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S A P P H O

A TRAGEDY.

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## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SAPPHO.

PHAON.

MELITTA.

RHAMNES.

EUCHARIS.

CITIZENS, FEMALE SLAVES, ETC., ETC.

# SAPPHO.

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## ACT FIRST.

*An open country: in the back-ground the sea, whose otherwise flat shore rises to the left of the scene into rocky shelves. Close to the shore an altar to Aphrodite. To the right of the foreground a grotto, whose entrance is overgrown with brush-wood and ivy. Further back the end of a colonnade, with steps leading to Sappho's dwelling. To the left of the foreground a tall rose-tree, standing upon a grassy bank.*

### SCENE I.

*Cymbals and flutes, and confusion of voices in the distance.*

*Enter in haste RHAMNES.*

Up from your slumbers, up! She comes, she's near!  
Oh that our wishes had a gift of wings,  
To bear our feet as well as hearts away!  
Come forth, ye loitering maidens. Quick, I say!  
Who called youth *eager* did not paint you true.

*Enter EUCHARIS, MELITTA, and other slaves from the  
colonnade.*

MELITTA.

Why do you chide us? Here we are!

RHAMNES.

She comes.

MELITTA.

Ye gods, who?

RHAMNES.

Sappho's near.

*(Shout from within.)*

Hail, Sappho, hail!

RHAMNES.

Right! Sappho, hail! ye loyal people, hail!

MELITTA.

But say, what means all this?

RHAMNES.

Now, by the gods,  
What wond'ring question would the maiden ask?  
She is returning from the Olympic games,

Where the triumphal garland she has won,  
 Before the presence of the whole of Greece  
 Assembled there to judge the noble strife,  
 The prize of poetry, of song, was hers !  
 And hence our citizens pour forth in crowds  
 To meet the favoured one, and raise her name  
 On wide-spread wings of gladness to the clouds :  
 And mine the hand, and mine the tongue, that first  
 Revealed to her the language of the lyre,  
 And taught, by harmony's sweet rules, to bind  
 The wild unshackled liberty of song !

PEOPLE, *from within.*

Hail, Sappho ! Sappho, hail !

RHAMNES, *to the maidens.*

Rejoice ye too !

See you the garland ?

MELITTA.

I but Sappho see !

We will to meet her.

RHAMNES.

No, remain, remain !

What the poor tribute of your joy to her ?  
 She is accustomed to far higher praise.

Rather make ready all within the house ;  
 You best by service will your homage pay !

MELITTA.

But see'st thou at her side—

RHAMNES.

Who ?

MELITTA.

See'st thou not

Another radiant form rise proudly there  
 Like *his*—the god of golden Lyre and Bow,  
 As pictures paint him.

RHAMNES.

Yes, I see ; but go.

MELITTA.

This moment thou didst call us.

RHAMNES.

True, I call'd ;

'Twas right that you should know your mistress near  
 Right you should learn your duty to rejoice ;  
 But your rejoicings must be held at home :  
 Man's love may shew itself by greetings loud ;  
 Woman's by silent service to the loved !

SAPPHO.

5

MELITTA.

But only let us—

RHAMNES.

No ; away, away.

(*Exeunt maidens.*)

Now let her come ! No dull and rustic minds  
Shall such a festival as this profane !

## SCENE II.

SAPPHO *richly dressed, in a chariot drawn by white horses ; a golden lyre in her hand, a triumphal wreath on her head : At her side PHAON, clad in simple garb. A crowd of people rejoicing surround the procession.*

PEOPLE *advancing.*

Hail ! Sappho, hail !

RHAMNES.

Hail, dearest lady, hail !

SAPPHO.

Thanks, friends and fellow-countrymen ; oh ! thanks !  
'Tis for your sakes I joy me in this crown,  
Which decks the *citizen* alone, but lies  
A heavy burthen on the *poet's* brow.  
'Tis amidst you that first I call it mine !

Here, where the dreamy purposes of youth,  
 Th' uncertain strivings of the task begun,  
 The glowing rapture of that task fulfilled,  
 Have all swept over my delirious soul ;  
 Here, where the cypress from my parent's grave  
 Whispers low spirit-greetings in mine ear,  
 Here, where so many early-faded rest  
 Who in my efforts and my doings joy'd,  
 Here, in your circle, with my loved ones round,  
 Here first, I do not deem this wreath a crime,  
 Here, the mere gaud first seemeth to adorn !

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

Well for us, lady, that we call thee ours !  
 Oh ye, who hear her modest speech, confess,  
 Greece has not so adorned her as her words have done.

RHAMNES, *pressing forward.*

I greet thee warmly—noble that thou art !

SAPPHO, *descending from her chariot, and exchanging friendly questions with the by-standers.*

My faithful Rhamnes greeting ! Thou, Artander,  
 Here too—despite the weakness of old age ?  
 Calisto, Rhodope, ye weep, beloved ?  
 Eyes pay their debts as faithfully as hearts,  
 And for your tears—see mine ; oh ! spare me them.



## ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

Be welcomed to the ancient soil of home,  
To the glad circle of thy own be welcomed !

## SAPPHO.

You shall not greet me thus without reward,  
I bring you back another citizen.  
See Phaon here—Descended from the best,  
He with the best may boldly claim a place.  
Although as yet, if judged by years, a youth,  
Both word and deed have well approved him man !  
If you should ever need the warrior's sword,  
The orator's bold speech, the poet's tongue,  
The friendly counsel, or the helping arm,  
Then call on him—you will not call in vain.

## PHAON.

Thou mockest, Sappho, at a humble youth.  
Say, how have I deserved such wealth of praise ?  
Who will believe so much of the untried ?

## SAPPHO.

All who have seen thee blushing at my words.

## PHAON.

Abashed, I can but wonder and be mute.

## SAPPHO.

Thus best securing what thou'dst fain refuse,  
 Merit and silence still are sisters found.  
 Yes, friends ! I bid you know it now and aye,  
 I love him ! upon him my choice is fixed ;  
 He is by fulness of rich gifts decreed  
 To draw me down with soft constraining might  
 From cloud-capt summits of poetic art,  
 Into life's brighter, warmer, flower-strewn vales.  
 Henceforth in midst of you and by his side  
 A simple, silent shepherd's life I'll lead—  
 Gladly the laurel for the myrtle changing ;  
 Only in praise of hearth and household joys  
 Shall wake henceforth the music of this lyre  
 That you have honoured, hitherto admired,  
 Now you shall learn to love it—*love* it, friends.

## PEOPLE.

All honour to thee, Sappho ! Hail ! oh, hail !

## SAPPHO.

It is enough. I thank you all, kind friends.  
 Follow my servants—they will lead you in  
 By joyous dancing and good cheer to end  
 This meeting festival—this glad return

Of a long absent sister to her own !

(*To the people, who cheer her.*)

Farewell ! and thou—and thou—to all, farewell !

(*Exeunt RHAMNES and PEOPLE.*)

### SCENE III.

SAPPHO.

See'st thou, my friend, the life thy Sappho leads ?

Thanks for her service—for her love—good will ;

Thus have I always in life's barter fared :

I *was* contented—I *am* richly blest

If thou returnest half the love I give thee,

Deeming thyself unwrong'd by such exchange,

For I have learnt to lose and learnt to want !

My parents both went early to the grave,

My sisters, after dealing many wounds

To this fond sister-heart, (in part through fate,

In part through their own guilt,) died early too—

I know how thanklessness and falsehood torture.

Illusions both of friendship and—of love

I have already in this bosom nursed—

Yea, I have learnt to lose and learnt to want !

There is but one thing that I *could* not lose,

Thee, Phaon—thee, thy friendship and thy love !

Therefore, beloved ! prove thy spirit well,

Thou canst not yet divine the infinite  
 That heaves, like yonder ocean, in my breast.  
 Oh ! thou beloved, never let me feel  
 The pang of laying my full heart on thine  
 To find it empty !

PHAON.

Noble lady !

SAPPHO.

How !

Does thy heart teach thee then, no sweeter name ?

PHAON.

I scarcely know, or what I do or say :  
 From out the silence of my lowly life,  
 Borne thus away upon a beam of light,  
 Placed on an airy pinnacle so high,  
 That proudest wishes still have fail'd to reach it,  
 I almost sink beneath th' unhoped-for joy,  
 I lose the sense of self in bliss so new :  
 I see the woods, I see the shores fly past,  
 Blue hills and lowly dwellings fade from sight,  
 And scarcely can my reason feel assured  
 That *they* stand firm and stedfast—while 'tis *I*  
 That fortune's chariot wildly sweeps along !

SAPPHO.

Sweet is thy flattery, love, but flattery still !

PHAON.

And canst thou really that great Sappho be,  
Whose fame—resounding far from Pelops' strand,  
To where the rugged mountain range of Thrace  
Unites with Hellas' life-exulting land,  
And on each lonely isle by hand of Jove  
Flung out into the far Egean sea,  
And wheresoever else a Grecian tongue  
Speaks that god's language, whose mere words are song,  
Whose fame is raised in triumph to the stars !  
And canst thou, then, that very Sappho be ?  
How fell thy glance upon a humble youth,  
Who, without pomp of fortune or of name,  
Boasts of no higher worth than boasts this lyre,  
Honoured by others, because touched by thee !

SAPPHO.

Fie on the paltry, feeble-tonéd lyre,  
Does it when touch'd give forth its mistress' praise ?

PHAON.

Oh ! since the waking of my earliest thought,  
Since first my trembling touch essayed the lyre,  
Thy form divine has still before me stood !

When in the midst of a glad sister-band  
Within my parent's lowly home I sat,  
And when Theano, best loved of them all,  
Would take the roll from off the blackened shelf,  
To read us one of thine, of Sappho's songs,—  
How silent, then, the noisy youths would grow,  
How crept the maidens close and closer still,  
Lest they should lose a fragment of the gold !  
And when she read to us the burning lay  
Sung by Adonis to the Queen of Love,  
Night's lonely wail, Andromeda's strange tale,  
How eagerly each listened, blam'd the breath  
That came too quickly in a pleasure tide,  
As all too loud a sound for such an hour !  
Then would Theano, pensive, lean her head  
Back on the lowly seat—and gazing long  
Around her through the spreading gloom, exclaim,  
“ What outward semblance does the gifted wear ?  
Methinks I see her now ! By all the gods,  
Amidst a thousand I should know her well ! ”  
Then were the bands of silence fast unloosed,  
And each would strain his fancy as he could  
To deck thy image with some new found grace ;  
One gave Minerva's brow, one Juno's arm,  
One Aphrodite's magic girdle gave ;—  
But I arose in silence, and went forth  
Into the lone, still reign of holy night,

There on soft slumb'ring nature's throbbing breast,  
And in the circle of her powerful spells,  
I, in wild longing, stretched my arms towards thee !  
And when the snow-flake from the passing cloud,  
The zephyr's breath, the perfume of the hills,  
The silver radiance of the pallid moon  
Blended in one, would play around my brow,—  
Then wert thou mine ; I felt thy presence near,  
And in the light clouds floated Sappho's form !

## SAPPHO.

Thou hast adorned me from thy own rich stores :  
Ah ! what if thou take back what thou hast lent ?

## PHAON.

And when my father sent me to Olympia,  
To try my fortune in the chariot-race,  
Along my way these tidings echoed loud—  
That in the contest for the poet's wreath,  
Sappho would strike her lyre, and striking, win !  
Then swelled my heart with longing and desire,  
My o'er-urged coursers dropt down on the road,  
Before Olympia's towers I discerned.  
I came—the chariots in their rapid course,  
The wrestler's skill, the Discus' manly game,  
These had no power to move my boding soul !  
I asked not even who had won the prize ;

Had *I* not gained, the highest, best of all ?  
I was to see *her*, crown of womanhood !  
Now came the day to judge the claims of song—  
Alcæus sang, Anacreon—in vain !  
They could not free my spirit from its chain.  
When, lo ! there ran a murmur through the crowd,—  
The multitude divided—“ It is she !”  
Then holding in her hand a golden lyre,  
A woman passed throughout that wond’ring throng,  
With flowing garments, white as innocence,  
That reached, but not concealed, the ankle’s grace,  
(Like a clear brook that runs o’er banks of flowers,)  
The hem with palm and laurel leaves adorned,  
Imaging gracefully both peace and fame,  
Bespoke the poet’s need and his reward.  
Like gorgeous morning clouds about the sun  
A Tyrian mantle floated round her form,  
And in the “ purple midnight” of her hair  
Uprose a shining moon-like diadem,  
Emblem of genius, shedding wide its rays !  
My soul exclaimed, “ ’Tis she !” and it was thou.  
And ere my own conjecture found a tongue,  
A nation’s thousand-voicéd joy proclaimed  
Loud confirmation of my sweet foreboding.  
But of thy song, thy triumph, of the wreath  
Placed, when the strain was ended, on thy head,  
And how in trance of inspiration high



From thy relaxing hold fell out the lyre,  
How at one glance, from thy all-conquering eyes,  
The rustic youth stood trembling and abashed.  
This know'st thou better, lofty one, than I,  
Who but half wakened yet, can scarce decide  
How much was real and how much was dream.

## SAPPHO.

Ah! well I know how thou wert standing there  
With all thy life concenter'd in thine eyes,  
Which, although scarcely lifted from the ground,  
Could not conceal their quenchless light from mine.  
I bade thee follow, and thou follow'dst me,  
In wondering and doubting all absorbed.

## PHAON.

Who would have thought the highest Grecian dame  
Would deign to look on Grecia's humblest son?

## SAPPHO.

Thou art unjust, both to thyself and fate,  
Do not despise the gods' own golden gifts,  
Which at the birth of such as they decree  
To taste life's full enjoyment, forth they pour  
O'er cheek and brow, in glowing heart and breast.  
The gift of beauty is a bounteous gift,  
Joy in existence is a precious thing,

Boldness of spirit, world-commanding strength,  
Firmness and skill with actual things to deal,  
And fancy rendering sweet service due,  
'Tis these adorn the rugged path of life,  
And life's best, truest end, is but—"to live."  
Not without meaning did the muses choose,  
For their adornment fruitless laurel boughs,  
Scentless and cold they weigh upon the brow  
As substitutes for many a sacrifice.  
Humanity's bleak heights are sad and lone,  
And still poor Genius has been forced to stand  
*(Extending her arms to PHAON)*  
A beggar at life's overflowing feast!

