

Say: 'Take care alike of sheep and masters of sheep.  
 Let all harm be averted from my stalls.  
 If I used sacred pasture, sat by a sacred tree,  
 750 And my ignorant sheep browsed on graves;  
 If I entered a forbidden wood, and the nymphs  
 And half-goat god bolted from my sight;  
 If my knife has robbed a grove of a shady bough  
 To give ailing sheep a basket of leaves:  
 755 Forgive my offence. Do not fault me for sheltering  
 My flock from the hail in a rustic shrine,  
 Nor harm me for disturbing the pools. Pardon, nymphs,  
 Trampling hooves for muddying your stream.  
 Goddess, placate for us the springs and fountain spirits,  
 760 Placate the gods dispersed through every grove.  
 Keep from our sight the Dryads and Diana's bath  
 And Faunus lying in the fields at noon.  
 Drive diseases away. Health to men and to herds,  
 Health to the guard dogs, that vigilant pack!  
 765 May I never drive home less than the morning's count,  
 Or groan at wolf-torn fleeces in my hands.  
 Banish hateful hunger. May grass and leaves abound,  
 Water to wash the body and to drink.  
 May I milk full udders, my cheeses make money,  
 770 My wicker sieves pass the watery whey.  
 May the ram be lustful, his pregnant mate return  
 The seed, and lambs aplenty fill my pens.  
 May wool be produced, unabrasive to girls,  
 Soft and fit for the most dainty hands.  
 775 May my prayers be fulfilled, and let us make each year  
 Great cakes for Pales, the shepherds' mistress.'

Placate the goddess with this. Utter this four times  
 Facing east and wash your hands with fresh dew.  
 It is then allowed to set a bowl for mixing  
 780 And drink snow-white milk and the purple must;

And later to hurl mighty limbs and speeding feet  
 Over fiery heaps of crackling straw.

I have explained the custom but not its origin.  
 Confusion casts doubt and baulks my efforts.  
 Consuming fire cleanses all and melts flaws in metal. 785  
 Is that why it purifies sheep and shepherd?  
 Or, because the contrary seeds of the universe  
 Are fire and ocean, two discordant gods,  
 Did our fathers join these elements and think it fit  
 To touch bodies with flames and splashing water? 790  
 Or, since they contain life's cause, are lost by exiles,  
 Turn bride to wife, are these two thought important?  
 I hardly believe that some think Phaëthon's referred to  
 And Deucalion's excessive waters.  
 One group also says that sparks suddenly leapt out 795  
 When shepherds were pounding rock with rock.  
 The first of course died, the second was caught in straw.  
 Is the *Parilia* flame based on this?  
 Or did Aeneas' piety cause this custom,  
 When fire offered safe passage in defeat? 800  
 Is it nearer the truth that, when Rome was founded,  
 They ordered the Lares to move house,  
 And, as the farmers changed their homes, they fired  
 Their rustic sheds and abandoned hovels,  
 And both flock and farmer vaulted through the flames? 805  
 Which happens now, too, on your birthday, Rome.

Chance gives the poet scope. The city's birth has come.  
 Be present for your deeds, great Quirinus.  
 Already Numitor's brother had been punished,  
 All the shepherd crowd were led by the twins. 810  
 The two agree to unite the peasants and build walls.  
 Who should construct the walls is disputed.  
 'There is no need for any fight,' said Romulus;  
 'Birds are greatly trusted, let us try birds.'

815 They agree. One ascends the wooded Palatine's cliff,  
 The other at dawn climbs Aventine's peak.  
 Remus sees six birds, the other twelve in sequence.  
 The pact holds: Romulus controls the city.  
 A suitable day is picked to mark walls with a plough.  
 820 Pales' rites approached. The work began then.  
 A ditch is dug to solid rock, earth's fruits are thrown  
 To the bottom and soil fetched from nearby.  
 The ditch is refilled with dirt, an altar tops the fill,  
 And the new hearth enjoys its kindled fire.  
 825 The king grips the plough and marks the walls with a furrow;  
 A white cow and snowy bull bore the yoke.  
 The king said: 'As I found the city, be present, Jove,  
 And Father Mavors and Mother Vesta.  
 Attend all gods whom it is pious to summon:  
 830 Let this work of mine rise with your auspices.  
 Grant it long years, dominion over mistress earth,  
 And the lordship of the East and the West.'  
 He prayed. Jove furnished omens with thunder on the left  
 And hurtled lightning from heaven's left.

835 The augury is cheered. The citizens throw down  
 Foundations and soon a new wall stood.  
 Celer urges on the work, whom Romulus had called,  
 Saying, 'Celer, your job is to prevent  
 Anyone from crossing the walls or the ploughed ditch.  
 840 Execute whoever dares to do this.'  
 Remus, unaware of this, mocked the lowly walls  
 And said, 'Will these make a people secure?'  
 No delay; he leapt. Celer hits the fool with a spade;  
 He drops on to the hard ground, gushing blood.  
 845 When the king learnt this, he swallows the sobs welling  
 Inside and coffins the wound in his breast.  
 He rebuffs open tears and keeps his brave example,  
 Saying: 'So may enemies cross my walls.'

Yet he grants funeral rites and no longer suspends  
 His weeping. Cloaked piety is patent. 850  
 He pressed last kisses on the lowered bier and said:  
 'Farewell brother, removed against my will.'  
 He anointed the body for cremation; Faustus  
 And Acca did the same, hair loosed in grief.  
 Then the (not yet named) Quirites wept for the youth; 855  
 Finally the lamented pyre was torched.

A city rises (who could then have believed it?)  
 To set its victor's foot upon the earth.  
 Rule all things and ever subject to great Caesar,  
 And often possess many of that name; 860  
 And when you stand sublime within a mastered globe,  
 May your shoulders tower over everything.

APRIL 23 *Vinalia Fastus*

I've told Pales, likewise I'll tell the *Vinalia*.  
 But a day intervenes between the two.  
 Street girls, celebrate the divinity of Venus; 865  
 Venus boosts the profits of working girls.  
 Request beauty and public favour with your incense,  
 Request seductive charm and playful words.  
 Give your mistress pleasing mint and her own myrtle  
 And wicker baskets covered in roses. 870  
 Now you should pack the temple near the Porta  
 Collina, named from Sicily's mountain.  
 When Claudius retook Arethusan Syracuse  
 With arms and made you a captive, Eryx,  
 The undying Sibyl's song made Venus migrate. 875  
 She chose to live in her offspring's city.

Why, then, do they call the *Vinalia* Venus' feast,  
 You ask, and why is this day Jupiter's?