

Turn your heart, wild man. A bull was seduced by my mother.
Will you be more unfeeling than a bull?

By Venus, the goddess greatest to me now, I pray that you have mercy.
May you never love a woman who would spurn you, yes,
may the nimble goddess join you, yes, deep in hidden glade,
may the forest bare for you her wild things to kill,
yes, may the Satyrs favor you, Pans, the mountain gods, too,
may the boar pierced by your spear fall dead,
may the Nymphs, although you hate girls, share their waters
and so lessen your withering thirst.
I add tears to my prayers. You can only read my prayers'
words, but try to picture me crying.

170

HEROIDES V: OENONE TO PARIS

The nymph Oenone writes to her husband, Paris, whom she had married before his royal heritage was recognized. Oenone discovers his betrayal with the arrival of his new wife, Helen.

Will you read this through, or does your new wife forbid it?
Just read it. It's not written by a Greek
but by Oenone the fountain nymph, well-known in Phrygia,
wronged by you but, if you will, still yours.
What divinity has decided to oppose me?
What have I done that I may not remain yours?
We must bear lightly whatever we deserve to suffer,
but unearned anguish is nothing but woe.
You weren't so mighty when I decided to wed you—
I, a nymph sprung from a truly great stream.
Let's not mince words. Though you are now a son of Priam,
you were then a slave, wed by me, a nymph.

10

We have often lain among our flocks in the forest
where grass mixed with leaves provided a couch,
often lain upon straw or upon the deep haystack
of a hut that sheltered us from the frost.
Who else but me showed you the best hunting grounds
and the dens where she-bears hid their cubs?
I have often helped you to stretch out the hunting nets
and to lead the hounds over the long ridge.
You can still see my name that you carved in the beeches,
OENONE inscribed there by your hunting knife,

20

[two spurious lines omitted]

and as the trees grow, my name also grows greater.
Grow high, trees, and make my name known!

25

21

Live on, poplar, rise straight up by the streambed,
and preserve these verses in your furrowed bark:
"If Paris can still breathe after spurning Oenone,
Xanthus's waters will flow back to their source."
Flow backward, Xanthus, yes, flow back in a hurry!
Paris has left Oenone and still draws his breath.

30

That day was doomsday for me, the awful beginning
of our love affair's tempestuous end,
the day when Venus and Juno and naked Minerva
(better clothed) came to be judged by you.
My heart skipped a beat when you told me about it,
an icy tremor rushed through my bones.
Terrified, I went to see my grandmas and grandpas,
who all agreed that doom was at hand.

40

Fir trees were felled, beams hewn, the fleet was ready,
the blue sea received the well-waxed hulls.
You wept at departure—you cannot deny it—

[two spurious lines omitted]

and deep in grief, we mingled our tears.
An elm tree is not embraced by a vine more tightly
than my neck was by your clinging arms.
Whenever you complained that the wind delayed you,
your comrades smiled—the wind was fine.
How often did you ask for another kiss goodbye,
your tongue unable to say "farewell."

46

50

A light breeze wafts the sails that hang from the masthead,
the water foams white under the churning oars.
My wretched eyes follow the sails as best they are able,
the sand at my feet is wet with tears.
I pray to Nereus's daughters that you return swiftly—
yes, return swiftly to do me in!
Prayed for, you've returned—for the sake of another?
My prayers turned out to be for a whore.

60

A huge outcropping of native rock, a mountain really,
looks down on the sea and withstands its surge.
From there, I was the first to spot the sails of your vessel,
and I wanted to rush through the waves to you.
Delaying, I saw on the prow a gleam of purple
and shuddered. That was not how you dressed.
The craft touches shore, borne on by the zephyr.
I trembled when I saw a woman's face.
Why was I insane enough to keep on looking?
That slut was clinging to your embrace.
I kept beating my breast, tore open my bosom,
clawed ridges into my tear-streamed cheeks,
and my howling laments filled holy Mount Ida,
bearing my tears to my beloved rocks.
May Helen grieve like this, bereft of her lover,
and may she suffer the grief she brought me.

70

You prefer now, Paris, women who follow you
over the sea, leaving their lords behind.
But when you were a poor shepherd, only Oenone
was wedded to you, and no one else.
Your wealth does not amaze me, nor does your palace,
nor would I be called one of Priam's sons' wives,
not that I would be disdained by Priam or Hecuba
as a nymph who was a wife of their son.
I am worthy of being a powerful lord's consort.
A scepter would fit nicely into my hands.
Don't despise me for sleeping with you on beech fronds:
I would much prefer a royal-purple bed.

80

And remember this: my love will not entail battle.
No avenging ships will sail against Troy.
An enemy army is demanding back fugitive Helen:
this is the dowry she proudly presents.
Should she be returned to the Greeks? Go ask Hector,
your brother, go ask Deiphobus.
Consult grave Antenor, and seek out lord Priam,
both of whose long lives have made them wise.

90

What a poor start, to value a stolen mistress
over your country. Her lord's war is just.

And don't even hope for fidelity from Helen,
who so quickly accepted your embrace. 100

Just as Menelaus laments his violated marriage
and is wounded by his unfaithful wife,
you, too, will lament. Chastity once violated
can be restored by no art.

She burns with love for you, as she did for Menelaus.

The trusting fool now lies in an empty bed.

Happy Andromache, wife of faithful Hector!

You could have been like your brother with me,
but you are lighter than leaves that dry up in autumn
and flutter away in the shifting winds. 110

You weigh less than the fuzz on an ear of grain does,
burned to a crisp by the summer sun.

I remember the time that your sister, Cassandra,
hair unbound, prophesied to me:

"What are you doing, Oenone, sowing seeds in sandbars,
plowing shores that will accomplish naught?

A Greek heifer is coming to the ruination
of yourself, your homeland, and your house.

Keep her far away! Sink the unclean vessel!

Alas for all the Phrygian blood aboard!" 120

She was still raving when her slaves took her away.

My blond hair was standing on end.

Ah, you were for me all too true a prophetess.

The heifer indeed now has my fields.

No matter how fair her face, she is still an adulteress
smitten with a stranger, forsaking her gods.

Theseus, I'm pretty sure it was Theseus,

had stolen her away once before.

The eager young hero didn't return her a virgin.

You ask how I know this? I'm in love. 130

You can call it violence, veiling her compliance,
but one stolen often is partial to theft.

But Oenone remains chaste, unlike her husband,
although she could have been false like you.

The Satyrs, a light-footed, lusty mob, used to
seek me out in the deep woods, as did
Faunus, his horny head crowned with pine needles,
up on Mount Ida's boundless cliffs.

Apollo, who built Troy's walls with his lyre's music,
loved me and trained my hands to his gifts. 140

Whatever herbs and roots that are useful to healers
the world over are known to me.

Alas, if only love could be healed by herbals!

I am left helpless by the very art I know.

The aid that neither the fruitful earth nor a deity
can grant, you have the power to bestow.

You have the power; now show you have pity.

I come with no Greeks, bear no bloody arms,

I am yours and have been so from childhood.

Yours forever, I pray I may be. 150