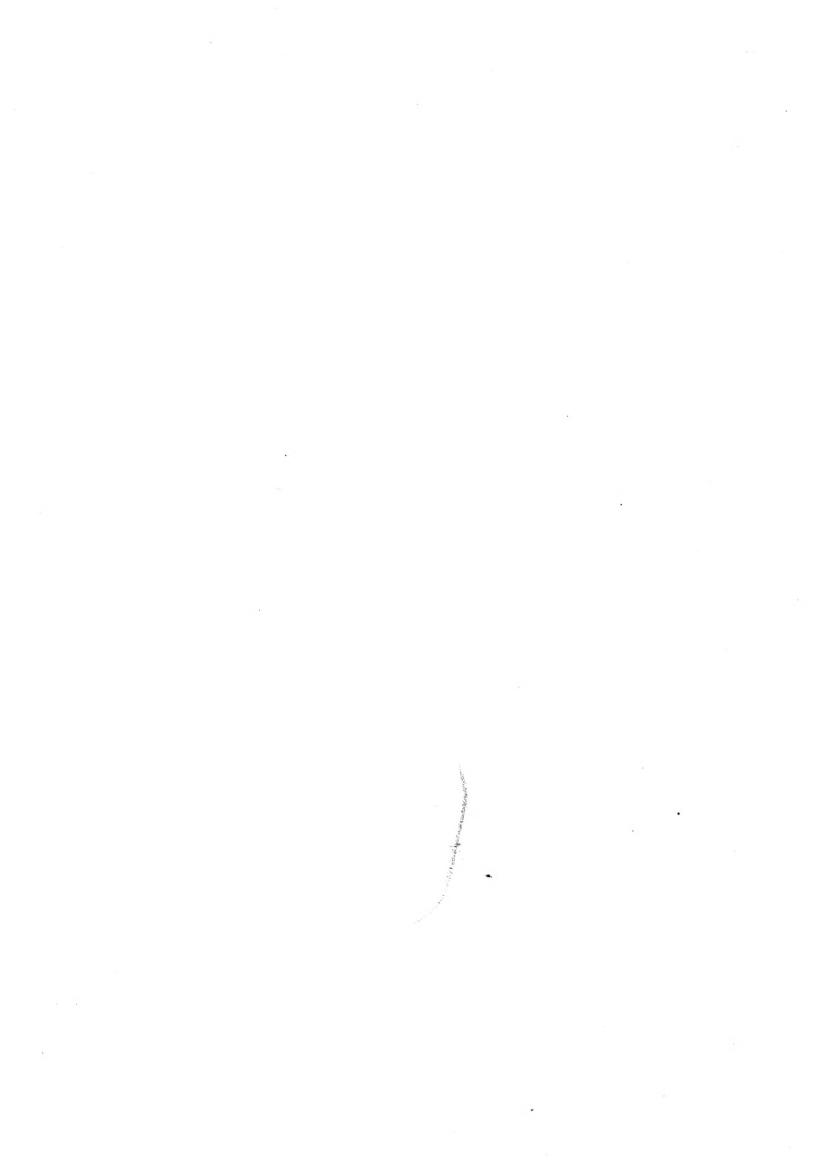


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SAPPHO.

A Tragedy in Five Acts.

BY

FRANZ GRILLPARZER.

TRANSLATED BY ELLEN FROTHINGHAM.



BOSTON:
ROBERTS BROTHERS.

1876.

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MEMOIR.

FRANZ GRILLPARZER was born in Vienna, January 15, 1791. His father was a lawyer, and in comfortable circumstances until the disasters attendant on the invasion of Austria by Napoleon destroyed his property. At his death, in 1809, Franz found himself at the age of eighteen obliged not only to provide for his own support, but to contribute something towards the maintenance of his mother and three younger brothers. He obtained, first, a position as tutor in a nobleman's family, and, in 1813, a small post under government. For this the legal studies which he had pursued with zeal after the death of his father abundantly qualified him. His promotion was exceedingly slow and rather hindered than furthered by his literary works, notwithstanding the ardent patriotism and the loyalty to the House of Hapsburg which many of his dramas express.

The censorship was very severe in Austria at that time, and Grillparzer was condemned to feel the full rigor of it. Obstacles were put in the way not only of the success, but of the presentation, of his plays. Not until he had grown an old man, were party prejudices so allayed that his countrymen could do justice either

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to his integrity as a citizen, or his worth as a dramatic poet. The first public expression of love and respect to him was on the occasion of his attaining his eightieth birthday, in 1871. Then the largest hall in the city was filled with deputations, bringing laurel crowns and costlier presents, and there speeches were made and verses read in honor of the venerable poet and patriot. A year later, the capital celebrated his funeral as if he had been a ruler in the land. He died, January 21, 1872, at the age of eighty-one.

His long life was that of a solitary student. He labored faithfully and successfully to make up for the defects of his early education, which had been intrusted to incompetent tutors over whom his father exercised no supervision, though living under his own roof. In his years of lonely reading, he not only made himself familiar with the modern European languages, but became so conversant with Greek and Latin that the classic authors were among the favorite companions of his old age. His one recreation was travelling. He visited Greece and Italy, stayed long in London and Paris, and acquainted himself with the chief cities and famous men of Germany.

Grillparzer cherished a life-long attachment to Katharina Fröhlich; but want of means, and perhaps peculiarities of disposition on both sides, prevented their

marrying. The last few years of his life, he lived near her in modest rooms, which the three sisters Fröhlich fitted up for him, adjoining their own, in the fourth story of a house in the Spiegelgasse. Here he enjoyed, for the first time, something like the companionship of home. The sisters cared for him when the infirmities of age came on, and Katharina was with him at his death.

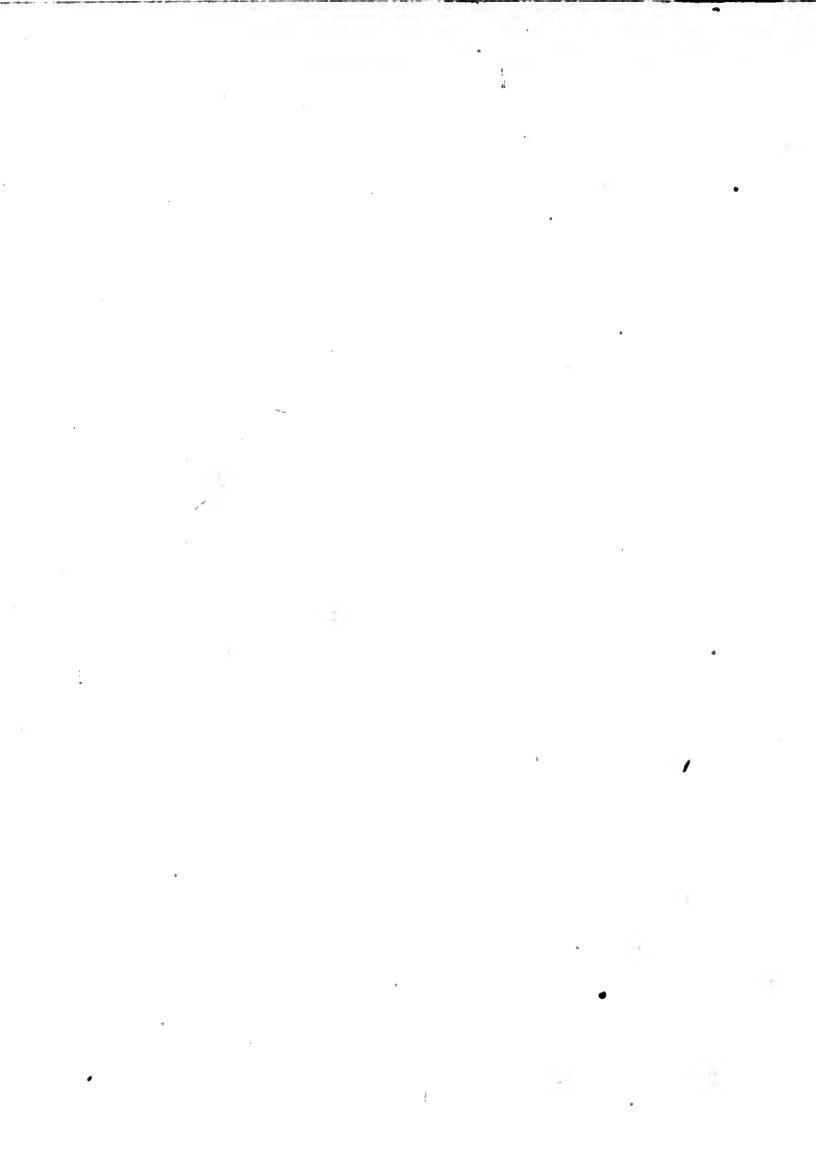
The first of Grillparzer's dramas that appeared upon the stage was "Die Ahnfrau," produced in 1817.

"Sappho" was first acted in 1818, and was followed at intervals of three years by six other plays, the last of which was given in 1838. After that time, Grillparzer allowed no drama to be offered for representation, although he left three completed in manuscript. He was reserved and sensitive, and shrank ever more and more from all contact with the public. The success of a piece, he said, could no longer give him pleasure, while its failure might still cause him pain. Several of the dramas, including the "Sappho," continue to form part of the repertory of the principal German theatres.

The complete edition of Grillparzer's works, published in 1872, comprises — beside the dramas — poems, tales, aphorisms, an account of the Spanish theatre, and the fragment of an autobiography.

ELLEN FROTHINGHAM.

BOSTON, October, 1876.



P R E F A C E.

GRILLPARZER tells us that, as he was walking one afternoon of early autumn along the Danube in the direction of the Prater, he met an acquaintance who suggested Sappho to him as the subject of an opera libretto. The name struck him as furnishing the simple material for a tragedy which he had long been seeking. He continued his walk, and by the time he returned home in the evening the outline of the piece was finished. The next day he looked over the fragments of Sappho's poems that still remain to us, and, finding that one of the two addressed to the goddess of love exactly suited his purpose, he translated it upon the spot, and the next morning began the work of composing. In fact, the prayer at the end of the first act, beginning, "Goldenthroned Aphrodite," is an almost literal translation of Sappho's own lines.

One critic, Grillparzer tells us, took great exception to the first act, and advocated its being omitted altogether. Readers of to-day will be more likely to find fault with the last page of the final act, and to think that the play

should have ended with Sappho's throwing herself into the sea. Our author, however, thoroughly understood stage effects, and the very natural action on the part of the lookers-on of sending out boats for her rescue makes no doubt a suitable finish to the tragedy when acted.

Grillparzer has allowed himself greater freedom in regard to the number of syllables in a line than is pleasing to an English ear. The rule of ten syllables has been adhered to throughout in the translation, with the exception of the first line of Sappho's greeting to her fellow-citizens, where the eight syllables of the German have been retained.

E. F.

SAPPHO.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

SAPPHO.

PHAON.

EUCHARIS, } *female attendants of Sappho.*
MELITTA, }

RHAMNES, *a slave.*

A countryman.

Female attendants, slaves, and country people.

SAPPHO.



ACT FIRST.

SCENE FIRST.

THE stage represents an open country, with the sea in the background. The coast is flat, except for a rocky promontory which rises on the left. Near the shore is an altar to Aphrodite. In the foreground, to the right, partly concealed by shrubs and vines, is the entrance to a grotto; farther back, the opening of a colonnade, within which steps lead up to Sappho's dwelling. In the foreground, to the left, stands a tall rose-bush with a grassy seat beneath it.

Cymbals and flutes and the shouting of voices are heard in the distance.

RHAMNES (*entering hurriedly*).

Up from your slumber, she is coming;— up!
Oh why are wings lent only to our wishes,
And feet left sluggish while the heart is eager?
Forth, lazy maidens! wherefore do ye tarry?
Ye give the lie to him who calls youth hasty.

EUCCHARIS, MELITTA, and maidens from the colonnade.

MELITTA.

Why art thou angry? Here we are.

RHAMNES.

She comes.

MELITTA.

Who comes?

RHAMNES.

She — Sappho comes.

VOICES WITHOUT.

Hail, Sappho, hail!

RHAMNES.

Hail, Sappho, hail, indeed! Well cried, good people!

MELITTA.

What means —

RHAMNES.

Now, by the gods, the girl asks strangely.

She is returning from Olympia crowned,

For she has won the wreath of victory.

To her, in presence of assembled Greece,

Gathered in witness of the noble strife,

Was given the prize of poesy and song.

Therefore the people haste with shouts to greet her,

And on the broad wings of their exultation

Bear upward to the stars the favored name.
This hand of mine it was, ay, and this mouth,
First taught her to draw language from the lyre,
And to confine the lawlessness of song
Within the sweet restraints of harmony.

PEOPLE (*without*).

Hail, Sappho! Sappho, hail!

RHAMNES (*to the maidens*).

Rejoice! rejoice!

Do ye not see her crown?

MELITTA.

I see but Sappho.

Let us go forth to meet her.

RHAMNES.

Stay, girl, stay!

What cares she for the tribute of your joy?
She is grown wonted now to other praise.
Rather make ready all within the house,
For servants please their master best by serving.

MELITTA.

But seest thou at her side —

RHAMNES,

What?

MELITTA.

Seest thou not

Another radiant shape that towers beside her?
 In such a form we picture to ourselves
 The god of lyre and bow.

RHAMNES.

I see ; but haste !

MELITTA.

And but just now thou call'dst us.

RHAMNES.

True ; I called you

That ye should know your mistress was approaching,
 And know it was your duty to be glad ;
 But ye should keep your gladness for the house.
 A man may give loud welcome to his love :
 Intent on serving, woman loves in silence.

MELITTA.

But let us only —

RHAMNES.

No, away, away !

(He hurries the maidens away.)

Now she may come, nor with its forwardness
 Will folly now disturb her festive welcome.

SCENE SECOND.

SAPPHO appears upon a car drawn by white horses ; she is richly dressed, and wears a crown of laurel ; a golden lyre is in her hand. By her side stands Phaon simply attired. The people surround them shouting.

PEOPLE.

Hail, Sappho, hail !

RHAMNES (*mingling with the crowd*).

Hail, Sappho, most dear lady !

SAPPHO.

Thanks, friends ; thanks, fellow countrymen !
Glad am I for your sake to wear this crown :
The citizen it decks, the poet burdens.
Here among you I first can call it mine,
Here where the aspirations of my childhood,
The uncertain stammering of youthful effort,
The hot delirious rapture of achievement,
Crowd all at once on my entrancèd soul ;
Here where the cypresses waft over to me
Low spirit-greetings from my parents' grave ;
Here where repose the many early lost,
Who in my strivings, my success rejoiced ;
Here among you, surrounded by my dear ones,
Here only does this crown appear no crime,
The guilty bauble grow a fair adornment.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

Happy for us that we may call thee ours !
 Have ye not heard how modest are her words ?
 More than the gifts of Greece her speech adorns her.

RHAMNES (*pressing up to her*).

I bid thee welcome, welcome, glorious lady !

SAPPHO (*descending from the car, and bestowing kindly greetings on those about her*).

