

Arachne — Volume 04 eBook

Arachne — Volume 04 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XIV.

Outside the door of the tent Hermon was trying to banish Althea's image from his mind. How foolishly he had overestimated last night the value of this miserable actress, who as a woman had lost all charm for him— even as a model for his Arachne!

He would rather have appeared before his pure friend with unsightly stains on his robe than while mastered by yearning for the Thracian.

The first glance at Daphne's beloved face, the first words of her greeting, taught him that he should find with her everything for which he longed.

In simple, truthful words she reproached him for having neglected her to the verge of incivility the evening before, but there was no trace of bitterness or resentment in the accusation, and she gave Hermon little time for apology, but quickly gladdened him with words of forgiveness.

In the opinion of her companion Chrysilla, Daphne ought to have kept the capricious artist waiting much longer for pardon. True, the cautious woman took no part in the conversation afterward, but she kept her charge in sight while she was skilfully knotting the fringe into a cloth which she had woven herself. On account of her favourite Philotas, it was well for Daphne to be aware that she was watched.

Chrysilla was acquainted with life, and knew that Eros never mingles more arbitrarily in the intercourse of a young couple than when, after a long separation, there is anything whatever to forgive.

Besides, many words which the two exchanged escaped her hearing, for they talked in low tones, and it was hot in the tent. Often the fatigue she felt after the sleepless night bowed her head, still comely with its unwrinkled face, though she was no longer young; then she quickly raised it again.

Neither Daphne nor Hermon noticed her. The former at once perceived that something was weighing on the sculptor's mind, but he did not need any long inquiry. He had come to confide his troubles to her, and she kindly lightened the task for him by asking why he had not gone to breakfast with the Pelusinians.

"Because I am not fit for gay company today," was the reply.

"Again dissatisfied with Fate?"

"True, it has given me small cause for contentment of late."



“Put in place of Fate the far-seeing care of the gods, and you will accept what befalls you less unkindly.”

“Let us stick to us mortals, I entreat you.”

“Very well, then. Your Demeter does not fully satisfy you.”

A discontented shrug of the shoulders was the reply.

“Then work with twofold zeal upon the Arachne.”

“Although one model I hoped to obtain forsook me, and my soul is estranged from the other.”

“Althea?” she asked eagerly, and he nodded assent.



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Daphne clapped her hands joyfully, exclaiming so loudly that Chrysis's head sprang up with a jerk. "It could not help being so! O Hermon! how anxious I have been! Now, I thought, when this horrible woman represented the transformation into the spider with such repulsive accuracy, Hermon will believe that this is the true, and therefore the right, ideal; nay, I was deceived myself while gazing. But, eternal gods! as soon as I imagined this Arachne in marble or chryselephantine work, what a painful feeling overpowered me!"

"Of course!" he replied in an irritated tone. "The thirst for beauty, to which you all succumb, would not have much satisfaction to expect from this work."

"No, no, no!" Daphne interrupted in a louder tone than usual, and with the earnest desire to convince him. "Precisely because I transported myself into your tendency, your aspirations, I recognised the danger. O Hermon! what produced so sinister an effect by the wavering light of the lamps and torches, while the thunderstorm was rising—the strands of hair, the outspread fingers, the bewildered, staring blue eyes—do you not feel yourself how artificial, how unnatural it all was? This transformation was only a clever trick of acting, nothing more. Before a quiet spectator, in the pure, truthful light of Apollo, the foe of all deception, what would this Arachne probably become? Even now—I have already said so—when I imagine her executed in marble or in gold and ivory! Beauty? Who would expect to find in the active, constantly toiling weaver, the mortal daughter of an industrious dyer in purple, the calm, refreshing charm of divine women? I at least am neither foolish nor unjust enough to do so. The degree of beauty Althea possesses would entirely satisfy me for the Arachne. But when I imagine a plastic work faithful to the model of yesterday evening—though I have seen a great deal with my own eyes, and am always ready to defer to riper judgment—I would think, while looking at it: This statue came to the artist from the stage, but never from Nature. Such would be my view, and I am not one of the initiated. But the adepts! The King, with his thorough connoisseurship and fine taste, my father, and the other famous judges, how much more keenly they would perceive and define it!"

Here she hesitated, for the blood had left Hermon's cheeks, and she saw with surprise the deep impression which the candid expression of her opinion had produced upon the artist, usually so independent and disposed to contradiction. Her judgment had undoubtedly disturbed, nay, perhaps convinced him; but at the same time his features revealed such deep depression that, far from rejoicing in so rare a success, she patted his arm like an affectionate sister, saying: "You have not yet found time to realize calmly what yesterday dazzled us all—and you," she added in a lower tone, "the most strongly."

"But now," he murmured sadly, half to himself, half to her, "my vision is doubly clear. Close before the success of which I dreamed failure and bitter disappointment."



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“If this ‘doubly’ refers to your completed work, and also to the Arachne,” cried Daphne in the affectionate desire to soothe him, “a pleasant surprise will perhaps soon await you, for Myrtilus judges your Demeter much more favourably than you yourself do, and he also betrayed to me whom it resembles.”

She blushed slightly as she spoke, and, as her companion’s gloomy face brightened for a short time, went on eagerly: “And now for the Arachne. You will and must succeed in what you so ardently strive to accomplish, a subject so exactly adapted to your magnificent virile genius and so strangely suited to the course which your art has once entered upon. And you can not fail to secure the right model. You had not found it in Althea, no, certainly not! O Hermon! if I could only make you see clearly how ill suited she, in whom everything is false, is to you—your art, your only too powerful strength, your aspiration after truth—”

“You hate her,” he broke in here in a repellent tone; but Daphne dropped her quiet composure, and her gray eyes, usually so gentle, flashed fiercely as she exclaimed: “Yes, and again yes! From my inmost soul I do, and I rejoice in it. I have long disliked her, but since yesterday I abhor her like the spider which she can simulate, like snakes and toads, falsehood and vice.”

Hermon had never seen his uncle’s peaceful daughter in this mood. The emotions that rendered this kindly soul so unlike itself could only be the one powerful couple, love and jealousy; and while gazing intently at her face, which in this moment seemed to him as beautiful as Dallas Athene armed for battle, he listened breathlessly as she continued: “Already the murderous spider had half entangled you in her net. She drew you out into the tempest—our steward Gras saw it—in order, while Zeus was raging, to deliver you to the wrath of the other gods also and the contempt of all good men; for whoever yields himself to her she destroys, sucks the marrow from his bones like the greedy harpies, and all that is noble from his soul.”

“Why, Daphne,” interrupted Chrysilla, raising herself from her cushions in alarm, “must I remind you of the moderation which distinguishes the Greeks from the barbarians, and especially the Hellenic woman—”

Here Daphne indignantly broke in: “Whoever practises moderation in the conflict against vice has already gone halfway over to evil. She utterly ruined—how long ago is it?—the unfortunate Menander, my poor Ismene’s young husband. You know them both, Hermon. Here, of course, you scarcely heard how she lured him from his wife and the lovely little girl who bears my name. She tempted the poor fellow to her ship, only to cast him off at the end of a month for another. Now he is at home again, but he thinks Ismene is the statue from the Temple of Isis, which has gained life and speech; for he has lost his mind, and when I saw him I felt as if I should die of horror and pity.



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Now she is coming home with Proclus, and, as the way led through Pelusium, she attached herself to our friends and forces herself in here with them. What does she care about her elderly travelling companion? But you—yes, you, Hermon—are the next person whom she means to capture. Just now, when my eyes closed But no! It is not only in my dreams; the hideous gray threads which proceed from this greedy spider are continually floating before me and dim the light.” Here she paused, for the maid Stephanion announced the coming of visitors, and at the same time loud voices were heard outside, and the merry party who had been attending the breakfast given by the commandant of Pelusium entered the tent.

Althea was among the guests, but she took little notice of Hermon.

Proclus, her associate in Queen Arsinoe’s favour, was again asserting his rights as her travelling companion, and she showed him plainly that the attention which he paid her was acceptable.

Meanwhile her eager, bright blue eyes were roving everywhere, and nothing that was passing around her escaped her notice.

As she greeted Daphne she perceived that her cheeks had flushed during her conversation with Hermon.

How reserved and embarrassed the sculptor’s manner was now to his uncle’s daughter, whom only yesterday he had treated with as much freedom as though she were his sister! What a bungler in dissimulation! how short-sighted was this big, strong man and remarkable artist! He had carried her, Althea, in his arms like a child for a whole quarter of an hour at the festival of Dionysus, and, in spite of the sculptor’s keen eye, he did not recognise her again!

What would not dyes and a change of manner accomplish!

Or had the memory of those mad hours revived and caused his embarrassment? If he should know that her companion, the Milesian Nanno, whom he had feasted with her on oyster pasties at Canopus after she had given the slip to her handsome young companion was Queen Arsinoe! Perhaps she would inform him of it some day if he recognised her.

Yet that could scarcely have happened. He had only been told what she betrayed to him yesterday, and was now neglecting her for Daphne’s sake. That was undoubtedly the way the matter stood. How the girl’s cheeks were glowing when she entered!

The obstacle that stood between her and Hermon was the daughter of Archias, and she, fool that she was, had attracted Hermon’s attention to her.



No matter!

He would want her for the Arachne, and she needed only to stretch out her hand to draw him to her again if she found no better amusement in Alexandria. Now she would awaken his fears that the best of models would recall her favour. Besides, it would not do to resume the pleasant game with him under the eyes of Philippus and his wife, who was a follower of the manners of old times. The right course now was to keep him until later.

