

Arachne — Volume 02 eBook

Arachne — Volume 02 by Georg Ebers

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Page 1

ARACHNE

By Georg Ebers

Volume 2.

In the extreme northern portion of the little city of Tennis a large, perfectly plain whitewashed building stood on an open, grass-grown square.

The side facing the north rested upon a solid substructure of hard blocks of hewn stone washed by the waves.

This protecting wall extended along both sides of the long, plain edifice, and prevented the water from overflowing the open space which belonged to it.

Archias, the owner of the largest weaving establishment in Tennis, the father of the Alexandrian aristocrat who had arrived the evening before, was the owner of the house, as well as of the broad plain on which he had had it built, with the indestructible sea wall, to serve as a storehouse to receive the supplies of linen, flax, and wool which were manufactured in his factories.

It was favourably situated for this purpose, for the raw materials could be moved from the ships which brought them to Tennis directly into the building. But as the factories were at a considerable distance, the transportation required much time and expense, and therefore Archias had had a canal dug connecting the workshops with the water, and at its end erected a new storehouse, which rendered a second transportation of the ships' cargoes unnecessary.

The white mansion had not yet been devoted to any other purpose when the owner determined to offer the spacious empty rooms of the ware house to his nephews, the sculptors Hermon and Myrtilus, for the production of two works with whose completion he associated expectations of good fortune both for the young artists, who were his nephews and wards, and himself.

The very extensive building which now contained the studios and spacious living apartments for the sculptors and their slaves would also have afforded ample room for his daughter and her attendants, but Daphne had learned from the reports of the artists that rats, mice, and other disagreeable vermin shared the former storehouse with them, so she had preferred to have tents pitched in the large open space which belonged it.

True, the broad field was exposed to the burning sun, and its soil was covered only with sand and pitiably scorched turf, but three palm trees, a few sunt acacias, two carob trees, a small clump of fig trees, and the superb, wide-branched sycamore on the extreme outer edge had won for it the proud name of a "garden."



Now a great change in its favour had taken place, for Daphne's beautiful tent, with walls and top of blue and white striped sail-cloth, and the small adjoining tents of the same colours, gave it a brighter aspect.

The very roomy main tent contained the splendidly furnished sitting and dining rooms. The beds occupied by Daphne and her companion, Chrysilla, had been placed in an adjoining one, which was nearly as large, and the cook, with his assistants, was quartered in a third.

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The head keeper, the master of the hounds, and most of the slaves remained in the transports which had followed the state galley. Some had slept under the open sky beside the dog kennel hastily erected for Daphne's pack of hounds.

So, on the morning after the wholly unexpected arrival of the owner's daughter, the "garden" in front of the white house, but yesterday a desolate field, resembled an encampment, whose busy life was varied and noisy enough.

Slaves and freedmen had been astir before sunrise, for Daphne was up betimes in order to begin the hunt in the early hour when the birds left their secret nooks on the islands.

Her cousins, the young sculptors, to please her, had gone out, too, but the sport did not last long; for when the market place of Tennis, just between the morning and noontide hours, was most crowded, the little boats which the hunters had used again touched the shore.

With them and Daphne's servants seafaring men also left the boats— Biamite fishermen and boatmen, who knew the breeding places and nests of the feathered prey—and before them, barking loudly and shaking their dripping bodies, the young huntress's brown and white spotted dogs ran toward the tents.

Dark-skinned slaves carried the game, which had been tied in bunches while in the boats, to the white house, where they laid three rows of large water fowl, upon the steps leading to the entrance.

Daphne's arrows were supposed to have killed all these, but the master of the hunt had taken care to place among his mistress's booty some of the largest pelicans and vultures which had been shot by the others.

Before retiring to her tent, she inspected the result of the shooting expedition and was satisfied.

She had been told of the numbers of birds in this archipelago, but the quantity of game which had been killed far exceeded her greatest expectations, and her pleasant blue eyes sparkled with joy as she began to examine the birds which had been slaughtered in so short a time.

Yet, ere she had finished the task, a slight shadow flitted over her well-formed and attractive though not beautiful features.

The odour emanating from so many dead fowls, on which the sun, already high in the heavens, was shining, became disagreeable to her, and a strong sense of discomfort, whose cause, however, she did not seek, made her turn from them.

The movement with which she did so was full of quiet, stately grace, and the admiring glance with which Hermon, a tall, black-bearded young man, watched it, showed that he knew how to value the exquisite symmetry of her figure.

The somewhat full outlines of her form and the self-possession of her bearing would have led every one to think her a young matron rather than a girl; but the two artists who accompanied her on the shooting party had been intimate with her from childhood, and knew how much modesty and genuine kindness of heart were united with the resolute nature of this maiden, who numbered two and twenty years.

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Fair-haired Myrtilus seemed to pay little heed to the game which Gras, Archias's Bithynian house steward, was counting, but black-bearded Hermon had given it more attention, and when Daphne drew back he nodded approvingly, and pointing to the heap of motionless inhabitants of the air, exclaimed with sincere regret: "Fie upon us human wretches! Would the most bloodthirsty hyena destroy such a number of living creatures in a few hours? Other beasts of prey do not kill even one wretched sparrow more than they need to appease their hunger. But we and you, tender-hearted priestess of a gracious goddess—leading us friends of the Muse— we pursue a different course! What a mound of corpses! And what will become of it? Perhaps a few geese and ducks will go into the kitchen; but the rest—the red flamingoes and the brave pelicans who feed their young with their own blood? They are only fit to throw away, for the Biamites eat no game that is shot, and your black slaves, too, would refuse to taste it. So we destroy hundreds of lives for pastime. Base word! As if we had so many superfluous hours at our disposal ere we descend into Hades. A philosopher among brutes would be entitled to cry out, 'Shame upon you, raging monster!'"

"Shame on you, you perpetual grumbler," interrupted Daphne in an offended tone. "Who would ever have thought it cruel to test the steady hand and the keen eye upon senseless animals in the joyous chase? But what shall we call the fault-finder, who spoils his friend's innocent enjoyment of a happy morning by his sharp reproaches?"

Hermon shrugged his shoulders, and, in a voice which expressed far more compassion than resentment, answered: "If this pile of dead birds pleases you, go on with the slaughter. You can sometimes save the arrows and catch the swarming game with your hands. If your lifeless victims yonder were human beings, after all, they would have cause to thank you; for what is existence?"

"To these creatures, everything," said Myrtilus, the Alexandrian's other cousin, beckoning to Daphne, who had summoned him to her aid by a beseeching glance, to draw nearer. "Gladly as I would always and everywhere uphold your cause, I can not do so this time. Only look here! Your arrow merely broke the wing of yonder sea eagle, and he is just recovering from the shock. What a magnificent fellow! How wrathfully and vengefully his eyes sparkle! How fiercely he stretches his brave head toward us in helpless fury, and—step back!—how vigorously, spite of the pain of his poor, wounded, drooping pinion, he flaps the other, and raises his yellow claws to punish his foes! His plumage glistens and shines exquisitely where it lies smooth, and how savagely he puffs out the feathers on his neck! A wonderful spectacle! The embodiment of powerful life! And the others by his side. We transformed the poor creatures into a motionless, miserable mass, and just now they

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were cleaving the air with their strong wings, proclaiming by proud, glad cries to their families among the reeds their approach with an abundant store of prey. Every one was a feast to the eyes before our arrows struck it, and now? When Hermon, with his pitying heart, condemns this kind of hunting, he is right. It deprives free, harmless creatures of their best possession—life—and us thereby of a pleasant sight. In general, a bird's existence seems to me also of little value, but beauty, to me as to you, transcends everything else. What would existence be without it? and wherever it appears, to injure it is infamous."

Here a slight cough interrupted the young artist, and the moist glitter of his blue eyes also betrayed that he was suffering from an attack of severe pain in his lungs; but Daphne nodded assent to him, and to Hermon also, and commanded the steward Gras to take the birds out of her sight.

"But," said the Bithynian, "our mistress will doubtless allow us at least to take the hard lower part of the pelicans' beaks, and the wing feathers of the flamingoes and birds of prey, to show our master on our return as trophies."

"Trophies?" repeated the girl scornfully. "Hermon, you are better than I and the rest of us, and I see that you are right. Where game flies toward us in such quantities, hunting becomes almost murder. And successes won by so slight an exertion offer little charm. The second expedition before sunset, Gras, shall be given up. The master of the hounds, with his men and the dogs, will return home on the transports this very day. I am disgusted with sport here. Birds of prey, and those only when brought down from the air, would probably be the right game in this place."

"Those are the very ones to which I would grant life," said Hermon, smiling, "because they enjoy it most."

"Then we will at least save the sea eagle," cried Daphne, and ordered the steward, who was already having the dead fowl carried off, to care for the wounded bird of prey; but when the latter struck furiously with his beak at the Biamite who attempted to remove it, Hermon again turned to the girl, saying: "I thank you in the eagle's name for your good will, you best of women; but I fear even the most careful nursing will not help this wounded creature, for the higher one seeks to soar, the more surely he goes to destruction if his power of flight is broken. Mine, too, was seriously injured."