Welcome, my faithful Rhamnes ! and Artander,
 Thou here despite the weakness of thine age ?
 Kallisto — Rhodopè — ye weep, beloved ?
 The eye repays as strictly as the heart
 Tears for your tears — behold ! — I pray you spare me.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

Welcome to the familiar soil of home,
 Welcome to the glad circle of thy people !

SAPPHO.

Not unrequited shall your welcome be,
 For see, your daughter brings you back a son,
 Brings Phaon ; from the best he is descended,
 And with the best may boldly mate himself.
 Although his years declare him still a youth,
 His words and deeds have proven him a man.
 Whenever ye shall need the warrior's sword,

The lips of orator, the poet's mouth,
A friend's advice or a deliverer's arm,
Then call on Phaon : ye need seek no further.

PHAON.

Thou mockest, Sappho, me a stranger youth ;
In what have I deserved such lavish praise ?
Who would believe so much of one untried ?

SAPPHO.

Whoever sees thee blush at thine own praise.

PHAON.

Ashamed, I can but wonder and be dumb.

SAPPHO.

Thou givest proof of what thou wouldst deny,
For silence and desert are near of kin.
Yes, friends, I here acknowledge to you frankly,
I love him, upon him my choice has fallen.
He in the fulness of his gifts was fated
To draw me with a soft constraining power
Down from the cloud-tipped heights of poesy
Into the cheerful, flowery vales of life,
Among you at his side henceforth to lead
A simple, quiet, pastoral life ; the laurel
Exchanging gladly for the myrtle wreath.
Only to sing the tranquil joys of home

Shall I awake the music of my lyre.
 What ye have prized and revered until now
 Ye yet shall learn to love, to love, dear friends.

PEOPLE.

Hail to thee, glorious one ! hail, Sappho, hail !

SAPPHO.

Enough, enough ; I thank you all good friends.
 Follow ye now my servant, who shall lead
 Where ye with food and wine and merry dance
 May end the festival of my return,
 A sister's glad return unto her home.

(To the country people, who salute her.)

Farewell ; thou too — and thou — all, all farewell.

(RHAMNES goes out with the country people).



SCENE THIRD.

SAPPHO. PHAON.

SAPPHO.

Thou seest, dear friend, such is thy Sappho's life :
 For favors, thanks ; for her love, friendliness ;
 Thus have I fared in all life's intercourse.
 I was content and shall be richly blessed

If thou wilt give but half thou dost receive,
 Nor deem thine even so the poorer share. —
 I have grown used to loss and disappointment;
 My parents sank into an early grave;
 Brothers and sisters, after many a wound
 Inflicted on a sister's faithful heart,
 Partly their guilt and partly fate's caprice,
 Banished to Acheron before their time.
 I know the smart of thanklessness, the sting
 Of falsity; this heart of mine has proved
 The treachery of friendship and of love;
 I am well used to loss and disappointment.
 But there is that I could not bear to lose:
 ➤ Thee, Phaon, thee; thy friendship and thy love.
 Therefore try well thy heart, O my beloved!
 Thou hast not sounded yet the immensity
 That surges up and down within this breast.
 O Phaon, never let there come a day
 When, leaning this full bosom upon thine,
 I find it empty.

PHAON.

Honored lady!

SAPPHO.

Nay,

Does not thy heart suggest a sweeter name?

PHAON.

I scarce know what I say or what I do.
 Drawn from my former still obscurity,

And to this sudden blaze of light exposed,
Transplanted to a breezy height, the aim
Of fruitless wishes to our best and greatest,
I sink beneath the unexpected bliss,
And am bewildered by my happiness.
I see the woods and banks go flitting by,
The purple heights and lowly dwellings vanish,
And scarcely can persuade myself that all
Is standing firm, and that 'tis I who dizzy
Am swept along on fortune's swelling billows.

SAPPHO.

Sweet flattery, but only flattery, love.

PHAON.

Art thou in very truth that lady high,
Whose name from farthest shore of Pelops' isle
To where the mountain heights of rugged Thrace
Are blended with the happy land of Hellas,
On every spot remote from men and land
By Chronos' hand hurled to the Grecian sea,
And upon Asia's fertile, sunny coasts,
And everywhere that but one Grecian mouth
Utters in song the language of the gods,
Is borne with acclamation to the stars?
And if thou art indeed that lady high,
Why was thine eye attracted to a youth
Obscure, without all name or reputation,

Who boasts of nothing greater than this lyre,
Which is of value but as thou hast touched it?

SAPPHO.

Fie on the lyre that is so ill attuned
It can sing nothing but its mistress' praise!

PHAON.

Since e'er I learned to think, since my weak hand
With touch uncertain sought to wake the lyre,
Has Sappho's godlike form before me stood.
When in the joyous circle of my home
I sat beside my parents' lowly hearth
And from the blackened shelf our loved Theano
Fetched down the roll, a song of thine, of Sappho's,
To sing to us, still grew the noisy youths,
While all the maidens close together drew,
That not a golden kernel might be lost.
When she began to sing of the fair boy,
The burning love-song of the queen of love,
The wail of solitary nights of watching,
The pastimes of Andromeda and Attis,
How listened every one, his very breath,
That swelled his bosom higher with delight,
Blaming at heart for being over loud!
And then Theano would lay back her head,
And gaze into the darkness of the room,
And say, How fancy ye great Sappho looks?

Methinks I see her now! By all the gods,
Among a thousand I should recognize her.
And then the tongues of all were quick unloosed,
And every one would spur his fancy on
To deck thy picture with some added charm.
One gave thee Pallas' eyes, the arm of Here,
Another Aphrodite's magic girdle.
But I rose silently and wandered forth
Into the solemn stillness of the night,
And 'mid the pulses there of slumbering nature,
Within the circle of her magic power,
I would stretch forth my longing arms to thee;
And when the snowy flakelets of the clouds,
The zephyrs' balmy breath, the mountain perfumes,
And the wan radiance of the silvery moon,
Melting together, wafted o'er my brow,
Then thou wast mine, I felt thy presence near,
Thine image floated in the illumined clouds.

SAPPHO.

With thine own riches thou hast decked me out:
Alas for me shouldst thou take back thy gifts!

PHAON.

And when my father sent me to Olympia,
Where in the chariot race I should contend,
And all along the way rang in my ears,
That in this strife the crown of poesy

Was to be sought and won by Sappho's lyre,
My heart swelled in me with resistless longing.
Upon the road my coursers both fell dead
Before I had descried Olympia's towers.
I reached the city, but the flying chariots,
The wrestler's skill, the merry discus throwing,
My boding senses passed unheeded by.
I asked not who had carried off the prize ;
Myself had won the fairest and the best,
For her I was to see — the crown of women.
Then came the contest for the prize of song :
Alcæus sang, Anacreon, — in vain ;
They could not loose the bond that held my senses.
But hark, there was a murmur through the crowd,
A parting of the people, and — 'twas done !
For, bearing in her hand a golden lyre,
A woman passed through the astonished throng ;
Her dress of the white hue of innocence
Came rippling downward to the hidden ankles,
A rivulet that flows o'er flowery meads.
Its hem made of green laurel boughs and palm,
Symbolical of fame and of repose,
Expressed the poet's need and his reward.
As rosy clouds of morning round the sun,
A crimson mantle floated round about her,
And through the darkness of her raven hair
Shone crescent-like the radiant diadem,
Flashing abroad the sign of sovereignty.

My spirit cried, 'Tis Sappho ! and 'twas thou.
I had not spoken my surmise aloud
Before the multitude with thousand voices
Proclaimed my sweet foreboding to be true.
How thou didst sing, how conquer ; how adorned
With the proud symbol of achieved success
In the first ecstasy of triumph the lyre
Slipped from thy hand ; how through the crowd I rushed,
And smitten by thy look before thee stood,
A bashful boy, o'ercome with sudden shame, —
That know'st thou, lady, better than myself,
For, still but half-awake, I pondering question
How much was real and how much but a dream.

SAPPHO.

I see thee as thou stood'st there timid, speechless,
With all of life compressed into thine eyes,
Which, scarcely lifted up from off the ground,
Plainly betrayed their unextinguished fire.
I bade thee follow, and thou didst obey,
Lost in uncertainty and wonderment.

PHAON.

Who could have thought that Hellas' greatest daughter
Would cast a glance on Hellas' meanest son ?

SAPPHO.

Unjust unto thyself and to the gods,
To scorn the golden gifts which at the birth

Of him they destine to the sweets of life
 They pour o'er cheek and brow, through heart and soul.
 Such gifts are sure supports to which existence
 May knit anew its lightly sundered threads.
 Beauty is a possession to be prized,
 Joy in existence a fair heritage ;
 Courage and strength that may command the world,
 Firmness of purpose, joy in that which is,
 And fancy in her place as gentle handmaid, —
 These beautify the thorny path of life ;
 And how to live is surely life's best aim.
 Not without meaning is the Muses' choice
 To deck themselves with the unfruitful laurel ;
 Scentless and cold it weighs upon the brow
 It promised to console for many losses.
 'Tis hard to stand upon the dizzy heights :
 Poor art is forced to be a constant beggar
 (With arms outstretched towards Phaon.)
 Upon the glad exuberance of life.

PHAON.

What would one not believe, gracious enchantress,
 That thou couldst say, even because thou say'st it?

SAPPHO.

Let it be our endeavor, then, dear friend,
 To twine a double crown about our brows ;
 Let us quaff life out of art's magic cup,

And from the hand of life partake of art.
Behold this landscape ; — in its simple charm
Half to the earth it seemeth to belong,
And half unto the fields that Lethe kisses.
Among these bowers of roses, in these grottoes,
Within the still enclosure of these columns,
Here let us, like unto the immortal gods,
Who know nor hunger nor satiety,
Only enjoyment changing not nor palling,
Rejoice together in a glad existence.
All that is mine is thine : whate'er I have
Is precious to me but as thou shalt use it.
Look round about thee ; thou art in thy home :
My slaves shall look upon thee as their lord,
And from mine own example learn obedience.
Come forth, ye maidens ; slaves, come hither !

PHAON.

Sappho !

How can I e'er requite so many favors ?
I am weighed down by my increasing debt.

SCENE FOURTH.

The same, EUCHARIS, MELITTA, RHAMNES, male and female attendants.

RHAMNES.

Thou calledst, lady?

SAPPHO.

Ay, come hither all.

Behold your master.

RHAMNES (*half to himself, amazed*).

Master?

SAPPHO.

Who speaks here?

What wouldst thou answer?

RHAMNES (*drawing back*).

Nothing.

SAPPHO.

Silence, then.

Behold your master : what he shall desire
Is law to you, as were it I who spoke.
Woe unto him who shall refuse obedience,
Whom but a passing shade upon this brow

Accuses of neglect of my command.
 Offence against myself I can forgive,
 A disrespect to him will rouse my anger. —
 And now, dear friend, confide thee to their care :
 Thou'rt weary with the journey ; let them practise
 The sacred rites of hospitality,
 Accepting frankly this first gift of Sappho.

PHAON.

Oh, that my whole past life might be cast from me ;
 That I might change it as we change our garments,
 And so regain collectedness and clearness,
 In very truth be what my wish would make me.
 Farewell, then, Sappho ; not I trust for long.

SAPPHO.

I wait for thee. Farewell ! — Stay thou, Melitta !



SCENE FIFTH.

SAPPHO. MELITTA.

SAPPHO (*after following him with her eyes*).

Well, my Melitta ? speak.

MELITTA.

What will my mistress ?

SAPPHO.

Does blood flow only in these veins of mine
 While all your hearts are stiffened into ice?
 Thou hast beheld him, thou hast heard his voice;
 The selfsame airs that played about his brow
 Have visited that lifeless breast of thine;
 And yet a meaningless "What will my mistress?"
 Is the first sound to issue from thy lips.
 Verily, I could hate thee, — Go! —

(Melitta turns to go in silence.)

SAPPHO *(throwing herself upon the bench of turf)*.

Melitta!

Is there indeed, then, nothing thou canst tell me
 That would rejoice my heart to hear, dear child?
 Thou didst behold him, didst thou notice nothing
 In what thou sawest that would be worth the telling?
 Why, girl, where were thine eyes?

MELITTA.

Thou oft hast told us
 It was not meet when in a stranger's presence
 For maidens to be lavish of their glances.

SAPPHO.

And thou, poor girl, didst keep thine on the ground?

(Kissing her.)

So that was it! The rule was not for thee,

But for those older, who are less discreet :
A child may do what ill becomes the maiden.

(Measuring her with her eyes.)

But now I look at thee, I find thee changed
Since I have been away ; I scarce should know thee,
Thou art become so tall, so —

(Kissing her again.)

Ah, my darling,

Thou wast quite right : the rule was for thee also.

(Rising.)

But why art thou so silent and so shy ?

Thou wast not so of old ; what dost thou fear ?

'Tis not thy mistress, Sappho, stands before thee :

Sappho, thy friend, addresses thee, Melitta.

The pride and arrogance and angry temper

And all that else was evil in thy friend

Were left behind ; they came not back with me,

But all were sunk within the water's bosom,

As I sailed through it, seated by his side.

For therein lies the magic power of love,

That it ennobles all it breathes upon,

Like to the sun that with its golden ray

Transforms the very thunder-clouds to gold.

Forgive me if I e'er with hasty speech

Or bitter word have given thee offence ;

Henceforward we will like trusting sisters live

In his companionship, alike in all

Except in the distinction of his love.

I will learn gentleness, be kind and good.

MELITTA.

Art thou not now, wast thou not ever so ?

SAPPHO.

Ay, good as we call good what is not bad ;
But that is not enough for such reward.
Dost think he will be happy here, Melitta ?

MELITTA.

Could any e'er be otherwise with thee ?

SAPPHO.

What can poor Sappho offer her beloved ?
In the rich fulness of his youth he stands,
Life's fairest blossoms clustering thick about **him** ;
His just-awakened mind, with glad surprise
Beholding the array of its own powers,
Boldly extends its wings ; its eagle eye
Fixed longingly on what is best and highest.
All that is great and good and high and fair
Belongs to him : the world is to the strong.
And I ! — O all ye Deities of heaven,
Restore to me the time that is gone by ;
Obliterate within this breast the furrows
Deep-worn of sorrows that are past, past joys ;
What I have felt and said and done and **suffered**,
Make it not be, not even in memory !
Oh lead me backward to that early time

When still a timid child with rounded cheeks,
A strange unrest within my boding heart,
I trod the untried world with untried senses ;
When yet anticipation, not transformed
To harsh experience, struck the golden strings ;
When love was yet a magic realm to me,
Strange, unexplored, a realm of wonderland !
(*Leaning on Melitta's breast.*)

MELITTA.

What is it ails my mistress : art thou ill ?

SAPPHO.

I stand upon the edge of the wide gulf
That threatening yawns between myself and him.
The golden land is beckoning me across :
I reach it with mine eye, but tread it not. —
Alas for him who lets the empty phantom
Of fame, of glory, tempt from his safe home !
On a wild stormy ocean he embarks
And in a fragile boat. No shade of trees,
No sprouting seed is there, nor any flower ;
Only the gray immensity about him.
He sees the cheerful shore, but far away ;
And, blending faintly with the surging waters,
Voices of loved ones steal upon his ear.
If he bethink himself, and turn him back
To seek the home which he forsook so lightly,

The spring is gone, and gone, alas ! the flowers :
(Taking off the wreath, and looking at it sadly.)
 Only a rustling of dry leaves is left him.