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Standing at Proclus's side, she took part gaily in the general conversation; but when Myrtilus and Philemon had joined the others, and Daphne had consented to go with Philippus and Thyone that evening, in order, after offering sacrifice together to Selene, to sail for Pelusium, Althea requested the grammateus to take her, into the open air.

Before leaving the tent, however, she dropped her ostrich-feather fan as she passed Hermon, and, when he picked it up, whispered with a significant glance at Daphne, "I see that what was learned of her heart is turned to account promptly enough."

Then, laughing gaily, she continued loudly enough to be heard by her companion also: "Yesterday our young artist maintained that the Muse shunned abundance; but the works of his wealthy friend Myrtilus contradicted him, and he changed his view with the speed of lightning."

"Would that this swift alteration had concerned the direction of his art," replied Proclus in a tone audible to her alone.

Both left the tent as he spoke, and Hermon uttered a sigh of relief as he looked after them. She attributed the basest motives to him, and Daphne's opinion of her was scarcely too severe.

He no longer needed to fear her power of attraction, though, now that he had seen her again, he better understood the spell which she had exerted over him. Every movement of her lithe figure had an exquisite grace, whose charm was soothing to the artist's eye. Only there was something piercing in her gaze when it did not woo love, and, while making the base charge, her extremely thin lips had showed her sharp teeth in a manner that reminded him of the way the she-wolf among the King's wild beasts in the Paneum gardens raised her lips when any one went near her cage.

Daphne was right. Ledscha would have been infinitely better as a model for the Arachne. Everything in this proud creature was genuine and original, which was certainly not the case with Althea. Besides, stern austerity was as much a part of the Biamite as her hair and her hands, yet what ardent passion he had seen glow in her eyes! The model so long sought in vain he had found in Ledscha, who in so many respects resembled Arachne. Fool that he was to have yielded to a swift and false ebullition of feeling!

Since Myrtilus was again near him Hermon had devoted himself with fresh eagerness to his artistic task, while a voice within cried more and more loudly that the success of his new work depended entirely upon Ledscha. He must try to regain her as a model for the Arachne! But while pondering over the "how," he felt a rare sense of pleasure when Daphne spoke to him or her glance met his.



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At first he had devoted himself eagerly to his father's old friends, and especially to Thyone, and had not found it quite easy to remain firm when, in her frank, kindly, cordial manner, she tried to persuade him to accompany her and the others to Pelusium. Yet he had succeeded in refusing the worthy couple's invitation. But when he saw Philotas, whose resemblance to the King, his cousin, had just been mentioned by one of the officers, become more and more eager in his attentions to Daphne, and heard him also invited by Philippus to share the nocturnal voyage, he felt disturbed, and could not conceal from himself that the uneasiness which constantly obtained a greater mastery over him arose from the fear of losing his friend to the young aristocrat.

This was jealousy, and where it flamed so hotly love could scarcely be absent. Yet, had the shaft of Eros really struck him, how was it possible that the longing to win Ledscha back stirred so strongly within him that he finally reached a resolution concerning her?

As soon as the guests left Tennis he would approach the Biamite again. He had already whispered this intention to Myrtilus, when he heard Daphne's companion say to Thyone, "Philotas will accompany us, and on this voyage they will plight their troth if Aphrodite's powerful son accepts my sacrifice."

He involuntarily looked at the pair who were intended for each other, and saw Daphne lower her eyes, blushing, at a whisper from the young Macedonian.

His blood also crimsoned his cheeks, and when, soon after, he asked his friend whether she cared for his companionship, and Daphne assented in the most eager way, he said that he would share the voyage to Pelusium. Daphne's eyes had never yet beamed upon him so gladly and graciously. Althea was right. She must love him, and it seemed as if this conviction awoke a new star of happiness in his troubled soul.

If Philotas imagined that he could pluck the daughter of Archias like a ripe fruit from a tree, he would find himself mistaken.

Hermon did not yet exactly understand himself, only he felt certain that it would be impossible to surrender Daphne to another, and that for her sake he would give up twenty Ledschas, though he cherished infinitely great expectations from the Biamite for his art, which hitherto had been more to him than all else.

Everything that he still had to do in Tennis he could intrust to his conscientious Bias, to Myrtilus, and his slaves.

If he returned to the city of weavers, he would earnestly endeavour to palliate the offence which he had inflicted on Ledscha, and, if possible, obtain her forgiveness. Only one thing detained him—anxiety about his friend, who positively refused to share the night voyage.



He had promised his uncle Archias to care for him like a brother, and his own kind heart bade him stay with Myrtilus, and not leave him to the nursing of his very skilful but utterly unreliable body-servant, after the last night had proved to what severe attacks of his disease he was still liable.



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Myrtilus, however, earnestly entreated him not to deprive himself on his account of a pleasure which he would gladly have shared. There was plenty of time to pack the statues. As for himself, nothing would do him more good just now than complete rest in his beloved solitude, which, as Hermon knew, was more welcome to him than the gayest society. Nothing was to be feared for him now. The thunderstorm had purified the air, and another one was not to be expected soon in this dry region. He had always been well here in sunny weather. Storms, which were especially harmful to him, never came at this season of the year.

Myrtilus secretly thought that Hermon's departure would be desirable, because the slave Bias had confided to him what dangers threatened his friend from the incensed Biamite husbands.

Finally, Myrtilus turned to the others and begged them not to let Hermon leave Pelusium quickly.

When, at parting, he was alone with him, he embraced him and said more tenderly than usual: "You know how easy it will be for me to depart from life; but it would be easier still if I could leave you behind without anxiety, and that would happen if the hymeneal hymns at your marriage to Daphne preceded the dirges which will soon resound above my coffin. Yesterday I first became sure that she loves you, and, much good as you have in your nature, you owe the best to her."

Hermon clasped him in his arms with passionate affection, and after confessing that he, too, felt drawn with the utmost power toward Daphne, and urging him to anticipate complete recovery instead of an early death, he held out his hand to his friend; but Myrtilus clasped it a long time in his own, saying earnestly: "Only this one frank warning: An Arachne like the model which Althea presented yesterday evening would deal the past of your art a blow in the face. No one at Rhodes—and this is just what I prize in you—hated imitation more, yet what would using the Arachne on the pedestal for a model be except showing the world not how Hermon, but how Althea imagines the hapless transformed mortal? Even if Ledscha withdraws from you, hold fast to her image. It will live on in your soul. Recall it there, free it from whatever is superfluous, supply whatever it lacks, animate it with the idea of the tireless artist, the mocking, defiant mortal woman who ended her life as the weaver of weavers in the insect world, as you have so often vividly described her to me. Then, my dear fellow, you will remain loyal to yourself, and therefore also to the higher truth, toward which every one of us who labours earnestly strives, and, myself included, there is no one who wields hammer and chisel in Greece who could contest the prize with you."

CHAPTER XV.

When the sun was approaching the western horizon the travellers started.

Light mists veiled the radiant right eye of the goddess of heaven. The blood of the contending spirits of light and darkness, which usually dyed the west of Egypt crimson at the departure of the great sun god, to-day vanished from sight.



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The sultry air was damp and oppressive, and experienced old Philippus, who had commanded a fleet of considerable size under the first Ptolemies, agreed with the captain of the vessel, who pointed to several small dark clouds under the silvery stratus, and expressed the fear that Selene would hardly illumine the ship's course during the coming night.

But before the departure the travellers had offered sacrifices to the foam-born Cyprian Aphrodite and the Dioscuri, the protectors of mariners, and the conversation took the gayest turn.

In the harbour of the neighbouring seaport Tanis they went aboard of the commandant's state galley, one of the largest and finest in the royal fleet, where a banquet awaited them.

Cushions were arranged on the high poop, and the sea was as smooth as the silver dishes in which viands were offered to the guests.

True, not a breath stirred the still, sultry air, but the three long double ranks of rowers in the hold of the ship provided for her swift progress, and if no contrary wind sprang up she would run into the harbour of Pelusium before the last goblet was emptied.

Soon after the departure it seemed as if the captain of the little vessel had erred in his prediction, for the moon burst victoriously through the black clouds, only its shining orb was surrounded by a dull, glimmering halo.

Doubtless many a guest longed for a cool breeze, but when the mixed wine had moistened the parched tongues the talk gained fresh animation.

Every one did his or her part, for the point in question was to induce Philippus and his wife to visit Alexandria again and spend some time there as beloved guests with Daphne in her father's house or in the palace of Philotas, who jestingly, yet with many reasons, contested the honour with the absent Archias.

The old warrior had remained away from the capital for several years; he alone knew why. Now the act which had incensed him and the offence inflicted upon him were forgotten, and, having passed seventy four years, he intended to ask the commander in chief once more for the retirement from the army which the monarch had several times refused, in order, as a free man, to seek again the city which in his present position he had so long avoided.

Thyone, it is true, thought that her husband's youthful vigour rendered this step premature, but the visit to Alexandria harmonized with her own wishes.

Proclus eagerly sided with her. "To him," said the man of manifold knowledge, who as high priest of Apollo was fond of speaking in an instructive tone, "experience showed



that men like Philippus, who solely on account of the number of their years withdrew their services from the state, felt unhappy, and, like the unused ploughshare, became prematurely rusty. What they lacked, and what Philippus would also miss, was not merely the occupation, which might easily be supplied by another, but still more the habit of command. One who had had thousands subject to his will was readily overcome by the feeling that he was going down hill, when only a few dozen of his own slaves and his wife obeyed him.”



