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REMEDIA AMORIS; OR,
THE REMEDY OF LOVE

Ovid

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Ovid

Remedia A Moris or, The Remedy Of Love / Literally Translated into English Prose, with Copious Notes

REMEDIA A MORIS; or, THE REMEDY OF LOVE

The God of Love had read the title and the name of this treatise, when he said, "War, I see, war is being meditated against me." Forbear, Cupid, to accuse thy Poet of such a crime; me, who so oft have borne thy standards with thee for my leader. I am no son of Tydeus, wounded by whom, [1201](#) thy mother returned into the yielding air with the steeds of Mars. Other youths full oft grow cool; I have ever loved; and shouldst thou inquire what I am doing even now, I am still in love. Besides, I have taught by what arts thou mayst be won; and that which is now a system, was an impulse before. Neither thee do I betray, sweet Boy, nor yet my own arts; nor has my more recent Muse unravelled her former work.

If any one loves an object which he delights to love, enraptured, in his happiness, let him rejoice, and let him sail with prospering gales. But if any one impatiently endures the sway of some cruel fair, that he may not be undone, let him experience relief from my skill. Why has one person, tying up his neck [1202](#) by the tightened halter, hung, a sad burden, from the lofty beam? Why, with the hard iron, has another pierced his own entrails? Lover of peace, thou dost bear the blame of their deaths. He, who, unless he desists, is about to perish by a wretched passion, let him desist; and then thou wilt prove the cause of death to none. Besides, thou art a boy; and it becomes thee not to do aught but play. Play on; a sportive sway befits thy years. Far thou mayst use thy arrows, when drawn from the quiver for warfare; but thy weapons are free from deadly blood.

Let thy stepfather Mars wage war both with the sword and the sharp lance; and let him go, as victor, blood-stained with plenteous slaughter. Do thou cherish thy mother's arts, which, in safety, we pursue; and by the fault of which no parent he comes bereft. Do thou cause the portals to be burst open in the broils of the night; and let many a chaplet cover the decorated doors. Cause the youths and the bashful damsels to meet in secret; and by any contrivance they can, let them deceive their watchful husbands. And at one moment, let the lover utter blandishments, at another, rebukes, against the obdurate door-posts; and, shut out, let him sing some doleful ditty. Contented with these tears, thou wilt be without the imputation of any death. Thy torch is not deserving to be applied to the consuming pile.

These words said I. Beauteous Love waved his resplendent wings, and said to me, "Complete the work that thou dost design." Come, then, ye deceived youths, for my precepts; ye whom your passion has deceived in every way. By him, through whom you have learned how to love, learn how to be cured; for you, the same hand shall cause the wound and the remedy. The earth nourishes wholesome plants, and the same produces injurious ones; and full oft is the nettle the neighbour of the rose. That lance which once made a wound in the enemy, the son of Hercules, afforded a remedy [1203](#) for that wound. But whatever is addressed to the men, believe, ye fair, to be said to you as well; to both sides am I giving arms. If of these any are not suited to your use, still by their example they may afford much instruction. My useful purpose is to extinguish the raging flames, and not to have the mind the slave of its own imperfections. Phyllis would have survived, if she had employed me as her teacher; and along that road, by which nine times she went, [1204](#) she would have gone oftener

still. And Dido, dying, would not have beheld from the summit of her tower the Dardanian ships giving their sails to the wind.

Grief, too, would not have armed Medea, the mother against her own offspring; she who took vengeance on her husband, by the shedding of their united blood. Through my skill, Tereus, although Philomela did captivate him, would not, through his crimes, have been deserving to become a bird. [1205](#)

Give me Pasiphaë for a pupil, at once she shall lay aside her passion for the bull; give me Phædra, the shocking passion of Phædra shall depart. Bring Paris back to us; Menelaus shall possess his Helen, and Pergamus shall not fall, conquered by Grecian hands. If impious Scylla had read my treatise, the purple lock, Nisus, would have remained upon thy head. With me for your guide, ye men, repress your pernicious anxieties; and onward let the bark proceed with the companions, me the pilot. At the time when you were learning how to love, Naso was to be studied; now, too, will the same Naso have to be studied by you. An universal assertor [1206](#) of liberty, I will relieve the breasts that are oppressed by their tyrants; do you show favour, each of you, to my liberating wand. [1207](#)

Prophetic Phoebus, inventor of song, and of the healing art, I pray that the laurel may afford me its aid. Do thou shew favour both to the poet and to the physician; to thy guardianship is either care consigned.

