

In Aquilo's name, Thracians captured Erechtheus's daughter,
 and Bistonia's shore remained safe from war.
 After Jason sailed off in his new ship with Medea,
 Thessaly was never threatened by Colchis.
 Theseus, who stole you, abducted Minos's daughter also,
 but Minos never called the Cretans to arms.
 Fear in these matters is greater than any actual danger,
 and it is shameful to fear all that can be feared.

350

But if you want to imagine that a great war is looming,
 I too have strength, and my weapons can kill.
 Nor are Asia's resources less than that of your country.
 It abounds with horses and is wealthy in men.
 Nor will Menelaus, son of Atreus, have spirit
 greater than Paris, or outstrip him in arms.
 While still only a child I killed the enemy and recovered
 our stolen flocks; hence my other name, Alexandros.
 And almost just a child I defeated among others
 both Ilioneus and Deiphobus.
 And if you think I am to be feared only in the thick of battle,
 my arrow can hit any spot you choose.
 Can you vouch for Menelaus such deeds in young manhood,
 claim for Atreus's son skill such as mine?
 And if you grant him everything, could he be Hector's brother?
 Hector alone has a multitude's might.
 You don't know what I can do, have never seen my prowess,
 do not know the man whose bride you will be.

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So you will either be sought back without martial tumult,
 or the Greeks will succumb to our Trojan might.
 Nor would I disdain to take up arms for such a consort.
 Great prizes arouse great strife.
 And if the whole world went to battle to win you,
 your fame among men would be without end.
 Just take hope and leave with the gods' good graces;
 take what is offered with complete confidence.

HEROIDES XVII: HELEN TO PARIS

Helen replies to Paris and addresses his desire for her to travel to Troy with him.

Now that my eyes have been violated by your letter,
 to give no reply seems a glory too slight.
 You, a stranger, defiled sacred hospitality,
 dared to lead a bride's fidelity astray.
 Was it for this the Taenarian shores ushered you into their harbor
 when you had ridden the wind-rattled seas?
 Not a single closed door blocked your way in our palace,
 though you come from a race different from our own.
 All this for our courtesies to be paid back in injury?
 That was your entrance? Were you a guest or a foe?
 However justified my complaint may be, I do not question
 that you would consider it old-fashioned.
 Well, let me be old-fashioned if I can hold on to my honor,
 if the tenor of my life can be pure.
 If the look on my face is sincere in its sorrow,
 and I'm not sitting fiercely, brows set hard,
 my reputation sparkles still, I have lived a life of innocence,
 and no adulterer gets his laurels from me.

10

All the more I marvel. What confidence in your endeavor!
 How my bed's motivation gives you hope!
 Or is it because I was violated by Neptune's hero?
 Raped once and you think I deserve it again?
 If I'd been charmed into bed, the crime would belong to the both of us.
 Since I was raped, only my refusal was mine.
 Yet he did not obtain the joy he sought through his actions;
 No, I returned having suffered nothing but fear.
 The shameless man stole kisses as I struggled, but only a couple,
 and he took nothing beyond this from me.
 Yet your depravity would not be content with just kisses—
 treat me better, O gods!—he was not like you.

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He returned me intact, his moderation reduced his charges,
and it's clear the young man did have regret.

Did Theseus repent so that Paris could succeed him,
so my name will forever be in someone's mouth?
Yet I'm not angry—who could be enraged by a lover?—
if only the love you profess isn't feigned.

But I doubt this is the case—not that I lack confidence in myself,
or that my face is not famous (it is).

But loss often follows a girl's gullibility,
and your words are said to lack truth.

But other women sin, chaste wives are rare. Who will stop me
from being counted among the rare?

My mother seemed suitable enough to you, by whose
example you think I can be swayed,
but the error of my mother was to be deceived by a false image,
the adulterer hidden behind feathers.

But if I sin, I can claim ignorance of nothing,
and no error will obscure the deed's crime.

