Sappho’s Helen

1. Sappho 16.1-20 (Voigt)

Some say a host of cavalry, some say a host of foot soldiers, and some say a fleet of ships is the most beautiful thing upon the black earth, but I say it is that thing, whatever it is, that someone loves;

And it is entirely easy to make this clear to everyone, for she who was surpassing people by far with respect to her beauty, Helen, [having left behind] an excellent husband,

Having left behind [an excellent husband] she went sailing to Troy, entirely without thinking of either her child or her beloved parents, but […] led her aside…

for

now she reminds me of Anaktoria not present

I would rather see her lovely walk and the shining gleam of her face than the Lydian chariots and the armed foot soldiers.

2. Iliad 3.413-7

But growing angry the goddess Aphrodite spoke to her: “Don’t provoke me, bold woman, lest growing angry I let you go, and hate you just as terribly as I have loved you, and I will devise miserable hatred on both sides, from the Trojans and the Danaans, and you would meet a bad fate.”

3. Odyssey 4.261-4

“I lamented the madness that Aphrodite granted, when she led me there from my dear fatherland, turning away from my own daughter, my bedchamber, and my husband, who lacked nothing, either of sense or of form.”
4. Sappho 1 (Voigt)
poikilóthron’ ἀθανάτ Αφρόδιτα,
pai Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαι σε,
μη μ’ ἁσαισι μηδ’ ὀνάσαι δάμνα,
pότνια, θόμον,

άλλα τυίδ’ ἐλθ’, αἱ ποτα κάτερωτα
tάς ἔμας αὐδάς ἁοίσα πῆλοι
ἐκλευς, πάτρος δε δόμων λίποισα
χρύσιον ὕλθες

ἀρμ’ ὑπασδεξάεσαι: κάλοι δε σ’ ἀγον
όκεες στροθίοι περί γας μελαίνας
πόκνα δίνεσαντες πτέρ’ ἀπ’ ἀφράνω αἴθε-
ρος δι’ ὑμέσω.

κόττι μοι μάλισσα θέλω γένεσθαι
μαινόλαι θύμωι: τίνα δητε πείθω
]σάγην ες σάν χιλότατα; τίς σ’, δ’
Ψάξης’, ἀδικήσει;

καὶ γὰρ αἱ φίλεις, ταχέως διώξει,
αἱ δὲ δόρα μὴ δέκετ’, ἀλλὰ δόσει,
αἱ δὲ μὴ φίλεις, ταχέως φιλήσει
cοικ’ ἑθλοισα.

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λύσον
ἐκ μερίμναν, ὀσσα δε μοι τέλεσαι
θύμος ιμέρρει, τέλεσον, σὺ δ’ αὐτα
σύμμαχος ἐσσο.

Richly-throned deathless Aphrodite,
woe-weaving child of Zeus, I beseech you,
don’t overpower my heart with distress or grief,
my queen,

But come here, if ever before, hearing
my voice from afar you listened, and leaving
the golden house of your father
you came,

Having yoked your chariot; and lovely,
swift sparrows brought you over the black earth,
quickly whirring their wings down from heaven
through the ether;

Suddenly they arrived; but you, blessed lady,
smiling with deathless face, asked
what now I suffered, and for what I
called out,

And what I wish to happen in my frenzied
heart: “Whom should I persuade this time
to lead into your love? Who wrongs you,
Sappho?”

For if she flees, soon she will pursue; and if she
does not now receive gifts, she will give them instead;
and if she does not love, soon she will love,
even being unwilling.”

Come also to me now, and release me from difficult
cares, and as many as my soul longs to be accomplished,
fulfill them; you yourself,
by my ally.

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