

# HEPHAESTUS

PERSEPHONE AT ENNA AND  
SAPPHO IN LEUCADIA

BY  
ARTHUR STRINGER



METHODIST BOOK & PUBLISHING HOUSE  
TORONTO  
GRANT RICHARDS, LONDON

1903

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## DEDICATION

What bird that climbs the cool dim Dawn  
But loves the air its wild wings roam?  
And yet when all the day is gone  
But turns its weary pinions home,  
And when the yellow twilight fills  
The lonely stretches of the West,  
Comes down across the darkened hills,  
Once more to its remembered nest?

And I who strayed, O Fond and True,  
To seek that glory fugitive  
And fleeting music that is You,  
But echoes of yourself can give  
As through the waning gold I come  
To where the Dream and Dreamer meet:  
Yet should my faltering lips be dumb,  
I lay these gleanings at your feet!

## HEPHAESTUS

(HEPHAESTUS, *finding that his wife APHRODITE is loved by his brother ARES, voluntarily surrenders the goddess to this younger brother, whom, it is said, APHRODITE herself preferred.*)

Take her, O Ares! As Demeter mourned  
Through many-fountained Enna, I shall grieve  
Forlorn a time, and then, it may be, learn,  
Some still autumnal twilight by the sea  
Golden with sunlight, to remember not!  
As the dark pine forgoes the pilgrim thrush  
I, sad of heart, yet unimpassioned, yield  
To you this surging bosom soft with dreams,  
This body fashioned of Aegean foam  
And languorous moonlight. But I give you not  
The eluding soul that in her broods and sleeps,  
And ne'er was mine of old, nor can be yours.  
It was not born of sea and moon with her,  
And though it nests within her, no weak hand  
Of hers shall cage it as it comes and goes,  
Sorrows and wakens, sleeps, and sings again.  
And so I give you but the hollow lute,  
The lute alone, and not the voices low  
That sang of old to some forgotten touch.  
The lamp I give, but not the glimmering flame  
Some alien fire must light, some alien dusk  
Enisle, ere it illumine your land and sea.  
The shell I give you, Ares, not the song  
Of murmuring winds and waves once haunting it;  
The cage, but not love's wings that come and go.  
I give you them, light brother, as the earth  
Gives up the dew, the mountain-side the mist!

Farewell sad face, that gleamed so like a flower  
Through Paphian groves to me of old—farewell!  
Some Fate beyond our dark-robed Three ordained  
This love should wear the mortal rose and not  
Our timeless amaranth. 'Twas writ of old, and lay  
Not once with us. As we ourselves have known,  
And well your sad Dodonian mother found,  
From deep to deep the sails of destined love  
Are blown and tossed by tides no god controls;  
And at the bud of our too golden life  
Eats this small canker of mortality!

I loved her once, O Ares—  
I loved her once as waters love the wind;  
I sought her once as rivers seek the sea;  
And her deep eyes, so dream-besieged, made dawn  
And midnight one. Flesh of my flesh she was,  
And we together knew dark days and glad.  
Then fell the change;—some hand unknown to us  
Shook one white petal from the perfect flower,  
And all the world grew old. Ah, who shall say  
When Summer dies, or when is blown the rose?  
Who, who shall know just when the quiet star  
Out of the golden West is born again?  
Or when the gloaming saddens into night?  
'Twas writ, in truth, of old; the tide of love  
Has met its turn, the long horizon lures  
The homing bird, the harbour calls the sail.  
Home, home to your glad heart she goes, while I  
Fare on alone, and only broken dreams  
Abide with me! And yet, when you shall tread  
Lightly your sunlit hills with her and breathe  
Life's keener air, all but too exquisite,  
Or look through purpling twilight on the world,  
Think not my heart has followed nevermore  
Those glimmering feet that walked once thus with me,  
Nor dream my passion by your passion paled.  
But lower than the god the temple stands;  
As deeper is the sea than any wave,  
Sweeter the summer than its asphodel,  
So love far stronger than this woman is.  
She from the untiring ocean took her birth,  
And from torn wave and foam her first faint breath;  
Child of unrest and change, still through her sweeps  
Her natal sea's tumultuous waywardness!  
And losing her, lo, one thin drifting cloud  
Curls idly from the altar in that grove  
Where burn the fires that know not change or death!

Yet she shall move the strange desires of men;  
For in her lie dim glories that she dreams  
Not of, and on her ever broods a light  
Her Cyprian eyes ne'er saw; and evermore  
Round her pale face shall pleading faces press;  
Round her shall mortal passion beat and ebb.  
Years hence, as waves on islands burst in foam,  
Madly shall lives on her strange beauty break.

When she is yours and in ambrosial glooms

You secretly would chain her kiss by kiss,  
Though close you hold her in your hungering arms,  
And with voluptuous pantings you and she  
Mingle, and seem the insentient moment one,  
Yet will your groping soul but lean to her  
Across the dusk, as hill to lonely hill,  
And in your warmest raptures you shall learn  
There is a citadel surrenders not  
To any captor of the outer walls;  
In sorrow you shall learn there is a light  
Illumines not, a chamber it were best  
To leave untrod.

