

Arachne — Volume 07 eBook

Arachne — Volume 07 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER VIII.

Without a word of explanation, Hermon dragged his guide along in breathless haste. No one stopped them.

The atrium, usually swarming with guards, servants, and officials until a far later hour, was completely deserted when the blind man hurried through it with his friend.

The door leading into the outer air stood open, but Hermon, leaning on the scholar's arm, had scarcely crossed the threshold and entered the little courtyard encircled with ornamental plants, which separated this portion of the palace from the street, when both were surrounded by a band of armed Macedonian soldiers, whose commander exclaimed: "In the name of the King! Not a sound, if you value your lives!"

Incensed, and believing that there was some mistake, Hermon announced himself as a sculptor and Crates as a member of the Museum, but this statement did not produce the slightest effect upon the warrior; nay, when the friends answered the officer's inquiry whether they were coming from Proclus's banquet in the affirmative; he curtly commanded them to be put in chains.

To offer resistance would have been madness, for even Hermon perceived, by the loud clanking of weapons around them, the greatly superior power of the enemy, and they were acting by the orders of the King. "To the prison near the place of execution!" cried the officer; and now not only the mythograph, but Hermon also was startled—this dungeon opened only to those sentenced to death.

Was he to be led to the executioner's block? A cold shudder ran through his frame; but the next moment he threw back his waving locks, and his chest heaved with a long breath.

What pleasure had life to offer him, the blind man, who was already dead to his art? Ought he not to greet this sudden end as a boon from the immortals?

Did it not spare him a humiliation as great and painful as could be imagined?

He had already taken care that the false renown should not follow him to the grave, and Myrtilus should have his just due, and he would do whatever else lay in his power to further this object. Wherever the beloved dead might be, he desired to go there also. Whatever might await him, he desired no better fate. If he had passed into annihilation, he, Hermon, wished to follow him thither, and annihilation certainly meant redemption from pain and misery. But if he were destined to meet his Myrtilus and his mother in the world beyond the grave, what had he not to tell them, how sure he was of finding a joyful reception there from both! The power which delivered him over to death just at that moment was not Nemesis—no, it was a kindly deity.

Only his heart grew heavy at the thought of leaving Daphne to the tireless wooer Philotas or some other—everything else from which it is usually hard to part seemed like a burden that we gladly cast aside.

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“Forward!” he called blithely and boldly to the officer; while Crates, with loud lamentations, was protesting his innocence to the warrior who was putting fetters upon him.

A chain was just being clasped around Hermon’s wrists also when he suddenly started. His keen ear could not deceive him, and yet a demon must be mocking him, for the voice that had called his name was the girl’s of whom, in the presence of welcome death, he had thought with longing regret.

Yet it was no illusion that deceived him. Again he heard the beloved voice, and this time it addressed not only him, but with the utmost haste the commander of the soldiers.

Sometimes with touching entreaty, sometimes with imperious command, she protested, after giving him her name, that this matter could be nothing but an unfortunate mistake. Lastly, with earnest warmth, she besought him, before taking the prisoners away, to permit her to speak to the commanding general, Philippus, her father’s guest, who, she was certain, was in the palace. The blood of these innocent men would be on his head if he did not listen to her representations.

“Daphne!” cried Hermon in grateful agitation; but she would not listen to him, and followed the soldier whom the captain detailed to guide her into the palace.

After a few moments, which the blind artist used to inspire the despairing scholar with courage, the girl returned, and she did not come alone. The gray-haired comrade of Alexander accompanied her, and after a few minutes both prisoners were released from their fetters. Philippus hastily refused their thanks and, after addressing a few words to the officer, he changed his tone, and his deep voice sounded paternally cordial as he exclaimed to Daphne: “Fifteen minutes more, you dear, foolhardy girl, and it would have been too late. To-morrow you shall confess to me who treacherously directed you to this dangerous path.”

Lastly, he turned to the prisoners to explain that they would be conducted to the adjacent barracks of the Diadochi, and spend the night there.

Early the next morning they should be examined, and, if they could clear themselves from the suspicion of belonging to the ranks of the conspirators, released.

Daphne again pleaded for the liberation of the prisoners, but Philippus silenced her with the grave exclamation, “The order of the King!”

The old commander offered no objection to her wish to accompany Hermon to prison. Daphne now slipped her arm through her cousin’s, and commanded the steward Gras, who had brought her here, to follow them.

The goal of the nocturnal walk, which was close at hand, was reached at the end of a few minutes, and the prisoners were delivered to the commander of the Diadochi. This kindly disposed officer had served under Hermon's father, and when the names of the prisoners were given, and the officer reported to him that General Philippus recommended them to his care as innocent men, he had a special room opened for the sculptor and his fair guide, and ordered Crates to enter another.

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He could permit the beautiful daughter of the honoured Archias to remain with Hermon for half an hour, then he must beg her to allow herself to be escorted to her home, as the barracks were closed at that time.

As soon as the captive artist was alone with the woman he loved, he clasped her hand, pouring forth incoherent words of the most ardent gratitude, and when he felt her warmly return the pressure, he could not restrain the desire to clasp her to his heart. For the first time his lips met hers, he confessed his love, and that he had just regarded death as a deliverer; but his life was now gaining new charm through her affection.

Then Daphne herself threw her arms around his neck with fervent devotion.

The love that resistlessly drew his heart to her was returned with equal strength and ardour. In spite of his deep mental distress, he could have shouted aloud in his delight and gratitude. He might now have been permitted to bind forever to his life the woman who had just rescued him from the greatest danger, but the confession he must make to his fellow-artists in the palaestra the following morning still sealed his lips. Yet in this hour he felt that he was united to her, and ought not to conceal what awaited him; so, obeying a strong impulse, he exclaimed: "You know that I love you! Words can not express the strength of my devotion, but for that very reason I must do what duty commands before I ask the question, 'Will you join your fate to mine?'"

"I love you and have loved you always!" Daphne exclaimed tenderly. "What more is needed?"

But Hermon, with drooping head, murmured: "To-morrow I shall no longer be what I am now. Wait until I have done what duty enjoins; when that is accomplished, you shall ask yourself what worth the blind artist still possesses who bartered spurious fame for mockery and disgrace in order not to become a hypocrite."

Then Daphne raised her face to his, asking, "So the Demeter is the work of Myrtilus?"

"Certainly," he answered firmly. "It is the work of Myrtilus."

"Oh, my poor, deceived love!" cried Daphne, strongly agitated, in a tone of the deepest sorrow. "What a terrible ordeal again awaits you! It must indeed distress me—and yet Do not misunderstand me! It seems nevertheless as if I ought to rejoice, for you and your art have not spoken to me even a single moment from this much-lauded work."

"And therefore," he interrupted with passionate delight, "therefore alone you withheld the enthusiastic praise with which the others intoxicated me? And I, fool, blinded also in mind, could be vexed with you for it! But only wait, wait! Soon-to-morrow even—there will be no one in Alexandria who can accuse me of deserting my own honest aspiration,

and, if the gods will only restore my sight and the ability to use my hands as a sculptor, then, girl, then—”

Here he was interrupted by a loud knocking at the door.

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The time allowed had expired.

Hermon again warmly embraced Daphne, saying: "Then go! Nothing can cloud what these brief moments have bestowed. I must remain blind; but you have restored the lost sight to my poor darkened soul. To-morrow I shall stand in the palaestra before my comrades, and explain to them what a malicious accident deceived me, and with me this whole great city. Many will not believe me, and even your father will perhaps consider it a disgrace to give his arm to his scorned, calumniated nephew to guide him home. Bring this before your mind, and everything else that you must accept with it, if you consent, when the time arrives, to become mine. Conceal and palliate nothing! But should the Lady Thyone speak of the Eumenides who pursued me, tell her that they had probably again extended their arms toward me, but when I return to-morrow from the palaestra I shall be freed from the terrible beings."