"Here?" asked Daphne anxiously. "At this time, which is of such great importance to you and your art?"

Then she interrupted herself to ask Myrtilus's opinion, but as he had gone away coughing, she continued, in a softer tone: "How anxious you can make one, Hermon!

Has anything really happened which clouds your pleasure in creating, and your hope of success?"

"Let us wait," he answered, hastily throwing back his head, with its thick, waving raven locks. "If, in leaping over the ditch, I should fall into the marsh, I must endure it, if thereby I can only reach the shore where my roses bloom!"

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"Then you fear that you have failed in the Demeter?" asked Daphne.

"Failed?" repeated the other. "That seems too strong. Only the work is not proving as good as I originally expected. For the head we both used a model—you will see—whose fitness could not be surpassed. But the body! Myrtilus knows how earnestly I laboured, and, without looking to the right or the left, devoted all my powers to the task of creation. True, the models did not remain. But even had a magic spell doubled my ability, the toil would still have been futile. The error is there; yet I am repairing it. To be sure, many things must aid me in doing so, for which I now hope; who knows whether it will not again be in vain? You are acquainted with my past life. It has never yet granted me any great, complete success, and if I was occasionally permitted to pluck a flower, my hands were pricked by thorns and nettles!"

He pursed up his lips as if to hiss the unfriendly fate, and Daphne felt that he, whose career she had watched from childhood with the interest of affection, and to whom, though she did not confess it even to herself, she had clung for years with far more than sisterly love, needed a kind word.

Her heart ached, and it was difficult for her to assume the cheerful tone which she desired to use; but she succeeded, and her voice sounded gay and careless enough as she exclaimed to the by no means happy artist and Myrtilus, who was just returning: "Give up your foolish opposition, you obstinate men, and let me see what you have accomplished during this long time. You promised my father that you would show your work to no one before him, but believe my words, if he were here he would give you back the pledge and lead me himself to the last production of your study. Compassion would compel you disobliging fellows to yield, if you could only imagine how curiosity tortures us women. We can conquer it where more indifferent matters are concerned. But here!—it need not make you vainer than you already are, but except my father, you are dearest in all the world to me. And then, only listen! In my character as priestess of Demeter I hereby release you from your vow, and thus from any evil consequences of your, moreover, very trivial guilt; for a father and daughter who live together, as I do with your uncle, are just the same as one person. So come! Wearied as I am by the miserable hunting excursion which caused me such vexation, in the presence of your works—rely upon it—I shall instantly be gay again, and all my life will thank you for your noble indulgence."

While speaking, she walked toward the white house, beckoning to the young men with a winning, encouraging smile.

It seemed to produce the effect intended, for the artists looked at each other irresolutely, and Hermon was already asking himself whether Daphne's arguments had convinced Myrtilus also, when the latter, in great excitement, called after her: "How gladly we would do it, but we must not fulfil your wish, for it was no light promise—no, your father exacted an oath. He alone can absolve us from the obligation of showing him, before

any one else, what we finish here. It is not to be submitted to the judges until after he has seen it.”

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"Listen to me!" Daphne interrupted with urgent warmth, and began to assail the artists with fresh entreaties.

For the second time black-bearded Hermon seemed inclined to give up his resistance, but Myrtilus cried in zealous refusal: "For Hermon's sake, I insist upon my denial. The judges must not talk about the work until both tasks are completed, for then each of us will be as good as certain of a prize. I myself believe that the one for Demeter will fall to me."

"But Hermon will succeed better with the Arachne?" asked Daphne eagerly.

Myrtilus warmly assented, but Hermon exclaimed: "If I could only rely upon the good will of the judges!"

"Why not?" the girl interrupted. "My father is just, the king is an incorruptible connoisseur, and certainly yesterday evening you, too, believed the others to be honest men; as for your fellow-candidate Myrtilus, he will no more grudge a prize to you than to himself."

"Why should he?" asked Hermon, as if he, too, was perfectly sure of his friend. "We have shared many a bit of bread together. When we determined upon this competition each knew the other's ability. Your father commissioned us to create peaceful Demeter, the patroness of agriculture, peace, marriage, and Arachne, the mortal who was the most skilful of spinners; for he is both a grain dealer and owner of spinning factories. The best Demeter is to be placed in the Alexandrian temple of the goddess, to whose priestesses you belong; the less successful one in your own house in the city, but whose Demeter is destined for the sanctuary, I repeat, is now virtually decided. Myrtilus will add this prize to the others, and grant me with all his heart the one for the Arachne. The subject, at any rate, is better adapted to my art than to his, and so I should be tolerably certain of my cause. Yet my anxiety about the verdict of the judges remains, for surely you know how much the majority are opposed to my tendency. I, and the few Alexandrians who, following me, sacrifice beauty to truth, swim against the stream which bears you, Myrtilus, and those who are on your side, smoothly along. I know that you do it from thorough conviction, but with other acknowledged great artists and our judges, you, too, demand beauty—always beauty. Am I right, or wrong? Is not any one who refuses to follow in the footsteps left by the ancients of Athens as certain of condemnation as the convicted thief or murderer? But I will not follow the lead of the Athenians, inimitably great though they are in their own way, because I would fain be more than the ancients of Ilissus: a disciple and an Alexandrian."

"The never-ending dispute," Myrtilus answered his fellow-artist, with a cordiality in which, nevertheless, there was a slight accent of pity.

“Surely you know it, Daphne. To me the ideal and its embodiment within the limits of the natural, according to the models of Phidias, Polycletus, and Myron is the highest goal, but he and his co-workers seek objects nearer at hand.”

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“Or rather we found them,” cried Hermon, interrupting his companion with angry positiveness. “The city of Alexandria, which is growing with unprecedented vigour, is their home. There, the place to which every race on earth sends a representative, the pulse of the whole world is throbbing. There, whoever does not run with the rest is run over; there, but one thing is important—actual life. Science has undertaken to fathom it, and the results which it gains with measures and numbers is of a different value and more lasting than that which the idle sport of the intellects of the older philosophers obtained. But art, her nobler sister, must pursue the same paths. To copy life as it is, to reproduce the real as it presents itself, not as it might or must be, is the task which I set myself. If you would have me carve gods, whom man can not represent to himself except in his own form, allow me also to represent them as reality shows me mortals. I will form them after the models of the greatest, highest, and best, and also, when the subject permits, in powerful action in accordance with my own power, but always as real men from head to foot. We must also cling to the old symbols which those who order demand, because they serve as signs of recognition, and my Demeter, too, received the bundle of wheat.”

As the excited artist uttered this challenge a defiant glance rested upon his comrade and Daphne. But Myrtilus, with a soothing gesture of the hand, answered: “What is the cause of this heat? I at least watch your work with interest, and do not dispute your art so long as it does not cross the boundaries of the beautiful, which to me are those of art.”

Here the conversation was interrupted; the steward Gras brought a letter which a courier from Pelusium had just delivered.

Thyone, the wife of Philippus, the commander of the strong border fortress of Pelusium, near Tennis, had written it. She and her husband had been intimate friends of Hermon’s father, who had served under the old general as hipparch, and through him had become well acquainted with his wealthy brother Archias and his relatives.

The Alexandrian merchant had informed Philippus—whom, like all the world, he held in the highest honour as one of the former companions of Alexander the Great—of his daughter’s journey, and his wife now announced her visit to Daphne. She expected to reach Tennis that evening with her husband and several friends, and mentioned especially her anticipation of meeting Hermon, the son of her beloved Erigone and her husband’s brave companion in arms.

Daphne and Myrtilus received the announcement with pleasure; but Hermon, who only the day before had spoken of the old couple with great affection, seemed disturbed by the arrival of the unexpected guests. To avoid them entirely appeared impossible even to him, but he declared in an embarrassed tone, and without giving any reason, that he should scarcely be able to devote the entire evening to Daphne and the Pelusinians.

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Then he turned quickly toward the house, to which a signal from his slave Bias summoned him.

CHAPTER VI.

As soon as Hermon had disappeared behind the door Daphne begged Myrtilus to accompany her into the tent.

After taking their seats there, the anxious exclamation escaped her lips: "How excited he became again! The stay in Tennis does not seem to agree with you—you are coughing, and father expected so much benefit to your ailment from the pure moist air, and to Hermon still more from the lonely life here in your society. But I have rarely seen him more strongly enlisted in behalf of the tendency opposed to beauty."

"Then your father must be satisfied with the good effect which our residence here has exerted upon me," replied Myrtilus. "I know that he was thinking of my illness when he proposed to us to complete his commissions here. Hermon—the good fellow!—could never have been induced to leave his Alexandria, had not the hope of thereby doing me a kindness induced him to follow me. I will add it to the many for which I am already indebted to his friendship. As for art, he will go his own way, and any opposition would be futile. A goddess—he perceives it himself—was certainly the most unfortunate subject possible for his—"

"Is his Demeter a complete failure?" asked Daphne anxiously.

"Certainly not," replied Myrtilus eagerly.

"The head is even one of his very best. Only the figure awakens grave doubts. In the effort to be faithful to reality, the fear of making concessions to beauty, he lapsed into ungraceful angularity and a sturdiness which, in my opinion, would be unpleasing even in a mortal woman. The excess of unbridled power again makes it self visible in the wonderfully gifted man. Many things reached him too late, and others too soon."