O Ares, dread the word

That silences this timorous nightingale,  
The touch that wakens strings too frail for hands;  
For, giving her, I gain what you shall lose;  
Forsaking her, I hold her closer still.  
The sea shall take a deeper sound; the stars  
Stranger and more mysterious henceforth  
Shall seem, the darkening sky-line of the West  
For me, the solitary dreamer, now shall hold  
Voices and faces that I knew not of.  
More, henceforth, shall all music mean to me,  
And she, through lonely musings, ever seem  
As beautiful as are the dead. But you—  
You in your hand shall guard the gathered rose,  
Shall hold the riven veil, the loosened chord!

So love your hour, bright god, ere it is lost,  
A swan that sings its broken life away.  
In that brief hour, 'tis writ, you shall hear breathe  
Songs blown from some enchanted island home,  
Then mourn for evermore life's silent throats,—  
Aye, seek and find the altar when its fires  
Are ashes, and the worship vain regret!  
A mystic law more strong than all delight  
Or pain shall each delicious rapture chill,  
Exactingly sternly for each ecstasy;  
And when her voice enwraps you and in arms  
Luxurious your softest languor comes,  
Faintly torn wings shall flutter for the sun,  
Madly old dreams shall struggle toward the light,  
And, drugged with opiate passion, you shall know  
Dark days and shadowy moods when she may seem  
To some dusk underworld enchaining you.  
Yet I shall know her as she was of old,



Fashioned of moonlight and Aegean foam,  
Some visionary gleam, some glory strange  
Shall day by day engolden her lost face.  
The slow attrition of the years shall wear  
No tenderest charm away, and she shall live  
A lonely star, a gust of music sweet,  
A voice upon the Deep, a mystery!  
But in the night, I know, the lonely wind  
Shall sigh of her, the restless ocean moan  
Her name with immemorial murmurings,  
And the sad golden summer moon shall mourn  
With me, and through the gloom of rustling leaves  
The shaken throats of nightingales shall bring  
Her low voice back, the incense of the fields  
Recall too well the odour of her hair.  
But lo, the heart doth bury all its dead,  
As mother Earth her unremembered leaves;  
So the sad hour shall pass, and with the dawn  
Serene I shall look down where hills and seas  
Throb through their dome of brooding hyaline  
And see from Athens gold to Indus gray  
New worlds awaiting me, and gladly go,—  
Go down among the toilers of the earth  
And seek the rest, the deeper peace that comes  
Of vast endeavour and the dust of strife.  
There my calm soul shall know itself, and watch  
The golden-sandalled Seasons come and go,  
Still god-like in its tasks of little things;  
And, woven not with grandeurs and red wars,  
Wanting somewhat in gold and vermeil, shall  
The Fates work out my life's thin tapestry,  
As sorrow brings me wisdom, and the pang  
Of solitude, O Ares, keeps me strong!

# PERSEPHONE

Goddess and Mother, let me smooth thy brow  
And cling about thee for a little time  
With these pale hands,—for see, still at the glow  
Of all this white-houred noon and alien sun  
I tremble like a new-born nightingale  
Blown from its nest into bewildering rain.

How shall I tell thee, Mother, of those days  
My aching eyes saw not this azure sea  
Of air, unknown in Death's gray Underworld  
And only whispered of by restless Shades  
Rememb'ring shadowy things across their dusk?—  
Or how I often asked: "Canst thou, dark heart,  
Remember home? So far and long forlorn  
Canst thou, my heart, remember Sicily?"  
Then didst thou, weeping, call Persephone  
The Many-Songed, and where thy lonely voice  
Once fell all greenness faded and the song  
Of birds all died, and down from brazen heights  
A blood-red sun long noon by sullen noon  
On ashen days and desolation shone;  
And cattle lowed about the withered springs,  
And Earth gaped wide, each arid Evening moaned  
Amid the dusk for rain, or dew at most.  
But thou in anger didst withhold the green,  
And grim of breast forbade the bursting sap,  
And dared the darkest sky-line of lone Deeps  
For thy lost daughter, and could find her not.

Then came the Arethusan whisper, and release;  
The refreshing rains washed down and gushed  
And sluiced the juicy grasses once again,  
And bird by bird, the Summer was re-born,  
And drooping in thine arms I wakened here.  
Yet all those twilight days I was content  
Though silent as a frozen river crept  
The hours entombed, though far I was from thee  
And from the Nysian fields of open sun,  
The sound of waters, and the throats of song.

