand –
 No time to learn of Tomis's location
 (Known scarcely by the neighbouring Getae),

No time to learn what busies the Sarmatian,
 The fierce Iazygian, Tauric lands which lie 80
 Under Diana's watch, what people wind,
 When Hister freezes, through her harsh expanse
 On speedy horses' backs. Most pay no mind
 To gorgeous Rome nor fear the dominance
 Of Latian arms. Full quivers, bows and steeds
 That run forever give them fortitude;
 They've learnt to tolerate for long the needs
 For food and water and that, when pursued,
 They'll face parched enemies. A mild man's spleen
 Would not have sent me hither if this shore 90
 He'd known. If I or any man has been
 Snatched by an adversary (I least, for
 He let me live). Though able, he declined
 To have me killed with just the slightest nod.
 There is no single need that I can find
 For the Getae to extirpate me. Our god
 Unearthed no deed of mine that merited
 My death. Perhaps he's less unfriendly now.
 He didn't do a thing that was not fed
 By my own deeds. His anger is somehow 100
 Less than my due. May all the gods concede
 (Of whom Augustus is the most upright)
 That the all-nourishing earth may nothing breed
 Greater than Caesar: under Caesar's might
 My it continue. Speak, I pray, for me
 While he's as mild as I found him. Implore
 Not for contentment but security,
 Far from the savage foe upon this shore;
 The life his godhead granted me request
 To not by some foul Getan be erased: 110
 That, if I die, my bones are laid to rest,
 Not under Scythian earth, but rather placed
 In peaceful ground, and what is left of me
 Not meanly buried (perhaps a fate that's fit
 For exiles such as me) that it not be
 Crushed by a Bistonian horse. If there's a bit
 Of feeling after death, I pray no wraith
 From hereabouts will terrify my shade.
 This could move Caesar if you too have faith
 In what I say. I pray, come to my aid, 120
 Calm Caesar's ears by speaking as you do
 When helping anxious clients, instigate
 With that sweet, learned tongue that hero who
 We must with the divinities equate.

No cruel Atreus, no Theromedon
 Will you appeal to, nor the man who made
 Men victuals for his steeds to feed upon –
 No, here's a prince swift with an accolade
 But slow to punish, one who grieves when he
 Must be severe, ever the conqueror 130
 Only to give the conquered clemency,
 Who with eternal bars has closed the door
 Of civil war, with fear of punishment
 Rules much but rarely chastens; also rare
 Are his unwilling thunderbolts. Now sent
 To plead to clement ears, ask that the air
 I breathe be nearer Rome. I followed you,
 A frequent banquet guest, the song of Hymen
 I ushered to your fires; lyrics, too,
 I sang, fit for a blessed couch; why, man, 140
 I know you praised my books, except for what
 Has hurt your master, and he would esteem
 What you would sometimes read to him: I got
 A bride from your own house – Marcia would beam
 Approval of her, whom she'd loved of old
 And placed among her friends, whom Caesar's aunt
 Had also loved; she whom *their* loves enfold
 Is fine indeed; even Claudia would not want
 Celestial aid, she who excelled her glory,
 If *they* praised her. I all those years I, too, 150
 Lived spotlessly: let's skip my recent story.
 But, leaving me aside, my wife to you
 Present a heavy stress: your loyalty
 You can't preserve while likewise her you slight.
 She hastens to you for security,
 Encircling your shrines – it's only right
 That to the god he worships each should come –
 And, shedding tears, she begs you soothe the heart
 Of Caesar with your prayers so that my tomb
 And Rome, my home, be not so far apart.