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This word aroused the mirth of old Philippus, who praised all the good qualities of Macedonian wives except that of obedience, while Thyone protested that during her more than forty years of married life her husband had become so much accustomed to her complete submission than he no longer noticed it. If Philippus should command her to-morrow to leave their comfortable palace in Pelusium to accompany him to Alexandria, where they possessed no home of their own, he would see how willingly she obeyed him.

While speaking, her bright, clear eyes, which seemed to float in the deep hollows sunk by age, sparkled so merrily in her wrinkled face that Philippus shook his finger gaily at her and showed plainly how much pleasure the jest of the old companion of his wanderings gave him.

Yet he insisted upon his purpose of not entering Alexandria again until he had resigned his office, and to do this at present was impossible, since he was bound just now, as if with chains, to the important frontier fortress. Besides, there had probably been little change in the capital since the death of his beloved old companion in arms and master, the late King.

This assertion evoked a storm of contradiction, and even the younger officers, who usually imposed severe restraint upon themselves in the general's presence, raised their voices to prove that they, too, had looked around the flourishing capital with open eyes.

Yet it was not six decades since Philippus, then a lad of seventeen, had been present at its foundation.

His father, who had commanded as hipparch a division of cavalry in the army of Alexander the Great, had sent for the sturdy youth just at that time to come to Egypt, that he might enter the army. The conqueror of the world had himself assigned him, as a young Macedonian of good family, to the corps of the Hetairoi; and how the vigorous old man's eyes sparkled as, with youthful enthusiasm, he spoke of the divine vanquisher of the world who had at that time condescended to address him, gazed at him keenly yet encouragingly with his all-discerning but kindly blue eyes, and extended his hand to him!

"That," he cried, "made this rough right hand precious to me. Often when, in Asia, in scorching India, and later here also, wounded or exhausted, it was ready to refuse its service, a spirit voice within cried, 'Do not forget that he touched it'; and then, as if I had drunk the noble wine of Byblus, a fiery stream flowed from my heart into the paralyzed hand, and, as though animated with new life, I used it again and kept it worthy of his touch. To have seen a darling of the gods like him, young men, makes us greater. It teaches us how even we human beings are permitted to resemble the immortals. Now he is transported among the gods, and the Olympians received him, if any one, gladly.



Whoever shared the deeds of such a hero takes a small portion of his renown with him through life and into the grave, and whom he touched, as befell me, feels himself consecrated, and whatever is petty and base flows away from him like water from the anointed body of the wrestler. Therefore I consider myself fortunate above thousands of others, and if there is anything which still tempts me to go to Alexandria, it is the desire to touch his dead body once more. To do that before I die is my most ardent desire.”



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“Then gratify it!” cried Thyone with urgent impatience; but Proclus turned to the matron, and, after exchanging a hasty glance with Althea, said: “You probably know, my venerable friend, that Queen Arsinoe, who most deeply honours your illustrious husband, had already arranged to have him summoned to the capital as priest of Alexander. True, in this position he would have had the burden of disposing of all the revenues from the temples throughout Egypt; but, on the other hand, he would always have his master’s mortal remains near and be permitted to be their guardian. What influences baffled the Queen’s wish certainly have not remained hidden from you here.”

“You are mistaken,” replied Philippus gravely. “Not the least whisper of this matter reached my ears, and it is fortunate.”

“Impossible!” Althea eagerly interrupted; “nothing else was talked of for weeks in the royal palace. Queen Arsinoe—you might be jealous, Lady Thyone—has been fairly in love with your hero ever since her last stay in your house on her way home from Thrace, and she has not yet given up her desire to see him in the capital as priest of Alexander. It seems to her just and fair that the old companion of the greatest of the great should have the highest place, next to her husband’s, in the city whose foundation he witnessed. Arsinoe speaks of you also with all the affection natural to her feeling heart.”

“This is as flattering as it is surprising,” replied Thyone. “The attention we showed her in Pelusium was nothing more than we owed to the wife of the sovereign. But the court is not the principal attraction that draws me to the capital. It would make Philippus happy—you have just heard him say so—to remember his old master beside the tomb of Alexander.”

“And,” added Daphne, “how amazed you will be when you see the present form of the ‘Soma’, in which rests the golden coffin with the body of the divine hero whom the fortunate Philippus aided to conquer the world!”

“You are jesting,” interrupted the old warrior. “I aided him only as the drops in the stream help to turn the wheel of the mill. As to his body, true, I marched at the head of the procession which bore it to Memphis and thence to Alexandria. In the Soma I was permitted to think of him with devout reverence, and meantime I felt as if I had again seen him with these eyes—exactly as he looked in the Egyptian fishing village of Rhacotis, which he transformed into your magnificent Alexandria. What a youth he was! Even what would have been a defect in others became a beauty in him. The powerful neck which supported his divine head was a little crooked; but what grace it lent him when he turned kindly to any one! One scarcely noticed it, and yet it was like the bend of a petitioner, and gave the wish which he expressed resistless power. When he stood erect, the sharpest eye could not detect it. Would that he could appear before me thus once more! Besides, the buildings which surrounded the golden coffin were nearly completed at the time of our departure.”



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“But the statues, reliefs, and mosaic work were lacking,” said Hermon. “They were executed by Lysippus, Euphranor, and others of our greatest artists; the paintings by Apelles himself, Antiphilus, and Nicias. Only those who had won renown were permitted to take part in this work, and the Ares rushing to battle, created by our Myrtilus, can be seen among the others. The tomb of Alexander was not entirely completed until three years ago.”

“At the same time as the Paneum,” added Philotas, completing the sentence; and Althea, waving her beaker toward the old hero, remarked: “When you have your quarters in the royal palace with your crowned admirer, Arsinoe—which, I hope, will be very soon—I will be your guide.”

“That office is already bestowed on me by the Lady Thyone,” Daphne quietly replied.

“And you think that, in this case, obedience is the husband’s duty?” cried the other, with a sneering laugh.

“It would only be the confirmation of a wise choice,” replied Philippus, who disliked the Thracian’s fawning manner.

Thyone, too, did not favour her, and had glanced indignantly at her when Althea made her rude remark. Now she turned to Daphne, and her plain face regained its pleasant expression as she exclaimed: “We really promised your father to let him show us the way, child; but, unfortunately, we are not yet in Alexandria and the Paneum.”

“But you would set out to-morrow,” Hermon protested, “if we could succeed in fitly describing what now awaits you there. There is only one Alexandria, and no city in the world can offer a more beautiful scene than is visible from the mountain in the Paneum gardens.”

“Certainly not,” protested the young hipparch, who had studied in Athens. “I stood on the Acropolis; I was permitted to visit Rhodes and Miletus—”

“And you saw nothing more beautiful there,” cried Proclus. “The aristocratic Roman envoys, who left us a short time ago, admitted the same thing. They are just men, for the view from the Capitol of their growing city is also to be seen. When the King’s command led me to the Tiber, many things surprised me; but, as a whole, how shall I compare the two cities? The older Rome, with her admirable military power: a barbarian who is just beginning to cultivate more refined manners— Alexandria: a rich, aristocratic Hellene who, like you, my young friend, completed her education in Ilissus, and unites to the elegant taste and intellect of the Athenian the mysterious thoughtfulness of the Egyptian, the tireless industry of the Jew, and the many-sided wisdom and brilliant magnificence of the other Oriental countries.”



“But who disdains to dazzle the eyes with Asiatic splendour,” interrupted Philotas.

“And yet what do we not hear about the unprecedented luxury in the royal palace!” growled the gray-haired warrior.

“Parsimony—the gods be praised!—no one need expect from our royal pair,” Althea broke in; “but King Ptolemy uses his paternal wealth for very different purposes than glittering gems and golden chambers. If you disdain my guidance, honoured hero, at least accept that of some genuine Alexandrian. Then you will understand Proclus’s apt simile. You ought to begin with the royal palaces in the Brucheium.”

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“No, no-with the harbour of Eunostus!” interrupted the grammateus.

“With the Soma!” cried the young hipparch, while Daphne wished to have the tour begin in the Paneum gardens.

“They were already laid out when we left Alexandria,” said Thyone.

“And they have grown marvellously, as if creative Nature had doubled her powers in their behalf,” Hermon added eagerly. “But man has also wrought amazing miracles here. Industrious hands reared an actual mountain. A winding path leads to the top, and when you stand upon the summit and look northward you at first feel like the sailor who steps on shore and hears the people speak a language which is new to him. It seems like a jumble of meaningless sounds until he learns, not only to understand the words, but also to distinguish the sentences. Temples and palaces, statues and columns appear everywhere in motley confusion. Each one, if you separate it from the whole and give it a careful examination, is worthy of inspection, nay, of admiration. Here are light, graceful creations of Hellenic, yonder heavy, sombre ones of Egyptian art, and in the background the exquisite azure of the eternal sea, which the marvellous structure of the heptastadium unites to the land; while on the island of Pharos the lighthouse of Sostratus towers aloft almost to the sky, and with a flood of light points out the way to mariners who approach the great harbour at night. Countless vessels are also at anchor in the Eunostus. The riches of the whole earth flow into both havens. And the life and movement there and in the inland harbour on Lake Mareotis, where the Nile boats land! From early until late, what a busy throng, what an abundance of wares—and how many of the most valuable goods are made in our own city! for whatever useful, fine, and costly articles industrial art produces are manufactured here. The roof has not yet been put on many a factory in which busy workers are already making beautiful things. Here the weaver’s shuttle flies, yonder gold is spun around slender threads of sheep guts, elsewhere costly materials are embroidered by women’s nimble fingers with the prepared gold thread. There glass is blown, or weapons and iron utensils are forged. Finely polished knives split the pith of the papyrus, and long rows of workmen and workwomen gum the strips together. No hand, no head is permitted to rest. In the Museum the brains of the great thinkers and investigators are toiling. Here, too, reality asserts its rights. The time for chimeras and wretched polemics is over. Now it is observing, fathoming, turning to account, nothing more!”



