

12. Letter 4.19

About 100 CE, Pliny married for the third time. His wife's death ended his second marriage. We do not know whether death or divorce ended the first. And we know almost nothing about the first two wives, although we learn, from his published letters, that he remained on very good terms with his second mother-in-law. Pliny was about forty years old at the time of his third marriage. His bride was in her midteens. This age discrepancy was not unusual. It was not uncommon for girls to be married when they were thirteen or fourteen years old. In fact, Letter 5.16 records that a girl of twelve years of age was about to be married. When an older man was looking for a wife, he often sought a young bride who had many years of childbearing ahead of her. It is important to realize that life expectancy in the ancient world was very low. Many children died before they were even five years old, and therefore a wife was expected to have many pregnancies to ensure that at least one or two of the children survived to adulthood. The mortality rate among young adults was also high, and thus many people lost spouses to death. It was therefore not unusual for a middle-aged man to have had two or three wives.

Pliny's third wife, whose name was Calpurnia (the feminine form of the family **nomen**, Calpurnius), was raised in his hometown, Comum. Their families had been friends for several generations. (See Genealogy Chart 1.) At the time of the marriage, she was living with her paternal grandfather, Calpurnius Fabatus, and her paternal aunt, Calpurnia Hispulla. Her father was dead. Her mother may also have been dead or perhaps had lost custody of her because, under Roman law, children belonged to the family of their father. This letter is addressed to Calpurnia's aunt, Calpurnia Hispulla, who was about the same age as Pliny, who had known him since childhood, and who seems to have played a major role in arranging the marriage.

To avoid confusion, Pliny's wife will henceforth be identified as Calpurnia and her aunt as Hispulla, although the aunt's full name was Calpurnia Hispulla. It was customary for women to receive, as their **nomen**, the feminine form of their father's **nomen**. (On Roman naming practices, see "The Life of Pliny" in the introduction.) Calpurnia Hispulla had, in addition, a **cognomen**. Hispulla is presumably the feminine form of the **nomen gentilicium** Hispullus, but we do not know what Calpurnia's relationship to that family may have been.

C. PLINIUS CALPURNIAE HISPULLAE SUAE S.

- 1 Cum sis pietatis exemplum, fratremque optimum et
 amantissimum tui pari caritate dilexeris, filiamque eius
 ut tuam diligas, nec tantum amitae ei, verum
 5 etiam patris amissi adfectum repraesentes, non dubito
 maximo tibi gaudio fore, cum cognoveris dignam patre,
 dignam te, dignam avo evadere.

- 1 **Cum:** introducing causal clauses with the subjunctive verbs **sis**, **dilexeris**, **diligas**, and **repraesentes**.

pietatis: *Pietas* means *devotion*, here particularly to one's family.

amantissimum tui: *very loving of you*; less literally *very loving toward you*. **Amantissimum** modifies **fratrem**. **Tui** is objective genitive of the personal pronoun **tu**.

pari caritate: *with equal affection*; ablative of manner. The brother (Calpurnia's deceased father) and sister (Calpurnia's aunt) loved one another equally.

ut tuam: *as if your own* (daughter).

amitae: genitive singular. Construe with **adfectum**.

ei: feminine singular, dative of indirect object with **repraesentes**; referring to the niece, Calpurnia.

amissi: perfect passive participle, genitive singular of **amittere**.

dubito: The main verb of the sentence. The use of **dubitare** with an infinitive (here **fore**) was used by Pliny instead of **dubito quin** + subjunctive.

maximo tibi gaudio: a double dative construction (dative of purpose and dative of reference): *it will be a very great joy to you*.

fore: alternative form of the future infinitive of **esse**, which is **futurum esse**.

cum: introducing a temporal clause.

dignam: modifying an understood **Calpurniam**, which is the accusative subject of **evadere** in an indirect statement after **cognoveris**. **Dignam** is an adjective modifying the understood **Calpurniam** predicatively: *that Calpurnia (or she) is turning out worthy*. **Dignus** takes the ablative case.

evadere: Pliny reports that his new wife is proving worthy of her family. Pliny wrote this letter to reassure Hispulla, who had arranged the marriage, that the marriage was going well and that she, who had raised Calpurnia in the absence of her parents, had done a good job of preparing her for marriage.

