CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Rape of the Lock

Alexander Pope · *1714* · *original English text*

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs, what mighty contests rise from trivial things: Pope's mock-epic of a stolen lock of Belinda's hair is here the five-canto poem only. The Gutenberg file also contains other Pope poems; the site EPUB does not. Quote the poem that is in both.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can a trivial slight be sung in the high style of arms and gods, and what does that singing tell us about pride, beauty, and a quarrel?

"What dire offence from am'rous causes springs, What mighty contests rise from trivial things,"

Canto I, the opening

The hosted EPUB is the five-canto poem (the 1714 version, with 1717 additions, in the Parrott 1906 text), without the editor's introduction and notes. Project Gutenberg #9800 is The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems, a larger Pope volume. Quote only the poem, including "am'rous" and "ev'n" as printed. The machinery of sylphs, a card game, and a lock cut at court is comic and exact. A short mock-epic, excellent for a wide older band. Do not quote the other poems in the Gutenberg file as this work.

KEY CHARACTERS

Belinda
The young lady of the lock, whose morning and whose slight are the action.

the Baron
The cutter of the lock, in the mock-heroic role of a conqueror.

the sylphs
The airy guardians, the poem's burlesque gods.

the court of the quarrel
The friends, umpires, and speakers who turn a slight into a war.

TRIVIAL THINGS

> *"What dire offence from am'rous causes springs, What mighty contests rise from trivial things,"*
>
> Canto I

Grades 9–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Dire Offence, Trivial Things

CANTO I, THE PROPOSITION

The poet will sing a dire offence from amorous causes, and mighty contests from trivial things. The verse is due to Caryl; even Belinda may view it.

- The opening is exact, including 'am'rous' and the two balanced lines.
- This is a mock-epic: the high style is the joke and the judgment.
- The Gutenberg volume's other poems are not this map.

> *"What dire offence from am'rous causes springs, What mighty contests rise from trivial things,"*
>
> Canto I

02

Belinda's Morning

CANTO I, THE TOILET

A guardian sylph, a morning rite of beauty, and the world of a young lady of fashion. The lock is not yet taken.

- The toilet is an arming scene, in mock-heroic key.
- The sylphs are the poem's 'gods.'
- Belinda is proud and also in danger of a slight.

03

A Game, and a Pair of Scissors

THE CENTRAL CANTOS

Ombre, coffee, and the baron who will have the lock. The cut, when it comes, is a battle and a joke at once.

- The card game is a campaign; keep Pope's exactness.
- The offence is real in that world, however slight.
- Teach the 'rape' as the poem means it: a lock of hair, a social wound—not a lurid substitute for another crime.

04

The Quarrel

THE LATER CANTOS

Spleen, speeches, and a war of fans and words. The mock-epic battle is the poem's second half.

- The speeches are funny and proud.
- Clarissa's counsel, if it is in this five-canto text, should be read as part of the moral, not as a lecture pasted on.
- Quote this typography, including contractions with apostrophes.

05

A Starry Lock

THE CLOSE

The lock's last fate is not a simple return. The hosted EPUB ends with the poem; the Gutenberg file goes on with other Pope. Stop where the five cantos stop.

- Flag PG #9800 as a larger volume; the site EPUB is this poem only.
- The close is a poetic stellification, not a court report.
- A short, complete mock-epic for a wide older band.

A Mock Epic · Pride and Beauty · A Trivial Contest · Court and Wit · A Stolen Lock

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The site EPUB is the five-canto Rape of the Lock only (1714 text with 1717 additions, Parrott 1906), without the editor's introduction and notes. Project Gutenberg #9800 is a larger volume, The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems. Quote only the poem, in stretches that appear in both. The opening is exact: "What dire offence from am'rous causes springs, / What mighty contests rise from trivial things," (am'rous as printed).
2. The 'rape' of the title is the cutting of a lock of hair, a social slight sung as an epic. Teach that meaning clearly. A short mock-epic for a wide older band.
3. Do not quote the other Pope poems in the Gutenberg file as this work.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #9800: The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems, ed. Thomas Marc Parrott (Boston: Ginn, 1906), the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-rape-of-the-lock/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.