But when with happier lips I tell thee all  
Thou must, worn Mother, leave me here alone  
Where soft as early snow the white hours fall  
About my musing eyes, and life seems strange,

And strange the muffled piping of the birds,  
And strange the drowsy music of the streams,  
The whispering pavilions of the pines;  
And more than strange the immersing wash of air  
That breathes and sways and breaks through all my being  
And lulls away, like seas intangible,  
Regrets, and tears, and days of heavy gloom.  
O Mother, all these things are told not of  
Where I have been, and on these eyes estranged  
Earth's vernal sweetness falls so mystical  
Its beauty turns a thing of bitter tears;  
And even in my gladness I must grieve  
For this dark change, where Death has died to me,—  
For my lost Gloom, where life was life to me!

Long years from now shall ages yet unborn  
Watch the returning Spring and strangely yearn;  
Others shall thrill with joy like unto mine;  
Vague things shall move them and strange voices steal  
Through sad, bud-scented April eves to them.  
Round them shall fall a glory not of earth,  
As now o'er these Sicilian meadows fall  
Dim memories that come I know not whence.  
In lands I know not of some sorrowing girl  
Shall faintly breathe: "I am Persephone  
On such a day!" and through the world shall run  
The immemorial rapture and the pangs,  
And pale-eyed ghosts shall creep out to the light  
And drink the sun, like wine, and live once more.  
The dower of my delight shall make them glad;  
The tears of my regret shall weigh them down,  
And men with wondering eyes shall watch the Spring  
Return, and weep, indeed, these selfsame tears,  
And laugh with my good laughter, knowing not  
Whence came their passing bliss so torn with pain.

For good is Enna, and the wide, glad Earth,  
And good the comfortable green of grass  
And Nysian meadows still so milky pale;  
Good seems the dark steer in the noonday sun,  
The ploughman's keel that turns black waves of loam,  
The laughing girls, the fluting shepherd boys,  
And beautiful the song of many birds;  
Good seem these golden bees whose busy wings  
With wavering music drone and die away,—  
The orchard odours and the seas of bloom;  
And good the valleys where the green leaves breathe,

The hills where all the patient pines look down;  
Good seem the lowland poplars bathed in light,  
That pillar from the plain this tent of blue,—  
The quiet homes amid the cooling fields,  
The flashing rivers and the woods remote,  
The little high white town among the hills!

All, all are good to look on, and most dear  
To my remembering eyes. Each crocus, too,  
And gold narcissus, gleams memorial,—  
Untouched of sorrow for that troubled day  
Impetuous hoof and wheel threshed through the wheat,  
And 'mid these opiate blooms the Four-Horsed One  
Swept down on me, half lost in pensive dreams,  
And like a poppy in some panting noon,  
All drooping, bore me to the gates of Hell,—  
When on my fragile girlhood closed his arms  
As on some seed forlorn Earth's darkest loam.  
Yet think not, Mother, this fierce Son of Night  
Brought only sorrow with him, for behold,  
In learning to forbear I learned to love;  
And battling pale on his impassioned breast  
I felt run through my veins some golden pang  
Of dear defeat, some subjugation dim,  
Presaging all this bosom once was made  
To be thus crushed, ere once it could be glad.  
Thus are we fashioned, Mother, though we live  
Immortal or the sons of men; and so  
Each day on my disdain some tendril new  
Bound me the closer to him; loving not,  
Some wayward bar of pity caged me down,  
And day by languid day amid Death's gloom,  
I grew to lean upon him, and in time  
I watched his coming and his absence wept.  
I walked companion to his pallid shades,  
And pale as yon thin crescent noonday moon  
I dwelt with him, a ghost amid his ghosts.  
If this was love, I loved him more than life.  
And now he means to me what flame and ruin  
And tumultuous conflagration of great towers  
And citadels must mean to martial eyes,  
Bewildering the blood like dizzy wine  
And sweeping on to any maddened end:  
I came to glory in him,—felt small hands  
Clutch at my breast when he was standing near,  
And knew his cruel might, yet thrilled to it

And in his strength even took my weak delight.  
Stern were his days, yet leaned he patient o'er  
This wayward heart, till I in wonder saw  
From those dark weeds of wanton lust creep forth  
Belated violets of calmer love,—  
And, link by link, found all my life enchained!

Only at times the music of the Sea  
Sang in my ears its old insistent note;  
Only at times I heard the wash and rush  
Of waves on open shores and windy cliffs;  
Only at times I seemed to see great wings  
Scaling some crystal stairway to the Sun,  
And languid eagles shouldering languid clouds.  
Singing on summer mornings too I heard,—  
I caught the sound that sweet green waters make,  
The music—O so delicate!—of leaves  
And rustling grasses, and the stir of wings  
About dim gardens. Where shy nightingales  
Shook their old sorrow over Ida's gloom  
I into immortality was touched  
Once more by song and moonlight, far away.  
I mused beside dim fires with Memory  
And through my tears rebuilt some better life  
Untouched of time and change, and dreaming thus  
Forgot my woe, and, first of all the gods,  
I, wistful-eyed, with Aspiration walked!

