

# **Fragments of Sappho**

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# Fragments of Sappho

A Play by Polypsyches

## ACT One

*We discover SAPPHO onstage, reclining on a sofa, with a lyre in her hands, a laurel wreath on her head. As she sings her song, she slowly rears herself up and walks center-stage.*

SAPPHO: It isn't easy living a life of love, a life you take from fickle Aphrodite. It can be so hard sometimes to choose which love you find more fitting, more appropriate. Aphrodite and her father do not always see eye to eye.

*Enter ALCAEUS, unseen.*

SAPPHO:  
So Hither to me from Crete, to this holy temple,  
To this delightful grove of apple-trees Where the  
altars are smoking With incense.

Where cold water babbles through the branches  
That bear fruit, roses all over the place Casting  
shadows, the leaves all stirred up, Enchanting  
with sleep,

Where horses graze till sated in the meadows,  
With the flowers of spring and the winds Blow  
sweetly

*Sound of Paper being torn.*

There you, Cypris, take Pouring gracefully into  
our golden cups For our magnificent festivities in  
your honor, The nectar of life.

ALCAEUS: You always did have a way with words.

SAPPHO: What are you doing here?

ALCAEUS: Visiting an old friend.

SAPPHO: Who are you calling old?

ALCAEUS: Age becomes you.

SAPPHO: You're not gaining any points here.

ALCAEUS: I'm not playing a game. SAPPHO:

What are you doing, then?

ALCAEUS: Paying tribute to the most grim of gods, whom Iris of the fair sandals bore, having laid with golden-haired Zephyrus.

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS:  
Lady of violets and reverie,  
Sappho—I long to speak, but shame restrains me.

SAPPHO:  
Alcaeus, had your thoughts been beautiful, Nor any  
double-speech upon your tongue, Shame would not  
turn away your eyes from mine; You would have  
spoken simply to me now.

ALCAEUS:  
It is not simple to say beautifully  
What I would say.—Hast thou, in Mytilene,  
Watched the young market-maidens weaving fillets  
Of wild flowers? Know you what men say 'tis sign of?

SAPPHO: Is it a sign?

ALCAEUS: That all such are in love.  
Truly they are but country maids, and yet  
Persephone herself was such a girl  
Weaving *her* wild-flowers when dark Pluto plucked her.  
Lady, you too are weaving: may I ask  
For whom?

SAPPHO: And if I answered—for Alcaeus?

ALCAEUS: Sappho!

SAPPHO: And if I gave this—to another!

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: Violet-haired, holy, sweet-smiling Sappho,  
How cruelly you abuse me!  
Renounced when first you beckon me to hold you—

*Shred.*

SAPPHO: You never had ahold of me to begin with. How many times have you done this to me?

ALCAEUS: What?

SAPPHO: Suckered me into some dumb little fantasy and then dropped me like a hot rock. How many times has that happened?

ALCAEUS: It's no fantasy.

SAPPHO: It's all a fantasy.

ALCAEUS: And I never dropped you either.

SAPPHO: No, you just disappeared!

ALCAEUS: I'm here now, aren't I?

SAPPHO: Well, praise (*shred*) Poseidon and Hera!

ALCAEUS: Look, I'm here! I'm here, Sappho, and I'm never going to leave again!

SAPPHO: You may not want to leave... But Alcaeus, I... I only wish I could!

ALCAEUS: Then we can leave together! Sappho! Sappho, listen to me. I'm ready to don the purple cloak, look, it covers my skin already.

*Shred*

ALCAEUS:  
And it is my counsel that  
You, too, should be like this arrayed;  
Then you would feel released and free,  
And you would find what life can be.

SAPPHO:  
I shall not cease to feel in all attires,  
The pains of our narrow earthly day. I  
am too old to be content to play, Too  
young to be without desire.

What wonders could the world reveal?  
You must renounce! You ought to yield!  
That is the never-ending drone Which we  
must, our life long, hear, Which,

hoarsely, all our hours intone And grind  
into our weary ears. If I but think of any  
pleasure, Bright critic day is sure to chide  
it, And if my heart creates itself a  
treasure, A thousand mocking masks  
deride it. The god that dwells within my  
heart Can stir my depths, I cannot hide—  
Rules all my powers with relentless art,  
But cannot move the world outside; And  
thus existence is for me a weight, Death  
is desirable, and life I hate.

ALCAEUS:

And yet when death approaches, the welcome is not great.

SAPPHO:

Oh, blessed whom, as victory advances,  
He lends the blood-drenched laurel's grace,  
Who, after wildly whirling dances,  
Receives her in a girl's embrace!  
Oh, that before the lofty spirit's power  
I might have fallen to the ground, unsouled!

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: This I know for certain, that if a man moves gravel, stone not safely  
workable, he will probably get a sore head.

SAPPHO: Don't move gravel.

ALCAEUS: Don't move gravel!

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: Then you really don't love me?

SAPPHO: Not now. Not right now, no. Maybe... someday... in another life... in another  
time... in another body...

*Exit ALCAEUS*

SAPPHO:

The all-singing Muse Polyhymnia came down From Heaven and fell  
in love with the river Oiagrus. Their love bore fruit in the end in Their  
son Orpheus.

Gifted the Lyre of Apollo, this bard had All the gifts of music to seduce the wild Beasts  
of the forest and bring them to tears with The sweetest of songs

*Enter the Chorus, slowly.*

Sung for the lovely nymph Eurydice whom Orpheus found to his liking, coming up-On  
her one day in the stream while she was bath-Ing there unashamed.

*Exit SAPPHO.*

CHORUS:

*Entry*

Woe, that the day had not arrived  
When the pair were wed!  
That day when Aristaeus chas'd the maid then chaste  
Across the way into the tall grass with the hydra!

*Strophe I*

From that day forth, the singer sang  
Only of you, sitting alone in the woods,  
Eurydice,  
You, as the day broke on, you as the day broke down.  
And all the animals of the forest wide  
Wept with the singer.

*Antistrophe I*

But one day broke on the singer's sight  
Of a way to dark Hades beneath the black earth,  
For Eurydice,  
For him to go down to her, for her to come up to him  
And down into the darkest depths of hell  
Went forth the singer!

*Half-chorus I*

There he tamed the mighty beast,  
The three-headed dog, the watch-dog,

Then past the river all the shades of men, Of  
heroes serving as food for the birds And his  
song paved the way to Persephone On her  
throne where he made his bargain,

A boon from the Goddess of Darkness.

*Half-Chorus II:*

And so the deal was set,

Death not cheated, but convinced, persuaded  
To his cause, the maid released into his care  
On the sole condition that he trust the dead to keep their word  
And not look back.  
They set out, ascended. And on the threshold  
Broke in to light and there the singer breathed, relieved  
And longed for his beloved sight...

*Enter REYNOLDS, CLAUDIA and ALICE. REYNOLDS sets herself at the head of the class, CLAUDIA and ALICE at desks facing her, taking notes on what is said.*

CHORUS:

*Epode*

Woe the day a second time corrupted, plunged in darkness  
As the very mountain airs cried out from Mytilene to Syracuse!  
The waning day brought night to Orpheus's soul  
As dark as the depths he had conquered  
And darker still, for the music had died in his heart.

*Exit Chorus at length*

REYNOLDS:

Alone he wandered, lost Eurydice Lamenting, and the gifts of Dis ungiven. Scorned by which tribute the Ciconian dames, Amid their awful Bacchanalian rites And midnight revellings, tore him limb from limb, And strewed his fragments over the wide fields. Then too, even then, what time the Hebrus stream, Oeagrian Hebrus, down mid-current rolled, Rent from the marble neck, his drifting head, The death-chilled tongue found yet a voice to cry 'Eurydice! ah! poor Eurydice!' With parting breath he called her, and the banks From the broad stream caught up 'Eurydice!'

Now, what makes this version of the story of particularly appealing quality is the creative use of what we call in literary terms a Lacuna.

*REYNOLDS writes the word "LACUNA " in big letters on the blackboard.*

REYNOLDS: Lacuna is what we call it when a plot-point is deliberately left out of the story. Something very important happens, but the author doesn't tell us what it is. It is simply implied from the story that goes on around it. Who can tell me what the lacuna is in this story?

*CLAUDIA raises her hand.*

REYNOLDS: Yes, Claudia?

CLAUDIA: He never tells us that Orpheus turns around. I mean, he implies it, but that's... that's what a lacuna is, right? Implying.

REYNOLDS: Yes, that's right. And what is the effect of that?

CLAUDIA: Well, it tells me that he was trying to... what's the word? Kind of, like, de-

emphasize the fact that this man wasn't able to take care of his woman. He was weak.

REYNOLDS: An interesting feminist approach to the text, to be sure, but I don't think that sort of thing would have occurred to a Roman at the birth of the Empire.

*ALICE raises her hand.*

REYNOLDS: Yes, Alice?

ALICE: I think it's kind of... poignant, isn't it? Not telling it sort of makes the moment... it leaves it to your own imagination.

REYNOLDS: Very good. That does tend to be the point to leaving things out in a story. It leaves more to the imagination.

ALICE: Which would be why he left the other lacuna, too.

CLAUDIA: *(whispering)* What other lacuna?

ALICE: Eurydice's death at the beginning. How she gets bitten by the snake. I mean, he showed us the snake and then he showed us the... the heavens weeping and the mountains and... all that stuff. But we never saw the event.

*The bell rings. CLAUDIA prepares to leave. ALICE seems disappointed.*

REYNOLDS: Well, class, it looks like that's all we have time for. I'll see you all tomorrow.



*REYNOLDS turns around and starts washing the board. CLAUDIA heads for the door, exchanging a look first with Alice. ALICE walks up to Reynolds and CLAUDIA hangs back.*

ALICE: Sister Reynolds?

REYNOLDS: Yes, Miss Harper?

ALICE: I was just wondering: what happened to the head?

REYNOLDS: Whose head?

ALICE: The Head of Orpheus.

REYNOLDS: Oh... well, um... well, you see... we'll talk about that tomorrow in class.

*CLAUDIA exits.*

ALICE: Oh... OK...

*ALICE exits. REYNOLDS stays in the room and continues cleaning the board. Once the board is cleared, she arches her back and starts descending to the floor. Enter SAPPHO.*

SAPPHO: Excuse me? BAKCHANTA/REYNOLDS: Yes,

dear? SAPPHO: This is the temple of Bakchos, isn't it?

BAKCHANTA: Why, yes, dear, yes it is. How can I help you?

SAPPHO: Oh, I... the priestess of Artemis sent me here. She said there was something I needed to get. Wow, this place, it seems so... old.

BAKCHANTA: Well, that makes sense, dear. It's the oldest temple on Lesbos, founded, inaugurated and built more than five hundred years ago, they say, after the Head of the Thracian singer, Orpheus, washed up on our shores. They buried it here, you know. That's why we worship Dionysus here, still. You see, when Orpheus's head washed up on our shores, it was still singing. That's the reward of poetry, you see: you get torn to bits, but all the bits still sing, (*chuckles*)

SAPPHO: Oh... Well, that's nice, of course, but—

BAKCHANTA: But the oracles do not belong to the singer. For more than a hundred Olympiads, the Head of Orpheus gave prophecy in this temple, but then came the day when Apollo came down from Mount Olympus and spoke to the Head with winged

words, saying: "Cease from the things which are mine, for I have born long enough with thy singing." And Orpheus's tongue was tied. But every now and then...

*The BAKCHANTA makes a move towards SAPPHO, -who stumbles back.*

SAPPHO: What?

BAKCHANTA: Every now and then, I have heard the bard's tongue untie when he is needed. And if you stand... just there... just for a moment, you might hear him speak, if he feels bold enough to disobey the God who held him.

*Exit BAKCHANTA. SAPPHO goes to stand in the middle of the room, right where the Bakchanta told her to, and looks up. Enter ORPHEUS behind her, unseen. SAPPHO waits.*

SAPPHO: I can't believe I'm doing this. Who am I to think I can speak to a God?

ORPHEUS: You know, the opposite of hybris is just as bad.

SAPPHO: *(Frightened, pulls back)* Who are you? Another worshiper of Dionysos?

ORPHEUS: I was once, I suppose. Or so they say. *(blank look from SAPPHO)* You were expecting to come to the Temple of Bakchos Orphicus and not meet the great singer himself?

SAPPHO: I was told to come to the Temple of Bakchos, I wasn't told what for.

ORPHEUS: Well, then. Surprise. You are to be the next poet laureate of Lesbos.

SAPPHO: *(Pause)* Wait, what?

ORPHEUS: Your name will echo through the ages. Congratulations.

SAPPHO: Wait, wait, wait. Back up. Poet laureate?

ORPHEUS: Poetess laureate of all Greece, of all the ages. So famous unknown fragments will be attributed to you on the basis of being poetry of love.

SAPPHO: Poetry of love? But what do I know about love? Love is the domain of Aphrodite. I belong to Artemis—

ORPHEUS: Your inspiration will come from Aphrodite.

SAPPHO: But I don't serve Aphrodite. Not directly, that is.

ORPHEUS: You will. I must go now before the Far-Shooter flings an arrow through my tongue again. But before I go... You know the hollow in the bay of Mytilene where you used to play with your brothers as a child? Where you played before Larichus was old enough to go out?

SAPPHO: I remember it.

ORPHEUS: Go there. Soon. You'll find something... interesting... Something that will help you.

SAPPHO: Help me do what?

ORPHEUS: You'll see. *(Exit)*

SAPPHO: Something that will help me what? Become a "poet laureate" or something? More successful than Alcaeus? No one's a better poet than Alcaeus.

*Exit SAPPHO. We discover ALICE and CLAUDIA sitting in the cafeteria.*

CLAUDIA: Why do you care so much about it? It's not like it's a real head. The whole thing's probably, like, a metaphor or something.

ALICE: Well, yeah, but... I don't know, it just feels... incomplete.

CLAUDIA: You really care about this, don't you?

ALICE: Yeah. I guess so. I mean, I really... something about the Orpheus story really got me, you know? Going down to the Underworld to bring back your lover. It's so romantic.

CLAUDIA: I know what happened to the head.

ALICE: You do?

CLAUDIA: Yeah, and I can do you one better, too. I know why Reynolds didn't want to talk about it.

ALICE: What do you mean? Why would she not want to talk about it?

CLAUDIA: Oh, come on. Don't be so naive. We're at a Catholic girls' school. Our teachers are supposed to be uptight. Especially when it comes to pagan stories. And especially when it comes to Sappho.

ALICE: Sappho? Who's that?

CLAUDIA: Sappho is the reason why we have the term "Lesbian".

ALICE: Claudia! What are you talking about?

CLAUDIA: That's what happened to the Head.

ALICE: Wait—what? The Head... became a lesbian?

