

Translation of the *Deidamia Achilli* (Parkes 2011)

If it is right for a lawful wife to be called a mistress,
a chaste mistress sends these words to you, her husband.
If, descendant of Aeacus, you are reading the words of the girl who is sending them,
read through these words sent to you to the end! Send words for me to read,
send words for your son to read, with your dear wife! 5
Or do not wish to send words but come yourself!
Or if you are not able to come or to write, do not be lazy:
although you may write only a few words, it is pleasing to see a few words!
Now the fifth sun renews the year which has been completed four times
and the urn of Janus pours back rain waters, 10
since you who were about to expose auspicious sails
– but not favourable enough for me also – over the sea
when Ulysses was just on the point of preparing to loosen the ropes,
you said to me in my misery: "Deidamia, goodbye!
I am being carried off to Troy and demanded by the cruel fates 15
and the whole of Greece asks for my help.
And I would have you as my companion and as fellow for my toil
but I am borne as a rather unpolished soldier into strange arms.
There will be a time when you will happily see me return,
when Trojan booty will follow white horses 20
and when gifts of foreign treasure will come to you
and whichever Phrygian maidservants you will choose."
While soothing me in this manner – now the wind was blowing the soft sails –
you flee, as you and your companions wished.
From that time the mother of wanton Love will be witness – 25
the mother and her son who causes wounds will be witness –,
that no consolation has been pleasing to me in my misery,
but food grudgingly consumed before displeased me,
and, although soft covers were pressed by my tired limbs,
yet my limbs were refreshed by no bed. 30
See, I am more and more weighed down and, impatient of grief,
I beg for your return day and night!
But neither piety nor love nor the youth
of Pyrrhus, who joins me in my tears as a companion, moves you.
Now he is a boy who is not to be disowned even by a father Achilles, 35
but he is such that he is worthy to have such a father,
except that no one is able to become equal with you
in savagery, which the burning of the Stygian water bestowed on you.
But Pyrrhus has piety, which is beyond what his age expects;
The boy has piety which would be honourable for the man. 40
As often as I, a distressed wife, complain that my husband is absent,
my son grieves that his father is absent
and offers to me as I weep whatever comfort he is able
and checks my tears – yet he himself weeps.
Achilles, may not God in his justice see the tears of me in my misery, 45
may he not see my tears to your detriment!
You are hard and more intractable than our age,
your mind is harder than all adamant.
Shunning us, you have an intractable heart
and your son and I are defendants against your anger 50

But if your faith were true, you would have a tractable heart,
 nor would a foreign cow seize my bull.
 But she does seize; and favouring winds have deserted me
 and in the middle of the seas shipwrecked sails drink!
 How well I could have called myself a wretched girl – 55
 but no mind foresees ill to come –
 when Thetis came from the crag of the Thessalian teacher
 and entered my father's dwelling along with you!
 Then also I could have uttered just complaints
 when the shore of Scyros received the Greek men; 60
 but then, I remember, I called myself a wretched girl
 when the breeze was carrying away the swift ships without me.
 And now, lest there be any time lacking my complaints
 now also my cheeks are dripping with falling tears.
 Rumour has come into the troubled palace of Lycomedes 65
 saying that you, the master, have submitted to your slave,
 and after barbarian triumphs seized from the enemy
 you are said to have been captured by your maidservant.
 The slave girl Briseis tarnishes the distinctions of Achilles
 and a mistress conquers the conqueror of Phrygian men; 70
 and furthermore she is said to have been the cause of a quarrel,
 for shame, she was worthy of drawn swords!
 Did you not swear thus, as long as you loved me violently –
 and then I was loved enough in return on equal terms – ;
 "I swear to you by yourself, be joined to me only, I ask, 75
 may I be joined to you, Deidamia, only!"?
 Although you are joined to me first, not to me only, Achilles,
 I am joined to you as my only, not my first husband!
 So I promised it would be, and I held onto my promises tenaciously;
 But your deeds are less than your words. 80
 You, more of a captive, now enjoy a captive mistress
 and Deidamia lies in a widowed bed.
 And we believe that mortal matters are of concern to God,
 since God quietly sees wicked deeds.
 O God and whatever powers favour the wretched, 85
 no one keeps faith, no one loves day-by-day!
 If the matter were not well known, who would ever wish to believe
 that you have quickly abandoned your intention?
 O, descendant of Aeacus, you are far lighter than a falling leaf,
 lighter than the wind and the swelling sea! 90
 Where has your love for your beloved girl disappeared to,
 to whom in those days you were unwilling to liken goddesses?
 Certainly Briseis is not a goddess, brave Achilles,
 shake your free neck from the shameful yoke!
 Alas, alas for wretched me! Surely you alone are not able 95
 to store a whore in the Argive camp
 without the blush which you are accustomed to have at the smallest matters
 and do you not fear to sully your reputation?
 Goddess, who does not disregard lovers who cry out to you,
 force the new wife to die by a new death, 100
 lest the mistress long rejoices to herself about me
 and lest I am forced to die unavenged, overcome by the force of ill!

Whatever Achilles has done wrong, she will atone for more justly,
 she who was more seductive than is fitting.
 Goddess, I beg you not to allow my complaints to perish 105
 but I pray that you feel sympathy with my tears!
 For we do not have one cause for our grief,
 yet the cause of grief stems from one man.
 This is the first cause of grief for me and the greatest cause for you,
 that a shameful mistress lies in my bed. 110
 Another matter, small indeed, but this also makes me sad:
 a slave has become a stepmother for my Neoptolemus;
 third, that you are able to have overpowered a youthful girl
 and that you have the flower of my virginity.
 I regret, descendant of Aeacus, that I yielded to you when you were a boy, 115
 I regret that I yielded to you also when you were a young man.
 I rejoiced in your amorous sport, but for a short time;
 now your sport makes me wretched.
 Completed joys give way to present grief;
 see the ill is greater than the good was before! 120
 You who were then a cause of joy are now a cause of grief;
 you, the same man, give sweet draughts and death!
 After the sea has been changed, the ship gives in to sudden winds.
 Unless you bring aid hither, it will be overcome and go beneath the waters.
 Return yourself to me, I pray. If I seek what is fair, return yourself to me! 125
 Let the barbarian mistress depart from the bed she has usurped!
 O Achilles, always especially loved by me,
 remove this disgrace from your camp!
 Administer a cure to me either now or later –
 so may the spear of Mount Pelion pierce the side of Hector. 130