

The First Speech Against Lucius Sergius Catilina (loeb translation)

[Delivered in the Senate]

[1] In heaven's name, Catiline, how long will you take advantage of our forbearance? How much longer yet will that madness of yours make playthings of us? When will your unbridled effrontery stop vaunting itself? Are you impressed not at all that the Palatine has a garrison at night, that the city is patrolled, that the populace is panic-stricken, that all loyal citizens have rallied to the standard, that the Senate is meeting here behind stout defences, and that you can see the expression on the faces of the senators? Do you not appreciate that your plans are laid bare? Do you not see that your conspiracy is held fast by the knowledge of all these men? Do you think that there is a man among us who does not know what you did last night or the night before last, where you were, whom you summoned to your meeting, what decision you reached? What an age we [2] live in! The Senate knows it all, the consul sees it, and yet—this man is still alive. Alive did I say? Not only is he alive, but he attends the Senate, takes part in our debates, picks us all out one by one and with his gaze marks us down for death. We, however, brave fellows that we are, think that we are doing our duty to the Republic if only we avoid his frenzy and his cold steel. You, Catiline, should have been led to your death long ago and on a consul's orders. It is upon yourself that the fate which you have long been planning for all of us ought to be visited. Publius [3] Scipio, a man of distinction and the chief pontiff, was a private citizen when he killed Tiberius Gracchus even though he was not seriously undermining the constitution of the Republic. Shall we, the consuls, then tolerate Catiline whose aim it is to carry fire and the sword throughout the whole world? I pass over precedents that are too old, the fact that Gaius Servilius Ahala killed Spurius Maelius with his own hand when Maelius was planning revolution. Gone, gone for ever is that valour that used to be found in this Republic and caused brave men to suppress a citizen traitor with keener punishment than the most bitter foe. We have a decree of the Senate against you, Catiline, a decree of power and authority. It is not the deliberations and decisions of this body that the Republic lacks. It is we,—I say it openly—we consuls, who are lacking. Once the Senate passed a [4] decree that the consul Lucius Opimius should see that the Republic came to no harm: not a single night intervened: Gaius Gracchus, for all the distinction of his father, grandfather and ancestors, was killed on vague suspicions of treason; Marcus Fulvius, an ex-consul, was killed together with his children. A similar decree of the Senate entrusted the Republic to the consuls, Gaius Marius and Lucius Valerius: did the tribune of the commons, Lucius Saturninus, and the praetor, Gaius Servilius, have to wait a single day for the death penalty imposed by the Senate? For twenty days now we have been allowing the edge of the Senate's authority to grow blunt. We have a decree of the Senate like theirs, but it is locked up with the records like a sword buried in its sheath; yet it is a decree under which you, Catiline, ought to have been executed immediately. You still live and, as long as you live, you do not cease your acts of recklessness but add to their number. It is my wish, gentlemen, to be a man of compassion, it is my wish not to seem easygoing at a time of serious danger for the Republic, but now I condemn myself for my inaction and my negligence.

[5] There is in Italy a camp of enemies of the Roman people situated in the passes of Etruria and the number of those enemies is increasing daily. The commander of that camp and the leader of those enemies you see within the walls and even, indeed, in the Senate, plotting daily in our midst the destruction of the Republic. If I give orders, Catiline, for your instant arrest and execution, what I shall have to fear, I suppose, is not that all loyal citizens will say that I have acted too late but that some individual will say that I have acted too harshly. In fact there is one particular reason why I, for my part, cannot bring myself to do what I ought to have done long ago.

You will only be executed when there can no longer be found a single individual so evil, so abandoned, so like yourself, as to say that it was an act of injustice. So long as there remains a single man bold enough to [6] defend you, you will live, and live as you live now, hemmed in by all my stout guards to prevent your making a move against the Republic. Furthermore, although you

will not be aware of them, there will be, as there have been in the past, many eyes and ears observing you and keeping watch upon you.