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“Gently, my young friend,” Proclus interrupted the artist. “I know that you, too, sat at the feet of some of the philosophers in the Museum, and still uphold the teachings of Straton, which your fellow-pupil, King Ptolemy, outgrew long ago. Yet he, also, recognised in philosophy, first of all, the bond which unites the widely sundered acquisitions of the intellect, the vital breath which pervades them, the touchstone which proves each true or false. If the praise of Alexandria is to be sung, we must not forget the library to which the most precious treasures of knowledge of the East and West are flowing, and which feeds those who thirst for knowledge with the intellectual gains of former ages and other nations. Honour, too, to our King, and, that I may be just, to his illustrious wife; for wherever in the Grecian world a friend of the Muses appears, whether he is investigator, poet, architect, sculptor, artist, actor, or singer, he is drawn to Alexandria, and, that he may not be idle, work is provided. Palaces spring from the earth quickly enough.”

“Yet not like mushrooms,” Hermon interrupted, “but as the noblest, most carefully executed creations of art-sculpture and painting provide for their decoration both without and within.”

“And,” Proclus went on, “abodes are erected for the gods as well as for men, both Egyptian and Hellenic divinities, each in their own style, and so beautiful that it must be a pleasure for them to dwell under the new roof.”

“Go to the gardens of the Paneum, friends!” cried young Philotas; and Hermon, nodding to Thyone, added gaily: “Then you must climb the mountain and keep your eyes open while you are ascending the winding path. You will find enough to do to look at all the new sights. You will stand there with dry feet, but your soul will bathe in eternal, imperishable, divine beauty.”

“The foe of beauty!” exclaimed Proclus, pointing to the sculptor with a scornful glance; but Daphne, full of joyous emotion, whispered to Hermon as he approached her: “Eternal, divine beauty! To hear it thus praised by you makes me happy.”

“Yes,” cried the artist, “what else should I call what has so often filled me with the deepest rapture? The Greek language has no more fitting expression for the grand and lofty things that hovered before me, and which I called by that chameleon of a word. Yet I have a different meaning from what appears before you at its sound. Were I to call it truth, you would scarcely understand me, but when I conjure before my soul the image of Alexandria, with all that springs from it, all that is moving, creating, and thriving with such marvellous freedom, naturalness, and variety within it, it is not alone the beauty that pleases the eye which delights me; I value more the sound natural growth, the genuine, abundant life. To truth, Daphne, as I mean it.”

He raised his goblet as he spoke and drank to her.



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She willingly pledged him, but, after removing her lips from the cup, she eagerly exclaimed: "Show it to us, with the mind which animates it, in perfect form, and I should not know wherein it was to be distinguished from the beauty which hitherto has been our highest goal."

Here the helmsman's loud shout, "The light of Pelusium!" interrupted the conversation. The bright glare from the lighthouse of this city was really piercing the misty night air, which for some time had again concealed the moon.

There was no further connected conversation, for the sea was now rising and falling in broad, leaden, almost imperceptible waves. The comfort of most of Philippus's guests was destroyed, and the ladies uttered a sigh of relief when they had descended from the lofty galley and the boats that conveyed them ashore, and their feet once more pressed the solid land. The party of travellers went to the commandant's magnificent palace to rest, and Hermon also retired to his room, but sleep fled from his couch.

No one on earth was nearer to his heart and mind than Daphne, and it often seemed as if her kind, loyal, yet firm look was resting upon him; but the memory of Ledscha also constantly forced itself upon his mind and stirred his blood. When he thought of the menacing fire of her dark eyes, she seemed to him as terrible as one of the unlovely creatures born of Night, the Erinyes, Apate, and Eris.

Then he could not help recalling their meetings in the grove of Astarte, her self-forgetting, passionate tenderness, and the wonderfully delicate beauty of her foreign type. True, she had never laughed in his presence; but what a peculiar charm there was in her smile! Had he really lost her entirely and forever? Would it not yet be possible to obtain her forgiveness and persuade her to pose as the model of his Arachne?

During the voyage to Pelusium he had caught Althea's eye again and again, and rejected as an insult her demand to give her his whole love. The success of the Arachne depended upon Ledscha, and on her alone. He had nothing good to expect from the Demeter, and during the nocturnal meditation, which shows everything in the darkest colours, his best plan seemed to be to destroy the unsuccessful statue and not exhibit it for the verdict of the judges.

But if he went to work again in Tennis to model the Arachne, did not love for Daphne forbid him to sue afresh for Ledscha's favour?

What a terrible conflict of feelings!

But perhaps all this might gain a more satisfactory aspect by daylight. Now he felt as though he had entangled himself in a snare. Besides, other thoughts drove sleep from his couch.



The window spaces were closed by wooden shutters, and whenever they moved with a low creaking or louder banging Hermon started and forgot everything else in anxiety about his invalid friend, whose suffering every strong wind brought on again, and often seriously increased.



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Three times he sprang up from the soft wool, covered with linen sheets, and looked out to convince himself that no storm had risen. But, though masses of black clouds concealed the moon and stars, and the sea beat heavily against the solid walls of the harbour, as yet only a sultry breeze of no great strength blew on his head as he thrust it into the night air.

This weather could scarcely be dangerous to Myrtilus, yet when the morning relieved him from the torturing anxiety which he had found under his host's roof instead of rest and sleep, gray and black clouds were sweeping as swiftly over the port and the ramparts beside him as if they were already driven by a tempest, and warm raindrops besprinkled his face.

He went, full of anxiety, to take his bath, and, while committing the care of the adornment of his outer man to one of the household slaves, he determined that unless—as often happened in this country—the sun gained the victory over the clouds, he would return to Tennis and join Myrtilus.

In the hall of the men he met the rest of the old hero's guests.

They received him pleasantly enough, Althea alone barely noticed his greeting; she seemed to suspect in what way he thought of her.

Thyone and Daphne extended their hands to him all the more cordially.

Philippus did not appear until after breakfast. He had been detained by important despatches from Alexandria, and by questions and communications from Proclus. The latter desired to ascertain whether the influential warrior who commanded the most important fortress in the country could be persuaded to join a conspiracy formed by Arsinoe against her royal husband, but he seemed to have left Philippus with very faint hopes.

Subordinate officers and messengers also frequently claimed the commandant's attention. When the market place was filling, however, the sturdy old soldier kindly fulfilled his duties as host by offering to show his guests the sights of the fortified seaport.

Hermon also accompanied him at Daphne's side, but he made it easy for Philotas to engross her attention; for, though the immense thickness of the walls and the arrangement of the wooden towers which, crowned with battlements, rose at long intervals, seemed to him also well worth seeing, he gave them only partial attention.

While Philippus was showing the guests how safely the archers and slingers could be concealed behind the walls and battlements and discharge their missiles, and explaining the purpose of the great catapults on the outermost dike washed by the sea,



the artist was listening to the ever-increasing roar of the waves which poured into the harbour from the open sea, to their loud dashing against the strong mole, to the shrill scream of the sea gulls, the flapping of the sails, which were being taken in everywhere—in short, to all the sounds occasioned by the rising violence of the wind.



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There were not a few war ships in the port and among them perfect giants of amazing size and unusual construction, but Hermon had already seen many similar ones.

When, shortly after noon, the sun for a few brief moments pierced with scorching rays the dark curtain that shrouded it from sight, and then suddenly dense masses of clouds, driven from the sea by the tempest, covered the day star, his eyes and ears were engrossed entirely by the uproar of the elements.

The air darkened as if night was falling at this noontide hour, and with savage fury the foaming mountain waves rushed like mad wild beasts in fierce assault upon the mole, the walls, and the dikes of the fortified port.

“Home!” cried Thyone, and again entered the litter which she had left to inspect the new catapults.

Althea, trembling, drew her peplos together as the storm swept her light figure before it, and, shrieking, struggled against the black slaves who tried to lift her upon the war elephant which had borne her here.

Philotas gave his arm to Daphne. Hermon had ceased to notice her; he had just gone to his gray-haired host with the entreaty that he would give him a ship for the voyage to Tennis, where Myrtilus would need his assistance.

“It is impossible in such weather,” was the reply.

“Then I will ride!” cried Hermon resolutely, and Philippus scanned the son of his old friend and companion in arms with an expression of quiet satisfaction in his eyes, still sparkling brightly, and answered quickly, “You shall have two horses, my boy, and a guide who knows the road besides.”

Then, turning swiftly to one of the officers who accompanied him, he ordered him to provide what was necessary.

When, soon after, in the impluvium, the tempest tore the velarium that covered the open space from its rings, and the ladies endeavoured to detain Hermon, Philippus silenced them with the remark:

“A disagreeable ride is before him, but what urges him on is pleasing to the gods. I have just ventured to send out a carrier dove,” he added, turning to the artist, “to inform Myrtilus that he may expect you before sunset. The storm comes from the east, otherwise it would hardly reach the goal. Put even if it should be lost, what does it matter?”