While still you may, and while moderate emotions influence your breast; if you repent, withhold your footsteps upon the very threshold. Tread under foot the hurtful seeds of the sudden malady, while they are still fresh; and let your steed, as he begins to go, refuse to proceed. For time supplies strength, time thoroughly ripens the young grapes; and it makes that into vigorous standing corn, which before was only blades of grass. The tree which affords its extending shade to those who walk beneath, was but a twig at the time when it was first planted. At that time, with the hand it could have been rooted from the surface of the earth; now, increased by its own powers, it is standing upon a large space. Examine with active perception, what sort of object it is, with which you are in love; and withdraw your neck from a yoke that is sure to gall. Resist the first advances; too late is a cure attempted, when through long hesitation the malady has waxed strong. But hasten, and do not postpone to a future moment; that which is not agreeable to-day, will to-morrow be still less so. Every passion is deceiving, and finds nutriment in delay. Each day's morrow is the best suited for liberty.

You see but few rivers arise from great sources; most of them are multiplied by a collection of waters. If thou hadst at once perceived how great a sin thou wast meditating, thou wouldst not, Myrrha, have had thy features covered with bark. I have seen a wound, which at first was curable, when neglected receive injury from protracted delay. But because we are delighted to pluck the flowers of Venus, we are continually saying, "This will be done to-morrow just as well." In the meantime, the silent flames are gliding into the entrails; and the hurtful tree is sending its roots more deep.

But if the time for early aid has now passed by, and an old passion is seated deeply in your captured breast, a greater labour is provided; but, because I am called in but late to the sick, he shall not be deserted by me. With unerring hand the hero, son of Peeas, [1208](#) ought at once to have cut out the part in which he was wounded. Still, after many a year, he is supposed, when cured, to have given a finishing hand to the warfare. I, who just now was hastening to dispel maladies at their birth, am now tardy in administering aid to you at a later moment. Either try, if you can, to extinguish the flames when recent; or when they have become exhausted by their own efforts. When frenzy is in full career, yield to frenzy in its career; each impulse presents a difficult access. The swimmer is a fool, who, when he can cross the stream by going down with it sideways, struggles to go straight against the tide. A mind impatient, and not yet manageable by any contrivance, rejects the words of an adviser, and holds them in contempt. More successfully, then, shall I attempt it when he shall now allow his wounds to be touched, and shall be accessible to the words of truthfulness.

Who, but one bereft of understanding, would forbid a mother to weep at the death of her son? On such an occasion she is not to be counselled. When she shall have exhausted her tears, and have

satisfied her afflicted feelings; that grief of hers will be capable of being soothed with words. The healing art is generally a work of opportunity; wine, administered at the proper time, is beneficial, and administered at an unsuitable time, is injurious. And, besides, you may inflame maladies and irritate them by checking them; if you do not combat them at the fitting moment.' Therefore, when you shall seem to be curable by my skill, take care, and by my precepts shun the first approaches of idleness. 'Tis that which makes you love, 'tis that which supports it, when once it has caused it: that is the cause and the nutriment of the delightful malady.

If you remove all idleness, the bow of Cupid is broken, and his torch lies despised and without its light. As much as the plane-tree [1209](#) delights in wine, the multitude in the stream, and as much as the reed of the marsh in a slimy soil, so much does Venus love idleness. You who seek a termination of your passion, attend to your business; love gives way before business; then you will be safe. Inactivity, and immoderate slumbers under no control, gaming too, and the temples aching through much wine, take away all strength 'from the mind that is free from a wound. Love glides insidiously upon the unwary. That Boy is wont to attend upon slothfulness; he hates the busy. Give to the mind that is unemployed some task with which it may be occupied. There are the Courts, there are the laws, there are your friends for you to defend. [1210](#) Go into the ranks [1211](#) white with the civic gown; or else do you take up with the youthful duties of bloodstained Mars; soon will voluptuousness turn its back on you.

Lo! the flying Parthian, [1212](#) a recent cause for a great triumph, is now beholding the arms of Caesar on his own plains. Conquer equally the arrows of Cupid and of the Parthians, and bring back a two-fold trophy to the Gods of your country. After Venus had once been wounded by the Ætolian [1213](#) spear, she entrusted wars to be waged by her lover.

Do you enquire why Ægisthus became an adulterer? The cause is self-evident; he was an idler. Others were fighting at Ilium, with slowly prospering arms: the whole of Greece had transported thither her strength. If he would have given his attention to war, she was nowhere waging it; [1214](#) or if to the Courts of law, Argos was free from litigation. What he could, he did; that he might not be doing nothing, he fell in love. Thus does that Boy make his approaches, so does that Boy take up his abode.