MELITTA.

How beautiful the wreath and what an honor !
 One thousands have contended for in vain.

SAPPHO.

One thousands have contended for in vain ;
 Ay, that is true, Melitta, is it not ?
 One thousands have contended for in vain.
(Putting the wreath again upon her head.)

Let fame be not despised by its possessor :
 It is no empty sound devoid of meaning,
 But with its touch bestows a godlike power.
 Courage ! I am not poor ; but in exchange
 For his great wealth have equal wealth to give ;
 For the fair crown he offers of the present,
 The blossoms of the past and of the future.
 Thou art amazed ; thou dost not understand me ?
 Well that thou dost not ; pray thou never may !

MELITTA.

Thou art not angry with me ?

SAPPHO.

Nay, dear child.
 Go join the others now, and let me know
 When 'tis thy master's wish to speak with me.

SCENE SIXTH.

SAPPHO (*alone*).

She rests her head upon her hand lost in thought ; then, seating herself upon the grassy bench, she takes her lyre, and accompanies the following words with occasional accords.

Gold-enthronèd Aphrodite,
Artifice-weaving daughter of Zeus,
Oh, delude me not with love's anguish !
Bruise not, Goddess, this fluttering heart.

But descend, if ever the measures
Sung to my lyre have charmed thine ear ;
For my call thou often hast heeded,
Leaving thy father's golden abode.

Thou wouldst harness thy glittering chariot,
And thy doves, a frolicsome pair,
Gaily spreading their darkling pinions,
Bore thee downward from heaven to earth.

Swift thou camest, Deity, wearing
Radiant smiles on thy deathless brow,
Asking what grief afflicted the wailer,
Wherefore rang upward the suppliant's cry.

“What is that passionate bosom’s longing ;
Whom does that beating heart desire
In the snares of love to entangle ;
Who, O Sappho, doeth thee wrong ?

“Though he now flee, he quick shall pursue thee ;
Scorns he thy gifts, gifts soon shall he bring ;
Yea, though he love not, love shall soon thrill him,
Making him follow its every sign.”

Come to me now, and lighten my bosom
Of this burden of sore unrest ;
Help me attain the end that I sigh for ;
Be my ally in this contest of love.

(Leans her head back wearily.)

The curtain falls.

ACT SECOND.

An open space as before.

SCENE FIRST.

PHAON.

How grateful this repose ! the noise of feasting,
The sound of cymbal-players and voice of lutes,

The uproar of unbridled merriment,
Reach me not here beneath these quiet trees,
That whispering low, as fearful to disturb,
Invite to solitary contemplation.

How all has changed within me since the hour
I left my parents and my quiet home,
And towards Olympia turned my coursers' heads !
In cheerful meditation, I was wont
To follow out the tangled threads of feeling
With a keen eye, and bring them into order,
Until as knowledge all lay clear before me.
But now, as on a sultry summer night,
A heavy mist, tormenting and yet pleasing,
Lies brooding o'er my senses, while the flash
Of thought like distant lightning through it darts,
Now here, now there, now vanished altogether,
And makes of all a torturing confusion.
A veil impenetrable hides the past :
I scarce to-day remember yesterday,
Scarce in this hour recall the one just gone.
I ask myself, Am I indeed the same
Who stood beside her at the Olympic games,
Beside her in the moment of her triumph ?
Was it my name mingled with that of Sappho
The people's shouts sent ringing through the air ?
All answers, Yes ; and yet I scarce believe.
How pitiful a being then is man,

If that which hoped for quickens all his senses,
 When grasped, but stupefies them into sleep !
 Ere I had seen and known her, while her image
 Still floated undefined on fancy's canvas,
 I deemed it easy for a look from her,
 For one kind word, to sacrifice my life ;
 And now that she is mine, that I possess her,
 Now that my wintry and slow-creeping wishes
 As golden butterflies are playing round me,
 I still have doubts, and hesitate and question.
 Alas ! I here forget my very self
 And her and home and parents. —

O my parents,

Why have I not remembered you till now,
 Why left you in this long uncertainty ?
 Perchance ye now are mourning for my death,
 Or rumor may already have made known
 Your son, who to Olympia had been sent,
 Not to seek love, but in the games to share,
 In Sappho's arms —

Who dare cast blame on her,

Pride of her sex, the crown of womanhood ?
 Should envy's poisonous breath assail her name,
 I would defend her, were a world against me.
 Surely my father if he could but see her
 Would lay aside the ancient prejudice
 The sight of bold-faced maidens with their zithers
 Has printed on his heart with holy horror.

(*Lost in thought.*)

Who comes? — the sound of revel even here?
 Hateful intrusion! — whither flee? Ah, hither!

(Enters the grotto.)



SCENE SECOND.

EUCCHARIS. MELITTA. Female attendants with flowers and wreaths.

EUCCHARIS.

Haste, maidens, haste! bring flowers, and yet more
 flowers;

Flowers to deck house and hall and court and columns;
 Deck threshold, door, and flower-beds too with flowers;
 Add spice to spices, for to-day our mistress
 Is keeping a glad festival of love.

MAIDENS *(showing their flowers)*.

Behold!

(They begin to twine flowers about the trees and columns.)

EUCCHARIS.

'Tis well, 'tis well; but thou, Melitta,
 Where are thy flowers, girl?

MELITTA *(looking at her empty hands)*.

Mine?

EUCCHARIS.

Ay surely, thine.

Why, see the little dreamer, how she stands!
 Dost thou alone come hither empty-handed?

MELITTA.

I will go fetch some.

EUCCHARIS.

Will go fetch, she says,
And stirs no jot and neither wills nor fetches.
Thou little hypocrite, come now, confess
What 'tis that ails thee ; wherefore at the table
The mistress often glanced across at thee
With an arch look and smile upon her face,
And then would mockingly cast down her eyes.
Oft as she did it, I could see thee blush
And tremble with confusion, and forget
The service that thy hand so oft had rendered.
And when at last she bade thee taste the cup
For the fair stranger, and thou timidly
Hadst raised it to thy lips and touched the brim,
She cried out suddenly, Cast down thine eyes !
And lo, full half the mighty cup's contents
Were all at once poured on the polished floor ;
Then Sappho laughed aloud. What meant it all ?
Confess, confess ; no subterfuge will help thee.

MELITTA.

Oh, let me go !

EUCCHARIS.

Nay, nay, no mercy, child ;
Hold up thy head and make a full confession.

Oh woe ! I see the tears begin to start ;
 Thou naughty child ! — Well, well, I say no more,
 Only no tears ! — But be not often thus,
 Or thou wilt really vex me ; dry thine eyes.
 Are all your blossoms gone ? then come away,
 And let us gather more ! — Sit here, Melitta,
 Here are still roses, help us weave our garlands ;
 Be busy, child, and let me have no tears.
 (*Goes out with the maidens*).



SCENE THIRD.

MELITTA (*alone*).

She sits down on the grassy bench, and begins to weave a garland ; but soon shakes her head sadly, and puts her work by.

I cannot : 'tis as if my brain would burst,
 And in my breast my heart is beating wildly.

Here I must sit, forsaken, solitary,
 ✓ Far from my parents, in a foreign land,
 The chains of slavery upon these hands
 Which I stretch out in vain to find my loved ones.
 Alas for me ! I sit alone, forsaken,
 — And no one hearkens to me, no one heeds me.

With tearful eyes I kindred see and friends
 Leaning for solace on a kindred breast.
 In all the land there beats no heart for me ;

My friends are in their far, far distant home.
Children I see at play about their father,
Kissing his honored brow and reverend locks ;
Between me and my father lies the sea ;
No greeting from his child, no kiss can reach him.

'Tis true they act as if they loved me here,
Nor do they let me want for kindly accents ;
And yet it is not love : 'tis but compassion—
Which even to the slave gives gentle words.
The lips that late with flatteries overflowed
May soon be filled with bitterness and scorn :

They are allowed to love and hate at will,
And what is in their hearts their lips may speak ;
Them gold and purple deck and costly jewels,
And wondering looks pursue them as they move ;
But the slave's place is by the lowly hearth,
Where not a look can reach her nor a question,
No eye, alas ! nor any thought or wish. —
Ye Gods who oft have hearkened to my prayer,
And poured your blessings down with bounteous hand,
When I have prayed out of a pious heart,
Oh ! listen to me once again with favor,
And mercifully lead me to my home,
That I may rest my sorrow-laden brow
Upon a tender sympathizing breast ;
Lead me unto my own, or take me up, —
Oh, take me up unto yourselves — yourselves !

SCENE FOURTH.

PHAON. MELITTA.

PHAON (*who during the preceding monologue appeared at the entrance of the grotto, but drew back and listened, now comes forward, and from behind MELITTA lays his hand upon her shoulder*).

So young, yet so desponding, maiden?

MELITTA (*starting*).

Ah!

PHAON.

I heard thee praying to the gods but now
 For friendly sympathy. Here is a friend.
 A common grief unites like common blood,
 And the unhappy everywhere are kin.
 I also mourn the parting from dear parents;
 I too am longing for my distant home.
 Come, let us tell our griefs, that each one's sorrow
 May be a balsam for the other's heart.
 Still silent! — wherefore so distrustful, maiden?
 Look up at me; for I mean kindly by thee.

(*Putting his hand under her chin and raising her head.*)

Aha! the little cup-bearer, I see,
 Who gave the floor her wine, and not the guest;

Therefore so anxious? nay, 'twas a mishap
That but amused me as it did thy mistress.

(MELITTA, *who had shrunk back at the last words, raises
her eyes to his, then rises to go.*)

I had not meant to give thee pain, my child,
Whence have those gentle eyes so grave a look?

Thou shalt not go till thou hast answered me.

I had observed thee in the banquet hall:

Thy maidenly reserve made grateful contrast

To the wild tumult of the revellers.

Who art thou, and what keeps thee here alone?

Thou didst not share the feast: I saw thee serving;

The slaves' familiarity appeared

To claim thee as companion, and —

MELITTA.

I am.

(*Turning to go.*)

PHAON (*detaining her*).

Impossible!

MELITTA.

What wilt thou with the slave?

Let her go seek the company of slaves!

(*Tears choking her voice.*)

Oh take me up unto yourselves, ye Gods!

PHAON (*putting his arm about her*).

Thou art in tears; thou tremblest: calm thyself!

The chains of slavery only bind the hands:

The mind makes freemen or makes bondmen of us.
Be calm : Sappho is merciful and kind ;
A word from me, and she without a ransom
Will give thee back unto thy home, thy father.

(MELITTA *silently shakes her head.*)

Trust me she will, — or is it thou who wilt not ?
Has passed so suddenly the eager longing
Thou felt'st but now to see thy native land ?

MELITTA.

Where is my native land ?

PHAON.

Dost thou not know ?

MELITTA.

A little child they tore me from its keeping :
Its vales and flowers my memory has retained,
But not its name. Only methinks it lay
Near to the rising sun : all was so bright.

PHAON.

Then it is far from here ?

MELITTA.

Far, very far.

I was surrounded there by other trees,
And other was the perfume of the flowers,
In bluer heavens than these shone fairer stars,

And all the dwellers in the land were kind.
 I in the midst of many children lived,
 And I remember well a white-haired man,
 Father I used to call him, who caressed me ;
 And yet another man, so fair and good,
 Brown hair and eyes he had — almost like thine —

PHAON.

Why dost thou pause? This man —

MELITTA.

He too—

PHAON.

Caressed thee :

Say, did he not?

(Taking her hand.)

MELITTA *(softly)*.

I was a child.

PHAON.

I know ;

Sweet, innocent, an unsuspecting child.

(Dropping her hand.)

But tell me further.

MELITTA.

All went happily

Till I was waked one night by piercing screams,

That from all sides rang wildly in mine ears.
The attendants came : they took me up and bore me
Into the cruel night. Round me I saw
Dwellings in flames ; men fighting, fleeing, falling.
A ruffian came with outstretched hand and seized me ;
Then all was groans, screams, furious battle-cries.
When next I woke I was upon a ship,
That like an arrow darted through the waves.
There saw I other maids and children weeping ;
But ever smaller grew the unhappy band,
The farther we were parted from our home.
For many days and nights, ay, months, we sailed,
Till I was left alone with those wild men.
At length the coast of Lesbos rose before us,
And I was put on shore. There Sappho saw me,
Offered them gold, and I became her slave.

PHAON.

And has thy lot been hard in Sappho's hands ?

MELITTA.

Nay ; she received me kindly, dried my tears,
And cared for me, teaching me lovingly ;
For, although violent at times and hasty,
Sappho is good at heart, ay, kind and true.

PHAON.

And yet thou never couldst forget thy home ?

MELITTA.

Alas, it was forgotten but too soon ;
 Absorbed in dance and play and in my tasks,
 I seldom thought of those I'd left behind.
 But sometimes when I'm troubled and unhappy,
 A longing takes possession of my heart,
 And with sweet sadness memory lifts the veil
 That hides from me that golden, sunny distance.
 And so to-day: my heart was heavy, troubled,
 And quivered at each lightly spoken word,
 As if its very fibres were laid bare.
 But all is well again, and I am happy.

A VOICE WITHOUT.

Melitta !

PHAON.

Hark ! they call thee.

MELITTA.

I must go.

(She gathers up the flowers and the wreath she had begun.)

PHAON.

What hast thou in thy hands ?

MELITTA.

Flowers.

PHAON.

And for whom ?

MELITTA.

For thee, — for thee and Sappho.

PHAON.

Stay!

MELITTA.

They call me.

PHAON.

Thou shalt not go with such averted look.
Come, let me see thy flowers!

MELITTA.

Here!

PHAON.

Take this rose:

(Fastens it upon her bosom.)

Let it remind thee of this hour; remind thee
That not in thine own home alone, but here,
Even in this far land, are — friends.

(MELITTA, who had shrunk back at his touch, now stands motionless with heaving bosom, her arms hanging at her side, her head bowed and eyes cast down. PHAON steps a little back and observes her.)

VOICE FROM WITHOUT.

Melitta!

MELITTA.

Didst call me?

PHAON.

No, not I: 'twas from the house.

MELITTA (*gathering up the flowers she had let fall*).

I come.

PHAON.

So chary of thy gifts, Melitta?
Does my rose merit nothing in return?

MELITTA.

I make return? What can a poor girl give?

PHAON.

Gold is the gift of vanity and pride:
Friendship and love give flowers, and flowers thou hast.

MELITTA.

What! these that those wild maidens gathered for —
Ah, never! —

PHAON.

But what then?

MELITTA.

Alas, they've stripped
The bushes; not a blossom to be seen.
Upon that branch still hangs indeed a rose:
But 'tis too high for me; I cannot reach it.

PHAON.
Try. I will help thee.

MELITTA.

Nay!

PHAON.

And wherefore not?
I give not up my claim so easily.

MELITTA (*mounting on the bench*).

Come then: I'll bend the branch for thee.

PHAON.

Ay, do!

MELITTA (*standing on tiptoe, and bending down the branch
on the end of which hangs a rose*).

Canst reach?

PHAON (*who, without heeding the rose, has been looking only
at MELITTA*).

Not yet.

MELITTA.