Thyone nodded to her old husband with a look of pleasure, and her eyes shone through tears at Hermon as she clasped his hand and, remembering her friend, his mother,



exclaimed: "Go, then, you true son of your father, and tell your friend that we will offer sacrifices for his welfare."

"A lean chicken to Aesculapius," whispered the grammateus to Althea. "She holds on to the oboli."

"Which, at any rate, would be hard enough to dispose of in this wretched place unless one were a dealer in weapons or a thirsty sailor," sighed the Thracian. "As soon as the sky and sea are blue again, chains could not keep me here. And the cooing around this insipid rich beauty into the bargain!"



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This remark referred to Philotas, who was just offering Daphne a magnificent bunch of roses, which a mounted messenger had brought to him from Alexandria.

The girl received it with a grateful glance, but she instantly separated one of the most beautiful blossoms from its companions and handed it to Hermon, saying, "For our suffering friend, with my affectionate remembrances."

The artist pressed her dear hand with a tender look of love, intended to express how difficult it was for him to leave her, and when, just at that moment, a slave announced that the horses were waiting, Thyone whispered: "Have no anxiety, my son! Your ride away from her through the tempest will bring you a better reward than his slave's swift horse will bear the giver of the roses."

CHAPTER XVI.

Hermon, with the rose for his friend fastened in the breast folds of his chiton, mounted his horse gratefully, and his companion, a sinewy, bronzed Midianite, who was also to attend to the opening of the fortress gates, did the same.

Before reaching the open country the sculptor had to ride through the whole city, with which he was entirely unfamiliar. Fiercely as the storm was sweeping down the streets and squares, and often as the horseman was forced to hold on to his travelling hat and draw his chlamys closer around him, he felt the anxieties which had made his night sleepless and saddened his day suddenly leave him as if by a miracle. Was it the consciousness of having acted rightly? was it the friendly farewell which Daphne had given him, and the hope Thyone had aroused, or the expectation of seeing Ledscha once more, and at least regaining her good will, that had restored his lost light-heartedness? He did not know himself, nor did he desire to know.

While formerly he had merely glanced carelessly about him in Pelusium, and only half listened to the explanations given by the veteran's deep voice, now whatever he saw appeared in clear outlines and awakened his interest, in spite of the annoyances caused by the storm.

Had he not known that he was in Pelusium, it would have been difficult for him to determine whether the city he was crossing was an Egyptian, a Hellenic, or a Syrian one; for here rose an ancient temple of the time of the Pharaohs, with obelisks and colossal statues before the lofty pylons, yonder the sanctuary of Poseidon, surrounded by stately rows of Doric columns, and farther on the smaller temple dedicated to the Dioscuri, and the circular Grecian building that belonged to Aphrodite.

In another spot, still close to the harbour, he saw the large buildings consecrated to the worship of the Syrian Baal and Astarte.



Here he was obliged to wait awhile, for the tempest had excited the war elephants which were returning from their exercising ground, and their black keepers only succeeded with the utmost difficulty in restraining them. Shrieking with fear, the few persons who were in the street besides the soldiers, that were everywhere present, scattered before the huge, terrified animals.



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The costume and appearance of the citizens, too, gave no clew to the country to which the place belonged; there were as many Egyptians among them as Greeks, Syrians, and negroes. Asiatics appeared in the majority only in the market place, where the dealers were just leaving their stands to secure their goods from the storm. In front of the big building where the famous Pelusian xythus beer was brewed, the drink was being carried away in jugs and wineskins, in ox-carts and on donkeys. Here, too, men were loading camels, which were rarely seen in Egypt, and had been introduced there only a short time before.

How forcibly all these things riveted Hermon's attention, now that no one was at hand to explain them and no delay was permitted! He scarcely had time for recollection and expectation.

Finally, the last gate was unlocked, and the ramparts and moats lay behind him.

Thus far the wind had kept back the rain, and only scattered drops lashed the riders' faces; but as soon as they entered the open country, it seemed as though the pent-up floods burst the barriers which retained them above, and a torrent of water such as only those dry regions know rushed, not in straight or slanting lines, but in thick streams, whirled by the hurricane, upon the marshy land which stretched from Pelusium to Tennis, and on the horsemen.

The road led along a dike raised above fields which, at this season of the year, were under water, and Hermon's companion knew it well.

For a time both riders allowed themselves to be drenched in silence. The water ran down upon them from their broad-brimmed hats, and their dripping horses trotted with drooping heads and steaming flanks one behind the other until, at the very brick-kiln where Ledscha had recalled her widowed sister's unruly slaves to obedience, the guide stopped with an oath, and pointed to the water which had risen to the top of the dam, and in some places concealed the road from their eyes.

Now it was no longer possible to trot, for the guide was obliged to seek the traces of the dike with great caution. Meanwhile the force of the pouring rain by no means lessened—nay, it even seemed to increase—and the horses were already wading in water up to their fetlocks.

But if the votive stones, the little altars and statues of the gods, the bushes and single trees along the sides of the dike road were overflowed while the travellers were in the region of the marsh, they would be obliged to interrupt their journey, for the danger of sinking into the morass with their horses would then threaten them.

Even at the brick-kiln travellers, soldiers, and trains of merchandise had stopped to wait for the end of the cloud-burst.



In front of the farmhouse, too, which Hermon and his companion next reached, they saw dozens of people seeking shelter, and the Midianite urged his master to join them for a short time at least. The wisest course here was probably to yield, and Hermon was already turning his horse's head toward the house when a Greek messenger dashed past the beckoning refuge and also by him.

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“Do you dare to ride farther?” the artist shouted in a tone of warning inquiry to the man on the dripping bay, and the latter, without pausing, answered: “Duty! On business for the King!”

Then Hermon turned his steed back toward the road, beat the water from his soaked beard with the edge of his hand, and with a curt “Forward!” announced his decision to his companion. Duty summoned him also, and what another risked for the King he would not fail to do for his friend.

The Midianite, shaking his head, rode angrily after him; but, though the violence of the rain was lessening, the wind began to blow with redoubled force, beating and lashing the boundless expanse of the quickly formed lake with such savage fury that it rolled in surges like the sea, and sweeping over it dense clouds of foam like the sand waves tossed by the desert tempests.

Sometimes moaning, sometimes whistling, the gusts of the hurricane drove the water and the travellers before it, while the rain poured from the sky to the earth, and wherever it struck splashed upward, making little whirlpools and swiftly breaking bubbles.

What might not Myrtilus suffer in this storm! This thought strengthened Hermon’s courage to twice ride past other farmhouses which offered shelter. At the third the horse refused to wade farther in such a tempest, so there was nothing to be done except spring off and lead it to the higher ground which the water had not yet reached.

The interior of the peasant hut was filled with people who had sought shelter there, and the stifling atmosphere which the artist felt at the door induced him to remain outside.

He had stood there dripping barely fifteen minutes when loud shouts and yells were heard on the road from Pelusium by which he had come, and upon the flooded dike appeared a body of men rushing forward with marvellous speed.

The nearer they came the fiercer and more bewildering sounded the loud, shrill medley of their frantic cries, mingled with hoarse laughter, and the spectacle presented to the eyes was no less rough and bold.

The majority seemed to be powerful men. Their complexions were as light as the Macedonians; their fair, red, and brown locks were thick, unkempt, and bristling. Most of the reckless, defiantly bold faces were smooth-shaven, with only a mustache on the upper lip, and sometimes a short imperial. All carried weapons, and a fleece covered the shoulders of many, while chains, ornamented with the teeth of animals, hung on their white muscular chests.



“Galatians,” Hermon heard one man near him call to another. “They came to the fortress as auxiliary troops. Philippus forbade them to plunder on pain of death, and showed them—the gods be thanked!—that he was in earnest. Otherwise it would soon look here as though the plagues of locusts, flood, and fire had visited us at once. Red-haired men are not the only sons of Typhon!”

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And Hermon thought that he had indeed never seen any human beings equally fierce, bold to the verge of reckless madness, as these Gallic warriors. The tempest which swept them forward, and the water through which they waded, only seemed to increase their enjoyment, for sheer delight rang in their exulting shouts and yells.

Oh, yes! To march amid this uproar of the elements was a pleasure to the healthy men. It afforded them the rarest, most enlivening delight. For a long time nothing had so strongly reminded them of the roaring of the wind and the rushing of the rain in their northern home. It seemed a delicious relief, after the heat and dryness of the south, which they had endured with groans.

When they perceived the eyes fixed upon them they swung their weapons, arched their breasts with conscious vanity, distorted their faces into terrible threatening grimaces, or raised bugle horns to their lips, drew from them shrill, ear-piercing notes and gloated, with childish delight, in the terror of the gaping crowd, on whom the restraint of authority sternly forbade them to show their mettle.

Lust of rapine and greed for booty glittered in many a fiery, longing look, but their leaders kept them in check with the sword. So they rushed on without stopping, like a thunderstorm pregnant with destruction which the wind drives over a terrified village.

Hermon also had to take the road they followed, and, after giving the Gauls a long start, he set out again.

But though he succeeded in passing the marshy region without injury, there had been delay after delay; here the horses had left the flooded dike road and floundered up to their knees in the morass, there trees from the roadside, uprooted by the storm, barred the way.

