

Juvenal Satires 5.1-37

If you are not yet ashamed of your life plan and you persist in your view that the highest good is to live off someone else's crumbs, if you can endure treatment which not even Sarmenus or abject Gabba would have put up with at Caesar's hierarchical tables, I'd hesitate to trust your word, even if you were on oath. I know of nothing less demanding than the belly. Yet, suppose you don't have the little it takes to fill your empty guts, is there no beggar's pitch vacant? Isn't there a bridge or the smaller half of a shared mat anywhere? Is the insult of a dinner worth so much? Is your hunger so famished? Wouldn't it be more dignified to shiver where you are and gnaw filthy bits of dog's bread?

In the first place, get this straight: an invitation to dinner is payment in full for your long-standing services. The reward of Great Friendship is—food. Your Lord enters this as a debt, yes, a debt, however infrequent. So if after two months it's his whim to invite his forgotten client, so the third cushion on some empty couch won't be vacant, he says, "Let's get together." It's your dream come true! What more could you ask for? Now Trebius has a good reason for interrupting his sleep and letting his laces fly loose in his panic that the whole mob of morning visitors has already completed the round, while the stars are fading, or even at that hour when the frosty cart of sluggish Boötes is wheeling round.

But what a dinner! You get wine that fresh wool wouldn't absorb: you'll see the guests turned into Corybants. Insults open the hostilities, but once you're hit it won't be long before you're hurling cups too, and mopping your wounds with a reddened napkin. That's what happens once battle with the Saguntine crockery starts up and rages between you guests and the squad of freedmen. Himself downs a wine bottled when consuls had long hair and gets drunk on a grape trodden during the Social Wars, but he'll never send even a spoonful to a friend who's suffering from indigestion. Tomorrow he'll be drinking something from the hills of Alba or Setia. Old age has obliterated its origin and label with layers of smoke on the ancient jar. It's the sort of wine that Thrax and Helvidius used to drink, wearing garlands, on the birthdays of Cassius and the Bruti...