But now; — ah me, I slip,
I'm falling!

PHAON.

Nay, I hold thee!

(*She lets go the branch; totters, and falls into PHAON'S
outstretched arms.*)

MELITTA.

Let me go!

PHAON (*pressing her to him*).

Melitta!

MELITTA.

Leave, oh leave me! — ah!

PHAON.

Melitta!

(Hastily kissing her lips.)

SCENE FIFTH.

The same. SAPPHO, simply dressed, without lyre and wreath.

SAPPHO (*entering*).

I have to seek thee, friend; — but what is this?

MELITTA.

Hark, 'tis my mistress, Sappho!

PHAON.

Sappho here?

(Releases her. Pause.)

SAPPHO.

Melitta!

Lady!

MELITTA.

SAPPHO.

What has brought thee here?

MELITTA.

I came to look for flowers.

SAPPHO.

Nor looked in vain.

MELITTA.

Yon rose —

SAPPHO.

I see it burning on thy lips.

MELITTA.

It hung too high.

SAPPHO.

Not high enough perhaps.

Go! —

MELITTA.

Wilt thou have me — ?

SAPPHO.

Go, I tell thee, go!

SCENE SIXTH.

SAPPHO. PHAON.

SAPPHO (*after a pause*).

Phaon!

PHAON.

Sappho!

SAPPHO.

Why didst thou leave so soon ;
Before the feast was ended ? Thou wert missed.

PHAON.

I love not wine, nor care for noisy pleasures.

SAPPHO.

For noisy pleasures ? That sounds like reproach.
Was I then wrong to celebrate thy coming
With loud rejoicings and demonstrative ?

PHAON.

Thou misinterpretest me.

SAPPHO.

The full heart
Seeks the full stream of noisy mirth sometimes,
That in the tumult of the general joy
It may, in stillness, unobserved rejoice.

PHAON.

Ah, true.

SAPPHO.

Besides, I had to show my thanks
To our good neighbors for their proofs of love :
Thou knowest they have no pastime without wine.
Henceforth shall no unwelcome banqueting
Mar the repose I love not less than thou.

PHAON.

I thank thee.

SAPPHO.

Wilt thou go ?

PHAON.

Wilt thou I stay ?

SAPPHO.

It is for thee to go or stay at pleasure.

PHAON.

Thou 'rt angry ?

SAPPHO (*with emotion*).

Phaon !

PHAON.

Wilt thou aught ?

SAPPHO.

Nought. — Stay !

One thing (*with an effort*): I saw thee jesting with Melitta.

PHAON.

Melitta! — who? — ah yes, thou 'rt right; what then?

SAPPHO.

She is a sweet, pure child.

PHAON.

Ay, so she seems.

SAPPHO.

Among my maidens she is dearest to me, —
Among my children, I indeed might say;
For I have always loved them as my children.
If I have not already loosed their bonds,
It is that, dearer having been denied
By nature, I would not remove too soon
These homeless orphans from their teacher's eye,
And from a mother's tender watchfulness;
Such has my custom ever been, and many
Of Mytilene's fairest citizens
Recall with love and gratitude the work
That Sappho wrought on them in earlier days.

PHAON.

Thou art quite right, quite right,

SAPPHO,

Of all the maidens
That have been brought me by caprice of fortune

Was never one more dear than this Melitta,
The gentle maiden with the quiet heart.
Although not great in intellect or talent,
And without skill in practice of the arts,
I loved and prized her above all the rest,
For her so modest, unpretending nature,
Her sensitive reserve that ever watchful
Seems like the noiseless garden-snail, at once
House and inhabitant, which terrified
Draws back into itself at each light noise,
And feeling all about with subtle touch
Scarce ventures to lay hold of aught that's strange,
But fastens itself firmly where it clings,
And only with its life gives up its grasp.

PHAON.

Indeed, thou art quite right.

SAPPHO.

I should regret, —
Forgive me, dearest friend, — I should regret
If ever any thoughtless, passing jest
Should waken wishes in this maiden's heart
With cruel sting to rankle unfulfilled.
For I could wish that she might never know
The wasting pain of disappointed hope,
Or how an unrequited love can torture.
My friend —

PHAON.

What wast thou saying ?

SAPPHO.

Hear'st thou not ?

PHAON.

I hear thee : love can torture.

SAPPHO.

Torture ! ay.

Thou art not in the mood for listening now :
Another time we will speak more of this.

PHAON.

Yes, yes ; another time.

SAPPHO.

For now, farewell.

It is my wont to consecrate this hour
Unto the Muses, in yon quiet grotto.
May I not hope to-day to find the Muses,
I am secure at least of finding quiet,
And that I sorely need. Meanwhile, farewell.

PHAON.

Thou art not going ?

SAPPHO.

Dost thou wish — ?

PHAON.

Farewell !

SAPPHO (*turning hastily away*).

Farewell !

(Enters the grotto.)

SCENE SEVENTH.

PHAON (*alone, after gazing for some moments fixedly before him*).

Hast thou in truth then ?

(Looking about him.)

She is gone. —

What was it passed between us ? Scarce I know.

All is confused : my head is dull and heavy.

(Looking at the bench.)

'Twas here she sat, the lovely, blooming child :

(Seating himself.)

Here will I lie and rest my weary head.

(Rests his head upon his hand.)

The curtain falls.

ACT THIRD.

Landscape as before. PHAON asleep upon the bench.

SCENE FIRST.

SAPPHO (*entering from the grotto*).

In vain ; I cannot guide my wandering thoughts,
That rove abroad and bring back no refreshment.
Whate'er I muse upon, whate'er I do,
That hateful picture, from which I would flee
Beyond the utmost limits of this earth,
Stands vividly before my burning eyes.
How he supported, how his arm embraced, —
And then how, yielding to the tender impulse, —
She on his lips — away, I will forget !
The very thought is death a thousandfold.

And yet am I not foolish to torment me,
And thus bewail what may have no existence?
For who can tell what fugitive impression,
What fancy of the moment, drew him to her,
A something vanishing as soon as born,
Without design and therefore without fault ?
What right have I the measure of his feeling
To seek within my own impassioned heart ?
Who measures love of man by woman's fire,
He knows not man and woman, life and love ;

For changeful is the restless mind of man,
And varies ever with his varying life.
He enters free the arena of existence,
Surrounded by the rosy dawn of hope ;
With strength and courage as with spear and shield,
Equipped to conquer in the glorious strife.
Too narrow seems the quiet world within :
His restless, daring spirit flies abroad ;
And if he meet with love, he stoops indeed
To raise the tender floweret from the ground,
Examines it, enjoys it, coldly then
To add it to the trophies in his helm.
Unknown to him that still, intensest flame
That love awakens in a woman's heart ;
How her desires, her thoughts, her very being
Revolve about this single, central point ;
How all her wishes, like the little birds
That flutter anxious round the mother's nest,
Gather with easily awakened dread
About her love, their cradle and their grave ;
How like a precious gem her whole existence
Is hung about the neck of new-born love.
He loves ; but in his bosom there is place
For something else than only for his love,
And much which to the woman seems a crime
Is but amusement and a jest to him.
A kiss, wherever met with on his way,
He takes, nor ever thinks he does a wrong.

Alas that it should be so, but it is !

(*Turning, and perceiving PHAON.*)

Ah, see, within the shadow of the roses —

Yes, it is he, the beautiful deceiver !

He sleeps ; upon his brow what sweet repose,

What quiet happiness ! so innocence

Alone can breathe, so rise and fall

Only a bosom burdened by no ill.

Yes, my beloved, I will trust thy sleep,

Whatever evil tale thy waking tells.

Forgive me, dearest, if in that first moment

I hurt thee with suspicion, if I fancied

That falseness could defile so pure a temple.

He smiles, — his lips are parted, — and a name

Seems trembling in their breath. Awake ! and, **waking,**

Name Sappho who embraces thee. Awake !

(*Kissing his forehead.*)

PHAON. (*Wakes, stretches out his arms, and speaks with half-closed eyes.*)

Melitta !

SAPPHO (*starting back*).

Ah !

PHAON.

Who wakes me ? Who in envy

Frighted my dream's sweet images away ?

Thou, Sappho ? welcome ! Something fair, I knew,

Was standing at my side, or else my dream

Had not assumed so fair a countenance.
 But why art thou so troubled? I am happy;
 The weight that has lain heavy on my bosom
 As by a miracle is fallen from me,
 And I again breathe freely. Like the wretch
 Who falls engulfed in the dark realm of ocean,
 Where horror reigns and mystery and fear,
 When in their arms the waves have thrown him up,
 And once again the pleasant, golden sunlight,
 The breezes' kiss, the cheerful sound of voices,
 About his senses suddenly are playing, —
 So stand I happy, blissful, drunk with joy
 And only wish, weighed down by so much pleasure,
 For other senses or for less enjoyment.

SAPPHO (*to herself*).

Melitta!

PHAON.

Be thou joyful, love, and gay:
 It is so beauteous here, so heavenly fair!
 With downy wings, the gracious summer eve
 Sinks wearied down upon the quiet fields;
 The ocean's amorous bosom heaves and sinks
 With longing to embrace the lord of day,
 Whose steeds already hasten toward the west.
 A gentle breath the slender poplars stirs,
 That, as they dally with the virgin columns,
 Love's greeting send across to us, and whisper,
 "Behold, we love; ye mortals, do as we!"

SAPPHO (*to herself*).

My heart is fain to yield itself again.
But no : I've looked too deep into his soul.

PHAON.

A fever frenzy had possession of me,
But it has vanished even as it came,
And be assured that I have never loved thee,
Never more truly loved than at this moment.
Let us be glad, then, glad and light of heart.
But tell me, Sappho, what thou think'st of dreams.

SAPPHO.

They lie, and I detest all liars.

PHAON.

See ;

As I lay sleeping here just now, I dreamed
A strange and wondrous dream. I was transported
Back to Olympia, as it was when first
I saw thee in the excitement of the games.
I stood among the noisy, bustling crowd,
The din of chariots and the games about me.
Sudden a lyre was heard and all grew still :
'Twas thou ; thou sang'st the golden joys of love,
And to its very depths my soul was stirred.
I rushed towards thee, but — oh, wonderful !

E'en as I did so thou wast changed to me;
 The form still stood there as it was before,
 The crimson floating from the rounded shoulders,
 In the white hand the golden lyre still rang;
 But the whole face was changed, the features melting,
 Like mists that circle round the purple heights.
 Gone of a sudden was the laurel crown;
 The lofty brow had lost its gravity;
 The lips, which had but lately sung the gods,
 Were parted with a smile of earthly sweetness;
 The countenance, that had been that of Pallas,
 Was changed into the image of a child:
 In short it was thyself, and not thyself;
 Now Sappho seemed the shape, and now —

SAPPHO (*with a cry*).

Melitta!

PHAON.

Thou well-nigh frightenest me: — who says 'twas she?
 I scarce myself had guessed it. — Thou art moved.

(SAPPHO *with her hand motions him to go*.)

Thou biddest me to go? yet hear me, Sappho,
 One word —

(SAPPHO *again motions him to leave her*.)

PHAON.

Thou wilt not? — must I go? — Farewell.

SCENE SECOND.

SAPPHO (*alone, after a pause*).

The bow has sprung ;—

(Pressing her hands upon her breast.)

the arrow hit the mark.

What room for further doubt? all is too clear ;
 'Tis she who dwells within his perjured breast ;
 Her shape that floats before his shameless eyes ;
 They take her image all those flattering dreams
 That hover round the couch of the deceiver.
 Sappho forsaken and her slave preferred !
 Forsaken! who? ye heavens, and by whom?
 Am I no more that Sappho who beheld
 Kings at her feet, played with their proffered crowns,
 Saw, heard the haughty suitors and dismissed them?
 No more that Sappho who with acclamation
 All Greece has hailed as its most precious treasure?
 Fool that I was to leave the radiant heights,
 Where laurel crowns, where Aganippe murmurs,
 Where Muses mate while stars make harmony,
 And to descend into this narrow vale
 Where falseness dwells, and poverty and crime.
 My place was there above, among the clouds :
 Here is no room for me except the grave.
 He whom the gods have chosen for their own

May not consort with citizens of earth :
The mortal lot and heavenly ne'er can mingle
In the same cup ; but thou must choose between them.
Hast thou once chosen there is no receding ;
One taste of the immortal fruit of fame,
Like to Proserpina's pomegranate seeds,
Ranks thee for ever with the quiet shades,
And to the living thou belong'st no more.
Life may turn ne'er so sweet a face towards thee,
May sing her dulcet notes into thine ear,
May lure thee back with friendship and with love :
Beware, unhappy ! thinking to pluck roses,
Thou wilt but press their thorns into thy breast.

Where is she ? I would see the wondrous beauty
Who boasts of such a triumph over Sappho.
What must I think ? does memory play me false,
That when I question it brings up before me
A simple child with unformed, bashful mien,
Whose eyes are ever fixed upon the ground,
Whose lips can utter nought but childish nonsense ;
With empty breast, whose pitiful emotions,
But love of play and fear of punishment
Can rouse sometimes from their lethargic rest ?
Is there some subtle charm I cannot see
That draws him with such potency towards her ? —
Melitta ! — I must look on her ! — Melitta !

SCENE THIRD.

EUCCHARIS. SAPPHO.

EUCCHARIS.

Thy pleasure, lady ?

SAPPHO.

I would have Melitta.

Where is she ?

EUCCHARIS.

As I think, within her chamber.

SAPPHO.

Seeks the girl solitude ? — what does she there ?

EUCCHARIS.

I cannot tell ; but strange has been her bearing,
Unlike herself her manner through the day.
This morning she was silent and in tears,
And yet but now I met her going gaily,
Laden with linen, down to the clear brook
That spreads its coolness through the myrtle grove.

SAPPHO.

She is rejoicing in her triumph. — Further !

EUCCHARIS.

I curious to know what she could seek

Crept softly after into the still grove
And found her there —

SAPPHO.

With him ?

EUCHARIS.

With whom ?

SAPPHO.

Tell on.

EUCHARIS.

I found her there in the clear water standing,
The linen lying thrown upon the bank.
Her dress upraised, thinking no eye was near,
She scooped up water with her little hands,
And washed and rubbed with care her arms and face,
Which from the sunlight falling through the leaves,
And from her eagerness and the rough way
In which the little maiden set to work,
Were glowing o'er and o'er with fiery crimson.
As there she stood might Artemis herself
Have held her for the youngest of her nymphs.

SAPPHO.

I wished for facts, not for a eulogy.

EUCHARIS.

Her long bath ended, face and neck and arms

She dried, and, gaily singing, sought the house.
 So lost in thought was she and so absorbed,
 She noticed not the leaves that, from the grove,
 I flung upon her path to startle her.
 Arrived, she shut herself within her room.
 What there she does I know not, but I heard
 How she was searching busily in chests,
 And all the while came snatches of gay song.

SAPPHO.

She sings, and Sappho— nay, I do not weep.
 Bring her to me! —

EUCHARIS.

Melitta?

SAPPHO.

Ay; whom else? —

Melitta! — oh, a sweet and liquid name,
 A name to charm the ear, so full of love.
 Melitta! Sappho! — Go, bring her to me!



SCENE FOURTH.

