

NUX

Hard by the roadside I, a walnut tree,
Though blameless, am by passing peasantry
Pelted with stones. This is the punishment
For flagrant sinners, when no time is spent
On people's wrath. When it's taught a crime
To give the husbandman each summer time
His harvest. I'm no sinner. Times gone by,
When days were happier, saw trees all vie
In fruitfulness, then, when the fruit would grow,
The owners crowned the farmer-gods, and so, 10
Bacchus, your grapes would often startle you;
Her olive crop startled Minerva, too.
The apples would have hurt the mother-tree
Had not a long fork, planted handily
Beneath the labouring bough, brought aid; What's more,
By our example women also bore
Their progeny, for then maternity
Was rampant, and, since more celebrity
Was granted plane-trees than all other trees,
We who bear fruit (if I can among these 20
Be counted) have begun to grow and spread.
But now it is not every year that's fed
With apples; grapes and berries hared by blight
Are carried home; she who, in others' sight,
Would seem attractive, hurts her womb, and she
Who would give birth is quite a rarity.
I would be safer had I not created

New life, as Clytemnestra might have stated.

Thus, knowing this, her younglings as they grew

The vine would choke; the tree of Palls, too, 30

Would not bear fruit. So let this knowledge reach

Apples and pears so that bereft of each

The woods would stand, and let it reach the cherry-

Trees, who then will not allow each berry

To flourish. Ehen it hears this, the fig-tree

Will reconcile to infertility.

I do not envy them; yet does *one* stone

Assail a sterile tree, whose leaves alone

Are honoured? Those uninjured trunks you see

Have no cause to be struck, yet look at me! – 40

Sore wounded but stripped clean. It is not spite

That causes this but hope that plunder might

Be gained. Let others bear fruit – they'll complain

As well, and thus those whose defeat means gain

Are generally accused, while others who

Are poor escape all censure. Travellers, too,

Who know why they should tremble fear they might

Be ambushed; those with pockets that are light

Go safely. I alone, though, am beset

Since my assailants know that they will get 50

Something at least' with untouched greenery

The rest stay verdant, while sometimes a tree

Near me has broken fragments, many bent

With injured branches, but this detriment

Is not their fault – it's the proximity.

They get the stones that boomerang off me.

None would believe this but that those afar
 Retain their beauty with nary a scar.
 So, were they wise and able to relate
 Their thoughts, my shade those nearest me would hate 60
 End curse. Add to my lot, then, enmity –
 That's sad – and for undue proximity
 I must stand trial. My brisk husbandman
 Cares much for me, I think! I'm sure he can
 Find not a thing that he has given me
 Save earth. On despised ground I easily
 And freely grow. The place where I am found
 Standing is almost wholly public ground,
 And lest I harm the crops (which, understand,
 They say I do), the edges of this land 70
 Receive me. Saturn's sickle gives no aid
 To me by pruning my superfluous shade;
 My hardened soil is not renewed for me
 By diggers. I must labour thirstily
 In blazing sunlight, almost deadly sick;
 I'm given no sparkling rill. The cruel stick,
 However, comes when the nut starts to bear
 Chinks in its splitting rind and everywhere
 Upon my swelling boughs, that stick will rain
 With cruel scars, that I may not complain 80
 Of stones alone: my fruit falls, opted for
 Dessert. The thrifty housewife to her store
 Lays down the chosen nuts. Unerringly
 Some boy will split them while they're on the tree
 Or strike them with his finger once or twice

Once they're brought down. The hazard of the dice
Is just four nuts, with three nuts placed below
The fourth. Another urges them to go
Down a declining board and says a prayer
That one of many may touch his. Then there 90
Is he who guesses whether the number be
Even or odd and by the augury
That he has given his winnings he will take
Away with him. With chalk someone will make
The picture of the heavenly constellation
Of Aries or, instead, an illustration
Of the fourth Greek letter. When degrees within
This drawing have been made, the boy will win
All nuts *his* nuts have touched. An empty jar
A boy deposits at a distance far 100
From him – then into this with skilful hand
He flings a nut. In a secluded land
There grows a happy tree, able to bear
Her tribute for her master only: there
She hears no human hubbub nor the sound
Of rumbling wheels, nor is the neighbouring ground
Dusty. Whatever fruits she bears she can
Give as a gift to her own husbandman
And rate that wealth in full. But as for me,
I'm not allowed to bear ripe progeny, 110
Cut down before its prime. My skin's still tender
With its young milk, nor may I even render
Anything useful through my misery:
With over-hasty blows, though, men pelt me