CLAUDIA: Yeah, you could say that. The Head and the Lyre of Orpheus both washed up on the shores of Lesbos, it's this island of Greece, I think it's off the coast of Asia Minor.

ALICE: Well, so then... what happened?

CLAUDIA: Well, the head... isn't really all that important. But the Lyre was found by Sappho and that's what made her famous.

ALICE: Well, if she's so famous, why haven't I ever heard of her?

CLAUDIA: Because you're a silly little Catholic school girl and you only listen to what they tell you.

ALICE: *(pause)* I guess that's fair.

CLAUDIA: I'm sorry. That... came off as a little bit harsher than I wanted it to. But do you want to hear about Sappho?

ALICE: Yeah. Sure. I guess.

CLAUDIA: Well, let's see... where to begin? Well, for starters, of course, there's the fact that she was, in fact, the first lesbian in the sense that we know.

ALICE: Like she... liked... girls?

CLAUDIA: Liked. Yeah. Sure. Anyway, it was even more brilliant than that. Not only did she like girls, she had this school, like a school for girls, where she brought them in and—

ALICE: But I thought the ancient Greeks and Romans were misogynists

*Enter CLAUDIA and ALICE.*

CLAUDIA: Well... yeah.

ALICE: So what did they teach girls, then?

CLAUDIA: O-ho. Oh, baby, they had stuff to teach.

SAPPHO: Hi. *(Silence)* Sleep well?

ATTHIS: Yeah. Yeah, fine.

SAPPHO: You looked like you were sleeping like a baby. Only without the whole waking up and crying every five minutes. A perfect little angel.

ATTHIS: Thank you.

SAPPHO: Are you hungry? Mnasis will be in soon. I could have her bring you some bread, if you like.

ATTHIS: No thanks. I'm not really hungry.

SAPPHO: Are you sure? *(pause)* Well, then. All right.

*ATTHIS, still covering herself with her sheets, starts feeling around for her clothes.*

SAPPHO: What's wrong?

ATTHIS: Nothing, I just...

SAPPHO: What?

ATTHIS: Where are my clothes?

SAPPHO: Your clothes? Oh. I think maybe...

ATTHIS: I mean, it's not... it's not important or anything.

SAPPHO: Oh, of course it is, dear. Wait a moment.

ATTHIS: I just...

SAPPHO: *(crosses the room and picks up a shift)* Here. Here's a chiton. It... it was supposed to be my daughter's. I keep thinking I'll someday find her again, but... I don't know.

ATTHIS: Thank you.

SAPPHO: You don't have to be so modest, loverling.

ATTHIS: Oh, I'm not, I just... Oh... Right.

*She drops the covers, but then turns away and puts on the handed chiton.*

SAPPHO: Oh, cheer up, Atthis, dear. What's bothering you?

ATTHIS: Nothing. I'm not... I'm fine...

SAPPHO: Atthis, darling, you don't have to lie to me. I'm not some man who will use you, impregnate you and then leave you to be stoned. I'm Sappho. I'm your teacher. I'm here *for you*, dear. So if something's wrong, it's my duty to understand. And my pleasure.

ATTHIS: (*hesitant*) I'm fine. It's nothing.

SAPPHO: You've just experienced love, my dear. Pleasure. Physical bliss. Last night, you seemed so eager, so... comfortable... in the dark, anyway. I thought you might have done this before. But from what I see now, I suppose—

ATTHIS: I'd never done it before.

SAPPHO: Not even by yourself?

ATTHIS: I can do that to myself?

SAPPHO: Oh, certainly. I could show you now, if you'd—

ATTHIS: No, no. I think I get the picture.

SAPPHO: Right. Another time, perhaps.

ATTHIS: Sappho?

SAPPHO: Yes, my darling Atthis?

ATTHIS: Thank you. For this.

SAPPHO: You're welcome, my dear. It was my pleasure. Really.

*Exit ATTHIS.*

ALICE: Oh.

CLAUDIA: Yep.

ALICE: Wow.

CLAUDIA: I'll say. Anyway, so that was the main thing that was going on. That's the main reason why she's known to us today. I mean, yeah, sure, she wrote some poems and stuff, but we don't really have all that much of that.

ALICE: So she slept with women?

CLAUDIA: Is that so hard to understand? ALICE:

I thought that was, like, a recent thing.

CLAUDIA: Oh, no, baby, there have been lesbians ever since men started putting us down. There have always been women who have wanted to shake loose the male dominant patriarchal values of the time, mark my words! They just haven't always been that vocal about it. And, I mean, what better way to screw men than to screw other women, right? And you know what the best part is?

ALICE: What?

CLAUDIA: No one's the wiser.

ALICE: What do you mean?

CLAUDIA: Well, I mean, if you sleep with other women, there's no, like, you know.

ALICE: No what?

CLAUDIA: No proof.

ALICE: Oh... Oh!

CLAUDIA: And Sappho totally knew that. She wrote a poem to her virginity. She talked to her virginity.

ALICE: Wait, what?

CLAUDIA: Yeah, I know, weird, right? But she's Sappho! She's brilliant! And just a little bit evil.

ALICE: Well, yeah, I mean sleeping with women, that's—

CLAUDIA: There was this woman that she talked about in her poems, oh boy, this woman named... what was it? Rhodopis. Or maybe Doricha.

ALICE: Those names don't sound anything alike.

CLAUDIA: Well, she used both of them and they were the same person. Maybe one of them was her middle name or something. I don't know. Anyway, this woman was a prostitute, right?

ALICE: leuw. *Enter*

*CHARAXUS.*

CLAUDIA: Yeah, I know, right? Talk about male dominance. Anyway, she *really* hated this Rhodopis girl—

ALICE: Why? Just because she was a prostitute?

CLAUDIA: Well... no. I can't remember. There was definitely a reason, though.

*Exit CLAUDIA and ALICE at length.*

SAPPHO: I don't like her.

CHARAXUS: I know you don't like her.

SAPPHO: Ah, but do you know how much I don't like her?

CHARAXUS: Well, you keep telling me how much you don't like her, so I don't see how I could be confused.

SAPPHO: I was reading one of my poems in my private quarters. I was *rehearsing*, Charaxus, and she barges in like she owns the place, tells *me* how to run things and what's going on with the place, how we're spending too much money to feed the servants and we might have to lose Mnasicida—Mnasis, Charaxus, *my* Mnasis. And she turns around and asks me to admire her new dress, Persian silk, says it would go so well with my rainbow sandals and then has the gall to ask if she can borrow them!

CHARAXUS: I'm sure she didn't mean anything by it.

SAPPHO: No. She didn't mean anything by it, Charaxus, that's her problem. She never *means* anything. She never means anything because she never *thinks* anything!

CHARAXUS: But you have to understand where she comes from, sister—

SAPPHO: Well, frankly, brother, when it comes to that kind of—

CHARAXUS: Would you let me finish! Great Zeus, you're pissing me off!

*SAPPHO gives wordless assent.*

CHARAXUS: She was born on a farm, Sappho, a commoner—

SAPPHO: All the more reason.

CHARAXUS: She was born a commoner. When she was ten, she was made a slave, whored out to any gentleman merchant who happened by and all before she even... that



is... she should have been worshiping Artemis, and instead, she was laid out as Aphrodite's bitch!

SAPPHO: You watch your language, little brother!

CHARAXUS: Look, my point is, she's had a hard life. A life I don't think you could even imagine. And now, I mean... now she has everything.

SAPPHO: We do not have everything, Charaxus, what we have is debt. We have debt and a father who's too old to provide and while you're out making what little money we can raise, your... wife, though I'm loathe to call her that, is spending all our money!

CHARAXUS: But you can't blame her for spoiling herself after all that—

SAPPHO: Watch me. Watch me, Charaxus. With those eyes—watch my lips say that that bitch, as you so aptly described her, has no more excuses. I can see her splurging the first six months, but after two years, she's abusing her privileges and endangering our stability. Moreover, and now I want your ears to listen closely to this part or I will rip them off, there is a difference between spoiling yourself and engorging on all these useless accoutrements on the one hand and, on the other hand, having all these beautiful things around and then criticizing *me*, and telling *me* what to do about the finances like I'm just another common servant. I'm the head of this household!

CHARAXUS: Um... well, actually...

SAPPHO: What? What, Charaxus?

CHARAXUS: When father dies, everything'll go to the eldest son. Well... you're not a son. So technically, *I'm* the head of the household. And she's my wife.

SAPPHO: Why you ungrateful little-

*Enter MNASIDICA.*

SAPPHO: What?

MNASIDICA: Mistress... Rhodopis... is announced.

*Enter RHODOPIS with much pomp and ceremony.*

SAPPHO: That's it... I've had it.

Blessed Goddess, may he atone for his past mistakes, with good fortune guiding him to every harbor.

RHODOPIS: Charaxus, what is she doing?

SAPPHO: But Cypris, may *she* find you very harsh; and may she, *Doricha*, not boast, telling how he came a second time to a longed-for love.

CHARAXUS: Sappho, that's enough!

SAPPHO: And when you die, you will lie there, and afterwards there will never be any recollection of you or any longing for you since you have no share in the Roses of Pieria; unseen in the house of Hades also, flown from our midst, you will go to and fro among the shades and languish. I have no reason to stay here. Mnasis, come along. We're leaving.

*SAPPHO and MNASIDICA move to the other side of the stage.  
REYNOLDS is discovered on stage. Enter ALICE.*

ALICE: Sister Reynolds?

REYNOLDS: Oh, hello, dear. What can I do for you?

ALICE: I was just—

REYNOLDS: Please, sit down, dear.

ALICE: Oh. Thank you.

REYNOLDS: What's on your mind, Miss Harper?

ALICE: Well, um.. .I've been thinking a lot about the Head.

REYNOLDS: The head?

ALICE: The Head of Orpheus.

REYNOLDS: Oh. Yes, of course. That head.

ALICE: Well, I... I was talking to... one of my friends about it, and she started talking about Sappho, the poet of Lesbos.

REYNOLDS: Oh. Yes. Yes, that is one version of the story, yes, that it... um... washed up, yes, that's what they say.

ALICE: And so that's had me thinking about Sappho. Is it true? What they say?

REYNOLDS: I assume you're referring to this new-fangled term "lesbian" meaning a woman who... fornicates with other women.

ALICE: I guess... yeah... Is that really... I mean, was that really what Sappho...

REYNOLDS: Oh, no, dear, whoever told you this was being led on by modern society, by some... pop-culture version of the story. There is absolutely no evidence whatsoever to support the theory that Sappho was a tribad.

ALICE: Tribad?

REYNOLDS: It's the more accurate term for what they call "lesbian", dear.

ALICE: Oh.

*Enter SAPPHO.*

REYNOLDS: As I was saying, there is no evidence for it and, as a matter of fact, there is plenty of evidence against it, particularly if one were to look at her fragments directly. There are a great many of them, you see, that were directed to her daughter, Cleis.

ALICE: A daughter?

SAPPHO: I have a beautiful daughter who looks like golden flowers, my darling Cleis, for whom I would not take all Lydia or lovely Crete. Her hands—those tender little fingers that clasp and clutch when I poke her. Those rosy little cheeks that wrinkle when I make her smile, that head so soft that to touch it feels like falling on a bed of feathers, like taking a warm bath.

*Enter CERCYLAS, who stands in the doorway.*

SAPPHO: If I were Helen, I should very much think that she would be my Hermione. Yet though I am only me, I don't feel sure that she isn't Hermione. If only her father had been Paris.

*Exit CERCYLAS.*

ALICE: She had a daughter? But—

REYNOLDS: You see? There is no way she could have been a tribad.

ALICE: But—but she had a school, didn't she? A career?

REYNOLDS: Yes, some sources do indicate—

ALICE: I thought she taught all her students to be... well...

REYNOLDS: What, dear?

ALICE: Her students weren't... tribads?

REYNOLDS: Oh, heavens, no, dear. That's preposterous! Apocryphal! Her students weren't tribads, they were artists! And yes, she loved them, but... she loved them as a mother loves a child.

ALICE: I guess that does make more sense.

REYNOLDS: You see, dear? Nothing amiss with our Lesbian poetess.

ALICE: Thank you, Sister Reynolds.

REYNOLDS: It was my pleasure, Alice.

*ALICE starts to leave, turns back.*

ALICE: Sister Reynolds?

REYNOLDS: Yes, dear.

ALICE: If she had a child, she must have had a husband too, right?

REYNOLDS: Yes. Yes, she probably did.

ALICE: OK. Thanks.

*SAPPHO and CERCYLAS set themselves at either side of the table for dinner.  
MNASIDICA attends them.*

CERCYLAS: Pass the salt, please, chick-pea?

SAPPHO: Yes, dear, certainly, *(she does)*

*Shred.*

CERCYLAS: Mnasidica has done a good job on these.

SAPPHO: Yes, she certainly has.

CERCYLAS: She's a good slave. Very valuable.

SAPPHO: I agree completely, *(aside)* Happy husband, your marriage has been fulfilled as you prayed, you have the girl for whom you prayed... Your form is graceful, your eyes... gentle, and love streams over your beautiful face. Aphrodite has honored you outstandingly.

CERCYLAS: And what about you? How have your days been, my bride? Filled with excitement?

SAPPHO: I've been keeping busy.

CERCYLAS: I hope you haven't been wasting time with that foolish poetry again. I don't know why you bother. It's useless for a woman to be a poet. Women know not how to use words. Words flow outwards. Women, by their nature, draw things in. They cannot express themselves in words. You should stick to what you do best. Stick to mending and weaving. And cooking. You're a good cook. You and um... Mnasidica.

*Shred.*

*Silence. SAPPHO and CERCYLAS keep eating.*

*Shred.*

CERCYLAS: Do you need the salt?

SAPPHO: No, thanks, dear. I want neither the honey nor the bee.

*Shred.*

*Shred.*

*Shred.*

*Rearrangement of furniture. SAPPHO sits herself down center-stage.*

SAPPHO: Dream... black night... you come whenever sleep... sweet god, truly from sorrow powerfully... to keep separate the power... but I have hope that I shall not share... nothing... of the blessed gods... for I would not be so... trinkets... and may I have... them all...

PHAON:

And can it be that Muses walk the earth? Their passions are felt in such melodies that The words they bring forth turn winter to spring And harvest from darkness a light of their own. But who is this, this beauty I see all clad In radiant reds, this lyre-bearing damsel here In a place where Gods are said to've dwelt? Speak, dear Muse. Or else hold thy tongue And I shall know thy godlike virtues—

*Exit SAPPHO and PHAON. ALICE and MARTIN are on opposite ends of the stage, talking to each other on the phone.*

ALICE: So I definitely think there's something going on with this Sappho woman.

