

SAPPHO IN
LEUCADIA

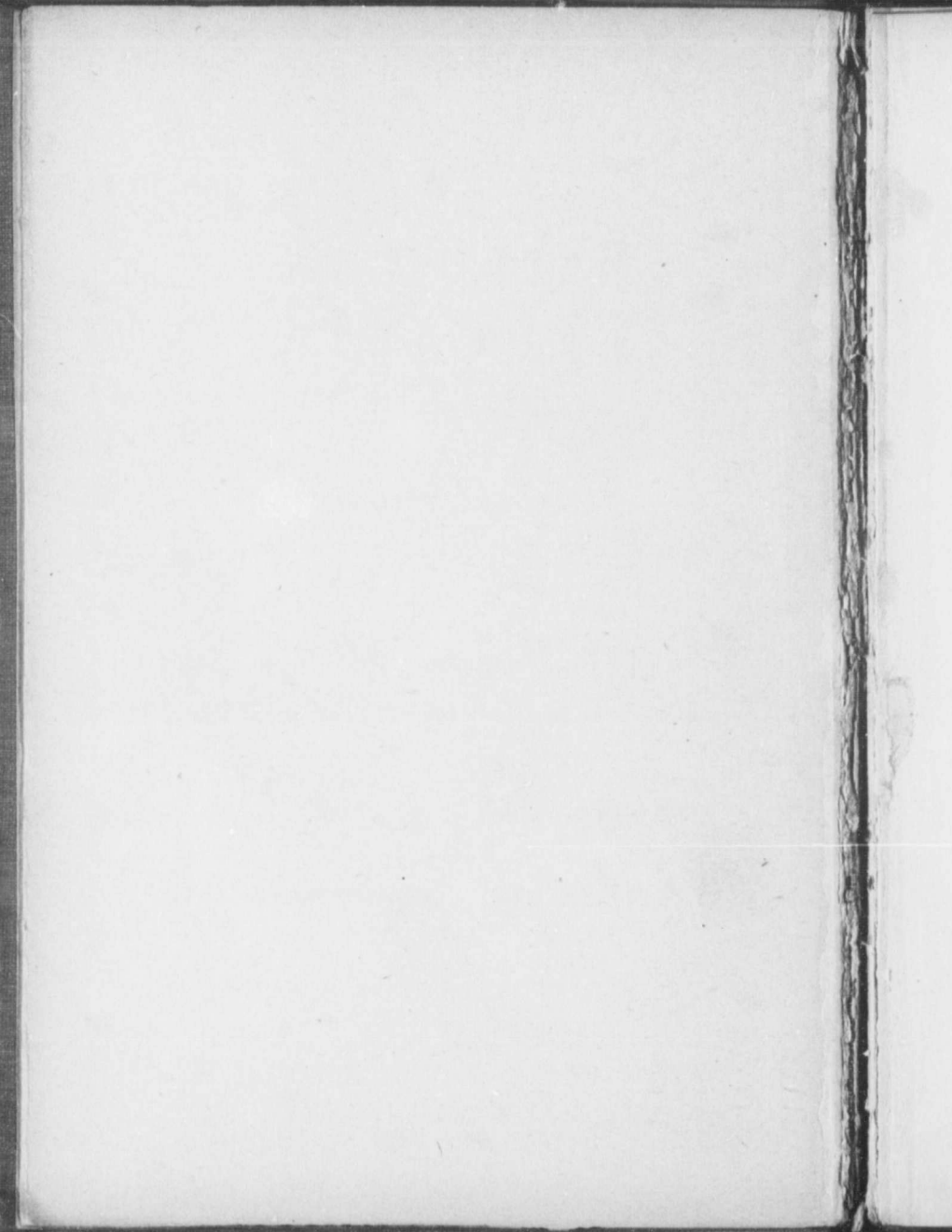
BY
ARTHUR STRINGER



BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1907

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SAPPHO IN LEUCADIA

CHARACTERS

- Sappho.* The poetess of Lesbos. A beautiful woman, still in her youth, passionate in word and mood and action.
- Omaphale.* A young girl of Pharos, dark and slender, simple, rustic, almost uncouth in her shrinking timidity.
- Erinna.* }
Atthis. } Three young Lesbian women who study
Megara. } under Sappho.
- Phaon.* A Lesbian sailor; a swarthy, high-spirited, audacious, passionate man of the sea and lover of women, in the careless prime of his youthful strength.
- Pittacus.* Tyrant of Mytilene; lean, calm, dispassionate, ambitious; of middle age.
- Alcaeus.* The Lesbian poet; a thin, thoughtful, stoical man; an embittered scholar of middle age, plotting against Sappho.
- Phocus.* An idle and drunken poet of Samnos; fat and garrulous.
- Inarchus.* An old Captain of the Guard of Pittacus; stolid, grisled, brawny.
- Hoplites, Sailors, a Soothsayer, Lesbian Men and Women.*

Sappho in Leucadia

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The white-rocked cliff of Leucate, on the Island of Leucadia, overlooking the Ionian Sea. It is a quiet night in early Spring, and the cliff is bathed in the clear, blue-white moonlight of the Mediterranean. On the right stands the Leucadian Temple to Apollo, showing a wall of pale marble touched here and there with gold. On the left is the curving line of the cliff-edge, with the sea beyond. Across the centre distance stretches a shadowy line of Leucadian sweet-apple grafted on quince-trees, in full bloom. Under this canopy of pale blossoms, silent and motionless, at first, sit Sappho and Phaon, watching the sea. Near by stands a bronze fire-basin, set in a block of marble, the embers within it still gently smouldering. The only sound, as the curtain goes up, is the soft and rhythmical wash of the waves on the sea-beach below, which continues in a gentle*

undertone throughout the act. Once the curtain is up the quietness is broken by the entrance of two swarthy, slender-bodied boys, who walk slowly across the stage. One youth, trailing a shepherd's crook on his arm, blows a plaintive-noted air on a seven-piped syrinx. He stops before the cliff-edge, drops his crook, and peers below. Then he flings a stone out into the sea, waiting for the sound of its fall. The second youth continues to play on his rough wooden flute. The music he makes is the blithely sorrowful music of a contented and primitive people. The boys pass on, still playing. Sappho stirs and sighs, and raises her arms to Phaon's shoulders. On her head she wears a rope of violets woven into a chaplet. Her gown, however, is Grecian in its severity, almost plastic in its loose, full lines and statue-like lack of color. Phaon, in contrast to this, is robed in the softest of Tyrian purples above a mild Phœnician azure. Rings of beaten gold, a roughly jewelled knife-belt, and a polished bronze clasp mounted with alternating emeralds and sapphires, tend to make his figure one of almost Oriental richness.

Sappho

Oh, Phaon, was the world not made for love
On such a night? The moonbeams and the sound
Of music and the whispering of the waves —

They seem a woman's breast that throbs and burns
And cries for love!

Phaon

This is our last glad night

On Leucate.

Sappho

Then lean to me again
And say you love me as no woman, as
No goddess clothed in glory, e'er was loved.
Kindle and keep me burning like a flame
Until I fall into your arms and lie
As still as ashes. Kiss me on the mouth
And say I am your first love and your last,
The only love that all your life has known.

Phaon

Moon-white and honey-pale and delicate
Your body seems, and yet within it burns
A fire more fierce than Ætna's.

*He stoops above her, but she thrusts him back with a
sudden fear.*

Sappho

Nay, I know
These lips were not the first you crushed and kissed!

Phaon

But you — have you ne'er sung of other lips?

Sappho (with the deep voice of utter earnestness and conviction)

I have known Love, but never love like this!
I have loved oft and lightly so at last
I might love you! These other men were not
A god to me! They were the trodden path,
But not the Temple! They were but the key
And not the chamber! They were but the oil
And not the guarded lamp, the shallow tarn
But not the mystic and impassioned Sea!
They were the mallet, not the marbled line,
The unconsidered sail, but not the port;
They were the flutters of a wing unfledged,
The footsteps of a child who scarcely dreamed
Of this predestined race with utter Joy!
They only served to bring me near to you,
And on their weakness raise and throne your strength!

She clings to him again, passionately, fiercely.

Look, Phaon, in my eyes, and say once more
You will not change, that you will never change!
You are a sea-god, not a man, I think,
So bronzed and sinewed, so unruled and fierce

and
And jealous of your strength, so made to crush
And hold and battle for the thing you love!
Oh, is it true that Aphrodite leaned
Across your oar, that night in Mysia,
And gave you of her ointment whereby Youth
And Strength and Courage should be ever yours?
Are you more beautiful than other men,
Or do I dream these god-like graces round
About your wilful body?

Phaon

Beautiful
You are, so beautiful must ever be
Your dreams; the thoughts in your own heart
Are hallowed with its spirit, as the Sea
Leaves brighter color on the stones it laves!

Sappho

ngth!
Yet men whose years are spent upon the Sea
Inconstant live! They know as many loves
As lands! O Phaon, love but me, but me!

Phaon

One land alone, the gods have now decreed,
And but one woman! Lesbos is the land,
And you, you, you, the woman, that I love!

Sappho and Lesbos — they shall ever seem
The only music made by lonely waves
Sounding on lonely shores!

Sappho

I am afraid,
Sometimes I am still half afraid of joy
So great as this. Why should I be content
Without Erinna, Atthis, Megara,
And all my singing children? . . . And you say
Unhappy lovers come to this same cliff
And leap into the Sea?

Phaon

And if they live
The fires of love are quenched, 'tis held; no more
They sigh and wait, no more their bodies burn . . .

Sappho (peering across the cliff, with musing and mournful eyes)

And if they die they wait and weep no more!
O Phaon, why should we be talking here
Of tears and sorrow! They seem out of tune
With languorous nights like this and love like ours!
For I am happy, Phaon . . . All the world
Seems over-run with rapture, as with wine.
It makes me look and wonder, leaves me thrilled

With wordless yearnings, with some vague content
That seems too god-like in its unconcern,
Too rare, too exquisite, for earthly hearts !

*She turns from the Sea to the Temple and the higher
slope of the cliff.*

Now Happiness and Leucate shall mean
The same to me. Now all that life may bring
Must seem a broken shadow of this month,
This lotos-month of Love, this last soft night
Of silence and of moonlight and of You !

She pauses and stirs and sighs, tremulously.

What have you done to me ! I live in dreams
Yet walk in light. I ache and burn with bliss.
I could reach out my arms to all the world
And take it to my breast and sing to it, —
Yes, sing with music that would make it young
And leave it glad, as in its Golden Age ;
Sing as the Sea has known no throat to sing,
Sing, sing as Night has heard no lover sing !

Phaon

But since you came from Lesbos there has been
No music !

Sappho

No; nor need of music here!
For lips that press on lips can ne'er lament,
And song, Alcaeus says, is born of grief.
You, you it was that made the throbbing lyres
All vain and empty seem, you, you it was
That stilled the singing voices, that dusk hour
Amid the tangled mastic, when you bore
Me up the cliffs in your bronzed arms and kissed
Me on the mouth, and taught me that our mad,
Glad, careless youth was lost, and left our world
A world of moving shadows and of dream,
And made me love you as I love you now —
O Phaon, tell me you will never change!

Phaon

See, slow of speech I am, as all men are
Who fare upon the ocean and have known
Its loneliness! I scarce can say the words
That seem to die upon my lips, and yet
You know I love you — love you!

Sappho (rapturously)

Breathe those words
A thousand times, and still some music new
Shall throb and murmur through each uttering!

Yes; yes; I know how at our feeble lips
The words e'er beat and flutter and fall back,
The wings of love are held like prisoners!
If mortals all were lovers there should be
No music and no need of music here!
That much this honeyed month with you, my own,
Has taught me!

Phaon

Have you never dreamed of home
And Lesbos?

Sappho

Only of those days when you
And I were happy there — those golden days
Down by the sea, those idle afternoons
When you and I and all the world were young,
And from the sands we watched the opal sails
And waded out into the pale green waves,
Wet to our golden knees. Then you would stoop
And lift me to the wave-worn galley deck,
Lapped by the tremulous low Lesbian surf.
And then when evening came, back through green
waves
We plunged and swam with laughter, side by side!

Phaon

You seemed more water-nymph than woman, more
A child of Cyprian foam than mortal flesh!

Sappho

And often, when you pointed out the path
Your outbound sail would take, to Leucate,
Past Chios and Nakaria, on and on,
Past Myconos and Naxos, cleaving west
Through all the flashing Cyclades, and on
Still westward, on past Creta low and dim
Along the southern skyline, and still on
Past thunderous Malea, beating up
The blue Ionian, on, until you saw
The tall Leucadian cliffs so white and calm
Above the azure water — then I thought
You were indeed a god, of wind and storm,
With all your sea-bronze and your fearless eyes.
Round you a wonder fell, the wonder of
Dark shores I knew not of, and day by day
I watched for your return, and vaguely mourned
Each wind and tide that carried you away!
Yes, like a god you seemed in that glad youth
Of dreamy hours and languorous afternoons
When close beside the murmuring sea we walked.
Then all the odorous summer ocean seemed
A pale green field where foam one moment flowered,
Along the shallows and the golden bars,
And then was gone, and ever came again —
A thousand blossom-burdened Springs in one.
A god you seemed to me, and I was more
Than happy, and at little things we laughed!

Phaon

And how we plunged and splashed deep in the cool
Green waves — like Tethys and Oceanus,
You said it was, upon the uttermost
Last golden rampart of the world!

Sappho (still musingly)

Yes . . . yes . . .

Then would we rest, and muse upon the sands,
Heavy with dreams, and touched with some sad peace
Born of our very weariness of joy,
While drooped the wind and all the sea grew still,
And unremembered trailed the idle oar,
And no leaf moved, and hushed were all the birds,
And on the shoals the soft low ripples lisp'd
Themselves to sleep, and sails swung dreamily,
And the azure islands floated on the air!

