

TWO HOLD FRIENDS (Idyll by Elisa)

KERASPHOROS

Oh, there he is, my dear friend Cynophileos! How many times I waited for this reunion,
Rubbing my feet in excitement as I savored the thought of embracing each other again
Under this very tree, that saw us grow up together. Of all the children, Cynophileos
Was the strongest and the most spirited, untamed and undaunted like a son of Heracles,
Always followed by a herd of dogs that believed him their leader and owner.
Even now, the dogs sit around him as an army, bathing him in affection and admiration.
I were a dog, I would join them, too, jumping all over him...

CYNOPHILEOS

Kerasphoros, my friend, is that really you or do my eyes betray me?
Certainly, I must be dreaming. My Kerasphoros left for years ago,
And when he did, he was small, skinny, and delicate like a crunchy autumn leaf;
A gust of wind could have swept him away, blowing him all the way to Thrace.
Now, this before me is no Kerasphoros, but a man through and through!

KERASPHOROS

My dear Cynophileos, your eyes are telling the truth, though at the expense
of my youthful pride. It is I, your dearest friend. Why don't you come and kiss me?
I came back last night from a War that has kept me far too many years away from home.
But... wait, something is not right. Your embrace is shy. You pulled away so quick.
And you are crying. You! Whose eyes I thought were incapable of spilling such rivers.
Your hounds pull you around like dead weight, so that you seem to be their pet rather than their master!
One puppy kisses your face, and you remain impassible, colder than marble.
Another brings you a stick, and you sigh, casting the lightest twig with no joy nor strength,
so that the hound reaches its prize in merely two bounds. He wonders why his master,
who once hurled the heaviest logs across the park, so far that it would take him
the whole day to fetch them back, is now so weak and woman-like in his arms.
Another hound barks fiercely at a poor young couple, hidden in the bush to make love.
He frightens the girl and mocks the boy; yet instead of rebuking him, you growl along with him.
It does not make you smile the shaking of the dogs' tail, nor the playful sounds they make.
What troubles your soul to such degree that makes you blind to your beloved hounds?

CYNOPHILEOS

You are not wrong, dear friend, who always read the swings of my humor so well!
I find no joy today in the spring, nor in my dear four-legged companions.
I let them drag me around because I have no desire to move. I had not them,
I would not have left the house, nor my bed, laying there sighing all day about my misery.
The muscles in me are weak, so that when I pick up a stick, promptly it slips from my hands.
And the dog you scolded for growling is the one most like me in the litter, forever reading me
and casting my own feelings upon others. He knows it is not the kisses of puppies I desire.

KERASPHOROS

So, it is Eros who has stolen your good humor? I see. He is a little rascal, ready to weaken
the strongest and unsettle the most self-assured. His mother, Cypris, is forever reproaching him for it,
When he, sometimes, steals her plans and strikes the poor wretched souls, forgetting to pair them.
I myself know a thing or two about his arrows... maybe another kiss will help you!

CYNOPHILEOS

You are a good friend, Kerasphoros. But I do not forget you come from hardship yourself.
Tell me please, so that I may forget my sorrows, of your heroic deeds upon foreign soil!
What lands did you see and whence did you come? Did you fight godlike creatures or mighty
Enemies? Was your journey home obstructed like that of Odysseus?
Your beard and muscles surely tell me you have grown up fast in the mud and blood!

KERASPHOROS

Cynophileos, let the war be sung by bards! I, for once, I am not and will never be one.
Moreover, and it is no secret war-like Ares' sympathy for beautiful Cypris.
He is a gentleman. He surely would let her speak first! That I shall do, too.
If I look like a man, as you said, you look like a dog whose owner orders him to play dead.
Perhaps, telling me what happened could mend your broken heart,
As a treat or command would get you back up on your feet?

CYNOPHILEOS

I am not playing dead: I am dead. But since you insist, I shall tell you of the woes that afflict me.
I have been in love for two years now. And for the first time
in my life, I have found myself truly undone by it.
She passed through the park one day, and I was struck, as you said, by the sharpest of arrows.
A fever took possession of me. I could think of nothing but her.
By day, I would pray that she might chance upon me or stop to pet my hounds,
I would teach her to rub their belly or how to make them sit.
By night, she visited me in my dreams, whispering spells of love into my ear.
(What sorrow it was to wake and find her gone, only a dog in my arms!)
I could not eat, nor play with beloved dogs, nor throw the heavy logs.
Sometimes, I would find myself howling at the moon alongside my wolfhounds.
I began to groom myself and them, so that our scent would not repel her.
And when she noticed me back, though I have always been a free spirit,
I placed a collar around my own neck and swore that I would belong to her alone.

KERASPHOROS

By all means, who is this lucky (oh, so incredibly lucky!) girl?

CYNOPHILEOS

A dame, beautiful beyond compare. Her hair is golden as a Golden Retriever's;
her eyes, blue as those of a Husky; her face sharp and finely cut, like that of a Shiba.
But her personality is mongrel: sometimes she is sweet and cuddly like a Beagle,
Sometimes she is stubborn and loud like a Chihuahua.

KERASPHOROS

Sounds like a real bitch.

CYNOPHILEOS

Yet of all the qualities one might cherish in a dog, she lacked the greatest of all: loyalty.
Nothing like enduring Argos, nor faithful Penelope. Or you, devoted Kerasphoros!
Last night, unlucky me, I invited her to my house.
I had prepared everything for the occasion: I asked the servant to clean the house,
bathed myself in oil and changed the sheets. I even put all the dogs outside!
I prepared a fine meal for the two of us.
From our garden, I gathered plums and baked them into a pie,

That I decorated with cream and edible flowers.
Every kind of delicacy was ready to be served, and yet... no guest came!
I waited, and waited, blaming the traffic, finding excuses for her absence.
But as the hours passed, my thoughts grew darker.
“She has had an accident!” cried I, and the soul in me was inconsolable.
I could not give myself peace; I was nearly driven mad with worry.
Little did I know that she had been held captive by one of the Gods.

KERASPHOROS

Had Zeus stroked her? Apollo stolen her away? Hephaestus ensnared her?
Or was it Artemis, who recruited her to be one of her hunters?
Come now, speak! Tell me more!

CYNOPHILEOS

Any of those Gods you mentioned would have put my heart to peace, dear friend.
But the truth was much bitter, more than unfiltered wine.
It was Hera, beautiful among goddesses, who had a hold on her!

KERASPHOROS

Was she married?!

CYNOPHILEOS

Alas, she had been all the while I was courting her!
Her parents had married her off before her husband, a twink, was sent to war.
So frail was he, and so little made for battle, that they took him for dead;
and she went about the village saying she was a widow.
But last night, while I was waiting for her, who comes back if not he,
Her husband!

KERASPHOROS

Good Zeus!

CYNOPHILEOS

And he had grown into a stallion, tanned and tall, almost unrecognizable!
She jumped over him and forgot all about me!
And now I am but a stray dog, left behind and forgotten,
while she delights in her husband as though he were fresh from the forge.

KERASPHOROS

Don't despair, my friend! You'll always have me!
Second to a dog, Kerasphoros is a man's best friend.
Alas, I must run now—my wife awaits me at home.