MARTIN: Well, yeah, if she's an ancient Greek lesbian, I'd say she's got something going on. Was she *the first* lesbian?

ALICE: Well, since the term "Lesbian" comes from the island of Lesbos, which was where she was from, I would say there's a pretty good chance of that.

MARTIN: I hope none of this is giving you any ideas.

ALICE: Don't worry, Marty, I still love the heck out of you.

MARTIN: Oh, don't do that. I may need my heck one of these days.

ALICE: You're so silly.

MARTIN: Yeah. I think that's what's putting my heck at risk of being loved away.

ALICE: But see, that's the weird thing.

MARTIN: Yeah, I know. How can you love away heck?

ALICE: No, I mean... if Sappho was a Lesbian... I mean, in the modern sense, if she was a—

MARTIN: Tribad?

ALICE: Yeah.

MARTIN: Whatever that means.

ALICE: Then why would she kill herself for the love of a man?

MARTIN: I don't know. Maybe she was bi.

ALICE: I guess that would be the simplest explanation.

MARTIN: Would you kill yourself for me?

ALICE: What kind of question is that?

MARTIN: Well, I... I don't know, I just figured... since we're on the subject... and, I mean, if you love the heck out of me anyway, I was just thinking maybe you'd love me all the way to heck. You know?

ALICE: OK, that is just weird. I don't think I can have this conversation with you.

MARTIN: But haven't you ever thought about it?

ALICE: About what?

MARTIN: You know. Death. And what would... bring a person to do that. I mean, just think about it: The undiscovered country.

ALICE: Was that a Hamlet quote?

MARTIN: Uh... maybe... ALICE:

Drama geek.

MARTIN: Dammit, you've seen through my evil plan into making you think I'm some, sweaty, hairy jock who does shop. Well, OK, I do do shop, but only for theatre. Only scene shop.

ALICE: Stop talking, Martin.

MARTIN: OK. Sorry.

ALICE: I do love you.

MARTIN: I love you, too.

ALICE: I'll call back tomorrow.

MARTIN: OK, well, I guess I'll talk to you then.

ALICE: Right.

MARTIN: Or, you know, maybe I just won't pick up, since, you know, you've already said you love me, so obviously my evil plan worked—

ALICE: You, Mr. MJQ, have more evil plans than anyone else I know.

*There is a knock at the door.*

ALICE: Hold on, there's someone at the door. Who is it?

MARTIN: Weren't we hanging up anyway?

ALICE: Sh. This'll only take a second.

MARTIN: All right. I'll hold. Your call is very important to us.

*ALICE opens the door. Enter CLAUDIA.*

ALICE: Oh, Claudia. Hi. *(to phone)* Listen, I gotta go. I talk to you later, right?

MARTIN: Didn't we just cover that?

ALICE: OK, bye. Love you

MARTIN: Ciao bella. *(exit)*

CLAUDIA: Parents?

ALICE: Boyfriend.

CLAUDIA: Boyfriend? I didn't know you had a boyfriend.

ALICE: Yeah. He's off at college now, actually. But yeah, we've been dating, for, like, almost a year now.

CLAUDIA: Really?

ALICE: Yeah. He's a really good guy. He can be silly sometimes, though. And he is *such* a Drama nerd. Oh, my God. You would not believe.

CLAUDIA: Oh, drama, hunh? Right.

ALICE: Yeah. He got all the good parts at my old school before I came here. He does Shakespeare like nobody's business.

CLAUDIA: Oh, Shakespeare, hunh? Cool.

ALICE: And Musicals.

CLAUDIA: So have you done it yet?

ALICE: What?

CLAUDIA: You know.

ALICE: I... that's none of your business.

CLAUDIA: Oh, come on, talk to me. That's what friends do, right? Every girl needs someone she can confide in.

ALICE: I generally confide in Martin.



CLAUDIA: Oh, and his name's Martin, too. Look, is he your boyfriend or is he your girlfriend? Come on. You can tell me.

ALICE: We haven't done it yet.

CLAUDIA: But you've been dating for, like, a year, right?

ALICE: Yeah.

CLAUDIA: So like... what's stopping you? And especially with him all off at college and all. You know that he's gonna be, like, surrounded by... stuff.

ALICE: He wouldn't cheat on me, though.

CLAUDIA: How do you know? *(silence)* So why haven't you done it yet? Are you holding back?

ALICE: I guess. I mean, I don't want to... I don't know, spoil things. I want it to be perfect.

CLAUDIA: Oh, honey, it's never gonna be perfect.

ALICE: Well... I don't know. There was one time... I thought it was gonna be perfect, but then... I don't know, he... he wasn't...

CLAUDIA: Was he holding out on you?

ALICE: Yeah.

CLAUDIA: That rat bastard. Men! Always wanting it except when it's about you. That's why you've gotta catch him off-guard.

ALICE: I guess.

CLAUDIA: Although, from what you've been saying about him so far, frankly, I think he's gay.

ALICE: Oh, shut up, he is not. Why does everybody keep saying that?

*CLAUDIA gives her a look.*

ALICE: Shut up. He is not.

CLAUDIA: Anyway, we should probably get down to business.

ALICE: Business?

CLAUDIA: Sappho. Research. You wanna know more, right?

ALICE: Oh. Right. Well... I've been doing some research of my own on Sappho.

CLAUDIA: Have you, now?

ALICE: Yeah. I mean, at first, I talked to Reynolds. She had some things to say that were... well... not like you'd put them. And so I went to the library and looked her up.

CLAUDIA: So what did you find?

ALICE: Well... the only thing I can tell for sure is that she was a singer. And that's why she had Orpheus's Lyre. But there's more. There's lots more. Like... like that guy, Alcaeus.

CLAUDIA: Who?

ALICE: He was another singer, a poet, on Lesbos. A man.

CLAUDIA: Wo, wo, wo, a *lesbian* man?

ALICE: He was... he was her inspiration. In a way.

SAPPHO:

Let your graceful form appear near me, as I  
To lady Hera pray, as have prayed illustrious  
Kings, as when the sons of Atreus set sail  
And left Ilium,

*Enter ALCAEUS, behind, unseen.*

First around the city they started out to The seas  
and the island just off the coast, but Their journey  
on that island stopped for yours is The pow'r to  
stop ships

Until they call on you and Zeus the suppliants' God  
And Thyone's lovely son who bears the wine Now  
help me and be graceful by that prece-Dent of ancient  
times.

*ALCAEUS walks towards her, clapping.*

ALCAEUS: Oh, bravo, bravo. Quite commendable.

SAPPHO: Oh... dear... me... Have you... have you been standing there long?

ALCAEUS: Long enough to do damage to my ears—

SAPPHO: *What?!*

ALCAEUS: -if damage were to be done with tunes so sweet.

SAPPHO: Oh. Sweet? You think so? Really?

ALCAEUS: Well, I *don't pretend* to be an expert on poetry, but it does seem to me that you have quite a good grasp of rhythm and word-use.

SAPPHO: Oh, that. Well... I just use the basic um... Alcaic stanzas. That's all.

*The Sound of Paper being shred.* ALCAEUS: What's your name, poet? SAPPHO:

Oh, nice try, buddy-ALCAEUS: What?

SAPPHO: Giving my name to strangers? What, next you're going to poison me some grapes or something?

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: Psappho. Such a rough and course name for one who spins words out of honey.

SAPPHO: I know what you're trying to do.

ALCAEUS: Oh? Do you now?

SAPPHO: Yes. You're trying to convince me to grant you the gift of my virginity.

ALCAEUS: (*laughs'*) My, my, you're a feisty one. And such a... such a *quaint* way of putting it. Is *that* what I'm up to?

SAPPHO: Yes, it is. And I'm here to tell you, sir, that it couldn't possibly work. I am spoken for.

ALCAEUS: Spoken for? Really?



SAPPHO: Alcaeus?

ALCAEUS: The one and only. At your service.

SAPPHO: Oh—my—Gods! I can't believe it! But you're... I thought you were banished!

ALCAEUS: Oh, pish. Pittacus couldn't banish a warthog if he gave it an armed escort.

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: You know, for one of Artemis's chosen, you're getting awfully close to me.

SAPPHO: Do you not want me this close?

ALCAEUS: Well...

SAPPHO: Does it make you... uncomfortable? Alcaeus?

*Shred.*

SAPPHO: I can be aggressive! Wait, but what do you... I don't understand.

ALCAEUS: Do you have any brothers?

SAPPHO: Yeah, I have, like, three. Larichus pours wine for—

ALCAEUS: Do they ever go off alone with the male servants?

SAPPHO: Yeah.

ALCAEUS: Haven't you ever wondered what they're up to?

SAPPHO: Wait, so they're-

ALCAEUS: Yep.

SAPPHO: How does that work?

*Shred.*

SAPPHO: Oh. leuw.

ALCAEUS: I've heard of women doing it, too.

SAPPHO: You mean... with each other?

ALCAEUS: Absolutely.

SAPPHO: But that would mean—

ALCAEUS: Technically, it would mean your virtue would remain intact.

SAPPHO: Wow. I mean... interesting.

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: About your poetry. And I want you to listen very carefully and think about the conversation we've just had.

SAPPHO: Uh-hunh?

ALCAEUS: It's about your poetry.

*Shred.*

*ALCAEUS grabs Sappho, dips her and kisses her.*

ALCAEUS: Passionate.

SAPPHO: Oh... OK.

ALCAEUS: I'll keep my ears peeled for you, Sappho of Lesbos, searching for any snippet of work from you.

SAPPHO: OK. Urn... you too... I guess...

*Exeunt.*

ALICE: And then they fell in love.

CLAUDIA: Oh, come on. That's silly! Sappho wouldn't fall in love with a man. She's a lesbian! Hello?

ALICE: But then how do you explain Phaon?

CLAUDIA: Phaon?

*Shred. SAPPHO walks along, bumps into PHAON.*

PHAON: My fair young lady, may I make free To offer you my arm and company?

SAPPHO: I'm neither fair nor lady, pray,  
Can unescorted find my way.

*Shred*

PHAON:  
Why, Sappho, do you treat me thus?  
Why frown upon my visage?  
Can it be that you so loved the husband  
Though he treated you wrong—that you shun  
What most you desire?

Come, poet, come with me.

SAPPHO: Why should I with you? Wither to go?

PHAON: Whence this frustration?

SAPPHO: From my pain! (*Shred*)

PHAON: I love you. Nothing's going to change that. Ever.

SAPPHO: Weaker words are rare, but I would thank the Gods for their intercession.

PHAON: Speak to me, Sappho: what's wrong?

SAPPHO: Leave me be. I beg of you.

*Shred.*

PHAON: We can still be together. We can.

SAPPHO: I can't be with you, Phaon. It would be like a mortal spending life with a god,  
how don't you see that?

*Shred. CYDRO takes off the PHAON disguise.*

SAPPHO: What?

*Shred.*

CYDRO: How long have you known?

SAPPHO: I don't know. I suppose I've always known. Always been somewhat of a  
tomboy.

CYDRO: Why didn't you tell me?

SAPPHO: Because it didn't seem important.

CYDRO: How could it not seem important?—

SAPPHO: Well, obviously *you* didn't think it was that important!

CYDRO: How did you know?

SAPPHO: Did you honestly think I wouldn't be able to tell the difference?

CYDRO: Oh... well... I guess not.

*Enter CERCYLAS.*

CERCYLAS: There she is.

SAPPHO: Cercylas? What are you doing here?

CERCYLAS: I knew it! That's him, isn't it?

SAPPHO: Where's Cleis?

CERCYLAS: That's the bastard son of Venus that's made me cuckold!

SAPPHO: Cercylas, wait!

CYDRO: You made yourself a cuckold long before I regained my youth!

SAPPHO: Cydro, no! Cercylas!

*CERCYLAS and CYDRO fight with rapiers. CERCYLAS stabs CYDRO.*

SAPPHO: No!

CERCYLAS: Now who's man enough for Sappho's heart?

CYDRO: I'm not a man.

*CERCYLAS extracts his sword He offers SAPPHO his hand.*

CERCYLAS: Come with me.

*Shred. Exit Cercylas.*



CYDRO:

I'm dying. It is simply said,  
More simply brought about.  
Why stand there, cry and moan? Instead,  
Come up and hear me out.

Call not on the Almighty's  
name. What's done is  
done, alas, and past, Now  
it will go the way it must.  
With one in stealth it was  
begun, Soon there'll be  
some in place of one, And  
when a dozen's been with  
you, Then all the town has  
had you too.

But be not afraid of  
such Greatness.  
Consider but that  
Aphrodite herself,  
That Golden  
Goddess, has thrust  
Such Greatness upon  
your breast... Such  
ample breasts...  
(Dies)

SAPPHO:

Love shook my heart like a wind falling on oaks on a mountain. Now, I  
am greener than grass and it seems to me that I am little short of dying, so  
I will lay down my limbs on soft cushions.

You roast us. But I guess that makes sense. The Gods  
punish/burn/reward/carry away straight away the one who sheds no tears  
when their heart has grown cold, and they slacken their wings.

The stars hide away their shining form around the lovely moon when in all  
her fullness she shines over all the earth, but the moon has set and the  
Pleiades; it is midnight, and time goes by, and I lie alone.

*Shred.*

ALICE: All of the ancient sources talk about him. He was a man that  
Sappho fell in love with. But he didn't return her love. And that's why she  
killed herself.

CLAUDIA: She killed herself?

ALICE: Yes. She killed herself. I'm surprised you didn't know that. Yeah, she jumped off a cliff because a *man* didn't return her love.

CLAUDIA: I'm sure there's... some... logical explanation. Sappho wouldn't do that. Not for a man.

ALICE: Well, then maybe she just wanted to see what it was like. To die.

*Enter PITTACUS. He sits himself on his throne. Enter SAPPHO to him.*

PITTACUS: Well, well. By the stars, I do believe it's our Sappho coming. "Come, wake up: go and fetch the young bachelors of your own age, so that we may see less sleep than the clear-voiced bird." Is it really she? Can it be that she graces my presence?

SAPPHO: It is I, Sappho of Lesbos. What is your bidding?

PITTACUS: It seems to me, my sweet thing, that your heart may not be exactly in this. Is something troubling you, dear?

SAPPHO: No, there's no trouble.

PITTACUS: Are you sure, my sweetling? Have I not in any way *offended you*'?

SAPPHO: Who could find offence in your majestic presence?

PITTACUS: Ha-ha. Quite right. Oh, how I have looked forward to this meeting, my sweet. Your reputation is known far and wide for the... arts... of love, (*pause*) Well, what are you waiting for?

SAPPHO: You wish me to begin? PITTACUS:

Yes—isn't that why you're here?

SAPPHO: Well... I suppose, yes. All right, (*sings*)

Like the hyacinth which the shepherds tread underfoot in the mountains, and on the ground the purple flower...

