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. 2

Here to me from Crete, to this holy temple come, to your enchanting apple-grove and your altars smoking sweetly with incense.

Here through apple-branches slips the trickle of cold water, roses shade the precinct everywhere, and down from the glancing leaves entrancement

floats. . . In the meadow where horses graze spring flowers are in bloom, and breezes gently blow []

There, Aphrodite, take [and gracefully pour into our golden cups the nectar you have stirred with our festivity.

5 Cypris and Nereids, grant that my brother come back safe from harm, and [whatever] he desires in his heart, may that be [wholly] accomplished.

Grant that he may atone for [all] his errors in the past, and [to those who love him] be a delight: to his enemies [a torment,] never so to us.

And may he desire to bring some honour to his sister; and may all the grievous troubles [] he used to suffer []

[] 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

94 "[] honestly I wish that I were dead." In tears she was leaving me, repeatedly saying, "Sappho, what we've been through is awful, I swear I don't want to leave you now." And I answered her, "Farewell, go now, and don't forget meyou know how I cared for you; if you don't, let me remind you ſ I when we were happy. So many wreaths of roses, violets and [] you wore as you sat beside me, so many garlands strung round your delicate neck, with flowers woven into them, and you used to anoint [1 with scent of blossom fit for a queen

and on the soft bed

for the lovely [

you would satisfy your longing

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