

— *Carmen 13* —

Invitations to a dinner or drinking party were a stock theme of ancient poetry. Catullus wrote this poem in that tradition, inviting his friend Fabullus (mentioned with affection in other poems) to dine with him. At the same time, he adds his own witty variations on the theme, so that the poem may be considered a parody of an invitation.

cenabis bene, mi Fabulle, apud me
 paucis, si tibi di favent, diebus,
 si tecum attuleris bonam atque magnam
 cenam, non sine candida puella
 5 et vino et sale et omnibus cachinnis.

1 **apud me:** “at my house.”

2 **paucis . . . diebus:** The poet does not give an exact date or time; this is our first hint that the invitation is not entirely serious.

si tibi di favent: the first in a series of “if” clauses, showing the contingent nature of the invitation.

3-5 **si / . . . cachinnis:** Catullus’s first twist to the stock theme: Fabullus will have a fabulous time if he brings everything with him! The POLYSYNDETON of **et . . . et . . . et** (line 5) adds to the effect of a grocery list.

4 **non sine = cum,** LITOTES. The objects are **candida puella** and (in line 5) **vino, sale,** and **omnibus cachinnis.**

candida = pulchra. A Roman banquet or symposium (drinking party) would sometimes end with lovemaking, and Catullus subtly mentions the possibility here by telling Fabullus to bring a **puella.**

5 **sale:** A pun, since **sal** in Latin could be either “salt” or “wit.” The latter meaning makes a good transition to **omnibus cachinnis** and fits in well with Catullus’s fondness for witty, sophisticated people.

cachinnis: “laughs.” The word is an example of ONOMATOPOEIA.



A variety of Greek, Roman, and Etruscan objects informed the classically inspired paintings of the Italian artist Roberto Bompiani (1821–1908). His *Roman Feast* is now in the collection of the Getty Museum. (Getty Museum, California) (Public Domain)



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haec si, inquam, attuleris, venuste noster,
 cenabis bene: nam tui Catulli
 plenus sacculus est aranearum.
 sed contra accipies meros amores
 10 seu quid suavius elegantiusve est:
 nam unguentum dabo, quod meae puellae
 donarunt Veneres Cupidinesque,
 quod tu cum olfacies, deos rogabis,
 totum ut te faciant, Fabulle, nasum.

6-7 **haec / . . . bene:** Catullus restates the “invitation” of the opening lines and addresses Fabullus flatteringly as **venuste noster** (line 6). **Venustas** (urbane charm or refinement) was a very important quality to Catullus. Forms of the adjective **venustus** or the noun **venustas** are frequent in his poetry. He invites **quantum est hominum venustiorum** to mourn the passing of Lesbia’s sparrow (poem 3.2). Asinius Marrucinus in poem 12 commits an **invenusta** act when he steals Catullus’s dinner napkins. The writer Suffenus is **venustus** (poem 22.2) as a person but not as a poet. Quintia is physically attractive but uninteresting to Catullus because she lacks **venustas** (poem 86.3).

7-8 **nam / . . . aranearum:** Having made his request of Fabullus and repeated his invitation, he now explains the reason for the “bring your own everything”: His **sacculus** (the ancient equivalent of a wallet) is full (**plenus**) . . . of cobwebs (**aranearum**) instead of money.

9-14 **sed / . . . nasum:** Catullus now reveals what Fabullus will receive in exchange for supplying all the food, drinks, and entertainment, and the poem becomes a tribute to his **puella** (no doubt Lesbia).

9 **contra:** “in return.”

meros amores: “pure love.” What Catullus means by this is disputed. In line 11 he names **unguentum** as his very special gift, but the **amores** could also be love poems. The word **meros** is another pun, since **merum** was wine undiluted with water.

10 **quid:** “whatever.”

suavius elegantiusve: Being **suavis** and **elegans** was important to Catullus, as was the quality of **venustas** (see the note on line 6 above).

11-12 **unguentum / ... Cupidinesque:** The diners, both men and women, typically wore scent at a Roman banquet. This **unguentum** is no ordinary perfume, however. It was given to Lesbia by **Veneres Cupidinesque**, a poetic plural used by Catullus in other poems (3.1, 36.3). Catullus suggests that an evening in Lesbia's presence is a fair exchange for Fabullus's supplying everything else.

11 **quod:** relative pronoun; the antecedent is the **unguentum**.

meae puellae: Catullus's use of **meae** subtly indicates that Fabullus is invited to share Lesbia's company to look, listen, and smell, but not touch. The **puella** he was earlier invited to bring will be his romantic partner for the evening.

12 **donarunt = donaverunt.**

13-14 **tu / ... nasum:** The poem shifts back to Fabullus and a final bit of humor with **totum ... nasum**, encompassing **te, Fabulle**. The emphatic last word, **nasum**, creates a surreal image. Fabullus will want to be "all nose" once he has a whiff of the amazing perfume.



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