*She breaks off when PITTACUS starts stroking her hair.*

PITTACUS: Oh, I'm sorry, was that wrong, sweetie? I'm sorry. I'll keep to myself.

SAPPHO:

I talked with you in a dream, Goddess born of Cyprus's foam—

*PITTACUS puts his hand on her leg and she stops again.*

PITTACUS: Well, what's wrong, sweetie, should I not be doin' this?

SAPPHO: I would prefer it if you didn't.

PITTACUS: Isn't that how it goes, though? Isn't that what you do, sweetie?

SAPPHO: Please don't call me that.

PITTACUS: Don't call you what? (*silence*) Don't call you what, sweetie?

SAPPHO: Let go of me.

PITTACUS: Are you sure?

SAPPHO: Let go of me *now!*

PITTACUS: I don't think you *really* want me to do that now, sweetie-pie, do you?

SAPPHO: You don't want me to get angry. Aphrodite and Ares don't dwell in the same bed.

PITTACUS: Where *did you* go to school? Oh, that's right. You're a *woman!* Ha-ha!

SAPPHO: Get your hands off of me!

PITTACUS: Oh. Oh, I see. You really don't want to do this with me, do you? Well, all right, I guess, I... I guess I have somewhat overstepped the bounds of hospitality, haven't I? Well, I suppose there's really only one way to solve this. Leave. No, I'm serious. Leave. If a servant cannot please her master, if a subject cannot serve her *KING*, it's best she were not in his presence. Oh, and uh, don't stop at the palace gates. Don't even stop at your own quarters. Go to the coast. Find yourself a nice boat and get off of my island. That's right. Learn a lesson from Orpheus and don't look back.

*Exit SAPPHO.*

PITTACUS :Ta-ta. Slut!

*PITTACUS turns around and becomes FATHER HUFFMAN. Enter REYNOLDS.*

REYNOLDS: You asked to see me, Father?

HUFFMAN: Ah. Sister Reynolds. Yes. I did. I wanted to speak to you about your Latin class.

REYNOLDS: Which one, Father?

HUFFMAN: The one that contains Miss Alice Harper and Miss Claudia Stiles.

REYNOLDS: Oh, yes, the senior class, sir.

HUFFMAN: Yes, the senior class. The senior classicists. I understand you've been teaching them Virgil?

REYNOLDS: I have, yes, Father Huffman.

HUFFMAN: Ah, yes, he's quite the read. The author of Aeneas. Such a fine example of pagan cults attempting to emulate and anticipate Christ. Noble. No wonder God chose him to guide Dante in quest through the Lower Regions, right?

REYNOLDS: Indeed, Father. We've just been reading from the Georgics so far.

HUFFMAN: Really? The Georgics?

REYNOLDS: Yes, Father.

HUFFMAN: Why?

REYNOLDS: Well, it's still an important work, Father—

HUFFMAN: A bad treatise on agriculture? Which would get you nowhere as a farmer even if you were a farmer, which certainly none of these girls are—

REYNOLDS: It's still Virgil, Father.

HUFFMAN: What part of the Georgics?

REYNOLDS: Book 4. In the three hundreds.

HUFFMAN: The story of Orpheus and Eurydice.

REYNOLDS: A classic tale of love and death and the power of music. Not unlike the Divine Comedy, I might add.

HUFFMAN: Can I be frank with you, Sister Reynolds?

REYNOLDS: As far as I'm concerned, Father, you can be anyone you like—

HUFFMAN: It has come to my attention that those girls, Alice and Claudia, have been asking questions about Sappho, have been researching Sappho of Lesbos with such an alarming... tenacity... that I fear they may be getting ideas.

REYNOLDS: Ideas, Father?

HUFFMAN: About Sappho's practices.

REYNOLDS: Oh, Father, I'm ashamed of you. You may be a member of the clergy, but you're an academic, surely you must understand as well as I do that there is no conclusive evidence that Sappho actually committed any... acts of... homosexuality.

HUFFMAN: Sister Reynolds, do you even hear what you're saying? There may not be any *conclusive* evidence that Sappho was a Lesbian, but there is *evidence* and, like it or not, these girls are going to believe about her whatever they want to believe.

REYNOLDS: Frankly, Father, since that is the tone of this conversation, in this particular time in history, young girls hardly need to have learned about Sappho to know what the word... "lesbian" has come to mean.

HUFFMAN: Sister Reynolds, I am going to make myself quite clear. Those girls are not to research Sappho. You are to put a stop to this. Now. Before it's too late.

REYNOLDS: Yes, Father. Certainly.

HUFFMAN: And as for the Orpheus text... it's too dangerous. It leads places. Not just here. Orpheus is... dark... sinister... we can't risk him.

REYNOLDS: Certainly, Father. I understand.

HUFFMAN: Good. You may go.

REYNOLDS: Thank you, Father.

*Exit REYNOLDS. At length, exit HUFFMAN. Re-enter CHARAXUS with ALCAEUS. He throws him onto the floor. Then he laughs at him.*

ALCAEUS: *(addressing Sappho)* I fail to understand the direction of the winds: One wave rolls in from this side, another from that, and we in the middle are carried along in company with our black ship, much distressed in the great storm. The bilge-water covers the masthead; all the sail lets the light through now, and there are great rents in it.

*SAPPHO starts to speak. Shred.*

ALCAEUS: Hard to be a narcissist without a glass to look in.

SAPPHO: Or drink from.

ALCAEUS: Have you come to gloat? You warned me, didn't you? That this wasn't the life for me.

SAPPHO: Of course this is the life for you. A lesser man would have turned to a sniveling wretch, but you hold your ground. Don't crack your voice.

ALCAEUS: Then why are you here? A fellow pri—

*Shred.*

SAPPHO: And even if you'd mentioned me, his wife would probably have had you murdered in your sleep long before this.

ALCAEUS: Thank you.

SAPPHO: Those who follow inspiration err when flung apart.

ALCAEUS: To err is the only path of true art.

SAPPHO: But without purpose, the Muse goes rogue.

ALCAEUS: Worse things roam the black earth than a Muse gone rogue.

SAPPHO: Have you ever *seen* a *Muse* walk the black earth? They walk only in dreams.

ALCAEUS: What are we even talking about?

SAPPHO: Talking? That wasn't talking. We're musing on a subject. Hermes methinks lies drunk between use.

ALCAEUS: Without Hermes, what's the use of speech? Let Aphrodite do the talking.

SAPPHO: There's a reason we haven't done this before. ALCAEUS: That reason has expired.

SAPPHO: Has it? When first we met, what was the reason why you turned me down? For you remember it?

ALCAEUS: Hardly.

SAPPHO: Poets are wasted on each other.

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: Sappho... Stay with me. Aphrodite commands you.

SAPPHO: Obviously, you don't know her like I do. We can't stay together, Alcaeus.

*Shred*

ALCAEUS: See, there, Sappho. That's it exactly: you *are* a man!

SAPPHO: Really? Then what's this smoothness between my thighs? This delta entering an ocean of life?

ALCAEUS: You have the *soul* of a man.

SAPPHO: Oh, please. Men don't have souls. You think with the wrong head for them. Think from the chest, from the sternum, and *then* speak of soul.

ALCAEUS: It is not in the nature of Pandora to pursue.

SAPPHO: No. It is in the nature of Pandora to bleed. To cleanse her box of pollution and guard her hopes. *That* is what it means to be a woman. No more and certainly no less. It is a quality I cherish.

*Shred.*

SAPPHO: Alcaeus, why do we fight? For glory?

ALCAEUS: It is not for glory! We fight for survival! We fight because our families require it of us! There are certain things we need to survive that we can't get anywhere but by fighting.

SAPPHO: So men fight for their children?

ALCAEUS: And their wives.

SAPPHO: So that their wives can bear more children. So that the people will survive. So we can have a future. Women don't bear (*shred*). Women bear children for the tribe.

*Shred. Exit ALCAEUS. SAPPHO stands center-stage, addressing the audience as though it were a poetry reading.*

*Applause.*

SAPPHO: Thank you. Thank you.

I shall now sing these songs beautifully to delight my companions Hither again, Muses, leaving the golden house of your father Zeus Who made me honored by the gift of their works.

*Enter ALICE and CLAUDIA into the bedroom area.*

ALICE: Listen to this. This guy Porphyrio describes her as "Masculine". Wait no, Horace describes her as masculine, and this guy Porphyrio says that that's "either because she is famous for her poetry, in which men more often excel, or because she is maligned as being a tribad." There's that word again. Tribad.

CLAUDIA: (*with parodied venom*) Homosssssexual.

ALICE: Do you really think she was?



CLAUDIA: I don't see how she couldn't have been.

ALICE: I don't know. The whole virginity thing. I don't think she would have done anything she thought of as bad.

CLAUDIA: Why would she think of homosexuality as a bad thing?

ALICE: Well, because it's unnatural.

CLAUDIA: But the Greeks didn't think so.

ALICE: What do you mean?

CLAUDIA: Greek men were always willing to take it up the ass—

ALICE: Claudia!

CLAUDIA: No, I'm sorry, you can't argue with that now, Alice, that's a fact! It's been documented!

ALICE: Well, yeah, but...

CLAUDIA: OK, listen to this. This is from the Orations of Maximus of Tyre: "What else could one call the love of the Lesbian woman than the Socratic art of love? For they seem to me to have practiced love after their own fashion, she the love of women, he of men. For they said they loved many, and were captivated by all things beautiful." OK, and now listen to this, this is a clue. "What Alcibiades, Charmides and Phaedrus were to him, Gyrinna and Atthis and Anaktoria were to her; what the rival craftsmen blahdiblah were to Socrates, Andromeda and Gorgo were to Sappho."

ALICE: Who would name their daughter Gorgo?

CLAUDIA: I don't know. Maybe it means something pretty in Greek.

ALICE: What, like Gorgon?

CLAUDIA: Shut up.

ALICE: So she wasn't just a Lesbian. She was a lesbian with rivals. So there were others.

CLAUDIA: That's what it looks like.

ALICE: But... but it's wrong, isn't it?

CLAUDIA: What is?

ALICE: The whole... homosexuality?

CLAUDIA: Why would it be?

ALICE: Well, because... sex is... for children, right? I mean, not *for* children, but... to make children, right? To make babies?

CLAUDIA: If that was the only function, why would it be so much fun?

ALICE: How do you know it's so much fun? I keep thinking like maybe it's... maybe it's all just some big conspiracy. I mean, the media tells us it's great and all, but the church says it's... sinful.

CLAUDIA: Why would it be sinful to make babies?

ALICE: Well, it's not sinful to make babies, of course, but... just for fun?

CLAUDIA: If He hadn't wanted us having fun, he wouldn't have given us the equipment.

ALICE: Right, but... the equipment, it is... I mean, it goes together. It goes together in a certain way. To be fun.

CLAUDIA: But that's not the only way to have fun. I like to think of them as... equal opportunity parts.

*SAPPHO sits up on stage again. She has just finished singing a song. Applause.*

SAPPHO: Thank you. Thank you. *ANDROMEDA sits in the audience.*

ANDROMEDA: What? What the hell was all that crap? Did you hear that shit? I mean, here she is, this big almighty woman with her big frickin' lyre, telling us it's OK for women to be tribads? What the hell is she singing about? You expect us to leave our husbands and go off into the wilderness like a bunch of Maenads, what the hell would that do for our husbands? It's disgusting! You call yourself a poet? Your songs defy the will of the Gods!

SAPPHO: What do you know of the will of the Gods?

ANDROMEDA: I know that the Gods made humans twofold: man and woman. One sticks out, the other comes in, together they form a whole. That's the way it should be. That's the only way it fits.

SAPPHO: I completely agree.

ANDROMEDA: Oh, you would—wait, what?

SAPPHO: I'm not suggesting that all women should forsake their husbands and seek each other's company. I'm not implying that all men are evil, as you suggest. My message is one of love, dear child, not of hate. I am the mouthpiece of Aphrodite herself.

ANDROMEDA: That's not what I've heard.

SAPPHO: Well, then I'm afraid you've misread my meaning—

ANDROMEDA: The only reason you seek the love of women is because your own husband left you. And the only reason—

SAPPHO: Now, you just wait right there!

ANDROMEDA: And the only reason you keep that damn school is so that you'll have enough young girls to have your way with all of them!

SAPPHO: My school and the temple I run are dedicated to the instruction and education of girls, to prepare them for marriage. Every facet of it is designed to make them more comfortable with themselves, and therefore more pleasing to their husbands.

ANDROMEDA: Name me one husband who has ever wanted his wife to be comfortable!

SAPPHO: What is your name?

ANDROMEDA: I am Andromeda, daughter of Polyanax.

SAPPHO: The daughter of many kings, perhaps, yet yourself such a country girl. Poor thing.

ANDROMEDA: Who are you calling country?

SAPPHO: I would ask you to please leave your own personal marital problems out of the equation. I have no time for them—

ANDROMEDA: What? But I'm not—that is...

SAPPHO: Not even married! A virgin, or at least one must assume a virgin, yet trying to instruct a Priestess of Aphrodite on the nature of love and dynamics of marriage!

ANDROMEDA: No, I'm telling some woman with a lyre that she'd better stop corrupting our children!

SAPPHO: Security, take this girl away. She has nothing to contribute.

*GUARDS appear to take her away.*

ANDROMEDA: Hey! Hey! You can't do this to me! I have rights!

SAPPHO: Rights? Yes, rights you would give up for your husband, (*turning to the audience*) Now, where were we?

Some Say a Host of Cavalry or of infantry Or perhaps a fleet  
of ships is the most beautiful thing On this black earth, but I  
say for my part It is whatever is most loved.

It is quite easy to make this understood To quiet anyone, just think:  
she who in her beauty Overshadowed all others, Helen, left her behind  
her husband, The best of all men,

To go sailing off to Troy with her lover Abandoning in her passion  
her child and her dear parents And everything she'd ever known,  
seduced By this blind infatuation.

For the light in her life told her that was the way, And  
so lightly she sped on her course, And it reminds me  
now of Anaktoria, Who is not here.

I would rather gaze upon her lovely stride Or see her face trembling  
in the soft light Than have to look at all the chariots and infantry in  
Lydia Arming for battle.

END OF ACT ONE

## ACT Two

SAPPHO: 'tis the sea,  
The teeming, terrible, maternal sea  
That spawned us all. She calls me back to her,  
But I will not go. Her womb hath brought me forth  
A child defiant. I will be free of her!  
Her ways are birth, fecundity, and death,  
  
But mine are beauty and immortal love.

*Enter ANAKTORIA.* Did you like the

song? ANAKTORIA: Oh, yes,

Priestess.