Lastly, he asked to be told quickly how she had happened to come to the palace at the right time at so late an hour, and Daphne informed him as briefly and modestly as if the hazardous venture which, in strong opposition to her retiring, womanly nature, she had undertaken, was a mere matter of course.

When Thyone in her presence heard from Gras that Hermon intended to go to Proclus's banquet, she started up in horror, exclaiming, "Then the unfortunate man is lost!"

Her husband, who had long trusted even the gravest secrets to his discreet old wife, had informed her of the terrible office the King had confided to him. All the male guests of Proclus were to be executed; the women—the Queen at their head—would be sent into exile.

Then Daphne, on her knees, besought the matron to tell her what threatened Hermon, and succeeded in persuading her to speak.

The terrified girl, accompanied by Gras, went first to her lover's house and, when she did not find him there, hastened to the King's palace.

If Hermon could have seen her with her fluttering hair, dishevelled by the night breeze, and cheeks blanched by excitement and terror, if he had been told how she struggled with Thyone, who tried to detain her and lock her up before she left her father's house, he would have perceived with still prouder joy, had that been possible, what he possessed in the devoted love of this true woman.

Grateful and moved by joyous hopes, he informed Daphne of the words of the oracle, which had imprinted themselves upon his memory.

She, too, quickly retained them, and murmured softly:

“Noise and dazzling radiance are hostile to the purer light, Morning and day will rise quietly from the starving sand.”

What could the verse mean except that the blind man would regain the power to behold the light of clay amid the sands of the silent desert?

Perhaps it would be well for him to leave Alexandria now, and she described how much benefit she had received while hunting from the silence of the wilderness, when she had left the noise of the city behind her. But before she had quite finished, the knocking at the door was repeated.

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The lovers took leave of each other with one last kiss, and the final words of the departing girl echoed consolingly in the blind man's heart, "The more they take from you, the more closely I will cling to you."

Hermon spent the latter portion of the night rejoicing in the consciousness of a great happiness, yet also troubled by the difficult task which he could not escape.

When the market place was filling, gray-haired Philippus visited him.

He desired before the examination, for which every preparation had been made, to understand personally the relation of his dead comrade's son to the defeated conspiracy, and he soon perceived that Hermon's presence at the banquet was due solely to an unlucky accident or in consequence of the Queen's desire to win him over to her plot.

Yet he was forced to advise the blind sculptor to leave Alexandria. The suspicion that he had been associated with the conspirators was the more difficult to refute, because his Uncle Archias had imprudently allowed himself to be persuaded by Proclus and Arsinoe to lend the Queen large sums, which had undoubtedly been used to promote her abominable plans.

Philippus also informed him that he had just come from Archias, whom he had earnestly urged to fly as quickly as possible from the persecution which was inevitable; for, secure as Hermon's uncle felt in his innocence, the receipts for the large sums loaned by him, which had just been found in Proclus's possession, would bear witness against him. Envy and ill will would also have a share in this affair, and the usually benevolent King knew no mercy where crime against his own person was concerned. So Archias intended to leave the city on one of his own ships that very day. Daphne, of course, would accompany him.

The prisoner listened in surprise and anxiety.

His uncle driven from his secure possessions to distant lands! Daphne taken from him, he knew not whither nor for how long a time, after he had just been assured of her great love! He himself on the way to expose himself to the malice and mockery of the whole city!

His heart contracted painfully, and his solicitude about his uncle's fate increased when Philippus informed him that the conspirators had been arrested at the banquet and, headed by Amyntas, the Rhodian, Chrysippus, and Proclus, had perished by the executioner's sword at sunrise.

The Queen, Althea, and the other ladies were already on the way to Coptos, in Upper Egypt, whither the King had exiled them.

Ptolemy had intrusted the execution of this severe punishment to Alexander's former comrade as the most trustworthy and discreet of his subjects, but rejected, with angry curtness, Philippus's attempt to uphold the innocence of his friend Archias.

The old man's conversation with Hermon was interrupted by the functionaries who subjected him and Crates to the examination. It lasted a long time, and referred to every incident in the artist's life since his return to Alexandria. The result was favourable, and the prisoner was dismissed from confinement with the learned companion of his fate.

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When, accompanied by Philippus, Hermon reached his house, it was so late that the artists' festival in honour of the sculptor Euphranor, who entered his seventieth year of life that day, must have already commenced.

On the way the blind man told the general what a severe trial awaited him, and the latter approved his course and, on bidding him farewell, with sincere emotion urged Hermon to take courage.

After hastily strengthening himself with a few mouthfuls of food and a draught of wine, his slave Patran, who understood writing, wished to put on the full laurel wreath; but Hermon was seized with a painful sense of dissatisfaction, and angrily waved it back.

Without a single green leaf on his head, he walked, leaning on the Egyptian's arm, into the palaestra, which was diagonally opposite to his house.

Doubtless he longed to hasten at once to Daphne, but he felt that he could not take leave of her until he had first cast off, as his heart and mind dictated, the terrible burden which oppressed his soul. Besides, he knew that the object of his love would not part from him without granting him one last word.

On the way his heart throbbed almost to bursting.

Even Daphne's image, and what threatened her father, and her with him, receded far into the background. He could think only of his design, and how he was to execute it.

Yet ought he not to have the laurel wreath put on, in order, after removing it, to bestow it on the genius of Myrtilus?

Yet no!

Did he still possess the right to award this noble branch to any one? He was appearing before his companions only to give truth its just due. It was repulsive to endow this explanation of an unfortunate error with a captivating aspect by any theatrical adornment. To be honest, even for the porter, was a simple requirement of duty, and no praiseworthy merit.

The guide forced a path for him through carriages, litters, and whole throngs of slaves and common people, who had assembled before the neighbouring palaestra.

The doorkeepers admitted the blind man, who was well known here, without delay; but he called to the slave: "Quick, Patran, and not among the spectators—in the centre of the arena!"

The Egyptian obeyed, and his master crossed the wide space, strewn with sand, and approached the stage which had been erected for the festal performances.



Even had his eyes retained the power of sight, his blood was coursing so wildly through his veins that he might perhaps have been unable to distinguish the statues around him and the thousands of spectators, who, crowded closely together, richly garlanded, their cheeks glowing with enthusiasm, surrounded the arena.

“Hermon!” shouted his friend Soteles in joyful surprise in the midst of this painful walk. “Hermon!” resounded here, there, and everywhere as, leaning on his friend’s arm, he stepped upon the stage, and the acclamations grew louder and louder as Soteles fulfilled the sculptor’s request and led him to the front of the platform.

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Obeying a sign from the director of the festival, the chorus, which had just sung a hymn to the Muses, was silent.

Now the sculptor began to speak, and noisy applause thundered around him as he concluded the well-chosen words of homage with which he offered cordial congratulations to the estimable Euphranor, to whom the festival was given; but the shouts soon ceased, for the audience had heard his modest entreaty to be permitted to say a few words, concerning a personal matter, to those who were his professional colleagues, as well as to the others who had honoured him with their interest and, only too loudly, with undeserved applause. The more closely what he had to say concerned himself, the briefer he would make his story.

And, in fact, he did not long claim the attention of his hearers. Clearly and curtly he stated how it had been possible to mistake Myrtilus's work for his, how the Tennis goldsmith had dispelled his first suspicion, and how vainly he had besought the priests of Demeter to be permitted to feel his statue. Then, without entering into details, he informed them that, through an accident, he had now reached the firm conviction that he had long worn wreaths which belonged to another. But, though the latter could not rise from the grave, he still owed it to truth, to whose service he had dedicated his art from the beginning, and to the simple honesty, dear alike to the peasant and the artist, to divest himself of the fame to which he was not entitled. Even while he believed himself to be the creator of the Demeter, he had been seriously troubled by the praise of so many critics, because it had exposed him to the suspicion of having become faithless to his art and his nature. In the name of the dead, he thanked his dear comrades for the enthusiastic appreciation his masterpiece had found. Honour to Myrtilus and his art, but he trusted this noble festal assemblage would pardon the unintentional deception, and aid his prayer for recovery. If it should be granted he hoped to show that Hermon had not been wholly unworthy to adorn himself for a short time with the wreaths of Myrtilus.