She erred well and the sin was redeemed by its author.

What Jove will cause me to be deemed lucky in guilt?
You boast of your birth, your name, and your ancestry.

My noble house has enough fame of its own.

Even if Jove, my in-law's ancestor, is left unmentioned,
and Tantalid Pelops's and Tyndareus's glory,

still Leda, deceived by the swan, gives me Jove as my father,
gullibly stroking the false bird in her lap.

Go on now, tell again the beginnings of the Phrygian people
and of Priam, along with his Laomedon!

These I admire, but the one who is your great glory,
five steps from you but only one from my name.

Yes, I do deem your land's scepters to be mighty,
but don't think ours are any less than yours.

If this place is surpassed by your home in men's riches and number,
still yours is a barbarous land.

Your rich letter promises sumptuous presents,
by which even goddesses could be moved,
but if I ever wished to cross over shame's threshold,
the cause for my transgression would be you.
Either I will keep forever my unstained reputation,
or I will follow *you*, not your gifts.

If I do accept your presents, then I only find them precious
because the giver himself makes them so.
More important is that you love me, that I am the cause of your labor,
that your hope reached so far across the waves,

And—naughty man!—although I'm trying to hide it, I do notice
the things you do when the table's set:
when just now—lewd man!—you set reckless eyes upon me,
urgent eyes that I can barely endure,
and just now, you're sighing, you lift the cup that is near me,
and now sip the cup's lip where I sipped.
Ah! How many times I have noticed hidden signals of your fingers
and your brow that almost speaks when it moves!
And often I'm afraid that my husband will see them,
I blush at gestures not concealed well enough.

Often I say, now quietly, now not even bothering to whisper,
"This man has no shame!" And it's true.
On our round table, I read my name and beneath it,
the letters he had scrawled out in wine: I LOVE.
I refuse to believe my own self, my eye rejects what it's seeing.
Oh god! Now I know one can speak like this.

If I were ever to stray, it would have been at these flatteries,
by these my heart might well have been caught.
Your face, I admit, is of an uncommon beauty,
the kind a girl might want to lie beneath.
Better for another girl to be with you innocently
than for my honor to fall to a stranger's love.
Learn from my example how to be deprived of beauty.
It is a virtue to abstain from desire.

How many young men do you think want what you want but are wiser?
 Or is Paris the only man who has eyes? 100
 No, you don't see more than they do, but you dare more, you're reckless.
 You don't have more heart, just too much mouth.

Back when my virginity was sought by a thousand suitors,
 I'd have wanted you to come in your swift ship.
 If I'd laid eyes on you then, you'd have been first of a thousand.
 Even my husband will forgive me for this.
 You come too late for joys that now belong to another.
 Your hope was slow. What you seek, someone else owns.
 But even if I wished to become your Trojan consort,
 I belong to Menelaus, and not against my will. 110
 Stop picking at my soft heart with words, I beg you,
 and do not hurt me, the girl you claim to love.
 But allow me to defend the fate that fortune has given,
 do not covet my honor's foul spoils.

Yet Venus promised this in the vales of high Ida,
 when three goddesses showed themselves to you nude,
 and while the first promised you a kingdom, the second war's glory,
 the third said: "You will marry Tyndareus's girl."

I can scarcely believe those celestial bodies
 subjected their beauty to your whim, 120
 and though this part of your tale may be true, the other must not be,
 when you say I am your judgment's reward.

I am not so confident in my own body that I imagine
 I was the greatest gift in a goddess's eyes.

My beauty is content to be proven in the eyes of mortals.

A Venus who heaps me with praise harbors spite.

But I dispute nothing, and I indulge in these praises.

Why should my voice deny what my mind desires?

Don't be angry that I believe you with such reluctance.