SAPPHO: I'm glad. It brings me such joy to know that girls these days still appreciate good music.

ANAKTORIA: But Priestess...

SAPPHO: Please. Call me Sappho.

ANAKTORIA: Sappho. When you sing it, it isn't just music. You sing the words of Aphrodite herself. You sing the words of the Gods.

SAPPHO: We mustn't tempt Nemesis with pride, child, (*puts down the lyre*) Now come, tell me. What brings you to my humble dwelling?

ANAKTORIA: I have come to your temple, Priestess, for assurances.

SAPPHO: You've fallen in love. ANAKTORIA: Yes. *Shred.*

SAPPHO: What an impertinent thing is a young girl bred in a temple! How full of questions! Prithee no more, Anaktoria, I have told thee more than thou understand'st already.

ANAKTORIA: The more's my grief, I would fain know as much as you, which makes me so inquisitive, not is't enough I know you're a lover—

*Shred.*

ANAKTORIA: If I could but... woo him. I mean... I know he loves me.

SAPPHO: Tell me, child, dear Anaktoria. Who is this man who seems so like a God in your eyes?

ANAKTORIA: His name, dear priestess, is Phaon. Phaon, like light itself that carries the vision of him to my eyes. (*Shred*) When I behold beauty before the sun, his beams dim beauty; when by candle, beauty obscures torchlight, so as no time I can judge, because at any time, I cannot discern being in the sun a brightness to shadow beauty and in beauty a glistening to extinguish light, (*shred*) Oh, tell me you have heard naught but good of him. Tell me all is well with my love.

SAPPHO: All is well with your love. All is more than well with Phaon. It is said that she once made the crossing from Lydia here when he was an old man and because he treated her with such goodness, she rewarded him with renewed youth. Renewed youth because he was the favorite of Aphrodite.

ANAKTORIA: Oh, I knew it! I knew it, Sappho. I could feel there was something divine about him!

SAPPHO: But do not despair, child. I'm certain he loves you.

ANAKTORIA: Really? Are you sure?

SAPPHO: Most certainly. I make the passage quite often myself in search of my daughter. I have heard him speak of a girl of your description. Hair the color of night, resting down on the shoulders, eyes wide to meet the world in stride, the smooth olive skin, the ample—well... Who could resist, after all?

*ANAKTORIA swoons.*

SAPPHO: But he will not marry you.

ANAKTORIA: What?

SAPPHO: How could he? He, too, belongs to Aphrodite.

ANAKTORIA: No...

SAPPHO: But don't despair. You can still love him.

ANAKTORIA: But how?

SAPPHO: How? My child, do you need the workings of love explained?

ANAKTORIA: Well, no, I know how it works, but... what if... what if we're discovered? What if he gets me with child?

SAPPHO: He won't.

ANAKTORIA: But how do you know? How can you know for sure?

SAPPHO: Because... his seed is weak. Don't get me wrong, it has no bearing whatsoever on his manhood, but because he was once an old man, he can no longer produce children.

ANAKTORIA: And what of my virginity?

SAPPHO: All girls worship Artemis until it comes time to worship Aphrodite.

ANAKTORIA: And they worship Aphrodite until it comes time to worship Demeter.

SAPPHO: One step at a time is always best.

ANAKTORIA: Thank you, Sappho. Oh, from the bottom of my heart, Sappho, thank you.

SAPPHO: Oh, don't fret it, Anaktoria. It was my pleasure.

*Exit ANAKTORIA. Shred. Enter ABANTHIS and GONGYLA.*

ABANTHIS: But thank the stars, I have no cause,  
To rail at man, or human laws,  
    To me they're kind and true:

SAPPHO: No, no, no, Abanthis, darling. It has to be softer. Softer than pillows of silk.  
Softer than... than Gongyla's skin. Am I right? Try again, darling.

ABANTHIS: But thank the stars, I have no cause,  
To rail at man, or human laws,  
    To me they're kind and true:  
But I detest the jealous race, I'd  
rather see Almeria's face.  
    Or gaze on pretty Cydro.

SAPPHO: Better, yes. Much better. I do not imagine that any girl who has looked on the light of the sun will have such skill at any time in the future.

ABANTHIS: Surely not as good as all that.

GONGYLA: Yes, it was. You were wonderful.

ABANTHIS: Thank you.

SAPPHO: And now, since you seem to have done that so brilliantly, there's something new I would like you to try. For, as always in the artist's trade, the reward for a job well done is more work. But I think you'll like this.

ABANTHIS: What? What do you expect me to do?

SAPPHO: Improvise. ABANTHIS: Wait—what?

SAPPHO: I'm not going to tell you what to sing. I want you to sing me something on your own. Something new, you know, just make something up.

ABANTHIS: OK...

SAPPHO: Let not this challenge task your lovely face with its unpleasant air. Otherwise winter will one day find you without entertainment, and painless it won't be. I bid you, Abanthis, take your lyre and sing of Gongyla, while desire once again flies around you, the lovely one—for her dress excited you when you saw it; and I rejoice.

ABANTHIS: OK. I think I can do that.

Against thy Charms we struggle but in vain  
With thy deluding Form thou giv'st us pain,  
While the bright Nymph betrays us to the Swain.

In pity to our Sex sure thou wert sent,  
That we might Love, and yet be Innocent:  
For sure no crime with thee we can commit;  
Or if we shou'd—thy Form excuses it.

SAPPHO: Well done! Well done indeed! I have an heir! An heir at last!

GONGYLA: That was really good.

ABANTHIS: Thanks. I... I wrote it for-

GONGYLA: I know.

SAPPHO: I always love this part of the training.

BOTH: What part?

SAPPHO: The connection that grows. Between the students.



ABANTHIS: Oh. That.

SAPPHO: It's nothing to be ashamed about.

ABANTHIS: I'm not.

GONGYLA: I'm... not either.

SAPPHO: I don't care what that wretched Gorgon says, trying to turn to stone the hearts of all who gaze upon her. You shouldn't listen to what people say. No one's opinion matters but your own. If they don't like who you are, well, then, it's not of their business.

ABANTHIS: We know, Priestess.

SAPPHO: Do you? *(pause)* I think that's enough of a lesson for today, *(looks with fondness)* Towards you lovely ones my thoughts are unchangeable. But Gongyla—

GONGYLA: Yes, priestess?

SAPPHO: Remember what we spoke about before.

GONGYLA: Yes, mistress.

ABANTHIS: What?

SAPPHO: Be careful.

GONGYLA: I will, mistress, *(starts to leave)*

ABANTHIS: What was that all about?

GONGYLA: Never mind that. It's not important.

ABANTHIS: But it sounded like—Never mind. You're right. Let's go.

*Exeunt all but Sappho.*

SAPPHO: *(reclining)* I'm starting to get too old for these maidens.

CLEIS: *(entering)* Hello? Hello?

SAPPHO: Oh. Yes, dear. Hello. Can I help you?

CLEIS: Is this the temple of Aphrodite Lesbia?

SAPPHO: Why, yes it is, and I'm Sappho, the Priestess. What can I—Oh. Oh, don't tell me. You must be our new initiate.

CLEIS: New what? No, I—(*backs away*)

SAPPHO: Oh, don't worry dear, I don't bite. Biting isn't until later in the curriculum.

CLEIS: Biting? Wait, but—

SAPPHO: We like to start our girls off slow, exploring the senses—

CLEIS: No, but I-

SAPPHO: We start off with... sigh... (*strikes a pose*) Then we move on to sound... (*moans*) There can be smells and such, all manner of perfumes... And then of course (*leans in*) There is Touch.

*SAPPHO kisses CLEIS. CLEIS breaks away.*

CLEIS: Mother!

SAPPHO: Well, that was quick, we were hardly even kissing—

CLEIS: But you're my mother!

SAPPHO: What are you talking about? I'm not—

CLEIS: I'm Cleis!

SAPPHO: What?

CLEIS: As sure as you're Sappho, the poet of Lesbos, I'm your daughter Cleis.

SAPPHO: (*uplifted*) Oh, dear Gods! (*disturbed*) Oh, dear Gods! I have a daughter who looks like golden flowers, who smells like hyacinth, whiter than egg.

CLEIS: But that's not why I came.

SAPPHO: No?

CLEIS: I came because... well...

SAPPHO: What? What is it?

CLEIS: I've fallen in love.

SAPPHO: In love?

CLEIS: Yes.

SAPPHO: With a man? Oh, you poor, poor dear.

CLEIS: And now I just don't know.

SAPPHO: I know, I know.

CLEIS: I mean, I know that he likes me. He has to. He's... just...

SAPPHO: A man.

CLEIS: Well, yeah. There you go. Hey, is that why you... you know, with women?

SAPPHO: Oh, no, dear. Women can be every bit as stupid.

CLEIS: Oh. Then maybe I've—

SAPPHO: No, no, don't go blaming yourself. He'll come around.

CLEIS: But what if he doesn't?

SAPPHO: Then it was never meant to be. You know what, why don't you stay here in my temple for a while? I think there are some things we could teach you.

CLEIS: Really? SAPPHO:

Really? CLEIS: I love you.

Mother. *She leaves.*

SAPPHO: I have a daughter who looks like golden flowers, for whom I would not share all the wealth of Lydia or fair Lesbos itself.

*Enter ATTHIS,*

SAPPHO: Oh. Atthis. Darling. How good it is to see you.

ATTHIS: Oh, I bet it is.

SAPPHO: Just when I thought this night couldn't possibly get any better, I find fate still has a wonderful little surprise in store for me.

ATTHIS hits her.

SAPPHO: What was... How dare you!

ATTHIS: Oh, shut up, you old tramp!

SAPPHO: Atthis!

ATTHIS: Don't say my name, *witch!* I'm through with your lies.

SAPPHO: What lies? Atthis, what are you talking about? (*Fragment*)

ATTHIS: Are you going to say it's not true, then?

SAPPHO: Yes, I am.

ATTHIS: She said you would say that. But I know the truth. I know what you did to me. What you do to all the girls who walk through that door.

SAPPHO: I set you free—

ATTHIS: You teach us sin!

SAPPHO: I teach you what?

ATTHIS: These... these ways you teach, these habits, these... what you call *love*. It isn't love.

SAPPHO: But of course it is.

ATTHIS: True love can't exist between equals, between... people who are... t has to be a man and a woman or it doesn't count!

SAPPHO: I've done that. You think I haven't? I was married once, you know. To a man. And I did leave him over time, or so I thought. But it wasn't love. Just because it's a man and a woman doesn't make it love and just because it's two women doesn't make it wrong!

ATTHIS: Look, maybe that was how it was for you, OK? But that's not me, OK? I don't... I don't like... that, and when I... when I think of all the things that you... that we... God, I'm just so... *disgusted*.

SAPPHO: Then why didn't you say anything?

ATTHIS: How could I? How could I? You were my teacher. But I have a new teacher now.

SAPPHO: No, Atthis, please!

ATTHIS: Don't try to stop me. I'll scream.

SAPPHO: Don't go to her. Her way isn't any better.

ATTHIS: Well maybe it is! At least she doesn't make me feel... (*shudders*)

SAPPHO: Atthis! Atthis, don't go!

*Exit ATTHIS.*

SAPPHO: She's gone. She's really gone. Well... no matter. She's not the only friend I can call upon.

*Enter ANAKTORIA to another part of the stage. SAPPHO puts on a mask.*

ANAKTORIA: And hither I come again to this holy temple. A temple now shrouded in darkness out in the woods, but soon... soon I know it will be filled with light. Oh Phaon, Phaon, Whereat art thou, Phaon?

*Enter SAPPHO as PHAON.*

PHAON: I am here!

ANAKTORIA: What light from yonder window breaks?

*PHAON sweeps down and clasps Anaktoria, then dips and kisses her.*

PHAON: O beautiful one! O graceful one!

ANAKTORIA: Oh, please, don't use those names for me.

PHAON: But even these names do not do you justice. As the sweet-apple reddens on the bough-top, on the top of the topmost bough; the apple-gatherers have forgotten it—no they have not forgotten it entirely, but they could not reach it. Like the hyacinth which shepherds tread underfoot in the mountains, and on the ground the purple flower, shot from Eros's bow. Once again limb-loosening love makes me tremble, the bittersweet, irresistible creature.

ANAKTORIA: Oh, stop it.

PHAON: Superior, as the Lesbian singer to those of other lands.

ANAKTORIA: I talked to Sappho.

PHAON: What words from the Mortal Muse?

ANAKTORIA: She said... she said it was all right. That there's no danger.

PHAON: There's always a danger for lovers, my queen.

ANAKTORIA: I know. But there's nothing stopping us now.

*They kiss. ANAKTORIA breaks off.*

ANAKTORIA: Nothing except...

PHAON: What? What is it, my love?

ANAKTORIA: She also said you wouldn't marry.

PHAON: She's right. I can't. I shouldn't.

ANAKTORIA: But why not?

PHAON: Because I've lived this life before. Because marriage is for children and it is not for me to serve Demeter.

ANAKTORIA: Why not? Why can't you just... I don't know, have a life?

PHAON: As I told you, I have lived before. Anaktoria... ANAKTORIA:

But what about me?

PHAON: Anaktoria, listen to me. Just because I want you, just because I love you, that doesn't put you under any obligation.

ANAKTORIA: What do you mean?

PHAON: Marriage... marriage is just a convenience. Marriage has nothing to do with love. Not real love. Not true love. It is a matter of wealth and by consequence, it is a matter of children who are heirs to that wealth. If I kept you from that life—

ANAKTORIA: Then you would allow me to lie with another man?

PHAON: Well, yes.

ANAKTORIA: But that... that would be deceitful. Adulterous.

PHAON: Lying with someone in what is called love doesn't have to be love. It can be marriage. Listen to me, Anaktoria. I love you. That means I want what's best for you. If that means letting you marry someone else, I can't stop you. That would be selfish.

ANAKTORIA: Then I... I would be committing adultery *with you*.

PHAON: In the eyes of the law, yes.

ANAKTORIA: But your... your seed is...

PHAON: No one would know.

ANAKTORIA: And I could have a child and worship Demeter—

PHAON: And still not leave Aphrodite.

*Exeunt. Enter MARTIN and ALICE on opposite ends of the stage.*

MARTIN: Wait. Say that again.

ALICE: I like girls.

MARTIN: But you like guys too, right? You can like both at the same time, right?

ALICE: I guess. Probably.

MARTIN: Well, can't you, like... can't you do both? At the same time?

ALICE: Oh, is that how it is, Martin? You want to be invited?

MARTIN: Well, I wouldn't pass it up.

ALICE: Martin, you've never even done it with one girl. You've never even done it with me.

MARTIN: I know. But that's... that's why I'm, like... How can you know? How can you know for sure? Because you've never done it either, have you? With another guy? There isn't something you, like, haven't told me or anything? Is there?