When he closed, deep silence reigned for a brief interval, and one man looked at another irresolutely until the hero of the day, gray-haired Euphranor, rose and, leaning on the arm of his favourite pupil, walked through the centre of the arena to the stage, mounted it, embraced Hermon with paternal warmth, and made him happy by the words: "The deception that has fallen to your lot, my poor young friend, is a lamentable one; but honour to every one who honestly means to uphold the truth. We will beseech the immortals with prayers and sacrifices to restore sight to your artist eyes. If I am permitted, my dear young comrade, to see you continue to create, it will be a source of joy to me and all of us; yet the Muses, even though unasked, lead into the eternal realm of beauty the elect who consecrates his art to truth with the right earnestness."

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The embrace with which the venerable hero of the festival seemed to absolve Hermon was greeted with loud applause; but the kind words which Euphranor, in the weak voice of age, had addressed to the blind man had been unintelligible to the large circle of guests.

When he again descended to the arena new plaudits rose; but soon hisses and other signs of disapproval blended with them, which increased in strength and number when a well known critic, who had written a learned treatise concerning the relation of the Demeter to Hermon's earlier works, expressed his annoyance in a loud whistle. The dissatisfied and disappointed spectators now vied with one another to silence those who were cheering by a hideous uproar while the latter expressed more and more loud the sincere esteem with which they were inspired by the confession of the artist who, though cruelly prevented from winning fresh fame, cast aside the wreath which a dead man had, as were, proffered from his tomb.

Probably every man thought that, in the same situation, he would have done the same yet not only justice—nay, compassion—dictated showing the blind artist that they believed in and would sustain him. The ill-disposed insisted that Hermon had only done what duty commanded the meanest man, and the fact that he had deceived all Alexandria still remained. Not a few joined this party, for larger possession excite envy perhaps even more frequently than greater fame.

Soon the approving and opposing voices mingled in an actual conflict. But before the famous sculptor Chares, the great and venerable artist Nicias, and several younger friends of Hermon quelled this unpleasant disturbance of the beautiful festival, the blind man, leaning on the arm of his fellow-artist Soteles, had left the palaestra.

At the exit he, parted from his friend, who had been made happy by the ability to absolve his more distinguished leader from the reproach of having become faithless to their common purpose, and who intended to intercede further in his behalf in the palaestra.

Hermon no longer needed him; for, besides his slave Patran, he found the steward Gras, who, by his master's order, guided the blind man to Archias's closed harmamaxa, which was waiting outside the building.

CHAPTER IX.

The sculptor's head was burning feverishly when he entered the vehicle. He had never imagined that the consequences of his explanation would be so terrible. During the drive—by no means a long one—to the great harbour, he strove to collect his thoughts. Groaning aloud, he covered his ears with his hands to shut out the shouts and hisses from the palaestra, which in reality were no longer audible.

True, he would not need to expose himself to this uproar a second time, yet if he remained in Alexandria the witticisms, mockery, and jibes of the whole city, though in a gentler form, would echo hundreds of times around him.

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He must leave the city. He would have preferred to go on board the staunch Tacheia and be borne far away with his uncle and Daphne, but he was obliged to deny himself the fulfilment of this desire. He must now think solely of regaining his sight.

Obedient to the oracle, he would go to the desert where from the “starving sand” the radiant daylight was to rise anew for him.

There he would, at any rate, be permitted to recover the clearness of perception and feeling which he had lost in the delirium of the dissolute life of pleasure that he had led in the past. Pythagoras had already forbidden the folly of spoiling the present by remorse; and he, too, did not do this. It would have been repugnant to his genuinely Greek nature. Instead of looking backward with peevish regret, his purpose was to look with blithe confidence toward the future, and to do his best to render it better and more fruitful than the months of revel which lay behind him.

He could no longer imagine a life worth living without Daphne, and the thought that if his uncle were robbed of his wealth he would become her support cheered his heart. If the oracle did not fulfil its promise, he would again appeal to medical skill, and submit even to the most severe suffering which might be imposed upon him.

The drive to the great harbour was soon over, but the boat which lay waiting for him had a considerable distance to traverse, for the Tacheia was no longer at the landing place, but was tacking outside the Pharos, in order, if the warrant of arrest were issued, not to be stopped at the channel dominated by the lighthouse. He found the slender trireme pervaded by a restless stir. His uncle had long been expecting him with burning impatience.

He knew, through Philippus, what duty still detained the deceived artist, but he learned, at the same time, that his own imprisonment had been determined, and it would be advisable for him to leave the city behind him as quickly as possible. Yet neither Daphne nor he was willing to depart without saying farewell to Hermon.

But the danger was increasing every moment, and, warm as was the parting, the last clasp of the hand and kiss swiftly followed the first words of greeting.

So the blind artist learned only that Archias was going to the island of Lesbos, his mother's home, and that he had promised his daughter to give Hermon time to recover his sight. The property bequeathed to him by Myrtilus had been placed by the merchant in the royal bank, and he had also protected himself against any chance of poverty. Hermon was to send news of his health to Lesbos from time to time if a safe opportunity offered and, when Daphne knew where he was to be found, she could let him have tidings. Of course, for the present great caution must be exercised in order not to betray the abode of the fugitives.

Hermon, too, ought to evade the pursuit of the incensed King as quickly as possible.

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Not only Daphne's eyes, but her father's also, overflowed with tears at this parting, and Hermon perceived more plainly than ever that he was as dear to his uncle as though he were his own son.

The low words which the artist exchanged with the woman whose love, even during the period of separation, would shed light and warmth upon his darkened life, were deeply impressed upon the souls of both.

For the present, faithful Gras was to remain in charge of his master's house in Alexandria. Leaning on his arm, the blind man left the Tacheia, which, as soon as both had entered the boat, was urged forward by powerful strokes of the oars.

The Bithynian informed Hermon that kerchiefs were waving him a farewell from the trireme, that the sails had been unfurled, and the wind was driving the swift vessel before it like a swallow.

At the Pharos Gras reported that a royal galley was just passing them, undoubtedly in pursuit of the Tacheia; but the latter was the swiftest of all the Greek vessels, and they need not fear that she would be overtaken by the war ship.

With a sore heart and the desolate feeling of being now utterly alone, Hermon again landed and ordered that his uncle's harmamaxa should convey him to the necropolis. He desired to seek peace at his mother's grave, and to take leave of these beloved tombs.

Guided by the steward, he left them cheered and with fresh confidence in the future, and the faithful servant's account of the energy with which Daphne had aided the preparations for departure benefited him like a refreshing bath.

When he was again at home, one visitor after another was announced, who came there from the festival in the palaestra, and, in spite of his great reluctance to receive them, he denied no one admittance, but listened even to the ill-disposed and spiteful.

In the battle which he had commenced he must not shrink from wounds, and he was struck by many a poisoned shaft. But, to make amends, a clear understanding was effected between him and those whom he esteemed.

The last caller left him just before midnight.

Hermon now made many preparations for departure.

He intended to go into the desert with very little luggage, as the oracle seemed to direct. How long a time his absence would extend could not be estimated, and the many poor people whom he had fed and supported must not suffer through his departure. The arrangements required to effect this he dictated to the slave, who

understood writing. He had gained in him an extremely capable servant, and Patran expressed his readiness to follow him into the desert; but the wry face which, sure that the blind man could not see him, he made while saying so, seemed to prove the contrary.