Trust always comes slow when the stakes are so high. 130

My first bliss, then, is that I have pleased Venus,
 my second, that I seemed to you the best prize,

and the honors of Pallas and Juno fell in the rankings
 when the blessings of Helen reached your ear.
 Then in your eyes I am virtue, in your eyes a noble kingdom.
 I would be iron if I did not love that heart.
 Believe me, I'm not iron! Still, I fight against loving
 a man I hardly believe could be mine.
 Why attempt to slice thirsty shore with curved plow, why follow
 a vain hope the place itself won't allow? 140

I am the raw stuff, untouched by Venus's tricks—gods bear witness—
 I have not used art to mock a faithful man.
 Now too, since I entrust my words to a book that is silent,
 my letters perform strange new tasks.
 Those with experience are lucky. Naive in these matters,
 I can only guess the guilty path is hard.
 Fear itself is a wicked thing. Now, I am thrown into confusion,
 and I imagine every gaze is on my face.
 Nor is this mere delusion. I can sense the crowd's wicked whispers,
 and my Aethra relays snippets of their words. 150
 But go on pretending, unless you would now prefer to end it.
 But why end it when you can pretend?
 Play your games, but in secret! More freedom, not *all* freedom,
 has been granted while Menelaus is away.
 Yes, he is far away, tending to his business;
 his reason for the sudden journey was good.
 At least, that is what I thought. When he was unsure about going,
 I said, "Go, but return as soon as you can!"
 Happy with this omen, he kissed me and said, "You must care for
 our affairs and the house and our Trojan guest." 160
 I barely restrained my laugh and, struggling to gain composure,
 I could say nothing in response, but "I will."

He set off for Crete, spreading sails to good breezes.

But don't think everything is now allowed!

My husband is absent so that he can guard me in absence.

Or do you not know how far kings' hands reach?

My beauty is a burden, too. The more compliments I am given,
 the more justified he is in his fear.

The same glory that pleases is now my damnation,
it would be better if I just gave Rumor words. 170

Don't marvel that he is absent while I am here with you.

He has come to trust my conduct, my way of life.

My face makes him afraid, but the way I live reassures him.

My goodness brings comfort, my beauty brings fear.

You say we must not let our allotted time wither,

a simpleminded husband plays into our hands.

This both pleases and frightens me, and I've not come to a decision—
at least not yet. My heart wavers in doubt.

And my husband is far from us now, and you go to bed wifeless;

I am captured by your beauty, and you by mine. 180

And the nights are so long, already in words we come together,

and you—oh!—seductive, and we're under one roof . . .

Let me die now if guilt isn't everywhere, summoning,

and I don't know what fear holds me back.

Instead of coaxing me ineptly, I wish you'd just take me.

You should have shaken out my old-fashioned ways.

Sometimes injury does good to those who suffer it.

I'm sure I would have been happily forced.

While it's fresh, let us fend off this love in its nascency.

A mere sprinkling of rain quells new flames. 190

Love is unsure between strangers. It wanders as they do.

You hope nothing will be more stable, then it flees.

Hypsipyle bears witness, the Minoan virgin bears witness,

who were both mocked in clandestine beds.

They say that you, too, faithless man, have abandoned

Oenone, whom you loved for many years.

You yourself don't deny it, and if you haven't noticed,

my greatest wish is to learn all about you.

This too: you couldn't be constant in love if you wanted.

Now, the Phrygians are unfurling your sails. 200

While you are speaking with me, while the night you hoped for is readied,
the wind to carry you home will be here.

You'll abandon midcourse the brimming joys of newness,
and our love will pass you by on the wind.

Or should I follow, as you ask, look out at lauded Pergamon,
and be a bride to great Laomedon's offspring?

I do not so much despise winged Fame's proclamations
that my insults would fill inner earth.

What could Sparta say of me, or all of Achaea,
the peoples of Asia, or Troy itself? 210

What will Priam think of me, or the wife of Priam,
or all your brothers and Dardanian brides?