For, Mother, see, this dubious death in life  
Makes beautiful my immortality:  
Once all my world was only phantom stream  
And shadowy flower, and song that was not song,  
And wrapt in white eternities I walked  
A daughter of the gods, who knew not Death:  
I was a thing of coldness and disdain,  
Half-losing all that was so dear in life:  
Enthroned in astral taciturnity,  
I, looking tranquil-eyed on beauties old,  
E'er faced some dull Forever, strange to Hope  
And strange to Sorrow, strange to Tears,—Regrets;  
Joy was not joy, and living was not life.  
So unreluctantly the long years went,  
Though I had all that we, the gods, have asked,  
Drunk with life's wine, I could not sing the grape,  
And knew not once, till Hades touched my hand  
And made me wise, how good the world could be.

Now, now I know the solace and the thrill  
Of passing Autumns and awakening Springs;  
I know and love the Darkness, many-voiced,  
Since Night it was that taught me to be strong;  
The meaning of all music now I know,—  
The song autumnal sky and twilight seas  
Would sing so well, if once they found the words,—  
The sorrow of dear shores grown low and dim  
To darkling eyes, that may not look again,—  
The beauty of the rose made rich by death,—  
The throbbing lark that hymns amid the yew,  
And mortal love grown glorious by the grave.

For worlds and faces now I see beyond  
The sad-aisled avenues of evening stars;  
The Future, like an opal dawn, unfurls  
To me, and all the dreaming Long Ago  
Lies wide and luring as the open Deep.  
And so, still half in gloom and half in sun  
Shall men and women dwell as I have dwelt.  
Half happy and half sad their days shall fall,  
And grief shall only learn beside the grave  
How beautiful life can be, how deep is love.  
As snow makes soft Earth's vernal green, so tears  
Shall make its laughter sweet, and lovers strange  
To thee and me, gray Mother, many years  
From now shall feel this thing and dimly know  
The bitter-sweetness of this hour to me,  
Whom Life has given unto Death and Death  
Back unto Life—both ghost and goddess, lo,  
Who faced these mortal tears to fathom love!

## SAPPHO IN LEUCADIA

SCENE.—*The white-rocked promontory of Leucate, on the Island of Leucadia, overlooking the Ionian Sea. High on the cliff, in the background, towers the Leucadian Temple to Apollo, white and gold in the waning sunlight. SAPPHO, of Lesbos, stands on the brink of the cliff, and at her feet kneels PHAON, of Mitylene. As they gaze seaward a group of young shepherds pass from the Temple, and a voice in the distance is heard singing.*

SAPPHO

Where rests your sail that faced so many winds?—  
(O Aphrodite, help me in this hour!)

PHAON

There white against the blue of yonder bay.

SAPPHO

It seems a little thing to creep so far  
From home and Asian shores—a little thing!

PHAON

Bird-throated child of Lesbos—

SAPPHO (*musingly*)

Yet I too  
Am frail, and I have fared on troubled seas!

PHAON

Bird-throated child of Lesbos, let us turn  
To those dark hills of home and Long Ago  
That one great love relumes, and one lost voice  
Still like a fading lute with sorrow haunts.

SAPPHO

Dear hills of sun and gloom and green—soft hills  
Ambrosial I shall see no more!

PHAON

Nay, come,  
O Violet-Crowned, come back where still the girls  
Laugh ruddy-ankled round the Lesbian vats  
And swart throats from the laden galleys sing  
At eve of love and women as of old—

SAPPHO

How far away those twilight voices are!

PHAON

And down the solemn Dorian scale the pipes  
Wander and plead, then note by note awake  
Shrill with Aeolian gladness once again.  
Come back where opiate lyres shall drowse away  
This wordless hunger that has paled your face,  
Where island hills reach out their arms for you;  
Come back, and be at rest!

SAPPHO (*turning to him*)

O island home

Where we were happy once!

PHAON

And shall again

Be happy as of old, remembering not  
The little shower that gathered at the break  
Of dawns so blue and golden. For to you,  
Sad-hearted Alien, have I come afar  
By many lands and seas to lure you back,—  
Back where the olive groves and laughing hills  
Still glow so purple from Aeolia's coast  
And all the harbour-lights have watched so long,  
Like weary eyes, for you to come again.

SAPPHO

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

PHAON

And slowly there, like wine with honey made  
Too sweet, our languid days shall flow.

SAPPHO

O home

Where we so long ago were happy once!

PHAON

'Twas but a little time I went from you,  
And I have sorrowed for it, and am wise;  
And with my wisdom, lo, the tremulous wings  
Of twilight love have now flown home again.



SAPPHO

It is too late, my Phaon.

Your light hand

Has crushed the silver goblet of my heart,  
And all the wine is spilt; the page is read,  
And from the tale the olden glory gone;  
The lamp has failed amid the glimmering dusk  
Of midnight; and now even music sounds  
Mournful as evening bells on seas unknown.

PHAON

O, Lesbos waits, and still you will not come—  
Our home is calling, and you will not hear?

