

Martin Robertson

Love Scene

from the Greek of Archilochus

“... but if you’re in a hurry and can’t wait for me
there’s another girl in our house who’s quite ready
to marry, a pretty girl, just right for you.”

That was what she said but I can talk too.
“Daughter of dear Amphimedo”, I said,
“(a fine woman she was—pity she’s dead),
there are plenty of kinds of pretty play
young men and girls can know and not go all the way
—something like that will do. As for marrying,
we’ll talk about that again when your mourning
is folded away, god willing. But now
I’ll be good, I promise—I do know how.
Don’t be hard, darling. Truly I’ll stay
out on the garden-grass, not force the doorway
—just try. But as for that sister of yours,
someone else can have her. The bloom’s gone—she’s coarse—
the charm too (she had it)—now she’s on heat
the whole time, can’t keep away from it—
damn her, don’t let anyone saddle me with that.
With a wife like she is I shouldn’t half
give the nice neighbours a belly-laugh.
You’re all right, darling. You’re simple and straight
—she takes her meat off anyone’s plate.
I’d be afraid if I married her
my children would be like the bitch’s litter
—born blind, and several months too early.”
But I’d talked enough. I laid the girl
down among the flowers. A soft cloak spread,
my arm round her neck, I comforted
her fear. The fawn soon ceased to flee.
Over her breasts my hands moved gently,
the new-formed girlhood she bared for me;
over all her body, the young skin bare,
I spilt my white force, just touching her yellow hair.