PHAON.

What is there, sweet enchantress, thou can'st say  
That seems not true to all when said by thee?

SAPPHO.

Let us endeavour, then, beloved friend,  
To weave both garlands round about our brows,  
To drink of life from Genius' magic cup,  
To taste of Genius out of life's warm hand.  
Look at this site, which half to living earth,  
Half to the flowery meadows Lethe laves  
Seems to belong—so silent are its charms,—  
Here in this grot, beneath the rose-tree's shade,

Surrounded by the friendly columns here,  
 We,—like to those undying ones above,  
 Who nor satiety nor hunger know,  
 Nor aught but equal and eternal bliss,—  
 In our united being will rejoice.  
 That which is mine, is thine: if used by thee  
 'Twill henceforth have new value in my eyes.  
 Look all around;—thou standest in thy home:  
 I show thee to my people as their lord,  
 And they shall learn from me to serve thee well.  
 Come forth, ye maidens! Hither, slaves!

PHAON.

Oh, Sappho!

How can I e'er such love as this repay?  
 I am weigh'd down by ever-growing debt!

SCENE IV.

*Enter* EUCHARIS, MELITTA, RHAMNES, *men and women-*  
*servants.*

RHAMNES.

Thou calledst, lady!

SAPPHO.

Yes. Come nearer all !  
Here you behold your lord !

RHAMNES, *astonished and half aloud.*

Lord !

SAPPHO, *angrily.*

Who replied ?  
What would you say ?

RHAMNES, *starting back.*

Nothing.

SAPPHO.

Keep silence, then !  
You here behold your lord ! his lightest wish  
Is a command to you no less than mine ;  
And wo to him who faileth to obey,  
Who by the merest cloud upon this brow  
Is charged with disobedience or neglect.  
I can o'erlook offences 'gainst myself :  
Who fails towards Phaon will awake my wrath.  
And now, my friend, commit thee to their care,  
I see that thou art weary, travel-spent ;  
Let them perform all hospitable rites,  
Freely enjoy thy Sappho's earliest gifts !

PHAON.

O that I could my all of former life,  
 E'en like these dusty garments, cast aside,  
 And win instead a clear serenity,  
 Wholly to be what I to be desire.  
 So fare-thee-well—it will not be for long.

SAPPHO.

I wait thy call. (*To MELITTA.*) Remain.

(*Exeunt PHAON and ATTENDANTS.*)

## SCENE V.

SAPPHO, *who has gazed after Phaon.*

Now, then, Melitta !

MELITTA.

What, my gracious lady ?

SAPPHO.

So blood flows warm within these veins alone ;  
 Its current freezes in all other hearts !  
 She looked upon him,—listened to his voice ;  
 The very self-same air that fanned his brow  
 Has play'd around her own life-empty breast,  
 And a dull,—“ What, my gracious lady !”

Is all the sound that issues from her lips.  
Oh ! truly I could hate thee.—Go !

(MELITTA prepares to go in silence.)

SAPPHO, *who meanwhile has thrown herself on the  
grassy bank.*

Melitta !

And know'st thou, then, so little how to say  
That which would give me pleasure, dearest child ?  
And yet thou sawest him. Didst nothing mark  
On which once seen 'twere natural to dwell,  
To talk of to me ? Girl ! where were thine eyes ?

MELITTA.

Thou knowest well how often thou hast said,—  
“ Beseems not that a maiden send her glance  
In presence of a stranger freely round.”

SAPPHO.

And thus, poor thing, thine eyelids were cast down.  
(*Kisses her.*)

This was thy reason. Not for thee, my child,  
This lesson, but for older, wilder hearts ;  
What suits the girl befits not womanhood.

(*Measuring her with her eyes.*)

And yet, see there !—How strangely thou art chang'd

Since last I left ! Why, now, I scarcely know thee—  
Grown so much taller and——(*Kisses her again.*)

Thou sweetest one !

Yes, thou wert right—my lesson suits thee too.

(*Rises.*)

Why art thou still so frightened and so mute ?

Thou wert not wont to be so !—Wherefore tremble ?

'Tis not thy mistress, Sappho, thou dost see ;

Sappho, thy friend, Melitta, speaks with thee.

Ambition, pride, the sting of angry words,

And all that once was faulty in my nature,

These I have not brought back unto my home ;

I cast them deep into the wave's abyss,

When o'er the ocean sailing at his side ;

By this is proved the magic power of love,—

It glorifies whate'er its breath has stirr'd,

Like to the sun whose golden beams can change

Even dark storm-clouds into molten gold.

If ever I have pained thee by quick speech,

Or bitter word, forgive it to me now !

In future we will trusting sisters be,

Will both live near him—equal in all else

But in the nature of the love he gives.

Oh ! I will grow more kind—more meek and kind.

MELITTA.

Art thou not kind, then ? Wert not ever so ?

SAPPHO.

Kind!—yes; if *not unkind* deserves such praise.  
 Was that enough for such a high reward?  
 Will *he* be happy, think'st thou, maiden, here?

MELITTA.

Who could be aught but happy near to thee?

SAPPHO.

What can my poverty that loved one give?  
 He stands there in the fulness of his youth,  
 Adorned with all the fairest flowers of life;  
 His scarce awaken'd mind in glad surprise  
 The wide extent of its own powers surveys,  
 Spreads out bold pinions, and to highest skies  
 Directs, ambitious, its keen eagle gaze.  
 All that is great, and high, and rich, and fair,  
 Is his. The world belongeth to the strong.  
 And I! O all ye gracious gods above!  
 Oh, give to me the vanish'd past again!  
 Blot out within my breast each deep-worn trace  
 That former sorrows—former joys have left.  
 All I have felt—have said—have suffered—done—  
 Annihilate it e'en in memory!  
 Let me return once more to that far time  
 When timid still, with childhood's rounded cheek,  
 And feelings indistinct within my breast,



On the new world I gazed with mind as new !  
When 'stead of sad experience, guesses sweet  
But dallied with the golden strings—and love  
Was a mere magic land as yet to me,  
An unknown, untried, magic, stranger-land !

## MELITTA.

What ails my mistress ? Speak—What moves thee so ?

## SAPPHO.

Upon the edge of the deep gulf I stand,  
That yawns devouring between him and me ;  
I see the golden land that smiles beyond,—  
Mine eye can reach it—but my foot may not !  
Wo unto all who once have been allured  
From out the silent circle of their home  
By the vain shadow of an empty fame !  
They hold their course o'er a tempestuous sea  
In a most fragile bark. No flower blooms there,—  
There springs no seed, and there no trees wave green,—  
Nothing but grey infinitude around !  
They only see from far the cheerful shore,  
And all confused with hollow sound of waves,  
The voices of their loved ones reach their ear !  
If late reflecting—they would fain put back  
And seek the fields of home they careless left.

Summer is over ! Flow'rs their bloom have shed,  
*(Taking off her wreath and looking at it sadly.)*  
 And only dry leaves rustle where they tread !

## MELITTA.

The beauteous wreath ! the emblem of reward  
 That thousands strove for, and yet fail'd to win !

## SAPPHO.

That thousands strove for, and yet fail'd to win !  
 Is it not true, Melitta ? True, my child ?  
 That thousands strove for, and yet fail'd to win !  
*(Looking again at the wreath.)*

They who possess should not despise their fame !  
 It is no empty and unmeaning word—  
 Where'er it rests it brings a strength divine !  
 I am not all so poor ! I can oppose  
 To wealth of his an equal wealth of mine !  
 The crown of triumph that the present gives,  
 The blossoms of the future and the past !  
 Thou understand'st me not, thou wond'ring child,—  
 Well for thee ! Never learn to understand !

## MELITTA.

Art angry with me ?

SAPPHO.

Angry, dear one! Nay!

Go now and join the rest, and let me know  
 Soon as thy master wishes for my presence.

*(Exit MELITTA.)*

## SCENE VI.

SAPPHO *alone.* *(She remains lost in thought, her brow resting in her hand, then she sits down on the bank, and takes the lyre, accompanying herself with a few chords.)*

Great Aphrodite, Jove's most mighty daughter,  
 Fertile in wiles, and fanciful and subtle,  
 No more with care and heavy sorrow load my  
 Wild throbbing bosom.

Come thou, far rather come, if e'er the music,  
 Swept from my lyre strings, struck thy senses sweetly,  
 If to its accents listening delighted,  
 Heav'n thou forsookest.

And in thy light car borne along in brightness  
 By thy glad dove pair, dusky wing'd and rapid,  
 E'en as the lightning through the hush'd air camest  
 Down to this dark earth.

And then thou spakest, (lovely was the smiling  
 Streaming o'er forehead and o'er rose-lip meanwhile,)  
 "Wherefore arises loud and help-imploring  
 Prayer from my priestess ?

"What is thy spirit yearning for so deeply ?  
 Whom is thy bosom panting to entangle  
 Soft in Love's meshes, prison'd past releasing ?  
 Who is this victim ?

Does he now fly from—soon he will pursue thee,  
 Scorns he thy gifts ? he'll give thee gifts himself soon.  
 Loves he not yet ? soon, loving, he'll obey thee,—  
 Slave of each eye-glance."

Come to me now, and drive away the anguish  
 That o'er my heart broods, all its powers crushing ;  
 In this sweet contest be mine Love's prevailing,—  
 Be thou on *my* side.

## ACT SECOND.

*The open country as in former Scenes.*

## SCENE I.

*Enter PHAON.*

'Tis well ! 'Tis quiet here—The feast's loud mirth,  
The din of clashing cymbals, viols, pipes,  
The torrent of rejoicing uncontroll'd,  
Are heard no longer underneath these trees ;  
That whisp'ring low, as fearing to disturb,  
Kindly invite to contemplation lone !  
Wherefore is all within me then so changed  
Since I forsook my parent's humble home,  
And towards Olympia turned my coursers' heads ?  
Once I had power in recollection clear  
To trace and disentangle with keen glance  
Each filmy thread in feeling's complex web,  
Until I clearly apprehended all ;  
But now, like to a sultry summer's night,  
Broods o'er my soul a heavy cloud—half sweet  
Half sorrowful, through which, confused and strange,

Flash out thought's sudden lightnings—then expire.  
A veil has dropt between me and the past—  
To-day I scarce can yesterday recall,  
Scarce in the present hour the hour gone by.  
I ask myself,—Canst thou in truth be he,  
Who at Olympia's games stood at her side—  
Stood at her side in her triumphant hour ?  
Was thine the name which, blent with hers, arose  
In shouts of loud rejoicing high in air ?  
All answers, " Yes ;" and yet I scarce believe !  
How poor and pitiable, in sooth, is man !  
The object which when hoped for wakes desire,  
Once granted, lulls it soon again to sleep.  
Ere I had seen, had known, aught save the form  
Which fancy most imperfectly portray'd  
On each light cloud that melted 'neath my gaze,  
I thought 'twere easy for one glance of hers,  
For one kind word to fling my life away !  
And now that she belongs to me, is mine,  
When casting off their winter shell—my hopes  
Like golden butterflies around me play,  
I question still, and musing I delay !  
Alas ! I have forgot my very self.  
Sappho—my parents, and—

Oh ! parents mine,

How could I then forget you until now,  
And leave you thus without one greeting word ?

Perchance ye weep my early death,—perchance  
 The mouth of rumour has not told you yet  
 That he, your son—whom to Olympia's walls  
 Ye sent forth to contend and not to love,—  
 In Sappho's arms——

Who dareth to despise her !  
 The pride of womanhood—its brightest crown,—  
 What though foul envy cast its venom at her,  
 I will defend her—I against a world !  
 Even my father, could he but behold her,  
 Would lay the ancient prejudice aside,  
 Left in his innocent and simple heart,  
 By sight of the licentious minstrel tribe.

*(Remains lost in thought.)*

Who comes ? The noisy troop is hither bent.  
 How shall I shun them—whither fly—ah, *here !*

*(Enters the grotto.)*

## SCENE II.

*Enter EUCHARIS, MELITTA, female slaves with garlands.*

EUCHARIS, *noisily.*

Come, maidens, haste ! Bring hither other flowers ;  
 Heap up whole piles of flowers,—adorn the house,  
 The court, the hall, the threshold, pillars, doors,

Even the very flower-beds deck with flowers ;  
Spare neither root nor branch, for on this day  
Our mistress holds her festival of love.

MAIDENS, *showing the flowers they have gathered.*

See here !

*They begin to hang the surrounding trees and pillars with  
garlands.*

EUCHARIS.

Well done ! But thou, Melitta, *thou* !  
Where, maiden, hast thou hid thy garlands ?

MELITTA, *looking down at her empty hands.*

I ?

EUCHARIS.

Yes, thou ! But what can ail the dreaming girl ?  
Art thou the only empty-handed here ?

MELITTA.

I too will gather.

EUCHARIS.

Gather ! So she says,  
And stirs nor hand nor foot, and gathers nought !



Thou little hypocrite, at once confess  
 What it is ails thee ! Wherefore at the feast  
 Did Sappho with arch smile upon her lips  
 Look towards thee and then cast down her eyes ?  
 Oft as she did so I could mark thee blush,  
 And trembling with confusion and distress,  
 Forget thy service at the festal board,  
 And when required by her to bear the cup  
 Unto the beauteous stranger at her side,  
 Thou didst prepare to raise it to thy lips,  
 And she cried suddenly, " Cast down thine eyes !"  
 Half the great cup contained at once, alas !  
 Was spilt by thee upon the marble floor.  
 E'en Sappho laughed. What meant all this, I say ?  
 Confess it, girl ! for falsehood is in vain.

## MELITTA.

Oh, leave me !

## EUCCHARIS.

Leave thee ! Hope no pity, child,  
 Till, head erect, thou 'st frankly told us all.  
 But see—already springs a little tear,  
 Thou foolish thing ! Well, I will say no more ;  
 But do not weep. So often as thou weepest,  
 However angry, I—come weep no more—  
 Is it about thy flowers alone ? Why we

Will soon get others for thee. So sit down,  
 See here are roses—help us to entwine them,  
 Be busy, child ; but—hear'st thou—weep no more.