Weary, and yet too excited to find sleep, Hermon at last went to rest.

If his Myrtilus had been with him now, what would he not have had to say to express his gratitude, to explain! How overjoyed he would have been at the fulfilment of his wish to see him united to Daphne, at least in heart; with what fiery ardour he would have upbraided those who believed him capable of having appropriated what belonged to another!

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But Myrtilus was no more, and who could tell whether his body had not remained unburied, and his soul was therefore condemned to be borne restlessly between heaven and earth, like a leaf driven by the wind? Yet, if the earth covered him, where was the spot on which sacrifices could be offered to his soul, his tombstone could be anointed, and he himself remembered?

Then a doubt which had never before entered his mind suddenly took possession of Hermon.

Since for so many months he had firmly believed his friend's work to be his own, he might also have fallen into another delusion, and Myrtilus might still dwell among the living.

At this thought the blind man, with a swift movement, sat erect upon his couch; it seemed as if a bright light blazed before his eyes in the dark room.

The reasons which had led the authorities to pronounce Myrtilus dead rendered his early end probable, it is true, yet by no means proved it absolutely. He must hold fast to that.

He who, ever since he returned to Alexandria from Tennis, had squandered precious time as if possessed by evil demons, would now make a better use of it. Besides, he longed to leave the capital. What! Suppose he should now, even though it were necessary to delay obeying the oracle's command, search, traverse, sail through the world in pursuit of Myrtilus, even, if it must be, to the uttermost Thule?

But he fell back upon the couch as quickly as he had started up.

"Blind! blind!" he groaned in dull despair. How could he, who was not able even to see his hand before his eyes, succeed in finding his friend?

And yet, yet——

Had his mind been darkened with his eyes, that this thought came to him now for the first time, that he had not sent messengers to all quarters of the globe to find some trace of the assailants and, with them, of the lost man?

Perhaps it was Ledscha who had him in her power, and, while he was pondering and forming plans for the best way of conducting investigations, the dimmed image of the Biamite again returned distinctly to his mind, and with it that of Arachne and the spider, into which the goddess transformed the weaver.

Half overcome by sleep, he saw himself, staff in hand, led by Daphne, cross green meadows and deserts, valleys and mountains, to seek his friend; yet whenever he fancied he caught sight of him, and Ledscha with him, in the distance, the spider

descended from above and, with magical speed, wove a net which concealed both from his gaze.

Groaning and deeply disturbed, half awake, he struggled onward, always toward one goal, to find his Myrtilus again, when suddenly the sound of the knocker on the entrance door and the barking of Lycas, his Arabian greyhound, shook the house.

Recalled to waking life, he started up and listened.

Had the men who were to arrest him or inquisitive visitors not allowed themselves to be deterred even by the late hour?

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He listened angrily as the old porter sternly accosted the late guest; but, directly after, the gray-haired native of the region near the First Cataract burst into the strange Nubian oaths which he lavished liberally whenever anything stirred his aged soul.

The dog, which Hermon had owned only a few months, continued to bark; but above his hostile baying the blind man thought he recognised a name at whose sound the blood surged hotly into his cheeks. Yet he could scarcely have heard aright!

Still he sprang from the couch, groped his way to the door, opened it, and entered the impluvium that adjoined his bedroom. The cool night air blew upon him from the open ceiling. A strong draught showed that the door leading from the atrium was being opened, and now a shout, half choked by weeping, greeted him: "Hermon! My clear, my poor beloved master!"

"Bias, faithful Bias!" fell from the blind man's lips, and when he felt the returned slave sink down before him, cover his hand with kisses and wet it with tears, he raised him in his strong arms, clasped him in a warm embrace, kissed his cheeks, and gasped, "And Myrtilus, my Myrtilus, is he alive?"

"Yes, yes, yes," sobbed Bias. "But you, my lord-blind, blind! Can it be true?"

When Hermon released him to inquire again about his friend, Bias stammered: "He isn't faring so badly; but you, you, bereft of light and also of the joy of seeing your faithful Bias again! And the immortals prolong one's years to experience such evils! Two griefs always belong to one joy, like two horses to a chariot."

"My wise Bias! Just as you were of old!" cried Hermon in joyful excitement.

Then he quieted the hound and ordered one of the attendants, who came hurrying in, to bring out whatever dainty viands the house contained and a jar of the best Byblus wine from the cellar.

Meanwhile he did not cease his inquiries about his friend's health, and ordered a goblet to be brought him also, that he might pledge the slave and give brief answers to his sympathizing questions about the cause of the blindness, the noble Archias, the gracious young mistress Daphne, the famous Philippus and his wife, the companion Chrysilla, and the steward Gras. Amid all this he resolved to free the faithful fellow and, while Bias was eating, he could not refrain from telling him that he had found a mistress for him, that Daphne was the wife whom he had chosen, but the wedding was still a long way off.

He controlled his impatience to learn the particulars concerning his friend's fate until Bias had partially satisfied his hunger.

A short time ago Hermon would have declared it impossible that he could ever become so happy during this period of conflict and separation from the object of his love.

The thought of his lost inheritance doubtless flitted through his mind, but it seemed merely like worthless dust, and the certainty that Myrtilus still walked among the living filled him with unclouded happiness. Even though he could no longer see him, he might expect to hear his beloved voice again. Oh, what delight that he was permitted to have his friend once more, as well as Daphne, that he could meet him so freely and joyously and keep the laurel, which had rested with such leaden weight upon his head, for Myrtilus, and for him alone!

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But where was he?

What was the name of the miracle which had saved him, and yet kept him away from his embrace so long?

How had Myrtilus and Bias escaped the flames and death on that night of horror?

A flood of questions assailed the slave before he could begin a connected account, and Hermon constantly interrupted it to ask for details concerning his friend and his health at each period and on every occasion.

Much surprised by his discreet manner, the artist listened to the bondman's narrative; for though Bias had formerly allowed himself to indulge in various little familiarities toward his master, he refrained from them entirely in this story, and the blind man's misfortune invested him in his eyes with a peculiar sacredness.

CHAPTER X.

He had arrived wounded on the pirate ship with his master's friend, the returned bondman began. When he had regained consciousness, he met Ledscha on board the Hydra, as the wife of the pirate Hanno. She had nursed Myrtilus with tireless solicitude, and also often cared for his, Bias's, wounds. After the recovery of the prisoners, she became their protectress, and placed Bias in the service of the Greek artist.

They, the Gaul Lutarius, and one of the sculptor's slaves, were the only ones who had been brought on board the Hydra alive from the attack in Tennis, but the latter soon succumbed to his wounds.

Hermon owed it solely to the bridge-builder that he had escaped from the vengeance of his Biamite foe, for the tall Gaul, whose thick beard resembled Hermon's in length and blackness, was mistaken by Hanno for the person whom Ledscha had directed him to deliver alive into her power.

The pirate had surrendered the wrong captive to the woman he loved and, as Bias declared, to his serious disadvantage; for, though Hanno and the Biamite girl were husband and wife, no one could help perceiving the cold dislike with which Ledscha rebuffed the giant who read her every wish in her eyes. Finally, the captain of the pirate ship, a silent man by nature, often did not open his lips for days except to give orders to the crew. Frequently he even refused to be relieved from duty, and remained all night at the helm.

Only when, at his own risk, or with the vessels of his father and brother, he attacked merchant ships or defended himself against a war galley, did he wake to vigorous life and rush with gallant recklessness into battle.

A single man on the Hydra was little inferior to him in strength and daring—the Gaul Lutarius. He had been enrolled among the pirates, and when Hanno was wounded in an engagement with a Syrian war galley, was elected his representative. During this time Ledscha faithfully performed her duty as her young husband's nurse, but afterward treated him as coldly as before.