SAPPHO

Out of my time I am, and like a bird  
On nor'land wings too early flown, I dream  
Amid the wintry cold of all the world  
Of dawns and summer rains I ne'er shall see! . . .  
Lightly you loved me, Phaon, long ago,  
And there were other arms unknown to me  
That folded over you, though none more fond  
Than mine that fell so wing-like round your head.  
And there were other eyes that drooped as mine  
Despairingly before your pleading mouth;  
And many were the nights I wept, and learned  
How sorrowful is all divided love,  
Since one voice must be lost, and being lost,  
Is then remembered most.

PHAON

But you alone

It was, pale-throated woman, that I loved:  
Through outland countries have I seen your eyes,  
And like a tender flow'r through perilous ways  
Your face has gone before me, and your voice  
Across dim meadows and mysterious seas  
Has drawn me to you, calling from the dunes  
Where Summer once hung low above our hands  
And we, as children, dreamed to dreaming waves,  
And all the world seemed made for you and me.

SAPPHO

It is too late; for now the wine of life  
Is spilt, the shore-lark of first love has flown,  
And all the Summer waned.

Yet, long ago,

How lightly I had passed through any pain,—  
How gladly I had gone to any home,  
A wanderer with you o'er many seas;  
And slept beside your little fire content,  
And fared still on again between green hills  
And echoing valleys where the eagled pines  
Were full of gloom, and many waters sang,—  
Still on to some low plain and highland coign  
Remembered not of men, where we had made  
Our home amid the music of the hills,  
Letting life's twilight sands glide thro' the glass  
So golden-slow, so glad, no plaintive chime  
Could e'er be blown across autumnal eves  
From Life's gray towers of many-tongued Regret:  
Then I had been most happy at your side,  
Easing this aching heart with homely thoughts  
And turning these sad hands to simple things.  
In the low oven that should gleam by night  
Baking my wheaten loaves, and with my wheel  
Spinning the milky wool, and light of heart  
Dipping my brazen pitcher in the spring  
That bubbled by our door.

And then, perchance

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

And music, stars, and silence, when the sea  
Sighs languorously as a god in sleep—  
Singing into my saddened heart should come  
White thoughts, to bloom in words as roses break  
And blow and wither and are gone; and we,  
Reckless of time, should waken not and find  
Our hearts grown old, but evermore live on  
As do the stars and Earth's untroubled trees,  
While seasons came, like birds, and went again,—  
Though Greece and her green islands were no more,  
And all her marbled glory should go down  
Like flowers that die and fall, and one by one  
Like lamps her lofty cities should go out.

PHAON

Your voice, like dew, falls deep in my dry heart,  
And like a bell your name swings through my dreams;  
Now all my being throbs and cries for you;  
Come back with me; but come, and I will speak  
A thousand gentle words for each poor tear  
That dimmed your eyes! Come back, and I will crown  
Your days with love so enduring it shall light  
The eternal stars to bed!

SAPPHO

Ask me no more,—  
My Phaon, you must ask me nevermore:  
Though Music pipe from Memory's darkest pine  
Her tenderest note, all time her wings are torn;  
The assuaging founts of tears themselves have failed.  
Life to the lees I drained, and I have grown  
Too lightly wayward with its wine of love,  
Too sadly troubled with its wind of change,  
And some keen madness burns through all my blood.  
The whimpering velvet whelps of Passion once  
I warmed in my white breast, and now full-grown  
And gaunt they stalk me naked through the world;  
Too fondly now I bend unto the fierce  
Necessity of bliss, yet in each glow  
Of golden angour yearn forever toward  
Some quiet gloom where plead the nightingales  
Of lustral hope. I am a garden old  
Where drift dead blossoms now and broken dreams  
And only ghosts of old pale Sorrows walk.

Earth, April after April, beauteous is,

But from this body worn, yet once so fair,  
My tired eyes gaze, as from a ruined tower  
Some nesting bird looks out upon the sun.  
These vagrant feet too many homes have known  
To claim one door; all my waste heart is now  
An impregnant thing of weeds and wilful moods,  
Where even Love's most lowly groundling ne'er  
Could creep with wearied plumes, and be at rest:  
Not now like our sad plains of Sicily,  
Pensive with happier harvests year by year  
This bosom is,—but hot as Aetna's, torn  
And seared with all the fires of vast despairs,—  
A menace and a mockery where still brood  
On its dark heights the eagles of Unrest.

Yet had you only loved me, who can tell  
How humble I had been, how I had tried  
From this poor broken twilight to re-build  
The Dawn, and from Love's ashes to re-dream  
The flower.

PHAON

I loved you then, and love you now.  
The torn plumes of the wayward wings I take,  
The ruined rose, and all the empty cruse;  
Here I accept the bitter with the sweet,  
The autumnal sorrow with the autumnal gold;  
Tears shall go unregretted, and much pain  
Gladly I take, if grief, in truth, and you  
Go hand in hand.