ALICE: I'm still a virgin when it comes to guys.

MARTIN: Well, then, how do you know you wouldn't like it better?

ALICE: I don't, I guess. But I know I like this. It's... comfortable.

MARTIN: I just don't understand how you can know all that for sure, though.

ALICE: Look up Sappho and you'll understand.

MARTIN: Sappho. Right. You know, I looked at that other guy, Alcaeus.

ALICE: So what have you found out?

MARTIN: Um... well, pretty much his name, actually.

ALICE: Is that it?

MARTIN: And I know he liked boys. But I also know he liked Sappho. He loved Sappho.

ALICE: Yeah.

MARTIN: So, like... you can do both. Right?

ALICE: Look, I... I can't talk about this right now.

*MARTIN turns into ALCAEUS. Enter LARICHUS, who sets himself up in his shop. ALCAEUS comes to him.*

ALCAEUS: Well, hello, there, friendly taylor Larichus.

LARICHUS: Anacreon! This is a pleasant surprise! What are you doing here?

ALCAEUS: Well, Lari—do you mind if I call you Lari?

LARICHUS: Do you mind if I call you Alky?

ALCAEUS: Not at all. You see, Lari, I am in need of a good, fine taylor such as yourself in order to make me a dress.

•

LARICHUS: I see. You going to uh... gonna impress some lady?

ALCAEUS: You could say that.

LARICHUS: Well, alright then. I assume you have her measurements?

ALCAEUS: Oh, no, actually, the dress is for me.

LARICHUS: Come again?

ALCAEUS: The dress? It's for me.

*Shred*



ALCAEUS: So why don't you talk to her?

LARICHUS: How can I say anything?

ALCAEUS: Well, the first thing you do is open your mouth—

LARICHUS: No, no, I understand *that* much! But how can I... *tell* her... *that*?...

ALCAEUS: Here's what I would do.

LARICHUS: Yes?

ALCAEUS: I would tell her...

LARICHUS: Yes?

ALCAEUS: And if she says yes, I'd be elated. And I'd go out and get drunk off my ass with friends to celebrate.

LARICHUS: But what if she doesn't say yes?

ALCAEUS: Then fuck her. Wasn't meant to be. And I'd go out and get smashed to recover.

LARICHUS: No, no, I can't do that. I have a weak stomach.

ALCAEUS: All the more reason!

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: What you need to understand is, she's probably every bit as insecure as you are. That means *you* have to be the strong one, to go to her, to woo her, to show *her* how you feel about her.

LARICHUS: Right.

ALCAEUS: And then if that doesn't work, we can break into your father's stash. It'll be beautiful.

*Enter ANAKTORIA. LARICHUS is quite taken aback ALCAEUS notices.*

LARICHUS: Can I h-h-help y-you?

ANAKTORIA: Oh. Certainly.

ALCAEUS: (*less than subtle*) Well... I'd best be off. Best of luck to you on that uh... yeah, (*exits*)

LARICHUS: Urn... so, uh... What can I help you with?

ANAKTORIA: I'm trying to find someone who can make me a nice-looking dress for a wedding.

*LARICHUS is disappointed.*

LARICHUS: Oh. Um... Well, you're uh... you've come to the right place. Let me see what I have here in white—

ANAKTORIA: Oh, I'm not the bride.

*LARICHUS is elated.*

LARICHUS: Oh. Of course not. For *a* wedding, *not your...* of course.

ANAKTORIA: Is something wrong?

LARICHUS: Wrong?

ANAKTORIA: Yes. It's just that, well... You do look a bit flustered.

LARICHUS: Oh. Right. Well, urn... you know how—

*Shred*

ANAKTORIA: Oh.

LARICHUS: You don't have to answer now or anything. It's just...

ANAKTORIA: No, no, that's—

LARICHUS: No?

ANAKTORIA: What? Oh, no, that's not what I-

LARICHUS: Oh. Not no? Not no. Good.

ANAKTORIA: Right. I mean not... you know.

LARICHUS: Right.

ANAKTORIA: It's not just weird.

LARICHUS: Yeah. Yeah, I understand.

ANAKTORIA: Yeah.

*Shred. ANAKTORIA starts walking out the door.*

LARICHUS: Wait.

*ANAKTORIA stops. LARICHUS walks up to her and grabs her, as though to kiss her. Shred. Enter REYNOLDS, CLAUDIA and ALICE into the space.*

REYNOLDS: I wanted to talk to the two of you.

CLAUDIA: OK.

REYNOLDS: I wanted to talk to you about Sappho.

ALICE: What about her?

REYNOLDS: Well, I understand how you would be interested in a powerful female role model like her. A poet who presumably earned her own living independent of men. But there are... darker aspects of Sappho's personality that you must have become aware of by now.

*At this point, REYNOLDS has her back turned to the two girls. CLAUDIA looks at ALICE and smiles and winks at her. ALICE smiles wanly.*

ALICE: What do you mean?

REYNOLDS: Please don't make me explain myself, Miss Harper. You know exactly what I'm talking about.

ALICE: I'm sorry.

CLAUDIA: You're referring to Sappho being a... tribad?

REYNOLDS: To put it coldly, yes.

CLAUDIA: OK. So... what *about* gay sex?

REYNOLDS: Miss Stiles!

CLAUDIA: What? That's what you're asking us, right?

REYNOLDS: I'm not... asking. I'm telling you, if you do... get those sorts of ideas... God won't like it!

CLAUDIA: Why not? REYNOLDS:

What? CLAUDIA: God is love,

right?

REYNOLDS: Look, we are not having this conversation. I am simply telling you, if you don't stop... learning about Sappho, Father Huffman is concerned and he will... put a stop to it in whatever way he can.

CLAUDIA: I thought this was a school. Shouldn't we be allowed to learn?

REYNOLDS: I won't tell you again. Just stop learning about *this*. Not all knowledge is good to have.

CLAUDIA: Well, thank you, Sister Reynolds, for this enlightening session, *(to Alice)* Shall we?

REYNOLDS: Now, wait just a minute there, young lady. I'm not finished with you yet!

CLAUDIA: Oh. Was there something else, Sister Reynolds? REYNOLDS: Well... no, just... remember what I said. About Sappho.

CLAUDIA: Oh, don't worry, Sister Reynolds. I think we have all the information we needed to put us on the proper path.

REYNOLDS: Oh... very well, just... just as long as you're careful.

CLAUDIA: Always.

ALICE: Thank you, Sister Reynolds.

CLAUDIA: Come on.

*Exeunt CLAUDIA and ALICE.*

ALICE: Claudia?

CLAUDIA: Yes, Alice?

ALICE: What are we doing?

CLAUDIA: Well, right now, we are lying in the sun, looking up at the sky. It's a beautiful day. And we're dating.

ALICE: And what... what does that mean?

CLAUDIA: Why does that matter? Why do you always do that, Alice? You always do that, you're always... probing for more information.

ALICE: I just... I need to know that what I'm doing is... right.

CLAUDIA: We've talked about this before, Allie. Don't sweat it.

ALICE: But what if... What if they're right? CLAUDIA: What if who's right?

ALICE: Huffman and Reynolds. The church. What if... what if loving you... what if it really is wrong?

CLAUDIA: Isn't it worth it?

ALICE: Is it?

*Shred. CLAUDIA and ALICE become ABANTHIS and GONGYLA respectively.*

ABANTHIS: I'm *not* prying, OK? I'm just curious because my *girlfriend* has been acting weird lately. What's wrong? Is there someone else?

GONGYLA: No. No, there's no one else but you, OK? You need to remember that. Abanthis. You need to know that for sure—

ABANTHIS: Then what is it? Talk to me, Gongyla. I'm here for you. Whatever it is, we'll make it through. OK? We'll make it through together.

GONGYLA: I'm fine, OK? I'm fine, I don't need any help with this.

ABANTHIS: Gongyla, this is what I signed up for, OK? We both knew that this was what it was going to be like, didn't we? Please just... just let me in.

ANDROMEDA: Look at the two of you. You and your perversity, you and your sin! It's sin, that's what it is! It's sick!

GONGYLA: Is that who I think it is?

ABANTHIS: I don't think it could be anyone else.

ANDROMEDA: I know what it is with you two. Why you abjure the company of men, why you seem to think it's so much better to become an abomination. It's the decline of good father figures in our society.

ABANTHIS: What is she talking about?

GONGYLA: I think she's trying to tell us why this is wrong.

ANDROMEDA: Listen to me when I speak to you! Here's the proof: neither of you girls has any manners! Hasn't anyone taught you to respect your elders? Oh, no, because that lying bitch Sappho only wants you respecting *her!*

ABANTHIS: You take that back!

ANDROMEDA: Or what? Don't you even see? Don't either of you know what's going on here? Now that the two of you are tainted, neither one of you will ever find a husband. You'll shrivel up and die as an old maid because all you ever thought of was yourself! You see? Sin comes with its own punishment. And if you ever do get a husband, if by some chance you are forced into it, his touch will be the touch of nails driven into flesh and your touch will be to him like poison. Look! (*indicates Gongyla*) She knows what I mean!

ABANTHIS: Gongyla? Gongyla, are you all right? Don't listen to her, baby, don't listen.

ANDROMEDA: She will listen to me! And you will listen, too. Because if you don't listen to me, you will face the wrath of the Gods! Great Zeus himself shall descend from the heavens to visit his wrath upon thee!

SAPPHO: No, he will not!

ANDROMEDA: What did you say?

SAPPHO: Children, it is best you were to leave; presently.

*Exit ABANTHIS and GONGYLA.*

SAPPHO: It occurs to me to ask what on blackest earth you think you're doing here.

ANDROMEDA: I can do whatever I want. I was here long before you were, you whore!

SAPPHO: Really, *must* we resort to the calling of names?

ANDROMEDA: That ain't no name, bitch. I was insulting you! Tramp.

*Shred.*

SAPPHO: Who are you to tell others not to speak? Who are you to tell anyone anything, for that matter?

ANDROMEDA: Who am I? I am a decent human being, which is more 'n I can say for some folk, I'll tell you what.

SAPPHO: Decency? Oh, please, don't get me started.

*Shred.*

ANDROMEDA: But at least I know what the fuck I'm talking about when I mention the Gods.

SAPPHO: You wouldn't know a God if he struck you through the heart with his archery. I'm not sure you even have a heart. I would ask your companion here, but you've forbidden her to speak. And everyone who even looks at you, you try to turn their hearts to stone as hard as yours, as un-beating.

ANDROMEDA: Fuck you!

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SAPPHO: I wish the daughter of Polyanax a very good day. Unfortunately, I must retire to my abode with those who have had quite enough of this Gorgon, *(exit)*

ANDROMEDA: Bitch! Did you hear what she just—

*Shred.*

*Shred. Shred. Shred. Bunsen burner.*

*Exeunt. Enter ALCAEUS in a dress, as GYRINNO.*

GYRINNO: Well, here I am, ready to party. Got my classic dress get-up, not too revealing, obviously. (Describes dress) What woman could resist? Well, given of course that she's a lesbian.

Uh-oh. Here comes someone. It... oh, dear. It looks like a man. O, dear! Oh... sweet Dionysos, and here I am in a dress next to Dionysos's temple. Oh, boy. This is... well, this is not good, to say the least. But I'm hoping if I just keep cool, I might be able to get out of the situation.

*Enter SAPPHO as PHAON.*

PHAON: *(aside)* I meant what I said earlier, to Anaktoria. I believe that Aphrodite meant her son to split his own arrows after he hit his mark, but still keep all of them in the bullseye. True, Anaktoria is dear to my heart, but I wouldn't be jealous of her. Jealousy is an act of selfishness and love can never be selfish, *(sees Gyrinno)* And by the same token, I expect Anaktoria to understand if I want a bit of action, *(to Gyrinno)* Greetings, fair lady. How goes it?

GYRINNO: Oh, fine, fine. Nothing wrong with my... um... Nothing wrong here.

PHAON: *(aside)* To begin with, I shall start of as a man would, so as not to arouse suspicion, *(to Gyrinno)* So, do you uh... come here often?

GYRINNO: Um... no, no, I uh... I've never been here before in my life.

PHAON: *(aside)* This could be problematic, but nevertheless, all men enjoy a field of unplucked roses, *(to Gyrinno)* Well, in that case... what's your name, gorgeous?

GYRINNO: My name? *(aside)* I hadn't thought of that. I suppose, since I seem to have turned from one thing to another it should be the Greek for "turning" *(to Phaon)* Gyr...inno. Gyrinno is my name.

PHAON: Gyrinno. Oh, that's a very pretty name. Are you from around here?

GYRINNO: Um... no, um... Not really. I'm actually from uh... Nepal. Neapolitan. Naples. Naples, I'm from Naples.

PHAON: Ooh. You've come a long way to our little town. What brought you here?

GYRINNO: Oh, you know, the usual. Travel. I... I often come this way from nipples—Naples. Naples, yes.

PHOAN: You know, you're very pretty.

GYRINNO: Oh, uh... why, thank you, kind sir—

PHAON: Please, call me Phaon.

GYRINNO: Oh, uh... why, certainly, your um... hm... Phaon. *(jumps up)* Oh, dear!

PHAON: But what's the matter?

GYRINNO: You uh... your hand—I mean... There was a bee! There was a bee and it was going to sting me.

PHAON: You know, speaking of bees... Eros was once stung by a bee and his mother told him it served him right. Always shooting his arrows. Sooner or later, it's good he'd get stung.

GYRINNO: Oh, I... I don't know how I feel about that. *Enter*

*ANAKTORIA.*

PHAON: You're killing me, Gyrinno. You're breaking my heart! Cut me. Do it. Take a knife and cut out my heart.



*GYRINNO notices Anaktoria.*

GYRINNO: Um... Is he supposed to be with you?

*ANAKTORIA starts to leave.*

PHAON: Anaktoria, wait!

ANAKTORIA: Wait? Why should I wait for you? I knew there had to be another reason why you wouldn't marry me!

GYRINNO: You were going to marry her? *(scoffs, slaps Phaori)*

ANAKTORIA: And who's she?

PHAON: No, Anaktoria, it's not like that, please, I swear.

ANAKTORIA: Then what is it like? Why don't you want to marry me? And don't give me the story about the ferry and the Goddess—

GYRINNO: That was you?

ANAKTORIA: Because I know it isn't true. Gods don't walk the earth anymore. They haven't for generations. So why won't you marry me?

PHAON: *(removes the mask)* Because I'm Sappho.

GYRINNO: Sweet Plum Purple Aphrodite!

ANAKTORIA: You... it was all along.

GYRINNO: This is such a coincidence! I came here for you.

ANAKTORIA: And I suppose you must do this with all your students?