To gain a pointless prize. So, if account
 Was made, wayfarer, of the full amount
 Of what was filched and what was left behind,
 You gain more than my master, you would find.
 Seeing my summit with its scarcity
 Of leaves, one often blames the activity 120
 Of furious Boreas. One man may guess
 That lack of heat has caused my distress,
 Another, lack of frost, another still
 Will think it's hail. But I am caused no ill
 By hail (to hasty husbandmen a pain)
 Nor wind nor sun nor frost my fruit's my bane;
 Fertility is harmful: acquisition
 Has harmed so many – in the same position
 Am I. Gain hurt you, Polydorus, too;
 To fight in Thebes your wicked spouse sent you, 130
 Amphiaraus, lured by gain. One tree
 Of Hesperus held great prosperity,
 Or else those orchards would have safely grown.
 However, some find safety in their own
 Defense – brambles and briars and the likes
 Of these, born just to hurt. I have no spikes,
 I'm harmless but by wanton pebbles sent
 By greedy hands I'm pelted. Yet I've lent
 Fit shade to those who fled the dun, when the ground
 Was cracked by the Dog-Star, while others found 140
 Shelter from unexpected rain. However,
 Despite my tireless work, folk still persevere
 To batter me with stones. Moreover, I

Must bear my master's grouse – the reason why
His field is full of stones is I, he'll say.
He clears the ground and throws the stones away,
But still there's ammunition there for me
Upon the road. Thus cold, the enemy
Of others, is my friend. I'm guaranteed
Safety by winter. Though I am indeed
Naked in winter, it's a blessing then,
Because I have no spoil to entice men.
But since I've clothed my boughs with fruit, again
I'm hailed with stones more numerous than rain.
Here one may say: 'From public ground one may
Pluck fruit - the road may claim this.' Then I say,
"If this is so, pluck olives and invade
The harvest, greedy traveller, and raid
The local cabbages, and, Romulus,
Let this same cheek affect the populus
Of Rome. From a shop-front encourage theft
Of jewels or silver. Yet these things are left
Alone; while Caesar governs everywhere
No robber will be safe. That god takes care
Not to confine peace inside Rome; no, he
Sends aid to all the world. How can this be
Of help, however, if in the light of day
I'm beaten, and if not one nut-tree may
Be safe? Therefore, upon my boughs you see
No nests, no birds among my greenery,
Ut stones wedged in my forks remain forever

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Like victors in a captured tower. However,
There are some crimes often denied, concealed
By night's own mantle: it ay be revealed
That all y injuries with dark fruit mark
The fingers, so the guilty hands the bark
Will stain. That is my blood. To no avail
Those hands are washed. Long life has grown so stale
I've often longed to shrink and perish – brought
Down by a heedless hurricane or sought 180
By a firebrand with a virulent flame. O may
My fruit by sudden squalls be sept away
Or I myself shake off my nuts! Thus you,
O Pontic beaver, when you've bitten through
The cause of peril, keep what's left behind
In safety. How could I have peace of mind
When the traveller takes his weapons, with his eye
Upon his target? These fierce bruises I
May not avoid by moving from each blow
Because the root's curved bonds hold me below 190
The earth. I face the stroke, as often he
Whom folk forbid to loose his chains will be
The butt of arrows or when the victim spies
The axe about to fall before his eyes
Or the knife drawn through the throat. You've often thought
My leaves were trembling in the wind yet nought
But terror was the cause. If I should rate
A guilty verdict, let it be my fate
To burn upon some smoky hearth. Fell me
With steel and put an end to misery. 200

If you've no cause for doing this, then say

You spare me and continue on your way.