Daphne eagerly asked what he meant by these words, and Myrtilus replied: "Surely you know how he became a sculptor. Your father had intended him to be his successor in business, but Hermon felt the vocation to become an artist—probably first in my studio—awake with intense force. While I early placed myself under the instruction of the great Bryaxis, he was being trained for a merchant's life. When he was to guide the reed in the countinghouse, he sketched; when he was sent to the harbour to direct the loading of the ships, he became absorbed in gazing at the statues placed there. In the warehouse he secretly modelled, instead of attending to the bales of goods. You are certainly aware what a sad breach occurred then, and how long Hermon was restrained before he succeeded in turning his back upon trade."



“My father meant so kindly toward him,” Daphne protested. “He was appointed guardian to you both. You are rich, and therefore he aided in every possible way your taste for art; but Hermon did not inherit from his parents a single drachm, and so my father saw the most serious struggles awaiting him if he devoted himself to sculpture. And, besides, he had destined his nephew to become his successor, the head of one of the largest commercial houses in the city.”

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"And in doing so," Myrtilus responded, "he believed he had made the best provision for his happiness. But there is something peculiar in art. I know from your father himself how kind his intentions were when he withdrew his assistance from Hermon, and when he had escaped to the island of Rhodes, left him to make his own way during the first period of apprenticeship through which he passed there. Necessity, he thought, would bring him back to where he had a life free from anxiety awaiting him. But the result was different. Far be it from me to blame the admirable Archias, yet had he permitted his ward to follow his true vocation earlier, it would have been better for him."

"Then you think that he began to study too late?" asked Daphne eagerly.

"Not too late," was the reply, "but with his passionate struggle to advance, an earlier commencement would have been more favourable. While the companions of his own age were already doing independent work, he was still a student, and so it happened that he began for himself too soon."

"Yet," Daphne answered, "can you deny that, directly after Hermon produced his first work which made his talent undeniable, my father again treated him like his own son?"

"On the contrary," replied Myrtilus, "I remember only too well how Archias at that time, probably not entirely without your intercession, fairly showered gold upon his nephew, but unfortunately this abundance was by no means to his advantage."

"What do you mean?" asked Daphne. "Were not you, at that very time, in full possession of the great wealth inherited from your father and mother, and yet did you not work far beyond your strength? Bryaxis—I heard him—was full of your praises, and yet entreated my father to use all his influence, as guardian, to warn you against overwork."

"My kind master!" cried Myrtilus, deeply moved. "He was as anxious about me as a father."

"Because he perceived that you were destined for great achievements."

"And because it did not escape his penetration how much I needed care. My lungs, Daphne, my lungs—surely you know how the malicious disease became fatal to my dear mother, and to my brother and sister also. All three sank prematurely into the grave, and for years the shades of my parents have been beckoning to me too. When the cough shakes my chest, I see Charon raise his oar and invite me also to enter his sable boat."

"But you just assured me that you were doing well," observed the girl. "The cough alone makes me a little anxious. If you could only see for yourself what a beautiful colour the pure air has given your cheeks!"

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"This flush," replied Myrtilus gravely, "is the sunset of life's closing day, not the dawn of approaching convalescence. But let us drop the subject. I allude to these sorrowful things only to prevent your praises of me at Hermon's expense. True, even while a student I possessed wealth far beyond my needs, but the early deaths of my brother and sister had taught me even then to be economical of the brief span of life allotted to me. Hermon, on the contrary, was overflowing with manly vigour, and the strongest among the Ephebi in the wrestling school. After three nights' revel he would not even feel weary, and how difficult the women made it for the handsome, black-bearded fellow to commence his work early! Did you ever ask yourself why young steeds are not broken in flowery meadows, but upon sand? Nothing which attracts their attention and awakens their desires must surround them; but your father's gold led Hermon, ere the season of apprenticeship was over, into the most luxuriant clover fields. Honour and respect the handsome, hot-blooded youth that, nevertheless, he allowed himself to be diverted from work only a short time and soon resumed it with ardent zeal, at first in superabundance, and then amid fresh need and privation."

"O Myrtilus," the girl interrupted, "how terribly I suffered in those days! For the first time the gods made me experience that there are black clouds, as well as bright sunshine, in the human soul. For weeks an impassable gulf separated me from my father, with whom I had always had one heart and soul. But I never saw him as he was then. The first prize had been awarded to you for your Aphrodite, radiant in marvellous beauty, and your brow had also been already crowned for your statue of Alexander, when Hermon stepped forward with his works. They were at the same time the first which were to show what he believed to be the true mission of art—a hideous hawk, hide in hand, praising his wares with open mouth, and the struggling Maenads. Surely you know the horrible women who throw one another on the ground, tearing and rending with bestial fury. The spectacle of these fruits of the industry of one dear to me grieved me also, and I could not understand how you and the others saw anything to admire in them. And my father! At the sight of these things the colour faded from his cheeks and lips, and, as if by virtue of his guardianship he had a right to direct Hermon in the paths of art also, he forbade his ward to waste any more time in such horrible scarecrows, and awaken loathing and wrath instead of gratification, exultation, and joy. You know the consequences, but you do not know how my heart ached when Hermon, frantic with wounded pride and indignation, turned his back upon my father and severed every tie that united him to us. In spite of his deep vexation and the unbridled violence with which the nephew had allowed himself to address his uncle, my father did not dream of withholding his assistance from him. But Hermon no longer came to our house, and when I sent for him to bring him to reason, he positively declared that he would not accept another obolus from my father—he would rather starve than permit any one to dictate to him in the choice of his subjects. Liberty was worth more than his uncle's gold. Yet my father sent him his annual allowance."

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"But he refused it," added Myrtilus. "I remember that day well, how I tried to persuade him, and, when he persisted in his intention, besought him to accept from my abundance what he needed. But this, too, he resolutely refused, though at that time I was already so deeply in his debt that I could not repay him at all with paltry money."

"You are thinking of the devotion with which he nursed you when you were so ill?" asked Daphne.

"Certainly; yet not of that alone," was the reply. "You do not know how he stood by me in the worst days. Who was it that after my first great successes, when base envy clouded many an hour of my life, rejoiced with me as though he himself had won the laurel? It was he, the ambitious artist, though recognition held even farther aloof from his creations than success. And when, just at that time, the insidious disease attacked me more cruelly than ever, he devoted himself to me like a loving brother. While formerly, in the overflowing joy of existence, he had revelled all day and caroused all night, how often he paused in the rush of gaiety to exchange the festal hall for a place beside my couch, frequently remaining there until Eos dyed the east, that he might hold my fevered hand and support my shaken frame! Frequently too, when already garlanded for some gay banquet, he took the flowers from his head and devoted the night to his friend, that he might not leave him to the attendance of the slaves. It is owing to him, and the care and skill of the great leech Erasistratus, that I am still standing before you alive and can praise what my Hermon was and proved himself to me in those days. Yet I must also accuse him of a wrong; to this hour I bear him a grudge for having, in those sorrowful hours, refused to share my property with me fraternally. What manly pride would have cheerfully permitted him to accept was opposed by the defiant desire to show me, your father, you, the whole world, that he would depend upon himself, and needed assistance neither from human beings nor even the gods. In the same way, while working, he obstinately rejected my counsel and my help, though the Muse grants me some things which he unfortunately lacks. Great as his talent is, firmly as I believe that he will yet succeed some day in creating something grand, nay, perhaps something mighty, the unbelieving disciple of Straton lacks the power of comprehending the august dignity, the superhuman majesty of the divine nature, and he does not succeed in representing the bewitching charm of woman, because he hates it as the bull hates a red rag. Only once hitherto has he been successful, and that was with your bust."

Daphne's cheeks suddenly flamed with a burning flush, and feeling it she raised her feather fan to her eyes, and with forced indifference murmured: "We were good friends from our earliest childhood. And, besides, how small is the charm with which the artist who chooses me for a model has to deal!"

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"It is rather an unusually fascinating one," Myrtilus asserted resolutely. "I have no idea of flattering you, and you are certainly aware that I do not number you among the beauties of Alexandria. But instead of the delicate, symmetrical features which artists need, the gods bestowed upon you a face which wins all hearts, even those of women, because it is a mirror of genuine, helpful, womanly kindness, a sincere disposition, and a healthy, receptive mind. To reproduce such a face, not exactly beautiful, and yet bewitching, is the hardest possible task, and Hermon, I repeat it, has succeeded. You are the only one of your noble sex who inspires the motherless man with respect, and for whom he feels more than a fleeting fancy. What does he not owe you? After the bridge which united him to his uncle and paternal friend had been so suddenly broken, it was you who rebuilt it. Now, I think, it is stronger than ever. I could not imagine anything that would induce him to give you up; and all honour to your father, who, instead of bearing the insubordinate fellow a grudge, only drew him more warmly to his heart, and gave us two commissions which will permit each to do his best. If I see clearly, the daughter of Archias is closely connected with this admirable deed."