What point is there, Catiline, in your waiting any longer, if night cannot conceal your criminal assemblies in its shadows nor a private house contain the voices of your conspirators within its walls, if they are all in a blaze of light and exposed to view? Take my advice; abandon your scheme and forget your murder and arson. You are trapped on every side; all your plans are as clear as daylight to us. Let us go through them together. Do you remember that I [7] said in the Senate on the 21st of October that Gaius Manlius, your tool and lackey in your wild scheme, would take up arms on a certain day and that the day would be the 27th of October? Was I not right, Catiline, both in the seriousness of the plot, beyond belief in its ferocity though it was, and—a much more remarkable feat—in the date? I also said in the Senate that you had postponed the massacre of leading citizens until the 28th of October even though by that date many of the leading figures in the State had left Rome, not so much to save themselves as to thwart your plans. You cannot deny, can you, that, on that very day after the others had departed, my guards and my elaborate precautions had hemmed you in and you could not move against the Republic? And that you said that you were quite content with the slaughter of those of us who had remained behind? You confidently expected to take [8] Praeneste in a night assault on the 1st of November, but were you aware that the defences of that colony had been set on my orders with my garrison, my guard-posts, and my sentinels? Nothing you do, no attempt you make, no plan you form, but I hear of it, see it, and know it all.

Go over with me, please, the events of the night before last. You will appreciate now that my concern for the safety of the Republic is much deeper than is yours for its destruction. I say that on the night before last you came to the street of the scythe-makers—I shall be precise—to the house of Marcus Laeca. There you were joined by many of your accomplices in your criminal folly. You do not have the effrontery to deny it, do you? Why are you silent then? If you deny it, I shall prove it. In fact, I see some of those who were with you here in the Senate. In heaven's name! Where in the world [9] are we? What State is ours? What city are we living in? Here, gentlemen, here in our very midst, in this, the most sacred and important council in the world, there are men whose plans extend beyond the death of us all and the destruction of this city to that of the whole world. As consul, I see these men and call for their views upon affairs of state, and as yet I am not even wounding with my tongue men who ought to be butchered with the sword. You were, then, at the house of Laeca on that night, Catiline; you allocated the regions of Italy, you decided where you wanted each man to go, you chose those whom you were leaving at Rome and those whom you were taking with you, you assigned the parts of the city to be burnt, and you confirmed that you were on the point of departure yourself, but said that you still had to wait a little longer because I was alive. Two Roman knights were found to free you from that particular anxiety and to promise that they would kill me in my bed that very night, shortly before dawn. Your meeting had scarcely broken up [10] when I learned all this. I strengthened the guards, made my house more secure, and barred the door against the men whom you had sent to call upon me early in the morning; and there duly arrived the very individuals whom, as I had already told many prominent citizens, I expected to come at that time.

In these circumstances, Catiline, finish the journey you have begun: at long last leave the city; the gates are open: be on your way. Manlius and that camp of yours have all too long been waiting for their general. Take all your men with you or, if you cannot take them all, take as many as you can. Cleanse the city. You will free me from my great fear, once there is a wall between us. You cannot remain among us any longer; I cannot, I will not, I must not permit it.

We owe a heavy debt of gratitude to the immortal [11] gods and not least to Jupiter Stator, the most venerable guardian of this city, in whose temple we are today, because so often in the past have we escaped this pestilence, so foul, so loathsome, so deadly to the Republic. Never again must one man have the power to imperil the very existence of the State. As long as you, Catiline, plotted against me when I was consul-designate, I protected myself not with a public guard but by my own alertness. At the last consular elections when I was consul you wanted to kill me and your fellow

candidates in the Campus Martius; I sounded no public call to arms but foiled your wicked efforts with a guard provided by a force of friends; whenever you went for me, I thwarted you in person, although I saw that my death would be a major disaster to the Republic. Now you are openly attacking the whole commonwealth; [12] you are hailing to their destruction and devastation the temples of the immortal gods, the buildings of this city, the lives of all the citizens and the whole of Italy. I do not yet, however, presume to take the most obvious course, the course appropriate to the authority of my position and the stern tradition of our ancestors, and I shall therefore act in a way that is more lenient in degree of severity but more conducive to the common safety. If I give an order for you to be killed, there will remain in the State the rest of the conspirators; but if, as I have long been urging, you leave the city, there will then be drained from it that flood of the State's deadly sewage—your accomplices. Well, Catiline? Surely [13] you are not hesitating to do at my bidding what you were minded to do of your own free will? The consul orders a public enemy to leave the city. You ask me, "You don't mean exile?" I do not command that but, if you ask my opinion, that is my advice.