III

Naso greets you , if an unfortunate,
 Rufinus, can be anybody's friend.
 Both help and hope in my dejected state
 Are in the consolation you now send
 To my poor heart. Just as the healing art

Of Machaon relieved Poeas's son,
 I, languishing and by a bitter dart
 Injured, by your kind words am taking on
 New strength. Your words revived me just when I
 Was failing, as a pulse set off again 10
 By wine. Your eloquence cannot supply
 The power, however, that will quell the pain
 Completely. Although you may drain away
 Much from my flood of grief, there'll be no less
 Remaining. Over time the scar just may
 Heal over: a raw wound that feels the press
 Of hands will quiver. Remedying the ill
 Can sometimes stump a doctor: a disease
 Sometimes is stronger than a doctor's skill.
 Blood flowing from a tender lung, one sees, 20
 Will lead to Hades unavoidably.
 The sacred herbs of Aesculapius
 Won't heal the heart. There is no remedy
 For crippling gout, the poor edematous
 Cannot be cured. Grief sometimes finds no art
 That cures or, if it does, it's gradually.
 When your precepts strengthen my prostrate heart
 And I have donned your nature's weaponry,
 Back come my love of Rome, much greater than
 All reason, and undoes your fluency. 30
 Devotion? Less than what becomes a man?
 My wretched heart, I own, is womanly.
 Odysseus' wisdom's plain, yet he desires
 To see his native smoke. A tenderness
 Draws on all men to see their own home fires.
 What transcends Rome? What's adulated less
 Than Scythian cold? Barbarian folk, however,
 From hence flee hither. Happy though she be
 Within her cage, Philomela strives forever
 To go back to her native greenery. 40
 Bulls seek their wonted groves, the lion, too –
 Despite his feral nature – tries to spot
 His caves. And yet my pangs of exile you
 Would soothe and extirpate. Make sure you're not,
 You and your kin, so dear to me; that way
 The loss will be the lighter tragedy.
 But, "Though I lack my birthplace," I might say,
 "At least I live among humanity."
 Abandoned at the edge of earth I lie
 With constant snow. There is no single field 50
 Of apples or sweet grapes, on mountain high

There are no oaks, the river-banks don't yield
 One willow. Lest you choose land over sea,
 The sunless sea swells with each raging blast.
 Wherever you look a total scarcity
 Of reapers meets your eye, and fields, so vast,
 With no possessor. Foes both left and right
 Appal us. Here threaten Bistonian spears,
 There loom Sarmatian darts. Go, then, and cite
 Brave men old who met advancing fears 60
 And sturdy-hearted Rufus who declined
 Return from exile. Smyrna held the man,
 Not Pontus, not a hostile country, mind,
 No, there's scarce any sweeter region than
 Smyrna. Diogenes did not deplore
 That he was far from home, for Attic land
 He chose. Themistocles, who won the war
 Against the Persian horde first felt the hand
 Of banishment in Argos. When expelled
 From home-land Aristides then took flight 70
 To Sparta; which of these two should be held
 The better is disputed. In a fight
 Patroclus killed a man and left Opus
 To join Achilles in his Thessaly.
 The captain in the *Argo's* exodus
 Through Colchian waves became a refugee
 From Haemonia to Pirene's spring.
 Cadmus left Sidon's walls to fabricate
 The ramparts in a better settling.
 The exile Tydeus had to relocate 80
 From Calydon to Adrastus. Teucer went
 To Venus' Cyprus; Roman men of old
 Were went at furthest to the settlement
 Of Tibur. Though all exiles be enrolled
 Herein, there never was locality
 More distant or forbidding than right here.
 In wisdom, then, excuse my agony.
 To your suggestions scarcely I adhere.
 Yet if my wounds can heal, it could be you
 Who heal them. Yet you'll strive in vain, I fear, 90
 And in my malady, whatever you do,
 I'll not be aided. What I'm saying here
 Is not because I'm wiser: no, I know
 Myself more than a doctor could know me.
 Your good will, nonetheless, though this is so,
 I welcome and I take it thankfully.