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Yet she devoted herself eagerly to the ship and the crew, and the fierce, lawless fellows cheerfully submitted to the sensible arrangements of their captain's beautiful, energetic wife. At this period Bias had often met Ledscha engaged in secret conversation with the Gaul, yet if any tender emotion really attracted her toward any one other than her husband, Myrtilus would have been suspected rather than the black-bearded bridge-builder; for she not only showed the sculptor the kindest consideration, but often entered into conversation with him, and even persuaded him, when the sea was calm, or the Hydra lay at anchor in one of the hidden bays known to the pirates, to practise his art, and at last to make a bust of her. She had succeeded in getting him clay, wax, and tools for the purpose. After asking which goddess had ill-treated the weaver Arachne, she commanded him to make a head of Athene, adorned with the helmet, modelled from her own. During this time she frequently inquired whether her features really were not beautiful enough to be copied for the countenance of a goddess, and when he eagerly assured her of the fact, made him swear that he was not deceiving her with flattery.

Neither Bias nor Myrtilus had ever been allowed to remain on shore; but, on the whole, the slave protested, Myrtilus's health, thanks to the pure sea air on the Hydra, had improved, in spite of the longing which often assailed him, and the great excitements to which he was sometimes exposed.

There had been anxious hours when Hanno's father and brothers visited the Hydra to induce her captain to make money out of the captive sculptor, and either sell him at a high price or extort a large ransom from him; but Bias had overheard how resolutely Ledscha opposed these proposals, and represented to old Satabus of what priceless importance Myrtilus might become to them if either should be captured and imprisoned.

The greatest excitements, of course, had been connected with the battles of the pirates. Myrtilus, who, in spite of his feeble health, by no means lacked courage, found it especially hard to bear that during the conflicts he was locked up with Bias, but even Ledscha could neither prevent nor restrict these measures.

Bias could not tell what seas the Hydra had sailed, nor at what—usually desolate-shores she had touched. He only knew that she had gone to Sinope in Pontus, passed through the Propontis, and then sought booty near the coasts of Asia Minor. Ledscha had refused to answer every question that referred to these things.

Latterly, the young wife had become very grave, and apparently completely severed her relations with her husband; but she also studiously avoided the Gaul and, if they talked to each other at all, it was in hurried whispers.

So events went on until something occurred which was to affect the lives of the prisoners deeply. It must have been just beyond the outlet from the Hellespont into the

AEgean Sea; for, in order to pass through the narrow straits leading thither from Pontus, the Hydra had been most skilfully given the appearance of a peaceful merchant vessel.

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The slave's soul must have been greatly agitated by this experience, for while, hitherto, whenever he was interrupted by Hermon he had retained his composure, and could not refrain from occasionally connecting a practical application with his report, now, mastered by the power of the remembrance, he uttered what he wished to tell his master in an oppressed tone, while bright drops of perspiration bedewed the speaker's brow.

A large merchant ship had approached them, and three men came on board the Hydra—old Satabus, his son Labaja, and a gray-haired, bearded seafarer of tall stature and dignified bearing, Schalit, Ledscha's father.

The meeting between the Biamite ship-owner and his child, after so long a separation, was a singular one; for the young wife held out her hand to her father timidly, with downcast eyes, and he refused to take it. Directly after, however, as if constrained by an irresistible impulse, he drew his unruly daughter toward him and kissed her brow and cheeks.

Roast meat and the best wine had been served in the large ship's cabin; but though Myrtilus and Bias had been locked up as if a bloody battle was expected, the loud, angry uproar of men's deep voices reached them, and Ledscha's shrill tones shrieking in passionate wrath blended in the strife. Furniture must have been upset and dishes broken, yet the giants who were disputing here did not come to blows.

At last the savage turmoil subsided.

When Bias and his master were again released, Ledscha was standing, in the dusk of evening, at the foot of the mainmast, pressing her brow against the wood as if she needed some support to save herself from falling.

She checked Myrtilus's words with an imperious "Let me alone!" The next day she had paced restlessly up and down the deck like a caged beast of prey, and would permit no one to speak to her.

At noon Hanno was about to get into a boat to go to her father's ship, and she insisted upon accompanying him. But this time the corsair seemed completely transformed, and with the pitiless sternness, which he so well knew how to use in issuing commands, ordered her to remain on the Hydra.

She, however, by no means obeyed her husband's mandate without resistance, and, at the recollection of the conflict which now occurred between the pair, in which she raged like a tigress, the narrator's cheeks crimsoned.

The quarrel was ended by the powerful seaman's taking in his arms his lithe, slender wife, who resisted him with all her strength and had already touched the side of the boat with her foot, and putting her down on the deck of his ship.

Then Hanno leaped back into the skiff, while Ledscha, groaning with rage, retired to the cabin.

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An hour after she again appeared on deck, called Myrtilus and Bias and, showing them her eyes, reddened by tears, told them, as if in apology for her weakness, that she had not been permitted to bid her father farewell. Then, pallid as a corpse, she had turned the conversation upon Hermon, and informed Myrtilus that an Alexandrian pilot had told her father that he was blind, and her brother-in-law Labaja had heard the same thing. While saying this, her lips curled scornfully, but when she saw how deeply their friend's misfortune moved her two prisoners, she waved her hand, declaring that he did not need their sympathy; the pilot had reported that he was living in magnificence and pleasure, and the people in the capital honoured and praised him as if he were a god.

Thereupon she had laughed shrilly and reviled so bitterly the contemptible blind Fortune that remains most loyal to those who deserve to perish in the deepest misery, that Bias avoided repeating her words to his master.

The news of Myrtilus's legacy had not reached her ears, and Bias, too, had just heard of it for the first time.

Ledscha's object had been to relieve her troubled soul by attacks upon the man whom she hated, but she suddenly turned to the master and servant to ask if they desired to obtain their liberty.

Oh, how quickly a hopeful "Yes" reached the ears of the gloomy woman! how ready both were to swear, by a solemn oath, to fulfil the conditions the Biamite desired to impose!

As soon as opportunity offered, both were to leave the Hydra with one other person who, like Bias and herself, understood how to manage a boat.

The favourable moment soon came. One moonless night, when the steering of the Hydra was intrusted to the Gaul, Ledscha waked the two prisoners and, with the Gaul Lutarius, Myrtilus, and the slave, entered the boat, which conveyed them to the shore without accident or interruption.

Bias knew the name of the place where it had anchored, it is true, but the oath which Ledscha had made him swear there was so terrible that he would not have broken it at any cost.

This oath required the slave, who, three days after their landing, was sent to Alexandria by the first ship that sailed for that port, to maintain the most absolute secrecy concerning Myrtilus's hiding place until he was authorized to speak. Bias was to go to Alexandria without delay, and there obtain from Archias, who managed Myrtilus's property, the sums which Ledscha intended to use in the following manner: Two attic talents Bias was to bring back. These were for the Gaul, probably in payment for his assistance. Two more were to be taken by the slave to the Temple of Nemesis. Lastly, Bias was to deliver five talents to old Tabus, who kept the treasure of the pirate family

on the Owl's Nest, and tell her that Ledscha, in this money, sent back the bridal dowry which Hanno had paid her father for his daughter. With this she released herself from the husband who inspired her with feelings very unlike love.

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Hermon asked to have this commission repeated, and received the directions Myrtilus had given to the slave. The blind man's hope that they must also include greetings and news from his friend's hand was destroyed by Bias, whom Myrtilus, in the leisure hours on the Hydra, had taught to read. This was not so difficult a task for the slave, who longed for knowledge, and had already tried it before. But with writing, on the other hand, he could make no headway. He was too old, and his hand had become too clumsy to acquire this difficult art.

In reply to Hermon's anxious question whether his friend needed anything in his present abode, the slave reported that he was at liberty to move about at will, and was not even obliged to share Ledscha's lodgings. He lacked nothing, for the Biamite, besides some gold, had left with him also gems and pearls of such great value that they would suffice to support him several years. As for himself, she had supplied him more than abundantly with money for travelling expenses.