SAPPHO

Ask me no more! For good  
Were life, indeed, if every lonely bough  
Could lure again the migrant nightingale!  
—If all that luting music of first love  
Could be recalled down years grown desolate!  
Lightly they sing who love and are beloved;  
And men shall lightly listen; but the heart  
Forlorn of hope, that hides its wound in song,  
Remembered is through many years and lands.  
And I have wept and sung, and I have known  
So many hours of sorrow—all for you!

PHAON

What Love remembers little things?—what wave  
Withholds itself for sighs of broken reeds?

SAPPHO

The wave remembers not, till reed by reed  
The lyric shores of youth lie ruinous;  
It was not much I asked in those old days;—  
As waters come whence reeds may never see,  
So men have wider missions than we know.  
'Tis not thro' all their moods they hunger for  
Our poor pale faces; as a flame at sea  
They seek us in the gloom, and then forget.  
'Tis when by dusk the battle-sweat has dried;  
'Tis when the port is won, and wind and storm  
Are past; 'tis when the heart for solace aches;  
'Tis when the road is lost in darkling woods,  
Or under alien stars the fire is lit  
And when strange dreams make deep the idle hour;  
Then would I have my name sing throbbingly  
Thro' some beloved heart, soft as a bird,—  
And swing with it—swing sweet as silver bells!  
Not all your hours I hoped to see you turn  
To my poor face; but when the wayside flower  
Shone through the dust and won the softer mood,  
And when the soul aspired for better things,  
Disturbed by voices calling past the Dawn,  
I hoped your troubled eyes would seek my eyes.  
And in those days that I have cried for you  
And went uncomforted, had you returned,  
I could have washed your guilty feet with tears,  
And unto you still grown, and gone thro' sun  
And gloom beside you, holding in my arms  
Hope's hostage children, while I gladly felt  
The keen captivity of love re-wake  
At each light touch, and in the sweet dread bliss  
Of motherhood and most mysterious birth  
Forgot old wrongs, and starred the hills of grief  
With primrose faith and opiate asphodel.

PHAON

Why brood on things turned ashes long ago  
When softly dawn by golden dawn, and eve  
By opal eve, Earth whispers: Life is good?

Once I had listened to you e'er I go;—  
 For like a god you seemed in those glad days  
 Of droning wings and languorous afternoons,  
 When close beside the murmuring sea we walked.  
 Then did the odorous summer ocean seem  
 A meadow green where foam one moment flowered  
 And then was gone, and ever came again,  
 A thousand blossom-burdened Springs in one!  
 —How like a god you seemed to me; and I  
 Was then most happy, and at little things  
 We lightly laughed, and oftentimes we plunged  
 Waist-deep and careless in the cool green waves,  
 As Tethys once and Oceanus played  
 Upon the golden ramparts of the world:  
 Then would we rest, and muse upon the sands,  
 Heavy with dreams and touched with some sad peace  
 Born of our very weariness of joy,  
 While drooped the wind and all the sea grew still  
 And unremembered trailed the idle oar  
 And no leaf moved and hushed were all the birds  
 And on the dunes the thin green ripples lisped  
 Themselves to sleep and sails swung dreamily,  
 Where azure islands floated on the air.  
 Then did your body seem a temple white  
 And I a worshipper who found therein  
 No god beyond the gracious marble, yet  
 Most meekly kneeled, and learned that I must love.  
 The bloom of youth was on your sunburnt cheek,  
 The streams of life sang thro' your violet veins,  
 The midnight velvet of your tangled hair  
 Lured, as a twilight rill, my passionate hands;  
 The muscles ran and rippled on your back  
 Like wind on evening waters, and your arm  
 Seemed one to cherish, or as sweetly crush.  
 The odour of your body sinuous  
 And saturate with sun and sea-air was  
 As Lesbian wine to me, and all your voice  
 A pain that took me back to times unknown;  
 And all the ephemeral glory of the flesh,—  
 The mystic sad bewilderment of warmth  
 And life amid the coldness of the world  
 Did seem to me so feeble on the Deep,  
 Poised like a sea-bird on some tumbling crest  
 As you called faintly back across the waves,  
 That one must love it as a little flower—

So strange, that one must guard it as a child.  
Some spirit of the Sea crept in our veins  
And through long immemorial afternoons  
We mused and dreamed, and wave by pensive wave  
Strange moods stole over us, and lo, we loved!

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

PHAON

Nay, Violet-Crowned, once in our time we loved,  
The hand of that love's ghost shall lead you back.  
Life, without you—life is an empty nest!  
A grove with god and altar lost! A lute  
Whereon no lonely fingers ever stray.  
When in the moonlight Philomela mourned  
Sad-throated for poor murdered Itylus,  
And when the day-birds woke the dewy lawn  
And white the sunlight fell across my bed  
And all the dim world turned to gold again,—  
Oft then, it seemed, the truant would come home,  
Back as a bird to its forgotten nest,  
And O the lute should find its song, and life  
Be glad again!

SAPPHO

Your words but live and die  
Like desert blooms, flow'rs blown and gone again  
Where no foot ever fell.