IV

A worse age plagues me now: my hair turns white
 While aged wrinkles plough across my face:
 My shattered body shows a wretched sight.
 The pleasures of my youth now hold no place
 In me. You'd scarcely now remember me,
 So great the havoc wrought upon my years.
 Time does this, I confess, but you may see
 Another cause – distress and constant fears.
 Mete out all of my ills through my long span –
 I'd top Nestor in seniority. 10
 In stubborn fields strong bulls – what's sturdier than
 A bullock? – are ground down by drudgery.
 Fields never left untouched grow old and fade
 Through constant harvest. Horses which contest
 Without remission fall. Though strongly made,
 A ship will founder if it gets no rest
 From sailing. I, too, by an endless chain
 Of woes am crushed, compelled to age too soon.
 Consistent Pauses body and mind sustain. 20
 Neither to constant labour is immune.
 How praised is Jason by men of today
 For coming here, his toil less, all the same,
 Than mine, if mighty names don't hide away
 The truth. Dispatched by Pelias he came
 To Pontus, scarcely fearing him as far
 As Thessaly. But Caesar's wrath harmed me,
 Caesar at whom from eastern to western star
 The whole earth quakes. Also to Pontus he
 A shorter journey made than I from Rome.
 His friends were Argive leaders: all of mine 30
 Left me when I was banished from my home.
 I travelled in a frail ship of the line;
 A sturdy ship took Jason on his way.
 No Tiphys was my pilot, I was shown
 By no Phineus which paths to keep at bay
 And which to follow. Juno from her throne
 And Pallas guarded. No god helped me.
 He profited from Cupid's furtive skill,
 Would I had such familiarity
 Not given Love. He went back home: I will 40
 Expire here if our god's weighty rage
 Persists. My task, then, is, my dearest wife,

Harsher than his. You were of tender age
When I left you in Rome, but my great strife
Has made you old. O might I see
You thus and kiss your altered locks and hold
Your slender frame and say, "Your care for me
Has wasted you," and then may I unfold,
As we shed mutual tears, my sufferings,
Enjoying chatter unanticipated,
And bring with grateful hand the offerings
To the Caesars and a helpmate to be rated
Along with Caesar, true gods – incense due
To the divine! With Caesar's lenity
Aurora, with you lips of rosy hue,
Effect that day with all expediency!

50

V

I, Maximus, who once was not the last
Among your friends, am asking you to read
This letter. For my native wit don't cast
Around, lest you seem to have paid no mind
To my exile. See how a frame at ease
Is marred by leisure. Water that is still
Is spoiled. So my lyric facility's
By languid inactivity made ill.
What you read here, believe me, Maximus,
I write perforce and most unwillingly.
To tackle such a task is odious,
Stern Getae call no Muse. But, as you see,
I strive to churn my verses out; my grief
No softer than their fabric, though. To read
Them over shames, for it's my belief
(I who have penned them!) many verses need
Erasing. But I balk. This toil entails
More work than writing them, and my sick heart
Can't bear to undertake such tough details.
Am I to use a harsher file and start
To censure single words? Am I, then, racked
By fate without my making Lixus roll
Into the Hebrus and the Alps be stacked
With leaves from Athos? One must spare a soul
That's wounded grievously. An ox withdraws
From heavy burdens. Merit is at hand,
I reckon, though, the most appropriate cause