Phaon

Was't years ago, or only yesterday?

Sappho

Then all your body seem'd a temple white
To me, and I a seeker who could find
No god beyond the marble, no soft voice

Beyond the carven silence — yet I kneeled
And asked no more, and knew that I must love!
The bloom of youth was on your sunburnt cheek,
The streams of life sang through your violet veins,
The midnight velvet of your tangled hair
Lured like a cooling rill my passionate hands.
The muscles ran and rippled on your back
Like wind on evening waters, and your arm
Seemed one to cherish, or as sweetly crush.
The odor of your body sinuous
And saturate with sun and sea-air was
As Lesbian wine to me, and all your voice
A pain that took me back to times unknown.
And when you swam bare-shouldered out to sea,
Then, then the ephemeral glory of the flesh,
The mystic sad bewilderment of warmth
And life amid the coldness of its world
Was like a temple with the god restored.
It seemed so pitiful, so fragile there,
Poised like a sea-bird on some tumbling crest,
Calling so faintly back across the storm,
That one must love it as a tender flower,
That one must guard it as a little child.
It must have been some spirit of the Sea
Crept through our veins in those long afternoons,
For wave by wistful wave strange moods and dreams
Stole over us — and then you turned and kissed
Me on the mouth!

Phaon (bending over her)

. . . As I must ever do —
But listen where some restless woman sings!

*Out of the gloom, softened by distance, sounds the voice
of a woman, singing to a cithara. The two figures
on the cliff are poised motionless, listening, and
slowly a drifting cloud dims the clear blue-white
light of the full moon.*

The Voice sings

When you lie in dewy sleep,
And the night is dark and still,
O that Voice which seems to creep
From beyond some barrier hill!

O that sound, not wind or sea,
From no bird or woodland blown,
Bearing you away from me,
Crying "One shall go alone!" —

Like a ghost that will not rest,
Calling, calling us apart,
Where you dream, Love, on my breast,
Where you breathe close on my heart!

O that Cry, so far and lone,
Mourning as the night grows old,

For the tears as yet unknown,
For the parting still untold!

Then for nights you know not of,
You who lie so near in sleep —
Long I watch beside you, Love,
Long and bitterly I weep!

Phaon (repeating the words)

Long I watch beside you, Love,
Long and bitterly I weep!
But yours this music is — it is the song
Called "Sleep and Love!"

Sappho

I was a dreaming girl
When first I wove the fancy into words —
I scarcely knew the meaning of the mood
I toyed so lightly with!

Phaon

To me it seems

Too mournful.

The night has been slowly turning darker. They stand outlined against the distant sea, still silver-white with the moon. A sense of awe creeps into their voices as they speak.

Sappho

Yes, to-night it casts a chill
Across my spirit. It thrusts upon my heart
The weight of all the tears that eyes have wept
Because of love, since first the world began.
Felt you my body shiver? And a cloud
Has crept across the moon! What makes the night
Seem passion-worn and old and touched with calm,
So suddenly?

Phaon

'Tis nothing but a cloud
Across the moon's face.

*The liquid notes of a nightingale float through the night.
Sappho starts up, raptly, listening to the bird.*

Sappho

Listen. . . . Like the plash
Of water turned to music still it sounds!
A nightingale! It is a nightingale —
To swear the world is young again, and love
Shall live forever. Oh, my Phaon, come
And creep a little closer, while it sings!

*She moves slowly in the direction of the sound, Phaon
still clinging indolently to her hand as she draws
away.*

Phaon

'Twill only lure you on, and creep away
Between the leaves, and seem an empty Voice
Along the echoing hillside.

Sappho

Come, oh, come!

*She goes slowly, with intent and upturned face, walking
heedless towards the sound as Phaon speaks again.
It grows still darker, and the figures seem almost
ghostly in the half-light.*

Phaon

Then I must burn a signal to my men,
For I see lights on shore, new lights at sea,
And torches moving by the outer cliff.

*He twists three handfuls of dried grass loosely together, and
three times burns a signal from the cliff-edge, lighting
his beacon on the smouldering urn-fire at the altar.
The drifting flame lights up his bronzed face and
figure. As he stands there, peering out for an answer-
ing signal, Inarchus and a group of armed hoplites
enter from the rear. The men carry flaring torches.
Their armor sounds noisily through the quietness,*

*and Phaon wheels about with resentment, eyeing
the intruders almost angrily, but otherwise unmoved.*

*Inarchus (with the gruff, deep-chested voice of a grizzled
veteran, bluff, matter-of-fact, authoritative)*

You, there — what man are you?

Phaon

First tell me then

What fish are you?

Inarchus

Men, hold your torches close!

*They swing about, circling Phaon with light. He
starts back in anger as the smoking torches flare in
his face.*

Phaon

Stand back! Stand back there with your stinking brands,
Or by the gods, you go across this cliff,
And drink a tierce of brine!

The men fall back a little, but Inarchus remains unmoved.

What seek you here?

Inarchus

Is your name Phaon?

Phaon

Phaon once it was!

*The hoplites remain motionless, while Inarchus bends
over a scroll of parchment, under one of the torches.*

Inarchus

Phaon, of Chios born, but many years
Of Lesbos, once a ferry-man to Mysia,
And now the master of a ship that plies
From Lemnos down to Cyprus, and still out
As far as Sicily, and north at times as far
As Leucate?

Phaon

I am that selfsame man.

Inarchus

Ho, Lesbians, stand close! . . . Then you are charged
Of seizing and of taking off, by force,
To sea with you the girl Omaphale,
Daughter of Rhodopus of Pharos, born
A free-man . . .

Phaon

Stop! Who makes this charge?

Inarchus (ignoring his query)

. . . The girl

Thus seized, abducted, and betrayed, was held
Against her will . . .

Phaon

What woman need I hold
Against her will?

Inarchus

. . . And on your ship was forced
To suffer . . .

Phaon (his quick anger now aroused)

Stop! Enough! This woman came
Unforced and willingly!

Inarchus (cynically)

This shall be seen.

Phaon

Has she thus spoken?

Inarchus

She has spoken naught . . .

Phaon

Then who confronts me with this charge?

Inarchus

'Twas laid

By one in Lesbos.

Phaon

Not the girl herself?

Inarchus

By one who is esteemed of Pittacus
Himself, who makes the woman's cause his own!

Phaon

And is this man sometimes Alcaeus called?

Inarchus

Alcaeus, if you will.

Phaon

I thought as much!

Inarchus

The charge was laid . . .

Phaon (passionately)

. . . By one who learned to fawn
Round Tyrants that have taught him not to snarl;
By one who strums on harps and boasts how calm
And water-cool his numbers are, yet was
Lycimnia's, Clito's, Stheno's lover; by
The priest of half-way passion, who is hot
And cold by turns; by him who struts and mouths
Of closet intrigues up and down the streets
Of Mytilene!

Inarchus

Cease! For Justice mouths
Still up and down the streets of Mytilene!
Sir, I am of the guard of Pittacus.
To him three witnesses have duly sworn
You carried off this girl, while mad with wine . . .

Phaon

They lie, each one of them!

Inarchus

. . . While mad with wine,
You seized and took this girl, the sister of
Scylax, the youth Alcaeus schools in song.
Hence, by the new decree of Pittacus,
Who stands behind Alcaeus that the law

May be upheld, all crime in drunkenness
 Enacted shall be met by punishment
 Two-fold!

Phaon

A blow for wine, and then a blow,
 I take it, for the fall the wine compelled!
 And so Alcaeus thus resents the hand
 That holds what ne'er was his . . . and so he fights!

Inarchus

He stands within the law, my hot-eyed youth!
 He knows his ground, and he in Lesbos said
 You should be branded like a slave re-caught,
 Ay, dragged back unto Justice by the hair!

*Phaon's quick southern blood is now on fire, and he
 snatches out the short-bladed Lesbian sword that
 hangs at his waist. He turns on them.*

Phaon

Enough of this! Who drags me by the hair?
 Who brands me like a slave? You lead these men,
 You seem to be the mouth-piece of this king
 In Lesbos who ordains how men shall love
 And shall not love! I say this woman came
 To me of her free will. And you have said

That like a street-cur with a bone, I caught
And seized and carried her away! You stand
And cry such things! Great gods, no breathing man
Speaks words like this to me — you hireling dog
Of harlot-mongers, we shall fight this out!

Inarchus

I do not fight with brawlers of the sea,
With every cut-throat who has smelt of pitch
And carried off a woman!

Phaon

Mark you this:
Here stands a hawser-puller you shall fight!
Here stands an anchor-scraper who will make
You eat your liar's oaths, or die of it!

Inarchus (who now holds himself in with a visible effort)

No, I am here the servant of the Law . . .

Phaon

Then say this woman was not seized by me,
Or Law and you are liars!

Inarchus

What you seized
Or left unseized, is not for me to say!

Phaon

And there again you lie. . . . You could have sought
 This woman out, and from her mouth have learned
 The truth itself. Instead of that you take
 The pay of slanderers, and nose through mire
 For money!

Inarchus

Check this passion, or by all
 The gods of war, your tongue shall taste my steel!

Phaon

I feed on steel when cowards such as you
 Hold forth a platter! Come! I love to spit
 Fat-legged defamers, pompous cavillers,
 Red-nosed deriders . . .

Inarchus (beyond control now)

Stop; we two shall fight;
 We two shall fight, you Fury of the Deep,
 You tunny spiced with brine! Come; we shall fight!

*Inarchus discards his heavy metal shield, and flings
 down his spear, keeping only his short-bladed Grecian
 sword. The torch-bearers fall back and range them-
 selves in a wider but regular circle about the two com-
 batants. Inarchus faces the infuriated Phaon with the
 contemptuous pity of a seasoned soldier for an unequal*

foe, with the forbearance of a misunderstood man forced into an undesired fight. Then the momentary silence is broken by the voice of Sappho, sounding clear, mellow, unexpected, out of the gloom. It is a call that is rich and low, alluring and warm. As Phaon hears it he remembers. A change creeps over him; he awakens, as from a dream, and unconsciously draws back. Then his arm slowly falls, down to his side.

Sappho

My Phaon, are you coming? I have found
The thicket, and the nightingale has sung
Of love, love, love to me, until my arms
Are aching for you? Are you coming soon?

Phaon

Her voice? (*Inarchus wheels about in amazement*)

Inarchus

What girl is this that floats between
The trees?

Phaon

It must not be! No, no; not now!

Inarchus

Who is this virgin lost in th' moonlight there? —
How many women woo you, in the year?

Phaon

She must not know! This *can not be to-night!*
It must not be!

Inarchus

How now? What must not be?

Phaon

I was a fool . . . I cannot fight with you!

Inarchus

O gods of war, what weather-cocks we are!—
This fight you hungered for, and you shall have!

Phaon

No; I was blind; I must not, can not, fight!
Oh, more in this there is than you can know;
Yet listen, for beneath the gods I speak
The utter truth! If I have done aught wrong
I shall still answer for it. But this girl
Omaphale, of her own choosing, made
My ship her home till one short journey's end!
It was a youthful folly, and naught else,
A wildness of the blood, a weakness shown
And set aright. A coast girl she had been,
And swam out like a nereid to my prow
When we were in the harbor. She would sit

Upon the galley's thwart and shyly laugh
And talk with me. She month by month would watch
For my return. Then one day when we sat
Alone upon the deck, and her dark hair
Fell loose about her, drying in the sun,
A silence crept upon us, and her face
Went suddenly white and she cried out to me:
"Oh, I would go with you unto the ends
Of all the world!" And when I wakened she
Lay weeping there upon my arm!

Inarchus

And so?

Sappho (from without)

Are you not coming, Phaon?

Phaon

Coming — yes.

Inarchus

When you, good youth, have passed a further word
Or two with me!

Phaon

Then quick, what would you hear?

Inarchus

Put up your sword! . . . I am the instrument
And not the State you answer to. These things
Must still be told to them who know the Law . . .

Phaon

They shall be told . . .

Sappho

What keeps you waiting there
So late, my Phaon?

Phaon

'Tis a crying ewe
Strayed from its flock! Quick, closer here. My ship
Lies yonder in the bay. At dawn we sail
For Lesbos. There I pledge to meet this charge
And show it false.

Inarchus (impatiently)

How will you show it false?

Phaon

By bringing my accusers and this girl
Together, face to face. If she then says
That I compelled her into crime, I stand
Prepared for punishment. Alcaeus then

Can be disposed of one who crossed his path
More times than once. . . . Nay, send these very men
Aboard my ship, to guard the homeward course —
But as you are a man of justice, breathe
No word of this mad charge to . . .

*(Sappho has entered while he speaks, and stands before
the group, for a moment perplexed. Then she
holds torch after torch to the immobile faces of the
hoplites, still puzzled)*

Sappho

But what men

Are these?

Phaon

Fresh seamen, for the ship, I signalled for.

Sappho

Their faces all look strange. I thought I knew
Each man among them, all who used to sing
On deck with me the Sailors' Song to Dusk!
They all look hard and cold. . . . And this great cliff
Is but the rampart from which cruel Love
Thrusts out its lost, as from the frowning walls
Of War the dead are flung!

*She shudders and shrinks away, then starts, looks upward,
and motions, almost imperiously, for the silent Phaon.*

But hark; there flutes
And calls the nightingale again. . . . So come. . . .
This is our last night, Love, on Leucate!