I shall go Home,—  
Home, Home afar, where unknown seas forlorn  
On gloomy towers and darkling bastions foam,  
And lonely eyes look out for one dim sail  
That never comes, and men have said there is  
No sun.—And though I go forth soon no fear  
Shall cling to me, since I a thousand times  
Ere this have died, or seemed in truth to die.  
For sun by sun the grave insatiable

Has taken to its gloom some fleeting grace,  
And day by day some glory old engulfed,  
And left me as a house untenanted.  
The unfathomed Ocean of wide Death, at most,  
And that familiar stream called sleep are one!

PHAON

Enough of this! I need you; nay, turn back  
With me, and let one riotous flame of bliss  
Forever burn away these withered griefs  
As fire eats clean autumnal mountain-sides;  
For all this sweet sad-eyed dissuasiveness  
Endears like dew the flow'r of final love!

SAPPHO

Yes, I have died ere this a thousand times;  
For on the dusky borderlands of dream  
Thro' the dim twilight of dear summer dawns  
So darkly gold, before the hurrying hooves  
Of Apollonian pearl throbbed down the wind,  
Hearing the Lesbian birds amid green boughs  
Where tree and hill and town were touched with fire,  
—Hearing, yet hearing not, thro' all the thin  
Near multitudinous lament of Dawn's  
Low-rustling leaves, stirred by some opal wing,—  
Oft have I felt my pilgrim soul come home,  
For all its caging flesh a wanderer  
That in the night goes out by those stern gates  
Where five grim warders guard the body well.  
It was not I, but one long dead that woke,  
When, half in dreams, I felt this errant soul  
Once more to its tellurian cage return:  
An angel exile, looking for its lost,—  
A draggled glory, brooding for its own!  
Then faint and strange on my half-hearing ears  
There fell the flute and pipe of early birds;  
And strange the odour of the opening flowers;  
And strange the great world lay; and stranger still  
The quiet rain along the glimmering grass:  
And Earth, sad with so many memories  
Of bliss, and beautiful with vague regrets,  
Took on a poignant glory, strange as death;  
And light and water, grass, and dark-leaved trees  
Were good to look on, and most dear was life!



PHAON

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

SAPPHO

Hush! I have seen Death pass a hand  
Along old wounds, and they have ached no more;  
And with one little word lull pain away,  
And heal long-wasting tears.

PHAON

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

SAPPHO

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

PHAON

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

SAPPHO

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

But you,—

You will forget me, Phaon; there, the sting,  
The sorrow of the grave is not its green  
And the salt tear upon its violet;  
But the long years that bring the gray neglect,  
When the glad grasses smooth the little mound,—  
When leaf by leaf the tree of sorrow wanes  
And on the urn unseen the tamish comes,  
And tears are not so bitter as they were.  
Time sings so low to our bereavèd ears,—  
So softly breathes, that, bud by falling bud,  
The garden of fond Grief all empty lies  
And unregretted dip the languid oars  
Of Charon thro' the gloom, and then are gone.

PHAON

Red-lipped and breathing woman, made for love,  
How can this clamouring heart of mine forget?

SAPPHO

You will forget, e'en though you would or no,  
And the long years shall leave you free again;  
And in some other Spring when other lips  
Let fall my name, you will remember not.

PHAON

Enough,—but let me kiss the heavy rose  
Of your red mouth.

SAPPHO

Not until Death has kissed  
It white as these white garments, and has robed  
This body for its groom.

PHAON

O woman honey-pale  
And passion-worn, here to my hungering lips  
These arms shall hold you close!

SAPPHO

You come too late;  
Forth to a sterner lover must I fare!

PHAON

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

SAPPHO

Then meet this One, and know!

PHAON

The hounds of Hell  
And Aidoneus himself—

SAPPHO

Hush!

PHAON

You I seek!  
The sorrow of your voice enraptures me,  
And though you would elude me, still this arm  
Is strong, and this great heart as daring as

That dusky night in Lesbos long ago!

SAPPHO

Stop, son of passion,—hear!

PHAON

Not till these arms,  
O Oriole-throated woman, hold and fold  
About your beauty as in Lesbos once!

SAPPHO

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

PHAON

Thus women change! thus in their time forget!

SAPPHO

There lies the sorrow—if we could forget!  
For one brief hour you gave me all the love  
That women ask, and then with cruel hands  
Set free the singing voices from the cage,  
And shook the glory from the waiting rose;  
And in life's empty garden still I clung  
To this, and called it love, and seemed content!  
Love! Love! 'Tis we who lose it know it best!  
Love! Love! It gleams all gold and marble white  
High on the headlands of our troubled lives  
Pure as this golden temple of the Sun  
To twilight eyes; by day a luring star  
That leads our sea-worn hearts from strait to strait,  
By night a fire and solace thro' the cold;  
Yet standing as this temple stands, a door  
To worlds mysterious, to alien things,  
And all the glory of the waiting gods!  
Love! Love! It is the blue of bluest skies;  
The farthest green of waters touched with sun!  
It is the calm of Evening's earliest star  
And yet the tumult of most troubled tides!  
It is the frail original of things,  
A timorous flame that once half-feared the light,  
Yet, loosened, sweeps the world, consuming Time  
And tinsel empires grim with blood and war!  
It is a hostage lent of Death, that Life  
Once more in times afar may find its lost!  
It is the ache and utter loneliness

Of wintry lands made wonderful with Spring!  
Music it is, and song, regret and tears;  
The rose upon the tomb of fleeting youth;  
The one red wine of life, that on the lip  
Of Thirst turns not to ashes!

