



HOW FLACCUS THE FAUN SAVED SATURNALIA

L. Livius Seneca

‘T was the feast-day of Saturn,
and all throughout Rome,
not a Quirite was drunk
in the streets or at home!

They drank, and they slurped,
and they guzzled their wine,
but they never got drunk,
be it two cups or nine.

The people were panicked
by this dreadful news:
that they'd have to greet in-laws
but without any booze ...

They took to the streets
in a riot and terror,
and begged their new king
to see what was the matter.

So off in his chariot
he rode far away
to that emerald grove
where the fauns live and play.

For that ivy-twined woodland
is the home of a god—
why, Bacchus, of course,
and his whole entourage!

But the king found no mirth
in that frolicsome place,
only thrice-panicked fauns
with tears on their face.

For Bacchus, their god,
though getting on in his years,
still refused to cut back
on his wine and his beers.

He'd been drinking all day,
from the time he'd got up,
and just before noon,
had passed out in his cups!

The goat-men then led
the young king to a tree,
behind which they found
the drunk deity.

His clothes and his garland
were strewn on the ground,
and beside him were bottles
all heaped in a mound.

His hair was a mess,
and his cheeks glowed bright red,
and except for the snoring,
you'd think he was dead!

And with Bacchus out cold,
the sad fauns then explained,
not a soul could get plastered—
all drinking was vain!

So the king said, "Then I
shall take up the god's powers!"
And he stretched forth his hand
t'ward the garland of flowers.

But ere he had touched
the great chaplet of leaves,
he stumbled straight back,
and fell to his knees.

The fauns shrieked aloud,
their panic renewed.
"Stay your hand!" they all cried.
"You don't know the rules!"

"Only those who are blessed
with divine blood in their veins
can bear the god's mantle
and his crown safely claim."

So the king pondered long
o'er the problem at hand,
'til all of a sudden
he remembered great Pan!

"Are you fauns not the sons
of that goat-legged god?"
he asked, and they answered
with a slow, puzzled nod.

"Then as scions of Pan
each of you has the right
to lay claim to the garland,
at least for tonight ..."

How they cheered and they hollered!
"Why of course!" they all said.
So the eldest among them
put the wreath on his head.

But as soon as the chaplet
was brought to his brow,
the whole lot of them groaned,
at a new problem now.

For a faun, as you know,
has ears long and tall,
and the crown would not fit—
it was simply too small!

And each of them tried,
they stretched and they strained,
but 'twas of no use,
their efforts in vain.

When out of his eye,
the king spotted another:
a shy, quiet faun
hid away in a corner.

This sad little creature,
named Flaccus at birth,
was reckoned a failure
and without any worth.

His horns were both stunted,
his beard but a speck,
and his ears were all droopy,
hanging down 'round his neck.

His voice was quite squeaky,
and his hooves much too small,
so that all his faun-brothers
paid him no mind at all.

But the king coaxed him forth,
despite sputters and spouts,
and gave to poor Flaccus
the crown to try out.

With slow, trembling hands
it slipped o'er his soft ears,
and sat straight on his brow
to the shock of his peers!

And filled with the numen
of Bacchus divine,
meant that Flaccus—for now—
had become God of Wine.

The king and the goat-god
to his chariot raced,
and returned straight to Rome
with purpose and haste.

The Romans, all sober
and bored out of their wits,
had quite given up
and were calling it quits.

When all of a sudden
there rushed into town
their king and a goat-man
adorned ... with a crown?

But before they could question
this ridiculous sight,
Flaccus gave them his blessing
and relieved their sad plight.

Each vintage and liquor
he infused with new power,
so that everyone was wasted
within half an hour!

The reveling resumed,
and many threw up,
but most were just grateful
for the booze in their cups!

Flaccus shouted to all,
having put things aright:
“To Saturnalia to all,
and to all a good night!”

And that, my dear friends
is how a faun named Flaccus
Saturnalia saved
from the drunken god Bacchus.