2 Summum est acumen, summa frugalitas; amat me,
 quod castitatis indicium est. Accedit his studium
 10 litterarum, quod ex mei caritate concepit. 3 Meos
 libellos habet, lectitat, ediscit etiam. Qua illa
 sollicitudine, cum videor acturus, quanto, cum egi,
 gaudio adficitur! Disponit qui nuntient sibi, quem
 adsensum, quos clamores excitarim, quem eventum
 15 iudicii tulerim. Eadem, si quando recito, in proximo
 discreta velo sedet laudesque nostras avidissimis
 auribus excipit. 4 Versus quidem meos cantat etiam
 formatque cithara, non artifice aliquo docente, sed
 amore, qui magister est optimus.

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- 2 **Summum est acumen:** Supply a dative of possession: **ei** (*Calpurniae*). **Acumen** here means Calpurnia's astuteness in managing the household. Pliny also praises her **frugalitas**, *thriftiness*. Pliny was a very wealthy man, and his wife did not need to be frugal, but **frugalitas** was a virtue conventionally associated with good wives.

It is important to keep in mind that Calpurnia was only about fifteen years old and had been transported from a sheltered life in Comum to the crowded city of Rome, where she assumed the role of wife to a man more than twice her age and the duties of managing a large household with many slaves.

his: dative: *to these (qualities)*.

mei: objective genitive. Construe as **ex caritate mei**.

- 3 **libellos:** *small literary works*. Pliny may truly mean that his literary works are not long and substantial, or he may be adopting a posture of modesty. Compare the note on **opusculum** in Letter 4.13, Section 1.

lectitat, ediscit: **Lectitare** is a frequentative form of its cognate **legere:** *she reads again and again*. **Ediscere** is an emphatic form of its cognate **discere:** *she learns thoroughly*.

Although quite young, Calpurnia had astutely figured out that she could win her husband's affection by showing interest in his work as a writer and speaker. © Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc.

Qua: ablative of the interrogative adjective. Construe with **sollicitudine**.

illa: nominative singular feminine.

acturus: future active participle of **agere**, which can mean *to speak in court, plead a case*. In this context, the perfect indicative **egi** has the same meaning.

qui: introducing a relative clause of purpose, with the subjunctive verb **nuntient**.

Understand **eos** as the direct object of **disponit** and as the antecedent of **qui**: *she posts (those, i.e., men) who announce*.

sibi: *to her*; indirect reflexive pronoun. The accusative form is **se**. There is no nominative form.

clamores: *shouts* (of approval).

excitarim: a syncopated (contracted) form of **excitaverim**, the first person singular perfect subjunctive. The subjunctives **excitarim** and **tulerim** are required for the indirect questions.

Eadem: Calpurnia.

si quando: *if ever*. Better: *whenever*.

recito: It was common for men of Pliny's social class to host gatherings at which they read aloud their own literary compositions.

in proximo: *in the immediate proximity, close by*. The adjective is being used as a substantive. Compare the use of **proximo** in Letter 1.6, Section 1.

discreta velo: Pliny's wife Calpurnia listened to his recitations, but her presence was concealed behind a curtain from the male audience. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.5.2, uses the same phrase to describe a scene where Nero's mother, Agrippina, surreptitiously listened in on a Senate meeting, concealed by a curtain.

nostras: *my* (not *our*). It was not uncommon in Latin for the adjective **noster** to refer to one person, *my*, rather than several, *our*. Similarly the pronoun **nos** on occasion can mean *I* rather than *we*.

- 4 **citharā:** ablative case. *She arranges my verses (poetry) with the lyre; less literally for the lyre*. Calpurnia sets his poetry to music.

non artifice aliquo docente: ablative absolute: *not with some musician teaching (her)*.

amore: Understand **docente**, to form another ablative absolute.