What is there, Catiline, that can give you any pleasure in this city now? There is not here outside that conspiracy of ruined men a single person who does not fear you, not one who does not hate you. What mark of family scandal is there not branded upon your life? What deplorable episode in your personal affairs does not help form your reputation? What lust has never shone in your eyes, what crime has never stained your hands, what shameful deed has never fouled your entire body? What young man that you had ensnared with the allurements of your seduction have you not provided with a weapon for his crime or a torch for his passion? Or again, [14] shortly after you had made room for a new bride by murdering your former wife, did you not compound this deed with yet another crime that defies belief? I do not dwell on this and readily allow it to be glossed over in silence lest it be thought that this State has allowed so heinous a crime to have been committed or to have gone unpunished. I pass over the total ruin of your fortune which you will feel hanging over you on the coming Ides; I come to the events which are not concerned with the disgrace brought upon you by the scandals of your private life or with the poverty and shame of your family, but with the supreme interests of the State and the life and safety of us all. Can the light of this sun, Catiline, or can [15] the breath of this air give you any pleasure when you know that there is not one man present who does not know that on the last day of December, in the consulship of Lepidus and Tullus, you were standing in the comitium armed with a weapon, that you were organizing a band to kill the consuls and leading men in the State, and that it was not any reflection on your part or fear that foiled your mad crime but the Fortune of the Roman people? I omit these crimes too—they are no secret and you have committed many crimes since then; think of all the occasions on which you tried to kill me when I was consul-designate and even when I was consul! Think of all your thrusts which seemed bound to find their mark but which I dodged with a slight swerve and, as they say, by a body-movement! You achieve nothing, you accomplish nothing, but that does not stop you still trying and still hoping. Think of all the times when [16] your dagger has been wrenched from your grasp and when it has slipped out by some chance and fallen to the ground! With what rites you have consecrated and dedicated it I do not know, that you must plunge it into the body of a consul. At the end of it all what sort of a life are you living? I shall speak to you now so as to show that I feel not the hatred that I ought to feel but the pity that you do not at all deserve. A short time ago you came into the Senate. Who out of all that crowd, out of all your many friends and intimates greeted you? If no one else has received such treatment within the memory of man, are you waiting for condemnation to be voiced aloud, although you have been convicted by the hostile verdict of their silence? What of the fact that at your arrival the seats near you emptied, that the moment you sat down all the ex-consuls whom you had repeatedly marked out for death left the seats around you bare and empty—how do you think you ought to feel about that? Heavens [17] above! If my slaves feared me as much as all your countrymen fear you, I would think that I should get out of my house. Do you not consider that you should leave the city? And if I saw that—even undeservedly—I was so deeply suspected and loathed by my fellow-citizens, I should wish not to see a single one of them rather than meet the hostile gaze of them all. Yet you, recognizing as you do in your guilty

knowledge of your crimes that the universal hatred you attract is justified and has long been your due, do you hesitate to avoid the sight and presence of those whose hearts and minds you are wounding? If your own parents feared and hated you, and nohow could you be reconciled to them, you would, I imagine, retire somewhere out of their sight. As it is, your native land which is the mother of us all hates you and dreads you and has long since decided that you have been planning nothing but her destruction. Will you not respect her authority, bow to her judgement, or fear her power? She addresses you, Catiline, [18] and though silent somehow makes this appeal to you: "For some years now you have been behind every crime, involved in every scandal. No one but you has killed a host of citizens and oppressed and plundered the allies unpunished and scot-free. Not only have you been able to ignore the laws and law-courts but you have been able to overturn and shatter them. I tolerated as well as I could those earlier crimes, insupportable as they were, but that I should now be in a state of total terror on your account, that Catiline should be feared at every sound, that no scheme can be hatched against me without assuming your criminal complicity, truly this is intolerable. Depart, then, and free me from this dread; if it is well founded, that I may not be destroyed: if groundless, that I may at long last cease to feel afraid." If our country were to appeal to you with [19] these words, should not her request be granted, even if she cannot force you? What of the fact that you gave yourself into custody, that in order to avoid suspicion you said that you were willing to live at the house of Manius Lepidus? And when he would not have you, you even had the effrontery to come to me and ask me to guard you at my home. I gave you the same answer and said that if I was in great danger because we lived together in the same city, I certainly would not be safe with you in the same house. You then came to the praetor, Quintus Metellus. Rebuffed by him, you went off to your boon-companion, Marcus Marcellus, clearly because you thought that he would be very careful guarding you, very astute at suspecting you and very active in punishing you. How far off do you think detention in prison ought to be for a man who already thinks that he should be kept in custody?