"Of course," replied Daphne, "my father discussed his intention with me, but the thought was entirely his own. True, Hermon's Street-Boy eating Figs was not exactly according to his taste, but it pleased him better than his former works, and I agree with Euphranor, it is remarkably true to nature. My father perceived this too. Besides, he is a merchant who sets a high value upon what he has earned, and Hermon's refusal of his gold startled him. Then the good man also saw how nobly, in spite of his wild life, his obstinacy, and the work so unpleasing to him, his nephew always showed the noble impulses inherited from his brave father, and thus Hermon gained the day."

"But what would have become of him last year, after the mortifying rejection of his model of The Happy Return Home for the harbour of Eunostus," asked Myrtilus, "if you and your encouragement had not cheered him?"

"That verdict, too, was abominable!" exclaimed Daphne indignantly. "The mother opening her arms to the returning son was unlovely, it is true, and did not please me either; but the youth with the travelling hat and staff is magnificent in his vigour and natural action."

"That opinion, as you know, is mine also," replied Myrtilus. "In the mother the expression was intended to take the place of beauty. For the returning son, as well as for the fig-eater, he found a suitable model. True, the best was at his disposal for his Demeter."

Here he hesitated; but Daphne so urgently asked to know what he, who had already denied her admission to the studios, was now again withholding from her, that, smiling indulgently, he added: "Then I must probably consent to tell in advance the secret with which you were to be surprised. Before him, as well as before me, hovered—since you

wish to know it—in Alexandria, when we first began to model the head of the goddess, a certain charming face which is as dear to one as to the other.”

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Daphne, joyously excited, held out her hand to the artist, exclaiming: "Oh, how kind that is! Yet how was it possible, since I posed neither to him nor to you?"

"Hermon had finished your bust only a short time before, and you permitted me to use your head for my statue of the goddess of Peace, which went down with the ship on the voyage to Ostia. This was at the disposal of us both in three or four reproductions, and, besides, it hovered before our mental vision clearly enough. When the time to show you our work arrives, you will be surprised to discover how differently two persons see and copy the same object."

"Now that I know so much, and have a certain share in your works, I insist upon seeing them!" cried Daphne with far greater impetuosity than usual. "Tell Hermon so, and remind him that I shall at any rate expect him to meet the Pelusian guests at the banquet. Threaten him seriously with my grave displeasure if he persists in leaving it speedily."

"I will not fail to do my part," replied Myrtilus; "but as to your wish to see the two Demeters—"

"That will come to pass," interrupted Daphne, "as soon as we three are together again like a clover leaf." She returned the sculptor's farewell greeting as she spoke, but before he reached the entrance to the tent she again detained him with the exclamation: "Only this one thing more: Does Hermon deceive himself when he hopes so confidently for success with the weaver, Arachne?"

"Hardly—if the model whom he desires does not fail him."

"Is she beautiful, and did he find her here in Tennis?" asked Daphne, trying to assume an indifferent manner; but Myrtilus was not deceived, and answered gaily: "That's the way people question children to find out things. Farewell until the banquet, fair curiosity!"

CHAPTER VII.

The slave Bias had not gone to the hunting party with his master. He had never been fit for such expeditions, since the Egyptian guard who took him to the slave market for sale crippled the arch-traitor's son's left leg by a blow, but he was all the more useful in the house, and even the keenest eye could scarcely now perceive the injury which lessened his commercial value.

He had prepared everything his master would need to shoot the birds very early in the morning, and after helping the men push the boats into the water, he, too, remained out of doors.

The old Nubian doorkeeper's little badger dog ran to meet him, as usual, barking loudly, and startled a flock of sparrows, which flew up directly in front of Bias and fluttered to and fro in confusion.

The slave regarded this as an infallible omen, and when Stephanion, Daphne's maid, who had grown gray in the household of Archias, and though a freed woman still worked in the old way, came out of the tent, he called to her the gay Greek greeting, "Rejoice!" pointed to the sparrows, and eagerly continued: "How one flies above another! how they flutter and chirp and twitter! It will be a busy day."

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Stephanion thought this interpretation of the ordinary action of the birds very consistent with Bias's wisdom, which was highly esteemed in the household of Archias, and it also just suited her inclination to chat with him for a while, especially as she had brought a great deal of news from Alexandria.

By way of introduction she mentioned the marriages and deaths in their circle of acquaintances, bond and free, and then confided to the slave what had induced her mistress to remain so long absent from her father, whom she usually left alone for only a few hours at the utmost.

Archias himself had sent her here, after young Philotas, who was now apparently wooing her with better success than other suitors, had spoken of the enormous booty which one of his friends had brought from a shooting expedition at Tennis, and Daphne had expressed a wish to empty her quiver there too.

True, Philotas himself had been eager to guide the hunting party, but Daphne declined his escort because—so the maid asserted—she cared far more about meeting her cousins, the sculptors, than for the chase. Her mistress had frankly told her so, but her father was delighted to hear her express a wish, because for several months she had been so quiet and listless that she, Stephanion, had become anxious about her. Meanwhile, Daphne had tried honestly to conceal her feelings from the old man, but such games of hide and seek were useless against the master's keen penetration. He spared no pains in the preparations for the journey, and the girl now seemed already transformed. This was caused solely by meeting her cousins again; but if any one should ask her whether Daphne preferred Myrtilus or Hermon, she could not give a positive answer.

"Cautious inquiry saves recantation," replied Bias importantly. "Yet you may believe my experience, it is Myrtilus. Fame inspires love, and what the world will not grant my master, in spite of his great talent, it conceded to the other long ago. And, besides, we are not starving; but Myrtilus is as rich as King Croesus of Sardis. Not that Daphne, who is stifling in gold herself, would care about that, but whoever knows life knows—where doves are, doves will fly."

Stephanion, however, was of a different opinion, not only because Daphne talked far more about the black-bearded cousin than the fair one, but because she knew the girl, and was seldom mistaken in such matters. She would not deny that Daphne was also fond of Myrtilus. Yet probably neither of the artists, but Philotas, would lead home the bride, for he was related to the royal family—a fine, handsome man; and, besides, her father preferred him to the other suitors who hovered around her as flies buzzed about honey. Of course, matters would be more favourable to Philotas in any other household. Who else in Alexandria would consult the daughter long, when he was choosing her future husband? But Archias was a white raven among fathers, and would never force his only child to do anything.

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Marrying and loving, however, were two different affairs. If Eros had the final decision, her choice might perhaps fall on one of the artists.

Here she was interrupted by the slave's indignant exclamation: "What contradictions! 'Woman's hair is long, but her wit is short,' says the proverb. 'Waiting is the merchant's wisdom,' I have heard your master say more than once, and to obey the words of shrewd people is the best plan for those who are not so wise. Meanwhile, I am of the opinion that curiosity alone brought Daphne—who, after all, is only a woman—to this place. She wants to see the statues of Demeter which her father ordered from us."

"And the Arachne?" asked the maid. This was an opportune question to the slave—how often he had heard the artists utter the word "Arachne!"—and his pride of education had suffered from the consciousness that he knew nothing about her except the name, which in Greek meant "the spider."

Some special story must surely be associated with this Arachne, for which his master desired to use his young countrywoman, Ledscha, as a model, and whose statues Archias intended to place in his house in Alexandria and in the great weaving establishment at Tennis beside the statue of Demeter.

Stephanion, a Greek woman who grew up in a Macedonian household, must know something about her.

So he cautiously turned the conversation to the spinner Arachne, and when Stephanion entered into it, admitted that he, too, was curious to learn in what way the sculptors would represent her.

"Yes," replied the maid, "my mistress has more than once racked her brains over that, and Archias too. Perhaps they will carve her as a girl at work in the house of her father Idmon, the purple dyer of Colophon."

"Never," replied Bias in a tone of dissent. "Just imagine how the loom would look wrought in gold and ivory!"

"I thought so too," said Stephanion, in apology for the foolish idea." Daphne thinks that the two will model her in different ways: Myrtilus, as mistress in the weaving room, showing with proud delight a piece just completed to the nymphs from the Pactolus and other rivers, who sought her at Colophon to admire her work; but Hermon, after she aroused the wrath of Athene because she dared to weave into the hangings the love adventures of the gods with mortal women."

"Father Zeus as a swan toying with Leda," replied Bias as confidently as if Arachne's works were before his eyes, "and in the form of a bull bearing away Europa, the chaste Artemis bending over the sleeping Endymion."

“How that pleases you men!” interrupted the maid, striking him lightly on the arm with the duster which she had brought from the tent. “But ought the virgin Athene to be blamed because she punished the weaver who, with all her skill, was only a mortal woman, for thus exposing her divine kindred?”

“Certainly not,” replied Bias, and Stephanion went on eagerly: “And when the great Athene, who invented weaving and protects weavers, condescended to compete with Arachne, and was excelled by her, surely her gall must have overflowed. Whoever is just will scarcely blame her for striking the audacious conqueror on the brow with the weaver’s shuttle.”

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"It is that very thing," replied Bias modestly, "which to a short-sighted fool like myself—may the great goddess not bear me a grudge for it!— never seemed just in her. Even the mortal who succumbs in a fair fight ought not to be enraged against the victor. At least, so I was taught. But what, I ask myself, when I think of the stones which were flung at Hermon's struggling Maenads, could be less suited for imitation than two women, one of whom strikes the other?"