(*Exeunt* EUCHARIS *and* MAIDENS.)

### SCENE III.

MELITTA *alone.* *She seats herself upon the bank of grass, and begins to weave a garland. After a little while she shakes her head mournfully, and lays aside her work.*

It will not do. Alas ! my head will burst,  
 And wildly beats my heart within my breast.  
 Here must I sit forsaken and alone,  
 Far from my parents, in an alien land,  
 And slavish chains hang heavy on the hand  
 That I would fain stretch out unto my own.  
 Alas ! forsaken and alone I sit,  
 And no one listens to me—no one heeds !  
 I see with tears both friends and kindred pressing  
 Their loving bosoms to some kindred breast ;  
 For me in this wide land no heart is beating,  
 And all my friends dwell far away from here.  
 Children I see around their father playing,—  
 Kissing the brow benign,—the sacred hair.  
 My father from me is by broad seas parted—

Beyond the reach of kiss or greeting word.  
Here they all seem to love me, it is true ;  
Caressing speech is heard on every side ;  
Yet is it but compassion, and not love,  
That grants soft words in pity to the slave.  
The very lips that late o'erflow'd with praise  
May soon be filled with mocking and with scorn !  
She—*she* may love, may hate whoe'er she will,  
Her tongue may utter all her heart may feel ;  
She is adorned with purple and with gold,  
And every eye is strain'd to watch her path.  
The *slave's* fit place is on the lowly hearth,  
Where no glance finds her—no inquiring word,  
No eye, no thought, no wish that tends to her !  
Ye gods, who have so often heard my pray'r,  
And satisfied my wants with bounteous hand,  
When from a pious heart to you I called,  
O lend me once again a gracious ear !  
Lead me in mercy back unto my home,  
That on the bosom of familiar love  
My burning brow may rest till cool once more.  
Yes, lead me to my home, or else, kind gods,  
Receive me up to you—ye gods, to you !

## SCENE IV.

*Enter PHAON, who, during the foregoing soliloquy, has appeared at the entrance of the grotto and then retired. He now comes forward and lays (from behind) his hand upon MELITTA'S shoulder.*

So young and yet so mournful, maiden !

MELITTA, *starting.*

Ah !

PHAON.

I have o'erheard thee calling on the gods  
To grant a friendly heart.—Here *is* a friend !  
There is a bond of sorrow as of blood,  
And those that mourn are everywhere akin.  
I too am parted from my parents dear,—  
I too am yearning for a distant home ;  
Let us agree, then, that my sadness be  
A balsam for thy heart as thine for me.  
Thou'rt silent.—Wherefore, maiden, this distrust ?  
Look up—look at me : Mine no wrong intent.  
*(He raises her face with his hand.)*  
Why, see ! it is the little serving maid

Who spilt the cup upon the marble floor ;  
 Art *therefore* sad ? Thou needst not—the mischance  
 Amused me, as it did thy mistress too.

(MELITTA, *who, during the last words, had become more composed, now raises her eyes, looks at him, and prepares to go.*)

PHAON.

I did not purpose to offend thee, child.  
 Have then those gentle eyes a glance so hard ?  
 Nay, thou must stand and speak—thou shalt not go !  
 I had already marked thee at the feast ;  
 Thy maidenly repose shone out most fair  
 Through the wild tumult of the banquet hall.  
 Who art thou, and what ties detain thee here ?  
 Thou wert not of the guests : I saw thee serve.  
 The slaves' familiar bearing seem'd to claim  
 Thee for companion, and——

MELITTA.

I *am* a slave.

(*Turns as if to go.*)

PHAON, *detaining her.*

Not yet !

MELITTA.

What would you with a slave, my lord ?

Let her seek out the bosom of a slave.

*(Tears choke her voice.)*

Oh ! take me up to you, ye gods,—to you !

PHAON, *supporting her.*

Thou art excited, trembling ; grow more calm.

Fetters and chains can only bind the hands :

It is the mind that makes us slaves or free.

Be thou at rest—Sappho is good and mild.

A word from me, and without ransom paid

She gives thee back to parents and to home !

*(MELITTA silently shakes her head.)*

PHAON.

Believe me, that she will. But what ? has all

The burning longing for thy fatherland,

Felt but so late, so quickly died away ?

MELITTA.

Ah ! tell me first where is that fatherland ?

PHAON.

Thou dost not know it ?

MELITTA.

In my tend'rest years

From its kind shelter I was torn away.

Its beauteous flowers, its wooded valleys, still  
 Can memory recall ; but not its name.  
 And yet methinks it to the sunrise lay ;  
 For all was brighter, clearer, lighter, there !

PHAON.

Then it is far from hence ?

MELITTA.

Oh, very far.

By other trees I was surrounded there,  
 And other flow'rs than these perfumed the air.  
 In bluer midnight glow'd more radiant stars,  
 And kinder, gentler, were the men around.  
 I in the midst of many children, play'd ;  
 Ah, yes ! and an old man, with silver hair—  
 I call'd him father—would caress me oft.  
 And then another man, young, stately, tall,  
 With dark-brown hair and eyes—almost like thine—

PHAON.

Well, then—that man—go on.

MELITTA.

He, too—

SAPPHO.

PHAON.

Caress'd thee ;

Is it not so ?

*(He seizes her hand.)*

MELITTA.

I was a child !

PHAON, *softly*.

Thou wert !

I know thou wert a sweet unconscious child !

*(He releases her hand.)*

What further ?

MELITTA.

All went merrily and well—

Till one night I awoke. A savage cry

Fell loud upon my ear from every side.

My nurse approach'd ; they dragg'd me from my bed,

And bore me out into the darksome night.

I saw the dwelling round all wrapt in flames ;

I saw men fight ; I saw them fly and fall.

Then came a ruffian by, and grasp'd at me,

And all was shrieking, wailing, shouting wild.

And then I found myself upon a bark

That glided swiftly through the crested waves.

I saw around me other children weep ;



But ever smaller did their number grow,  
The further we were carried from our home.  
For many days and nights we held our way ;  
Nay, for whole moons,—till I alone was left,  
Of all that childish band, with savage men.  
At last our vessel neared the Lesbian shore ;  
They carried me to land. Then Sappho came  
And offered gold, and called Melitta hers !

PHAON.

Has then thy fate been hard in Sappho's hands ?

MELITTA.

Oh no ! she took me kindly to her heart ;  
She dried away the tears within my eyes,  
And, full of love, she nursed me, and she taught.  
For though impetuous, and oft quick of speech,  
Yet good is Sappho,—truly kind and good.

PHAON.

And yet thou never couldst forget thy home ?

MELITTA.

Alas ! I did forget it all too soon !  
Midst dances, childish games, and household cares,  
I thought but seldom of my dear ones left.  
But oft, if grieved and pained, or sad in mood,

A yearning wakes within my heavy heart,  
 And memory, with sweet yet mournful hand,  
 Draws back the curtain from that golden past ;  
 And then to-day—so sorrowful was I,  
 Each lightly spoken word was fraught with pain,  
 As if it fell upon unsheathéd nerves,  
 When—now though all seems right, and I am  
       glad again !

*(Voices within.)*

Melitta !

PHAON.

Hark ! they call.

MELITTA.

They call ! I go.

*(She lifts up the garland she has begun, and the flowers.)*

PHAON.

What hast thou here ?

MELITTA.

Here ? Flowers.

PHAON.

And for whom ?

MELITTA.

For thee—for thee and Sappho.

SAPPHO.

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PHAON.

Stay !

MELITTA.

They call !

PHAON.

Thou shalt not take so dark a look away.  
Shew me thy flowers.

MELITTA.

You see them.

PHAON, *taking out a rose.*

Take this rose.

*(He places it in her bosom.)*

Be it to thee a token of this hour,  
A token that not only in thy home,  
But e'en in foreign lands thou hast a friend !

*(MELITTA, who shrank from his touch, now stands with heaving breast, drooping arms, and eyes bent to earth ; PHAON, who has retreated a few steps, is looking at her.)*

*(Voices within.)*

Melitta !

SAPPHO.

MELITTA.

Didst thou call ?

PHAON.

They call'd within.

MELITTA.

I come !

PHAON.

Melitta, wilt thou then so chary be ?  
Does not my gift a gift from thee deserve ?

MELITTA.

From me ! oh what have I to call my own !

PHAON.

Gold is the gift of vanity and pride—  
Friendship and love give flow'rs to the beloved—  
Here thou hast flowers.

MELITTA, *throwing them away.*

What ! wouldst thou then have these,  
Plucked by the hands of those wild maidens yonder,  
Destined for thee, and—Never !

PHAON.

What instead ?

MELITTA.

Oh ! they have plunder'd e'en these bushes too ;  
 There scarce is left the vestige of a flower !

*(Looking up at the rose-tree.)*

Yes, on that branch there hangs a rose indeed,  
 But it is all too high, beyond my reach.

PHAON.

No, for I'll help thee.

MELITTA.

Oh ! not so.

PHAON.

Why not ?

I give not up thus easily my claim !

*MELITTA, ascending the bank.*

Then come, I'll bend the branch for thee.

PHAON.

So do !

*MELITTA, standing on tip-toe, and bending the branch, at  
 whose extremity there hangs a rose.*

Dost reach ?

PHAON, *who without heeding the rose, has contemplated*

MELITTA.

Not yet.

MELITTA.

Now then. Alas! I fall!

PHAON.

No, for I hold thee up!

*(The branch has slipped high out of her grasp, she loses her balance, and falls into PHAON'S arms, which are opened to receive her.)*

MELITTA.

Oh! let me go.

PHAON, *holding her to his heart.*

Melitta!

MELITTA.

Leave me—wo is me!

PHAON.

Melitta!

*(He suddenly presses a kiss upon her lips.)*

## SCENE V.

*Enter SAPPHO, simply dressed, and without lyre or wreath.*

SAPPHO.

We have to seek thee, friend. Ha! what is this?

MELITTA.

Listen, my mistress.

PHAON.

Ah! is Sappho here?

*(He lets MELITTA go—a pause.)*

SAPPHO.

Melitta!

MELITTA.

Lady!

SAPPHO.

What art seeking here?

MELITTA.

I sought for flowers.

SAPPHO.

SAPPHO.

And not it seems in vain.

MELITTA.

This lovely rose—

SAPPHO.

It burns upon thy lips.

MELITTA.

It hung so high,—

SAPPHO.

Not high enough, perhaps.

Go!

MELITTA.

May I not then—

SAPPHO.

Go, I bid thee go!

*(Exit MELITTA.)*



## SCENE VI.

SAPPHO, *after a pause.*

Phaon !

PHAON.

Sappho !

SAPPHO.

Thou didst forsake our feast  
Earliest of all ! We miss'd thy presence much.

PHAON.

Neither the wine-cup nor loud mirth I love.

SAPPHO.

Loud mirth ! That almost sounds reproachful.

PHAON.

How ?

SAPPHO.

It was an error then of mine to make  
Of our arrival such a joyous day !

PHAON.

I did not mean to say so.

SAPPHO.

SAPPHO.

The full heart  
 Will often seek for loud and open joy,  
 That in the universal mirth around  
 Its own still bliss may all unnoticed be.

PHAON.

'Tis true.

SAPPHO.

And then I needs must grateful prove  
 To my good neighbours for the love they've shown.  
 Their gladness calls for wine ; this thou well know'st.  
 In future no such weary feast shall break  
 The deep repose thou lov'st not more than I.

PHAON.

Thanks.

SAPPHO.

Art thou going ?

PHAON.

Will you that I stay ?

SAPPHO.

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SAPPHO.

Your will is free alike to stay or go.

PHAON.

Thou'rt angry!

SAPPHO, *moved*.

Phaon!

PHAON.

Would'st thou ought then?

SAPPHO.

Nought.

And yet—(*with self-control*)

I saw thee toying with Melitta.

PHAON.

Melitta—who? but yes; thou'rt right—go on.

SAPPHO.

She is a lovely child.

PHAON.

Yes, so she seems.

SAPPHO.

To me the dearest of my many slaves,

Or of my children, I might rather say,  
 Since they have ever been as children loved.  
 And if I have not broken slav'ry's bond  
 'Tis because nature sweeter ties denied,  
 That these poor homeless orphans might not be  
 Withdrawn too early from the tender care,  
 The tender teaching that a mother gives.  
 This has been long my wont, and many found  
 Midst Mitylene's noblest matrons now,  
 Gladly remembering the past, proclaim  
 That they were Sappho's work in earlier days.

PHAON.

'Tis well ! 'tis well !

SAPPHO.

Of all the maiden band  
 That e'er the play of Fate to me has brought,  
 None has been better lov'd than she, Melitta,  
 The little maiden with the placid mind,  
 Though lowly both in nature and in gifts,  
 And for the muses' service all unfit,  
 Yet was she dearer to me than the rest,  
 Through meek and unassuming modesty,  
 And through a sweet sincerity of heart,  
 Like to the little noiseless garden snail—  
 At once the home and dweller in the home—

Still ready—at the very slightest sound—  
 Frightened, to draw within itself again,  
 Still turning tender feelers all around,  
 And slow to venture forth on surface new,  
 Yet clinging closely, if it cling at all,  
 And ne'er its hold relaxing but in death !

PHAON.

Yes, true indeed, most true.

SAPPHO.

I would not wish—  
 Forgive me, dearest friend. I would not wish  
 That e'er a sudden, passing, careless jest,  
 Should in the maiden's bosom fancies wake,  
 Which, unfulfilled, torment with bitter sting.  
 I would to her the sad experience spare,  
 Of how unsatisfied desires consume,  
 And how despised love has power to pain.  
 My friend—

PHAON.

What sayest thou ?

SAPPHO.

Thou dost not hear !

SAPPHO.

PHAON.

I hear: Love pains, thou saidst.

SAPPHO.

*It pains indeed!*

My friend, I see thy mood is adverse now ;  
I'm silent. But some other time, perchance—

PHAON.

'Tis well—some other time !

SAPPHO.

And now, farewell.

This is the hour that still I dedicate,  
In yonder silent grotto, to the muse ;  
And though to-day I may not hope her smile,  
Yet am I there, at least, secure of rest ;  
And rest I need. And thou, meanwhile, farewell.