SAPPHO alone. She seats herself on the grassy bench, and rests her head upon her hand.

SAPPHO.

I cannot! — Woe is me! I call on pride
 In vain: love answers in its stead.

SCENE FIFTH.

MELITTA. SAPPHO.

MELITTA enters dressed simply, but with care ; roses in her hair and on her bosom. She pauses on the threshold, but, as SAPPHO does not move, approaches.

MELITTA.

Here am I!

SAPPHO (*turning quickly and starting back*).

Ah! — by the gods she's fair.

(*Covers her face with her hands, and hides it on the grass. — Pause.*)

MELITTA.

Didst thou not call?

SAPPHO.

How she has decked herself to please her lover,
False girl! But let me curb my inward rage. —
What festival calls for such gay attire?

MELITTA.

A festival?

SAPPHO.

Wherefore that dress, those flowers?

MELITTA.

Thou often hast reproached me for not wearing

The gifts thy hand so lavishly bestowed,
But putting them too savingly away,
Reserved for other times and happy days.
I thought of thy rebuke a while ago,
And since to-day is such a happy day
I went into my room and decked myself.

SAPPHO.

A happy day? I know not for what reason.

MELITTA.

What reason? — why, because thou hast returned ;
Because — I know not why, but I am happy.

SAPPHO.

False girl !

MELITTA.

What dost thou say ?

SAPPHO (*controlling herself*).

Melitta, come,

Let us talk quietly together. — Say,
How old art thou ?

MELITTA.

Thou knowest thyself, O Sappho,
What tragic fate disturbed my childish years.
No mother numbered them with fond exactness,
Yet, as I think, I am sixteen.

SAPPHO.

Thou liest !

MELITTA.

I ?

SAPPHO.

Speak'st not truly.

MELITTA.

Always, honored lady !

SAPPHO.

Thou numberest scarce fifteen.

MELITTA.

It may be so.

SAPPHO.

So young in years, how should she be already
 So practised in deceit ? It cannot be
 That Nature thus can contradict herself.
 Impossible ! away with such a thought ! —
 Melitta, dost remember still the day
 They brought thee to me thirteen years ago ?
 Thou hadst been carried off by savage men,
 And thou didst sob and cry in noisy grief.
 I had compassion on the homeless child ;
 Her tears went to my heart ; I paid the price ;
 Scarce more than child myself, I pressed thee close

With ardent love unto my youthful breast.
They tried to part us, but thou held'st me fast,
Thy little arms clinging about my neck,
Until the comfort-bringing sleep relaxed them.
Tell me, dost thou remember still that day?

MELITTA.

Oh, could I ever, ever, not remember?

SAPPHO.

And later when the serpent coils of fever,
Breathing out poison, held thee bound, Melitta,
Who was it watched the long nights through beside thee,
Making her head a pillow for thine own ;
Wrestled forgetful of herself with death
To rescue from his clutch the much-loved prey,
And rescued it with anguish and with tears?

MELITTA.

'Twas thou, O Sappho ! what do I possess,
That is not due to thee and to thy kindness?

SAPPHO.

It is so, is it not ? come to my heart :
I knew thou couldst not grieve me ; willingly,
Thou wouldst do nothing that could grieve me ; **come,**
Let heart beat against heart, let eye look deep
Within a sister's eyes, let words be mingled,

E'en as we breathe them, that the ear deceived,
 The sympathetic breast sweetly beguiled,
 By such harmonious blending, in each sound
 May recognize itself, though not its word.

MELITTA.

O Sappho !

SAPPHO.

I deceived me, did I not ?

MELITTA.

Wherein ?

SAPPHO.

How couldst thou ? but thou canst not ; no.

MELITTA.

What, O my mistress ?

SAPPHO.

Couldst thou then ? — But go,

First lay aside this vanity of dress :

I cannot see thee thus. Go ; other garments !

This gay adornment wounds my eye ; away !

Melitta simple loved simplicity ;

Coverings like those betoken something hid.

Another dress, I tell thee ; go, this moment. —

Stay : whither wilt thou go ? look in my face.

Wherefore those downcast eyes ? are they afraid

To meet those of thy mistress ? new thy shyness !

When lately Phaon — Ah thou blushest, traitress !

Thou hast betrayed thyself ; dost still deny ?
 I trust not thy false tongue, but will believe
 The testimony of thy cheeks, the glow
 Reflected from the guilty flame that burns
 Deep down in thy false heart. Unhappy girl !
 Thence came thy strange demeanor at the banquet,
 What I mistook for sign of maiden shame
 Was then the trick of cunning courtesan
 Seeking to spin a web about her victim.
 So young and yet so crafty ; fair and blooming,
 With mould and poison in thy wicked heart !
 Stand not so silent there ; dost thou lack words ?
 The tongue that stings can it not also hiss ?
 Speak, answer me !

MELITTA.

I know not what thou meanest.

SAPPHO.

Thou knowest not ? poor child ! and tears — weep not !
 Tears are the holy privilege of grief ;
 Use words : they long ago were desecrated,
 But not the silent speech of innocence.
 So gaily dressed, decked out so like a bride !
 Off with those flowers : they are of small avail
 To hide the serpent ill disguised beneath.
 Take off thy roses !

(MELITTA takes off the wreath in silence.)

SAPPHO.

Give the wreath to me :

I will preserve it in remembrance of thee ;
 And, if the leaves shall wither soon and drop,
 Think of thy truth and of my happiness.
 Why dost thou spare the rose upon thy breast ?
 Lay it aside !

(Melitta steps back.)

SAPPHO.

Is it a pledge of love ?

Discard it !

MELITTA *(crossing her arms over her breast and so concealing the rose).*

Never !

SAPPHO.

To resist is vain :

Give me the rose !

MELITTA *(her hands firmly pressed upon her breast).*

Rather my life !

SAPPHO.

False serpent !

I too can sting.

(Drawing a dagger.)

Give me the rose !

MELITTA.

Defend me,

Almighty Gods !

SCENE SIXTH.

The same.

PHAON.

Who calls? — Melitta, thou?

(Pause.)

Put up the dagger. — Sappho, what is this?

SAPPHO.

Ask of this girl.

PHAON.

Hast thou — ?

MELITTA.

The fault is mine :

I spoke as is not meet for slaves to speak.

SAPPHO.

Charge not thyself with guilt that is not thine :

Thine own is great enough. Alas for me,

Should I e'er need thy magnanimity.

(In a harsh tone.)

I bade her give the rose upon her breast,

And she refused obedience.

PHAON.

She refused ?

By all the gods, right was she to refuse ;

For no one shall deprive her of the flower.

I gave it her myself in memory

Of a most pleasant hour, and as a sign

That sympathy for undeserved misfortune

Is not extinct in every human breast ;

Gave as a drop of honey in the cup

That others' arrogance holds to her lips ;

As pledge of my belief the highest charm

Woman can have lies in a quiet heart,

And that the rosy wreath of innocence

Is better than the laurel crown of fame.

She weeps : let me not see thee weep, **Melitta !**

When thou didst buy her from the dealer's hand,

Didst thou include the value of these tears ?

The body is thine own ; come here and kill it :

But not one teardrop shalt thou force from her. —

Thou lookest at me with thy gentle eyes,

As asking pity for the pitiless.

Thou dost not know her, dost not know her pride.

See ! gleams there not a dagger in her hand ?

Two more lie veiled beneath those lowered lids.

*(Snatching up the dagger which has escaped from SAPPHO'S
hand.)*

Give me the dagger : I will wear it here,

On this warm heart so cruelly deceived ;

And, if a dream of by-gone days should e'er

Wake tender longing in my soul, one look

Upon this steel shall cure me of my folly.

SAPPHO (*her eyes fixed upon him*).

Phaon !

PHAON.

Oh, do not heed her dulcet tones :
 They would but lure thee on to meet her dagger.
 Their charm for me is over : long ago
 Ere I beheld her, from afar she threw
 The spell of song bewilderingly about me,
 Drawing me to herself with threads of gold ;
 And, struggle as I would, yet close and closer
 The magic circle wrapped me round. I saw her,
 And madness took possession of my senses ;
 Captive I threw myself at her proud feet.
 The sight of thee first brought me to myself.
 Trembling I saw myself in Circe's house,
 Felt myself parting with my human shape.
 Yet still I was not freed, till she herself
 By her own hand released me from the spell.

SAPPHO (*her eyes still fixed upon him*).

Phaon !

PHAON.

Oh, hear her not, and look not towards her :
 Her eye can kill as surely as her hand.

MELITTA.

She weeps !

PHAON.

Away : with tears she weaves new spells.

MELITTA.

My own dear mistress, can I see her suffer ?

PHAON.

The sight moves me no less : come, come away,
Ere she can cast her net anew about thee.

(Would lead her away.)

MELITTA.

I cannot. — Sappho !

SAPPHO *(with broken voice)*.

Call'st thou me, Melitta ?

MELITTA *(turning and embracing her knees)*.

Sappho, 'tis I ;— here, take the rose ; I give it ;
And with it take my life ! — where is thy dagger ?

PHAON *(snatching away the rose, which both hold, and raising MELITTA)*.

Thine, thine it is : no god shall take it from thee.
Away ; come, hasten from her presence.

(He leads her away.)

SAPPHO *(with outstretched arms)*.

Phaon !

The curtain falls.

ACT FOURTH.

LANDSCAPE as before. Moonlight.

SCENE FIRST.

SAPPHO (*appears lost in thought ; after a pause*).

Do I still live? does any thing still live?
 Did this broad universe not crash together
 In that terrific moment? Is this dark
 That o'er me broods the darkness but of night,
 Not of the grave? — They say great grief can kill : —
 Alas! it is not so. — All still about me :
 The air is hushed, the cheerful tones of life
 Have died away, no whisper more is heard
 From the unstirring leaves, and solitary,
 Like a belated stranger, goes my wail
 Into the night. — Oh if one could but sleep
 As sleep the little birds, but longer — longer —
 Without awakening ; folded in a sleep
 Profounder, sweeter, dreamless, where all — all —
 Even the pulses sleep, nor morning ray
 Wakes to fresh torture ; where ingratitude —
 But hold — let me not tread upon the serpent.

(In a half-whisper.)

Murder is verily a heinous crime,
 Deceit and robbery and all the rest,

Heads of that poisonous hydra, that begotten
 Beside the flaming pool infests the world
 With its pestiferous breath, crimes heinous, shameful !
 Yet one I know whose blackness is so deep
 The others all seem lily white beside it ;
 Ingratitude its name ! that one alone
 Performs the united work of all the rest :
 It lies, it steals, deceives, and swears false oaths :
 It can betray and kill — ingratitude !

Save me, ye Gods, oh, save me from myself !
 All the dark spirits in me rouse from sleep,
 And rattle at their prison bars of iron.
 This one I had besought of fate, this one
 Among all mortals ; him I would have placed
 Upon the summit of humanity,
 Raised above all that are ; I would have borne him
 Beyond the grave, mortality, and death,
 Upon the wings of fame, over and onward
 To the far brightness of the coming time ;
 All that I can and am, I would have bound
 Into a wreath to twine about his brow,
 Asking for no return but a kind word.

And he — do ye still live, ye righteous Gods ?

(As if seized by a sudden thought.)

Ay, ye do live, — for ye inspire the thought
 That flashes on my soul. Oh, let me grasp thee,
 Swift messenger, and catch thy fleeting word ! —
 To Chios, sayest thou, shall the maid be sent ;

To Chios, and there parted from the traitor,
Turn her misguided heart to penitence,
And with love's torment for love's crime atone?—
So be it! Rhamnes, Rhamnes! ay, so be it!
Thanks, ye Immortals, for the sign ye give:
I haste to follow it.



SCENE SECOND.

RHAMNES. SAPPHO.

RHAMNES.

Thy pleasure, lady!

SAPPHO.

She is my work: what were she without me?
And who denies the potter has the right
The thing he has created to destroy?
Destroy?—but can I?—woe is me, her bliss
Is safe beyond the reach of my weak hand.
For, if his love should follow her to Chios,
Were she not happier at a slave's poor hearth
Than I within my golden, loveless palace?
'Tis sweet to suffer for the one we love;
For hope and memory are roses blooming
On the same tree that bears for us the Now—
Roses without their thorns.—Oh, banish me

Into the unknown vastness of the ocean,
Upon some rock that, barren and abrupt,
Knows for all neighbors but the waves and clouds,
Rent savagely from every path of life, —
Only erase from memory's book in mercy
The hour that has gone by. Let me believe
But in his love, and I will prize my lot ;
Content will dwell in solitude, not lonely ;
Because at every thorn that wounds my foot,
At every pang that tortures, I could say,
Did he but know ! or, He is thinking of me,
What would he give to save me ! — and that thought
Would be a cooling balm for every wound.

RHAMNES.

Did I not hear thee call me, honored lady ?

SAPPHO.

O Phaon, Phaon, what have I e'er done thee ? —
Serene upon the fields of poesy,
With golden lyre, companionless I stood ;
My eyes looked down upon the joys of earth,
And earthly sorrows reached not up to me.
There not by moments, but by fairest flowers,
Woven into the cheerful wreath of song,
I marked the flight of never-resting time.
What to my song I gave, it gave me back,
And everlasting youth was on my brow.

Then came a cruel hand, and ruthlessly
My golden veil was cast upon the ground,
And I dragged down into this desert waste,
Where all around no footfall is nor path.
And now he -- he that was the only object
To smile upon me in this wilderness
Has turned away and left me desolate.

RHAMNES.

Lady! why wilt thou linger in the darkness,
The night's damp breath and ocean's mists upon thee?

SAPPHO.

Ingratitude — knowest thou a crime more black?

RHAMNES.

I know of none.

SAPPHO.

Or one more venomous?

RHAMNES.

No, none.

SAPPHO.

More worthy to be cursed and punished?

RHAMNES.

Indeed, 'tis justly burdened with all curses.

SAPPHO.

Ay, is it not? for all the other crimes.

They are hyenas, lions, tigers, wolves ;
 Ingratitude's the serpent, is it not ?
 So fair, so smooth, so bright, so poisonous ! — Ah ! —

RHAMNES.

Come in with me : thou wilt be better there ;
 For all the house is festively adorned,
 And Phaon waits for thee within the hall.

SAPPHO.

What ! — Phaon waits for me ?

RHAMNES.

Yes, noble mistress.

I saw him walking thoughtful up and down,
 Now standing still, now speaking to himself,
 Then from the window questioning the night.

SAPPHO.

He waits for me ? good Rhamnes, said he so ?
 For me, — for Sappho ?

RHAMNES.

Nay, he said it not ;
 But I beheld him waiting there and watching,
 And whom should he be waiting for ?

SAPPHO.

For whom ? —

'Tis not for Sappho ; but he waits in vain. —
 Rhamnes !

RHAMNES.

My mistress !

SAPPHO.

As thou knowest, at Chios
Dwells one who was my father's friend and mine.

RHAMNES.

I know.

SAPPHO.

Loose quickly from the shore the boat
The waves are rocking yonder in the bay.
This very night thou must away to Chios.

RHAMNES.

Alone ?

SAPPHO.

No.

(Pause).

RHAMNES.

Who is my companion thither ?

SAPPHO.

What sayest thou ?

