



Ancient Fanfiction: Sappho

By Celine Baumbach

With the last notes, my anxiety about the song's reception faded into relief. Even after all these years and especially in such an intimate setting where I shouldn't need to fear judgement, I was still afraid of disappointing my audience. But as I finally let my eyes settle on the faces of the three women around me, I knew they had enjoyed it.

Demetria, closest to me, had been listening with closed eyes and a wide smile. "That was beautiful, Sappho," she said when she realized the performance was over. "I almost regret that I won't be attending the banquet."

Next to her, Thais rose and crossed the room to sit beside me. She laid a hand on my arm, her thumb rubbing warm circles into my skin. "You've outdone yourself again, dearest." She smiled. "I can already hear the praises you'll receive in a few days' time. They already call you the tenth muse, did you know?"

"You listen too much to gossip," Lysandra, the last of our quartet said. She leaned back, crossing her arms in front of her chest. "And too much of it is nonsense. As much as they praise her to her face, they drag her name through the mud the moment she has turned around."

Thais scoffed. "Through what mud?"

I cocked my head, listening intently as I put away my lyre. I could imagine exactly what kind of mud Lysandra was referring to.

"Just yesterday I overheard two men at the market saying she's probably the easiest woman in all of Lesbos," Demetria interjected. "And it's not the first time I've heard someone say that Sappho will sleep with anything that has two legs."

I rolled my eyes, saying nothing. I was aware of the rumors, but at least half of them were untrue, and the other half exaggerated. Not to mention that I was probably the



opposite of easy.

“And what does it matter?” Thais asked. “When we are long dead, they will still sing her praises and her songs. No one will remember who she’s slept with or hasn’t.”

“Exactly. Thank you, love.” I pulled Thais closer and kissed her cheek. I left my hand resting on her hip. “Unless you would like to rescind your praise of my songs? Will I make a fool of myself at the banquet next week, Demetria?”

A grin split her face. “Please, you know you’re good. You don’t need us to tell you that.”

I smiled. “Indulge me. Please?”

Context:

Sappho was a 600 BCE capital “L” Lesbian poet. She was one of the most well-known poets of ancient Greece but was also often depicted as a man-crazy slut in ancient comedies. Today her reputation has survived better than any of her works (mainly available in fragments) and her actual biography (mostly found in questionable sources written long after her death). Because some of her fragmented work describes women in an erotic fashion, Sappho has also acquired a reputation as a queer icon.

Resources:

https://www.ancient.eu/Sappho_of_Lesbos/

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/03/16/girl-interrupted>

<https://eidolon.pub/re-queering-sappho-c6c05b6b9f0b>