

**Talking to Aphrodite**

*Text by Erica Jong (b. 1942)*

**[1] I.**

A sudden thunder  
of swans' wings  
and I am awake.  
The sky is streaked  
with ruby, tangerine, pimiento –  
lavender banners  
divide a molten core  
of cumulus clouds –  
and suddenly she is there  
rolling across the heavens  
in a chariot of burnished gold,  
her crown of towers burning  
like a city set ablaze  
by incendiary armies,  
her forehead a show of  
scenes of the Trojan War.

My lady, Aphrodite, Venus,  
fairest of goddesses,  
you cover the world  
with your mischief,  
making populations burgeon  
beyond our poor earth's power  
to bear.

**[2] II.**

What are the lives of poets  
but offerings to the goddess they adore?  
Do you think such worship is a choice?  
Even immortals  
Obey her capricious laws.

Poets die to become  
speaking instruments  
to sing your praises.  
Maidenheads fall  
like hyacinths grown  
too heavy to stand.  
Purple stains streak the skies.

Too-persuasive goddess,  
visit other planets for a while.  
Earth has had enough of your beneficence.

**[3] III.**

You laugh, uncaring –  
A goddess' laugh.  
Hecate attends you  
with her jet-black panthers,  
her gleamless jewels of night.

If anyone can do it,  
you can!  
But leave us alone  
on earth  
to catch our breath.

You laugh again,  
putting a torch to my heart,  
lifting your robe  
above your rosy knees  
and whispering, almost hissing:

"Death is  
good enough for mortals,  
not for gods."

**[4] IV.**

Some say love is a disease,  
a fire in the blood that burns  
every human city down.  
I'll take my chances.

Before I curl  
like incense to the sky,  
before I study how to die,  
drizzle the honey  
of my wishes  
on my waiting tongue.  
Teach me how to fly.

**[5] V.**

My Lady, Aphrodite, Venus,  
fairest of goddesses,  
sticking one shell-colored toe  
in the Aegean,  
paddling long, thin fingers  
in the Baltic,  
your sex a great South Sea  
of liquid pearl –  
Aphrodite smiles,  
Remembering Sappho's words:  
"If death were good,  
even the gods would die."

You who put your trust  
in words when flesh decays,  
know that even words  
are swept away –  
and what remains?  
Aphrodite's smile –  
the foam at her rosy feet  
where the dying dolphins play.

**[6] VI.**

I have always been drawn  
to these shores  
as if I knew  
the goddess I worshipped  
would be found  
looping in the ancient isles  
made of limestone,  
most soluble of stones.

She took the moon on her tongue,  
The silver wafer, tasting of lemon,  
giving a lemony light.  
She watched the waves erase  
her filigreed footsteps.

She is everywhere and nowhere –  
provoking love in the least  
recess of longing.  
She is the goddess for whom  
the earth continues to spin –  
in her turning  
all endings end  
and all beginnings  
begin.

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