SAPPHO: Only you. Only you, Anaktoria. It's only you that I loved.

GYRINNO: You were coming onto me pretty hard.

SAPPHO: Please, Anaktoria you have to believe me.

ANAKTORIA: How can I trust you? How can I ever trust anyone ever again?

GYRINNO: Pay no attention to her, sweet-voiced poet of Lesbos. For I am here and I believe in your cause.

SAPPHO: Well, it's good to know someone does.

GYRINNO: Oh, yes, I'm all about some girl-on-girl action.

ANAKTORIA: Oh, God, you're disgusting! GYRINNO:

Don't listen to her, Sappho. I love you. SAPPHO: Who *are*

you? Do I even know you? GYRINNO: Yes, you do.

*ALCAEUS reveals himself.* ALCAEUS: For I am Alcaeus!

SAPPHO and ANAKTORIA: Dear Gods!

ALCAEUS: What? Is that all you can say? Are those all the words you have for an old friend?

SAPPHO: A friend who wears a mask?

ALCAEUS: Look who's talking.

SAPPHO: I... that's different.

ALCAEUS: Right.

ANAKTORIA: Wait a minute. It was you. Yesterday, at the shop. At Larichus's shop.

SAPPHO: You know my brother Larichus?

ALCAEUS: Brother? (*slaps his head*) I really need to get your family members straight! Can't they wear signs?

SAPPHO: (*to Anaktoria*) But how do *you* know Larichus?

ANAKTORIA: !... well... ALCAEUS: He really likes you,

by the way. SAPPHO: He does?

ANAKTORIA: Yes, I know. He... that's really... that's what I was coming here to tell.. Phaon... He proposed to me yesterday.

SAPPHO: He did?

ALCAEUS: Go, Lari!

ANAKTORIA: And I said yes.

*Beat.*

ALCAEUS: O...K...

SAPPHO: Congratulations.

ANAKTORIA: You're not angry, then? You're not... jealous?

SAPPHO: How can I be jealous that my brother is finally finding happiness?

ANAKTORIA: Right.

SAPPHO: Take care of him. Take care of his heart. Don't break it like you broke mine.

ANAKTORIA: I won't. I promise, *(turns to leave, turns back}* Goodbye... Phaon. *(exit)*

ALCAEUS: So... do you... come here often?

*Shred. Exit ALCAEUS. SAPPHO starts having a fit, falls to her knees.*

SAPPHO:

Immortal Aphrodite on the rainbow throne, Child of  
Zeus with the maniest wiles, I implore you, Do not  
overrun or exhaust my poor heart, mistress, With  
anticipation

But come to me, if ever before you leaped  
Into the mud as you heard my voice, and  
Left your father's golden house To come

In your chariot; you drive the beautiful Swift  
Sparrows above this blackened earth Spinning their  
wings, beating fast from high heaven Through the  
firmament

To get here the sooner; and you, blessed you,  
With an immortal smile on an immortal face, Ask  
what's making me suffer this time, Why am I  
calling this time?

What does my raving heart most desire,  
Most crave; whom am I to persuade this time  
To lead you to her dearest love? Who, dear  
Sappho, does you wrong?

For though she flees, she shall soon pursue, And though  
now she turns away gifts, she shall give them, And though  
she scorns your love, soon she shall love Even against her  
will.

So come to me now, Goddess, release this hard  
Crop in my throat, fulfill all the wishes that My  
heart longs to see fulfilled, and be yourself My  
fellow fighter!

*Enter PITTACUS.*

PITTACUS: Sappho! What a pleasant surprise it is to find you back on our shores.

SAPPHO: Don't play games with me, Pittacus. You don't want me back on Lesbos any  
more than I want to see your ugly face on every coin I use while I stay here.

PITTACUS: Oh, nonsense, darling!

SAPPHO: Need I remind you, you sniveling piece of rat scum, that the last time we two  
exchanged words I was dismissed from the isle on pain of death!

PITTACUS: Oh, death, death, I don't recall ever saying *that*!

SAPPHO: And now suddenly, you invite me back to Lesbos. Why? A sudden change of  
heart? Considering the way you still treat your slave-girls, I would say this change of  
heart hasn't breached the rib-cage. You only want me here because my fame outreaches  
yours. You seek the approval of the people and the people want their poet back, so  
don't you dare pretend that we are friends, King Pittacus. You are a Tyrant. And  
Tyrants require support for their claims.

PITTACUS: Fancy talk. You know, I'm not sure my country-raised brain could quite  
keep up with all that. But now it's my turn to talk, bitch. You listen to me and you listen  
to me good, you are here for one reason, which is that we need a national poet—

SAPPHO: Then why don't you ask your good friend Alcaeus?

PITTACUS: We need a poet. You will do as I say, dammit!

SAPPHO: Or what?

PITTACUS: Or... (*chuckles*) I hold the keys to the future of your daughter's heart.

SAPPHO: What?

PITTACUS: Your daughter is not yet wed. No divine sanction prevents her from joining the house of a king. Now I know how much you loathe me, darling. So let me ask you this. Are you willing to give up your daughter?

SAPPHO: You have no power over her.

PITTACUS: I have consulted with the king of Syracuse. At a moment's notice, he has orders to seize her and bear her to me. We're old friends, see, it's the whole *tyrant* thing. So unless you want your daughter marrying a King—who would ever have thought anyone would say that as a threat—I suggest you comply.

SAPPHO: I have a daughter who looks like golden flowers. And I would not trade all Lydia for her, nor even this lovely isle of my home. She is mine, Pittacus. You shall not have either of us. Do your worst.

PITTACUS: You're throwing away a golden opportunity! Two, even, I would say! (*softer*) Maybe even three.

*Exit SAPPHO. PITTACUS turns into HUFFMAN. Enter ALICE. He motions her to sit.*

HUFFMAN: I wanted to talk to you, Alice, about the state of your soul.

ALICE: My soul?

HUFFMAN: Your soul. Your immortal soul, Alice. A sorry state it's in now, I would say. I know what you've been doing. I know who you've been doing it with. And I want to tell you... you are making a mistake. God made two sexes for a reason, Alice. There are two of every beast in the forest, even such animals as fish, come in both flavors. A seed and an egg. The only purpose of these things is procreation and the aspect of it that gives pleasure... Don't you take pleasure in creation? Can we not imagine that God took pleasure in creating the world? Reason would dictate there is no other reason for creation than to take pleasure in the act as much as the result.

ALICE: Right...?

HUFFMAN: But nowhere does it say that God *didn't practice* creation before going through with it. That is why people indulge in... practice rounds. But the sort of... abomination performed in heathen cults like the one you have been researching... This can never result in the creation of new life. Therefore it can be nothing but indulgence. And when it comes to indulgence, well... let's just say the Catholic Church has learned its lesson. And so should you.

ALICE: How?

HUFFMAN: By learning firsthand that the way of the virtuous is always better than the way of the wicked.

*They freeze.*

ALICE/GONGYLA:

The Moving Finger Writes, and having writ,  
Moves on, nor all thy piety nor wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a line, Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.

CLAUDIA: You gave me hyacinths first a year ago. CLEIS: She calls me her hyacinth girl.

ANDROMEDA: Twit Twit Twit.

ALICE/GONGYLA:

Look to the Rose that blows about us, Lo,      ALCAEUS: Weialala Leia  
Laughing, she says, into the world I blow      Wallala Leialala

At once the silken tassel of my purse  
Tear and its treasures to the garden throw.

CLAUDIA: My nerves are bad tonight. Yes. Bad. Stay with me. Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak. What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? I never know what you are thinking. Think.

ALICE/GONGYLA:

There is shadow under this purple rock

SAPPHO: Whispering

Come in under the shadow of this purple rock

And I will show you something different from either ANDROMEDA: Jug Jug Jug

Your shadow at morning striding behind you

Jug Jug Jug

Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you

Jug Jug Jug

I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

How sweet is mortal sov'ranty, think some,

Others, how blest the paradise to come. HUFFMAN: HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Ah, take the cash in hand and waive the rest.

Oh, the brave music of a distant drum.

CLAUDIA: What is that noise?

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain

CLAUDIA: What is that noise now? Thrills

me, fills me with fantastic terrors never felt before.

CLAUDIA: What is the wind doing? Telling myself "Here comes the morrow"—only a minute or two more to borrow

HUFFMAN: HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME Till I'll find surcease of sorrow—sorrow that marks me to the core Sorrow for my guilt that sends me kneeling to the floor

Quoth the Gorgon: "Evermore."

CLAUDIA: Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember Nothing?

ALICE/GONGYLA:

Sweet Lesbos, speak softly till I end my song. ALCAEUS: WeialalaLeia  
Sweet Lesbos, tread lightly, for I speak not loud or long. Wallala Leialala  
But at my back in a cold blast, I hear  
The rattle of bones, and a chuckle spread from ear to ear.

Lesbos, where kisses cascade down ALCAEUS: Weialala Leia Wallala Leialala  
Lesbos, where kisses rain eternally down, ANDROMEDA: Twit Twit Twit Lesbos,  
where the shes are drawn each to the other, ALCAEUS: *(Repeats)* Lesbos, land of  
warmth and languor in the nights. ANDROMEDA: Jug jug jug jug jug

SAPPHO: (repeats over following speech) Weialala Leia Wallala Leialala.

ALICE/GONGYLA:

No one is angry and no one is mean on fairest Lesbos where we lay our scene,  
Those fine words have ever been, but they don't speak of what's in store. For  
on Lesbos, where the "let us" grows, it will haunt you where you go, Crying  
out in darkness: "No! Save me from the wickedness that lies in store, Hide me  
from the ghastly monsters who won't stop to leave me sore." Quoth the  
Gorgon: "Nevermore."

The ball no question makes of ayes and noes, ANDROMEDA: Twit Twit Twit  
But left and right as strikes the player goes Jug Jug Jug Jug Jug Jug So  
And he that cast thee down into the field rudely forced PITTACUS:  
He knows about it all, he knows, he knows. Tereu! *(laughs)*

April is the cruelest month, breeding PITTACUS: Burning  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing PITTACUS: Burning  
Memory and Desire, stirring Dull PITTACUS: Burning  
roots with spring rain. Winter kept REYNOLDS: O Lord thou pluckest me out  
us warm, covering Earth in PITTACUS: Burning REYNOLDS:  
forgotten snow, feeding A little life O Lord thou pluckest  
with dried tubers.

The chair she stood on, like a burnished throne, PITTACUS: Burning  
So very like my own I have at home, CLAUDIA: Are you alive or not?  
CLAU

DIA: Is there nothing in your head?  
Doubled the flames of seven-branched candelabra,  
Burned all the pain away, down to the bone.

HUFFMAN: HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS... TIME!

ALICE/GONGYLA:

One moment in annihilation's waste,  
One moment of the well of life to taste—  
    The stars are setting and the Caravan  
Starts for the dawn of nothing. So make haste.

*REYNOLDS sits down at her desk. Enter CLAUDIA.*

CLAUDIA: You wanted to see me?

REYNOLDS: I wanted to check up on you. See how you're doing.

CLAUDIA: I thought I'd made that perfectly clear.

REYNOLDS: Claudia, you can't keep blaming yourself for what happened.

CLAUDIA: Oh, I assure you, Sister Reynolds, I've never blamed myself. I don't blame myself one bit. I blame you!

REYNOLDS: Claudia!

CLAUDIA: I blame you and I blame Father Huffman. Alice was doing just fine before you two made her regret wanting more.

REYNOLDS: You mean wanting you.

CLAUDIA: Yes.

REYNOLDS: The way Father Huffman and I see it, Claudia, Alice was fine until you decided to seduce her.

CLAUDIA: I thought you said it wasn't my fault.

REYNOLDS: It's not, but— CLAUDIA: Save it.

REYNOLDS: You can't change what happened, Claudia. We're not... we're not *blaming* you, I just wanted to point out—

CLAUDIA: Fuck you! Fuck you and Father Huffman! I don't need either of you bitches. I was happy! Happy, Sister Reynolds. And she would have been, too, if it hadn't been for you. So fuck you and fuck Father Huffman and this school and the Catholic Church and anyone who ever *dares* tell anyone else that they don't deserve what makes them happy! I'm through! The last twelve years I've had this liturgical bullshit shoved up my ass till it



comes out my ears, till it seeps through my pores and it's making me green! And I... I envy Alice that she managed to escape it!

REYNOLDS: You think you have it bad!-

CLAUDIA: I know I have it bad. And if you want to argue that things were stricter back in your day, sometimes... sometimes that's better. But people change. Times change. Time kills. That's all I know for sure.

*SAPPHO and CLEIS walk across the stage in procession.*

MARTIN: Unreal city,  
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over the river Styx, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many.  
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,  
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

SAPPHO: Thank you for coming, daughter. I fell I need support tonight.

CLEIS: It was the least I could do. She was one of your students.

SAPPHO: One of my best.

CLEIS: You must have been very... close to her.

SAPPHO: *(pause)* Yes.

CLEIS: How close?

SAPPHO: How much do you want to know?

*CLEIS starts to speak, then stops.*

ABANTHIS: Look what you did.

SAPPHO: Abanthis!

ABANTHIS: Look what you've done! You've ruined it! You've ruined her life. And you've ruined mine.

SAPPHO: Abanthis, calm down.

CLEIS: My mother had nothing to do with this! She loved that girl every bit as much as you did—

SAPPHO: Cleis.

ABANTHIS: And hence the problem. Love. I mean, that's why she killed herself, right? Because she loved me. And, dammit, she never would have loved me if it hadn't been for you, and I would ever have loved her and then I wouldn't feel this pain!

SAPPHO: And you wouldn't have felt her love, either! You can say what you want, Abanthis, but I know you loved her. I've never seen two people so much in love, man or woman. I know the good times you had with her. Now I know... I know you're in pain, but that's what happens. You've got to... If you want the good, you've... You've got to take the bad with the good.

ABANTHIS: But I can't... I can't—

SAPPHO: You can. Because that's life. Just remember. She loved you. Whatever else was true, she loved you and no one can ever take that away from you. Just breathe. Just breathe.

CLEIS: Do you really think she's in a better place?

SAPPHO: Death is an evil thing. The Gods have decreed it. Otherwise, the Gods themselves would seek it. I need you to promise me, Cleis. I need you to promise me right now that you'll never follow in Gongyla's footsteps, that you'll never venture to take your own life.

CLEIS: I promise.

SAPPHO: I lost you once, Cleis. I can't lose you again. Never again.

CLEIS: I promise I'm not going anywhere.