If in this situation, Catiline, you cannot face death [20] calmly, do you hesitate to leave for some other land and consign to exile and solitude a life that you have rescued from the numerous penalties that it so richly deserves? "Put the proposal," you say, "to the Senate." Yes, this is what you demand; and you say that, if they vote for you to go into exile, you will obey. I shall not put it to the Senate, for that is contrary to my practice, but I shall see to it that you are left in no doubt about what the Senate feels about you. Leave the city, Catiline, free the commonwealth from fear and, if these are the words that you are waiting for, go into exile. Well, Catiline? What are you waiting for? Do you not notice the Senate's silence? They accept it, they are silent. Why are you waiting for them to voice their decision, when you see clearly their wish expressed by their silence? If I had spoken these same words to this [21] distinguished young man, Publius Sestius, or to the gallant Marcus Marcellus, the Senate would have been fully justified in laying violent hands upon me this instant, consul though I am, and in the precincts of this temple. In your case, however, Catiline, their inaction signifies approval, their acquiescence a decision and their silence applause. And I am not only referring to these men whose decision presumably means a lot to you although you value their lives so lightly. I also mean those Roman knights, the most honourable and excellent of men, and the other citizens who are standing around the Senate, whose crowds you could see, whose support you could observe and whose voices you could hear just now. For a long time now only with difficulty have I kept their hands and weapons away from you, and I shall easily persuade them to accompany you as far as the city gates, when you leave all that you have for so long been longing to lay waste.

And yet, why do I bother to say this? Would anything [22] break your resolve? Would you ever take yourself in hand? Consider flight? Or ever think of exile? If only the immortal gods would put that idea into your head! Yet I see what a storm of unpopularity would break over my head if you are frightened by what I say and decide upon exile. It may not come immediately, while the memory of your crimes is still fresh, but in the future. But it is worth it, provided that your ruin remains the ruin of one man and is kept clear of peril to the Republic. But that you should be shifted from your evil ways, that you should fear the penalties of the law, that you should yield to exigences of state, that

is too much to ask. No, Catiline, you are not the man to be turned back from infamy by a sense of shame, from danger by fear, or from an act of madness by rational thought. Be on your way then!—I have said it often [23] enough—and, if you wish to fan men’s hatred of me, your enemy as you call me, go straight into exile. It will be hard for me to bear men’s criticism, if you do that; hard to sustain the burden of that hostility, if you go into exile at the consul’s command. If, however, you prefer to do my good name and my reputation a service, depart with that reckless gang of criminals and take yourself off to Manlius, gather to your cause the citizens who have abandoned all hope, separate yourself from loyal men, wage war upon your native land, revel in the banditry of traitors; for then men will think not that I drove you into the arms of men unlike yourself, but that I invited you to join your own kind. And yet why should I be pressing [24] you? I know that you have already sent men on ahead to await you under arms at Forum Aurelium; I know that you have agreed and fixed a day with Manlius; I know that you have also sent on ahead that silver eagle which will, I trust, bring death and destruction to you and all your followers and for which an evil shrine has been set up at your house. Could you be parted any longer from that eagle which you used to worship on your way to commit murder and from whose altar your sacrilegious hand often passed to the slaughter of citizens?

You will, then, at last be going where your ungovernable [25] and crazed greed was long taking you; and your path causes you no grief but a kind of pleasure that is incomprehensible to others. It was for madness such as this that Nature bore you, that your will has trained you, and that fortune has preserved you. Never have you wanted—I will not mention peace—even a war that was not a criminal enterprise. You have got a band of evil men, swept together from the refuse of society and from those who have been abandoned by all fortune and all hope. What a [26] wonderful time you will have with them, what pleasures will delight you and what evils will thrill you in your debauchery, for among all those friends of yours you will not see or hear a single decent man! These exertions of yours that men are always talking about have been good training for the pursuit of a life such as this; lying on the bare ground to attempt an act of indecency—for committing a crime; spending nights of wakefulness to trick husbands while they sleep—for seizing the possessions of peaceful citizens. You have an opportunity to show your famous ability to endure hunger, cold and deprivation of every necessity; an ability which you will shortly realize has destroyed you. I achieved this much when [27] I kept you from the consulship, that you would only be able to attack the State as an exile and not harry it as a consul, and that this criminal attack upon which you have embarked would go under the name of banditry not war.