*She links her arm in Phaon's, and they stand listening,
with uplifted faces swept by the clear, blue-white
moonlight breaking through soft cloud-ripts. The
foot-soldiers stand motionless, their torches flaring.*

Curtain

ACT TWO

An almond and olive grove above the Ægean Sea, near Mytilene, two weeks later. In the foreground is an open space, soft with turf, shadowed on the right by a row of cypresses, through which the pale marble of a headland Pharos towers and glimmers. On the left stretches the calm turquoise of the water. Violets can be seen thick along the cliff-edge, and flowers in profusion add to the coloring of the tropical background. It is late afternoon as the curtain goes up, and Alcaeus is discovered striding back and forth, lean and pale and impatient. A moment later Omaphale creeps in, looks about, and turns to Alcaeus with what is half a sob and half a gasp of disappointment. She is a slender, white-faced young girl with tragic and haunted eyes.

Omaphale

He is not here?

Alcaeus

Did Zetes of the Guard

Give you the message?

Omphale (still peering about)

Yes. . . . He is not here!

Alcaeus

Then what we two would speak of must be held
In secrecy.

Omphale

I know But where is he?
You promised that my Phaon would be here!

Alcaeus

Your Phaon! Girl, when was this Phaon yours?

Omphale

I loved him, sir!

Alcaeus

She loved him! So, indeed,
Have other women done, and little good
E'er came of it. If this man could be torn
To pieces as Actaeon, or as Pentheus was,
And parcelled out to them he claimed to love,
Still would there be some woman unpossessed
Of this capricious eel, this ferry-man
That swims in amorous tears!

Omphale

But you have said
That you would bring him back to me!

Alcaeus

I said
That if you acted as I may ordain
Your lover should once more be brought to you.

Omphale

What is it I must do?

Alcaeus

If still you wish
To wed this Phaon, 'tis within the power
Of Pittacus to make you man and wife —
If such you ask.

Omphale

What must I do?

Alcaeus

You wish
To make him yours, to see him bound to you?

Omphale

I care not if he weds me, or he comes
And takes me quite unwed . . . if only he
Will love me!

Alcaeus

Yet if wedded to this man
 You still may hold him, and you will be his
 Through every change of heart, and he must house
 And clothe and feed you, as the law commands.

Omphale

As he may house and feed a hungry dog,
 And love it not! I care not for the law —
 If he will love me, that is all I ask.

Alcaeus

You harp on love as though it were the last
 And only thing in life!

Omphale

It *is* — to me!

Alcaeus (aside)

It *was* — to me. But I am wiser now.
 Come closer while I speak — it must be brief.
 If still you love this man you shall be made
 His wife. To-night in Mytilene meets
 The Assembly, and its Council can decree
 That Phaon marry you, if you but swear
 That having lured you from your father's home,
 By force he took you off to sea, and there . . .

Omphale

This is not true!

Alcaeus

But truth it must be made!

Omphale

No, no; I went of my own will!

Alcaeus

Then weak

You were, and foolish!

Omphale (softly)

Yes . . . but happy, too!

Alcaeus

Why were you happy?

Omphale

Was I not with him?

Alcaeus

Then do as I have said, and you may be
Once more with him, Swear that, against your will
He took you out to sea — and in one day
All Lesbos will acclaim you as his wife!

Omphale

And *him* — what will I be to *him*? These words
 Are not the truth! Why should I seek to hold
 His love by lies?

Alcaeus

You knew, and lost, his love —
 That is the final truth we two must face.
 But still the man himself comes back to you
 If you but raise a finger!

Omphale

Lost his love?

Alcaeus

Then you can keep him close; then you can guard
 His coming and his going, and ward off
 Another woman's witcheries!

Omphale (wanly)

Ward off
 Another woman's witcheries! . . . You mean
 He loves some other woman now?

Alcaeus

He loves

Another woman.

Omphale

All . . . all these long months —
Was she with him for all these endless months?

Alcaeus

They were together!

Omphale (bewildered)

And I lost his love!

Alcaeus (bitterly)

Then say the word, and tear him from her arms,
And teach him what it is to feel the teeth
Of hunger in his heart, to know the ache
Of empty nights, the dragging days of pain
More desolate than any Hell, the years
Embittered, ay, the broken life that crawls
And whines for death!

Omphale

You hate this man!

Alcaeus (remembering himself, and reining in his fury)

I hold him one who should be envied more
Than Pittacus himself . . . I hate him not.

Omphale

From you he took this woman — 'twas from you!

Alcaeus

Mine she had never been!

Omphale (remembering)

But now is *his*!

Alcaeus

— Until you say the word that brings him back!
Some one approaches . . . Quick! We must be brief.
Will you, before the Council, make this charge?

Omphale

Would I against him make this charge? No; no!
I cannot! Oh, I cannot! It would mean
His empty body, his unanswering eyes,
His sullen unconcern, his growing hate
For me, his gaoler, and his greater love
For that far happier woman still withheld!
'Twould be like creeping to the tomb of one
We loved and lost, and gnawing on the bones
That once embraced us! No . . . It shall not be!

Alcaeus

The law itself may act! . . . if you will not.

Omaphale

I cannot act against the man I love.

Alcaeus

Quick, Pittacus approaches; we must not
Be seen together. Turn and walk away
Between the olive-trees, and look not back
Until you seem alone. And not a word
Of what I said until you meet me here
At nightfall.

Omaphale (bewildered and broken)

Phaon loves another!

Alcaeus

Quick,

And think upon these things, until we meet.

As Omaphale creeps slowly and dispiritedly away, Pittacus and Inarchus, in full armor, enter, followed by Phocus, carrying a leathern wine-sack. He is fat and blowsy, and prone to drop off into sudden sleep. Alcaeus greets the Tyrant and his Body-

guard, and stands beside Pittacus. Both seem lean and moody men preoccupied with their own thoughts and ends. Phocus settles himself beside a stunted olive-tree and slumbers.

Inarchus

'Tis here between the Pharos and the Sea
These women sing!

Pittacus

We know they sing, but *what?*

Inarchus

By Pluto's bones, 'tis more than I can say!
But here, as you and Pittacus desired,
I placed a guard, disguised as shepherd-boys;
And honest Phocus as a swine-herd sat
Close by and listened, since he has the gift
Of making song, like good Alcaeus here.

Alcaeus

Now, by Apollo's harp, this is too much!

Pittacus

Then tell us what was heard.

Inarchus

In the cool of early day

They come with cithara and harp and lyre
And plectrum, with outlandish instruments
Of string and wood, inlaid with ivory,
And some with gold, and squat between this grove
And yonder cypresses.

Pittacus (impatiently)

But what was said

Between these women? What songs were sung?

Inarchus

I am a rough man, sir, a son of War,
Unschool'd in twiddling thumbs on things of gold
And ivory. 'Twere best ask Phocus here;

(He kicks Phocus to awaken him)

His trade is making song! Ho, Phocus, wake.

Phocus

By Bacchus, now, I must have had a wink
Of sleep! *(He yawns and stretches, lazily)*

Inarchus

Tell us what amorous breed o' song
Your swine-herd ears were fed on yester-morn!

Phocus

What breed o' song! Song fit for one that was
In truth a swine-herd! Sirs, such sorry stuff
That I all but foreswore Euterpe's cause
And turned to honest labor — for this talk
Of Sappho and her school disgorges me!

Alcaeus (aside)

But, mark you, not of words!

Phocus

I could have shown
Your Lesbos, ay, and Athens, what true song
And singing is, but paugh! they'd know it not!
This world of ours grows worse, sirs, year by year,
And all they take to now is sham and sound!

Pittacus (to Alcaeus)

Oh, muffle somewhat these Mygdonian pipes!

Phocus

Why, song's not what I well remember it —
There was in Samnos, when I was a boy,
A lean old goat-herd — what a drunkard, too!

Alcaeus (to Pittacus)

Who died of a grape seed in the wind-pipe, sir!

Phocus

— Who strung, across a shark's-jaw on a box
Of cedar dipped in beeswax, five short strings,
And twanged them with a little brazen thumb,
And made up songs about the early days,
When life was worth the living, giving us
Most wondrous music — that I mind right well!

Pittacus

But we are like all Greece; we still would know
Of Sappho's singing!

Phocus

Sappho's singing — paugh!
The lady, mark you, sir, I much esteem,
And hold no quarrel with — 'tis but this stuff
Of burning fire and brimstone, and the mouth
Of black volcanoes boiling up with love
That scorches half of Lesbos! I could take
A syrinx made of willows and out-sing
This walking cithara, if only men
Would come and listen!

(He drinks and settles back, as if making ready to sleep)

Alcaeus

As we do, alas!

Pittacus

Enough of this fat wine-sack! Let me know
What you have noted!

Inarchus

Sir, as I have said,
This Sappho that you bade me watch so close
Comes forth and talks with them, all draped in flowers,
And schools them in the mincing of big words
To foolish sounding music! What might pass
Between them more I know not. But 'tis here
They come and sit and brood above the sea,
Like mooning cliff-birds!

Pittacus

Men and girls alike?

Inarchus

No; girls alone — grown girls — fine amorous-eyed
Deep-bosomed women, who should love and mate
With men like me, and bear us soldiers, sir,
To laugh at Solon, and have Lesbos feared!

Pittacus

And who shall fear an island full of harps?

Inarchus

I am a bluff man, sir, and what it means,
This singing of white virgins, I know not!
But when I was a youth no girls sat down
With girls, and strummed on wires of twisted gut

Alcaeus

Mark you his words! There lies the only way
This woman can be met and overthrown!
Since Athens crowned her for her singing here
They wait upon her like a goddess!

Pittacus

True!

And for a crown of olive! Yesterday
My chariot-wheels rang through deserted streets
And not a slave-girl watched me as I went.
But on the wharves all Mytilene cheered;
The harbor rocked with roses, and the ships
Lay smothered under blossoms, and a barge
Of myrtle-branches and shrill-singing girls
Went from the Western Quay, and boys swam out

Beyond the Second Bar — all, all to meet
Her sail — the sail of Sappho coming back
To Lesbos!

Alcaeus

Yet you always scoffed at Song!

Pittacus

And every way she turned were cries and tears,
And every street she walked was paved with leaves
Of oleander!

Alcaeus

And you scoffed at Song!

Pittacus

I knew no need of Song. I had my work —
My work that led me on by paths austere
And walked beside me with its patient eyes
And seemed forever mirthless. Yet when life
Grew wise and hard and empty, and the friends
Of youth all fell away, 'twas in this friend,
'Twas in this comrade with the quiet eyes
And solemn brow, I found my final peace.

Alcaeus

And she will come and overthrow that peace
With other friends — for she is loved of all
Your people, and she sways them at a word!

Pittacus

Ay, sways them as a wine-vat sways a mob!

Alcaeus

But still she sways them! Should they see her go
From Lesbos, as you threatened, at a word
The island would take fire and rage and sweep
With one unending "Down with Pittacus!"

Pittacus

I have scant fear of that! Much more I fear
What this poor land may fall to! Think of it
In hands like Sappho's, drugged with sighs and song!
As well ask butterflies to fight for us,
Ask larks to haul the iron-rimmed wheels of state!
Too well I see it! This shall be the home
Of weaklings; while some sturdier land unknown
To us shall cub rough-hearted men of war,
Men strong and ruthless, ravenous, uncouth,
To sweep upon us with their hurrying hordes
And grind our gentle hands and golden harps
Beneath barbarian heels. Wine, wine I hate,
And Sappho hate — and both shall be put down!

Alcaeus

You of To-morrow dream: she sings To-day! —
I thought and sang of both, and neither won!

Pittacus

Ah, yes! This crown they gave her — was it not
Once offered you?

Alcaeus

I sang not for the mob!
They howled for love and wine and rhapsody;
And to the songs I make must ever cling
Some touch of tears and twilight. It may be
That I, like Phocus there, was born before
My time. So when I saw that I should stand
Against a woman, I withdrew!

Pittacus

Withdrew,
And let a Sappho win! It has been said
You loved this woman?

Alcaeus

Sir, she has been loved
By many, and because of that, perchance,
She is as hard to combat as to win!

Pittacus

I fear no woman!

Alcaeus

Since you fought with none!
Nay, strike not openly, but undermine.

In secrecy this wall that neither you
Nor I can ever scale.

Pittacus

What mean you? Speak!

Alcaeus

I mean it has been said this woman's wiles
Are strange; she makes our wives forget their homes
And young girls who have never loved awake
And cry for tender words, and maidens, too,
That kissed o'er close, still seek another's mouth;
Half-mad with music, makes our women leave
Their waiting lovers and creep after her
With pleading eyes, and cling about her neck
And call her beautiful and passionate names!
And all the world has known that all her songs
Are drenched in tumult and with rapture washed.

Pittacus

Nay, start me not to storming on this string
That I have thumbed so often! She it is
Who leads my men away, and plants their spears
In colonnades, where rose and meadow-sweet
May climb, and little garden-birds may chirp!
She is the author of our idle days,
Our festivals of folly crowned with flowers,
Our bacchanalian midnights mad with wine

And song and reeling dance; our lovers pale
And silent in the gloom, who neither laugh
Nor move where gleam the white of arms
And marbled throats and limbs voluptuous!
Oft have I stumbled on this cyathus
That over-runs with fire, and marked the ways
Of those who follow her, the fearless laugh,
The muffled stir of torches through the leaves,
The flight, denial, capture, and the faint
Last struggles of some lover lost in sighs
And swooning unconcern — and through it all
The throbbing of the lyres, the drone and beat
Of citharas, the broken woodland chants,
The midnight sorceries, where they who weave
O'er-sweetened words to music sit and dream
By drooping oleanders, flinging lust
And enervating passion out across
This land of lovers! Paugh, I hate it all!

Alcaeus

Your people should be told, then: "Here is one
Who would corrupt the rose of Lesbian youth,
Who leaves a blight upon our homes, a taint
Upon our island!"

Pittacus

Yes; but to what end?