Myrtilus was awaiting his return in a city prospering under a rich and wise regent, and sent whole cargoes of affectionate remembrances. The sculptor, too, was firmly resolved to keep the oath imposed upon him.

As soon as he, Bias, had performed the commission intrusted to him, he and Myrtilus would be released from their vow, and Hermon would learn his friend's residence.

CHAPTER XI.

No morning brightened Hermon's night of darkness.

When the returned slave had finished his report, the sun was already shining into his master's room.

Without lying down again, the latter went at once to the Tennis notary, who had moved to Alexandria two months before, and with his assistance raised the money which his friend needed.

Worthy Melampus had received the news that Myrtilus was still alive in a very singular manner. Even now he could grasp only one thing at a time, and he loved Hermon with sincere devotion. Therefore the lawyer who had so zealously striven to expedite the blind man's entering into possession of his friend's inheritance would very willingly have permitted Myrtilus —doubtless an invalid—to continue to rest quietly among the dead. Yet his kind heart rejoiced at the deliverance of the famous young artist, and so during Hermon's story he had passed from sincere regret to loud expressions of joyous sympathy.

Lastly, he had placed his whole property at the disposal of Hermon, who had paid him liberally for his work, to provide for the blind sculptor's future. This generous offer had

been declined; but he now assisted Hermon to prepare the emancipation papers for his faithful Bias, and found a ship that was bound to Tanis. Toward evening he accompanied Hermon to the harbour and, after a cordial farewell from his helpful friend, the artist, with the new “freedman” Bias and the slave clerk Patran, went on board the vessel, now ready to sail.

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The voyage was one of the speediest, yet the end came too soon for both master and servant—Hermon had not yet heard enough of the friend beyond his reach, and Bias was far from having related everything he desired to tell about Myrtilus and Ledscha; yet he was now permitted to express every opinion that entered his mind, and this had occupied a great deal of time.

Bias also sought to know much more about Hermon's past and future than he had yet learned, not merely from curiosity, but because he foresaw that Myrtilus would not cease to question him about his blind friend.

The misfortune must have produced a deep and lasting effect upon the artist's joyous nature, for his whole bearing was pervaded by such earnestness and dignity that years, instead of months, seemed to have elapsed since their separation.

It was characteristic of Daphne that her lover's blindness did not alienate her from him; yet why had not the girl, who still desired to become his wife, been able to wed the helpless man who had lost his sight? If the father did not wish to be separated from his daughter, surely he could live with the young couple. A home was quickly made everywhere for the rich, and, if Archias was tired of his house in Alexandria, as Hermon had intimated, there was room enough in the world for a new one.

But that was the way with things here below! Man was the cause of man's misfortune! Daphne and Hermon remained the same; but Archias from an affectionate father had become transformed into an entirely different person. If the former had been allowed to follow their inclinations, they would now be united and happy, while, because a third person so willed, they must go their way solitary and wretched.

He expressed this view to his master, and insisted upon his opinion until Hermon confided to him what had driven Archias from Alexandria.

Patran, Bias's successor, was by no means satisfactory to him. Had Hermon retained his sight, he certainly would not have purchased him, in spite of his skill as a scribe, for the Egyptian had a "bad face."

Oh, if only he could have been permitted to stay with his benefactor instead of this sullen man! How carefully he would have removed the stones from his darkened pathway!

During the voyage he was obliged to undergo severe struggles to keep the oath of secrecy imposed upon him; but perjury threatened him with the most horrible tortures, not to mention the sorceress Tabus, whom he was to meet.

So Myrtilus's abode remained unknown to Hermon.

Bias approved his master's intention of going into the desert. He had often seen the oracle of Amon tested, and he himself had experienced the healthfulness of the desert air. Besides, it made him proud to see that Hermon was disposed to follow his suggestion of pitching his tent in a spot which he designated. This was at the end of the arm of the sea at Clysma. Several trees grew there beside small springs, and a peaceful family of Amalekites raised vegetables in their little garden, situated on higher ground, watered by the desert wells.

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When a boy, before the doom of slavery had been pronounced upon him and his father, his mother, by the priest's advice, took him there to recover from the severe attack of fever which he could not shake off amid the damp papyrus plantations surrounding his parents' house. In the dry, pure air of the desert he recovered, and he would guide Hermon there before returning to Myrtilus.

From Tanis they reached Tennis in a few hours, and found shelter in the home of the superintendent of Archias's weaving establishments, whose hospitality Myrtilus and Hermon had enjoyed before their installation in the white house, now burned to the ground. The Alexandrian bills of exchange were paid in gold by the lessee of the royal bank, who was a good friend of Hermon. Toward evening, both rowed to the Owl's Nest, taking the five talents with which the runaway wife intended to purchase freedom from her husband.

As the men approached the central door of the pirates' house, a middy-aged Biamite woman appeared and rudely ordered them to leave the island. Tabus was weak, and refused to see visitors. But she was mistaken; for when Bias, in the dialect of his tribe, shouted loudly that messengers from the wife of her grandson Hanno had arrived, there was a movement at the back of the room, and broken sentences, gasped with difficulty, expressed the old dame's wish to receive the strangers.

On a sheep's-wool couch, over which was spread a wolfskin, the last gift of her son Satabus, lay the sorceress, who raised herself as Hermon passed through the door.

After his greeting, she pointed to her deaf ear and begged him to speak louder. At the same time she gazed into his eyes with a keen, penetrating glance, and interrupted him by the question: "The Greek sculptor whose studio was burned over his head? And blind? Blind still?"

"In both eyes," Bias answered for his master.

"And you, fellow?" the old dame asked; then, recollecting herself, stopped the reply on the servant's lips with the hasty remark: "You are the blackbeard's slave—a Biamite? Oh, I remember perfectly! You disappeared with the burning house."

Then she gazed intently and thoughtfully from one to the other, and at last, pointing to Bias, muttered in a whisper: "You alone come from Hanno and Ledscha, and were with them on the Hydra? Very well. What news have you for the old woman from the young couple?"

The freedman began to relate what brought him to the Owl's Nest, and the gray-haired crone listened eagerly until he said that Ledscha lived unhappily with her husband, and therefore had left him. She sent back to her, as the head of Hanno's family, the bridal dowry with which Hanno had bought her from her father as his wife.

Then Tabus struggled into a little more erect posture, and asked: “What does this mean? Five talents—and gold, not silver talents? And she sends the money to me? To me? And she ran away from her husband? But no—no! Once more—you are a Biamite—repeat it in our own language—and loudly. This ear is the better one.”

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Bias obeyed, and the old dame listened to the end without interrupting him: then raising her brown right hand, covered with a network of blue-black veins, she clinched it into a fist, which she shook far more violently than Bias would have believed possible in her weak condition. At the same time she pressed her lips so tightly together that her toothless mouth deepened into a hole, and her dim eyes shone with a keen, menacing light. For some time she found no reply, though strange, rattling, gasping sounds escaped her heaving breast.

At last she succeeded in uttering words, and shrieked shrilly: "This— this—away with the golden trash! With the bridal dowry of the family rejected, and once more free, the base fool thinks she would be like the captive fox that gnawed the rope! Oh, this age, these people! And this, this is the haughty, strong Ledscha, the daughter of the Biamites, who— there stands the blind girl—deceiver!—who so admirably avenged herself?"

Here her voice failed, and Hermon began to speak to assure her that she understood Ledscha's wish aright. Then he asked her for a token by which she acknowledged the receipt of the gold, which he handed her in a stout linen bag.