20 5 His ex causis in spem certissimam adducor
 perpetuam nobis maioremque in dies futuram esse
 concordiam. Non enim aetatem meam aut corpus,
 quae paulatim occidunt ac senescunt, sed gloriam
 diligit. 6 Nec aliud decet tuis manibus educatam, tuis
 25 praeceptis institutam, quae nihil in contubernio tuo
 viderit nisi sanctum honestumque, quae denique amare
 me ex tua praedicatione consueverit. 7 Nam, cum
 matrem meam parentis loco vereris, me a pueritia
 statim formare, laudare, talemque, qualis nunc uxori
 30 meae videor, ominari solebas. 8 Certatim ergo tibi
 gratias agimus, ego, quod illam mihi, illa, quod me sibi
 dederis, quasi invicem elegeris. Vale.

5 **in dies:** *day by day.*

futuram esse concordiam: accusative infinitive construction in indirect statement, dependent on the verbal action of hoping implied in the noun **spem**.

Note that the **concordia** that Pliny believes he finds in his marriage is achieved when his young wife devotes herself to *his* interests. Although the etymology of the word suggests mutual efforts to live together harmoniously, in practice it was generally the wife who was expected to adapt herself to her husband's interests. In Letter 3.16, Section 10, Arria the Elder told her family that she had lived in harmony, **concordia**, with her husband for a long time.

quae: nominative neuter plural, referring to **aetatem meam aut corpus** (objects of **diligit**).

6 **aliud:** here used as a substantive, *anything else*, and as the subject of **decet**.

manibus, praeceptis: ablatives of means: *at your hands, by your instructions*.

educatam, institutam: perfect passive participles, accusative direct objects of **decet**. The participles modify an understood **illam**: *her or one educated*.

quae: feminine nominative singular. The antecedent is the **illam**, *her*, implied in the participles **educatam** and **institutam**.

viderit, consueverit: subjunctive verbs in a relative clause of characteristic.

Pliny's comments, that Calpurnia had been raised by Hispulla, inform us that Calpurnia's father had died when she was quite young and that she had lived with her father's family after his death. As noted above, her mother may also have died or perhaps had lost custody of her daughter when her husband died because, under Roman law, children belonged to the family of their father. Calpurnia, Hispulla, and Calpurnius Fabatus had formed a three-generation household. At a time when many people died when quite young, a multigenerational household of "survivors" was not unusual. It seems that Hispulla was a widow or divorcee who had returned home to live with her father.

- 7 **cum:** introducing a causal clause with **verereris**, second person singular, imperfect subjunctive. The main verb of the sentence, **solebas**, does not appear until the very end.

parentis loco: *in the place of a parent*. It seems that Hispulla's mother had died when Hispulla was a child and that Pliny's mother had served as a surrogate mother to her. Hispulla, in turn, took on the role of an older sister for Pliny, shaping his character, praising him, and predicting that he would be an outstanding person.

formare, laudare: dependent on **solebas**. **Me** is the direct object of these infinitives. Also dependent on **solebas** is **ominari**. **Ominari** introduces an indirect statement, of which the same **me** now serves as the accusative subject of an implied infinitive predicate: **futurum esse:** *to predict me* (to be), or better: *to predict that I* (would be).

talemque: In the indirect statement after the verb **ominari**, **talem** modifies **me** predicatively: *to predict that I* (would be) *such* (a person).

talem . . . qualis: correlative.

- 8 **agimus:** The subjects are **ego** and **illa**. **Gratias agere** = *to thank*. Compare Letter 6.16, Section 1.

quod . . . dederis: The subjunctive mood, used here, is less common than the indicative after **quod** causal.

illam, illa: Calpurnia.

sibi: *to her*; indirect reflexive pronoun.

invicem: *each in turn for the other*.

elegeris: perfect subjunctive following a primary tense main verb in a conditional clause of comparison.