Alcaeus

That where we idle wait the gods may act!
The seed thus planted quietly shall grow,
Shall spread suspicion, and shall pave the way
For grim uprootings. When the time is ripe
Proclaim the woman for the thing she is!

Phocus

I must have slept a wink, and known it not!

*(He rises and quietly drinks as the sound of music and
chanting voices floats softly up from the sea below
them)*

Pittacus

Listen, what sound is that?

Alcaeus

It is the song
All Lesbos sings at sunset!

Pittacus

All Lesbos sings?

Alcaeus

The Sailors' Hymn to Sunset it is called;
From every harbor where a tired oar drips,

Or rope is tied, or weary anchor dropped,
This selfsame music rises from the sea.

Phocus (aside, muttering)

That is the wide-mouthed rubble that the men
Of this mad Lesbos take, and leave unsung
My Shepherds' Song to She-Goats, writ by me
In pure Æolic, in Ionic, too,
That ripples like a rill! (*He sighs and sleeps*)

Pittacus

Whence came this song?

Alcaeus

It comes from Sappho! Listen; next to that
They call the Song For Lovers, and its mate,
The Sailors' Hymn to Sunrise, 'tis most sung.

The two men turn towards the Sea, listening.

And wonderful it is! From ship to ship,
From cape to misty cape, from wharf to wharf,
From harbor-town to headland and still on
To harbor-town it rises, eve by eve.
It mounts and swings until a chain of song
Round Lesbos has been woven!

*Phocus stirs and wakens, rubbing his eyes. Then he
shows that he is listening to the speakers preoccupied
on the cliff.*

Pittacus

I thought as much!
This woman stands a menace and a shame —
She must be silenced.

Alcaeus

Then, before I go,
Let me one sentence add: 'Twere best to strike
At her through Phaon — cut the cypress low,
And let the ivy wither, where it lies.
Of Phaon's deeds you know: should he go down,
Her desperate love for him would spell her own
Untimely ruin. Let them fall as one!

Pittacus

She has her following, such as it is!
We must strike cautiously. This Phaon boasts
That he has talked with goddesses, you say?

Alcaeus

He is the man who claims Poseidon speaks
With him across his gunwale. Still he tells
How on a night of storm and rain he found
A woman muffled in a gloomy cloak,
Waiting without a word beside his boat —
Who made a sign, whereat he rowed her out,

Against his will, into the driving spray.
And all the while her woman's dreaming eyes
Shone out like stars, and through the tempest flashed
Her white face like a flame, and filled his heart
With fear and wonder. And they reached the land;
And she passed silently out through the night,
And left no sign or footprint on the sand;
And he has claimed she was a goddess.

Pittacus (cynically)

He

May need her help!

Alcaeus

We boast no goddesses
To fight for us, in either love or war;
So we must stand prepared, and wait our hour . . .

Pittacus

And when the time is ripe . . .

Alcaeus

The gods may act
Where we have been most idle. I must go!

(Exit)

Phocus (peering blearily after Alcaeus)

Now, by the horn of Bacchus, here will be
Eryngo-root to spice to-morrow's talk! (*He laughs*)
But soft — there's one as lean as I am fat.

Omaphale creeps in, as he speaks. Her face is colorless, her hair dishevelled. She is about to speak to Pittacus, but shrinks away, with a gesture of fear and despair. A look of hopelessness is on her face, as she advances toward the cliff-edge.

Pittacus (wrapt in thought, unconscious of Inarchus standing so close beside him, in the statue-like immobility of the long-trained soldier)

The gods may act. . . . And out of hate and love,
Entangled and embattled, she may fall,
As others fell! (*He sees Omaphale*)

And there, I take it, walks
One of her Maenad band, chalk-faced and frail
And rapt of eye, a Bassarid grown sick
Of too much love!

Inarchus

It is Omaphale!

Pittacus *

Omaphale! For something lost she seeks!

Inarchus

What seek you, girl?

Omphale (abstractedly)

The Sea!

Inarchus (bluntly)

For Phaon's ship?

Omphale

He has been taken from me. . . . No, the Sea
Is all they left me. . . . 'Tis the only way!

She shudders and draws back, as she peers from the verge.

But oh, I cannot do it! I am weak!
The water is so far! The wheeling birds
Still make me dizzy! Oh, it is too hard!

*She lowers her hands, looks up at the sky, the cliff, the
sea, gazing slowly about her. Then she closes her
eyes, and gropes brokenly toward the sea, her hands
once more out-stretched.*

But now, it must be done!

*She is on the very verge when Inarchus seizes her. She
struggles fiercely as he drags her back.*

Oh, let me go!

I only ask to die — that, that is all!

Phocus

The girl would kill herself!

Omphale (struggling)

I want to die!

Pittacus

What is this madness, girl? (*She is silent*)

What is your name?

And why should one so young fight bitterly

To go to such a death!

Phocus (sadly)

She has been crossed

In love, as I in Samnos once was crossed!

*Omphale, wild-eyed and dumb, gazes at them. She
breaks away, but is caught by Inarchus.*

Inarchus

What shall I do with her?

Pittacus

The girl is weak;

She shakes and quivers like a captured bird!

We may have been too rough! Some woman's hand
Should hold her, and a woman's comrade voice
Should question with her softly! Tell me, girl,
What happened you?

Phocus

Ho, here are women now!
Quick, call them you. From *me* they might construe
One word as an advance, and hold me to it!

*Erinna, Atthis and Megara, crowned with flowers, have
entered while he speaks. They carry musical
instruments.*

Erinna (dropping her cithara)

What has this woman done, to be so held?

Inarchus

Just what she did I know not, but I think
She must be mad, for she would throw herself
From off the cliff!

Erinna

Why, she is but a girl!

*Omaphale turns away, with still another effort to reach
the cliff-edge.*

O Atthis, hasten by the Shepherd's Path, and call
To Sappho!

Exit Atthis

Phocus

Why call for Sappho?

Erinna

Knows she not

The most assuaging words, the softest tones,
To utter to a heart that sorrows wring?

Phocus

What, Sapphic music at a time like this!
The girl wants wine, good wine, to warm her blood
And make her spirits dance!

*He offers her his wine-flask, but the girl turns away,
still silent.*

The girl is mad!

He offers it again.

There is no question but the girl is mad!

He drinks, deeply, and replaces flask, with lips smacking.

Erinna

Oh, see if Sappho comes.

Megara

'Tis Atthis calls.

She answers; yes, 'tis Sappho.

Atthis (entering, breathless)

She is here.

They step back. Sappho enters with an armful of golden samphire, and a lyre of silver and gilded cedar-wood. She looks from face to face. There is a suggestion of power, of imperiousness, in her bearing.

Sappho

Why have you called me, Atthis? Was it you,
Erinna?

Erinna

Yes, 'twas I.

Sappho, whose eyes had met those of Pittacus, in a steady, combative gaze, now sees Inarchus and his captive for the first time.

Sappho

What girl is this,
And why is she held thus, a prisoner!

Phocus

Here is a girl, stark mad, who wants to die —
And so all Lesbos bellows out for you!

Sappho

For me? But why for me?

Phocus (mincingly)

She has a wound
That begs the oil of Sapphic song! She needs
A chain of golden music round her thrown,
To charm her back to life. Thus have I seen
Phœnician jugglers pipe and soothe an asp
To sleep most beautiful! So, since she will
Not drink of wine, let music do its worst!

Sappho

Peace, peace; this girl is shaking like a leaf,
She has been tortured by more things than fear!
Why, child, look up at me! You are too young
To know what sorrow is! These eyes are still
Too soft to peer into the awful Night
That never answers us, and never ends!

*Sappho kneels and takes the girl's hands, with a sign for
Inarchus to release her. Inarchus glances at Pittacus.
The latter nods, as if in assent. Inarchus holds the
girl by only one arm.*

Phocus

Now, by Astarte's eyes, here stands a test!
Here is the first, so called, most eloquent
Of Lesbian singers with a pretty task:

To medicine a grief, to make this girl
Content with life, as wine might do for me!

(*He drinks*)

Pittacus

You, Sappho, you forever sing of life
And of its joys. Let, then, your lyric gift
Lure back to love of life this broken girl
— Ay, let it stand a test, as Phocus says!

Sappho

I seek no triumph, I should ask no test
At such a time! For even Pittacus
I could not toy upon a wounded heart!

Pittacus

But you will talk with her, will plead with her?

Sappho

As I would plead with any troubled soul!
Release the maiden — she will not escape.
Why, you are nothing but a girl!

*Sappho holds the girl's face between her hands, gazing
into it. Then she continues to speak, gradually
growing oblivious of those about her.*

All life

Should mean so much to one who still has youth!
These saddened lips were made for happiness

And tender words and kisses touched with fire!
Such eyes as these should never mournful seem!
What sorrow is it makes them swim with tears
And shakes your slender body? Speak to me
What is it that has made all life so dark?

Omphale

No longer, now, he loves me.

Sappho

Tell me more.

Omphale

His love is dead, and I must die with it.

Sappho

No, no; think not because some foolish word
Has passed between you —

Omphale

Dead, his love is dead;

He is another's now!

Sappho

But love is love;

Although the torch may fall, the sacred fire
Endures and burns; the broken dream comes back;

The voices of the Spring may pass away,
 But other Springs shall bear another song
 And life shall know some newer love!

Phocus (aside)

Now, by the horn of Bacchus, here is Song
 Put into use!

Sappho

Nay, speak to me!

Omaphale

He loves

Another! Let me die! . . .

Sappho (pleadingly, softly)

. . . And say farewell
 To light and warmth and greenness, and go down
 To some grey world of ghosts you know not of!
 Think, think, what life still means . . . think of the joy
 Of breathing in such beauty, dusk and dawn,
 Moonbeam and starlight, sun and wind and sea,
 The marbled cities and the silences,
 The sting and sweep of the storm on night of rain,
 The wild surf and the brine-smell and the ship
 That brings the heart we love, the tangle old

Of tears and laughter, rapture and regret,
 The sheer glad careless god-like going-on
 From day to golden day, the grapeless wine
 Of music, dreaming music, to upbuild
 Ethereal homes for us when we have tired
 Of too much joy, the throats of song to lift
 Us out of loneliness and give our tears
 A touch of beauty, and the last great gift,
 The gift of Love, that makes death pitiful,
 And paves the world with wonder!

Omphale

All I asked

Was that he love me — and he loves me not!

Pittacus (aside to Inarchus)

Behold where Phaon comes, mark well each word
 That passes here between the two!

*Enter Phaon, who stands unnoticed on the outskirts of the
 preoccupied group.*

Sappho

Tell me

The name of him who has forgotten you!

Omphale

I cannot tell!

Sappho

Say where he may be found.

Omphale shakes her head, obdurately. Sappho still looks at her silent face, in wonder.

Then you can hate him not? You love him still?
 Could you not steal unto his couch and plunge
 A knife into his sleeping heart? And she,
 The one who came between you — would you kill
 This cruel woman with her careless smiles?

Omphale

I love this man so much that I would die
 To see him happy!

Sappho

But what man is this
 Who merits such mad love?

Omphale (looking away and seeing Phaon, in one involuntary scream)

Phaon!

Sappho

Why Phaon? What is Phaon unto you?

Omphale

O Phaon, tell them that you were, you are,
 The man I loved . . . tell them!

Sappho (pointing to Phaon)

Know you this man?

Pittacus

Come, answer quickly, child!

Sappho

Know you this man?

Enter Alcaeus, who watches silent and uneasy.

Omphale

He was — no, no; this means some woe
I cannot understand. What makes your face
So white? You shrink and quiver and your eyes
Are like dead women's eyes! This means some harm
To him! No, no, *I never knew this man!*

Pittacus

You knew him not?

Omphale (the falsehood only too obvious)

No! No! I knew him not!

(To Alcaeus) You, you can tell them he is innocent!

She starts towards Phaon with outstretched hands, but is held back by the stolid Inarchus.

Alcaeus

The girl is lying.

Sappho

Lying?

Alcaeus

Yes; she says

These words to shield the man.

Sappho

What man? What man?

Pittacus

What man would hide and skulk and wait behind
A woman's lie?

Alcaeus

The man who took this girl
And loved her till she grew a weariness
To him, the man who bore her off to sea
Against her will, and found in other lands
Another lover . . .

Sappho

Then his name! His name!

Alcaeus

His name is Phaon.

Omphale

No — he took me not
Against my will. I loved him, and I went.

Phaon

The woman speaks the truth! I skulk behind
No lies; and you, my sweet Alcaeus, you
Shall answer for this thing, or —

Pittacus

Silence!

Sappho (starting back, shaking)

So,
This is the truth! — And this the man I sought!

Phaon (to Alcaeus)

Oh, you, you half-way lover of women, you
Shall answer for these lies — you Janus-face!

Omphale (weeping before Pittacus)

We went as lovers, sir, as happy lovers!

Sappho

This is the truth, indeed, the woman speaks!
Oh, this is more than I can bear! They went
As lovers, till he looked about and found
Another lover from another land!

Phocus (wagging his head)

If you would shake the tree, then must you sort
The fruit!

Omphale

Will you forgive me, Phaon?

Sappho

Go—

Go to your lover! Go, I give him back
To you! Go there into his arms again!
He waits for you — he is impatient, see!

Phaon

Stop — this is mockery!

Sappho

See, I have sung
You back upon his breast. Look, I have saved
You from the Sea, that you may kiss his mouth!
Yes! Yes! I, I have saved you for this man!
With words as soft as first-born love I brought
You back to him! Most bravely, was it not,
Great Pittacus, I cooed and pleaded here,
I sounded like a gymnast of the wires,
The glory and the wonder of all life! —
But I shall wring your State with no more song,
And I shall mouth no more, and plead no more!

She flings her harp flashing and twirling into the Ægean.

This is the end of love! This is the end
Of faith in man, in life, in every god
That mocks your temples!