RHAMNES.

Who will go with me ?

SAPPHO *(leading him to the other side of the stage).*

Come hither ;—

Be cautious and be silent, dost thou hear ?

Go to Melitta's chamber, and command her
To come to me ; tell her that Sappho calls.
But secretly, that he observe not.

RHAMNES.

Who ?

SAPPHO.

Who ? — Phaon. — If she follow —

(*Pausing.*)

RHAMNES.

And what then ?

SAPPHO.

Then bring her by persuasion or by force,
But noiselessly, into the unmoored boat,
And with all speed make instantly for Chios.

RHAMNES.

And there ?

SAPPHO.

There give her to the friend thou knowest.
He is to keep her till I call her back,
And strictly — nay, not strictly need he keep her ;
She will have been chastised enough. Dost hear ?

RHAMNES.

I hasten.

SAPPHO.

Linger not.

RHAMNES.

Farewell, O Sappho !

To-morrow's sun shall find us far from here.
Thou shalt be well contented with thy servant.



SCENE THIRD.

SAPPHO (*alone*).

He's gone. — But — no! — Alas, how burdensome
Is habit binding us to what we hate!

(*Absorbed in thought.*)

Hark — steps! — nay, 'twas the wind. — How anxiously
My heart is throbbing in my storm-tossed breast! —
Now voices — yes, she comes — and willingly,
Suspecting not that she has looked her last —
Away, I will not see her — cannot see her!

(*Hastens out.*)



SCENE FOURTH.

MELITTA. RHAMNES.

MELITTA.

Was this the place where I should find the mistress?
She is not here.

RHAMNES (*looking about in embarrassment*).

Not here? no, verily.
She can but just have gone: we will seek further.

MELITTA.
But where?

RHAMNES.
She may have wandered on, perhaps,
Nearer the shore ; perhaps is in yon cove.

MELITTA.
Thither she never goes.

RHAMNES.
Perhaps to-day.

MELITTA.
Wherefore to-day?

RHAMNES.
Wherefore ? — Because — I know not —
Because — (*aside*) why chose she me for this com-
mission ?
I cannot look at her ; — what can I say ?

MELITTA.
How strange thy manner is ! Thou turn'st away ;
Thine eyes refusing to give confirmation
Of what thy lips have spoken. Say, what ails thee ?
Why art thou so disquieted and anxious,
Tell me where Sappho is that I may join her,
And if thou know'st not, let me go.

RHAMNES.
Nay, stop :
Thou must not go.

MELITTA.

Why not?

RHAMNES.

Thou must with me.

MELITTA.

Whither?

RHAMNES.

To — only come to yonder bay,
And thou shalt know.

MELITTA.

Ye Gods! what canst thou mean?

RHAMNES.

Come, maiden, come: midnight will soon be past;
Time presses; come!

MELITTA.

What wilt thou do with me?
Must I go hence — hence to some distant land?

RHAMNES.

Be tranquil, child! — Unto what distant land;
What art thou thinking? Is then Chios far?

MELITTA.

To Chios? Never, never!

RHAMNES.

Child, thou must :
The mistress wills it so.

MELITTA.

'Tis Sappho wills it ?
Take me to her.

RHAMNES.

Nay.

MELITTA.

Take me to her feet,
That she may hear and judge me !

RHAMNES.

Not one step.

MELITTA.

Wherefore so hard ?

RHAMNES.

I cannot otherwise.

I was commanded, and I must obey.

MELITTA.

Yield to my prayers !

RHAMNES.

They can avail thee nought ;
Though tears are in my eyes, it must be done.
Come, child, away !

MELITTA.

Behold me on my knees !
Oh be entreated !— Is there none to hear me,
No one to save ?

RHAMNES.

In vain : thou 'lt wake the house.

Come !

MELITTA.

Never ! has then none compassion on me ?



SCENE FIFTH.

PHAON. The same.

PHAON.

That is Melitta's voice ! — How dar'st thou, wretch,
Lay hand upon her ?

(RHAMNES *releases* MELITTA.)

I foreboded right

When wolf-like, reconnoitring with thine eyes,
I saw thee creeping up to where she was.
But thou hast reckoned false, thou cruel wolf :
The shepherd watches, and thine hour is near.

RHAMNES.

I do but carry out the mistress' orders.

PHAON.

How, Sappho's orders ? this was her command ?
O Sappho, Sappho, that was like thyself !

I know thee now, alas, too late! — Too late?
 There yet is time to shake the fetters off
 From her and me; and by the gods I will!
 Thou all too ready tool of other's malice,
 Confess. — Melitta, thou art pale, thou tremblest.

MELITTA.

Nay, all is well with me.

PHAON.

Slave, thank the gods
 That not a stone so much as scratched her foot.
 By heaven, thou shouldst have paid for every tear
 With sighs of mortal anguish. — Thou art weary:
 Lean upon me; no rest canst thou find surer.
 Look, madman, look upon this gracious being,
 The image of the gods, thou wouldst have harmed.

RHAMNES.

Not harmed.

PHAON.

What then?

RHAMNES.

I would — but pardon me,
 I cannot what I would, so let me go.

PHAON (*leaving MELITTA*).

By all the gods, thou stayest till I know
 The measure of thy wickedness. Speak out:
 What wert thou to have done?

RHAMNES.

Bear her away.

PHAON.

And whither ?

RHAMNES.

To — that is my mistress' secret.

PHAON.

Thou wilt not speak ?

RHAMNES.

She trusted it to me,
And safe it lies within her servant's breast.

PHAON.

This steel shall let it out. I thank thee, Sappho,
That thou hast given me arms against thyself.

(Drawing the dagger.)

Hide nothing from me ; for thou seest me ready
To force thy secret from its prison-house.

MELITTA.

Oh, spare him ! I was to be sent to Chios.

PHAON.

To Chios ?

MELITTA.

Yes : a friend of Sappho's dwells there,
Into whose care Melitta should be given.

PHAON.

Across the sea ?

MELITTA.

A boat in yonder bay —

PHAON.

A boat ?

MELITTA.

So said he ; is it not so, father ?

RHAMNES.

Call me not father, thou ungrateful girl,
Who thus betray'st the counsels of our mistress.

PHAON.

A boat ?

MELITTA (*to* RHAMNES).

What have I done that's worthy to be blamed ?
Didst thou not hear him ask ?

PHAON.

A boat ? so be it :

I take it as a sign from you, kind Gods ;
Too late I understand your admonitions ;
'Tis she, or none upon this earth, whose bosom
Answers to the deep passion stirred in mine.
Ye point me out the way I am to tread. —
Melitta, yes, thou shalt away to Chios :
But not alone ; thou goest with me beside thee.

MELITTA.

With him?

PHAON.

Come, quit this rude and hostile land,
Where hate and envy and the Gorgon head
Of vengeance intercept thy path, where snares
Are laid for thee by one who seeks thy life.
Come: there the boat; here courage, will, and strength
To guard thee, if it were against a world.

(Would lead her away.)

MELITTA *(terrified, to RHAMNES)*.

Rhamnes!

RHAMNES.

Bethink thyself!

PHAON.

Do thou bethink thee
Of thy design, and that thou 'rt in my power.

RHAMNES.

But she is Sappho's.

PHAON.

Liar, she is mine!
(To MELITTA.)

Come, follow me.

RHAMNES.

The dwellers on this island
Pay Sappho all the reverence due a queen,

And at the first alarm are ever ready
 In arms to guard the threshold of her door.
 A word from me, and hundreds will rise up —

PHAON.

The warning comes in time : I had forgotten
 With whom I am and where. Thou goest with us.

RHAMNES.

I with you ?

PHAON.

Yes, but only to the shore.
 Are we in safety, then thou may'st return,
 Tell what has happened, and — enough, thou goest.

RHAMNES.

Nay, never.

PHAON.

I have that will force obedience.

RHAMNES (*retreating towards the house*).

Ah, violence !

PHAON (*barring the way and drawing his dagger*).

Die, since thou so hast willed it :
 A madman's death is but a trifling price
 For this pure maid's deliverance.

MELITTA.

Kill him not !

PHAON.

Let him obey !

RHAMNES (*who has retreated to the opposite side*).

Alas, alas for age!

When will and power no longer work as one.

PHAON.

Come, maiden!

MELITTA.

Whither?

PHAON.

To the boat.

MELITTA (*hastening from him to the front*).

Great Gods,

Direct me!

PHAON.

Come: the distance stretches forth
Protecting arms to meet us. There is safety

And rest and love beyond the cold, gray sea.

Oh, come, beloved! the linden's spreading dome

That peaceful shades my parents' peaceful home

Shall be the temple of our happiness.

(*Putting his arm about her.*)

Why dost thou tremble? tremble not, dear maid:

Thy lover's arm holds thee in safe embrace.

Come, if thou follow not, then, by the gods,

These hands shall bear thee hence, and on and on,

To the world's end.

MELITTA.

O Phaon!

PHAON.

Come, away!

Propitious gleam the stars, the ocean calls,
Fair breezes blow; love Amphitrite favors.

(To RHAMNES.)

Go thou before; — go, if thou love thy life.



SCENE SIXTH.

After a pause, EUCHARIS appears upon the steps.

EUCHARIS.

Rhamnes!

(Descending.)

Is no one here? — I was deceived;
Methought I heard his voice: but o'er this house
An evil spirit of confusion reigns
Since Sappho has returned; alarmed and anxious
Each shuns the other, and on every face
Suspicion sits and care. I sought Melitta,
And found her couch was empty. Solitary
Strays Sappho through the night; here Rhamnes' voice
But not himself. — Would it were morning! — hark!

RHAMNES (*at a distance*).

Help, help!

EUCHARIS.

Who calls?

RHAMNES (*nearer*).

Here!

EUCHARIS.

Rhamnes?

RHAMNES (*close at hand*).

Slaves of Sappho!

EUCHARIS.

He comes all breathless. Rhamnes, what has passed?



SCENE SEVENTH.

RHAMNES entering hastily. EUCHARIS.

RHAMNES.

Up from your slumber! up, and hasten hither!
Pursue the fugitives! help, help!

EUCHARIS.

What is it?

RHAMNES.

Ask not, but call up Sappho and the servants.

EUCHARIS.

What cause?

RHAMNES.

This is no time for words; go, go;
Let all the house be wakened; quick, call help!

EUCCHARIS.

What can it mean?

(Ascends the steps.)

RHAMNES.

I can no more. — O traitor,
 Exult not yet: the good gods of the sea
 Will take revenge upon so base a deed.

(Servants come one after another.)

Haste down into the valley ; wake the people ;
 Let an alarm, a call for help be sounded :
 Ask not ; away, away ; sound the alarm !



SCENE EIGHTH.

SAPPHO. RHAMNES. EUCCHARIS.

SAPPHO.

What voice of terror through the quiet night
 Usurps the office of sleep-killing care ?
 Has any cause for wailing here but I ?

RHAMNES.

I, O my mistress !

SAPPHO.

Thou here, Rhamnes, thou ?
 And where is she ?

RHAMNES.

Melitta ?

SAPPHO.

Surely!

RHAMNES.

Gone.

SAPPHO.

She gone, and thou still here?

RHAMNES.

Escaped with —

SAPPHO.

Hold!

RHAMNES.

Escaped with Phaon.

SAPPHO.

No!

RHAMNES.

It is too true.

He overpowered my feeble age, and now
In the same boat that was prepared for me
Is fleeing with his booty through the waves.

SAPPHO.

Thou liest!

RHAMNES.

Oh, would that this one time I did!

SAPPHO.

Where was your thunder, ye eternal Gods?
Have ye no tortures save for Sappho's heart?

Is deaf the ear of vengeance, lame its arm?
 Send your avenging lightnings down, ye Gods,
 Oh, send them down upon the traitors' head,
 And blast them, even as ye have blasted me! —
 In vain: no bolt speeds through the quiet air;
 The wanton winds still whisper in the grove;
 And ever farther from the shore the sea
 Bears on its ample breast the boat of love.
 No help is there: Sappho, help thou thyself!

*(The stage has been gradually filling with country people
 and slaves bearing torches.)*

Lo, these about me! — Thanks, thanks to you all;
 May mortals give me what the gods refuse.
 Up, faithful friends, up and avenge your Sappho!
 If ye have ever loved me, show it now.

(Going about among them.)

Thou, Myron, oft hast sworn to me; and thou,
 Terpander; is thy song forgotten, Lychas?
 Xenarchos, — Pheres, thou, — all, all my friends;
 Haste downward to the beach, and man the boats,
 And like the wind pursue the fugitives.
 Remember that I here in torment wait,
 And every moment until your return
 Pierces my bosom with a thousand darts.
 Whoe'er will bring them, let me have the joy
 Of looking deep into his eyes and asking:
 What have I done to thee that thou shouldst slay me?

(Bursting into tears.)

But no ;— no tears ; nothing but rage and vengeance. —
 Whoe'er will bring them to me, he shall have
 My gold, my life. — Away, fly like the wind !

A PEASANT.

We come not back without him.

SAPPHO.

Take my thanks :

(To the men as they go.)

It is my life I give into your keeping.
 Let my desire give wings unto your feet,
 And let my vengeance strengthen every arm ;
 But speed you, speed, I pray you by the gods !
(Her hands crossed upon her breast.)
 They go : — 'tis well with me ; now I will rest.

EUCHARIS.

Thou tremblest.

RHAMNES.

Thou wilt fall. — O Sappho !

EUCHARIS *(supporting her in her arms).*

Gods !

SAPPHO *(in EUCHARIS' arms).*

Oh, let me fall : why do ye seek to hold me ?

The curtain falls.

ACT FIFTH.

Landscape as in the preceding acts. Morning breaks.

SCENE FIRST.

SAPPHO sits half reclining on the grassy seat gazing fixedly before her. At a little distance stands EUCHARIS, farther back several female attendants. — RHAMNES enters.

EUCHARIS (*her finger upon her lips*).

Still, still!

RHAMNES.

Is she asleep?

EUCHARIS.

Her eyes are open :

The body wakes ; the spirit seems to slumber.

Three hours immovable she thus has lain.

RHAMNES.

Ye had done well to lead her to her room.

EUCHARIS.

I tried, but she would not. — Still nothing?

RHAMNES.

Nothing.

Far as the eye can reach but sea and clouds :

No trace of any boat.

SAPPHO (*starting up*).

A boat ; where ?

RHAMNES.

Nothing

Have we yet seen, dear mistress.

SAPPHO (*sinking back*).

Nothing — nothing !

RHAMNES.

The morning air is chill : come to the house.

(SAPPHO *by a motion of the head refuses.*)

RHAMNES.

Oh, be entreated ! let me lead thee in.

(SAPPHO *again makes a sign of refusal.*)

RHAMNES (*drawing back*).

Wilt thou not come ? — It breaks my heart to see her.

EUCHARIS.

Look there : why crowd the people thus together ?

All hurry towards the shore ; methinks they come.

SAPPHO (*springing up*).

Ah !

(*She stands with body thrown backward, anxiously listening.*)

EUCHARIS.

Go to yonder rock and look abroad :

Perchance thou wilt descry them.

RHAMNES.

I will look.

(Ascends a rocky headland.)

EUCHARIS.

Quick, quick! say, is there nothing?

