

1

Mind shimmering, deathless Aphrodite,
child of Zeus, weaver of wiles,
I beg you, do not crush my spirit
with anguish, Lady,

but come here now, if ever before
you heard my voice in the distance
and heeded my prayer, left your father's
golden house,

yoked your chariot pulled by sparrows
swift and beautiful over the black earth,
their wings a blur as they streaked from heaven
through the middle air—

and then you were with me, a smile
playing about your immortal lips
as you asked what was it this time, why was I
calling you again,

what did my heart in its lovesick raving
most want to happen: "Whom now
should I persuade to love you? Who is
wronging you, Sappho?"

"She may run now, but she'll be chasing soon.
She may spurn gifts, but soon she'll be giving.
She may not love now, but she'll love soon,
even unwilling."

Come to me again now, release me
from my agony, fulfill all
that my heart desires, and be at my side.
Fight for me, Goddess.

1. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a first-century B.C.E. Greek literary critic and historian, quotes this poem as an example of "polished and exuberant" style in his work *On Literary Composition*. A second-century C.E. papyrus discovered at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century corroborates portions of the text. Over two-thirds of all surviving literary papyri have come from Oxyrhynchus (P. Oxy. 2288).

31

Look at him, just like a god,
that man sitting across from you,
whoever he is, listening to your
close sweet voice,

your irresistible laughter, and O yes
it sets my heart racing—
one glance at you and I can't
get any words out,

my voice cracks, a thin flame
runs under my skin,
my eyes see nothing,
my ears ring,

a cold sweat pours down my body,
I tremble all over, turn
paler than grass, and it seems that I'm
just a shade from dead.

But I must bear it, since a poor . . .

31. Longinus, a first-century C.E. critic who writes about the quality of thought and style (including the emotional element) that makes writing sublime, uses this poem in

16i

Some say an army on horseback, some say on foot,
and some say ships are the most beautiful things
on this black earth, but I say
it is whatever you love.

It's easy to show this. Just look
at Helen, beautiful herself
beyond anything human, and she left
her perfect husband

and went sailing off to Troy
without a thought for her child
or her dear parents, led astray

lightly
reminding me of Anactoria
who is gone

and whose lovely walk
and bright, shimmering face
I would rather see than all the chariots
and armed men in Lydia.

16i. (Campbell 16, lines 1–20). From two second-century C.E. Oxyrhynchus papyri and a second- to third-century C.E. papyrus (P. Oxy. 1231 fr. 1, P. Oxy. 2166[a] 2, and P.S.I. 123).