SAPPHO:

And honestly I wish I were dead  
She came to me with many tears and said

"Oh, dear Sappho, what bad luck has been ours.  
Truly I do not wish to leave this bed.  
But none of our lives are ever in our powers;

Our lives are in the claws of dreadful Gods."  
Yet I did convince her after many hours  
To listen; said goodbye, though we were at odds

And called to mind the good times we had had,  
The wreaths and the roses, the shakes and  
nods. Really our times couldn't be all that  
bad.

The trick, dear child, is simply to remember,  
For memory's river flows away from the mad  
To seek its solace even in dying embers

That keep a cold body from losing its grace, The  
grace every body must needs engender Though  
after some time they must be lost in space

As we seek to lose ourselves on a tender bed,  
Covered in tender touches, covered in lace,  
With our gentle lover stroking back the hair on our heads,

Hoping it could be no worse than this to be dead.

ALLOSAPPHO: Oh, dear Gods, such senseless drivel! Save me, save me, Aphrodite,  
from this emo fest.

SAPPHO: Who are you?

ALLOSAPPHO: Who am I? Who are you? That's the same question, isn't it? And the  
answer is also the same. I am Sappho, the love-goddess of Lesbos.

SAPPHO: You're Sappho? But... but I'm Sappho!

ALLOSAPPHO: Not for long. You may be the tenth muse, singer, you may think you  
hold sway over the hearts of men and women both, but soon... soon all they will  
remember will be me. Your poetry, all the lyric poems you've composed and entertained  
with through the ages, all will be scattered to the winds and they will remember you only  
as a tribad. The original Lesbian. Your name they will remember, but only as a word for  
sin and even those who praise you will praise you only because you were a lover. A  
lover. I blush to even say the word, can you imagine? Me, blushing.

SAPPHO: No. That's not how it goes! That's not what I was promised!

ALLOSAPPHO: You were promised to worship Aphrodite in song.

SAPPHO: And my songs would be remembered!

ALLOSAPPHO: Which ones?

SAPPHO: I believe in love!

ALLOSAPPHO: Whose love?

SAPPHO: I have a daughter who looks like golden flowers—

ALLOSAPPHO: A daughter who will marry a king—

SAPPHO: NO! No, not that! That I...

ALLOSAPPHO: Take your reputation where you can, sister.

SAPPHO: I can stop that. That part, I can stop.

ALLOSAPPHO: Then go.

SAPPHO: I will.

*Exit ALLOSAPPHO. SAPPHO moves to another part of the stage.*

SAPPHO: Excuse me, is Nikander in?

SERVANT: I'll go and check, miss.

*Shred.*

SAPPHO: Larichus! Larichus! It's your sister, darling. I need to talk to you.

*Shred.*

SERVANT: He can see you now, miss. Who should I tell him is calling?

SAPPHO: Tell him it's Sappho of Lesbos. *(Shred.)* Larichus!

LARICHUS: My Gods, woman, have you no manners?

SAPPHO: That's no way to speak to your older sister!

LARICHUS: It is when she call in the middle of the night! What's wrong with you?

SAPPHO: I needed to talk to you about something.

LARICHUS: About what? *(Shred)* NIKANDER: What feat of mine could possibly interest the tenth muse herself?

SAPPHO: One you've not yet undertaken.

NIKANDER: You've caught my interest. I've often wondered what it would be like to co-write a piece. An epic, perhaps.

SAPPHO: What? No. *(Shred)* I come on behalf of Anaktoria. LARICHUS: Oh, save it, Sappho. I don't need your throw-away pity cases.

SAPPHO: I didn't throw her away.

LARICHUS: You used to see her, though. Out in the woods. Didn't you?

SAPPHO: That's not why I'm here.

LARICHUS: You know what, I think it is. Because that's the very reason why I don't want her!

SAPPHO: Think of the passion. The sweet nights curled up together on the grass. The stars up above.

NIKANDER: You do make a convincing argument.

SAPPHO: You in the habit of Ares, she with the markings of Cypris Aphrodite.

LARICHUS: No, Sappho! How many times do I have to tell you? There will be no wedding!

SAPPHO: Why?

NIKANDER: Because I'm scared.

SAPPHO: What are you afraid of? Falling in love?

NIKANDER: Of her falling out of it.

SAPPHO: Don't.

LARICHUS: I don't want to be the cuckold by every servant girl from Sidon who happens to catch her eye.

SAPPHO: You won't be. I promise you. Marriage is an oath, stronger than a promise. If that oath is broken, the Gods do not look kindly on the one who falls apart. Besides, brother, she only loved me when I was a man—

LARICHUS: But she loved you. (*Shred*) NIKANDER: And what do I have to offer her?

SAPPHO: Uh... Security, a good home, she won't be a spinster. You present the possibility of someday having children, and take it from someone who learned it the hard way, there is no greater gift for a woman. Plus, you're a poet.

NIKANDER: What does that have to do with anything?

*Shred.*

SAPPHO: (*kisses Nikander on the cheek*) If you are my friend, take the bed of a younger woman, for I will not endure being the elder one in a partnership. NIKANDER: I will.

*NIKANDER/LARICHUS stands center-stage. SAPPHO addresses the audience.*

SAPPHO: Hither, holy rosy-armed Graces, daughter of Zeus. *Enter the rest of the ensemble as a CHORUS.*

CHORUS: On high the roof—  
Hymenaeus!—  
Raise up, you carpenters—  
Hymenaeus!  
The bridegroom is coming, the equal of Ares,  
much larger than a large man.

SAPPHO: Come and sing this, all of you. Converse and grant us generous favors. For we are going to a wedding. But send the maidens away as quickly as possible, that all night long they might sing of the love between you and the violet-robed bride. Come, wake up: go and fetch the young bachelors of your own age, so that we may see less sleep than the clear-voiced bird.

CLEIS: Mother, I know not... dear Gods, I never thought I'd be so nervous.

SAPPHO: Every bride is and ever will be.

CLEIS: I want everything to be perfect, but this... this curl... it's always out of place.

SAPPHO: Don't worry about the headband. For my mother once said that in her youth, if someone had her locks bound in a purple headband, that was indeed a great adornment but for the girl who has hair that is yellower than a torch it is better to decorate it with wreaths of flowers in bloom. Recently, I saw such a decorated headband from Sardis, from the fine Ionian cities. But for you, Cleis, I have no way of obtaining a decorated headband...

*Shred.*

CHORUS: On high the roof—Hymenaeus!—raise up, you carpenters—Hymenaeus! The bridegroom is coming, the equal of Ares, much larger than a large man.

*CLEIS sets herself down on one side of the table for the feast, ANAKTORIA on the other, NIKANDER/LARICHUS in the middle.*

SAPPHO: The door-keeper's feet are seven fathoms long, and his sandals are made from five ox-hides; ten cobblers worked hard to make them.

To what may I well compare you, dear bridegroom? I compare you above all to a tender sapling.

*Shred.*

SAPPHO: Happy bridegroom, your marriage has been fulfilled as you prayed, you have the girl for whom you prayed, whose form is graceful and whose eyes to look on are gentle, and love streams over your beautiful face... Aphrodite has honored you outstandingly. For, bridegroom, there was never another girl like this one. And to the bride... To the bride I must say...

*As she recites this next poem, everyone else melts off the stage.*

SAPPHO:

He seems to me akin to the  
Gods, That man, who sits  
across from You and can  
listen to your Sweet voice

And lovely laughter. Truly, though, It sets my  
heart to trembling in my breast. Every time I  
steal a glimpse of you, even for a moment, I find  
I can't even speak.

My tongue has snapped, and all of a  
sudden, A quiet flame has snuck under  
my skin, My eyes see nothing, my ears  
hear Nothing but this humming

Sweat seeps and pours from my pores, a  
trembling Takes me all over. I am greener  
than grass, I am, and surely death cannot be  
far away But that'sail right.

Because I know that you're here and you're  
happy And that's all that matters to me  
because I love you and love is a sacrifice  
that I Am willing to make.

*She turns.*

SAPPHO: Farewell, bride, farewell, worthy bridegroom. There they go, disappearing into that smooth doorway.

*The Leucadian cliffs. SAPPHO. She stands at the edge. She looks down,*

*calmly.*

SAPPHO:

This is the spot ~ 'tis here Tradition says  
That hopeless Love from this high towering  
rock Leaps headlong to Oblivion or to  
Death. Oh 'tis a giddy height! my dizzy  
head Swims at the Precipice—'tis death to  
fall!

*She brushes the edge with her foot, dangles a chain over it, looks at the chain, puts it away. Then she takes a step back and threatens to jump off, then chuckles to herself. She flirts with the cliff. Enter ALCAEUS, behind her, unseen. SAPPHO continues to flirt with the cliff, then stumbles and starts to fall off. She starts flailing back. Then ALCAEUS quickly comes to her rescue, grabbing her by the arm and pulling her back up.*

SAPPHO:

Alcaeus...

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: You come to a cliff, is it really all that likely you've come for the view? No. It's the thrill of it. For a poet, at least. But then, of course, once I arrive here, I find you flirting with Leukas like a tourist.

SAPPHO: I thought it'd

be fun. *Shred.*

ALCAEUS: The world is already yours, Sappho. Have I taught you nothing? The poet is answerable to no one. No one but himself. Or herself. You are a Goddess—

SAPPHO: But only in my mind. Only in the depths. At this height, such purported divinity won't do me any good.

ALCAEUS: Then why come here?

SAPPHO: To die. For love. That's what all the legends say, isn't it?

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: I don't know what to do about it now.

SAPPHO: It doesn't have anything to do with you.

ALCAEUS: Everything you do has to do with me, Sappho. You can't do *anything*, wash your face or cut your finger, without doing it to me. That's right! You might as well kill me as you, Sappho, it's the same thing. This has to do with me, Sappho.



SAPPHO: Then what if it does? What if it has everything to do with you! What if you are all I have and you're not enough? What if I could take all the rest of it if only I didn't have you here? What if the only way I can get away from you for good is to kill myself? What if it is? I can *still* do it!

ALCAEUS: Don't leave me, Sappho!

*Shred.*

ALCAEUS: Different for men? Are we speaking the same language here? Men can love every bit as deeply as women do. Haven't I proven that to you? Haven't I... I guess you wouldn't know... What man can rest easy when the blood of women has been shed?

SAPPHO: You still don't understand.

ALCAEUS: What? What don't I understand? (*no answer*) Who is he?

SAPPHO: Who said it was a "he"?

ALCAEUS: Of course, yes. This is you we're talking about, after all. I just caught wind of something about a man named Phaon.

SAPPHO: Phaon was never a

man. ALCAEUS: Wasn't he?

SAPPHO: Phaon was Adonis. Phaon was light. And now he lies in the lettuce, where I buried him.

*Shred*

SAPPHO: As a remedy. Like a poison. All the ills of the tribe, all the sins of the city were all heaped yearly on a sacrifice to rid the town of pollution. They don't have to die, but this brings their kindred out of harm. They even tie little birds to their bodies to give them wings. So they can fly to safety.

ALCAEUS: And you think you can fly that way?

SAPPHO: I cannot hope to reach the heavens with both hands. But if my sacrifice is to mean anything for them—

ALCAEUS: What sacrifice? For whom? Why all these riddles,

Sappho? SAPPHO: My life for their honor. ALCAEUS: Whose?

SAPPHO: All of them! For Mnasicca, for Alanna, for Mika and Megara, For Abanthis and poor dear Gongyla and Arthis, for you too. For Cleis. For Cydro. And for my dear Anaktoria, who isn't here because she's not for me. My reputation has tarnished them all. I've been defeated. I've been defeated by my own prejudice and hatred.

ALCAEUS: Why do you care about reputation?

SAPPHO: Haven't you been listening? If it was just me, I would grin and bear it. If it was only myself I should care for, I would throw caution to the wind and make love to my own daughter, whose beauty outshines purple sunrise! But that's not how it works. That's not what it means to be in love. I have to care about *her*, too. And rumors that she might have taken pleasure in her own mother will do her no good. That's why I've decided to suck all the poison out of their collective reputation and send a message to death. It can have me. It can have *me* for the redemption of Gongyla.

ALCAEUS: Sappho, there has to be another way—

SAPPHO: What could be more poetic than a mother dying for a child? Any child. Any mother.

ALCAEUS: I'm not going to win this, am I?

SAPPHO: We'll see.

*SAPPHO leaps.*

ALCAEUS: Sappho!

And she sends her thoughts soaring high on the stormless breaths of gentle winds

Your time has now passed by and what fruit there was has been gathered, but there is hope that the shoot, since it is a fine one, will bear clusters in plenty—late, however; for I am afraid that the harvesters, looking out for the constraints of time will tear bunches from such a vine, will harvest grapes that are unripe and sour.

Yet did I love thee to the last  
    As fervently as thou, Who didst  
not change through all the past,  
    And canst not alter now.  
The love where Death has set his  
seal, Nor age can chill, not rival  
steal,  
    Nor falsehood disavow:  
And, what were worse, thou canst  
not see Or wrong, or change, or  
fault in me.

For the privilege of those who obtain such heights you shall by the will of the gods  
flower imperishable.

*ALCAEUS turns around and becomes MARTIN. He approaches Claudia.*

MARTIN: So, you're Claudia?

CLAUDIA: Yeah.

MARTIN: I'm Martin.

CLAUDIA: The boyfriend?

MARTIN: Well, the ex, technically, but... yeah.

CLAUDIA: I'm sorry.

MARTIN: You don't have anything to feel sorry for.

CLAUDIA: But if I hadn't-

MARTIN: Don't-

CLAUDIA: If I hadn't taken her away from you.

MARTIN: Stop. Seriously. What's done is done.

CLAUDIA: What's done is done. Right.

MARTIN: She's in a better place now.

CLAUDIA: God, I hope so.

MARTIN: And besides, I'm... actually... kinda gay.

CLAUDIA: Really?

MARTIN: Yep.

CLAUDIA: When did that happen?

MARTIN: A couple days ago. Yeah, I tried to... um...

CLAUDIA: *(smiles}* And it didn't work?

MARTIN: It didn't work. Well... it did, but... no. That was quite enough.

CLAUDIA: (*Daps Martin*) Pride.

MARTIN: Pride.

CLAUDIA: Congratulations.

MARTIN: So what happens now?

CLAUDIA: I don't know.

SAPPHO:

Love, Love, that having found a heart  
And left it, leav'st it desolate;--  
Love, Love, that art more strong than Hate,  
More lasting and more full of art;—  
O blessed Love, return, return,  
Brighten the flame that needs must burn.

Ah, Love, should thou and I with Fate conspire  
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire  
Should not we shatter it to bits and then Re-  
mould it nearer to the heart's desire?

I must bear my pain, till Love shall turn  
To me in pity and come back.  
His footsteps left a smouldering track  
When he went forth, that still doth burn.  
Oh come again, thou pain divine,  
Fill me and make me wholly thine.

Love has attained for me the brightness and beauty of the sun