Phocus (aside)

Ætna, to a turn!

Erinna (weeping)

O Sappho, come away!

Atthis

Oh, come with us!

Sappho

Yes, I will come with you; the ghost of me
Will walk and talk with you — but I am dead!
This man has killed all life, all love, in me,
All happiness, all music, and all song!

Phaon

Nay, hear me, but a word . . .

Sappho

Wait, I shall speak!

Alcaeus, Phocus, you have wooed me both —

Sought me for many years, and day and night
 Sighed after me! Behold, I am for sale,
 For sale to him who takes me where I stand!
 I, Sappho, Queen of Song, ay, Queen of Love,
 The Tenth Muse after whom the others walk,
 Am I not worth the taking, one of you?

Alcaeus (his lean face blanching at her words)

And you will hold to this?

Sappho

I hold to it!
 I hold to anything that crushes him
 That I have learned to hate! You fear this man?
 Are both of you afraid?

Phocus

Now, by the horn
 Of Bacchus, lady, I did love you well —
 But weeping for it left me scant o' breath!

*Phaon, who has snatched out his sword, now turns on
 the more dangerous and determined Alcaeus.*

Phaon

I care not who he is, but by the gods
 Of seamen I will spit the first rash fool
 Who listens to this woman!

Sappho

One of you,
Which one of you will take me where I stand?

Phaon

Who does so, first must taste this bitter steel!

Alcaeus (aside to Phaon)

This is no place for brawling!

Phaon (desperately)

What, you still
Would woo your old-time love?

Alcaeus

I stand unarmed —
And thank your gods for it! But meet me here
At dawn, and you and I shall fight this out,
And I shall kill you!

Phaon

Kill me! I could mow
My way through fields of music-tinkler's throats,
Dig through a mountain made of poet's hearts,
Ay, swim and bathe in chorus-monger's blood,
And face a dithyrambic sea of all
The lean-gilled singers that have harped through Greece!

Sappho (distraught)

Kill him, Alcaeus, for he killed my joy
In life; he killed my hope of happiness;
He killed my new and tender love . . . he killed
The careless singing voices of my heart! . . .
Oh, kill him . . . kill him . . . as he killed my soul!

*White with fury, she rends and tears her robes, and sinks
back exhausted from her frenzy as the curtain falls.*

Curtain.

ACT THREE

SCENE: *the same as in Act II, early the next morning.*

*Erinna and Atthis, white and worn with watching,
face the sea.*

Erinna

See, Atthis, it is morning!

Atthis

What a night

Of sorrow!

Erinna

Like a child she wept and cried
For Phaon, and then paced the echoing gloom,
And asked if it were cruel thus to kill
The man who made her suffer! Then her wrath
Broke forth again, and down on him she called
The curses of the gods, then calmer grew,
And fell to weeping.

Atthis

I have sometimes thought
Her love was like her music when she sang

To us at midnight. 'Tis o'er passionate,
And seems as deep as life, as dark as death,
And wild beyond all words! In this our world
There are two kinds of women: one men seek
And desperately love, and some day leave,
Or some day meet their death for; likewise one
They seek not drunkenly, and yet when known,
They labor for, and cleave to, all their years,
And fight back from the world's end to rejoin.
The eternal mother calm of brow, the one,
And one, the eternal lover!

Erinna

Sappho has
The strength and fire of each! I love her so
I could not see her faults.

Atthis

She asks too much,
And ever gives too much. She is of those
Who threaten when they most alluring seem,
Who menace even when they yield the most.
Volcanic are such women: that same fire
Which makes them dangerous and dark and cruel
Still leaves them warm and rich and bountiful,
And Love creeps closer, presses ever up,
Up to the central fires, and mile by mile
The soft audacious green of vineyard dares

The dreaming crater. Then the outbreak comes,
And through the red-lipped lava and the ruin
The world remembers!

Erinna

Nay, you do her wrong.
She bleeds when she is wounded, but her ways
Are soft and gentle. Midnight scarce had gone
Ere she grew calm and sought Alcaeus out.
And called him from his home, and through the gloom
Of his walled garden pleaded that he would
Be merciful to Phaon.

Atthis

He, merciful!

Erinna

Alcaeus said that honor bade him meet
The man who challenged him, yet gave his word,
His cryptic word, that Phaon should not die,
If she but yielded him the little ring
Of beaten gold she wore upon her wrist!

Atthis

I fear this self-contained and watchful man,
Whose words are but a sheath to hide his thoughts.

Erinna

I, too, I fear the outcome of it all!

Atthis

If Sappho were but here!

Erinna (looking about)

And Phocus, too —
He should have come to us, an hour ago!
When once her woman's rage has burned away,
She will go back to Phaon, for such love
As she has known can wither not and die
In one short night.

Atthis

If only Pittacus
Would come to Sappho's aid!

Erinna

Not Pittacus!
Nay, Pittacus is hard and granite cold,
His breast is adamant, his hand is steel,
And he has dreamed that while this land endures
His name and that of Lesbos shall be linked!
He wills that on each temple "Pittacus"
Shall be inscribed in letters all of gold;
And bitter in his mouth has been the praise

Of Sappho; he has grown to hate her name,
Yet fears to act. But he may make this night
A pretext . . . See, 'tis Phocus come at last.

Enter Phocus, panting

Phocus

Ho, what a climb! Had I not stumbled on
A snoring herdsman with a wine-sack full
Of better life than his, I should be prone
Beside the City Wall! Oh, what a climb!

Erinna

But quick, what news?

Phocus

News? News enough to swamp

A galley! Pittacus is on his way;
Alcaeus by the herd-path also comes,
And Mytilene crowds upon the heels
Of Sappho, caterwauling ribald song,
And growling curses back upon the Guard!
And Phaon, it is said, was put in arms,
And then again was not, and still again
'Tis held he was deported in the night,
And still, once more, again, that Pittacus
Has issued mandates there shall be no fight —

While others whisper Phaon hurries forth
 To meet Alcaeus and fight out his fight
 Before 'tis known of!

Erinna (at the sound of singing)

Listen! Hear you not? —
 The Sailor's Hymn to Sunrise?

Atthis

Yes, I hear!

Phocus

But I have further tidings! First, a sip
 O' herdsman's comfort! — Pittacus, 'tis said,
 Commands these men must neither meet nor fight.
 He knows his words are useless — mark you that! —
 But purposes to wait, and make no move
 Till this fine-feathered, anchor-fouling, swart,
 Hot-headed son o' brine called Phaon comes,
 As he will surely come, and bleats and yawls
 For clash o' swords. Thereat the waiting Guard
 Shall clap him into irons; the charge to be
 Attempt at murder on a citizen,
 The penalty whereof, and mark you this,
 Is exile!

Erinna

Atthis, I must go at once
 And seek out Sappho: she must know of this!

Phocus

Nay, wait till I unload! 'Tis whispered round
That yester-night the Council secretly
Decreed that Phaon and Omaphale
Should in the streets be married, publicly!
Now, once in Samnos . . .

Erinna (to Atthis)

Wait on my return!

Exit Erinna

Phocus (swelling with importance)

And mark you this: the less your Sappho says
Concerning what has been, or is to be,
The better with you all! For Pittacus
And lean Alcaeus tooth and nail are set
On her undoing. Mark you that again!

Atthis

It shall not be. No; she and happiness
Must walk together. She must live to sing
And make life beautiful with music still!

Phocus

To sing? Ay, there's the long and short of it!
(He drinks from his flagon)

What song is there in these besotted days?
 A life most scandalous, and then a trick
 O' mouthing vowels, then a wanton youth
 And green-sick maid or two to syllable
 Your milk-and-water sorrows, warble out
 Your lecherous odes, and, ho, you have a poet!

Atthis

A poet who is fat and full of words!

Phocus (swaggering)

Now Pittacus has told me, man to man,
 When seeking of my counsel, that our tunes
 Have turned too amorous, and must be stopped.
 And I'm behind him in it! You talk of song,
 But once in Samnos was a lean old man
 Who strung across a shark's jaw on a box —

Atthis

See, see; they come . . . And Sappho is not here!

Enter Alcaeus, armed, attended by only a young servant.

Alcaeus

He is not here, this man that vowed to face
 A sea of liliated singers.

Phocus

Fear you not!

This hot-eyed tunny out of Pluto's ditch
Is foaming, lashing, frothing hitherward
Along the Shepherd's Path (*The sun rises*)

. . . And as he sware

He breaks upon us with the rising sun.

*Enter Phaon, followed by a handful of Lesbian sailors;
sunburned, graceful, light-hearted fellows, but now
watchful and furtive-eyed.*

Phaon

At dawn it was to be. Well, it is dawn.

*He whips out his sword, almost gaily, tries its edge on
his thumb, and wheels about. Alcaeus, nervous and
unstable, not yet sure of his ends, faces his opponent.*

Alcaeus

One word, before this fight begins . . .

Phaon

Words! Words!

I want no words! My life to-day is worth
A minnow's ransom! There's a narrative
In naked steel comes nearer to my wish
Than words!

Alcaeus

But things there are that we must say
By word of mouth. Still let judicial steel . . .

Phaon (shortly)

These words, then, if you must: I have been told
We two are destined not to fight this fight;
That one who much esteems you will step in
And stop this combat, as you stand informed!

Alcaeus

This is not true!

Phaon (determined)

Then show it to be false!
Quick! I shall brook no quibble or delay!
Fight! Fight, I charge you! Quick, defend yourself!

Alcaeus (aside to servant)

The Guard! What keeps the Guard!
(To Phaon) But I would know
For what we two are fighting here?

Phaon

For what?

You know full well — a woman!

Alcaeus

Then, we fight
For issues closed! This woman came to me.

Phaon

To you? So soon? Within a night?

Alcaeus

Within
A night, since you have said it!

Phaon

Liar; still
You swim in lies!

Alcaeus

And gave this band of gold
To be a token — Look well over it!

Phaon looks at the wrist-band, incredulous; Alcaeus, thus gaining time, peers out anxiously, awaiting Pittacus and the Guards.

Phaon (quivering)

Ha! Now; yes, now we fight; we doubly need
To know which man must die! We doubly need
To know how stand the gods, if this be true!
No more of empty words! Come, fight it out!

Alcaeus, about to expostulate, finds no time for words. Phaon, advancing, compels him to fight. The crowd draws closer, in an irregular circle, with groans and cheers, as the short-bladed swords clash and strike. Foot by foot Alcaeus is forced back. It is obvious that Phaon is driving him towards the cliff-edge. He is foiled in this by the sudden entrance of Pittacus, breathless, followed by his Guard. The huge Inarchus strikes down the sword of Alcaeus, who is already cut on the arm. Phaon, seized from behind, still slashes with his sword.

Pittacus

What brawl is this that stains our Lesbian peace?

A Voice

A fight for a woman!

Another Voice

Let them fight it out!

A Citizen

'Twas Phaon forced him to it!

A Sailor

Fight it out!

A Citizen

He fell upon him!

A Citizen

Ay, he up with sword
And at him like a Fury! Have it out!

A Sailor

They fight in honest combat! Have it out!

A Citizen

Alcaeus was compelled to draw!

A Sailor

You lie;

He came at dawn to meet this man.

Pittacus

Be still!

Who sought a Lesbian's life shall pay for it.
Guards, put this man in chains, and hold him close.

*The hoplites seize and manacle the struggling Phaon.
The sailors crowd close, but dare not interfere.*

Pittacus (aside to Alcaeus)

The gods have acted . . . With my second blow
We shall be masters! And this man you hate
Will go from Lesbos stained in thought and name.

Alcaeus

Omaphale — you hold her close?

Pittacus

We hold
Her close, assuredly. The girl must stand
The column of our acts. This Sappho heads
An army without arms, that secretly
Opposes, threatens, thwarts me. Here, to-day,
It shall be brought to issue. We shall learn
What hand rules Lesbos still — and more there is
In this, than but a foolish woman's fall!

Alcaeus

Then, I were best away.

Pittacus

Go, have your wound
Attended, for excuse. (*Aloud*) But, stop; were you
Assaulted by this man?

Alcaeus (showing wounded arm)

This speaks for me!

*Sappho enters, panting, her face pale. She is followed
by Erinna and a group of Lesbians, bearing sickles and
grape-knives.*

Pittacus

Assault it was.

Sappho (authoritatively. Her gaze has been on Phaon)

Why is this man in chains?

Pittacus

He broke a law of Lesbos.

Sappho (tauntingly)

Did he drink
A sip of wine? Or sing a happy chord
Of shepherd music?

Phocus

Shepherd music! Oh!
Oh! Shepherd music! That was good! 'Twas more
Like spouting sulphur crowned with Typhon's fire!

*Pittacus (judicially, realizing the people before him must
be convinced of the justness of his action)*

This man defied the State and broke the peace
Of Lesbos, and must suffer. I have sought
To make this island one of temperate ways,
And late and early I have strained and toiled
To reach this end. Its wastrel years have left
Its name a by-word on the lips of Greece,

And not until its must-vats are no more,
 And all its vaults of flagoned indolence
 Are emptied, and its vineyards are destroyed,
 And all its simpering harps made into swords,
 Shall we dare hope to be a State again!

Sappho (defiantly)

Then, it is worse to crush a thousand grapes,
 O, man of war, than twice a thousand lives?
 Quick, Phocus, give me of your wine to drink
 To one who knows his Lesbos! That puts blood,
 Good Lesbian blood, in me! Yet we had thought
 'Twas Bacchus who once called this island "home,"
 And blessed our vines! We thought Methymna saw
 The harp of Orpheus float to Lesbian shores,
 The god's own head washed high upon our sands —
 And from the dead mouth sounds of music creep
 And crown our island with its gift of song!

The Lesbians

That is the truth!