The country, too, soothes the feelings, and the pursuits of agriculture: any anxiety whatever may give way before this employment. Bid the tamed oxen place their necks beneath their burden, that the crooked ploughshare may wound the hard ground. Cover the grain of Ceres with the earth turned up, which the field may restore to you with bounteous interest. Behold the branches bending beneath the weight of the apples; how its own tree can hardly support the weight which it has produced. See the rivulets trickling along with their pleasing murmur; see the sheep, as they crop the fertile mead. Behold how the she-goats climb the rocks, and the steep crags; soon will they be bringing back their distended udders for their kids. The shepherd is tuning his song on the unequal reeds; the dogs, too, a watchful throng, are not far off. In another direction the lofty woods are resounding with lowings; and the dam is complaining that her calf is missing. Why name the time when the swarms fly from the yew trees, [1215](#) placed beneath them, that the honey-combs removed may relieve the bending osiers [1216](#) of their weight? Autumn affords its fruit; summer is beauteous with its harvests; spring produces flowers; winter is made cheerful by the fire. At stated periods the rustic pulls the ripened grape, and beneath his naked foot the juice flows out; at stated periods he binds up the dried hay, and clears the mowed ground with the wide toothed rake.

You yourself may set the plant in the watered garden; you yourself may form the channels for the trickling stream. The grafting [1217](#) is now come; make branch adopt branch, and let one tree stand covered with the foliage of another. When once these delights have begun to soothe your mind, Love, robbed of his power, departs with flagging wings.

Or do you follow the pursuit of hunting. Full oft has Venus, overcome by the sister of Phoebus, retreated in disgrace. Now follow the fleet hare with the quick-scented hound; now stretch your toils on the shady mountain ridge. Or else, alarm the timid deer with the variegated feather-foils; or let

the boar fall, transfixed by the hostile spear. Fatigued, at night sleep takes possession of you, not thoughts of the fair; and with profound rest it refreshes the limbs. 'Tis a more tranquil pursuit, still it is a pursuit, on catching the bird, to win the humble prize, either with the net or with the bird-limed twigs; or else, to hide the crooked hooks of brass in morsels at the end, which the greedy fish may, to its destruction, swallow with its ravenous jaws. Either by these, or by other pursuits, must you by stealth be beguiled by yourself, until you shall have learnt how to cease to love.

Only do you go, although you shall be detained by strong ties, go far away, and commence your progress upon a distant journey. You will weep when the name of your forsaken mistress shall recur to you: and many a time will your foot linger in the middle of your path. But the less willing you shall be to go, remember the more surely to go; persist; and compel your feet to hasten, however unwillingly. And don't you fear showers; nor let the Sabbaths [1218](#) of the stranger detain you; nor yet the Allia, [1219](#) so well known for its disasters. And don't enquire how many miles you have travelled, but how many are yet remaining for you; and invent no excuses, that you may remain near at hand. Neither do you count the hours, nor oft look back on Rome: but fly; still is [1220](#) the Parthian secure in flight from his foe.

Some one may style my precepts harsh: I confess that they are harsh; but that you may recover, you will have to endure much that is to be lamented. Full oft, when ill, I have drunk of bitter potions, though reluctantly; and when I entreated for it, food has been refused me. To cure your body, you will have to endure iron and fire; and though thirsty, you will not refresh your parched lips with water. That you may be healed in spirit, will you refuse to submit to anything? Inasmuch as that part is ever of greater value than the body. But still, most difficult is the access to my art; and the one labour is how to endure the first moments of separation. Do you perceive how the yoke, at first, galls the oxen when caught? how the new girth hurts the flying steed?

Perhaps you will be loth to depart from your paternal home. But still you will depart; then you will be longing to return. No paternal home, but [1221](#) the love of your mistress, cloaking its own faultiness by specious words, will be calling you back. When once you have gone, the country, and your companions, and the long journey will afford a thousand solaces for your sorrow. And do not think it is enough to depart; be absent for a long time, until the flame has lost its power and the ashes are without their fire. If you shall hasten to return, except with your judgment strengthened, rebellious Love will be wielding his cruel arms against you. Suppose that, although you shall have absented yourself, you return both hungry and thirsty; will not all this delay even act to your detriment?

If any one supposes that the noxious herbs of the Hæmonian lands and magic arts can be of avail, let him see to it. That is the old-fashioned method of sorcery; my Apollo, in his hallowed lines, is pointing out an innoxious art. Under my guidance, no ghost shall be summoned to come forth [1222](#)

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