PHAON.

Thus then thou goest ?

SAPPHO.

Wouldst thou wish—

PHAON.

Farewell !

SAPPHO *abruptly turns away.*

Farewell ! (*Enters the grotto.*)

## SCENE VII.

PHAON.

And hast thou truly ?

(*Looks round.*)

She is gone !

I am bewildered : blank my mind, and strange.

(*Looks at the grassy bank.*)

'Twas here she sat, the lovely blooming child,

(*He seats himself.*)

Here will I lay my weary head to rest !

(*Rests wearily his head on his hand.*)

(*The curtain falls.*)

## ACT THIRD.

*Scene the same as in the former Act—PHAON sleeping upon the bank of grass.*

## SCENE I.

SAPPHO, *coming out of the grotto.*

It is in vain ; my thoughts swarm far and wide,  
And bring to me no honey-burden back.  
Whate'er I do, whatever I essay,  
Still, still that deeply hated vision stands—  
(That I would shun, would flee from, were it e'en  
Beyond the gloomy confines of the earth,)  
Stands in fresh hues before my aching gaze.  
How he upheld her ! How she clasped his arm !  
Then softly yielding to his firm embrace,  
She on his lips—away, I'll not think o'er it :  
The very thought contains a thousand deaths.  
Yet is it not then idle thus to grieve,  
Thus to lament what may a trifle be !  
Who knows what transient impulse, soon forgot,  
What strange capricious nothing drew him on,  
Which, quickly dying, as it quickly rose,  
Had no intention, merits no reproof.



Why should I seek the scale of what he feels  
In *my* so deeply moved and boding heart !

Man's love by woman's must not measured be ;  
This all who know the heart of each agree.  
A changing thing is man's impetuous mind,  
Subject to life which still we changing find.  
Existence opening to his onward tread,  
And hope's red morning light around it shed,  
Ready and armed for fame-rewarded strife,  
With strength and courage as with shield and sword.  
Too narrow seems to him the inner life,  
Towards outward things his restless strivings tend ;  
And should he meet with love, he fain will bend  
To lift the tender flow'ret from the ground,  
Exults, rejoices o'er the treasure found ;  
Then cold, 'midst other trophies, gives it place,  
His lordly helmet to adorn and grace.  
He recks not of the silent mighty flame  
That love wakes up within a woman's breast,  
How all her being, thinking, craving—all  
Around one only point alone revolve :  
How like to young and scarcely fledgéd birds,  
That flutter anxious round their parents' nest,  
Her timid wishes watch, with boding fear,  
The love that is their cradle and their grave.  
She hangs her whole life, like an amulet,

Around the neck of this her new-born love.  
Man loves, 'tis true ; but in his wider heart  
Is ample room for other things than love !  
And much that woman's faith would deem a crime,  
He boldly ventures on, and calls it jest !  
A kiss, whenever offered by fair lips,  
He holds his right to take or give at will.  
Sad that it should be ; but it is so still !

*Turns, and sees PHAON.*

But see ! There, in that rose-tree's shadow, lies  
The beauteous traitor ! Yes, 'tis he indeed !  
He sleeps, and peace and silent gladness seem  
Gently to rest upon his open brow.  
Thus only breathes the sleep of innocence,  
Thus only heaves the free unburdened breast.  
Thou dear one ! Yes, I will believe thy sleep,  
Whate'er the witness of thy waking hours.  
Forgive me if in that first moment I  
Wronged thee, beloved, by a brief mistrust.  
If I believed mean falsehood might avail,  
To creep its way into so fair a shrine.  
He smiles ;—his lips are slowly parting now.  
Some word appears to hover in his breath.  
Wake up, and waking, name thy Sappho's name,  
Whose arms are round thee—wake !

*She kisses his brow. PHAON awakes, opens his arms, and with half closed eyes, exclaims,*

Melitta !

SAPPHO, *starting back.*

Ha !

PHAON.

Ah ! Who has waked me ? Who has, envious, scared  
The lovely vision in my dream away ?

Thou, Sappho ! Welcome ! Well I knew, indeed,

Beauty was standing at my side, and hence

All beauteous was the image in the dream.

But thou art sad. What ails thee ? Joyful I.

That which so late lay heavy on my breast,

As by a miracle has fled away ;

I breathe again now, painlessly and free.

Like to some wretch a sudden fall had hurled

Deep in the dismal kingdom of the sea,

Where shapes of terror reign and hollow dread,

When lifted upward by the waves' strong arm,

So that once more the sun's glad golden light,

The breeze's kiss, the cheerful sounds of earth,

Blended in one, about his senses play.

So joy-intoxicate and tranced I stand,

And wish, half sinking 'neath the weight of bliss,

For keener senses or for less of joy !

SAPPHO, *aside*.

Melitta !

PHAON.

Love, be joyous, bright, and gay !  
 All is so fair here, so divinely fair !  
 On wearied wings the summer evening sinks  
 Down in sweet languor on the earth's hush'd breast ;  
 The sea, athirst for love, soft heaves and falls,  
 Expectant bride of the great lord of day,  
 Whose chariot turns already towards the west.  
 In the tall poplar plays a timid breeze,  
 Which, dallying with the virgin columns, seems  
 To whisper love's low greetings all around,  
 To say, " Behold, we love ! O love as we ! "

SAPPHO, *aside*.

Oh ! almost might he steal my heart again.  
 But, no ! Too deeply have I read his own !

PHAON.

Gone is the fever and its giddy spell,  
 Which has enthralld me for so long a time ;  
 And ne'er, believe me, hast thou been so dear,  
 So truly dear, as at this hour thou art.  
 Come, let us joyful be,—yes, joyful, Sappho !  
 But tell me first what dost thou think of dreams ?

## SAPPHO.

Why, that they lie ; and I hate liars.

## PHAON.

See,

Just now, while sleeping, I myself have had  
 A passing singular and wondrous dream.  
 I found me at Olympia once again,  
 Just as I was that time I saw thee first,  
 At the great contest for the Prize of Song.  
 I stood again amidst rejoicing crowds,  
 Round me the din of chariots and of men,—  
 Then sounded forth a lyre, and all was still.  
 'Twas thou—thy song the golden joys of Love ;  
 And deeply was my inmost being stirr'd.  
 I rush'd impetuous towards thee, when, behold !  
 It seemed as though at once I knew thee not,  
 And yet the former shape was standing there ;  
 The rounded shoulder wore the purple still,  
 The lyre still sounded in the small white hand,  
 Only thy face had changed—had sudden changed—  
 Like clouds that drive athwart the azure sky ;  
 The laurel-wreath had vanished all away,  
 Gone was the sadness from the lofty brow,  
 The lips that echoed late with songs divine  
 Now smiled with lovely, but with earthly smile ;  
 The features that a Pallas might have worn

Changed to the simple visage of a child ;  
 'Twas thou, in short, and 'twas not thou. Meseemed  
 It now was Sappho, and was now—

SAPPHO, *shrieks out.*

Melitta !

PHAON.

Why, thou hast almost scared me. Who told thee  
 That it was she ? Myself I scarcely knew it.  
 Thou art perturbed, and I—

(SAPPHO, *waving her hand, motioning him to go.*)

PHAON.

What ! Must I go ?  
 Yet one word, Sappho, let me say to thee.

(SAPPHO *repeats the movement.*)

PHAON.

Thou wilt not hear. I am to go. I go !

(*Exit* PHAON.)

## SCENE II.

SAPPHO, *alone, after a pause.*

The bow is drawn.

(*Pressing her hands to her breast.*)

The arrow rankles here !

Who any longer doubts ? 'Tis clear—most clear,  
'Tis she who in his faithless bosom lives,  
'Tis she who floats before his traitor brow ;  
The very dreams that wait upon his sleep  
Must wear the semblance of her form,—her smile.  
And for a slave's sake Sappho is despised !  
Despised ! What, I ! Oh ! heaven, and by whom ?  
Am I no longer the same Sappho, then,  
Who used to look at monarchs at her feet,  
And gaily playing with their offered crowns,  
See—hear the proud ones, then dismiss their suit ?  
Am I the Sappho whom the whole of Greece  
Gladly proclaimed its proudest ornament ?  
Fool that I was ! Why came I from the height—  
The laurel-crowned where Aganippa flows  
And blends the muse-song with the starry choir,  
Down to the lowly valley's narrow bounds,  
Where falsehood, poverty, and crime, hold sway ?  
My place was there on high amidst the clouds ;  
Here is no room for me but in the grave !  
They who the gods elect their own to be  
May claim no kindred with the sons of Earth.  
The human and the superhuman lot  
May ne'er be mingled in the self-same cup.  
Of the two worlds thou mayest choose thee one ;  
But having chosen, there is no recall !

If once thou taste the golden fruit of fame,  
Like to the pomegranate of Proserpine  
It will devote thee to the silent shades,  
Unto the living no more to belong !  
What though life beckon beauteous to thee still,  
Sing its sweet strains of flattery to thine ear,  
Woo thee in guise of friendship and of love ?  
Beware, unblest one ! Wouldst thou pluck the rose ?  
Thou canst but force its thorns within thy breast.  
I will behold this wondrous beauty, then,  
Who boasts of triumph over Sappho won !  
What am I to believe ? Does memory lie,  
Bringing, when questioned, back before my mind,  
The unformed image of a simple child ?  
With quiet eyes, that ever seek the ground,  
With lips that only babble nurs'ry tales,  
And empty bosom, whose unmeaning throbs  
Only by love of play or dread of blame,  
Are ever quickened out of dull repose ?  
How was it that each charm escaped my eye  
Which drew him towards her by such mighty spell ?  
Melitta ! Yes, I'll see her ! Here, Melitta !



## SCENE III.

EUCCHARIS, SAPPHO.

EUCCHARIS.

Thou callest, lady ?

SAPPHO.

Yes ; I called Melitta.

Where is she ?

EUCCHARIS.

In her chamber, as I think.

SAPPHO.

Seeks she for solitude ? What does she there ?

EUCCHARIS.

I know not, but her very self seems changed,  
And strange her bearing through the live-long day.  
This morning she was silent, tearful, sad :  
Just now she met me with a joyous air,  
As bearing household garments on her head,  
She took her way down to the crystal brook,  
Which flows on shaded by the myrtle grove.

SAPPHO.

SAPPHO.

She glories in her triumph ! On—go on !

EUCCHARIS.

Curious to know what she was seeking there,  
I gently followed through the silent woods,  
And found her—

SAPPHO.

How ? With him ?

EUCCHARIS.

With whom ?

SAPPHO.

Go on.

EUCCHARIS.

I found her standing in the limpid stream,  
Her burden scattered on the shore—her robes  
High lifted—for she deemed no watcher near,  
Holding the water in her little hands,  
And rubbing carefully her arms and face,  
Which, with the sunlight shining through the leaves,  
And her own earnestness, so rosy glowed,  
That as she stood there, for some nymph of hers  
(The youngest of them all) Diana might—

SAPPHO.

I asked your narrative and not your praise.

EUCCHARIS.

Then, when the business of the bath was o'er,  
 And brow, and breast, and burning cheeks were dried,  
 She went back singing gladly to the house ;  
 But, in her own thoughts so absorbed and lost,  
 The leaves which I from out my ambush threw—  
 Intent on startling her—fell all unheeded.  
 On reaching home she hurried to her chamber,  
 Closed it, and then I know not what she did ;  
 I only heard her searching in the presses,  
 And with her search was blent a joyful song.

SAPPHO.

She *sings*, and Sappho—No ! I will not *weep* !  
 Bring her to me.

EUCCHARIS.

Melitta ?

SAPPHO.

Yes. Who else ?

Melitta !—ah ! a sweet, a gentle name,—  
 A musical, a magic, love-fraught name.  
 Melitta—Sappho—Go and bring her hither.

## SCENE IV.

SAPPHO *alone.* *She seats herself upon the bank and leans her head upon her hand. After a pause.*

I cannot! 'Tis in vain I call on Pride.

Alas! instead of Pride there answers Love!

*(Sinks back into her former position.)*

*Enter MELITTA, carefully drest—roses in her hair and on her bosom.*

Here am I.

SAPPHO *turns rapidly, then relapses.*

Oh! ye gods! she's fair indeed!

*(Hides her face in both hands—pause.)*

MELITTA.

You called for me?

SAPPHO.

How gaily she's attired,  
The false one,—to delight her lover's eyes!  
Scarce can I check the wrath that burns within.

*(Aside.)*

What festival to-day adorns thee thus?

MELITTA.

A festival !

SAPPHO.

Or why this dress ?—these flowers ?

MELITTA.

Thou oft hast chidden me because I wore  
So seldom (hoarding still for future time  
Or joyful day) the robes that thou hast given.  
To-day I thought of this, and knowing well  
This was a joyous and a festive day,  
I somewhat to adorn myself did try.

SAPPHO.

A joyous day ! Oh ! know I not the cause ?

MELITTA.

The cause !—Why, was it not thy own return ?  
Thy—scarce I know the cause—but I was glad.

SAPPHO.

Ah ! false one !

MELITTA.

Wherefore false ?

SAPPHO, *grasping her.*

Melitta, come,  
We two will calmly with each other speak.  
How old art thou ?

MELITTA.

Thou knowest, Sappho, well,  
What mournful fate o'ertook my childish years.  
To me no mother counted up their tale  
With love's exactness, yet I do believe  
They number now sixteen.

SAPPHO.

'Tis false—thou liest.

MELITTA.

I ?

SAPPHO.

Thou speak'st not truth !

MELITTA.

Yes, lady, ever !

SAPPHO.

Thou'rt scarce fifteen.

MELITTA.

It may be so, indeed.

SAPPHO.

So young in years, can she already be  
Thus ripe in falsehood? No! I'll not believe it!  
Nature can ne'er forswear her promise thus.  
No—no! it is impossible. Melitta,  
Canst thou remember still the far off day—  
'Tis thirteen years since then—when thou wast brought  
me?