At this point, gentlemen, in order most firmly to reject a complaint by our fatherland that might be thought justified, listen carefully, I beg of you, to what I say, and memorize it deep down in your hearts and minds. If my country, which means much more to me than my own life, if all Italy, if the whole commonwealth were to say this to me: “What are you doing, Marcus Tullius? Are you going to let this man who is, as you have discovered, a public enemy; who will, as you see, be the leader in war; who, as you know, is awaited in the enemy’s camp as their general, who is the instigator of crime, the leader of the conspiracy, the recruiter of slaves and society’s outcasts; are you going to let him leave, not apparently despatched by you from the city but let into it? Are you not going to order him to be put in chains, taken off to execution and suffer the supreme penalty? What on earth is stopping you? The practice of our ancestors? In this Republic even private [28] individuals have frequently punished dangerous citizens with death. Is it the laws that have been passed concerning the punishment of Roman citizens? Never in this city have those who have rebelled against the State kept the rights of citizens. Or do you fear the hatred of posterity? Fine thanks indeed you are giving to the Roman people who have raised you so quickly through all the steps of office to the supreme power, when you were a man known only through your own efforts and without any backing from ancestors! Fine thanks if you neglect the safety of your fellow citizens because you are afraid of unpopularity or any danger to yourself! If you [29] are afraid of unpopularity, surely the unpopularity caused by severity and resoluteness is not to be feared any more than that caused by sloth and negligence. Or when Italy is laid waste by war, when her cities are destroyed, her dwellings in flames, do you not think that then you will be consumed by a blaze of unpopularity?”

To these most solemn words of the Republic and of those who share her feelings I shall give a brief reply. If I judged it best, gentlemen, to punish Catiline with death, I would not have given that cutthroat another hour to live. If our leading men and most distinguished citizens have been honoured rather than besmirched by the blood of Saturninus, the Gracchi, Flaccus, and of many before them, I certainly had no call to fear that any wave of unpopularity would flood over me because I had executed this murderer of citizens. If, however, it did seriously threaten me, I have always been of the opinion that unpopularity derived from doing what is right is not unpopularity but honour. Yet there [30] are some in this body who either cannot see what threatens us or pretend that they cannot, who have fed Catiline's hopes by their feeble decisions and put heart into the growing conspiracy by refusing to believe that it existed; who would have influenced many, the merely naïve as well as those of ill will, into saying that my action was cruel and tyrannical, if I had punished Catiline. As it is, I am sure that, if he arrives at Manlius' camp to which he is on his way, no one will be such a fool as not to see that a conspiracy has been formed and no one such a traitor as to deny it. Yet I believe that, if Catiline alone is killed, this cancer in the State can be held in check for a short time, but not eliminated for ever. If, however, he banishes himself and marches off his followers with him, and rounds up in one place the other castaways whom he has collected from every corner, then there will be wiped out and destroyed not only this cancer now grown so large in the State but with it the root and seed of all our ills.

We have lived among these dangers and plots of conspiracy [31] for a long time, gentlemen, but it has turned out that all these crimes and the reckless frenzy of such long standing have come to a head in my consulship. If he alone is removed out of all this band of brigands, we shall appear perhaps to have gained a short respite from anxiety and fear, but the danger will remain and be set deep in the veins and vitals of the Republic. Men who are seriously ill often toss to and fro with the heat of their fever and, if they drink cold water, seem to get relief at first, but then are much more seriously and acutely distressed. In the same way this disease from which the Republic is suffering will be temporarily relieved by his punishment, but so long as the others remain alive will grow more serious. Let the traitors, then, depart; let [32] them separate themselves from the loyal citizens, let them gather in one place and lastly, as I have now said so often, let them be separated from us by the city wall. Let them stop attacking the consul in his own home, surrounding the tribunal of the urban praetor, besieging the Senate-house with swords, and preparing burning arrows and torches to set fire to the city; finally, let there be written upon the brow of every man what he feels about the Republic. I make this promise to you, gentlemen, that we consuls will take such pains, that you senators will display such authority, the Roman knights such valour, all loyal citizens such close agreement that with Catiline's departure you will see everything not only revealed and illumined but crushed and punished.

[33] With omens such as these, Catiline, go forth to your impious and wicked war, and bring sure salvation to the Republic, disaster and ruin upon yourself, and destruction upon those who have joined you in every crime and act of treason. You, Jupiter, whom Romulus established with the same auspices as this city, whom we justly call the Supporter of this city and empire, will keep him and his confederates from your temple and those of the other gods, from the houses and the walls of the city, from the lives and fortunes of all her citizens. And these men, the foes of loyal citizens, public enemies of their native land, plunderers of Italy, men who are joined together in an evil alliance and companionship of crime, these men alive or dead you will visit with eternal punishment.