Shepherds

Our Sappho speaks the truth!

Sappho

Rail not at wine! When Athens threatened us,
 And sentineled our shores, and sail by sail

Shut off the Sea, and flung our ramparts down
And left us huddled close, without defence,
And all our cattle died for want of rain,
And drought drove all our people from the hills,
And Lesbos had no water, none to lave
The dying, none to give unto the sick,
And none to mix the waiting lime and sand
Whereof to build a wall against the foe —
Mark you the tale — 'twas from the sunburnt hills
Our fathers tore the abundant grapes, and crushed
The precious liquor from them, vat by vat,
And mixed their mortar, and threw up their walls
And fought the Athenians back into the Sea!
Nay, rail no more at wine, chaste Pittacus!

The Lesbians

And that is truth! Still Sappho speaks the truth!

Pittacus

To-morrow, then, shall turn it to a lie!

Sappho

My people, listen close! This man of war,
This man who walks in steel and sleeps in stone,
While we are ramparted by rustling leaves
And love and careless flowers, this same man
Who would make fortresses of garden walls,
And grape-fields into flashing battlegrounds,

Who would turn amphora and urn and bowl
To sword and pike and helmet — he would leave
Our towns no longer thronging-masted marts,
But tankards of dissension and of blood!
He would upon the lamb drape lion-skins,
And have us known for what we can not be!

Pittacus

No — have us known *not* as we now are known!

Sappho

He to the kilns would fling our carven fauns
And to the fire our stately marbles give —
Our chiselled dreams that cannot draw a sword,
Our Parian mutes that may not bear a pike! —
And make them into lime for arsenal walls,
And school us how to loa the a purple grape!
Wine — Wine! This island sings on, floats on, wine!
Wine roofs our homes, and feeds our hungry mouths;
Our galleys freight it to the thirsty world,
It makes the sorrowful no longer sad;
It leaves pain unremembered, makes us seem
The equal of the gods; the aged, young;
The sickly, well; the silent, full of song;
The parted lover grieve not for his love!
It is a secret god who stoops to make
Us rich with music!

Phocus (aside)

Now, by the horn, her words
At last are wisdom!

Pittacus

Stop, enough of this!
There shall be parted lovers that no wine
May comfort . . . Let the prisoner stand forth.

Sappho (desperately — in a mad torrent of defiance)

And this is wisdom, this the heart and core
Of that calm highest fruitage that you flaunt
Upon your thought-fed tree of knowledge! Oh,
It maddens me! These icy grandeurs make
Me like a Mænad, make me storm and rage
And wonder how the ruddy blood of life
Could run so slow and pale! You never laugh
And never weep, men say. . . . You never know
The meaning and the glory of the morn,
The passion and the pathos of the dusk,
The rapture and the wonder of all life!
You are a burnt-out kiln, a river-bed
Of aching emptiness, a dried-up vat,
A hearth without a fire, a thing of bones!
You have not found the secret and the sweep
Of Music, learned the meaning of the Spring,
Or known its soft renewals born of love

And sorrow! You have never watched the Sea
 Without some miser's thought of tax and toll,
 Nor bent above the crimson of the rose
 Without some rapine thought of battle-fields!
 Though you should live till your last hair is white.
 And I and this same man you hold in chains
 Should die this moment . . . we have known of life
 And earth far more than you could ever know!

A cry of approval breaks from the people.

Pittacus

Enough of this! Am I a king of sots?
 Our cities and our veins have come to flow
 With watery wine instead of good red blood!
 We are Sidonian idlers of the night
 Who pay out gold to have our fighting done
 By soldiers bred abroad. We are a land
 That women lead, who strum on droning gut
 And pipe through foolish tubes along our fields
 For years untilled, our roads all left unpaved,
 Our towns and harbors still unfortified.
 We sit and loiter by the walls that lean
 No longer mended, and ungathered wait
 The olive-crops while broken lutes are patched
 And some new song is learned. *Now it must cease!*

Sappho

He says, my people, we must sing no more.

Lesbians

And breathe and eat no more!

Phocus (aside)

And drink no more?

Pittacus

I am a patient man, and just, I think.
I seek to find the light, and sometimes learn
Through error, and advance through unbelief.
In things imperial I have been taught
To heed my people's wishes, and to yield —
But on one base I stand immovable;
And now I charge you with its final truth:
The State, that learns to *act*, endures and lives;
But one that sits and drones away its nights
In wine and amorous dreams, *must die of it!*

Phaon

Yet here two men would act: and one you hold
In chains — and you a lover of the strong!
But let me at him, and I'll leave him there
As swine-fat for your chariot's axletree!

Sappho

Yes, one you hold in chains, and say not why!

Pittacus

What I have done was done for Lesbos' sake.

Sappho (to the people)

Who has done most for Lesbos, Pittacus
Or Sappho?

The People

Sappho! Sappho!

Sappho

Who has taught
You to be happy?

The People

Sappho it has been!

Sappho

What are my sins, then, that you strike at me
Thus covertly, and put this man in chains?

*She steps towards Phaon, who turns away from her, with
a gesture of repudiation.*

Pittacus (seizing his chance)

Is this man aught to you?

Sappho (slowly, after a silence)

The man is naught to me!

Pittacus

Then what he suffers must be naught to you!

Sappho (dazed)

And what I suffered, too, is naught to him!

Pittacus (more assured, realizing Sappho's bewilderment)

Your sins are those of Lesbos, that must cease.

Sappho

And when two lovers kiss, I am the cause?

Pittacus

Enough! I say you are a blight and shame
To Lesbos, and this man who lived so deep
Has lived not in the law. Let him stand forth.
You are exiled. In seven days a ship
Shall leave this harbor, going forth at night;
And under guard you shall go forth with it
From Lesbos, and on pain of death return!

Sappho

Exiled! He, Phaon, is exiled from home!

Pittacus

The people of this isle shall speak of you
As of the dead.

Sappho (rebelliously)

My people, have you heard?

Erinna

O Sappho, say no more, lest some new blow
Upon you fall!

Sappho

Why should I fear a man
Who stands in fear of me? (*To Erinna*) Now shall
I taunt
Him till he sends me forth at Phaon's side!

Pittacus (nettled into anger)

What man is this who fears you?

*The people cheer for Sappho, and crowd closer, but the
hoplites hold them back with drawn swords, circling
about their Tyrant.*

Sappho (heatedly)

'Tis a man
Named Pittacus, who rules by hate and fear
And guile — whose guards, see, even now must hold

His subjects back with naked swords! A king
 That Athens calls the Fish-Net Fighter since
 He bore beneath his arm a hidden seine
 And when he fought with Phryno cast his net
 About the stronger man, enmeshed his sword,
 And like a harbor-sweeper, gilled and caught
 And claimed his sickly conquest. . . . We were free
 To choose our lovers and our leaders once,
 And sing when we were happy! Lesbians,
 Here is a man that Pittacus has said
 Shall into exile go! And I have said
 He is unjustly sent *and shall not go!*
 Which shall it be, my people?

*There is a cry or two of "Pittacus" from the waiting
 guards, followed by a roar of exultant "Sappho!"
 "Sappho!" Pittacus pales at the sound, and motions
 to Inarchus.*

Pittacus

Guards, stand forth!

(*Aside to Inarchus*) I must act quick, or all can still be
 lost!

This woman is a tigress, lashing bars
 Her fury yet may break. One whip I have
 Reserved until the end, one brand of fire
 To beat her back. You hold in readiness
 This girl, Omaphale. When I shall give
 The signal, let her stand before the crowd!

Inarchus

The trull shall be produced!

Sappho

Behold the king
Who casts his people forth without a trial.

Pittacus (wheeling)

This woman lies! No Lesbian has known
His wrath without just cause!

Sappho

Then tell us why
This man in chains is exiled!

Pittacus

Since he sought
A Lesbian's life.

Sappho

That worthy Lesbian
In turn sought his.

Pittacus

Enough of this; he forced
The fight upon Alcaeus!

Sappho

Lies! All lies!

'Twas I, I forced this fight upon them both!
I bent them to my will; I harried them,
And thrust and drove them at each other's throats!
I was the arm behind their lifted sword;
I was the rage behind their cries of hate!
And you, who talk of justice, you who turn
To smite the path, and let the serpent go,
You shrink and wait behind your sullen guard,
And dare not act!

Pittacus (enraged)

Act, act I *shall!* You hear
This woman's words? From her own mouth she stands
Accused, arraigned, convicted of her crime!

Sappho

Nay, not a woman, but the mangled husk,
The trampled marc, of one!

Pittacus

You are exiled!

A murmur rises from the crowd.

Sappho (aside)

'Tis come, Erinna! He and I shall go
Out to the lonely places of the world,
And learn to live again. . . . Great Pittacus,
I thank you for this banishment! It means
Release, re-birth, to me! I glory in it!

Pittacus

Ay, glory in it, for behold, you win!
You override my word, and *doubly* win!
You said this Phaon here should not be sent
From Lesbos. Then in Lesbos he remains!
You shall be listened to. . . . Your word is law!
Release this man, her vow leaves innocent.
'Tis she who goes from Lesbos, *and at dusk!*
'Tis she who now shall watch across the spray
The failing lights, the slowly sinking hills,
The home that is to her no longer home!

Sappho

Alone into the world . . . yet not alone,
For where Love is shall be no banishment,
And where Love waits and walks no loneliness!

Pittacus

Entombed and coffined from this day you are,
And we shall speak of you as of the dead!

Sappho

Oh, Phaon, did you hear? Time was you turned
And fought for me, at words like this!

Phaon

Time was

I loved you, too!

Sappho

Time was you loved me, too!

Phaon

You flung that love away!

Sappho

No; no; it seemed
Not mine . . . and for the moment I was not
Myself . . . it drove me unto madness.

Phaon (raging)

Drove

You unto madness . . . then unto the man
You met at midnight in his garden's gloom!
Is that not true?

Sappho

Yes; that is true.

Phaon

You sought
The buyer e'en before the price was paid!

Sappho

Stop!

Phaon

Stop? Why should I stop? Have you once stopped
When passion drove you into other arms? —
You palmer-worm that feeds on passion, then
Advances in a night to newer fields!

Sappho

Oh . . . Phaon!

Phaon

. . . When it took you forth at night
To seek Alcaeus, when you whirled your wrath
About me like a flail, for having known
A girl, and told you not!

Sappho (panting)

This . . . this from you!
I have forgiven much. . . . But now there is
A bourne past which I cannot go, a depth
To which I dare not stoop!

Phaon (bitterly)

And yet you stooped
And crept to your Alcaeus!

Sappho

Phaon! Stop!
'Twas love of you, 'twas foolish love of you,
That took me to him.

Phaon

Then must love of him
Take you from me!

Sappho

I love him not!

Phaon (laughing bitterly)

You love
Then neither him, nor me, nor any man
To whom you sold your kisses?

Sappho

Oh . . . Enough!

Phaon

Enough? More than enough! To me you are
A corpse corrupting, something hateful grown,
A woman who has passed away — dead, dead
To me!

Sappho

I . . . dead to you?

Pittacus (stepping forward)

And dead you are
To Lesbos and the people that your days
Have smirched and slavered, like a serpent's trail!

Sappho turns, in a mounting frenzy, toward the murmuring crowd, her speech growing ever more and more impassioned.

You hear, my people, you with whom I sang
And lived and loved and sorrowed — I shall be
But as the dead to you?

Erinna (wailing)

No; Sappho, no!

The crowd take up the cry, until it becomes a roar. They advance on the armed hoplites, shouting defiance, with cries of "Sappho!" "Sappho!" The guard close in, grim and silent, ready for the final stand or charge.

The Lesbians

She shall not go!

Other Lesbians

No, she is one of us!

Other Lesbians

Long live the age of love!

The Sailors

Let's fight for it!

*The hoplites are borne back by the force of the crowd,
Inarchus stands ready, awaiting a sign from Pittacus.*

A Sailor

The sea! The sea for Pittacus and all
His tribe!

A Lesbian

Ay, fling them o'er the cliff!

A Sailor

Put down

The Tyrant!

A Lesbian

Put an end to tyranny!

*Pittacus signals to Inarchus, and the girl Omaphale is
dragged forward through the crowd. She stands*

there, white and fragile, a slender barrier between the two bands of combatants. Sappho, remembering, becomes almost statuesque in her immobility. Pittacus, seizing the moment, leaps fearlessly into the crowd.

Pittacus

Is *this* the Kingdom, this the Age of Love
 You usher in? Behold this broken girl,
 A maid deserted for the Queen of Song
 You clamor of; a girl unwed and wronged
 By him, this flashing Phaon of the seas,
 This empty shell, this sabre of a man! . . .

Sappho

Cease!

Pittacus

. . . Whom she raged and stormed and plotted for . . .

Sappho

Cease!

Pittacus

. . . Whom she honeyed, humored, played you for . . .

Sappho

Cease!

Pittacus

. . . Whom she bound and blinded with her love,
Whom she has gripped and held from this wronged girl,
Whom still she shakes the columns of this State
To cling to, since our Council has decreed
That Phaon and this girl Omaphale
In public shall be wed, as is the law!

Erinna

Wait, Sappho — plead with Phaon; plead with him
For but a word, to make this folly clear!

Sappho

I, plead with Phaon? And relate how I
Have loved him hopelessly, and once forgave
His wandering, and wooed him back to her,
From exile, and would sing their marriage ode,
And humbly ask a word on why he cleaves
To earlier lovers? . . . Oh, this is the end!

*Sappho's fury now amounts to a white heat as she speaks.
It disregards the issue at hand; it disregards the
people awaiting her word; it is the last bitter cry
of a woman broken by fate.*

I hate this man called Phaon, hate him . . . hate
Him as the living hate the thought of Hell!