But his purpose was not fulfilled, for suddenly, flaming with passionate wrath, she thrust the purse aside, groaning: "Not an obol of the accursed destruction of souls shall come back to Hanno, nor even into the family store. Until his heart and hers stop beating, the most indissoluble bond will unite both. She desires to ransom herself from a lawful marriage concluded by her father, as if she were a captive of war; perhaps she even wants to follow another. Hanno, brave lad, was ready to go to death for her sake, and she rewards him by bringing shame on his head and disgrace on us all. Oh, these times, this world! Everything that is inviolable and holy trampled in the dust! But they are not all so! In spite of Grecian infidelity, marriage is still honoured among our people. But she who mocks what is sacred, and tramples holy customs under foot, shall be accursed, execrated, given over to want, hunger, disease, death!"

With rattling breath and closed eyes she leaned farther back against the cushions that supported her; but Bias, in their common language, tried to soothe her, and informed her that, though Ledscha had probably run away from her husband, she had by no means renounced her vengeance. He was bringing two talents with him to place in the Temple of Nemesis.

"Of Nemesis?" repeated the old dame. Then she tried to raise herself and, as she constantly sank back again, Bias aided her. But she had scarcely recovered her sitting posture when she gasped to the freedman: "Nemesis, who helped, and is to continue to help her to destroy her foe? Well, well! Five talents—a great sum, a great sum! But the more the better! To Nemesis with them, to Ate and the Erinyes! The talons of the avenging goddess shall tear the beautiful face, the heart, and the liver of the accursed one! A twofold malediction on her who has wronged the son of my Satabus!"

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While speaking, her head nodded swiftly up and down, and when at last she bowed it wearily, her visitors heard her murmur the names of Satabus and Hanno, sometimes tenderly, sometimes mournfully.

Finally she asked whether any one else was concerned in Ledscha's flight; and when she learned that a Gallic bridge-builder accompanied the fugitive wife, she again started up as if frantic, exclaiming: "Yes, to Nemesis with the gold! We neither need nor want it, and Satabus, my son, he will bless me for renunciation—"

Here exhaustion again silenced her. She gazed mutely and thoughtfully into vacancy, until at last, turning to Bias, she began more calmly: "You will see her again, man, and must tell her what the clan of Tabus bought with her talents. Take her my curse, and let her know that her friends would be my foes, and her foes should find in Tabus a benefactress!"

Then, deeply buried in thought, she again fixed her eyes on the floor; but at last she called to Hermon, saying: "You, blind Greek—am I not right?—the torch was thrust into your face, and you lost the sight of both eyes?"

The artist assented to this question; but she bade him sit down before her, and when he bent his face near her she raised one lid after the other with trembling fingers, yet lightly and skilfully, gazed long and intently into his eyes, and murmured: "Like black Psoti and lawless Simeon, and they are both cured."

"Can you restore me?" Hermon now asked in great excitement. "Answer me honestly, you experienced woman! Give me back my sight, and demand whatever gold and valuables I still possess—"

"Keep them," Tabus contemptuously interrupted. "Not for gold or goods will I restore you the best gift man can lose. I will cure you because you are the person to whom the infamous wretch most ardently wished the sorest trouble. When she hoped to destroy you, she perceived in this deed the happiness which had been promised to her on a night when the full moon was shining. To-day—this very night—the disk between Astarte's horns rounds again, and presently—wait a little while!— presently you shall have what the light restores you—" Then she called the Biamite woman, ordered her to bring the medicine chest, and took from it one vessel after another. The box she was seeking was among the last and, while handing it to Bias, she muttered: "Oh, yes, certainly—it does one good to destroy a foe, but no less to make her foe happy!"

Turning to the freedman, she went on in a louder tone: "You, slave, shall inform Hanno's wife that old Tabus gave the sculptor, whose blindness she caused, the remedy which restored the sight of black Psoti, whom she knew." Here she paused, gazed upward, and murmured almost unintelligibly: "Satabus, Hanno! If this is the last act of the old mother, it will give ye pleasure."

Then she told Hermon to kneel again, and ordered the slave to hold the lamp which her nurse Tasia had just lighted at the hearth fire.

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"The last," she said, looking into the box, "but it will be enough. The odour of the herb in the salve is as strong as if it had been prepared yesterday."

She laid the first bandage on Hermon's eyes with her own weak fingers, at the same time muttering an incantation; but it did not seem to satisfy her. Great excitement had taken possession of her, and as the silver light of the full moon shone into her room she waved her hands before the artist's eyes and fixed her gaze upon the threshold illumined by the moonbeams, ejaculating sentences incomprehensible to the blind man. Bias supported her, for she had risen to her full height, and he felt how she tottered and trembled.

Yet her strength held out to whisper to Hermon: "Nearer, still nearer! By the light of the august one whose rays greet us, let it be said: You will see again. Await your recovery patiently in a quiet place in the pure air, not in the city. Refrain from everything with which the Greeks intoxicate themselves. Shun wine, and whatever heats the blood. Recovery is coming; I see it drawing near. You will see again as surely as I now curse the woman who abandoned the husband to whom she vowed fidelity. She rejoiced over your blindness, and she will gnash her teeth with rage and grief when she hears that it was Tabus who brought light into the darkness that surrounds you."

With these words she pushed off the freedman's supporting arms and sank back upon the couch.

Again Hermon tried to thank her; but she would not permit it, and said in an almost inaudible tone: "I really did not give the salve to do you good—the last act of all—"

Finally she murmured a few words of direction for its use, and added that he must keep the sunlight from his blind eyes by bandages and shades, as if it were a cruel foe.

When she paused, and Bias asked her another question, she pointed to the door, exclaiming as loudly as her weakness permitted, "Go, I tell you, go!"

Hermon obeyed and left her, accompanied by the freedman, who carried the box of salve so full of precious promise.

The next morning Bias delivered to the astonished priest of Nemesis the large gifts intended for the avenging goddess.

Before Hermon entered the boat with him and his Egyptian slave, the freedman told his master that Gula was again living in perfect harmony with the husband who had cast her off, and Taus, Ledscha's younger sister, was the wife of the young Biamite who, she had feared, would give up his wooing on account of her visit to Hermon's studio.

After a long voyage through the canal which had been dug a short time before, connecting the Mediterranean with the Red Sea, the three men reached Clysma.

Opposite to it, on the eastern shore of the narrow northern point of the Erythraean sea —[Red Sea]—lay the goal of their journey, and thither Bias led his blind master, followed by the slave, on shore.

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CHAPTER XII.

It was long since Hermon had felt so free and light-hearted as during this voyage.

He firmly believed in his recovery.

A few days before he had escaped death in the royal palace as if by a miracle, and he owed his deliverance to the woman he loved.

In the Temple of Nemesis at Tennis the conviction that the goddess had ceased to persecute him took possession of his mind.

True, his blind eyes had been unable to see her menacing statue, but not even the slightest thrill of horror had seized him in its presence. In Alexandria, after his departure from Proclus's banquet, she had desisted from pursuing him. Else how would she have permitted him to escape uninjured when he was already standing upon the verge of an abyss, and a wave of her hand would have sufficed to hurl him into the death-dealing gulf?

But his swift confession, and the transformation which followed it, had reconciled him not only with her, but also with the other gods; for they appeared to him in forms as radiant and friendly as in the days of his boyhood, when, while Bias took the helm on the long voyage through the canal and the Bitter Lakes, he recalled the visible world to his memory and, from the rising sun, Phoebus Apollo, the lord of light and purity, gazed at him from his golden chariot, drawn by four horses, and Aphrodite, the embodiment of all beauty, rose before him from the snowy foam of the azure waves. Demeter, in the form of Daphne, appeared, dispensing prosperity, above the swaying golden waves of the ripening grain fields and bestowing peace beside the domestic hearth. The whole world once more seemed peopled with deities, and he felt their rule in his own breast.