Thou hadst been stolen by wild savage men,—  
Wert weeping, wailing piteously and loud.  
I had compassion on the homeless child;  
Its tears were prayers. The ransom-price I gave;  
And, still a childish thing myself, I press'd  
Thee to my youthful heart with fervent love.  
They wanted to remove thee, but in vain;  
Thy hands were firmly locked about my neck  
Until the soother, sleep, relaxed their hold:—  
Canst thou remember still that day, Melitta?

MELITTA.

Oh! can it ever, ever be forgot?

SAPPHO.

And then, soon after, when the serpent-coils

Of venom'd fever were around thee twined,  
 Who was it watch'd thee all the long night through,  
 And made her head a pillow for thine own ?  
 Who, self-forgetting, wrestled long with death,  
 Intent to win from him his precious prey,  
 And won—in pain and sorrow, won it back ?

MELITTA.

'Twas thou, O Sappho ! What do I possess  
 That is not to thee—to thy kindness owed ?

SAPPHO.

Not so !—come hither to my breast—come hither ;  
 I knew it well—thou couldst not me betray—  
 Not knowingly—not willingly betray.  
 Oh ! let our hearts upon each other beat,  
 Our eyes be fix'd upon a sister's eyes,  
 Our very words be blend'd as our breath,  
 So that each ear, each heart—most sweetly cheated  
 By such complete and perfect harmony—  
 May recognise its self, but not its speech.

MELITTA.

Oh ! Sappho !

SAPPHO.

Is't not so ! I was deceived.



MELITTA.

In what ?

SAPPHO.

How couldest thou ? thou could'st not. No !

MELITTA.

What ? oh, my mistress !

SAPPHO.

No ! thou could'st not. Go—

First lay aside this foolish vain attire ;  
 I like not thus to see thee.—Other garb !  
 These ornaments offend mine eye—away !  
 Melitta's form should simply still appear ;  
 So much disguise betokens the disguised.  
 Go—put on other garments—go, I say !  
 Stop !—whither go'st thou ? stay !—look in mine eyes.  
 Wherefore this down-cast glance ? Dost fear to meet  
 Thy mistress' gaze ? thou wert not timid thus  
 When late with Phaon——

What ! thou blushest now ?  
 Traitress ! thou hast at last betrayed thyself.  
 Would'st further lie ?—not to thy false, false tongue,  
 But to thy blushing cheeks will I give heed.

The reflex caught from that presumptuous flame  
 That deep within thy artful bosom burns.  
 Unblest one ! this was then the reason why  
 Thy bearing at the table was so strange :  
 That which I thought a token of meek shame  
 Was but the artful courtesan-like lure,  
 The spider-web spun round the thoughtless prey.  
 So young, and yet so cunning ! blooming fair,  
 And yet with poison in thy subtle heart !  
 Stand not thus dumb ! What ! hast thou lack of words ?  
 Has then thy tongue got only power to sting ?  
 Answer at once !

MELITTA.

I know not what you mean.

SAPPHO.

Dost not, poor child ?—Now tears come ! do not weep ;  
 Tears are the holy right that sorrow claims.  
 Speak *thou* with words,—they long have perjured been ;  
 Use not the silent speech of innocence.—  
 So bride-like in attire—so gaily decked !  
 Away these flowers—their aid cannot avail  
 The ill-concealéd serpent to disguise.  
 Down with thy roses !

(MELITTA *silently takes off her wreath.*)

Give to me those flowers,  
 I'll treasure them in memory of thee ;  
 And as their early faded leaves decay  
 I'll think on my good fortune and thy truth.—  
 Why sparest thou the rose within thy breast ?  
 Throw it away.

(MELITTA *starts back.*)

SAPPHO.

What ! Is't a pledge of love ?  
 Off with it !

MELITTA, *crossing both her arms on her breast and concealing  
 the rose.*

Never !

SAPPHO.

To resist is vain.  
 The rose !

MELITTA, *flying from her, her hands firmly crossed over her  
 breast.*

Oh ! take my life instead !

SAPPHO.

SAPPHO.

Thou snake!

*I too can sting! (Drawing a dagger.)*

Give me the rose!

MELITTA.

Ye gods!

Protect me, ye!—protect me, gracious gods!

## SCENE VI.

*Enter PHAON.*

What meaneth this? Thou—Sappho!

SAPPHO.

Ask of her.

PHAON.

Melitta, hast thou then—

MELITTA.

The fault was mine.

I spoke to her as seemeth not a slave.

SAPPHO.

Thou needest not to claim unreal guilt :  
 Too heavy on thee lies thy real crime.  
 Alas ! that I should need excuse from thee.  
 (*In a louder voice.*)

I asked from her the rose upon her breast,  
 And she refused it.

PHAON.

Did she so, indeed ?

By all the gods she has most rightly done !  
 Myself I gave it to her as a pledge  
 Of one fair mutual hour ; as seal and proof  
 That sympathy and feeling were not quenched  
 In every heart for suffering undeserved ;  
 As one small drop of honey in the cup  
 Pressed to her lips by overbearing pride ;  
 As token of my own assured belief  
 That calm repose is woman's ornament ;  
 And that the flower-wreath worn by innocence  
 Is far more precious than Fame's laurel crown !—  
 She weeps ! Oh ! do not weep, Melitta mine !  
 What ! didst thou pay the price of tears like these  
 When thou didst buy her from those savage men ?—  
 Her body is thine own. Come hither—kill—  
 But not one tear-drop shalt thou wring out more !  
 Look'st *thou* upon me with thy gentle eyes,

For mercy pleading towards the merciless ?  
 Thou know'st her not—thou knowest not her pride.  
 Look at the dagger glancing in her hand,  
 And those two others that half-hidden shine  
 Beneath the shadow of her downcast lids !

*(Seizes the dagger that is falling out of SAPPHO'S hands.)*

Give me this steel and I will wear it here,  
 On this warm beating, this deluded heart ;  
 And, if a vision of past days should e'er  
 Flit in sweet mournfulness across my mind,  
 One look upon this steel will set me free !

*SAPPHO, looking fixedly at him.*

Phaon !

PHAON.

Oh ! list not to the honeyed tone,  
 It flatters but to lure thee to thy death !  
 I too have often heard it. Long ago,  
 Before I ever saw her, from afar  
 Her web of melody was round me flung ;  
 By golden threads she drew me to herself,  
 And less and less, despite my strivings, grew  
 The magic circles that inclosed me fast.  
 Then, when I saw her, wild delirium seized  
 Upon my high-wrought soul, and weak and prone  
 I fell a captive at the proud one's feet.

Thy glance at first restored me to myself ;  
 I, shuddering, found around me Circe's halls,  
 And felt my neck already bowed and bent ;—  
 Yet was I not released. 'Twas she herself  
 Who needs her own enchantments must dissolve.

SAPPHO, *still looking at him.*

Phaon !

PHAON.

Oh ! do not listen—do not look !  
 Her eyes can kill as surely as her hand !

MELITTA.

She weeps !

PHAON.

Away ! There's magic in her tears.

MELITTA.

Shall I my much-loved lady suffering see ?

PHAON.

Her spells work on me too. Away—away !  
 Before her toils be further round thee cast.

*(Leading her away.)*

SAPPHO.

MELITTA.

I cannot—Sappho !

SAPPHO, *with broken voice.*

Call'st thou me, Melitta ?

MELITTA, *returning and embracing her knees.*

Look on me, Sappho ! Take the rose—'tis here ;  
Take it, and take my life. Where is thy steel ?

PHAON, *rushing in, tearing away the rose, which both are  
holding, and raising* MELITTA.

*Thine* is it—*thine*. No god shall take it from thee.  
Come quickly from her presence—come !

(*Drags away* MELITTA.)

SAPPHO, *with outstretched arms, calls out,*

Phaon !

(*The curtain falls.*)



## ACT FOURTH.

*An open country, as in the former Act.—Moonlight.*

## SCENE I.

*Enter SAPPHO, lost in thought. She remains standing.*

Do I still live ? Does anything still live ?  
This great wide world around me fell not then  
To utter ruin in that fearful hour !  
This darkness—heavy brooding o'er me now—  
It is the Night and not the Grave !  
They say, indeed, some strange and boundless griefs  
Have power to kill. Alas ! it is not so.  
'Tis silent round me here—the breezes sleep,  
The cheerful tones of life are hush'd and mute,  
No sound is stirring through the moveless leaves,  
And lonely, like a lost benighted stranger,  
My voice of weeping wanders through the night.  
If I could only sleep as do the birds ;  
But longer, longer—not awaking more,  
Hid in the breast of deeper, sweeter slumber,  
Where all, all—e'en the very pulses—sleep,  
Nor morning beams arouse to sorrows new,  
Nor ingrate—hush ! stir not the coiléd snake.

(*With a broken voice.*)

'Tis true that murder is a hideous crime,  
And theft, and falsehood, and what else so'er  
By which the hydra's many heads are named,  
That poison-bloated, which by hell begot,  
Infects this fair world with its burning breath.  
Yes, hideous, shameful, deadly crimes are all ;  
Yet know I one before whose blackness seem  
The rest to change to lily-white their hue ;—  
Ingratitude its name ! Alone it does  
The whole dark work that all the others share.  
It lies, it robs, deceives, swears perjur'd oaths,  
Betrays and murders ! Oh ingratitude !  
Protect me, gods, protect me from myself !  
The gloomy powers within the soul awake,  
And fiercely shake their prison's iron bars !  
Him had I pray'd for from the hands of fate,—  
From among mortals begged for him alone.  
I would have placed him on our nature's summit,  
Exalted him o'er all his fellow-men,  
Bearing him on the mighty wings of fame—  
O'er death, the grave, and o'er oblivion's bounds,  
To the bright distance of an after age.  
All that I may and can do, all I am,  
I would have twined as wreaths around his head,  
One gentle word but asking as reward !  
And he—just gods !—and do ye live there still !

*(As if struck by some sudden thought.)*

Ye live indeed ;—from you descends the thought  
 Whose light has burst at once upon my soul.  
 Let me then seize thee, messenger from heaven,  
 And catch the rapid word thy lips have framed.  
 To Chios ! speak'st thou, shall Melitta go ?  
 To Chios ! where from the betrayer parted,  
 Her spell-bound heart in penitence may turn,  
 By love's regrets to expiate love's crime.  
 So be it then—What Rhamnes ! Rhamnes ! yes,  
 Thanks, ye immortals, for this light divine !  
 I will obey it.

## SCENE II.

RHAMNES.

What commandest thou ?

SAPPHO.

She is my work ; what had she been without me ?  
 And who denies the sculptor's lawful right  
 To break the image he himself has made ?  
 To break—but can I then ? alas ! her bliss  
 Is far too high for my weak hand to reach.  
 If companied to Chios by her love,

Is she not happier, 'midst the herd of slaves,  
Than I, in golden but love-empty halls ?  
It is so sweet to suffer for the loved,  
And hope and memory are roses fair,  
Of the same stem that bears reality,  
Only without its thorns. Oh ! banish me  
Far in the distance of some unknown sea,  
Upon a rock whose steep and barren verge  
Knows no companion save the winds and surge,  
Rudely cut off from every living way.  
But be these last few fatal hours, I pray,  
All torn from out the scroll of memory !  
Faith in his love alone be left to me,  
And I will praise my lot, and joyful dwell,  
Not solitary in that solitude ;  
At every thorn that tears my tender feet,  
In every sorrow to myself I'll say,  
" Oh ! if he knew it," and " He thinks of me ;  
What would he give to rescue ?" Thus a balm  
At once were poured in—healing every wound.

## RHAMNES.

Just now you called for me, my noble lady !

## SAPPHO.

Oh ! Phaon, Phaon, what did I to thee ?  
In poetry's domain so peaceful standing,

Companion'd by my golden lyre alone,  
I calmly looked down on the joys of earth,  
And all its sorrows could not reach my throne.  
Not by the hours, but by bright blossoms woven  
Into the radiant wreath of poesy,  
I marked the flight of all too rapid time.  
What to my song I gave, it gave me back,  
And endless youth was green around my head.  
Then came the cruel, and with impious hand  
Tore off from me the golden veil I wore,  
And dragged me down into the barren waste,  
Where sounds no footstep, winds no path along.  
Then, when his own the only form that beamed  
Upon my sight in all that desert wild,  
He draws his hand from mine, and disappears !

RHAMNES.

Oh ! lady, wherefore thus in darkness stay,  
With the damp sea-breeze and the night around ?

SAPPHO.

Know'st thou a worse crime than ingratitude ?

RHAMNES.

I do not.

SAPPHO.

SAPPHO.

A more envenomed ?

RHAMNES.

None indeed.

SAPPHO.

A more abhorred, a more accursed crime ?

RHAMNES.

It is but just to visit it with curses.

SAPPHO.

It is, it is ; all other vices are—  
 Hyenas, tigers, lions, wolves indeed,—  
 Ingratitude's the *snake*. Is't not—the snake ?  
 So beauteous, shining, smooth, envenom'd—oh !

RHAMNES.

Come in with me, thou wilt be better there ;  
 The house is carefully adorned for thee,  
 And Phaon waits thee in the pillar'd hall.

SAPPHO.

How ! Phaon waits for me ?

RHAMNES.

My mistress, yes.

I saw him pacing thoughtful to and fro,  
 Then sudden stop, and muttering low words,  
 Walk to the window, gazing through the night.

SAPPHO.

He waits for me,—dear Rhamnes, *said* he so ?  
 He waits for *me*—for Sappho ?

RHAMNES.

Not in words ;

But yet I saw him waiting, listening, stand.  
 Whom should he wait for ?

SAPPHO.

Whom ? Ay, whom indeed ?

He waits not Sappho ; but he waits in vain.  
 Rhamnes—

RHAMNES.

My mistress.

SAPPHO.

There in Chios dwells,  
 Thou know'st, a friend of mine from earliest days.

SAPPHO.

RHAMNES.

I know it.

SAPPHO.

Loose at once the boat that's moored  
There on the strand, within the nearest creek ;  
For thou must go this very night to Chios.—

RHAMNES.

Alone !

SAPPHO.

No.

*(A pause.)*

RHAMNES.

Who then follows to the boat ?

SAPPHO.

What say'st thou ?

RHAMNES.

Who to Chios with me—

SAPPHO, *leading him to the other side of the stage.*

Come !

Be silent, cautious. Dost thou hear me well ?