And where he goes, or whom of all his loves
 He weds . . . is naught to me! Go, marry him,
 Meek, white-faced child . . . and learn how men are
 false,
 And how the world is built on lies . . . and how
 This thing called Love is but a hollow lie,
 And Hope is but a lie, and Happiness
 The crowning lie of all your world of lies!

*Erinna and Atthis, on either side, support her quivering
 body. Quickly the disordered guard re-forms into
 a solid line. The people fall back, murmuring but
 bewildered, while Sappho starts up, involuntarily,
 as Phaon is crowded back and turns away with
 Omphale at his side.*

Sappho (weakly)

Yet Phaon, it was all for you . . . for you!
 Oh, do not go without a look, a word!

*Pittacus, at this cry of the humbled and broken woman,
 is sure of his victory, and at once signals to Inarchus
 and his men. Phaon hesitates and turns to Sappho,
 but the levelled spears of the guard are before
 him.*

Pittacus

This last word must be *mine!* It calls the chains
To bind this woman, who all time is dead
To Lesbos! Guards, surround the prisoner.

Sappho, rising and towering above them in her last supreme outburst of indignation and passion, ecstatic in her rage.

I, dead to Lesbos! Tyrant, I am one
Who broods and wanders here as long as waves
Wash on your island's shore! Drive back the sea, —
But dream not you have driven Sappho forth
To be forgotten! Where a lover waits
Beside a twilit grove, I shall be there!
I, where he woos a woman, I shall breathe
Out through his lips! Yes, where a singing girl
Goes with her heavy pitcher to the spring
At earliest dawn, I shall beside her walk,
And at the well-curb I shall wait for her!
When sailors lift their sails, 'tis I shall breathe
Across the waves to them! When man and maid
Are joined in one, my voice shall chant their hymn!
And where the olive-pickers in the sun
Together sing, I shall be in their midst!
And where a net is dipped, the beryl waves
Shall break in little murmurs with my name!
And where the goat-herd tends his flock, and croons

The songs that once were mine, and where the men
Who shape the timbers in the shipyard's din
Make labor glad with music, *I* shall live!
Yes, where a youth still loves, a girl still waits,
I, Sappho, I shall not have passed away!

Curtain

ACT FOUR

The scene is the same as in Act One, on the cliffs of Leucadia. It is one year later, close to the hour of sunset. The rising curtain discloses Erinna and an old Soothsayer, muffled and cloaked. As the curtain goes up he is stooping over the bronze fire-basin set in marble, stained and blackened with smoke. Erinna sits watching.

Erinna

But are you man or woman?

Soothsayer

Neither. Man

I used to be! But much of me has died!

Erinna

How long have you been blind?

Soothsayer (bitterly)

It seems to me

That I have been a blind man from my birth.

Erinna

Yet by the drifting flame and flight of birds
You have foretold the future, and worked cures
Where other charms have failed?

Soothsayer

Ay, by the flight
Of birds, by smoke, by cocks devouring corn,
By winds, by meteors, by red-hot iron,
By divers entrails, and the drip of wax
In water, I have many wonders worked!

He gropes and jeels about the altar, nervously.

What is it, maiden, that you wish to know?

Erinna

First tell me, what am I?

Soothsayer (peering into space)

I seem to see
A thrush that crouches by a nightingale,
Yet neither sings.

Erinna

But once I used to sing.

Soothsayer

You are a singer, eh? When I was young
I knew a man of Leucas who would take
A hollow shin-bone pierced with many vents
And play us cunning tunes. In Lesbos, too,
I heard a girl called Sappho sing . . .

Erinna

Heard Sappho!

Soothsayer

Ay, the Tenth Muse after whom
The older Nine once walked!

Erinna

Yes, yes; I know —

Sir, it is for a sister that I ask
This augury.

Soothsayer

What has befallen her?

Erinna

She is sick

In heart.

Soothsayer

Aught else?

Erinna

And most unhappy.

Soothsayer

Ah,

Unhappy! Has she loved, or has she known
A man unworthy her?

Erinna

Such man she knew!
And now the loneliness of all the world
Weighs on her soul and turns her troubled dreams
To olden days and dark imaginings.

Soothsayer

And now her love is dead?

Erinna

That would I know.
She mourns by day, and never speaks his name,
But in the night she weeps and cries to him
And through her dreams his name forever sounds.
Yet when she wakes her heart seems dead again,
And hour by hour she broods beside the sea.

Soothsayer

Thinks she this lover dead?

Erinna

He is not dead.

Soothsayer

How could she know he is not dead?

Erinna

I sent

To Lesbos and made sure he lives.

Soothsayer

And when

You told her of it?

Erinna

Then she neither wept

Nor laughed nor spake!

Soothsayer

She must have suffered deep!

Erinna

O tell me how much longer it will last,

And what will come of it!

Soothsayer

Take then this seed

And cast it on the flame.

Erinna

What seed is it?

Soothsayer

Sea-fennel mixed with myrrh. But was it cast?

Erinna goes to the altar and casts the seed on the smouldering fire.

Erinna

'Tis on the flame.

Soothsayer

The smoke . . . how does it rise?

Erinna ?

It rises in a column, thin and straight.

Soothsayer

And still so rises?

Erinna

No . . . for now it drifts

And wavers, in a broken cloud.

Soothsayer

Enough!

Now take this sparrow. Hold it in your hand,
And face the east. . . . Now let the bird go free!

Erinna

'Tis free! 'Tis gone!

Soothsayer

How has it flown?

Erinna

It flew

Beyond the cliffs! 'Tis lost within the Sea!

What can such things portend?

The Soothsayer is silent, wrapt in thought.

What do they mean?

Soothsayer

It means good news, and bad. . . . Go you and bring

This woman to me . . . I must speak with her!

Erinna

Then gently, speak to her the darker news;

Oh, give her peace — for she has need of it!

(Exit)

Soothsayer (disclosing himself as Phaon)

This is the hour where life and death divide,

Where all the rivers of the world hold back

And wait some new beginning . . . or the end!

O Aphrodite, you who leaned across
My oar with luminous eyes and filled the gloom
With glory, help me, help me in this hour!

*Sappho enters, slowly, with Erinna. Sappho is robed
in white, and on her hair is a heavy crown of dark
violets, making paler her pale face. She does not
look towards Phaon — her dreamy gaze is bent on
the Sea.*

Sappho

What sail is that? I thought I knew each ship
That passes here!

Erinna

'Tis one from Lesbos come.

Sappho

From Lesbos! Lesbos! O how frail a thing
To face so many seas, to creep so far
From home! I wonder if its timbers thrill
And ache for Lesbos now? If through its keel
Some wordless anguish burns, when e'er the name
Of Lesbos comes to it . . . as in my heart!

Erinna

This prophet fares from Lesbos, and would speak
With you alone!

(Exit)

Sappho slowly turns and studies the soothsayer, who remains cloaked. The sunlight falls clear and gold on the two figures.

Sappho (murmurs)

This sail from Lesbos fares!

Phaon

Ay, from the land that cast Alcaeus out,
A broken exile, into Sicily;
The land that once was known as Sappho's isle,
And shall again be hers.

Sappho

What man are you?

Phaon

One who would wait and seek you out beyond
The uttermost unkeeled domains of Night!

Sappho

Who . . .

Phaon

One who comes to bear you home again,
Still crowned with ivy and wild olive as
You came from Athens!

Sappho

Phaon!

Phaon

Sappho!

Sappho

Oh,

Why have you followed me? Why have you come
To this grey land that is my Underworld
Of ghosts and dreams?

Phaon

To take you home again!

Sappho

It is too late!

Phaon

Nay, you have been recalled —
I bear the Lesbian Council's word to bring
You out of exile! Lesbos cried for you
Till Pittacus himself was forced to bow
Unto their clamor! Athens also rose
And said you should return. . . . And I,
Who loved you once, and love you evermore,
Now plead with you to come.

Sappho (musingly)

It is too late!

Dear hills of sun and gloom and green . . . soft hills
That I shall see no more!

Phaon

Nay, Sappho, come —

They wait and ask for you, but not as I.
They beg the glad bird-throated girl they crowned
With violets, the Voice they listened to
At twilight when the brief day's work was done.
I beg the woman who made all my world
A dusk of warmth and rapture . . . her to whom
My lonely heart has yearned!

Sappho (looking up)

Omaphale —

Where waits Omaphale? Where are the loves
You laughed and whispered to this many a year?

Phaon

There is but one great love in any life,
The rest are ghosts, to mock its memories.
All through the weary months I wanted you,
Cried out for you, and had to come to you!

Sappho (slowly)

And had to come to me! And wanted me!

Phaon

Great wrong I wrought you, but I was deceived,
And deeply I have suffered!

Sappho

Suffered? When?

Phaon

The loss of you . . . the ache and emptiness
Of one who knew all love, and is denied;
The torture of the days that are no more;
The terror and the anguish born of ways
That one great love illumed, that one lost voice
Still like a fading lute with sorrow haunts!
Turn not away . . . look at me, Sappho. . . . Come,
Come back with me where still the singing girls
Laugh, ruddy-ankled, round the Lesbian vats,
And every hill and lowland is your home,
And deep throats from the laden galleys sing
By night of love and women as of old!

Sappho (still wrapt in thought, wistfully)

How far away those twilight voices are!

Phaon

But still they chant your words, and wait for you,
And down the solemn Dorian scale the pipes
Wander and plead, and note by note still wake
With soft Æolian rapture. Still come back
Where droning flute and harp shall drowse away
This wordless hunger that has paled your face,
Where every lover knows your music still,
And every meadow keeps your voice alive,
Where lonely cliffs reach out their arms for you
Come back, and be at rest!

Sappho

O island home
Where we were happy once!

Phaon

And shall again
Be happy, where the golden vetch is thick
Along the cliffs, and cool the olive-groves,
And all the shadowy fir-lands and the hills
Lean tender purple to Æolia's coast,
And all the harbor-lights still wait and watch,
Like weary eyes, for you to come again!

Sappho

Yes, well I know them where their paths of gold
Once lay like wavering music on the sea!

Phaon

And there like wine made sweet with honey, life
Shall flow reluctantly!

Sappho

O sea-washed home
Where we, so long ago, were happy once!

Phaon

I brought a sorrow to that home, I know —
But I have suffered for it, and have learned
How all the paths of all the oceans lead
To you — you — you!

Sappho

Oh speak not thus to me —
It is too late, my Phaon.

'Twas your hand
That crushed the silver goblet of my heart,
And now the wine is spilt; the page is read,
And from the tale the earlier glory gone;
The torch has failed amid the falling dusk,
The dream has passed, and rapture is a word
Unknown to my sad heart, and music sounds
Mournful as evening bells on lonely seas.

Phaon

But Lesbos calls, and still you will not hear;
Our home is waiting, and you will not come!

Sappho

Lightly you loved me, Phaon, long ago;
And there were other arms unknown to me
That folded over you, though none more fond
Than mine that fell so wing-like round your head.
And there were other eyes that drooped as mine
Despairingly before your pleading mouth.

Phaon

"I have loved oft and lightly that, at last,
I might love you!" Can you remember not?

Sappho

But many were the nights I wept, and learned
How sorrowful is all divided love,
How we who give too often . . . *never give*,
How one voice must be lost, and being lost,
May be remembered most.

Phaon

But you alone
It was, pale-throated woman, that I loved!
Through outland countries have I seen your eyes,
And like a flower through all my perilous ways
Your face has gone before me, and your voice
Beyond dim islands and mysterious seas

Has drawn me to you, calling from the dunes
Where Summer once hung low above our hands,
And we, as children, dreamed to dreaming waves,
And all the world seemed made for you and me!

Sappho

It is too late; the wine of life is spilt,
The shore-lark of our youth has flown away,
And all the Summer vanished.

One brief year
Ago I could have gone to any home,
A wanderer with you o'er troubled seas;
And slept beside your fire content, and fared
Still on again between green hills and strange,
And echoing valleys where the eagled pines
Were full of gloom, and many waters sang, —
Still on to some low plain or highland coign
Remembered not of men, where we had made
Our home amid the music of the Spring,
Letting life's twilight sands glide thro' the glass
So golden-slow, so glad, no plaintive chime
Could e'er be blown to us across the dusk,
From Life's grey towers of many-tongued regret!
Then I had been most happy at your side,
Easing my exiled heart with homely thoughts
And turning these sad hands to simple things.
In our low oven that should gleam by night

Baking my wheaten loaves, and with my wheel
Spinning the milky wool, and light of heart
Dipping my brazen pitcher in the spring
That bubbled by our door.

And then, perchance,
(O anodyne for all dark-remembered days!)
To feel the touch of little hands, and hold
A child — your child and mine — close on this breast,
And croon it songs and tunes quite meaningless
Unto the bosom where no milk has been —
Yes, fonder than the poolside lulings low
Of dreaming frogs to their Arcadian god!
There had I borne to you a sailor folk,
A tawny-haired swart brood of boys, as brave
As mine old Phaon was, cubbed by the sea
And buffeted by wind and brume; and I,
On winter nights when all the waves were black,
In musing wise had told them tales and dreams
Of Lesbian days, e'en though the words should sound
To my remembering heart, so far from home,
As mournful as the wind to imprisoned men;
— Old tales they should re-tell long ages hence
Unto their children's children by the fire
When loud the dark South-West that brings the rain
Moaned round their walls! And in more happy days
By some pale golden summer moon, when dim
The waters were — mysterious eyes of dusk
And music, stars, and silence and regret —

Singing into my saddened heart should come
Soft thoughts, to bloom in words as roses break
And blow and wither and are gone; and we
Reckless of time, should waken not and find
Our hearts grown old, but evermore live on
As do the stars and Earth's untroubled trees,
While seasons came, like birds, and went again, —
Though Greece and her green islands were no more,
And all her marbled power should pass away,
And empires, like an arch, should crumble down,
And kings should live and die, and one by one
Like flames their lofty cities should go out!