"The woman who in her desperation at that blow desires to hang herself, must produce a still more horrible impression," replied Stephanion. "Probably she will be represented as Athene releases her from the noose rather than when, as a punishment for her insolence, she transforms Arachne into a spider."

"That she might be permitted, in the form of an insect, to make artistic webs until the end of her life," the slave, now sufficiently well informed, added importantly. "Since that transformation, as you know, the spider has been called by the Greeks Arachne. Perhaps—I always thought so—Hermon will represent her twisting the rope with which she is to kill herself. You have seen many of our works, and know that we love the terrible."

"Oh, let me go into your studio!" the maid now entreated no less urgently than her mistress had done a short time before, but her wish, too, remained ungratified.

"The sculptors," Bias truthfully asserted, "always kept their workrooms carefully locked." They were as inaccessible as the strongest fortress, and it was wise, less on account of curious spectators, from whom there was nothing to fear, than of the thievish propensities of the people. The statues, by Archias's orders, were to be executed in chryselephantine work, and the gold and ivory which this required might only too easily awaken the vice of cupidity in the honest and frugal Biamites. So nothing could be done about it, not to mention the fact that he was forbidden, on pain of being sold to work in a stone quarry, to open the studio to any one without his master's consent.

So the maid, too, was obliged to submit, and the sacrifice was rendered easier for her because, just at that moment, a young female slave called her back to the tent where Chrysilla, Daphne's companion, a matron who belonged to a distinguished Greek family, needed her services.

Bias, rejoicing that he had at last learned, without exposing his own ignorance, the story of the much-discussed Arachne, returned to the house, where he remained until Daphne came back from shooting with her companions. While the latter were talking about the birds they had killed, Bias went out of doors; but he was forced to give up his desire to listen to a conversation which was exactly suited to arrest his attention, for after the first few sentences he perceived behind the thorny acacias in the "garden" his countrywoman Ledscha.

So she was keeping her promise. He recognised her plainly, in spite of the veil which covered the back of her head and the lower portion of her face. Her black eyes were visible, and what a sinister light shone in them as she fixed them sometimes on Daphne, sometimes on Hermon, who stood talking together by the steps!

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The evening before Bias had caught a glimpse of this passionate creature's agitated soul. If anything happened here that incensed or wounded her she would be capable of committing some unprecedented act before the very master's honoured guest.

To prevent this was a duty to the master whom he loved, and against whom he had only warned Ledscha because he was reluctant to see a free maiden of his own race placed on a level with the venal Alexandrian models, but still more because any serious love affair between Hermon and the Biamite might bring disastrous consequences upon both, and therefore also on himself. He knew that the free men of his little nation would not suffer an insult offered by a Greek to a virgin daughter of their lineage to pass unavenged.

True, in his bondage he had by no means remained free from all the bad qualities of slaves, but he was faithfully devoted to his master, who had imposed upon him a great debt of gratitude; for though, during the trying period of variance with his rich and generous uncle, Hermon had often been offered so large a sum for him that it would have relieved the artist from want, he could not be induced to yield his "wise and faithful Bias" to another. The slave had sworn to himself that he would never forget this, and he kept his oath.

Freedmen and slaves were moving to and fro in the large open square before him, amid the barking of the dogs and the shouts of the male and female venders of fruit, vegetables, and fish, who hoped to dispose of their wares in the kitchen tent of the wealthy strangers.

The single veiled woman attracted no attention here, but Bias kept his gaze fixed steadily upon her, and as she curved her little slender hand above her brow to shade her watchful eyes from the dazzling sunlight, and set her beautifully arched foot on a stone near one of the trees in order to gain a better view, he thought of the story of the weaver which he had just heard.

Though the stillness of the hot noontide was interrupted by many sounds, it exerted a bewitching influence over him.

Ledscha seemed like the embodiment of some great danger, and when she lowered one arm and raised the other to protect herself again from the radiance of the noonday sun, he started; for through the brain of the usually fearless man darted the thought that now the nimble spiderlegs were moving to draw him toward her, entwine him, and suck his heart's blood.

The illusion lasted only a few brief moments, but when it vanished and the girl had regained the figure of an unusually slender, veiled Biamite woman, he shook his head with a sigh of relief, for never had such a vision appeared to him in broad noonday and

while awake, and it must have been sent to warn him and his master against this uncanny maiden.

It positively announced some approaching misfortune which proceeded from this beautiful creature.

The Biamite now advanced hesitatingly toward Hermon and Daphne, who were still a considerable distance from her. But Bias had also quitted his post of observation, and after she had taken a few steps forward, barred her way.

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With a curt “Come,” he took her hand, whispering, “Hermon is joyously expecting your visit.”

Ledscha’s veil concealed her mouth, but the expression of her eyes made him think that it curled scornfully.

Yet she silently followed him.

At first he led her by the hand, but on the way he saw at the edge of her upper veil the thick, dark eyebrows which met each other, and her fingers seemed to him so strangely cold and tapering that a shudder ran through his frame and he released them.

Ledscha scarcely seemed to notice it, and, with bowed head, walked beside him through the side entrance to the door of Hermon’s studio.

It was a disappointment to her to find it locked, but Bias did not heed her angry complaint, and led her into the artist’s sitting room, requesting her to wait for his master there.

Then he hurried to the steps, and by a significant sign informed the sculptor that something important required his attention.

Hermon understood him, and Bias soon had an opportunity to tell the artist who it was that desired to speak to him and where he had taken Ledscha. He also made him aware that he feared some evil from her, and that, in an alarming vision, she had appeared to him as a hideous spider.

Hermon laughed softly. “As a spider? The omen is appropriate. We will make her a woman spider—an Arachne that is worth looking at. But this strange beauty is one of the most obstinate of her sex, and if I let her carry out her bold visit in broad daylight she will get the better of me completely. The blood must first be washed from my hands here. The wounded sea eagle tore the skin with its claw, and I concealed the scratch from Daphne. A strip of linen to bandage it! Meanwhile, let the impatient intruder learn that her sign is not enough to open every door.”

Then he entered his sitting room, greeted Ledscha curtly, invited her to go into the studio, unlocked it, and left her there alone while he went to his chamber with the slave and had the slight wound bandaged comfortably.

While Bias was helping his master he repeated with sincere anxiety his warning against the dangerous beauty whose eyebrows, which had grown together, proved that she was possessed by the demons of the nether world.

“Yet they increase the austere beauty of her face,” assented the artist. “I should not want to omit them in modelling Arachne while the goddess is transforming her into a

spider! What a subject! A bolder one was scarcely ever attempted and, like you, I already see before me the coming spider.”

Then, without the slightest haste, he exchanged the huntsman’s chiton for the white chlamys, which was extremely becoming to his long, waving beard, and at last, exclaiming gaily, “If I stay any longer, she will transform herself into empty air instead of the spider,” he went to her.

CHAPTER VIII.

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While waiting in the studio Ledscha had used the time to satisfy her curiosity.

What was there not to be seen!

On pedestals and upon the boards of the floor, on boxes, racks, and along the wall, stood, lay, or hung the greatest variety of articles: plaster casts of human limbs and parts of the bodies of animals, male and female, of clay and wax, withered garlands, all sorts of sculptor's tools, a ladder, vases, cups and jars for wine and water, a frame over which linen and soft woollen materials were spread, a lute and a zither, several seats, an armchair, and in one corner a small table with three dilapidated book rolls, writing tablets, metal styluses, and reed pens.

All these articles were arranged haphazard, and showed that Bias possessed more wisdom than care in the use of duster and broom.

It would have been difficult to count the number of things brought together here, but the unusually long, wide room was by no means crowded.

Ledscha cast a wondering glance sometimes at one object, sometimes at another, but without understanding its meaning or its use.

The huge figure on the pedestal in the middle of the studio, upon which the full glare of light fell through the open windows, was certainly the statue of the goddess on which Hermon was working; but a large gray cloth concealed it from her gaze.

How tall it was!

When she looked at it more closely she felt small and oppressed by comparison.

A passionate longing urged her to remove the cloth, but the boldness of the act restrained her. After she had taken another survey of the spacious apartment, which she was visiting for the first time by daylight, the torturing feeling of being neglected gained possession of her.

She clinched her white teeth more firmly, and when there was a noise at the door that died away again without bringing the man she expected, she went up to the statue which she had already walked past quietly several times and, obeying an impatient impulse, freed it from its covering.

The goddess, now illumined by the sunlight, shone before her in gleaming yellow gold and snowy ivory.

She had never seen such a statue, and drew back dazzled.

What a master was the man who had deceived her trusting heart!

He had created a Demeter; the wheat in her hand showed it.

How beautiful this work was—and how valuable! It produced a powerful impression upon her mind, wholly unaccustomed to the estimate of such things.

The goddess before her was the very one whose statue stood in the temple of Demeter, and to whom she also sacrificed, with the Greeks in Tennis, when danger threatened the harvest. Involuntarily she removed the lower veil from her face and raised her hand in prayer.