Go to Melitta's chamber, and command  
That she come hither ; say that Sappho calls.  
But be thou cautious lest *he* hear thee.

RHAMNES.

Who ?

SAPPHO.

Who ! Phaon. If she follow—

RHAMNES.

What ?

SAPPHO.

Then lead ;

Lead her on willingly, or else by force,  
But silently, into the unmoored boat.  
To Chios then at once away,—

RHAMNES.

And there ?

SAPPHO.

There give her up to him, my early friend.  
He is to guard her until I recall ;  
And strictly—no, not strictly to secure—  
Her punishment already is enough.

SAPPHO.

RHAMNES.

I go.

SAPPHO.

Delay not.

RHAMNES.

Fare thee well, O Sappho,  
 Far shall we be from hence when morning dawns :  
 Thou shalt approve thine ancient servant's zeal.

## SCENE III.

SAPPHO, *alone.*

He's gone. Yet—No! Alas! a heavy chain  
 Is habit, binding e'en to what we hate!

*(Lost in thought.)*

Hush! footsteps. No, the wind. How sad and drear  
 Beats my poor heart within my storm-tossed breast :  
 Now voices—ha! she comes! she willing comes.  
 She does not dream that for the last time she—  
 Hence! for I will not see her—cannot see.

*(Exit in haste.)*

## SCENE IV.

MELITTA, RHAMNES.

MELITTA.

'Twas here thou saidst I should my mistress find :  
She is not here.

RHAMNES, *looks round in confusion.*

Not here ; no, truly not ;  
Yet was she here few moments since. Then come.

MELITTA.

Whither ?

RHAMNES.

Perchance she may have wandered down  
To the ravine upon the sea-shore near.

MELITTA.

She never goes there.

RHAMNES.

Yet perhaps to-day—

MELITTA.

And wherefore then to-day ?

RHAMNES.

Wherefore ? because—

*(Aside.)*

Alas ! that such a task be laid on me—  
I dare not meet her eye—know nought to say.

MELITTA.

Thou art so strange—thou turnest half away,  
As though thine eyes fear'd to confirm thy words.  
What ails thee, that thou art so sad and grave ?  
Tell me where Sappho hides, that I may find her ;  
Or, if thou know'st not, let me go.

RHAMNES.

Remain !

Thou must not go.

MELITTA.

And why ?

RHAMNES.

Thou must with me.

MELITTA.

Whither ?

RHAMNES.

To—Come with me to the ravine  
And thou shalt know.

MELITTA.

Great gods ! what meaneth this ?

RHAMNES.

Come, maiden, half the midnight hour is past,—  
Time presses—onward then.

MELITTA.

What meanest thou ?  
Onward, and whither ? To some distant shore ?

RHAMNES.

Child, be at ease, I say. Some distant shore ?  
What art thou dreaming of ? Is Chios far ?

MELITTA.

To Chios !—never !

RHAMNES.

But thou must, my child ;  
Thy mistress wills it.

MELITTA.

Sappho ! sayest thou ?  
I will to her.

RHAMNES.

Not so.

SAPPHO.

MELITTA.

Yes, to her feet ;  
She'll hear and judge !

RHAMNES.

Thou shalt not leave this spot.

MELITTA.

How, Rhamnes ! *Thou !*

RHAMNES.

What can I else, poor child !  
I am commanded thus, and I obey.

MELITTA.

Let me implore thee—

RHAMNES.

What can that avail ?  
What though the tears be standing in my eyes,  
It must be done. And therefore onward, child.

MELITTA.

Here lie I at thy feet. Oh, yield to prayer !  
Is there, then, no one who will hear and save ?

RHAMNES.

In vain.—Thou'lt wake the house. Come on with me.

MELITTA.

No, never! Is there none will pity show?

## SCENE V.

*Enter PHAON.*

That was Melitta's voice! Audacious!—What!  
Slave, hast thou raised thy daring hand 'gainst her?

*(RHAMNES releases her.)*

My strange foreboding did not then deceive,  
What time I saw thee, with thy stealthy glance,  
Creep like a wolf towards Melitta's chamber;  
Yet, grim destroyer, thou hast missed thine aim;  
The shepherd wakes, and thou art near thy death.

RHAMNES.

My lord, I acted thus by Sappho's bidding.

PHAON.

What! Sappho's bidding!—She enjoined thee thus.  
Oh! Sappho, Sappho! now I know thee well.  
But all too late, alas! Too late! and why?  
Yet is there time to shake away the chain

From her and me ; and by the gods I will !  
 Thou ready servant of an impious cause,  
 Wherefore— ? Melitta, thou art pale and trembling.

MELITTA.

Oh ! it is well with me.

PHAON.

Rejoice, thou slave!  
 For had a pebble e'en her soft foot bruised,  
 By heaven ! thou shouldst with dying gasps have paid  
 For every single tear that she had shed.  
 Thou seemest weary ; lean on me, beloved ;  
 Thou couldst not find thee out a safer stay.  
 Look here, thou ruffian ! 'twas this lovely form,  
 This heavenly being, that thou wouldest injure.

RHAMNES.

Not injure !

PHAON.

What then ?

RHAMNES.

Only——but forgive,  
 I cannot tell thee what my purpose was,—  
 Therefore release me.



PHAON, *relinquishing* MELITTA.

No, by all the gods!

I burn to know the measure of thy crime:—

What was thy purpose?

RHAMNES.

That she should depart.

PHAON.

Whither?

RHAMNES.

To——*that* my lady's secret is.

PHAON.

Thou wilt not speak it?

RHAMNES, *laying his hand on his breast.*

She has placed it here,

And safely will I lock it in my breast.

PHAON.

This steel shall open, then. Thanks, Sappho, thanks!

Thou gavest me a weapon 'gainst thyself.

*(Draws the dagger.)*

No more concealment, or I am prepared

To force the secret with my dagger's point.

SAPPHO.

MELITTA.

Oh ! spare him ! I to Chios was to go.

PHAON.

To Chios !

MELITTA.

There a friend of Sappho lives :—  
He would have guarded poor Melitta well.

PHAON.

How cross the sea ?

MELITTA.

A boat waits on the strand.

PHAON.

A boat !

MELITTA.

So said he. Didst not, father ?

RHAMNES.

Call me not father, thou ungrateful child,  
Betraying thus thy mistress.

PHAON.

What ! a boat ?

MELITTA, to RHAMNES.

What have I done that thou should'st blame me so ?  
He asked——

PHAON.

A boat ! So let it be. I hail  
The omen. 'Tis from you, kind gods !  
I have been slow to understand your voice.  
She is the one—or there is none on earth  
Who in her bosom bears the sever'd half  
Of that which yearning tow'rds her throbs in mine.  
Yourselves ye point the way that now I choose.  
Melitta ! yes, thou shalt to Chios go ;  
But not alone. With me, love—at my side.

MELITTA.

With him !

PHAON.

Forsake this cold and stranger land,  
Where the Medusa heads of Envy, Hate,  
And fierce Revenge, are glaring on thy path,  
And deadly snares are by thy rival laid.  
Come !—there the boat—here courage, strength, and  
skill,  
To guard thee safely though against a world.

(*Clasps her to his breast.*)

MELITTA, *sadly*.

Rhamnes !

RHAMNES.

Reflect, my lord.

PHAON.

Thyself reflect,  
That thou art now completely in my power.

RHAMNES.

My lord, she's Sappho's.

PHAON.

Liar ! she is mine !

(*To MELITTA.*)

Come, follow me !

RHAMNES.

The dwellers in this isle  
All honour Sappho as their princely head ;  
They, at the least appeal, are all prepared  
In arms to guard their Sappho's threshold well ;—  
A word from me, and hundreds will arise !

PHAON.

Thou warnest wisely. I had half forgot  
With whom I am and where. Thou go'st with us!

RHAMNES.

What, I?

PHAON.

Yes, thou! yet only to the coast.  
I do not envy Sappho such a slave.  
When we are safe then mayest thou return,  
Relate our flight, and—but it is enough—  
Prepare to follow!

RHAMNES.

Never!

PHAON.

I, methinks,  
Hold what ensures obedience.

RHAMNES, *approaching the house.*

Help! I say.

PHAON, *stopping the way, approaches him, dagger in hand.*  
Down to the shades then, since thou will'st it so.

Small price, indeed, the death of such as thou  
To save and free this pure one.

MELITTA.

Stay thy hand!

PHAON.

If he obey——

*RHAMNES, who has retreated to the opposite side.*

Alas! alas! old age!  
No longer do my will and power agree.

PHAON.

Now, maiden, come.

MELITTA.

But whither?

PHAON.

To the boat.

*MELITTA hurries from him to the foreground.*

Shall I, ye gods?

PHAON.

Away! the darkness lends

To us the safety of its sheltering wing ;  
 There—far across the old and hoary sea—  
 Dwells sweet security—dwell peace and love.  
 Oh ! follow, 'neath the spreading linden shade  
 That o'er my parents' quiet dwelling broods,—  
 Shall rise, belov'd, the temple of our bliss.

(*Embracing her.*)

What ! dost thou tremble ? Tremble, lovely bride !  
 Thy bridegroom's arm is firmly round thee cast.—  
 Come with me. If thou wilt not, by the gods  
 These hands shall bear thee in their grasp away  
 And onward—onward to the verge of earth.

MELITTA.

Oh ! Phaon—

PHAON.

Come, the stars look friendly down,  
 The sea soft murmurs—gentle breezes blow,  
 And Amphitrite is the friend of love.

(*To RHAMNES.*)

Onward !

RHAMNES.

My lord !

PHAON.

Thy life's at stake, I tell thee.

(*Exeunt.*)

## SCENE VI.

*A pause, then EUCHARIS appears on the threshold.*

EUCHARIS.

Rhamnes !

*(She descends.)*

I thought I surely heard his voice.  
 No !—there is no one here. I was deceived.  
 An evil spirit seems to hold misrule  
 Over this house since Sappho has return'd ;  
 Its dwellers, scared and anxious, roam apart,  
 Grief and suspicion rest on every brow,  
 I sought Melitta—found her chamber empty ;  
 Our mistress wanders lonely through the night ;  
 Here heard I Rhamnes' voice, and he's not here.—  
 O that it were but morning !—Hark !

RHAMNES, *at a distance.*

To arms !

EUCHARIS.

They call !

RHAMNES, *nearer.*

Hither !



EUCCHARIS.

Ha, Rhamnes !

RHAMNES, *at hand.*

Follow, slaves !

EUCCHARIS.

He is all breathless. Rhamnes, what is this ?

## SCENE VII.

*Enter RHAMNES, in haste.*

RHAMNES.

Up from your slumbers, up ! Come hither, friends ;  
Follow the fugitives. Help ! help !

EUCCHARIS.

Oh ! why ?

RHAMNES.

Ask not. Call Sappho, and her servants all.

EUCCHARIS.

Wherefore ?

RHAMNES.

This is no time for words. Go, go.  
Wake up the household, and then speed to rescue.

EUCHARIS.

What may this mean ?

*(Runs up the steps.)*

RHAMNES.

I can no more. Ye traitors,  
Rejoice not thus. The ocean Deities  
Will sure avenge so horrible a deed !

*(Enter more and more slaves.)*

Speed to the valley ; wake the dwellers all ;  
Oh, ask not wherefore : hence, and sound alarm !

*(Exeunt slaves.)*

## SCENE VIII.

SAPPHO.

What sound of terror through the still night rings,  
Usurping grief's sleep-murd'ring office thus ;  
Who here has reason to lament save I ?

SAPPHO.

105

RHAMNES.

I, oh ! my mistress,—

SAPPHO.

What ! is Rhamnes here ?

And where is she ?

RHAMNES.     •

Melitta ?

SAPPHO.

Yes.

RHAMNES.

She's gone.

SAPPHO.

Gone ! and yet thou here ?

RHAMNES.

She has fled, and with—

SAPPHO.

Stop !

SAPPHO.

RHAMNES.

Has fled with Phaon.

SAPPHO.

No !

RHAMNES.

Alas ! she has.

He overpowered my helpless weak old age,  
 And in the very boat for me prepar'd,  
 He bears away his captive o'er the waves.

SAPPHO.

Thou liest !

RHAMNES.

Oh ! that for once I did lie.

SAPPHO.

Where are your thunder-bolts, immortal gods ?  
 Have you then griefs for Sappho's heart alone ?  
 Is the right arm of vengeance weak and lame ?  
 Oh, hurl your dread avenging light'nings down  
 Upon the heads of this most guilty pair !  
 Blast them, ye gods, as ye have blasted me !  
 In vain. No flash disturbs the quiet air ;  
 The winds are whisp'ring softly to the leaves,

And on its broad smooth breast the sea upheaves  
 The bark of love still farther from this shore.  
 There is no help : then Sappho, help thyself !

*(The stage becomes gradually filled with slaves bearing torches,  
 and citizens.)*

Ha ! these appear. I thank you, faithful hearts.  
 Man will bestow, then, what the gods deny.  
 Haste ! haste ! my friends ; revenge your Sappho's cause :  
 If ever I was dear, oh ! prove it now !

*(Going amongst them.)*

Thou, Myron, oft didst swear, and thou, Terpander :  
 Licas, bethink thee of the song—thou Pheres—  
 And thou, Xenarchus—all kind friends and true,  
 Haste to the shore ; at once take ship, spread sail,  
 And follow swiftly on the traitor's track.  
 Think that I wait for you in anguish here ;  
 That every moment until you return  
 Sends home a thousand daggers to my breast.  
 He who but brings him—but gives me the joy  
 Of fixing my deep searching eyes on his—  
 Of asking once—"What have I done to thee,

*(Bursts into tears)*

That thou shouldst kill me ?" No—revenge alone !—  
 Who brings him to me, let him take my gold,  
 My life.—Away, forth, on the wind's swift wing !

SAPPHO.

A CITIZEN.

Only with him will we return.

SAPPHO.

I thank ye.

*(To the departing.)*

Remember that my life is in your hands :  
 Oh ! let my wishes wing your rapid feet,  
 And my revenge give strength to every arm.  
 But haste, but haste, I pray you, by the gods !

*(Exeunt SERVANTS and CITIZENS.)*

SAPPHO, *her hands pressed to her breast.*

They go : now am I well ; now will I rest !

