

# Sappho



## Selected Poems and Fragments

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‘Glittering-Minded deathless Aphrodite’

Glittering-Minded deathless Aphrodite,  
I beg you, Zeus’s daughter, weaver of snares,  
Don’t shatter my heart with fierce  
Pain, goddess,

But come now, if ever before  
You heard my voice, far off, and listened,  
And left your father’s golden house,  
And came,

Yoking your chariot. Lovely the swift  
Sparrows that brought you over black earth  
A whirring of wings through mid-air  
Down the sky.

They came. And you, sacred one,  
Smiling with deathless face, asking  
What now, while I suffer: why now  
I cry out to you, again:

What now I desire above all in my  
Mad heart. ‘Whom now, shall I persuade  
To admit you again to her love,  
Sappho, who wrongs you now?’

If she runs now she'll follow later,  
If she refuses gifts she'll give them.  
If she loves not, now, she'll soon  
Love against her will.'

Come to me now, then, free me  
From aching care, and win me  
All my heart longs to win. You,  
Be my friend.

'Be here, by me'

Be here, by me,  
Lady Hera, I pray  
Who answered the Atreides,  
Glorious kings.

They gained great things  
There, and at sea,  
And came towards Lesbos,  
Their home path barred

Till they called to you, to Zeus  
Of suppliants, to Dionysus, Thyone's  
Lovely child: be kind now,  
Help me, as you helped them...

'Come to me here from Crete'

Come to me here from Crete,

To this holy temple, where  
Your lovely apple grove stands,  
And your altars that flicker  
With incense.

And below the apple branches, cold  
Clear water sounds, everything shadowed  
By roses, and sleep that falls from  
Bright shaking leaves.

And a pasture for horses blossoms  
With the flowers of spring, and breezes  
Are flowing here like honey:  
*Come to me here,*

Here, Cyprian, delicately taking  
Nectar in golden cups  
Mixed with a festive joy,  
And pour.

'The stars around the beautiful moon'

The stars around the beautiful moon  
Hiding their glittering forms  
Whenever she shines full on earth....  
Silver....



'He is dying, Cytherea, your tender Adonis,'

He is dying, Cytherea, your tender Adonis,  
What should we do?  
Beat your breasts, girls, tear your tunics...

'Some say horsemen, some say warriors'

Some say horsemen, some say warriors,  
Some say a fleet of ships is the loveliest  
Vision in this dark world, but I say it's  
What you love.

It's easy to make this clear to everyone,  
Since Helen, she who outshone  
All others in beauty, left  
A fine husband,

And headed for Troy  
Without a thought for  
Her daughter, her dear parents...  
Led astray....

And I recall Anaktoria, whose sweet step  
Or that flicker of light on her face,  
I'd rather see than Lydian chariots  
Or the armed ranks of the hoplites.

'Stand up and look at me, face to face'

Stand up and look at me, face to face  
My friend,  
Unloose the beauty of your eyes.....

'Love shook my heart'

Love shook my heart,  
Like the wind on the mountain  
Troubling the oak-trees.

'He's equal with the Gods, that man'

He's equal with the Gods, that man  
Who sits across from you,  
Face to face, close enough, to sip  
Your voice's sweetness,

And what excites my mind,  
Your laughter, glittering. So,  
When I see you, for a moment,  
My voice goes,

My tongue freezes. Fire,  
Delicate fire, in the flesh.  
Blind, stunned, the sound  
Of thunder, in my ears.

Shivering with sweat, cold  
Tremors over the skin,  
I turn the colour of dead grass,  
And I'm an inch from dying.

‘But you, O Dika, wreathe lovely garlands in your hair,’

But you, O Dika, wreathe lovely garlands in your hair,  
Weave shoots of dill together, with slender hands,  
For the Graces prefer those who are wearing flowers,  
And turn away from those who go uncrowned.

## Fragments, on Love and Desire

### I

.....You burn me.....

### II

Remembering those things  
We did in our youth...

...Many, beautiful things...

### III

...Again and again...because those  
I care for best, do me  
Most harm...

### IV

You came, and I was mad for you  
And you cooled my mind that burned with  
longing...

### V

Once long ago I loved you, Atthis,  
A little graceless child you seemed to me

VI

Nightingale, herald of spring  
With a voice of longing....

VII

Eros, again now, the loosener of limbs troubles  
me,  
Bittersweet, sly, uncontrollable creature....

VII

.....but you have forgotten me...

VIII

You and my servant Eros....

IX

Like the sweet-apple reddening high on the branch,  
High on the highest, the apple-pickers forgot,  
Or not forgotten, but one they couldn't reach...



X

Neither for me the honey  
Nor the honeybee...

XI

Come from heaven, wrapped in a purple cloak...

XII

Of all the stars, the loveliest...

XIII

I spoke to you, Aphrodite, in a dream....

XIV

Yet I am not one who takes joy in wounding,  
Mine is a quiet mind....

XV

Like the mountain hyacinth, the purple flower  
That shepherds trample to the ground...

XVI

Dear mother, I cannot work the loom  
Filled, by Aphrodite, with love for a slender  
boy...

## Fragments, on the Muses

### I

And when you are gone there will be no memory  
Of you and no regret. For you do not share  
The Pierian roses, but unseen in the house of Hades  
You will stray, breathed out, among the ghostly dead.

### II

The Muses have filled my life  
With delight.  
And when I die I shall not be forgotten.

### III

And I say to you someone will remember us  
In time to come....

### IV

Here now the delicate Graces  
And the Muses with beautiful hair...

### V

It's not right, lament in the Muses' house...  
....that for us is not fitting....

VI

Here now, again, Muses, leaving the golden...

VII

Surpassing, like the singer of Lesbos, those elsewhere...

'I have a daughter, golden'

I have a daughter, golden,  
Beautiful, like a flower -  
Kleis, my love -  
And I would not exchange her for  
All the riches of Lydia.....

'Hesperus, you bring back again'

Hesperus, you bring back again  
What the dawn light scatters,  
Bringing the sheep: bringing the kid:  
Bringing the little child back to its mother.

'Girls, you be ardent for the fragrant-blossomed'

Girls, you be ardent for the fragrant-blossomed  
Muses' lovely gifts, for the clear melodious lyre:

But now old age has seized my tender body,  
Now my hair is white, and no longer dark.

My heart's heavy, my legs won't support me,  
That once were fleet as fawns, in the dance.

I grieve often for my state; what can I do?  
Being human, there's no way not to grow old.

Rosy-armed Dawn, they say, love-smitten,  
Once carried Tithonus off to the world's end:

Handsome and young he was then, yet at last  
Grey age caught that spouse of an immortal wife.

'The Moon is down'

The Moon is down,  
The Pleiades. Midnight,  
The hours flow on,  
I lie, alone.