RHAMNES.

Thank the gods,

They come.

SAPPHO.

Ah!

RHAMNES.

Yonder woody promontory
That stretches on the left into the sea
Hid from my eyes till now the welcome sight.
A tangled maze of boats rows towards the shore
With rapid strokes.

EUCHARIS.

The fugitives among them?

RHAMNES.

The sun is dazzling: I distinguish nothing. —
But, hold, a boat already nears the shore,
Sent in advance to bring the joyous news.
Now some one lands, — the shepherd from the valley.
He waves his staff. They surely must be taken. —
This way, good friend, this way! — he is approaching.
(Descending.)

EUCHARIS.

Be calm, my gracious mistress, be composed.



SCENE SECOND.

The same. A countryman.

COUNTRYMAN.

Hail, Sappho!

EUCHARIS.

Is he taken?

COUNTRYMAN.

Yes.

RHAMNES.

Where?

EUCHARIS.

How?

COUNTRYMAN.

They had an ample start, and he rows well :
It seemed as we should never overtake them,
When lo, at last, already in mid-sea,
We spied their boat, and at full speed pursued.
It soon was overtaken and surrounded.

We bade him turn about, but he would not.
 With his left hand he grasped the maid, his right
 Brandished a naked dagger. — Wilt thou aught,
 Most noble lady?

(SAPPHO makes him a sign to proceed.)

Well, he brandished thus
 His dagger threateningly, until an oar
 We aimed at him struck on the head the maid.
 She fell ; he clasped her in his arms ; while we,
 Seizing the moment, sprang into the boat,
 Secured him, and so brought them back to shore.
 They even now are landing ; see the two. .
 The little maid still totters in her walk.

SAPPHO.

Not hither !

RHAMNES.

Whither else ? They're close at hand.

SAPPHO.

Ah, who will save me from the sight of him ?
 Come, maidens ! — Aphrodite, guard thy servant !

(*She hastens to the back of the stage and embraces the altar,
 her female attendants surrounding her.*)

SCENE THIRD.

PHAON leading MELITTA. Country people. In the background
SAPPHO with her maidens.

PHAON.

Let no one dare to lay a finger on her ;
For I am not defenceless, though disarmed.
This hand shall be a rod for her protection.
And every limb of mine become a weapon.
Keep by my side, Melitta ; tremble not :
No harm shall come to thee while Phaon lives. —
How could ye strike her innocent pure head,
And call you men ? Methought a woman only,
An angry woman, weak and cowardly,
Could be so cruel. It was thou who struck her ;
I know thee : off ! lest I anticipate
The avenging gods and rob them of their prey. —
How is it with thee ?

MELITTA.

Well.

PHAON.

Thy look belies thee ;
Thy trembling and thy pallid cheek betray
The only falsehood that thy lips e'er uttered.
In vain thou seekest to repress my fury :

Thou dost but fan it to intenser flame.
 Seat thyself here upon this grassy bank,
 Where first thy gentle eyes, clear as the heavens,
 Shone forth upon me like the golden dawn,
 Loosening the fetters of the slumber dark
 In which the enchantress' song had bound me ; here
 Where love began her gracious work, e'en here
 Shall love complete it. — Tell me, where is Sappho ?

MELITTA.

O Phaon, call her not.

PHAON.

Fear nought, Melitta :
 Am I not free ? what right has she to hold me ?
 Proud Sappho yet shall learn and to her terror,
 That there is justice still in Greece. To her,
 To Sappho ! —

A COUNTRYMAN.

Stay !

PHAON.

Who holds me ?

COUNTRYMAN.

All of us.

PHAON.

I am a freeman.

COUNTRYMAN.

Free thou wast, but now
 Subject unto the penalty of law.

PHAON.

What penalty, for what ?

COUNTRYMAN.

Rape of a slave

Calls down the vengeance of the law upon thee.

PHAON.

Let Sappho name her ransom : I will pay it,
Should it require the riches of a Cræsus.

COUNTRYMAN.

'Tis Sappho's to demand, not thine to offer.

PHAON.

Are ye so tame that ye will lend your hands
To gratify an angry woman's vengeance,
And make you passive tools of love's caprice ?
Rather aid me, for I am suffering wrong.

COUNTRYMAN.

If right or wrong, 'tis Sappho must decide.

PHAON.

Dost thou not blush to speak such words, old man ?
Who then is Sappho, that thou heed'st her voice
As held she in her hand the scales of justice ?
Is she the sovereign of this land ?

COUNTRYMAN.

She is ;

Because we serve, not because she commands.

PHAON.

Has she then spun her nets about you all ?
But I will see how far the charm can reach.
To Sappho !

(Advancing towards the house.)

COUNTRYMAN.

Back !

PHAON.

Ye threaten me in vain ;

For I will see her. — Sappho, show thyself ;
Where art thou ? dost thou tremble at my presence ?
There at the altar is her band of slaves ;
I have her ; — she shall not escape ; stand forth !
*(Forces his way through the crowd, the circle of maidens
opens and discloses SAPPHO lying prostrate on the steps
of the altar.)*

COUNTRYMAN.

How darest thou, rash boy ?

PHAON.

What dost thou here

Before the gods ? they hear not evil prayers.
Up !

*(He lays his hand upon her ; at his touch, SAPPHO starts
up, and without looking at him hurries to the front of
the stage.)*

PHAON (*following her*).

Wouldst thou flee? I call thee to account,
 And thou must answer. Tremble: thou hast cause.
 Knowest thou what thou hast done? What right hast
 thou
 To hold me in unlawful durance, me,
 A freeman with no master but myself?
 Behold these men in unaccustomed arms:
 Were they sent out by thee? speak! didst thou send
 them? —
 Still silent? are the poet's sweet lips dumb?

SAPPHO.

This is too much.

PHAON.

The blood mounts to her cheek,
 Suffusing it with the deep glow of anger:
 Throw off thy mask; show thyself as thou art,
 And rage and slay, thou cruel, treacherous Circe.

SAPPHO.

This is too much. — Up, arm thyself, my heart.

PHAON.

Answer me: was it thou sent forth these men?

SAPPHO (*to RHAMNES*).

Go and bring back to me my slave, Melitta;
 'Twas she alone, none other, that I sent for,

PHAON.

Back, back ! let no one dare lay hands on her.
Demand a ransom ; though I am not rich,
Parents and friends will gladly help me purchase
My happiness from Sappho's avarice.

SAPPHO (*still looking away*).

I seek not gold, but only what is mine ;
She stays.

PHAON.

She shall not stay, no, by the gods !
That moment forfeited thy claim upon her,
When thou didst point the dagger at her breast :
Thy money bought her service, not her life.
Dost think that I would leave her in thy hands ?
Once more, demand her ransom and release her.

SAPPHO (*to RHAMNES*).

Do as I bid thee.

PHAON.

Stand back every one !
He meets his death who lays a finger on her. —
Art thou so void of all humanity
Thou hast no feeling left for others' woe ?
Cast down thy golden lyre, thou murderous serpent ;
For nevermore thy lips shall utter song :
Thy gift of poesy is forfeited.

Oh, desecrate no more the name of art,
 Which should be as the flower among life's leaves,
 Born of our purest powers, and lift its head
 Fragrant with balsam through the liquid blue
 Unto the stars whose image it should bear.
 But thou hast used it like the poisonous hemlock,
 To work a cruel death upon thy foes.
 Far otherwise in earlier, fairer days
 Had I, poor simple fool, imagined Sappho.
 Sweet as her song seemed her transfigured spirit,
 And spotless as her lays I deemed her heart.
 The harmonies that issued from her lips
 I fancied rose and fell within her bosom,
 And her whole being I deemed was melody.
 The wand of what magician has transformed thee?
 Turn not thine eyes away from me in fear,
 But look upon me : let me look on thee,
 That I may know if it be really thou ;
 If these can be the lips my lips have kissed,
 And those the eyes that smiled to mine so sweetly ;
 If thou be really Sappho's self.

*(He seizes her arm, and turns her towards him. She looks
 up; her eyes meet his.)*

SAPPHO (*shrinking with pain*).

Ah me !

PHAON.

Yes, thou art Sappho still : that was her voice.
 What I have said I scatter to the winds,

That it may not take root in any heart.
 Now all is clear again before my eyes,
 And as the sun after the thunder-storm,
 So through the spent clouds of the present shines
 The brightness of the past. I bid thee hail,
 Spirit of fairer days : thou art again
 What thou wast to me in my distant home
 Ere I had seen thy face, face of a god,
 Which I mistakenly have held for human.
 Show thyself now a goddess : Sappho, bless us !

SAPPHO.

Deceiver !

PHAON.

I am no deceiver, Sappho.

'Twas no deception when I swore I loved thee ;
 — For I did love thee as men love the gods,
 As we love all that 's beautiful and good.
 'Mongst higher beings, Sappho, seek thy mate :
 Not with impunity can one forsake
 The table of the gods to dwell with mortals.
 The hand that once has held the golden lyre
 Is consecrated, and should touch nought meaner.

SAPPHO (*with averted face, speaking to herself*).

Down with the golden lyre to ocean's depths,
 Rather than purchase it at such a price.

PHAON.

My senses reeled in wild bewilderment :
 I was in conflict with the world and self ;
 In vain I tried to rouse in me the feelings
 Which slumbered, as I thought, but which were not.
 A shape mysterious thou didst stand before me,
 All powerful to attract and to repel ;
 Too low my anger deemed thee for my love :
 Now I am conscious that thou art too high,
 And only like with like can gladly mate.
 Then I beheld Melitta, and to heaven
 The inward fountains of my being leapt,
 Whose every outlet had been clogged till then.
 Oh, come to her, Melitta! come to her :
 Banish all fear, for she is mild and good ;
 Unveil the shining crystal of thine eyes,
 That she may gaze into thy pious breast,
 And own with joy that thou art without blot.

MELITTA (*timidly approaching*).

My mistress !

SAPPHO (*holding her at a distance*).

Off from me !

MELITTA.

Ah, she is angry.

PHAON.

Can she then be the thing I feared to think ?

Come back, Melitta, hither to my side :
Thou shalt not pray to her ; not in my presence
Shall Sappho's pride insult thee. Pray not to her :
She does not know thy worth, nor yet her own ;
Or on her knees she would pay silent homage,
The guilty to the innocent : come back.

MELITTA.

Nay, let me kneel as it becomes a child
To kneel before its mother and accept
Her chastisement, if she deem right to chasten :
I will obey nor murmur at her sentence.

PHAON.

Thou art no longer thine alone, but mine,
And humblest me by this submission : come,
For we shall yet find means to wring from her
What harshly she refuses to our prayers.

MELITTA.

And were it so, I joy but in her gifts :
If wrung from her, the greatest bliss were torment.
Here will I kneel until a kindly glance,
A gentle word, assure me of forgiveness.
How often have I lain thus at her feet !
And never did I rise uncomforted.
She will not now dismiss me in my tears :
Look down upon thy child, belovèd lady.

(SAPPHO stands, her face hidden on EUCHARIS' shoulder.)

· PHAON.

Canst hear her prayers, and still be cold and dumb?

MELITTA.

She is not cold, although her lips be silent :
 I feel her heart communing with my heart.
 Be judge, O Sappho, 'twixt this man and me :
 Bid me to follow him and I will follow ;
 Bid me forsake him, — O ye Gods, — e'en that !
 Thou tremblest : — Sappho, dost thou hear me not ?

PHAON (*kneeling beside MELITTA and putting his arm about her*).

Love unto men and reverence to the gods.
 Give what belongs to us, and take thine own.
 Consider who thou art, and what thou dost.

(SAPPHO *starts up at these last words, casts one look on the kneeling figures before her, then turns away, and hurries from the stage*).

MELITTA.

Alas, she leaves me ; she casts off her child !

(EUCCHARIS *and maidens follow SAPPHO*.)

SCENE FOURTH.

The same. Without SAPPHO and EUCHARIS.

PHAON.

Arise, my child : pray not to mortal man ;
The gods remain to us and our own selves.

MELITTA.

I cannot live if Sappho shall condemn me :
Her eyes have always been the perfect mirror
Wherein I tested every deed and feeling ;
They show me now my own deformity.
How she must suffer, wounded to the heart !

PHAON.

Thou lendest her thy feeling : other waves
Are surging in that haughty woman's breast.

MELITTA.

Proud though she seems, I found her ever kind.
If often stern, there lay concealed for me
'Neath the rough shell a sweet and tender fruit.
Alas, alas, that I could e'er forget it !

RHAMNES.

Alas, indeed, thou ever couldst forget it !

PHAON.

Why do ye tremble, since she is so kind?

RHAMNES.

She went in wrath, and boundless as her love
Her anger is : alas for both of you !

PHAON.

What can we have to fear ?

RHAMNES.

Death for the slave.

PHAON.

By what authority?

RHAMNES.

Our country's laws.

PHAON.

I will defend her.

RHAMNES.

Who defendeth thee ?

PHAON.

If earth should open wide before my feet,
And ocean's thunders threaten to devour ;
Could she unite the elements of nature
In dreadful league against me, — I would hold

This maiden fast and laugh at Sappho's wrath,
Scorning her threats and her.

RHAMNES.

Scorn Sappho, thou?

And who art thou, that thou shouldst throw thy word
Into the scale wherein humanity
Measures its greatest? Thou, that thou shouldst dare
Pass judgment where the voice of Greece has spoken!
Dim-sighted, guilty fool, hold'st thou her worthless,
Because thou hast no measure for her worth?
Or the gem dull, because thine eye is blind?
That thee she loved and raised thee to herself
Out of thy native dust, a thankless serpent,
Whose poisonous fang is gnawing at her heart;
That she her riches lavished upon thee,
Who had no soul for such a priceless treasure, —
That is the only spot upon her life:
Envy itself can charge her with no other.
Speak not! the very boldness is not thine
Which prompts thee to set up thyself against her;
For how hadst thou out of thy nothingness,
The most forgotten of forgotten beings,
Dared lift thy voice against the boast of Hellas?
That she regarded thee gave thee the pride
With which thou now think'st to look down on her.

PHAON.

The glory of her song I would not question.

RHAMNES.

Wouldst not indeed! thou couldst not if thou wouldst.
 In characters of diamond she has writ
 Her name upon the stars, and it will last
 Long as the stars shall burn. In distant times,
 'Mong other nations, when our mortal bodies
 Shall long ago have crumbled into dust,
 And e'en our very graves have ceased to be,
 Shall Sappho's lays be sung, her name still live—
 And thine. Be proud of the immortality
 Which thou hast purchased by thy crime against her.
 In foreign lands and races still to come,
 When centuries which have not yet been born
 Are lying buried in the grave of time,
 The tale shall still be told by every mouth:—
 The poetess who sang this song was Sappho,
 And Phaon was the name of him who slew her.

MELITTA.

O Phaon!

PHAON.

Quiet, quiet!

RHAMNES.

Poor consoler,
 Enjoining quiet with unquiet voice.
 Let her acknowledge her offence and tremble:
 At least that vengeance Sappho shall enjoy.