EUCCHARIS.

Thou tremblest.

RHAMNES.

See, she totters ;—Sappho !

EUCCHARIS, *seizing her in his arms.*

Gods !

SAPPHO, *supported by* EUCCHARIS.

Oh ! let me sink ; wherefore uphold me thus !

*(Curtain falls.)*

## ACT FIFTH.

SCENE—*An open country, as in the former Acts—break of day.*

## SCENE I.

SAPPHO, *half lying, half sitting, upon the grassy bank, gazing fixedly before her.* At a little distance, EUCHARIS; farther off, other SLAVES.

*Enter RHAMNES.*

EUCHARIS, *her finger on her lips.*

Hush! hush!

RHAMNES.

She sleeps!

EUCHARIS.

Her eyes are open'd wide;  
Her body wakes, her spirit seems asleep;  
For three whole hours she motionless has lain.

RHAMNES.

She should be led into the house.

SAPPHO.

EUCCHARIS.

I tried,  
But she refuses. No sign yet ?

RHAMNES.

No sign.  
Far as the eye can reach but sea and clouds ;  
Still of a vessel not the smallest trace.

SAPPHO, *rising*.

A vessel ! Where ?

RHAMNES.

We have not seen it, lady.

SAPPHO, *sinking back*.

Not yet—not yet !

RHAMNES.

The morning air grows chill.  
Deign to be led by us into thy chamber.

(SAPPHO *shakes her head in refusal.*)

RHAMNES.

Yield to our prayers ; come with us to the house.

(SAPPHO *shakes her head again.*)



RHAMNES, *retreating.*

Thou wilt not!—Thus to see her rends my heart!

EUCHARIS.

Look—look! why throng the people?

RHAMNES.

I will see.

EUCHARIS.

They hurry to the shore—methinks they come.

SAPPHO, *springing up.*

Ha!

*(She continues bent down in the attitude of intense listening.)*

EUCHARIS.

Look down, Rhamnes, from the rocky height;  
Perhaps thou mayest see them.

RHAMNES.

I will go.

*(Ascending a rock that overhangs the shore.)*

EUCHARIS.

Oh! haste! what seest thou now?

SAPPHO.

RHAMNES.

Thanks, thanks, ye gods !

They 're coming !

SAPPHO.

Ah !

RHAMNES.

The wooded point of land  
That stretches far in ocean to the left,  
Has hid from me the welcome sight till now.  
A fleet of boats comes crowding to the shore,  
With rapid oar-strokes on each other pressing.

EUCCHARIS.

But are the fugitives among the throng ?

RHAMNES.

The sun's rays dazzle me ; I cannot tell.  
Yet stay ; a boat already nears the shore,  
As if the joyous tidings to convey—  
It grounds. A shepherd from this dale leaps out ;  
He waves his staff ; they certainly are found.  
Hither, my friend ; come hither. There he is.

*(Comes down from the rock.)*

EUCCHARIS.

Dear mistress, calm thyself ; be firm and strong.

## SCENE II.

*Enter the* SHEPHERD.

Hail to thee, Sappho !

EUCHARIS.

Is he taken ?

CITIZEN.

Yes.

RHAMNES.

But where ?

EUCHARIS.

And how ?

CITIZEN.

They had the start of us,  
And he's a gallant rower. Half I thought  
We never should o'ertake his rapid flight.  
At last in open sea we saw afar  
His little bark ; and then in chase we sped.  
Soon was he reached, and soon by us surrounded :  
We bade him change his course,—but he refused,

And with his left arm round the maiden cast,  
 He in his right swung round a naked blade.  
 What ails you, gracious lady ?

(SAPPHO beckons him to proceed.)

Thus it was:—

His uprais'd sword was threat'ning turn'd toward us,  
 Until an oar-stroke that was aimed at him  
 Happened to strike the little maiden's brow.

(SAPPHO hides her eyes with her hand.)

She sank ! He clasp'd her in his arms ; while we,  
 Seizing the lucky moment, leapt on board,  
 And took him prisoner, and brought him back.  
 Already they have landed : see them both :  
 The little maiden still walks tott'ring.

SAPPHO.

Ha !

Not here ?

RHAMNES.

Where else ? They are already come.

SAPPHO.

Oh ! who will save me from his presence—who ?  
 Thou, Aphrodite—thou thy servant shield.

(She hurries to the back-ground, and clasps the altar ; the attendants close around her.)

## SCENE III.

PHAON, *leading* MELITTA.—CITIZENS.—SAPPHO, *with her servants, in the back-ground.*

PHAON.

Is there among you who to touch her dares ?  
I am not all defenceless, though unarmed.  
In her defence my hand a sword would grow,  
And every limb of mine become an arm.  
Hither, Melitta, hither. Tremble not ;  
No ill shall happen to thee while I breathe !  
Ruffians ! ye would then dare to harm this head,  
This innocent, pure head ; and are ye men ?  
Only a woman deem'd I cruel thus ;  
A woman, cowardly, enraged and weak !  
'Twas thou who struck her ; yes, I know thee well :  
Away from me—away ! lest I should rob  
The gods of vengeance of their destin'd prey.  
How feelest thou ?

MELITTA.

Well.

PHAON.

Oh ! thy glance says nay !

This trembling and this pallor they betray  
 The first untruth that ever pass'd thy lips !  
 Seek not to quench the rage within my heart,—  
 Thou dost but fan it to a fiercer flame.  
 Here, sit thee down upon this grassy bank—  
 Here, where thy mild, thy heavenly beaming eyes  
 First shone upon me with their light serene ;  
 And—like the golden rays of morning dawn,  
 Freed from the gloomy bondage of the sleep  
 To which I had been by th' enchantress sung—  
 Since here the blessed work of love began,  
 Let it be also on this spot fulfilled.  
 Say, where is Sappho ?

MELITTA.

Phaon, call her not.

PHAON.

Be calm. What ! am I not a free man, then ?  
 Who gave to her the right to stop my way ?  
 There yet are judgment-seats on Grecian ground,—  
 This shall the proud one to her terror learn.  
 To Sappho—come !

CITIZEN.

Remain !

PHAON.

Who holds me ? Who ?

CITIZEN.

We all, assembled here.

PHAON.

I am a free man.

CITIZEN.

Free wert thou ?—now a debtor to the laws.

PHAON.

A debtor ?—and for what ?

CITIZEN.

The stolen slave  
Calls to the laws for vengeance on thy head.

PHAON.

Sappho may ask a ransom price for her,  
And I will pay it, were it Croesus' wealth.

CITIZEN.

'Tis hers to ask—not thine to offer this.

PHAON.

Are ye so tame that to a woman's rage  
Ye patient lend the aid of manly arms,  
And stoop to serve her love's caprices thus ?  
Be on my side—unjustly dragg'd back here !

CITIZEN.

Just or unjust—'tis Sappho shall decide.

PHAON.

Speakest thou thus, old man, without a blush ?  
Who, then, is Sappho, that thou shouldest deem  
Her sentence equal to the law's decree ?  
Is she the ruler in your land ?

CITIZEN.

She is ;

Not that she governs, but that we obey.

PHAON.

Has she, then, spun her web around ye all ?  
Yet will I prove how far her magic sways.

*(Going towards the house.)*

To her, then——



CITIZEN.

Back !

PHAON.

In vain your threat'nings all.

I will—must see her. Sappho, hither come !

Where art thou ? Dost thou tremble at my sight ?

Ha ! at the altar, midst her servants hid.

'Tis she ! 'Thou shalt not thus escape me. Here !

*(Breaks through the crowd, the circle of slaves opens—**SAPPHO lies prostrate on the steps of the altar.)*

CITIZEN.

Thou darest, then, thou bold presumptuous boy !

PHAON.

What seek'st thou at the altar from the gods ?

They hear not prayer from wicked hearts. Stand up !

*(He grasps her—at his touch she springs up, and without looking at him, hurries, with wild step, to the foreground.)*Wouldst thou then shun me ? Thou must stand  
and speak.

What ! tremblest thou ? Thou doest well to tremble.

Know'st thou what thou hast done ? What right  
hast thou,

That thou hast dared a free unshackled man,

Who but belongeth to himself alone,  
 Here to detain in most unlawful bands ?  
 Look at these men in all unwonted arms ;  
 Hast thou, then, sent them forth ? Hast done this ?—  
 Speak !  
 What ! dumb ? The poetess' sweet lips are dumb !

SAPPHO.

It is too much !

PHAON.

Thy cheeks are blushing deep,—  
 Are crimson with thy fury's burning glow.  
 Right—throw thy mask away—seem what thou art,  
 And kill—yes, kill, thou false deceiving Circe !

SAPPHO.

It is too much. Come, arm thyself, my heart !

PHAON.

Answer me, didst thou send these men or no ?

SAPPHO to RHAMNES.

Go thou and bring me back my former slave :  
 'Twas she, and no one else, I bade you seek.

PHAON.

Back—back ! let no one to approach her dare.  
 Demand a ransom ! Though I be not rich,  
 Yet gladly will my friends, my parents aid  
 To purchase from thy greed of gold my bliss.

SAPPHO, *still turning away.*

I ask not gold, but claim mine own.—She stays.

PHAON.

She does not stay. I swear it by the gods !  
 The right to her was forfeited by thee  
 When thou didst turn thy dagger 'gainst her breast !  
 Thou boughtest but her service—not her life.  
 Think'st thou that I will leave her in thy hands ?  
 Name thou the ransom : let Melitta go !

SAPPHO *to RHAMNES.*

Do that which I commanded !

PHAON.

Back ! I say ;  
 If thou but touch her, thou wilt meet thy death.  
 Hast thou, then, lost all human sympathies,  
 That human griefs can move thy heart no more ;  
 Thou fair but venom'd serpent, break thy lyre,

Let song no longer on thy lips be heard :  
 Thou hast misused the poet's golden gifts,  
 Profane not further poetry's sweet name.  
 She should have proved, midst life's dry leaves, a flow'r  
 Whose fragrant head was raised through purest air  
 Up to the stars, whose light she mirror'd back ;  
 But thou hast used her as a hemlock draught,  
 To bring thy foes to slow and painful death !  
 How all unlike to this did I, poor fool,  
 Paint Sappho in those earlier, brighter days !  
 Soft as her lay was her inspiréd mind,  
 Faultless her heart as were the songs she sung ;  
 The harmony that from her lips flow'd forth,  
 Had its pure fountain deep within her breast ;  
 And all her being music was to me !  
 Turn not thine eyes thus timidly away ;  
 Look up—look at me ! Let me see thy face,  
 That I may know if 'tis thyself indeed :  
 If these the lips that mine were wont to press,  
 If these the eyes that smiled so oft on mine,  
 If thou, indeed, that Sappho art—

*(He takes her by the arm and turns her towards him |  
 she looks up, and their eyes meet.)*

SAPPHO, *shrinking mournfully.*

Alas !

PHAON.

Thou art the same ; and that was Sappho's voice !  
What I have spoken let it to the winds !  
Let it not strike its roots in any heart !  
Oh ! it grows clear, all clear, before my sight,  
And—like the sun when thunder-storms are o'er—  
Streams through the Present's fast dispersing clouds,  
In its old glory all the Past once more.  
I greet thee, memory of a fairer time !  
Thou art again to me what once thou wert  
In my far distant home, before we met,  
The self-same form divine, that, erring wide,  
I held so long for human beauty only.  
Show thee a goddess ! Bless us, Sappho !—bless !

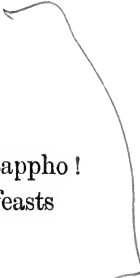
SAPPHO.

Deceiver !

PHAON.

No, in truth, that am I not !

When I vowed love to thee 'twas not deceit :  
I loved thee as we love the gods above,  
As still the good, the beautiful is loved.  
Thou hadst communion with the Immortals, Sappho !  
None may descend unscathed from their high feasts  
Into the circle of mere mortal joys.



The arm in which once rests the golden lyre  
Is sacred ; may not circle lowlier things.

## SAPPHO.

Down to the ocean's depths that golden lyre,  
Since its possession is thus dearly bought !

## PHAON.

I staggered on—intoxicate of heart,  
At strife both with myself and with the world.  
In vain I sought the feelings to arouse  
Which I deemed sleeping—which did not exist.  
Thou stood'st before me a mysterious form,  
Towards whom, away from whom, with equal force  
I was attracted by an unseen chain.  
Thou wert—too mean and low my rage bespoke thee,—  
Too high, my reason names thee, for my love :  
Only the equal can united be.  
Then saw I *her*—and high towards heaven upsprung  
The deepest fountains of my inmost soul.  
Come here, Melitta, mine ! Come here to her !  
Oh ! be not fearful. Sappho's good and mild ;  
Lift the long lashes of thy glistening eyes,  
That she may look down in thy guileless breast,  
And gladly own thee, spotless as thou art.

MELITTA, *timidly advancing,*

My mistress !

SAPPHO *thrusts her away.*

Touch me not !

MELITTA.

Alas ! she 's wroth.

PHAON.

Then she is all I dreaded to believe.  
 Come here, Melitta !—Come, love, to my side !  
 Thou shalt not kneel to her ; before mine eyes  
 At least the proud one shall not dare to scorn thee.  
 Thou shalt not kneel—she does not know thy worth  
 Compared with hers—or mute on bended knees,  
 Guilt would to innocence its homage pay.  
 Hither to me, I say !

MELITTA.

No, let me kneel—  
 It seemeth well the child unto its mother.  
 If she thinks right, why, let me punish'd be ;  
 I will not even murmur 'gainst her will.

PHAON.

Thou art no longer all thine own—thou'rt mine ;

By such submission thou degradest me.  
There are yet other means to gain the suit  
That in her pride she foolishly denies.

## MELITTA.

Oh ! if there be, I only love her gifts ;  
Bliss were a burden gained by other means.  
Here will I kneel, till one dear gentle look,  
One gracious word, bespeaks forgiveness mine.  
How often have I lain here at her feet,  
And always gladly to arise again ?  
She will not this time leave me weeping thus ;  
Beloved lady ! look down on thy child.

(SAPPHO stands with her face hid on the shoulder of EUCHARIS.)