Meanwhile she gazed into the pallid face, carved from ivory, of the immortal dispenser of blessings, and suddenly the blood crimsoned her cheeks, the nostrils of her delicate, slightly arched nose rose and fell more swiftly, for the countenance of the goddess—she was not mistaken— was that of the Alexandrian whom she had just watched so intently, and for whose sake Hermon had left her in the lurch the evening before.

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Now, too, she remembered for what purpose the sculptor was said to have lured Gula, the sailor's wife, and her own young sister Taus, to his studio, and in increasing excitement she drew the cloth also from the bust beside the Demeter.

Again the Alexandrian's face—the likeness was even more unmistakable than in the goddess.

The Greek girl alone occupied his thoughts. Hermon had disdained to model the Biamite's head.

What could the others, or she herself, be to him, since he loved the rich foreigner in the tent outside, and her alone? How firmly her image must have been impressed upon his soul, that he could reproduce the features of the absent one with such lifelike fidelity!

Yet with what bold assurance he had protested that his heart belonged solely to her. But she thought that she now perceived his purpose. If the slave was right, it was done that she might permit him to model what he admired in her figure, only not the head and face, whose beauty, nevertheless, he praised so extravagantly.

Had he attracted Gula and her sister with similar sweet flatteries? Had the promise to bestow their charms upon a goddess been made to them also?

The swift throbbing of her indignant heart made it impossible for her to think calmly, but its vehement pulsation reminded her of the object of her presence here.

She had come to obtain a clear understanding between him and herself.

She stood here as a judge.

She must know whether she had been betrayed or deceived.

He should confess what his intentions toward her were. The next moments must decide the fate of her life, and she added, drawing a long breath, perhaps of his also.

Suddenly Ledscha started. She had not heard Hermon enter the studio, and was now startled by his greeting.

It was not positively unkind, but certainly not a lover's.

Perhaps the words might have been warmer, but for his annoyance at the insolent boldness with which she had removed the coverings from his works. He restrained himself from openly blaming her, it is true, but he exclaimed, with a tinge of gay sarcasm: "You seem to feel very much at home here already, fairest of the fair. Or was it the goddess herself who removed the curtain from her image in order to show herself to her successor upon this pedestal?"

But the question was to remain unanswered, for under the spell of the resentment which filled her heart, and in the effort not to lose sight of the object that brought her here, Ledscha had only half understood its meaning, and pointing her slender forefinger at the face of his completed work, she demanded to know whom she recognised in this statue.

“The goddess Demeter,” he answered quietly; “but if it pleases you better, as you seem to be on the right track, also the daughter of Archias.”

Then, angered by the wrathful glance she cast at him, he added more sternly: “She is kind-hearted, free from disagreeable whims and the disposition to torture others who are kindly disposed toward her. So I adorned the goddess with her pleasant features.”

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"Mine, you mean to say," Ledscha answered bitterly, "would be less suitable for this purpose. Yet they, too, can wear a different expression from the present one. You, I think, have learned this. Only I shall never acquire the art of dissimulation, not even in your society."

"You seem to be angry on account of my absence yesterday evening?" Hermon asked in an altered tone, clasping her hand; but Ledscha snatched it from him, exclaiming: "The model of the Demeter, the daughter of the wealthy Archias, detained you, you were going to tell me, and you think that ought to satisfy the barbarian maiden."

"Folly!" he answered angrily. "I owe a debt of gratitude to her father, who was my guardian, and custom commands you also to honour a guest. But your obstinacy and jealousy are unbearable. What great thing is it that I ask of your love? A little patience. Practise it. Then your turn will come too."

"Of course, the second and third will follow the first," she answered bitterly. "After Gula, the sailor's wife, you lured my innocent young sister, Taus, to this apartment; or am I mistaken in the order, and was Gula the second?"

"So that's it!" cried Hermon, who was surprised rather than alarmed by this betrayal of his secret. "If you want confirmation of the fact, very well—both were here."

"Because you deluded them with false vows of love."

"By no means. My heart has nothing what ever to do with these visits. Gula came to thank me because I rendered her a service—you know it—which to every mother seems greater than it is."

"But you certainly did not underestimate it," Ledscha impetuously interrupted, "for you demanded her honour in return."

"Guard your tongue!" the artist burst forth angrily. "The woman visited me unasked, and I let her leave me as faithful or as unfaithful to her husband as she came. If I used her as a model—"

"Gula, whom the sculptor transforms into a goddess," Ledscha interrupted, with a sneering laugh.

"Into a fish-seller, if you wish to know it," cried Hermon indignantly. "I saw in the market a young woman selling shad. I took the subject, and found in Gula a suitable model. Unfortunately, she ventured here far too seldom. But I can finish it with the help of the sketch—it stands in yonder cupboard."

"A fish-seller," Ledscha repeated contemptuously. "And for what did my Taus, poor lovely child, seem desirable?"



“Over opposite,” Hermon answered quickly, as if he wished to get rid of a troublesome duty, pointing through the window out of doors, “the free maidens, during the hot days, took off their sandals and waded through the water. There I saw your sister’s feet. They were the prettiest of all, and Gula brought the young girl to me. I had commenced in Alexandria a figure of a girl holding her foot in her hand to take out a thorn, so I used your sister’s for it.”

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“And when my turn comes?” Ledscha demanded.

“Then,” he replied, freshly captivated by the magic of her beauty, in a kinder, almost tender tone, “then I will make of you, in gold and ivory, you wonderfully lovely creature, the counterpart of this goddess.”

“And you will need a long time for it?”

“The oftener you come the faster the work will advance.”

“And the more surely the Biamite women will point their fingers at me.”

“Yet you ventured here to-day, unasked, in the broad light of noon.”

“Because I wish to remind you myself that I shall expect you this evening. Yesterday you did not appear; but to-day-I am right, am I not? —to-day you will come.”

“With the greatest delight, if it is possible,” he answered eagerly.

A warmer glance from her dark eyes rested upon him. The blood seethed in his veins, and as he extended both hands to her and ardently uttered her name, she rushed forward, clinging to him with passionate devotion, as if seeking assistance, but when his lips touched hers she shrank back and loosed her soft arms from his neck.

“What does this mean?” asked the sculptor in surprise, trying to draw her toward him again; but Ledscha would not permit it, pleading in a softer tone than before: “Not now; but—am I not right, dearest—I may expect you this evening? Just this once let the daughter of Archias yield to me, who loves you better. We shall have a full moon to-night, and you have heard what was predicted to me—to-night the highest bliss which the gods can bestow upon a mortal awaits me.”

And me also,” cried Hermon, “if you will permit me to share it with you.”

“Then I will expect you on the Pelican Island—just when the full moon is over the lofty poplars there. You will come? Not to the Owl’s Nest: to the Pelican Island. And though your love is far less, far cooler than mine, yet you will not defraud me of the best happiness of my life?”

“How could I?” he asked, as if he felt wounded by such distrust. “What detains me must be something absolutely unavoidable.”

Ledscha’s eyebrows contracted sharply, and in a choked voice she exclaimed: “Nothing must detain you—nothing, whatever it may be! Though death should threaten, you will be with me just at midnight.”



"I will, if it is possible," he protested, painfully touched by the vehemence of her urging. "What can be more welcome to me also than to spend happy hours with you in the silence of a moonlight night? Besides, my stay in Tennis will not be long."

"You are going?" she asked in a hollow tone.

"In three or four days," he answered carelessly; "then Myrtilus and I will be expected in Alexandria. But gently—gently—how pale you are, girl! Yes, the parting! But in six weeks at latest I shall be here again; then real life will first begin, and Eros will make the roses bloom for us."

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Ledscha nodded silently, and gazing into his face with a searching look asked, "And how long will this season of blossoming last?"

"Several months, girl; three, if not six."

"And then?"

"Who looks so far into the future?"

She lowered her glance, and, as if yielding to the inevitable, answered: "What a fool I was! Who knows what the morrow may bring? Are we even sure whether, six months hence, we shall not hate, instead of loving, each other?"

She passed her hand across her brow as she spoke, exclaiming: "You said just now that only the present belonged to man. Then let us enjoy it as though every moment might be the last. By the light of the full moon to-night, the happiness which has been predicted to me must begin. After it, the orb between the horns of Astarte will become smaller; but when it fulls and wanes again, if you keep your promise and return, then, though they may curse and condemn me, I will come to your studio and grant what you ask. But which of the goddesses do you intend to model from me as a companion statue to the Demeter?"

"This time it can not be one of the immortelles," he answered hesitatingly, "but a famous woman, an artist who succeeded in a competition in vanquishing even the august Athene."

"So it is no goddess?" Ledscha asked in a disappointed tone.

"No, child, but the most skilful woman who ever plied the weaver's shuttle."

"And her name?"

"Arachne."

The young girl started, exclaiming contemptuously: "Arachne? That is— that is what you Greeks call the most repulsive of creatures—the spider."

"The most skilful of all creatures, that taught man the noble art of weaving," he eagerly retorted.

Here he was interrupted; his friend Myrtilus put his fair head into the room, exclaiming: "Pardon me if I interrupt you—but we shall not see each other again for some time. I have important business in the city, and may be detained a long while. Yet before I go I must perform the commission Daphne gave me for you. She sends word that she shall expect you without fail at the banquet for the Pelusinian guests. Your absence, do you

hear?—pardon the interruption, fairest Ledscha—your absence would seriously anger her.”