10

20

For toil, and crops are furnished by the land
 With ample interest. Though you count them all,
 So far my words have brought no gain to me - 30
 Would they had brought no pain! Why *do* you scrawl?
 You ask me, then, in all perplexity.
 I wonder too. Like you I seek to know
 What it would bring. Are people right to say
 That bards are mad, I proof that this is so,
 Who, many times deceived by sterile clay,
 Persist in sowing seed in harmful soil?
 Each person shows a passion for this work,
 Pleased to spend time in his accustomed toil.
 A wounded gladiator may well shirk 40
 The fight but arm himself, the ancient scar
 Forgetting quite. A shipwrecked man may state
 That on his sailing he has placed a ban
 Yet plies his oars where he has swum of late.
 Thus ever do I hold a vain vocation,
 Returning to the goddesses I rue
 My having served. I have no inclination
 To live an idle life. What must I do
 Instead? It's death to live in idleness.
 To steep myself in wine till break of day 50
 Displeases me. The tempting dice, no less,
 Will not induce my shaky hands to play.
 When I have slept the sleep our frame demands,
 How shall I, waking, long hours occupy?
 Forget the customs of my native land?
 Learn local bowmanship, attracted by
 Sarmatian skills? My lack of strength this, too,
 Forbids me, for my slender frame contains
 Less power than my mind, So now, when you
 About what I'm to do have racked your brains - 60
 Nothing is more useful than this useless art.
 Thereby of my fall I'm oblivious.
 It would be ample should my soul impart
 This crop. Perhaps fame is your impetus.
 Live with the Muses that your verse may be
 Read and respected. That I can produce
 What comes with ease is quite enough for me:
 For over-strenuous toil I have no use.
 Why polish what I write with ample care?
 Should I fear lest the Getan won't acclaim 70
 My verse? I may be bold but there's nowhere,
 I dare to boast, round Hister with the same
 Ability as I. Enough that I,

Out here where I must live, I plough the lea
 Of poetry among the rough Getae.
 Why strive for fame in the last boundary
 Of earth? Let Fortune's gift be Rome. My Muse,
 Though sad, is with this theatre satisfied:
 This I deserve, this do the great gods choose.
 I think my books from where I now reside 80
 Can't go to Rome to whom the North Wind flies
 On failing wing. We're severed by the sky:
 The She-Bear, far from you, may scrutinize,
 From close at hand, the shaggy-haired Getae.
 I scarcely can believe that any sign
 Of my pursuit has leapt across the sea
 And land so far. Opine it's read, opine
 (What wonder!) it delights the citizenry:
 It doesn't please the author, to be sure.
 What use that hot Syene praises you, 90
 Or the Tabropanes? Is there allure
 In going further? What should there accrue
 If the distant Pleiades should eulogize
 My work? Still, this inferior verse I write
 Will not allow me where my darling lies,
 For when the author of these lines took flight
 From Rome, his reputation went as well,
 And you, in whose eyes, with my fame interred,
 I breathe no longer, now in silence dwell
 Even about that death I have incurred. 100

VI

When hearing of my fall, did you feel blue
 (You lived then in another land)? It's clear
 Your heart was sad, if ever I knew,
 However you pretend it's not and fear
 Admitting it, Graecinus. Viciousness
 Is not your nature and it does not square
 With your activities. Our hearts liquesce
 By way of liberal arts, your greatest care,
 And harshness flees. With more fidelity
 There is no-one embraces them than you, 10
 When duty and a soldier's industry
 Allows it. Certainly when I first knew
 My calling – for so long both stupefied
 And reft of thought – I felt it was my fate

That you were absent, you who would abide
 As my protector. What might mitigate
 My sickly mind was absent too, my nerve
 And counsel for the most part gone as well.
 But now bring me the one thing that may serve,
 I pray – help from afar: your chat can swell 20
 My heart, which, if you trust an honest friend,
 One should call foolish, not iniquitous.
 A brief and safe description can't be penned
 Of my misdeeds: my wounds are timorous
 Of being touched. Don't ask how they arose:
 If you would have them heal, then leave them be.
 Whatever it was, my deed you must suppose
 A "fault", not "sin". Or is iniquity
 Found in all faults against the gods? Desire 30
 Of lighter punishment has not quite quit.
 The goddess Hope alone did not retire
 When all the other gods abandoned it,
 From this god-hated earth. She had remained
 To save the navvy, shackled though he be,
 And let him think he'll not always be chained,
 To save the shipwrecked sailor who can't see
 Land anywhere, provoking him to swim.
 Skilled doctors often have betrayed their care,
 Yet, pulseless, hope has not abandoned him.
 Convicts, they say, of freedom don't despair. 40
 A hanged man, too, upon the cross will pray.
 How many folk, while fastening the noose
 Around their necks has Hope allowed a stay
 And from extermination set them loose!
 While I tried with a sword to end my grief,
 She chid and checked me. "What is this?": she said,
 "There's need of tears, not blood. Often our chief
 Has heeded them." God's kindness may be fed
 By hope, though I've not earned it. May he be
 Not hard to win; pray, too, for me. May I 50
 In Tomis lie if you won't speak for me.
 Doves will avoid the towers, beasts will fly
 Their caves, flocks grass, gulls sea, before that date
 When you will lend a weak support to me,
 Your longtime friend. Things have not, through my fate,
 Suffered a turnaround so utterly.