Phaon

Your voice still falls on my dry heart like dew!
I hear you speak, and know not what you say,
For like a bell your name swings through my dreams!
And all my being throbs and cries for you!
Come back with me; but come, and I will speak
A thousand gentle words for each poor tear
That dimmed your eyes! Come back, and I will crown
Your days with love so enduring it shall light
The eternal stars to bed!

Sappho

Ask me no more, —
I warmed the whimpering whelps of Passion once
In this white breast of mine — but, now, full grown,

They seem to stalk me naked through the world!
Too fond I now should bend unto the fierce
Necessity of bliss, and in each glow
Of golden anguish yearn forever toward
Some quiet gloom where we can never walk!
These feet of mine have known too many homes
To claim one door, and close it on the world!
This bosom now is hot as Ætna's, torn
And seared with fires that long since passed away!
Yet had you only loved me, as I asked —
How humble I had been, how I had tried
From this poor broken twilight to rebuild
The Dream, and from its ashes to restore
The Temple!

Phaon

But I loved you then, and love
You now! The torn plume of the wing I take,
The ruined rose, and all the empty cruse;
Here I accept the bitter with the sweet,
The autumnal sorrow with the autumnal gold;
Tears shall go unregretted, and much pain
Gladly I take, if grief, in truth, and you
Can still come hand in hand to me.

Sappho

No! No!

For good were life if every lonely bough
Could lure again its vanished nightingale!

— If all that luting music of first love
Could be recalled down years grown desolate!
Lightly they sing who love and are beloved;
And men shall lightly listen; but the heart
That has been broken and must hide its wound
In music, is remembered through the years!
It was not much I asked in those old days —
For men have wider missions than we know.
'Tis not, thro' all their moods, they hunger for
Our poor pale faces. As a flame at sea
They seek us in the fog, and then forget.
'Tis when by night the battle-noise has died;
'Tis when the port is won, and wind and storm
Are past; 'tis when the heart for solace aches;
'Tis when they stop to rest in darkling woods,
Or under alien stars the fire is lit,
And when regret makes deep some idle hour.
Then would we have our name sing throbbingly
Thro' some beloved heart, soft as a bird, —
And swing with it — swing sweet as silver bells!
Not all your crowded day I hoped to see
You turn to me: but when some little flower
Shone through the dust and lured a softer mood,
I hoped your troubled eyes would seek my eyes!
And in those days that I first cried for you
And went uncomforted, had you returned,
I could have washed your careless feet with tears,
And unto you still grown, and gone thro' sun

And gloom beside you, and still in the bliss
Of motherhood and most mysterious birth
Forgotten ancient wrongs!

Phaon

Why brood on things
Turned into dust and ashes long ago,
When softly dawn by golden dawn, and eve
By opal eve, Earth whispers: Life is ours!

Sappho

Once I could listen to you, e'er you go;—

Phaon

And still you bid me go?

Sappho

Oh, had you gone
While still the glory of my dreaming fell
Like sunlight round you, — had you even died,
I should have loved you now, as women love
The wonder and the silence of the West
When with sad eyes they breathe a last farewell
To where the black ships go so proudly out, —
Watching with twilit faces by the Sea
Till down some golden rift the fading sails
Darken and glow and pale amid the dusk,
And gleam again, and pass into the gloom!

Phaon

Then once you loved me! Let me know no more!
The cry of that old love shall lead you back
To me, and make us one!

Sappho

Nay, Home I go —
Home, Home afar, where unknown seas forlorn
On gloomy towers and darkling bastions foam,
And lonely eyes look out for one dim sail
That never comes, and men have said there is
No sun. — And though I go forth soon no fear
Shall cling to me, since I a thousand times
Ere this have died a little day by day;
And sun by sun the grave insatiable
Has taken to its gloom some happier grace,
And hour by hour some glory old engulfed,
And left me like a house untenanted.

Phaon

No more of this! I need you; still turn back
With me, and let one riotous flame of bliss
Forever burn away these withered griefs,
As fire eats clean the autumn mountain-side;
For all this sweet sad-eyed dissuasiveness
Endears like dew the flower of final love!

Sappho (abstracted)

— Yes, I have died ere this a thousand times;
For on the dusky borderlands of dream,
Across the twilight of dim summer dawns
Before the hooves of pearl throbbed down the wind,
And listening to the birds amid green boughs
Where tree and hill and field were touched with fire,
— Hearing, yet hearing not, thro' all the thin
Near multitudinous lament of Dawn's
Low rustling leaves, stirred by some opal wing, —
Oft have I seemed to feel my soul come home!
And faint and strange on my half-wakened ears
Would fall the flute and pipe of early birds;
And strange the odor of the opening flowers;
And strange the world would lie, and stranger still
The quiet rain along the glimmering grass:
And Earth, sad with so many memories
Of bliss, and beautiful with vague regrets,
Would take on poignant glories, strange as death!

Phaon

What is this dim-eyed madness and dark talk
Of death?

Sappho

Hush! I have seen Death pass a hand
Along old wounds, and they have ached no more!

And with one little word lull pain away,
And heal long-wasting tears!

Phaon

But these soft lips
Were made not for the touch of mold!

Sappho

Time was
I thought Death stern, and scattered at his door
My dearest roses, that his feet might come
And softly go!

Phaon

This body white was made
Not for the grave, — this flashing wonder of
The hand for hungry worms!

Sappho

Oh, quiet as
Soft rain on water shall it seem, and sad
Only as life's most dulcet music is,
And dark as but a bride's first dreaded night
Is dark — mild, mild as mirrored stars!

But you, —
You will forget me, Phaon; there the sting!
The sorrow of the grave is not its green,

Nor yet the salt tear on its violet;
It is the years that bring the grey neglect,
When tangled grasses smooth the lessening mound,
When leaf by leaf the tree of sorrow wanes,
And on the urn unseen the tarnish comes,
And tears are not so bitter as they were!
Time sings so low to our bereaved ear,
So softly breathes, that, bud by falling bud,
The garden of our Grief all empty lies,
And unregretted dips the languid oar
Of Charon thro' the gloom, and then is gone!

Phaon

Red-lipped and breathing woman, made for love,
How can you talk of Death, or dream that one
Who ever looked upon you can forget?

Sappho

You will forget me, though you would or not!
Yes, in some other Spring when other lips
Let fall my name, you will remember not!—
Yet come and let me look into your eyes,
Thus quietly, as women view the dead,
And dream of far-off things! As in farewell,
Still let me feel your hand about my hand!

Phaon

Your touch burns thro' my blood like fire. You have
Not changed. Still must I kiss the heavy rose
Of your red mouth!

Sappho

No, not till Death has leaned
And kissed it white as this white cliff, and robed
This body for its bridegroom!

Phaon

Honey-pale
And passion-worn you seem, and I am blind
With looking on your beauty. Sappho, come —
Come close into my arms.

Sappho

It is too late;
Forth to a sterner lover must I fare!

Phaon

Mine flamed your first love, and shall glow your last!

Sappho

Then meet this One, and know!

Phaon

The hounds of Hell

And Aidoneus himself —

Sappho

Hush!

Phaon

You I seek!

The cadence of your voice enraptures me,
The very breathing of your bosom turns
My blood to sweeping fire, and leaves me faint
With longing, makes me flash and burn with love!
And still you would elude me — but this arm
Is strong, and I shall know no other god —

Sappho

Cease! son of passion!

Phaon

Not until these arms,
Shall hold and fold about you, not until —

Sappho

By all the hours you darkened, by the love
You crushed and left embittered, hear me speak!

Phaon (bitterly)

Thus women change — and in their time forget!

Sappho

There lies the sorrow — if we *could* forget!
For one brief hour you gave me all the love
That women ask, and then with cruel hands
Set free the singing voices from the cage,
And tore the glory from the waiting rose;
And through life's empty garden still I dreamed
And called for Love, and walked unsatisfied.
Love! Love! 'Tis we who lose it know it best!
By day a fire and wonder, and by night
A wheeling star that sinks in Mystery.
Love! Love! It is the blue of bluest skies;
The farthest green of waters touched with sun!
It is the calm of moonlight and of leaves,
And yet the troubled music of the Sea!
It is the frail original of faith,
The timorous thing that seems afraid of light,
Yet, loosened, sweeps the world, consuming time
And tinsel empires, grim with blood and war!
It is the voiceless want and loneliness
Of blighted lands made wonderful with rain!
Regret it is, and song, and wistful tears;
The rose upon the tomb of afterthought,
The only wine of life, that on the lip

Of Thirst turns not to ashes! Change and time
And sorrow kneel to it, for at its touch
The world is beautiful . . . the world is *born!*

Phaon

Your words were ever tuned to madden men,
And I am drunk with these sweet pleadings, soft
As voices over many waters blown!
And thus you come to me against your will!

Sappho

Hear me, for by those gods you fear the most
There is a fire within me burns away
All pity, and some Hate, half-caged, may eat
Thro' its last bar!

Phaon

Not till your mouth's
Sad warmth droops unto mine!

Sappho

Yours once I was,
And once I watched you spurn and tread me down
And long amid my perished roses lay,
Broken with sorrow, but still held my peace!
But now I warn you that the tide has turned!

Touch nevermore these hands, for my torn heart
Is desperate, and given not to words!
Quite humble have I been, and duly spake
My lips as you once asked that they should speak!
But now this empty husk from which you drained
Life's darkest wine, shall die in its own way.
Yes, yes; as water sighs and whispers through
Some hollow-throated urn, so now through me
Shall steal contentment. Touch me not! Stand back!
Or if you will, locked arm in reckless arm,
Come with me, down, down to this crawling Deep!

Phaon

What madness can this be?

Sappho

The ocean waves
Are softer with their dead, and autumn winds
More kindly are with leaves, than mortal love
With women, for it kills and buries not.

Phaon

You murmur of the dead, when warm and quick
You breathe before me, and bewilder thought!
With but the wine-like rapture of your voice
You make me desperate!

Sappho

Nay, touch me not!

Phaon

You shall come with me, Sappho! I alone
Dare not go back. I carry in my breast
The edict of the Council. It commands
I bring you safely home, and should I fail
A thousand hands would beat me to the sea.
But in this breast I bear a second scroll,
A more imperious message, writ and sealed
Of Love itself. I shall no longer be
Denied or trifled with, though I must tear
You like a rooted flower from where you wait;
Though I must take you, like a fluttered bird,
And bruise you in the taking! Come with me!

Sappho

Lay not unholy hands upon the dead.

Phaon

Yes, I shall bear you forth, as from a wall
That totters or a chamber wrapped in flame!

*He seizes her resisting body. His strength overpowers
her, and she lies back in his arms, panting. There
she catches sight of the knife in his belt.*

Sappho

Nay, Phaon, I shall go, if you but wait —

Phaon

Too long I waited!

Sappho

Take me not by force,
Oh, not by force now, Phaon! Let me come
Quite willingly, made ready for your arms —

Phaon

I shall release you not!

Sappho

But let me breathe
One brief farewell, one broken last good-by
To all my older life. . . . Then you can come
And take me where you will, and not a word
Of anger or lament shall pass my lips!

She forces him about so that they face the sea.

Then I shall go almost without regret;
For ghost-like even now I am; these eyes
Wave-worn as Leucothea's eyes must seem,
And I am tired, and it is good to sleep.
So alone, sad Mother Ocean, let me rest;

Alone, grey Mother, take me in your arms —
Whose sorrow must have been as deep as mine,
Who loved in times I know not of, and lost,
And still must murmur of it night and day
Along your mournful-noted shores!

Phaon

What gods
Are these you call upon in ecstasy?

Sappho

I call not on your gods, or mine. For they
Live high above our Earth, and scarce would know
The odor of my incense, or how white
My piteous altars stood! Too like the Moon
That looks so disimpassioned over men
And their tumultuous cities crowned with pain,
Smile down the gods on our tight-lipped despairs!
Yet far I am from home to go, and far
From any voice to comfort me beyond
The cypress twilight and the hemlock gloom!
But take me, Mournful Mother, while I feel
Burn through my blood this bitter ecstasy!
Oh, take me, Mother Ocean, in your arms,
And let the cooling waters lave and wash
All sorrow from my eyes and rock the pain
From my poor heart!

Phaon

Upon my heart your heart
Shall rock in weary slumber and forget
These ghostly sorrows!

He crushes her half-passive body still closer.

Give me of your lips
As once, on Leucate, so long ago!

Sappho

Oh, free me, Phaon!

Phaon

Not until you lie
At rest, and willingly, within my arms!

Sappho

Oh, free me, but a moment!

Phaon

Nevermore!

Sappho

This is the costliest last kiss of all
Your life . . . and mine!

Phaon

I care not what it costs,
It crowns me with a peace — above the gods!

She shudders, but lies passive in his arms, her own creeping about him. Her hand falls to his knife, which she withdraws, raises, and sinks deep in his side. His arms droop away, he crumbles down at her feet, without a word, dead. She scarcely moves as she gazes at the body. The two figures are bathed in the full golden light of the sunset. The voice of Erinna calls from the distance. Sappho turns with a haunted look, raises her arms, and leaps into the sea. Faintly, from the harbor beyond the cliff sounds the chords of "The Sailors' Hymn to Sunset," as the light slowly pales and passes.

Curtain

THE THREE VOICES

WHEN the fire sinks flame by flame
And the shadows, Dear, grow long,
Shall I turn for praise or blame
To the Brazen-Throated Throng?

When the last poor deed is done,
Shall I look, O Good and True,
To the old friends one by one,
The Silver-Throated Few?

Nay, all that I strove to do,
However it end, was done
For You and the love of You,
The Golden-Throated One!