As night closed in the rain ceased and the wind began to subside, but dark clouds covered the sky, and the horsemen were still an hour's ride from the place where the road ended at the little harbour from which travellers entered the boat which conveyed them to Tennis.

The way no longer led through the marsh, but through tilled lands, and crossed the ditches which irrigated the fields on wooden bridges.

On their account, in the dense darkness which prevailed, caution was necessary, and this the guide certainly did not lack. He rode at a slow walk in front of the artist, and had just pointed out to him the light at the landing place of the boat which went to Tennis, when Hermon was suddenly startled by a loud cry, followed by clattering and splashing.

With swift presence of mind he sprang from his horse and found his conjecture verified. The bridge had broken down, and horse and rider had fallen into the broad canal.



“The Galatians!” reached Hermon from the dark depths, and the exclamation relieved him concerning the fate of the Midianite.

The latter soon struggled up to the road uninjured. The bridge must have given way under the feet of the savage horde, unless the Gallic monsters, with brutal malice, had intentionally shattered it.



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The first supposition, however, seemed to be the correct one, for as Hermon approached the canal he heard moans of pain. One of the Gauls had apparently met with an accident in the fall of the bridge and been deserted by his comrades. With the skill acquired in the wrestling school, Hermon descended into the canal to look for the wounded man, while his guide undertook to get the horses ashore.

The deep darkness considerably increased the difficulty of carrying out his purpose, but the young Greek went up to his neck in the water he could not become wetter than he was already. So he remained in the ditch until he found the injured man whose groans of suffering pierced his compassionate heart.

He was obliged to release the luckless Gaul from the broken timbers of the bridge, and, when Hermon had dragged him out on the opposite bank of the canal, he made no answer to any question. A falling beam had probably struck him senseless.

His hair, which Hermon's groping fingers informed him was thick and rough, seemed to denote a Gaul, but a full, long beard was very rarely seen in this nation, and the wounded man wore one. Nor could anything be discovered from the ornaments or weapons of this fierce barbarian.

But to whatever people he might belong, he certainly was not a Greek. The thoroughly un-Hellenic wrapping up of the legs proved that.

No matter! Hermon at any rate was dealing with some one who was severely injured, and the self-sacrificing pity with which even suffering animals inspired him, and which in his boyhood had drawn upon him the jeers of the companions of his own age, did not abandon him now.

Reluctantly obeying his command, the Midianite helped him bandage the sufferer's head, in which a wound could be felt, as well as it could be done in the darkness, and lift him on the artist's horse. During this time fresh groans issued from the bearded lips of the injured warrior, and Hermon walked by his side, guarding the senseless man from the danger of falling from the back of the horse as it slowly followed the Midianite's.

This tiresome walk, however, did not last long; the landing place was reached sooner than Hermon expected, and the ferryboat bore the travellers and the horses to Tennis.

By the flickering light of the captain's lantern it was ascertained that the wounded man, in spite of his long dark beard, was probably a Gaul. The stupor was to be attributed to the fall of a beam on his head, and the shock, rather than to the wound. The great loss of blood sustained by the young and powerful soldier had probably caused the duration of the swoon.



During the attempts at resuscitation a sailor boy offered his assistance. He carefully held the lantern, and, as its flickering light fell for brief moments upon the artist's face, the lad of thirteen or fourteen asked if he was Hermon of Alexandria.

A curt "If you will permit," answered the question, considered by the Hellenes an unseemly one, especially from such a youth; but the sculptor paid no further attention to him, for, while devoting himself honestly to the wounded man, his anxiety about his invalid friend increased, and Ledscha's image also rose again before him.



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At last the ferryboat touched the land, and when Hermon looked around for the lad he had already leaped ashore, and was just vanishing in the darkness.

It was probably within an hour of midnight.

The gale was still blowing fiercely over the water, driving the black clouds across the dark sky, sometimes with long-drawn, wailing sounds, sometimes with sharp, whistling ones. The rain had wholly ceased, and seemed to have exhausted itself here in the afternoon.

As Archias's white house was a considerable distance from the landing place of the ferryboat, Hermon had the wounded warrior carried to it by Biamite sailors, and again mounted his horse to ride to Myrtilus at as swift a trot as the soaked, wretched, but familiar road would permit.

Considerable time had been spent in obtaining a litter for the Gaul, yet Hermon was surprised to meet the lad who had questioned him so boldly on the ferryboat coming, not from the landing place, but running toward it again from the city, and then saw him follow the shore, carrying a blazing torch, which he waved saucily. The wind blew aside the flame and smoke which came from the burning pitch, but it shone brightly through the gloom and permitted the boy to be distinctly seen. Whence had the nimble fellow come so quickly? How had he succeeded, in this fierce gale, in kindling the torch so soon into a powerful flame? Was it not foolish to let a child amuse itself in the middle of the night with so dangerous a toy?

Hermon hastily thought over these questions, but the supposition that the light of the torch might be intended for a signal did not occur to him.

Besides, the boy and the light in his hand occupied his mind only a short time. He had better things to think of. With what longing Myrtilus must now be expecting his arrival! But the Gaul needed his aid no less urgently than his friend. Accurately as he knew what remedies relieved Myrtilus in severe attacks of illness, he could scarcely dispense with an assistant or a leech for the other, and the idea swiftly flashed upon him that the wounded man would afford him an opportunity of seeing Ledscha again.

She had told him more than once about the healing art possessed by old Tabus on the Owl's Nest. Suppose he should now seek the angry girl to entreat her to speak to the aged miracle-worker in behalf of the sorely wounded young foreigner?

Here he interrupted himself; something new claimed his attention.

A dim light glimmered through the intense darkness from a bit of rising ground by the wayside. It came from the Temple of Nemesis—a pretty little structure belonging to the



time of Alexander the Great, which he had often examined with pleasure. Several steps led to the anteroom, supported by Ionic columns, which adjoined the naos.

Two lamps were burning at the side of the door leading into the little open cella, and at the back of the consecrated place the statue of the winged goddess was visible in the light of a small altar fire.



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In her right hand she held the bridle and scourge, and at her feet stood the wheel, whose turning indicates the influence exerted by her power upon the destiny of mortals. With stern severity that boded evil, she gazed down upon her left forearm, bent at the elbow, which corresponds with the ell, the just measure.

Hermon certainly now, if ever, lacked both time and inclination to examine again this modest work of an ordinary artist, yet he quickly stopped his weary horse; for in the little pronaos directly in front of the cella door stood a slender figure clad in a long floating dark robe, extending its hands through the cella door toward the statue in fervent prayer. She was pressing her brow against the left post of the door, but at her feet, on the right side, cowered another figure, which could scarcely be recognised as a human being.

This, too, was a woman.

Deeply absorbed in her own thoughts, she was also extending her arms toward the statue of Nemesis.

Hermon knew them both.

At first he fancied that his excited imagination was showing him a threatening illusion. But no!

The erect figure was Ledscha, the crouching one Gula, the sailor's wife whose child he had rescued from the flames, and who had recently been cast out by her husband.

"Ledscha!" escaped his lips in a muttered tone, and he involuntarily extended his hands toward her as she was doing toward the goddess.

But she did not seem to hear him, and the other woman also retained the same attitude, as if hewn from stone.

Then he called the suppliant's name loud tone, and the next instant still more loudly; and now she turned, and, in the faint light of the little lamp, showed the marvellously noble outlines of her profile. He called again, and this time Ledscha heard anguished yearning in his deep tones; but they seemed to have lost their influence over her, for her large dark eyes gazed at him so repellently and sternly that a cold tremor ran down his spine.

Swinging himself from his horse, he ascended the steps of the temple, and in the most tender tones at his command exclaimed: "Ledscha! Severely as I have offended you, Ledscha—oh, do not say no! Will you hear me?"



“No!” she answered firmly, and, before he could speak, continued: “This place is ill chosen for another meeting! Your presence is hateful to me! Do not disturb me a moment longer!”

“As you command,” he began hesitatingly; but she swiftly interrupted with the question, “Do you come from Pelusium, and are you going directly home?”

“I did not heed the storm on account of Myrtilus’s illness,” he answered quietly, “and if you demand it, I will return home at once; but first let me make one more entreaty, which will be pleasing also to the gods.”

“Get your response from yonder deity!” she impatiently interrupted, pointing with a grand, queenly gesture, which at any other time would have delighted his artist eye, to the statue of Nemesis in the cella.



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Meanwhile Gula had also turned her face toward Hermon, and he now addressed her, saying with a faint tone of reproach: "And did hatred lead you also, Gula, to this sanctuary at midnight to implore the goddess to destroy me in her wrath?"

The young mother rose and pointed to Ledscha, exclaiming, "She desires it."

"And I?" he asked gently. "Have I really done you so much evil?"

She raised her hand to her brow as if bewildered; her glance fell on the artist's troubled face, and lingered there for a short time. Then her eyes wandered to Ledscha, and from her to the goddess, and finally back again to the sculptor. Meanwhile Hermon saw how her young figure was trembling, and, before he had time to address a soothing-word to her, she sobbed aloud, crying out to Ledscha: "You are not a mother! My child, he rescued it from the flames. I will not, and I can not—I will no longer pray for his misfortune!"

She drew her veil over her pretty, tear-stained face as she spoke, and darted lightly down the temple steps close beside him to seek shelter in her parents' house, which had been unwillingly opened to the cast-off wife, but now afforded her a home rich in affection.