“Then I shall be prepared for considerable trouble in appeasing her,” replied Hermon, glancing significantly at the young girl.

Myrtilus crossed the threshold, turned to the Biamite, and said in his quiet, cheerful manner: “Where beautiful gifts are to be brought to Eros, it beseems the friend to strew with flowers the path of the one who is offering the sacrifices; and you, if everything does not deceive me, would fain choose to-night to serve him with the utmost devotion. Therefore, I shall need forgiveness from you and the god, if I beseech you to defer the offering, were it only until to-morrow.”

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Ledscha silently shrugged her shoulders and made no answer to the inquiring glance with which Hermon sought hers, but Myrtilus changed his tone and addressed a grave warning to his friend to consider well that it would be an insult to the manes of his dead parents if he should avoid the old couple from Pelusium, who had been their best friends and had taken the journey hither for his sake.

Hermon looked after him in painful perplexity, but the Biamite also approached the threshold, and holding her head haughtily erect, said coldly: "The choice is difficult for you, as I see. Then recall to your memory again what this night of the full moon means—you are well aware of it—to me. If, nevertheless, you still decide in favour of the banquet with your friends, I can not help it; but I must now know: Shall this night belong to me, or to the daughter of Archias?"

"Is it impossible to talk with you, unlucky girl, as one would with other sensible people?" Hermon burst forth wrathfully. "Everything is carried to extremes; you condemn a brief necessary delay as breach of faith and base treachery. This behaviour is unbearable."

"Then you will not come?" she asked apathetically, laying her hand upon the door; but Hermon cried out in a tone half beseeching, half imperious: "You must not go so! If you insist upon it, surely I will come. There is no room in your obstinate soul for kind indulgence. No one, by the dog, ever accused me of being specially skilled in this smooth art; yet there may be duties and circumstances—"

Here Ledscha gently opened the door; but, seized with a fear of losing this rare creature, whose singular beauty attracted him powerfully, even now, this peerless model for a work on which he placed the highest hopes, he strode swiftly to her side, and drawing her back from the threshold, exclaimed: "Difficult as it is for me on this special day, I will come, only you must not demand what is impossible. The right course often lies midway. Half the night must belong to the banquet with my old friends and Daphne; the second half—"

"To the barbarian, you think—the spider," she gasped hoarsely. "But my welfare as well as yours depends on the decision. Stay here, or come to the island—you have your choice."

Wrenching herself from his hold as she spoke, she slipped through the doorway and left the room.

Hermon, with a muttered oath, stood still, shrugging his shoulders angrily.

He could do nothing but yield to this obstinate creature's will.

In the atrium Ledscha met the slave Bias, and returned his greeting only by a wave of the hand; but before opening the side door which was to lead her into the open air, she

paused, and asked bluntly in the language of their people: “Was Arachne—I don’t mean the spider, but the weaver whom the Greeks call by that name—a woman like the rest of us? Yet it is said that she remained victor in a contest with the goddess Athene.”



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"That is perfectly true," answered Bias, "but she had to atone cruelly for this triumph; the goddess struck her on the forehead with the weaver's shuttle, and when, in her shame and rage, she tried to hang herself, she was transformed into the spider."

Ledscha stood still, and, while drawing the veil over her pallid face, asked with quivering lips, "And is there no other Arachne?"

"Not among mortals," was the reply, "but even here in this house there are more than enough of the disagreeable, creeping creatures which bear the same name."

Ledscha now went clown the steps which led to the lawn, and Bias saw that she stumbled on the last one and would have fallen had not her lithe body regained its balance in time.

"A bad omen!" thought the slave. "If I had the power to build a wall between my master and the spider yonder, it should be higher than the lighthouse of Sostratus. To heed omens guides one safely through life. I know what I know, and will keep my eyes open, for my master too."

CHAPTER IX.

Hermon had intended to add a few more touches to his Demeter, but he could not do it. Ledscha, her demand, and the resentment with which she had left him, were not to be driven from his mind.

There was no doubt that he must seek her if he was not to lose her, yet he reproached himself for having acted like a thoughtless fool when he proposed to divide the night between her and Daphne.

There was something offensive in the proposal to so proud a creature. He ought to have promised positively to come, and then left the banquet somewhat earlier. It would have been easy to apologize for his late arrival, and Ledscha would have had no cause to be angry with him.

Now she had, and her resentment awakened in him—though he certainly did not lack manly courage—an uncomfortable feeling closely allied to anxiety.

Angered by his own conduct, he asked himself whether he loved the barbarian, and could find no satisfactory answer.

At their first meeting he had felt that she was far superior to the other Biamite maidens, not only in beauty but in everything else. The very acerbity of her nature had seemed charming. To win this wonderful, pliant creature, slender as a cypress, whose independence merged into fierce obstinacy, had appeared to him worth any sacrifice;

and having perceived in her an admirable model for his Arachne, he had also determined to brave the dangers which might easily arise for the Greek from a love affair with a Biamite girl, whose family was free and distinguished.

It had been easier for him to win her heart than he expected; yet at none of the meetings which she granted him had he rejoiced in the secret bond between them.

Hitherto her austere reserve had been invincible, and during the greater part of their interviews he had been compelled to exert all his influence to soothe, appease her, and atone for imprudent acts which he had committed.

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True, she, too, had often allowed herself to display passionate tenderness, but always only to torture him with reproaches and demands inspired by her jealousy, suspicion, and wounded pride.

Yet her beauty, and the strong power of resistance which she offered to his wooing, exerted so bewitching a thrall over him that he had been led into conceding far too much, and making vows which he could not and did not desire to fulfil.

Love had usually been to him a richly flowing well-spring of gay delight, but this bond had plunged him from one vexation into another, one anxiety to another, and now that he had almost reached the goal of his wishes, he could not help fearing that he had transformed Ledscha's love to hate.

Daphne was dear to him. He esteemed her highly, and owed her a great debt of gratitude. Yet in this hour he anathematized her unexpected journey to Tennis; for without it he would have obtained from Ledscha that very day what he desired, and could have returned to Alexandria with the certainty of finding her ready later to pose as the model for his Arachne.

Never could he find anywhere a more fitting one.

He had devoted himself with passionate love to his art, and even his enemies numbered him among its most promising disciples. Yet hither to he had not succeeded in obtaining a great and undisputed success. On the other hand, he had experienced what were termed failures in abundant measure.

The art to which he had gained entrance by so severe a struggle, and on whose soil he had laboured diligently enough, proved, so far as outward recognition was concerned, cruel to the enthusiastic disciple. Yet even now he would not have abandoned it at any price; the joy of creation compensated him richly for suffering and disappointment. Confidence in his own powers and the final triumph of his conviction had deserted him only occasionally, and for a few brief hours.

He was born for conflicts. What ill-success, what antagonism and difficulties he had encountered! Some day the laurel which had so long adorned the brow of Myrtilus must also grow green for him and the great talent whose possession he felt. With the Arachne—he was sure of this—he would compel even his opponents to accord him the recognition for which hitherto he had striven in vain.

While pacing restlessly up and down the spacious apartment, stopping from time to time before his work to fix his eyes angrily upon it, he thought of his friend's Demeter, whose head also had Daphne's features, who also bore in her hand a bundle of wheat, and even in attitude did not differ very widely from his own. And yet—eternal gods!—how thoroughly dissimilar the two were!

In the figure created by Myrtilus, supernatural dignity blended with the utmost womanly charm; in his, a pleasing head rested upon a body in whose formation he had used various models without striving to accomplish anything except to depart as far as possible from established custom, with which he was at variance.

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Yet had he not found himself, nevertheless, compelled to follow the old rules? One arm was raised, the other hung down; the right foot was put forward, the left one back.

Exactly the same as in Myrtilus's statue, and thousands of other figures of Demeter!

If he could have used the hammer and chisel, the thing might have become more powerful; but how many things he had had to consider in employing the accursed gold and ivory upon which Archias obstinately insisted!

This hammering, chipping, and filing told unfavourably upon his power and his aspiration toward grandeur.

This time the battle seemed to be lost.

It was fortunate that the conqueror was no other than Myrtilus. Often as he had gone astray in his young life, many as were the errors he had committed, not even the faintest shadow of an envious feeling concerning his friend's more successful work had ever stained his soul.

True, the fact that fate, in addition to such abundant gifts of mind and spirit, had also endowed the latter with great worldly possessions, while he, but for the generosity of his uncle Archias, must have starved, had often led Hermon to inveigh angrily against the injustice of the gods. Yet he did not grudge Myrtilus the wealth without which he could not imagine him, and which his invalid friend needed to continue successfully the struggle against the insidious disease inherited with the gold. And his sufferings! Hermon could not have endured keener pain had they been his own. He must even rejoice over the poor dear fellow's victory; for if he, Hermon, succeeded with his Arachne as he hoped, it would make Myrtilus—he could swear to it—happier than his own triumph.

After these reflections, which again reminded him of the second appointment and of Ledscha, the sculptor turned away from his work and went to the window to look across at Pelican Island, where she must not await him in vain.