In place of words this greeting you may read,
 Messalinus, from the distant, stern Getae.
 The author's living there. Are you indeed
 Heedless that he who penned these words is I?
 Then read the name. Does any friend you know,
 Myself excepted, who would be *your* friend,
 Reside so far away? Gods grant it so
 That knowledge of this place, the very end
 Of all the earth, be far from every one
 Of those who love you with consideration. 10
 Enough that I should live far from the sun
 Among the ice and darts of this stern nation,
 If this apparent death may "life" be called.
 Let war on earth and heaven's chill crush me,
 By Getan arms and winter's hailstones galled:
 Let me be held by a community
 Devoid of fruit and grapes – and everywhere
 An enemy. Safe may the other mass
 Of all your clients be, of whom a share,
 Small though it was, I once had. O alas 20
 For me if you are pained by what I state,
 Denying that I ever was to you
 Allied at all! You ought to exculpate
 Me for my lying even were it true:
 My boast takes nothing from your approbation.
 Who, to the Caesars known, does not suppose
 That he's friend? Pardon my enervation:
 You were my Caesar. But I don't impose
 Where I'm not meant to go. That you agree
 You had me as your guest will satisfy. 30
 Though you'll have nothing more to do with me,
 One fewer friend now gives you greeting. I
 Was not denied by your papa as friend –
 The cause, the leading light of my vocation:
 I gave him tears, last bounty at life's end,
 And verses forum-fit. Such admiration
 Your brother had for you, a love as great
 As of the Argive kings: no shame he felt
 That I was his comrade and intimate,
 If only what I told you has not dealt 40
 A blow to him, or else I shall concede
 Here too I was mendacious: bar to me
 The whole house. Yet for this there is no need:
 For that a friend won't err no guarantee
 Is possible. Though my misdeed I long

To disclaim, there's no-one who's not aware
 I'm innocent. If some part of my wrong
 Can be excused, the punishment I bear
 Is small. But Caesar, who sees everything,
 Could see my crime was mere stupidity: 50
 He pardoned me, conditions warranting,
 As far as I allowed, and moderately
 Applied is thunderbolt. He took away
 Not life, not wealth, not even the prospect
 Of my return, as long as you may pray
 And crush his wrath. I'm well and truly wrecked.
 If one receives a wound that's far from slight
 When hit by Jove, it comes as no bombshell.
 If Achilles checked his strength, his ash-spear's flight,
 Regardless, on his foes still heavily fell. 60
 So since my liberator chastens me.
 Your door should not deny me. True, I paid
 Too little court to it. My destiny,
 However, was there too, I think I made
 Few moves towards the other house. And why?
 Under its *Lar* I stayed continually.
 Your sensibilities so deeply lie
 In loyalty, your brother's friend – that's me! –
 Has claim on you, though he does not court you
 In person. You've earned my indebtedness – 70
 Accept it. If you hearken to my view
 Of what you want, pray that you give not less
 Than you repay. You do this. I recall
 That you were noticed for your giving more.
 In any class you please you may install
 Myself, as long as I may pass your door,
 O Messalinus, no unwelcome part
 Of your household: for my deserved distress,
 If that I bear it doesn't grieve your heart,
 Yet that I have deserved it, grieve no less. 80