Immeasurably bitter scorn was depicted in Ledscha's features as she gazed after Gula. She did not appear to notice Hermon, and when at last he appealed to her and briefly urged her to ask the old enchantress on the Owl's Nest for a remedy for the wounded Gaul, she again leaned against the post of the cella door, extended both arms with passionate fervour toward the goddess, and remained standing there motionless, deaf to his petition.

His blood seethed in his veins, and he was tempted to go nearer and force her to hear him; but before he had ascended the first of the flight of steps leading to the pronaos, he heard the footsteps of the men who were bearing the wounded warrior after him.

They must not see him here with one of their countrywomen at this hour, and manly pride forbade him to address her again as a supplicant.

So he went back to the road, mounted his horse, and rode on without vouchsafing a word of farewell to the woman who was invoking destruction upon his head. As he did so his eyes again rested on the stern face of Nemesis, and the wheel whose turning determined the destiny of men at her feet.

Assailed by horrible fears, and overpowered by presentiments of evil, he pursued his way through the darkness.

Perhaps Myrtilus had succumbed to the terrible attack which must have visited him in such a storm, and life without his friend would be bereft of half its charm. Orphaned,



poor, a struggler who had gained no complete victory, it had been rich only in disappointments to him, in spite of his conviction that he was a genuine artist, and was fighting for a good cause. Now he knew that he had also lost the woman by whose assistance he was certain of a great success in his own much-disputed course, and Ledscha, if any one, was right in expecting a favourable hearing from the goddess who punished injustice.



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He did not think of Daphne again until he was approaching the place where her tents had stood, and the remembrance of her fell like a ray of light into his darkened soul.

Yet on that spot had also been erected the wooden platform from which Althea had showed him the transformation into the spider, and the recollection of the foolish error into which the Thracian had drawn him disagreeably clouded the pleasant thought of Daphne.

CHAPTER XVII.

Complete darkness enfolded the white house. Hermon saw only two windows lighted, the ones in his friend's studio, which looked out into the open square, while his own faced the water.

What did this mean?

It must be nearly midnight, and he could no longer expect Myrtilus to be still at work. He had supposed that he should find him in his chamber, supported by his slaves, struggling for breath. What was the meaning of the light in the workrooms now?

Where was his usually efficient Bias? He never went to rest when his master was to return home, yet the carrier dove must have announced his coming!

But Hermon had also enjoined the care of Myrtilus upon the slave, and he was undoubtedly beside the sufferer's couch, supporting him in the same way that he had often seen his master.

He was now riding across the open space, and he heard the men who carried the Gaul talking close behind him.

Was the wounded barbarian the sole acquisition of this journey?

The beat of his horse's hoofs and the voices of the Biamites echoed distinctly enough amid the stillness of the night, which was interrupted only by the roaring of the wind. And this disturbance of the deep silence around had entered the lighted windows before him, for a figure appeared at one of them, and—could he believe his own eyes?—Myrtilus looked down into the square, and a joyous welcome rang from his lips as loudly as in his days of health.

The darkness of the night suddenly seemed to Hermon to be illumined. A leap to the ground, two bounds up the steps leading to the house, an eager rush through the corridor that separated him from the room in which Myrtilus was, the bursting instead of opening of the door, and, as if frantic with happy surprise, he impetuously embraced his



friend, who, burin and file in hand, was just approaching the threshold, and kissed his brow and cheeks in the pure joy of his heart.

Then what questions, answers, tidings! In spite of the torrents of rain and the gale, the invalid's health had been excellent. The solitude had done him good. He knew nothing about the carrier dove. The hurricane had probably "blown it away," as the breeders of the swift messengers said.

Question and reply now followed one another in rapid succession, and both were soon acquainted with everything worth knowing; nay, Hermon had even delivered Daphne's rose to his friend, and informed him what had befallen the Gaul who was being brought into the house.



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Bias and the other slaves had quickly appeared, and Hermon soon rendered the wounded man the help he needed in an airy chamber in the second story of the house, which, owing to the heat that prevailed in summer so close under the roof, the slaves had never occupied.

Bias assisted his master with equal readiness and skill, and at last the Gaul opened his eyes and, in the language of his country, asked a few brief questions which were incomprehensible to the others. Then, groaning, he again closed his lids.

Hitherto Hermon had not even allowed himself time to look around his friend's studio and examine what he had created during his absence. But, after perceiving that his kind act had not been in vain, and consuming with a vigorous appetite the food and wine which Bias set before him, he obliged Myrtilus—for another day was coming—to go to rest, that the storm might not still prove hurtful to him.

Yet he held his friend's hand in a firm clasp for a long time, and, when the latter at last prepared to go, he pressed it so closely that it actually hurt Myrtilus. But he understood his meaning, and, with a loving glance that sank deep into Hermon's heart, called a last good night.

After two sleepless nights and the fatiguing ride which he had just taken, the sculptor felt weary enough; but when he laid his hand on the Gaul's brow and breast, and felt their burning heat, he refused Bias's voluntary offer to watch the sufferer in his place.

If to amuse or forget himself he had caroused far more nights in succession in Alexandria, why should he not keep awake when the object in question was to wrest a young life from the grasp of death? This man and his life were now his highest goal, and he had never yet repented his foolish eccentricity of imposing discomforts upon himself to help the suffering.

Bias, on his part, was very willing to go to rest. He had plenty of cause for weariness; Myrtilus's unscrupulous body-servant had stolen off with the other slaves the night before, and did not return, with staggering gait, until the next morning, but, in order to keep his promise to his master, he had scarcely closed his eyes, that he might be at hand if Myrtilus should need assistance.

So Bias fell asleep quickly enough in his little room in the lower story, while his master, by the exertion of all his strength of will, watched beside the couch of the Gaul.

Yet, after the first quarter of an hour, his head, no matter how he struggled to prevent it, drooped again and again upon his breast. But just as slumber was completely overpowering him his patient made him start up, for he had left his bed, and when Hermon, fully roused, looked for him, was standing in the middle of the room, gazing about him.



The artist thought that fever had driven the wounded warrior from his couch, as it formerly did his fellow-pupil Lycon, whom, in the delirium of typhus, he could keep in bed only by force. So he led the Gaul carefully back to the couch he had deserted, and, after moistening the bandage with healing balm from Myrtilus's medicine chest, ordered him to keep quiet.



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The barbarian yielded as obediently as a child, but at first remained in a sitting posture and asked, in scarcely intelligible broken Greek, how he came to this place.

After Hermon had satisfied his curiosity, he also put a few questions, and learned that his charge not only wore a mustache, like his fellow countrymen, but also a full beard, because the latter was the badge of the bridge builders, to which class he belonged. While examining the one crossing the canal, it had fallen in upon him.

He closed his eyes as he spoke, and Hermon wondered if it was not time for him to lie down also; but the wounded man's brow was still burning, and the Gallic words which he constantly muttered were probably about the phantoms of fever, which Hermon recognised from Lycon's illness.

So he resolved to wait and continue to devote the night, which he had already intended to give him, to the sufferer. From the chair at the foot of the bed he looked directly into his face. The soft light of the lamp, which with two others hung from a tall, heavy bronze stand in the shape of an anchor, which Bias had brought, shone brightly enough to allow him to perceive how powerful was the man whose life he had saved. His own face was scarcely lighter in hue than the barbarian's, and how sharp was the contrast between his long, thick black beard and his white face and bare arched chest!

Hermon had noticed this same contrast in his own person. Otherwise the Gaul did not resemble him in a single feature, and he might even have refused to compare his soft, wavy beard with the harsh, almost bristly one of the barbarian. And what a defiant, almost evil expression his countenance wore when—perhaps because his wound ached—he closed his lips more firmly! The children who so willingly let him, Hermon, take them in his arms would certainly have been afraid of this savage-looking fellow.

Yet in build, and at any rate in height and breadth of shoulders, there was some resemblance between him and the Gaul.

As a bridge builder, the injured man belonged, in a certain sense, to the ranks of the artists, and this increased Hermon's interest in his patient, who was now probably out of the most serious danger.

True, the Greek still cast many a searching glance at the barbarian, but his eyes closed more and more frequently, and at last the idea took possession of him that he himself was the wounded man on the couch, and some one else, who again was himself, was caring for him.

He vainly strove to understand the impossibility of this division of his own being, but the more eagerly he did so the greater became his bewilderment.

Suddenly the scene changed; Ledscha had appeared.



Bending over him, she lavished words of love; but when, in passionate excitement, he sprang from the couch to draw her toward him, she changed into the Nemesis to whose statue she had just prayed.



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He stood still as if petrified, and the goddess, too, did not stir. Only the wheel which had rested at her feet began to move, and rolled, with a thundering din, sometimes around him, sometimes around the people who, as if they had sprung from the ground, formed a jeering company of spectators, and clapped their hands, laughed, and shouted whenever it rolled toward him and he sprang back in fear.

Meanwhile the wheel constantly grew larger, and seemed to become heavier, for the wooden beams over which it rolled splintered, crashing like thin laths, and the spectators' shouts of applause sounded ruder and fiercer.

Then mortal terror suddenly seized him, and while he shouted for help to Myrtilus, Daphne, and her father Archias, his slave Bias, the old comrade of Alexander, Philippos, and his wife, he awoke, bathed in perspiration, and looked about him.

But he must still be under the spell of the horrible dream, for the rattling and clattering around him continued, and the bed where the wounded Gaul had lain was empty.

Hermon involuntarily dipped his hand into the water which stood ready to wet the bandages, and sprinkled his own face with it; but if he had ever beheld life with waking eyes, he was doing so now. Yet the barbarian had vanished, and the noise in the house still continued.