The boat which was to convey him over to it lay ready in the little flotilla, where a magnificently equipped galley had just been moored to the shore, undoubtedly the one that had brought the guests from Pelusium hither. The best thing he could do was to greet them at once, share the banquet with them, and, before the dessert was served, seek the beautiful woman whom his absence threatened to make his foe. And she was certainly justified in resenting it if, with cruel lack of consideration, he paid no heed to what had been prophesied for her on this night of the full moon.

For the first time compassion mingled with his feelings for Ledscha. If to avoid the fleeting censure of aristocratic friends he left in the lurch the simple barbarian maiden

who loved him with ardent passion, it was no evidence of resolute strength of soul, but of pitiful, reprehensible weakness. No, no! He must take the nocturnal voyage in order not to grieve Ledscha.

Soon after the girl's abrupt departure he dressed himself in festal garments for the banquet. It would flatter Ledscha also if he went to her in this attire and, with his figure drawn up to its full height, he walked toward the door to go to the Alexandrian's tent.

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But what did this mean? Myrtilus was standing before his Demeter, scanning it intently with his keen artist eyes. Hermon had not noticed his entrance, and did not disturb him now, but fixed his gaze upon his mobile features in intense expectation.

There were few of his fellow-artists whose opinion he valued as highly as that of this darling of the Muse.

At a slight shake of the head, which Hermon interpreted as disapproval, he clinched his teeth; but soon his lips relaxed and his breast heaved with a sigh of relief, for the sunny glance that Myrtilus bent upon the face of the goddess seemed to show Hermon that it aroused his approval, and, as if relieved from an oppressive nightmare, he approached his friend.

The latter turned toward him, exclaiming: Daphne! As in the case of yonder bust, you have succeeded most perfectly with this dear face— only—”

“Only,” Hermon repeated slowly; “I am familiar with that evil word. Doubts knock at the door with it. Out with them honestly. I gave up my last hope of the prize yesterday while looking at your Demeter. Besides, careful scrutiny has just destroyed the last gleam of satisfaction with my own work. But if you like the head, what seem to you the greatest defects in the figure?”

“It has nothing to do with defects, which, with your rare ability, can scarcely exist,” replied the other, the faint pink flush in his beardless cheeks deepening to a more vivid hue. “It refers rather to the expression which you have given the divinity in yonder statue.” Here Myrtilus hesitated, and, turning so that he stood face to face with Hermon, asked frankly, “Did you ever seek the goddess and, when you found her, did you feel any supernatural power and beauty?”

“What a question!” exclaimed Hermon in astonishment. “A pupil of Straton, and go in search of beings and powers whose existence he denies! What my mother instilled into my heart I lost with my childhood, and you address your question only to the artist who holds his own ground, not to the boy. The power that calls creation to life, and maintains it, has for me long had nothing in common with those beings like mortals whom the multitude designates by the name of divinities.”

“I think differently,” replied Myrtilus. “While I numbered myself among the Epicureans, whose doctrine still possesses the greatest charm for me, I nevertheless shared the master’s opinion that it is insulting the gods to suppose that they will disturb their blissful repose for the sake of us insignificant mortals. Now my mind and my experience rebel against holding to this view, yet I believe with Epicurus, and with you, that the eternal laws of Nature bow to neither divine nor human will.”

“And yet,” said Hermon, “you expect me to trouble myself about those who are as powerless as myself!”

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"I only wished that you might do so," answered Myrtilus; "for they are not powerless to those who from the first assumed that they can do nothing in opposition to those changeless laws. The state, too, rules according to them, and the wise king who refrains from interfering with them in the smallest trifle can therefore wield the sceptre with mighty power. So, in my opinion, it is perfectly allowable to expect aid from the gods. But we will let that pass. A healthy man, full of exuberant vigour like yourself, rarely learns early what they can bestow in suffering and misfortune; yet where the great majority believe in them, he, too, will be unable to help forming some idea of them; nay, even you and I have experienced it. By a thousand phenomena they force themselves into the world which surrounds us and our emotional life. Epicurus, who denied their power, saw in them at least immortal beings who possess in stainless perfection everything which in mortals is disfigured by errors, weaknesses, and afflictions. To him they are the intensified, reflected image of our own nature, and I think we can do nothing wiser than to cling to that, because it shows us to what heights of beauty and power, intellect, goodness, and purity we may attain. To completely deny their existence would hardly be possible even for you, because their persons have found a place in your imagination. Since this is the case, it can only benefit you to recognise in them magnificent models, by whose means we artists, if we imitate, perfect, and model them, will create works far more sublime and beautiful than anything visible to our senses which we meet here beneath the sun."

"It is this very superiority in sublimity and beauty which I, and those who pursue the same path with me, oppose," replied Hermon. "Nature is sufficient for us. To take anything from her, mutilates; to add anything, disfigures her."

"But not," replied Myrtilus firmly, "when it is done only in a special sense, and within the limits of Nature, to which the gods also belong. The final task of art, fiercely as you and your few followers contend against it, lies in the disentanglement, enhancing, and ennobling of Nature. You, too, ought not to overlook it when you undertake to model a Demeter; for she is a goddess, no mortal like yourself. The rest or I ought rather to say the alteration which converts the mortal woman into the immortal one, the goddess—I miss, and with special regret, because you do not even deem it worth consideration."

"That I shall never do," retorted Hermon irritably, "so long as it is a changing chimera which presents itself differently to every mind."

"Yet, should it really be a chimera, it is at any rate a sublime one," Myrtilus protested, "and whoever among us artists wanders through Nature with open eyes and heart, and then examines his own soul, will find it worth while to attempt to give his ideal form."

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"Whatever stirs my breast during such walks, unless it is some unusual human being, I leave to the poet," replied Hermon. "I should be satisfied with the Demeter yonder, and you, too, probably, if—entirely apart from that—I had only succeeded fully and entirely in making her an individual—that is, a clearly outlined, distinct personality. This, you have often told me, is just wherein I am usually most successful. But here, I admit, I am baffled. Demeter hovered before me as a kindly dispenser of good gifts, a faithful, loving wife. Daphne's head expresses this; but in modelling the body I lost sight of the whole creation. While, for instance, in my fig-eater, every toe, every scrap of the tattered garments, belongs to the street urchin whom I wished to represent, in the goddess everything came by chance as the model suggested it, and you know that I used several. Had the Demeter from head to foot resembled Daphne, who has so much in common with our goddess, the statue would have been harmonious, complete, and you would perhaps have been the first to acknowledge it."

"By no means," Myrtilus eagerly interrupted. "What our statues of the gods are we two know best: a wooden block, covered with gold and sheets of ivory. But to tens of thousands the statue of the divinity must be much more. When they raise their hearts, eyes, hands to it in prayer, they must be possessed by the idea of the deity which animated us while creating it, and with which we, as it were, permeated it. If it shows them only a woman endowed with praiseworthy qualities—"

"Then," interrupted Hermon, "the worshipper should thank the sculptor; for is it not more profitable to him to be encouraged by the statue to emulate the human virtues whose successful embodiment it shows him than to strive for the aid of the botchwork of human hands, which possesses as much or as little power as the wood, gold, and ivory that compose it? If the worshipper does not appeal to the statue, but to the goddess, I fear it will be no less futile. So I shall consider it no blemish if you see in my Demeter a mortal woman, and no goddess; nay, it reconciles me in some degree to her weaknesses, to which I by no means close my eyes. I, too—I confess it—often feel a great desire to give the power of imagination greater play, and I know the divinities in whom I have lost faith as well as any one; for I, too, was once a child, and few have ever prayed to them more fervently, but with the increasing impulse toward liberty came the perception: There are no gods, and whoever bows to the power of the immortals makes himself a slave. So what I banished from life I will also remove from art, and model nothing which might not meet me to-day or to-morrow."

"Then, as an honest man, abstain altogether from making statues of the gods," interrupted his friend.

"That was my intention long ago, as you are aware," the other answered.

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“You could not commit a worse robbery upon yourself,” cried Myrtilus. “I know you; nay, perhaps I see farther into your soul than you yourself. By ingenious fetters you force the mighty winged intellect to content itself within the narrow world of reality. But the time when you will yourself rend the bonds and find the divinity you have lost, will come, and then, with your mighty power once more free, you will outstrip most of us, and me also if I live to see it.”

Then he pressed his hand upon his rattling chest and walked slowly to the couch; but Hermon followed, helped him to lie down, and with affectionate solicitude arranged his pillows.

“It is nothing,” Myrtilus said soothingly, after a few minutes’ silence. “My undermined strength has been heavily taxed to-day. The Olympians know how calmly I await death. It ends all things. Nothing will be left of me except the ashes, to which you will reduce my body, and what you call ‘possession.’ But even this can no longer belong to me after death, because I shall then be no more, and the idea of possession requires a possessor. My estate, too, is now disposed of. I have just been to the notary, and sixteen witnesses—neither more nor less—have signed my will according to the custom of this ceremonious country. There, now, if you please, go before me, and let me stay here alone a little while. Remember me to Daphne and the Pelusinians. I will join you in an hour.”

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