VIII

Severus, great part of my soul, receive
 A friend's "hello". Don't ask me how I fare.
 If I tell all you'll weep. Enough to leave
 You with the total sum of all my care.
 I live, devoid of peace, in constant strife,
 The quivered Getans up in arms. Out here,

Alone of exiles, I've a soldier's life:
 I don't begrudge the reat, all free from fear.
 That you may be the more magnanimous,
 I write these verses on the battleground. 10
 An ancient city stands, contiguous
 To two-named Hister, hardly to be found,
 Protected by its walls and its location.
 Aegisos, if we accept what they say,
 Established it and his own appellation
 Gave to it. Then in a surprise foray
 The Odrysians were crushed by the fierce Getae
 Who took the city and attacked the king.
 He, knowing his mighty race, which he raised high,
 Approached, with many soldiers in a ring 20
 About him. When he left, he'd subjugated
 In fitting massacre the people's zest.
 And therefore may the state be dominated,
 Our bravest king, by you – on you be pressed
 The sceptre. As fierce Rome stands surety
 For you, may she commend you as she does
 Great Caesar – could you hear a fuller plea?
 But to resume, kind friend, I grieve because
 Grim war adds to my woes. Since on the shore
 Of Styx I've lain, of your society 30
 Bereft, the rising Pleiades have four
 Falls ushered in. Don't think the gaiety
 Of city life I seek, though on my mind
 Is that as well, for sometimes I recall
 You too, sweet friends, and other times I find
 That on my darling wife my thoughts will fall,
 My daughter too: from home to every show
 Of lovely Rome I turn with my mind's eye –
 The fora, shrines, each level portico,
 The marble theatres, Campus' swards which lie 40
 By the sweet gardens, Virgo's aqueduct,
 The pools, canals. I think, though, the delights
 Of city lights from poor me have been sucked
 In order that the country's lovely sights
 At least may please me. Fields I do not need,
 Nor yet Paelignian soil, gardens that lie
 On piney hillocks, which twin highways heed -
 Fluminia and Clodia – those I
 Tilled for someone or other: I would guide
 Spring water to the plants (I felt no shame). 50
 Somewhere are trees that, though they may have died,
 Were planted by my hand, but, all the same,

Their fruits may not be gathered by that hand.
 Would, for these losses, I could have at least
 A lot to till here in this foreign land!
 Then would I wish to pasture every beast,
 The rock-bound goats, the sheep, while on my crook
 I lean; to banish customary care
 I'd yoke and lead my oxen. I would look
 Up words of which these bullocks are aware 60
 And hurl known threats at them. I'd moderate
 The handle of the plough and try to scatter
 Seed on the furrowed earth nor hesitate
 To hoe the weeds, letting the pitter-patter
 Of water feed the garden. Can this be,
 However, when one wall and one closed portal
 Are all that separate my foes from me?
 When you were born, the fateful three immortal
 Goddesses were strong threads (a true delight
 For me). Now on the Campus, now in the shade 70
 Of the portico you walk, at times you might
 Seek the forum, a trip, though, seldom made.
 Now Umbria calls you, now your property
 In Alba, whither on the Appian Way
 Your gleaming carriage carries you. Maybe
 You entertain a hope that Caesar may
 Drop his just wrath that you may entertain
 Me at your villa. O alas, dear chum,
 It is too much that you desire to gain:
 You must reduce your hopes to a minimum. 80
 I beg you, furl the sails of all your prayers.
 I wish to live much nearer Italy,
 Somewhere that's not endangered by the cares
 Of war, ending much of my misery.

