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The Laughter of Aphrodite: A Novel about Sappho of Lesbos

Peter Green

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The Laughter of Aphrodite: A Novel about Sappho of Lesbos Peter Green
Best-selling classicist Peter Green recreates the life and times of the Greek lyric poet Sappho in this beautifully conceived, sharply detailed work of historical imagination. We meet Sappho at the age of fifty, when she is shaken by her fatal and final love affair with Phaon. She narrates her own story from the vantage point of self-questioning middle age, and her candid meditations make intimate, engrossing reading.

Only fragments of Sappho's poetry survive. In imagining Sappho's life Green found his task "rather like that of an archaeologist reassembling some amphora from hundreds of shards—of which more than half are missing." Yet, in his synthesis of historical evidence and ebullient invention, Green produces a seamless, moving, and persuasive portrait. He recreates Sappho's life by interweaving her surviving poetry into the narrative, not as quotations, but as her own imagined speeches and thoughts.

Sappho's life spanned one of the most exciting periods in Greek history. Green's novel, full of details about daily life on ancient Lesbos, draws the reader into the political and social climate of her world: the civil strife accompanying the transition from aristocracy to mercantilism, the household relations between slave and aristocrat, the details of sea travel in the Aegean. Green wrote the novel while living on Lesbos, and his graceful rendering of the landscape, the rhythms of the seasons, and the varied flora of Sappho's island pervades the narrative.

Sappho's poetry reveals a direct, spontaneous woman who eschewed artifice and embellishment. Green's extraordinary talent captures those qualities and brings this woman of unflinching honesty very much to life.

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