And you, how could you expect me to be faithful
and not be anxious about examples you've set?

Whatever foreigner will enter the ports of Ilium
will be the cause of solicitous fear.

How many times will you call me "adulteress!" in anger,
forgetting your own crime lies in mine!

In one man you'll be both my transgression's critic and author. 220

I pray for the earth to bury my face.

But I'll enjoy Ilium's wealth and the blessings of its culture,
and take gifts more fruitful than promises are.

I'll be given clothing, surely, that is purple and precious,
and revel in gold's weighty heft.

Forgive this confession: your gifts are worth little.

That land somehow still holds me back.

Who will help me on Phrygian shores if I'm injured?

How will I seek out my family's help?

Deceitful Jason promised the world to Medea—

was she not expelled from his Aesonian house? 230

When she was despised, there was no Aeëtes to return to,
no mother Idyia, no sister Chalciope.

I don't fear anything like this, but neither did Medea!

By its own augury hope is often deceived.

You will find every ship that the deep sea's now tossing
had smooth straits when it first left its port.

The torch scares me, too, which your mother birthed bloody
in a dream on the night before your birth.
I also fear prophets, who they say had premonitions
of Ilium blazing in Pelasgian fire. 240
While Cytherea favors you because she won double trophies
through the verdict that you had proclaimed,
I fear the other two, who—if your glory is authentic—
lost their cases while you were their judge.
No, I don't doubt if I follow you, arms will be readied.
Our love—oh god!—will have to dodge swords.
Or did Atrax's Hippodamia force the men of Haemonia
to declare wild wars against Centaurs?
Do you think Menelaus will be slow in righteous fury?
Both my twin brothers and Tyndareus, too? 250
You may boast of yourself and speak well of brave exploits,
but the look on your face says it all.
Your body is more suited to Venus than Mars. Let the heroes
wage wars, Paris. But you? Stick to love.
Order Hector, whom you praise, to fight your battles for you.
The other campaign is more worthy of your skill,
the kind of skill I'd use myself, if I were wise and a bit braver.
Any girl who is wise will make use of that skill.
Perhaps I'll be wise once my shame's set aside—my hesitant
hands will surrender, conquered by time. 260

What you ask for—that we discuss these things in private—
you call it a discussion, but I know what you want.
But you're moving too fast, your harvest's low in the grasses.
Perhaps delay may be friendly to your prayers.

For now, that is all. May this letter with its knowledge
of my secret end here. My thumb has grown tired.
All the rest may be said through Clymene and Aethra,
the two who are both my counsel and friends.

HEROIDES XVIII: LEANDER TO HERO

Leander writes to his lover, Hero, whom he often visits by swimming across the Hellespont. At the time of the letter's writing, a storm prevents him from crossing the channel.

From Abydos to Sestos: greetings I would deliver in person
if the sea's waves would only settle down.
If the gods are on my side, if they favor my passion,
you will read my words with unwilling eyes.
But the gods are not friendly, or they wouldn't delay me,
vowed to cut through these waves I know all too well.
As you can see, the sky is black as pitch, the straits so windswept
that ships can scarcely set sail upon them.
Only one bold mariner has put out from this harbor,
the one who transports this letter to you. 10
I would have boarded ship with him, but all of Abydos
was looking down as he pushed out from shore.
I could not evade as before the eyes of my parents,
and our secret love would no longer be so.

As soon as I wrote this, I said, "Go, happy letter.
Her lovely hand will soon reach for you.
You might even be brushed by her lips as she lifts you
to break the seal with her snow-white teeth."
Uttering words like this in an inaudible murmur,
my right hand caressing the sheet said the rest. 20
I would much rather have that hand swim than scribble
and carry me through the waves I know so well.
Yes, it is better at stroking through the deep-sea waters,
but it serves me well to express what I feel.

It is now the seventh night—it seems more like a year—
that the sea has been in a loud uproar.