IX

Your news of Celsus' death immediately
 Provoked my tears upon the page like rain.
 That I could read a word unwillingly
 From you! A thing it's wicked to maintain!
 Impossible! No bitterer words have I
 Received since living here, and may I hear
 None more. He lingers, as though he were nigh,
 Before my eyes. Though dead, he was so dear
 My fancy says he lives. I can recall

Often his joy, quite free of gravity, 10
 His serious tasks accomplished, one and all,
 With clear devotion. Yet most frequently
 Appears that time – would it had marked the end
 Of life for me – when round about my head
 My house collapsed in ruin. As my friend,
 While not sharing my fate, while others fled,
 He wept my grief as though, it seemed to me,
 I were his brother whom the conflagration
 Would soon destroy. As I in misery
 Lay prostrate there, he offered consolation, 20
 Sharing incessant tears, and held me tight.
 He often checked hands that would murder me
 In his alliance with my bitter fight
 For life. He often said, “The gods may be
 Placated: live and don’t deny that you
 May be absolved!” But mostly he would say:
 “Think how much help from Maximus is due.
 He’ll lay it on and reverently pray
 That Caesar’s wrath persist not to the end;
 His brother, too, he’ll use and try all ways 30
 To ease your burden.” These words helped to mend
 The weariness of all my wretched days.
 Don’t let them be in vain. He’d swear that he
 Would even come here, saying that only you
 Could grant so long an odyssey for me.
 Just as you give the mighty gods their due
 With true devotion, so he venerates
 Your household. Trust me. although you possess
 Many friends, than every one of them he rates
 No less, if one’s forebears’ illustriousness 40
 And wealth less make men great than probity
 And character. Therefore for Celsus’ death
 I rightly weep, as he shed tears for me,
 A refugee although still drawing breath.
 His peerless traits I rightly compliment
 In verse that future men may read his name.
 From Getan fields that’s all that can be sent:
 The one thing I may own. Your funeral flame
 Is worlds away – thus I could not be there
 To mourn and anoint your body. Maximus 50
 (Who *could* attend), who was your every care
 As though a god, was all-industrious
 On your behalf, performed each exsequy
 And honoured you and onto your cold breast
 Poured out the balsam. In his misery,

While in the neighbouring earth he laid to rest
 Your bones, the unguent with his tears he blended,
 So fast they flowed. Since he pays what he owes
 To those among his friends whose lives have ended,
 He can add me to the list of all of those. 60

X

Flaccus, accept "Health!" from a refugee,
 If one can send what one does not possess.
 For careworn frames long-lasting lethargy
 Will not endure their proper sturdiness.
 I have no pain, I do not gasp, afire
 With fever and my pulse beats steadily.
 My mouth lacks taste, though, and I've no desire
 For food; the hated dinner-time irks me.
 I'll eat neither what sea or land or air
 Provide. Let busy, shapely Hebe favour 10
 Me with the food that is celestial fare,
 Ambrosia and nectar, still their flavour
 Won't pique my jaded palate, and a weight
 Will in my idle stomach long persist.
 Though this is true, such things I'd hesitate
 To tell to anyone lest he insist
 That it's mere daintiness. Such is my plight
 That daintiness is possible! I pray
 That he who fears that Caesar's wrath's too light
 Upon me suffers daintiness some day. 20
 Sleep, too, which is a weak frame's sustenance,
 Won't feed my worn-out body. No, instead
 I and my endless woes keep vigilance:
 By them this place in which I live is fed.
 So you would scarcely recognize my face
 And start to wonder where its colour went.
 In my thin limbs no vigour finds a place,
 I'm paler than fresh wax. My discontent
 Comes not from heavy drinking: you're aware
 I usually drink but water, nor do I 30
 Oppress myself with food: scarce anywhere,
 Should I so wish it, is there in Getae
 The opportunity. I am not marred
 By ruinous Venus: her you will not see
 In dolorous beds. The things which make it hard
 Are water, this place and anxiety

(The greatest cause, forever here at hand).
You and your brother mitigate these woes
Or else I could not bear it. Kindly land
To a shipwreck, you assist me, unlike those
So many others. This may you still do
(I'll always need your aid) through Caesar's passion.
To cool it, though not end it, each of you,
I pray, beseech your gods in suppliant fashion.

