

## ***Sappho***

### **Plot Synopsis**

#### **Act 1, Scene 1**

New Lesbos. Three maids evict the hung-over poet Diomedes from the home of Sappho and her elderly merchant husband, Kreon.

Sappho reflects on her life with her tutor, Minos. Rescued as a child by Kreon and Minos from the ruins of a devastating earthquake, she has been blessed with two children, wealth, beauty and fame as a poet. But she is restless and unfulfilled.

Kreon wants to restore his fortune and power by recovering inscribed wax title deeds from the submerged town of Old Lesbos. He has engaged a sponge-diver, Phaon, twin brother of the famous general, Pittakos. Phaon, long presumed dead, describes his seven years solitude on an island.

#### **Act 1, Scene 2**

Everyone is present at Sappho's house the same evening for a symposium. Guests compete for a laurel wreath by recitations. Left alone at the end of the evening, Sappho and Phaon recognise that they are kindred spirits.

#### **Act 2, Scene 3**

Phaon will soon return to his island, having recovered Kreon's title deeds. Minos announces that Diomedes' son has been killed in battle and that Pittakos' fleet is returning in victory from Athens.

#### **Act 2, Scene 4**

Pittakos is welcomed as a conquering hero. He greets Phaon warmly, but they soon acknowledge that their worlds are diametrically opposed.

Pittakos and Sappho are alone. Pittakos prepares to consult the Oracle on the question of being appointed Tyrant; seeks to re-ignite a former love affair with Sappho and confesses he killed Diomedes' son for cowardice. Sappho, in turn, taunts that the Oracle is probably an old woman in a mask; she has forgotten their former love and is appalled at his cruelty in killing their friend.

Minos reports that Diomedes has taken poison. Sappho rushes to him.

#### **Act 2, Scene 5**

Sappho comforts the dying Diomedes. He admits his suicide is a result of his reaction to his son's death. He felt no grief, rather joy, as he was in love with his son's wife.

Diomedes has guessed that Sappho is the Oracle. In an anguish of responsibility, Sappho confesses that not only is this so, but that once she failed to take the requisite drug – sending Pittakos into battle of her own will.

#### **Act 3, Scene 6**

Kreon appears before the Oracle, unaware that the woman behind the mask is Sappho. He describes his return to Lesbos after many years abroad – at the precise moment of the earthquake. To his horror, the recently recovered wax inscriptions include a letter from his then wife, telling him of a daughter named Sappho. The Oracle decrees that Kreon's family will be put to death or exiled, according to vote.

**Act 3, Scene 7**

Pittakos announces that Kreon and Sappho are to be exiled to Corinth. Their children are to remain as hostages – a ploy by Pittakos to force Sappho to further his lust for power in Corinth. Sappho is left alone in her house one last time.