Was it possible that rats and mice—? No! That was the shriek of a terrified human being—that a cry for help! This sound was the imperious command of a rough man's voice, that—no, he was not mistaken—that was his own name, and it came from the lips of his Myrtilus, anxiously, urgently calling for assistance.

Then he suddenly realized that the white house had been attacked, that his friend must be rescued from robbers or the fury of a mob of Biamites, and, like the bent wood of a projectile when released from the noose which holds it to the ground, the virile energy that characterized him sprang upward with mighty power. The swift glance that swept the room was sent to discover a weapon, and before it completed the circuit Hermon had already grasped the bronze anchor with the long rod twined with leaves and the teeth turned downward. Only one of the three little vessels filled with oil that hung from it was burning. Before swinging the heavy standard aloft, he freed it from the lamps, which struck the floor with a clanging noise.

The man to whom he dealt a blow with this ponderous implement would forget to rise. Then, as if running for a prize in the gymnasium, he rushed through the darkness to the staircase, and with breathless haste groped his way down the narrow, ladderlike steps. He felt himself an avenging, punishing power, like the Nemesis who had pursued him in his dreams. He must wrest the friend who was to him the most beloved of mortals from the rioters. To defeat them himself seemed a small matter. His shout—"I am coming, Myrtilus! Snuphis, Bias, Dorcas, Syrus! here, follow me!" was to summon the old

Egyptian doorkeeper and the slaves, and inform his friend of the approach of a deliverer.



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The loudest uproar echoed from his own studio. Its door stood wide open, and black smoke, mingled with the deep red and yellow flames of burning pitch, poured from it toward him.

“Myrtilus!” he shouted at the top of his voice as he leaped across the threshold into the tumult which filled the spacious apartment, at the same time clashing the heavy iron anchor down upon the head of the broad-shouldered, half-naked fellow who was raising a clumsy lance against him.

The pirate fell as though struck by lightning, and he again shouted “Myrtilus!” into the big room, so familiar to him, where the conflict was raging chaotically amid a savage clamour, and the smoke did not allow him to distinguish a single individual.

For the second time he swung the terrible weapon, and it struck to the floor the monster with a blackened face who had rushed toward him, but at the same time the anchor broke in two.

Only a short metal rod remained in his hand, and, while he raised his arm, determined to crush the temples of the giant carrying a torch who sprang forward to meet him, it suddenly seemed as if a vulture with glowing plumage and burning beak was attacking his face, and the terrible bird of prey was striking its hard, sharp, red-hot talons more and more furiously into his lips, cheeks, and eyes.

At first a glare as bright as sunshine had flashed before his gaze; then, where he had just seen figures and things half veiled by the smoke, he beheld only a scarlet surface, which changed to a violet, and finally a black spot, followed by a violet-blue one, while the vulture continued to rend his face with beak and talons.

Then the name “Myrtilus!” once more escaped his lips; this time, however, it did not sound like the encouraging shout of an avenging hero, but the cry for aid of one succumbing to defeat, and it was soon followed by a succession of frantic outbursts of suffering, terror, and despair.

But now sharp whistles from the water shrilly pierced the air and penetrated into the darkened room, and, while the tumult around Hermon gradually died away, he strove, tortured by burning pain, to grope his way toward the door; but here his foot struck against a human body, there against something hard, whose form he could not distinguish, and finally a large object which felt cool, and could be nothing but his Demeter.

But she seemed doomed to destruction, for the smoke was increasing every moment, and constantly made his open wounds smart more fiercely.



Suddenly a cooler air fanned his burning face, and at the same time he heard hurrying steps approach and the mingled cries of human voices.

Again he began to shout the names of his friends, the slaves, and the porter; but no answer came from any of them, though hasty questions in the Greek language fell upon his ear.

The strategist, with his officers, the nomarch of the district with his subordinates, and many citizens of Tennis had arrived. Hermon knew most of them by their voices, but their figures were not visible. The red, violet, and black cloud before him was all he could see.



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Yet, although the pain continued to torture him, and a voice in his soul told him that he was blinded, he did not allow the government officials who eagerly surrounded him to speak, only pointed hastily to his eyes, and then bade them enter Myrtilus's studio. The Egyptian Chello, the Tennis goldsmith, who had assisted the artists in the preparation of the noble metal, and one of the police officers who had been summoned to rid the old house of the rats and mice which infested it, both knew the way.

They must first try to save Myrtilus's work and, when that was accomplished, preserve his also from destruction by the flames.

Leaning on the goldsmith's arm, Hermon went to his friend's studio; but before they reached it smoke and flames poured out so densely that it was impossible even to gain the door.

"Destroyed—a prey to the flames!" he groaned. "And he—he—he—"

Then like a madman he asked if no one had seen Myrtilus, and where he was; but in vain, always in vain.

At last the goldsmith who was leading him asked him to move aside, for all who had flocked to the white house when it was seized by the flames had joined in the effort to save the statue of Demeter, which they had found unharmed in his studio.

Seventeen men, by the exertion of all their strength, were dragging the heavy statue from the house, which was almost on the point of falling in, into the square. Several others were bearing corpses into the open air—the old porter Snuphis and Myrtilus's body servant. Some motionless forms they were obliged to leave behind. Both the bodies had deep wounds. There was no trace of Myrtilus and Bias.

Outside the storm had subsided, and a cool breeze blew refreshingly into Hermon's face. As he walked arm in arm with the notary Melampus, who had invited him to his house, and heard some one at his side exclaim, "How lavishly Eos is scattering her roses to-day!" he involuntarily lifted the cloth with which he had covered his smarting face to enjoy the beautiful flush of dawn, but again beheld nothing save a black and violet-blue surface.

Then drawing his hand from his guide's arm, he pressed it upon his poor, sightless, burning eyes, and in helpless rage, like a beast of prey which feels the teeth of the hunter's iron trap rend his flesh, groaned fiercely, "Blind! blind!" and again, and yet again, "Blind!"

While the morning star was still paling, the lad who after Hermon's landing had raced along the shore with the burning torch glided into the little pronaos of the Temple of Nemesis.



Ledscha was still standing by the doorpost of the cella with uplifted hand, so deeply absorbed in fervent prayer that she did not perceive the approach of the messenger until he called her.

“Succeeded?” she asked in a muffled tone, interrupting his hasty greeting.

“You must give the goddess what you vowed,” was the reply. “Hanno sends you the message. And also, ‘You must come with me in the boat quickly-at once!’”



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“Where?” the girl demanded.

“Not on board the Hydra yet,” replied the boy hurriedly. “First only to the old man on the Megara. The dowry is ready for your father. But there is not a moment to lose.”

“Well, well!” she gasped hoarsely. “But, first, shall I find the man with the black beard on board of one of the ships?”

“Certainly!” answered the lad proudly, grasping her arm to hurry her; but she shook him off violently, turned toward the cella again, and once more lifted her hands and eyes to the statue of Nemesis.

Then she took up the bundle she had hidden behind a pillar, drew from it a handful of gold coins, which she flung into the box intended for offerings, and followed the boy.

“Alive?” she asked as she descended the steps; but the lad understood the meaning of the question, and exclaimed: “Yes, indeed! Hanno says the wounds are not at all dangerous.”

“And the other?”

“Not a scratch. On the Hydra, with two severely wounded slaves. The porter and the others were killed.”

“And the statues?”

“They-such things can’t be accomplished without some little blunder-Labaja thinks so, too.”

“Did they escape you?”

“Only one. I myself helped to smash the other, which stood in the workroom that looks out upon the water. The gold and ivory are on the ship. We had horrible work with the statue which stood in the room whose windows faced the square. They dragged the great monster carefully into the studio that fronts upon the water. But probably it is still standing there, if the thing is not already—just see how the flames are whirling upward!—if it is not already burned with the house.”

“What a misfortune!” Ledscha reproachfully exclaimed.

“It could not be helped,” the boy protested. “People from Tennis suddenly rushed in. The first—a big, furious fellow-killed our Loule and the fierce Judas. Now he has to pay for it. Little Chareb threw the black powder into his eyes, while Hanno himself thrust the torch in his face.”



“And Bias, the blackbeard’s slave?”

“I don’t know. Oh, yes! Wounded, I believe, on board the ship.”

Meanwhile the lad, a precocious fourteen-year-old cabin-boy from the Hydra, pointed to the boat which lay ready, and took Ledscha’s bundle in his hand; but she sprang into the light skiff before him and ordered it to be rowed to the Owl’s Nest, where she must bid Mother Tabus good-bye. The cabin-boy, however, declared positively that the command could not be obeyed now, and at his signal two black sailors urged it with swift oar strokes toward the northwest, to Satabus’s ship. Hanno wished to receive his bride as a wife from his father’s hand.

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Ledscha had not insisted upon the fulfilment of her desire, but as the boat passed the Pelican Island her gaze rested on the lustreless waning disk of the moon. She thought of the torturing night, during which she had vainly waited here for Hermon, and a triumphant smile hovered around her lips; but soon the heavy eyebrows of the girl who was thus leaving her home contracted in a frown—she again fancied she saw, where the moon was just fading, the body of a gigantic, hideous spider. She banished the illusion by speaking to the boy—spiders in the morning mean misfortune.

The early dawn, which was now crimsoning the east, reminded her of the blood which, as an avenger, she must yet shed.

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Camels, which were rarely seen in Egypt

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