Change and time

And sorrow kneel to it, for at its touch  
The world is paved with gold, and wing by wing  
Drear autumn fields and valleys dark with rain  
Re-waken with the birds of Memory!

PHAON

All time your words were tuned to madden men;  
And I am drunk with these sweet pleadings, soft  
As voices over many waters blown.

SAPPHO

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

PHAON

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

SAPPHO

Yours once I was,  
And once, indeed, I watched you tread me down  
And trample on my whitest flower of youth;  
And long amid my poor dead roses lay,  
Stifling with sorrow, and still held my peace,  
Hoping thro' all that pain for better things.  
Down to this day I raised no voice in wrath  
But bowed my head beneath your heel, and smiled  
With quiet mouth and most unhappy eyes,  
And saw my woman's soul go thin and starved.  
But now I warn you that the tide has turned;  
Touch nevermore these hands, for my torn heart  
Is desperate, and given not to words.  
Quite humble have I been, and duly spake  
My lips as you once tutored them to speak.  
But now this empty husk from which you drained  
Life's darkest wine shall die in its own way,  
And whither now it will this thing you hurt  
Shall steal away, for all its broken wings.

And now, as waters sigh and whisper through  
Some hollow-throated urn, so peace this day  
Shall steal thro' all my veins, as I have said.  
So back! Stand back,—or if it must be, then  
Locked desperately arm in arm with me  
You shall go down, down to this crawling Deep!

*(She approaches him with open arms, but he draws back from her in fear.)*

PHAON

Madness throbs thro' her, and I fear this mood.

SAPPHO

The waves are softer with their dead, and winds  
More kindly are with leaves in winter than  
Men's cruel love, that kills and buries not!  
Naked and torn we lie beneath their feet,  
Who, had they known, in sorrow would have crept  
Thro' griefs entombing night with what once held  
Such joys and tears for them!

*(As she turns to the sea a voice in the distance is heard singing through the twilight:)*

O that sound, not wind or sea,  
From no bird nor dreamland blown,  
Bearing you away from me,  
Crying: "One must go alone!"  
O that Voice, so like my own  
Calling through the gloom for thee!—  
For the love that life has known,  
For the parting yet to be!

SAPPHO

Now I shall go

Quite gladly, with this more than anguish at  
My over-aching heart, that cries for rest:  
Yes, shade-like even now I seem,—this face  
Sea-worn as Leucothea's lonely face,  
So wistful white at eve amid the waves  
Where with sad eyes, men say, she gazes on  
Earth's failing hills and fields!

*(She turns once more to the sea.)*

'Tis good to sleep,

And alone, sad mother Ocean, let me lie;  
Alone, gray mother, take me in your arms  
Whose earthly sorrow once was deep as yours,

Whose passion was as vain, whose heart could sound  
Thro' all the sweetest meadows of this world  
Only for evermore the morning lutes  
Of loneliness and most unhappy love.  
For once, in times I know not of, you too  
Have loved and sorrowed, as your heart would say,  
Mourning at dusk among your golden Isles.  
I cannot call on mine old gods, for they  
Have lived so far from Earth, they scarce would know  
The odour of my incense, nor how white  
My piteous altars stand; for as the Moon  
Smiles sadly disempassioned over men  
And their tumultuous cities crowned with song,  
Where live by night so many heavy hearts,  
So smile the gods on my pale-lipped despairs.  
On to the end these feet must walk alone,—  
Alone, once more, and unilluminated, fare;  
For I am far from home to die, and far  
From any voice to comfort me beyond  
The cypress twilight and the hemlock gloom!  
Not evermore, O blue Ionian Sea,  
And vine-clad valleys, shall these eyes behold  
My Lesbos, still my first and last of loves!  
But take me, mother Ocean, while I feel  
Burn thro' my blood this magic ecstasy!  
Take me, O take me in your cooling arms,  
And let the ablution of soft waters lave  
Old sorrows from these eyes, and wash the pain  
From this poor heart, that sinned, but suffered more!

*(With arms upraised she walks through the gathering dusk to the edge of the cliff, and leaps into the sea beneath her.)*



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### **Transcriber's Notes:**

Hyphenation and archaic spellings have been retained as in the original. Punctuation errors have been corrected without note.

[The end of *Hephaestus, Persephone at Enna and Sappho in Leucadia* by Arthur Stringer]