

Poems · *Sappho*

1

On your throne of intricate art, immortal
Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, trick-weaver,
don't break my spirit with misery or heartache,
Lady, I pray, but

come to me—if ever before you listened
when you caught my cries from afar, and leaving
your father's house you had the golden
chariot harnessed

and came: miraculous sparrows conducted
you from heaven, their wings rapidly beating
a blur above earth's darkness through the midair
and in a moment

they were here. My blissful lady, a smile broke
out on your immortal face, and you asked me
what was the trouble this time? And why
now was I calling?

What most of all for myself in my mad heart
did I want? "Who should I be persuading
now to accept your love? Who is it, Sappho,
treats you so badly?

If she runs away, she will soon be chasing,
turns down gifts, yet she will surely be giving,
loves you not, though soon enough will love you,
even unwilling."

Come to me now again, and bring me freedom
from this malaise. All the fulfilment my heart
longs for, please fulfil it: Aphrodite,
battle beside me.

[] millet-seed
[] the citizens' accusation
[] again no
[]

[]
[] and you, holy Cypris
put aside [your hostility,] and from evil
[sufferings free him.]

15

And may Doricha find you harsher this time,
Cypris—give her no chance to boast,
telling how for the second time he came
to her longed-for love.

16

Horsemen in formation, some say; others,
infantry, or a fleet of ships is the loveliest
sight the dark earth has to offer, but I say
it is whatever

you love. And this I can demonstrate simply
for everyone to see. Consider how Helen,
who far surpassed all other mortals in beauty,
sailed away to Troy

deserting a fine and lordly husband, utterly
careless of her child and of the parents
whom she loved. She was led astray []
[]

[
[] lightly []
[] and from the distance Anactoria
comes to my mind now,

whose lovely movement, the play of radiance
bright on her face, I would rather see than
all the chariots of Lydia or any soldiers
marching in armour.

31

Fortunate as the gods he seems, the man there
sitting with you face to face, closely
picking up your sweet
talk and enticing

laughter: that set my heart
fluttering. When for a moment
I look up and see you,
I can no longer

talk, my tongue sticks, under
my skin a sliver of flame
slips, eyes see nothing, ears
hum, and a chilling

sweat spreads across me, shivering
takes me over, paler now
than grass, I seem to be hardly
short of death—

but I must risk everything, since a poor
.....

and there was no []
nor any holy []
not one was there that we missed,

no grove [] dance
[] sound
[]

104a

Evening star, bringing back
all that dawn's brightness has scattered,
you bring the sheep, bring the goat,
bring the child back to its mother.

105a

Like the sweet apple that reddens on the topmost branch,
at the tip of the topmost branch, missed by the pickers;
no, not missed by them, but they could not reach it—

105c

Like the hyacinth in the mountains, trampled
underfoot by shepherds—flattened on the ground
the purple flower . . .

translated from the Greek by Peter Jay