## PHAON.

Canst thou then hear, and mute and cold remain ?

## MELITTA.

She is not cold, although her lips are mute ;  
I feel her heart is speaking unto mine :  
Be judge, O Sappho, between him and me !  
Bid me to follow him, and I will follow !  
Bid me to fly him—even that—O gods !  
Thou tremblest, Sappho ; dost not hear me then ?



PHAON, *clasping* MELITTA *and kneeling with her.*

Love unto mortals, Reverence to the gods !  
Give us thy portion, and receive thine own ;  
Consider what thou dost, and who thou art.

(SAPPHO *draws herself up as the last words are spoken, and then hurries away.*)

MELITTA.

Alas ! she flies—her child she has rejected !

(*Exeunt* SAPHO, EUCHARIS, *and* SLAVES.)

#### SCENE IV.

PHAON.

Stand up, my child, to man no longer pray :  
On heaven and on ourselves we must rely.

MELITTA.

I cannot live on if condemned by her :  
Her eyes have ever been to me a glass,  
In which my thoughts and actions I beheld :  
They show me now my own deformity.  
How she must suffer, the much injur'd lady !

PHAON.

Thou lendest her thy feelings ; other waves  
Of passion storm within her haughty breast.

SAPPHO.

MELITTA.

Though proud she seem, she still was kind to me ;  
 Or if severe, the harshness but concealed  
 Ever for me a salutary fruit.  
 Wo unto me that I should this forget !

RHAMNES.

Yea, truly ; wo to thee that 'twas forgot !

PHAON.

Why tremblest thou if she is gentle thus ?

RHAMNES.

She went away in anger, and her wrath  
 Is boundless as her love. Wo unto you !

PHAON.

What can she threaten farther ?

RHAMNES.

To the slave,  
 Caught in the act of flying from her—death !

PHAON.

Who says so ?

RHAMNES.

Who? The statutes of the land.

PHAON.

I will defend her—

RHAMNES.

Who will thee defend?

PHAON.

And though the earth should yawn beneath my feet,  
And the sea thunder to engulf my form :  
Though all the powers of nature should combine  
In one grim bond of enmity 'gainst me,  
Fast would I hold this child, and laugh the while  
At Sappho's rage, and all her threats despise !

RHAMNES.

Despise ! what, Sappho ! And who then art thou,  
That thou shouldst lay thy voice within the scale  
In which humanity her noblest weighs,  
Shouldst dare to speak, when Greece itself has spoken ?  
Thou daring fool ! dost deem her worthless, then,  
Because thou hast no measure for her worth ?  
Call'st thou the lustre of the jewel dim,  
Because thou gazest on 't with blinded eyes ?  
That she should ever love thee, should upraise

The thankless serpent to her from the dust,  
 Which now with poison-fang her bosom rends,  
 That she should lavish all her wealth on thee,  
 Who hast no sense of such a treasure's worth,  
 This is the only stain in all her life,  
 Not even Envy can point out another.  
 Speak not ; this very pride on which thou lean'st  
 Thus for support against her is not thine.  
 How hadst thou dared, in thy obscure estate,  
 Thus to wage warfare with the crown of Greece,—  
 That she looked on thee, gave to thee the pride  
 With which thou lookest down upon her now !

## PHAON.

I cannot equal her in gift of song.

## RHAMNES.

Thou canst not ! what ! as though thou couldst, indeed !  
 In what besides canst thou pretend to equal ?  
 High, midst the stars, her glorious name is writ  
 In diamond letters, clear and plain to all.  
 In distant times, on foreign far off shores,  
 When these frail bodies have long since decayed,  
 And e'en our very graves are found no more,  
 Shall Sappho's song from youthful lips resound ;  
 Shall still survive her name, and with it thine !  
 Yes, thine ! Be proud of the immortal fame

Which guilt and falsehood on thy head confer.  
 In stranger lands, to future lines of men,  
 When centuries, that now are still unborn,  
 Have long gone down into the grave of time,  
 Still shall it echo back from every tongue,—  
 Sappho was she who sang this noble lay,  
 And Phaon he who caused that Sappho's death !

MELITTA.

O Phaon !

PHAON.

Peace, love.

RHAMNES.

Wretched comforter !

Dost promise peace to her with troubled voice ?  
 She knows her crime, and she already trembles.  
 Sappho at least will fail not of revenge.  
 "Thou canst not equal her in gift of song !"  
 In what else then canst thou pretend to equal ?  
 Thou dar'st to doubt the goodness of her heart !  
 Look all around thee ! Not a dweller here  
 But boasts her kindness, but rich traces bears,  
 In house and field, in worldly goods and gear,  
 And midst his kindred, of her bounteous hand ;  
 Not one who does not feel his heart beat higher,  
 When citizen of Mitylene's walls,

When fellow-countryman of Sappho named !  
Demand of her who trembles at thy side,  
Companion of thy deed, but not thy guilt,  
The bearing that her mistress towards her held,  
What has the slave to offer of her own ?  
If she has pleased thee, it was Sappho's spirit,  
Sappho's own gentle, tender mother-spirit,  
That from the lips of her own work spoke forth.  
Yes, press thy burning brow ; thou striv'st in vain ;  
Ne'er shall the memory of this be lost.  
What wilt thou do then ? whither wilt thou fly ?  
There is for thee no refuge upon earth.  
In every virtuous human breast will rise  
A foe to him who proved him Sappho's foe.  
Thy fame will still thy devious steps precede,  
And cry before thee in each startled ear,  
" 'Tis Sappho's murderer ! 'tis the foe of heaven !"  
Free as a bird to wander on with her  
To whom thou giv'st but ruin, not defence,  
No Greek shall hail thee guest within his doors ;  
No god allow thy entrance to his fane ;  
Trembling, thou needs the altar-steps must fly,  
When the priest banishes all unblest things ;  
And though thou fly, the fierce Eumenides  
Will shake their serpent-tresses round thee still,  
Will shriek out Sappho's name to fright thine ear,  
Till swallow'd by the grave that thou hast dug !

SAPPHO.

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MELITTA.

Hold, hold, in mercy !

PHAON.

Wouldst thou make me mad ?

RHAMNES.

Mad wert thou casting off that noble heart :  
Enjoy the bitter fruit of what thou'st sown !

MELITTA.

Come to her.

PHAON.

How shake off this bitter grief ?

SCENE V.

*Enter* EUCHARIS.

Art thou here, Rhamnes ? Haste thee ; come—

RHAMNES.

Oh, whither ?

SAPPHO.

EUCCHARIS.

To Sappho.

RHAMNES.

What ?

EUCCHARIS.

I fear that she is ill.

RHAMNES.

The gods forbid !

EUCCHARIS.

I followed her afar,  
 Up to the hall of entrance, and conceal'd,  
 I watch'd her actions with most careful eye :  
 There, leaning 'gainst a column, long she stood,  
 And downward gazed into the great wide sea,  
 That roaring foamed upon the rocky shore,—  
 Speechless and motionless, she stood and gazed,  
 With fixéd eyes, and cheeks as marble pale,  
 Circed by statues, seeming one herself.  
 Only at times she moved, and snatched at flowers,  
 At gold, and ornaments within her reach,  
 And threw them down into the hungry sea,  
 Watching their bubbling fall with longing eye.  
 Sudden there rung out music through the hall,



And all her being quiver'd at the sound.  
It was the lyre upon the pillar hung,  
Amidst whose strings the rising sea-breeze played ;  
Then, as if moved by super-human spell,  
With eyes intently fixed upon the lyre,  
Her rigid features seemed at once inspired,  
And strange mysterious smiles played o'er her face.  
Her lips compressed before were parted now,  
And words came forth of dread and awful sound  
From Sappho's mouth, that were not Sappho's words :  
" Call'st thou me ?"—thus she spoke—" Dost warning  
give ?

I understand thy voice, thou friendly lyre ;  
Thou mindest me of vanish'd days ! I thank thee."  
But how she reached the wall, and took the lyre  
Which hung so high, I have not power to tell,  
For rapid as a lightning flash it seemed ;  
When next I looked she held it in her hands,  
And prest it wildly to her storm-tossed breast,  
Whose heaving breath fell loud upon the ear ;  
Then the triumphal, the Olympic wreath,  
That hung upon the altar, next she seized,  
Placed on her head—the purple mantle threw  
Around her shoulders with high glowing mien.  
He who had seen her, for the first time seen,  
Standing upon the altar's lofty steps,  
With lyre in hand, and glance to heaven up-raised,

Up-raised her whole majestic radiant form,  
 Transfigured by the glory round her shed—  
 He of the goddesses had deemed her one,  
 And straightway bent in prayer a suppliant knee.  
 But as she stood there, motionless and mute,  
 A shuddering terror seized upon my heart ;  
 I trembled at her look of living death,  
 And hurried—

RHAMNES.

And forsook her thus ? Return—  
 But see, approach not ; she herself is here.

## SCENE VI.

SAPPHO, *richly dressed, as in first Act,—the purple mantle on her shoulders, the laurel crown on her head, the golden lyre in her hand,—appears on the steps of the colonnade, surrounded by her servants, and descends slowly and solemnly.*  
*A pause.*

MELITTA. —

O Sappho ! O my mistress !

SAPPHO, *calmly and gravely.*

What wouldst thou ?

MELITTA.

Fallen the darkness from mine eyes away.  
Oh ! let me be again thy child—thy slave ;  
That which is thine possess it, and forgive.

SAPPHO, *in the same tone.*

Believest thou that Sappho is so poor  
As to have need of gifts by thee bestowed ?  
That which was mine I have already had.

PHAON.

Oh ! listen to me, Sappho !

SAPPHO.

Touch me not.

I am devoted to the gods !

PHAON.

If e'er

Thou, Sappho, didst with loving eyes behold——

SAPPHO.

Thou speak'st of things that long are past and gone ;—  
I sought for *thee*, and I have found—*myself*.

Thou couldst not comprehend my heart.—Farewell !  
On firmer ground than this my hope must dwell.

PHAON.

So, then, thou hatest me !

SAPPHO.

To love !—to hate !  
Is there no other feeling ? Thou wert dear,  
And art so still, and evermore wilt be :  
Like to some pleasant fellow-traveller  
Whom fate's caprice has brought a little way  
In the same bark, until the goal be reached,  
And parting, each pursues his separate path ;  
Yet often from the far-off stranger land,  
Remembering the kind companion still—  
(*Her voice falters.*)

PHAON, *much moved.*

Oh ! Sappho !

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SAPPHO.

Silence ! Let us part in peace.

(*To the rest.*)

You who have seen your Sappho weak, forgive ;

I will for Sappho's weakness well atone.  
It is when bent the bow's full strength is shown.

*(Pointing to the altar in the back-ground.)*

Kindle the flames at Aphrodite's fane  
Till high into the morning-red they spire.

*(Her orders are obeyed.)*

And now retire ye, and leave me alone—  
Alone to seek for counsel from my gods !

## RHAMNES.

She wills it so. Let us obey. Come all !

*(They all retire.)*

SAPPHO, *advances.*

Glorious immortal gods !  
You have adorned me with your richest gifts—  
You gave to me the graceful bow of song—  
The well-filled quiver of the poet gave.  
An eye to see, a glowing heart to feel,  
A power my inmost fancies to reveal ;  
You have adorned me with your richest gifts—

I thank you.

You to this lowly head have crowns decreed,  
And on far off and widely-parted shores  
Have sown the poet's fame—immortal seed !

My song from foreign lips rings clear and high,  
 And only with the earth will Sappho wholly die.

I thank you !

You granted to the poetess to taste  
 Of mortal life's sweet flower-enwreathéd cup—  
 Only to taste, and not to drink :  
 Behold, obedient to your high behest,  
 I set it down—that sweet flower-wreathéd cup,  
 And do not drink.

All you commanded me I have obeyed :  
 Deny me not, ye gods ! the last reward.  
 Those who are yours no weakness may invade,  
 The coils of sickness may not round them twine ;  
 In perfect strength, in all their being's bloom,  
 Ye sudden snatch them to your own bright home ;  
 Such crowned and glorious lot, oh, be it mine !

Oh ! suffer not your priestess to become  
 The scorn of those who dare your power despise—  
 The jest of fools, who deem that they are wise :  
 You brake the blossoms—break the stem as well.  
 Let my life's close like its beginning be ;  
 From the dread mortal struggle set me free—  
 I feel too weak a further strife to bear,  
 Give me the triumph, but the conflict spare !

*(In an inspired tone.)*

The flames are kindled and the sun is up ;

I feel that I am heard.—I thank you, gods!  
Thou, Phaon—thou, Melitta, hither come!

*(Kisses PHAON upon his brow.)*

From far off worlds there kisses thee a friend.—

*(Embracing MELITTA.)*

'Tis thy dead mother gives this kiss to thee.  
Come now—and there where Venus' altar stands  
Be Love's mysterious destiny fulfilled.

*(Hurries to the altar.)*

RHAMNES.

What is her purpose? Glorified her form!  
Immortal radiance all around her shines!

*SAPPHO, retreating to a rocky height and extending her hands  
over the pair.*

Love unto mortals—Reverence to the gods!  
Enjoy what blooms for you, and think of me;—  
'Tis thus the latest debt of life I pay,  
Bless them, ye gods! and summon me away!  
*(Throws herself from the rock into the sea.)*

PHAON.

Hold, Sappho, hold!

MELITTA.

Alas! she falls!—she dies!

PHAON, *busied with* MELITTA.

Help!—help at once!—down to the shore and save her!

RHAMNES, *rushing down to the shore.*

Ye gods avert it! Yon projecting cliff—  
If there she falls she's dashed to pieces there;  
And if beyond—woe, woe, for all is over!

PHAON.

What, mutt'rest thou? A boat!—quick, speed and save her!

RHAMNES.

Hold!—hold! it is too late! Grudge not the grave  
Which she, aweary of this treach'rous earth,  
Has chosen in the ocean's holy wave.

PHAON.

Dead?

RHAMNES.

Dead!

PHAON.

Alas! it cannot be!



RHAMNES.

It is!

Faded the laurel crown and mute the lyre.

*(With upraised hands.)*

Upon our earth she sought a home in vain:

Her kindred gods have claimed their own again!

*(The curtain falls.)*











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