The glory of her song thou wouldst not question :
What other glory wouldst thou question then ?
He scarce will dare throw doubt upon her heart
Who solely to her heart owes all he is.
Look round about thee : there is no one here
Who has not found her kind ; who on himself
In house and field, in family and home,
Bears not abundant traces of her care ;
Not one whose pulses do not quicker beat
To call himself the countryman of Sappho,
A citizen with her of Mytilene.
Ask yonder trembling maiden at thy side,
Companion of thy deed more than thy guilt,
How good a mistress she has found in Sappho.
What had the slave herself to offer thee ?
If aught in her could please, 'twas Sappho's spirit,
Gentle and tender as a mother's love,
That spoke to thee from out her handiwork.
Ay, press thy brow, but thou wilt strive in vain
To wipe from it the memory of this day.
What future is before thee ? wilt thou flee ?
On all this earth thou wilt not find a refuge.
In every pious breast will rise a foe
Against the foe of goodness and of beauty.
Fame shall precede thee, crying in men's ears, —
Lo, Sappho's murderer ! lo, the gods' contemner !
Thou, homeless, through the land wilt roam with her,
Whom for protection thou hast given ruin.

No Greek will shelter thee beneath his roof,
No god allow thee entrance to his temple ;
But, conscience-stricken, thou wilt fly the altar
When the priest bids each evil thing depart !
And when thou fliest, the dread Eumenides,
The vengeance-bringers from the infernal world,
Will shake their snaky locks about thee, crying
The name of Sappho ever in thine ears
Until the grave thyself hast dug engulf thee.

MELITTA.

Enough, enough !

PHAON.

Man, thou wilt drive me mad.

RHAMNES.

Thy madness was in putting Sappho from thee :
Enjoy the harvest thou thyself hast sown.

MELITTA.

To her !

PHAON.

Ah, who will save me from this torture ?

SCENE FIFTH.

The same. EUCHARIS.

EUCHARIS.

Rhamnes, art thou still here? come quickly.

RHAMNES.

Whither?

EUCHARIS.

To Sappho.

RHAMNES.

What —?

EUCHARIS.

I fear me she is ill.

RHAMNES.

The gods forbid!

EUCHARIS.

I followed her afar
 Up to the spacious hall, where hid from sight
 I watched with eye intent her every movement.
 Leaning against a pillar there she stood,
 And downward gazed into the broad blue sea,
 That dashed its foam against the rocky shore.

Speechless and motionless she stood above me,
With eyes so fixed and cheeks so pale she seemed
One with the marble figures round about her.
But sometimes she would stir, and pulling flowers
Or gold or ornaments, whate'er was near,
Would fling them down into the murmuring sea,
Following them in their fall with longing eyes.
I was approaching, when a sudden clang
Made the hall ring, and shivered through her frame.
It was her harp, that hanging on the wall
Let the sea-air play loud among its strings.
She looked above, her breath came quick, she shrank
As at the touch of some unearthly power ;
While gazing thus intent upon the lyre,
The stony features stirred with sudden life.
A smile played round her mouth, the firm-pressed lips
Were parted, and I heard mysterious words
That seemed not Sappho's, though from Sappho's mouth.
"Callest thou me to warn me, friend," she said ;
"Reminding me of days that are gone by ?
I understand thee and return thee thanks."
How Sappho reached the wall I cannot tell,
Nor how the lyre that hung above her head,
For all things seemed to swim before my eyes ;
But when I looked again, she held the harp,
And pressed it closely to her heaving breast,
Whence I could hear the quick breath come and go.
From the domestic altar then she took

The wreath, the Olympic crown of victory,
 Bound it about her head, and threw the mantle
 Of glowing crimson round about her shoulders.
 Who for the first time had beheld her then —
 Her hand holding the lyre, her gaze upraised,
 Her figure lifted up and glorified,
 The brightness of transfiguration on her —
 Had hailed her as a being not of earth,
 And bowed his trembling knee to her in prayer.
 But mute and motionless as she had grown,
 I felt a dread and awe take hold upon me ;
 Those features dead in life filled me with horror,
 And I ran hither —

RHAMNES.

Left her ! — let us haste ; —
 But see ! — she comes.



SCENE SIXTH.

SAPPHO, richly dressed as in the first act, the crimson mantle about her shoulders, crowned with the laurel and holding the lyre in her hand, appears upon the steps of the colonnade, surrounded by her maidens, and advances slowly and gravely. Long pause.

MELITTA.

O Sappho, O my mistress !

SAPPHO (*calm and grave*).

What will'st thou ?

MELITTA.

From my eyes the veil is lifted :

Oh, let me be thy slave again ! take back
What is thine own, and keep it and forgive.

SAPPHO (*as before*).

Deemest thou Sappho in such evil case
That she has need of any gift from thee ?
Whatever is my own I have already.

PHAON.

Oh, hear me, Sappho ! hear me !

SAPPHO.

Touch me not !

I'm consecrated to the gods.

PHAON.

O Sappho,

If ever thou hast looked on me with kindness —

SAPPHO.

Thou speakest of the things that are gone by.
I sought for thee, and I have found myself.
Thou couldst not comprehend my heart ; farewell :
Upon a surer stay my hopes must rest.

PHAON.

Is thy love turned to hatred ?

SAPPHO.

Hatred—love :—

Is there no third? Thou hast been dear to me :
 Thou art so still, and wilt be ever dear,
 Dear as a fellow-traveller brought by chance
 Into our boat to cross a narrow sea ;
 When reached the goal, each goes his separate way,
 And only sometimes from the far, strange distance,
 In memory sees again the loved companion.

*(Her voice fails her.)*PHAON *(with emotion)*.

O Sappho !

SAPPHO.

Silence ! let us part in peace.

(To those about her.)

Ye who have witnessed Sappho's weakness, pardon ;
 For that weak hour I will make full atonement :
 The bow till it is bent shows not its strength.

(Pointing to the altar in the background.)

Kindle the flame of Aphrodite yonder,
 That it may mingle with the red of dawn ;

(It is done.)

And now withdraw, and let me here alone,
 Alone with these my friends take counsel.

RHAMNES.

Come :

She wills it so ; let us obey ; come all !

(Attendants draw back.)

SAPPHO (*advancing*).

Ye great and holy Gods,
With richest blessings ye have graced my life :
Into my hand ye gave the bow of song,
And gave me with it poesy's full quiver ;
A heart to feel ye gave, a mind to think,
And power to give expression to my thought.
With richest blessings ye have graced my life.
I thank ye.

Ye crowned with victory my feeble head,
And sowed abroad, into far distant lands,
The singer's fame, seed for eternity.
My golden lays shall sound from foreign tongues,
And Sappho's name shall die but with the earth.
I thank ye.

Ye have permitted to the poetess
'To taste of this life's fragrance-wreathèd cup, —
'To taste but not to drink.
And see, obedient to your high behest,
I set the fragrance-wreathèd goblet down
And drink it not.

I have completed what ye gave to do,
Therefore refuse me not the last reward.
'They who are yours know not infirmity,
'The serpent of disease steals not upon them ;

But in the bloom of life, in their full powers,
 Ye snatch them up to your divine abode :
 Vouchsafe to me a like high destiny.

Oh, suffer not your priestess to become
 An object of derision to your foes,
 A jest unto the fool who deems him wise !
 Ye broke the blossom : oh, break now the stem ;
 As my beginning was, so be my end ;
 Spare me the bloody torture of this strife ;
 I feel myself too weak to struggle longer ;
 The battle end and give me victory ! —

(With enthusiasm.)

The flame burns brightly, and the sun ascends.
 I feel that I am heard : ye Gods, be thanked ! —
 Thou Phaon, and Melitta thou, draw near :

(Kissing PHAON'S brow.)

One kisses thee who is not of this world.

(Embracing MELITTA.)

Thy mother who is dead sends thee this kiss.
 And now away ; at Aphrodite's altar
 Let love accomplish its dark destiny.

(Hastens to the altar.)

RHAMNES.

What plans she ? all her being is transfigured,
 The light of the immortal gods is on her.

✓ SAPPHO (*standing on a high place above the sea, and extending her arms towards the two*).

Love unto man and reverence to the gods :
 Enjoy your happiness, remembering Sappho.
 Thus I acquit myself of life's last debt :
 Bless them, ye Gods, and take me to yourselves.

(*She springs from the rock into the sea.*) *

PHAON.

Hold, Sappho, hold !

MELITTA.

Alas, she falls, she dies !

PHAON (*occupied with MELITTA*).

Quick, to her rescue : hasten to the shore !

(*Some hurry out.*)

RHAMNES (*standing upon the height*).

Ye Gods, protect her ! dreadful are the rocks :
 She will be dashed in pieces, if she touch them.
 Oh, bear her safely over ! — Woe, 'tis done.

PHAON.

Why stand there crying ? to the boats ; haste, haste !

RHAMNES (*descending*).

Hold, 'tis too late : begrudge her not the grave
 Which she, despising this false earth, has chosen
 Within the sacred bosom of the ocean.

Dead?

PHAON.

Dead.

RHAMNES.

PHAON.

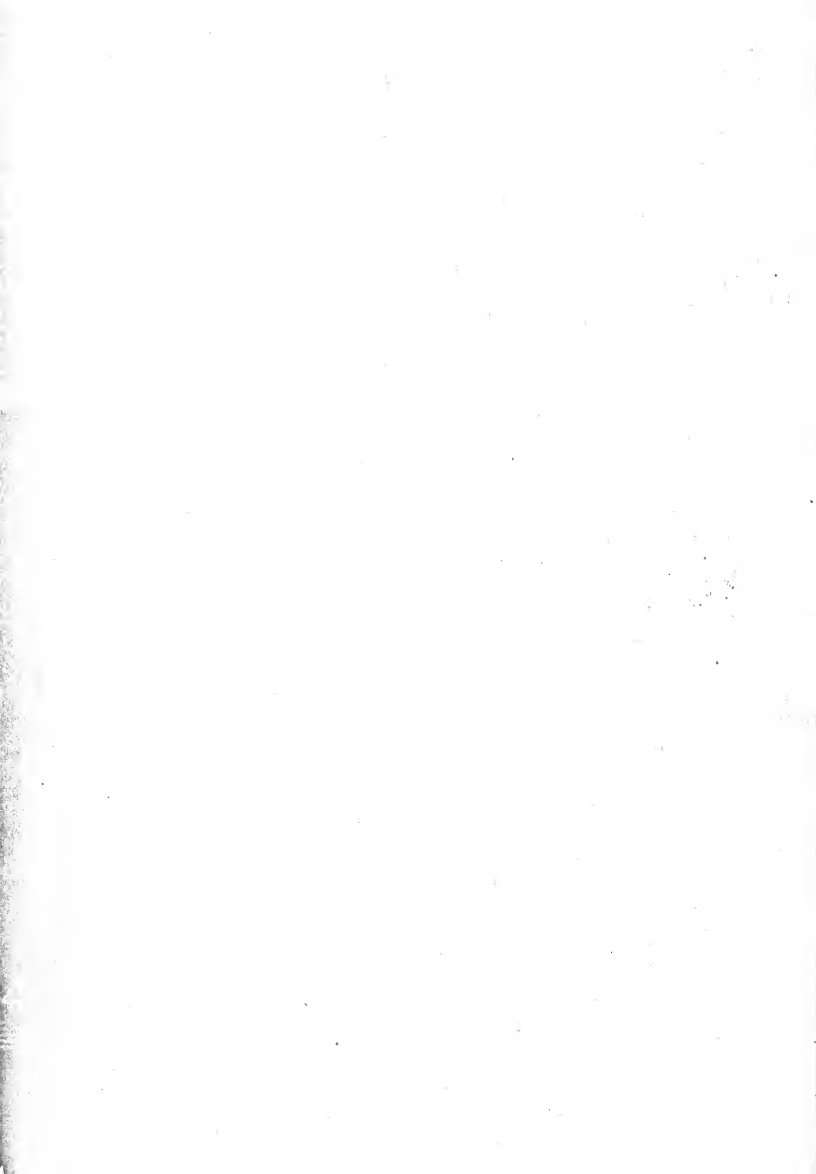
Oh, woe is me! impossible!

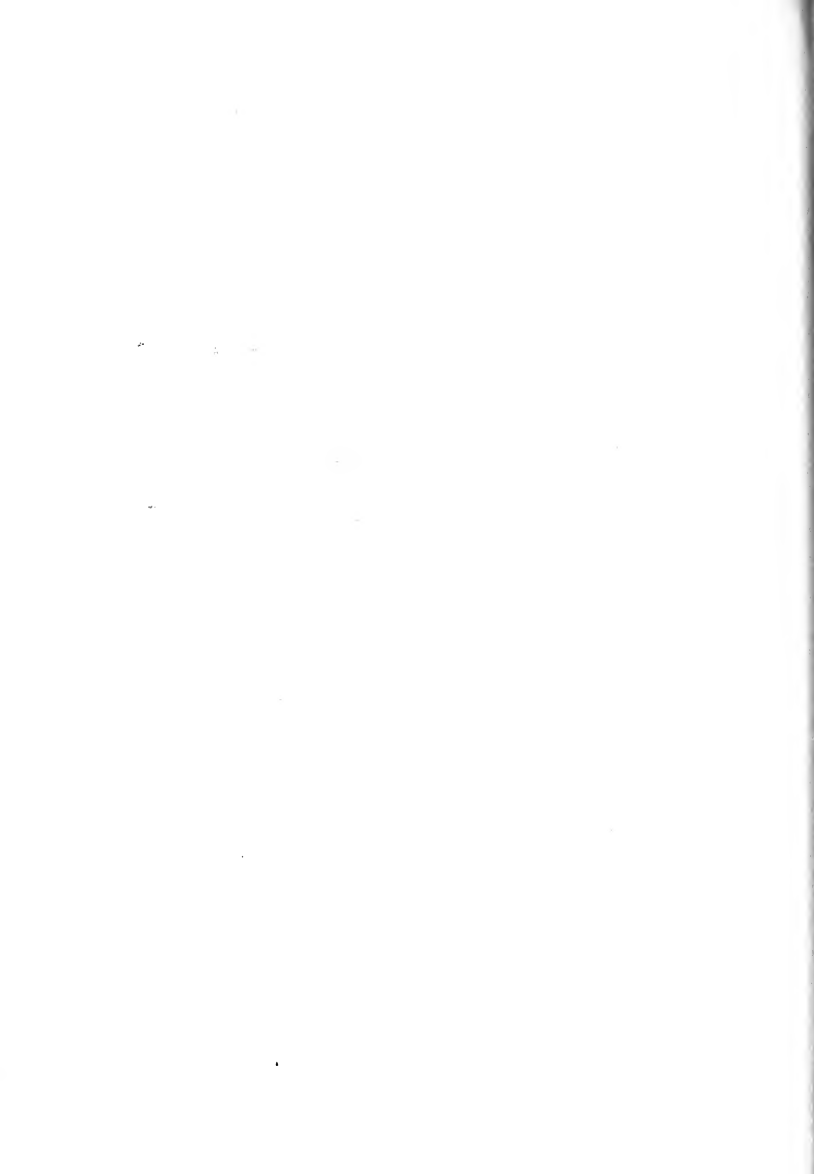
RHAMNES.

Hushed is the lyre, and faded is the laurel :
Her home was not with us upon the earth ;
She has returned to those from whom she came.

The curtain falls.

THE END.





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