The place of which Bias had told him was situated on a lofty portion of the shore. Beside the springs which there gushed from the soil of the desert grew green palm trees and thorny acacias. Farther on flourished the fragrant betharan. About a thousand paces from this spot the faithful freedman pitched the little tent obtained in Tennis under the shade of several tall palm trees and a sejál acacia.

Not far from the springs lived the same family of Amalekites whom Bias had known from boyhood. They raised a few vegetables in little beds, and the men acted as guards to the caravans which came from Egypt through the peninsula of Sinai to Petrea and Hebron. The daughter of the aged sheik whose men accompanied the trains of goods, a pleasant, middle-aged woman, recognised the Biamite, who when a boy had recovered under her mother's nursing, and promised Bias to honour his blind master as a valued guest of the tribe.

Not until after he had done everything in his power to render life in the wilderness endurable, and had placed a fresh bandage over his eyes, would Bias leave his master.

The freedman entered the boat weeping, and Hermon, deeply agitated, turned his face toward him.

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When he was left alone with his Egyptian slave, with whom he rarely exchanged a word, he fancied that, amid the murmur of the waves washing the strand at his feet, blended the sounds of the street which led past his house in Alexandria, and with them all sorts of disagreeable memories crowded upon him; but soon he no longer heard them, and the next night brought refreshing sleep.

Even on the second day he felt that the profound silence which surrounded him was a benefit. The stillness affected him like something physical.

The life was certainly monotonous, and at first there were hours when the course of the new existence, so devoid of any change, oppressed him, but he experienced no tedium. His mental life was too rich, and the unburdening of his anxious soul too great a relief for that.

He had shunned serious thought since he left the philosopher's school; but here it soon afforded him the highest pleasure, for never had his mind moved so freely, so undisturbed by any limit or obstacle.

He did not need to search for what he hoped to find in the wilderness. His whole past life passed before him as if by its own volition. All that he had ever experienced, learned, thought, felt, rose before his mind with wonderful distinctness, and when he overlooked all his mental possessions, as if from a high watch-tower in the bright sunshine, he began to consider how he had used the details and how he could continue to do so.

Whatever he had seen incorrectly forced itself resistlessly upon him, yet here also the Greek nature, deeply implanted in his soul, guarded him, and it was easy for him to avoid self-torturing remorse. He only desired to utilize for improvement what he recognised as false.

When in this delicious silence he listened to the contradictory demands of his intellect and his senses, it often seemed as though he was present at a discussion between two guests who were exchanging their opinions concerning the subject that occupied his mind.

Here he first learned to deepen sound intellectual power and listen to the demands of the heart, or to repulse and condemn them.

Ah, yes, he was still blind; but never had he observed and recognised human life and its stage, down to the minutest detail, which his eyes refused to show him, so keenly as during these days. The phenomena which had attracted or repelled his vision here appeared nearer and more distinctly.

What he called “reality” and believed he understood thoroughly and estimated correctly, now disclosed many a secret which had previously remained concealed.

How defective his visual perception had been! how necessary it now seemed to subject his judgment to a new test! Doubtless a wealth of artistic subjects had come to him from the world of reality which he had placed far above everything else, but a greater and nobler one from the sphere which he had shunned as unfruitful and corrupting.

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As if by magic, the world of ideality opened before him in this exquisite silence. He again found in his own soul the joyous creative forces of Nature, and the surrounding stillness increased tenfold his capacity of perceiving it; nay, he felt as if creative energy dwelt in solitude itself.

His mind had always turned toward greatness. The desire to impress his works with the stamp of his own overflowing power had carried him far beyond moderation in modelling his struggling Maenads.

Now, when he sought for subjects, beside the smaller and more simple ones appeared mighty and manifold ones, often of superhuman grandeur.

Oh, if a higher power would at some future day permit him to model with his strong hands this battle of the Amazons, this Phoebus Apollo, radiant in beauty and the glow of victory, conquering the dragons of darkness!

Arachne, too, returned to his mind, and also Demeter. But she did not hover before him as the peaceful dispenser of blessings, the preserver of peace, but as the maternal earth goddess, robbed of her daughter Proserpina. How varied in meaning was this myth!—and he strove to follow it in every direction.

Nothing more could come to the blind artist from Nature by the aid of his physical vision. The realm of reality was closed to him; but he had found the key to that of the ideal, and what he found in it proved to be no less true than the objects the other had offered.

How rich in forms was the new world which forced itself unbidden on his imagination! He who, a short time before, had believed whatever could not be touched by the hands was useless for his art, now had the choice among a hundred subjects, full of glowing life, which were attainable by no organ of the senses. He need fear to undertake none, if only it was worthy of representation; for he was sure of his ability, and difficulty did not alarm him, but promised to lend creating for the first time its true charm.

And, besides, without the interest of animated conversation, without festal scenes where, with garlanded head and intoxicating pleasure soaring upward from the dust of earth, existence had seemed to him shallow and not worth the trouble it imposed upon mortals, solitude now offered him hours as happy as he had ever experienced while revelling with gay companions.

At first many things had disturbed them, especially the dissatisfied, almost gloomy disposition of his Egyptian slave, who, born in the city and accustomed to its life, found it unbearable to stay in the desert with the strange blind master, who lived like a porter, and ordered him to prepare his wretched fare with the hands skilled in the use of the pen.

But this living disturber of the peace was not to annoy the recluse long. Scarcely a fortnight after Bias's departure, the slave Patran, who had cost so extravagant a sum, vanished one morning with the sculptor's money and silver cup.

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This rascally trick of a servant whom he had treated with almost brotherly kindness wounded Hermon, but he soon regarded the morose fellow's disappearance as a benefit.

When for the first time he drank water from an earthen jug, instead of a silver goblet, he thought of Diogenes, who cast his cup aside when he saw a boy raise water to his lips in his hand, yet with whom the great Macedonian conqueror of the world would have changed places "if he had not been Alexander."

The active, merry son of Bias's Amalekite friend gladly rendered him the help and guidance for which he had been reluctant to ask his ill-tempered slave, and he soon became accustomed to the simple fare of the nomads. Bread and milk, fruits and vegetables from his neighbour's little garden, satisfied him, and when the wine he had drunk was used, he contented himself, obedient to old Tabus's advice, with pure water.

As he still had several gold coins on his person, and wore two costly rings on his finger, he doubtless thought of sending to Clysma for meat, poultry, and wine, but he had refrained from doing so through the advice of the Amalekite woman, who anointed his eyes with Tabus's salve and protected them by a shade of fresh leaves from the dazzling rays of the desert sun. She, like the sorceress on the Owl's Nest, warned him against all viands that inflamed the blood, and he willingly allowed her to take away what she and her gray-haired father, the experienced head of the tribe, pronounced detrimental to his recovery.

At first the "beggar's fare" seemed repulsive, but he soon felt that it was benefiting him after the riotous life of the last few months.

One day, when the Amalekite took off his bandage, he thought he saw a faint glimmer of light, and how his heart exulted at this faint foretaste of the pleasure of sight!

In an instant hope sprang up with fresh power in his excitable soul, and his lost cheerfulness returned to him like a butterfly to the newly opened flower. The image of his beloved Daphne rose before him in sunny radiance, and he saw himself in his studio in the service of his art.

He had always been fond of children, and the little ones in the Amalekite family quickly discovered this, and crowded around their blind friend, who played all sorts of games with them, and in spite of the bandaged eyes, over which spread a broad shade of green leaves, could make whistles with his skilful artist hands from the reeds and willow branches they brought.

He saw before him the object to which his heart still clung as distinctly as if he need only stretch out his hand to draw it nearer, and perhaps— surely and certainly, the Amalekite said—the time would come when he would behold it also with his bodily eyes.

If the longing should be fulfilled! If his eyes were again permitted to convey to him what formerly filled his soul with delight! Yes, beauty— was entitled to a higher place than truth, and if it again unfolded itself to his gaze, how gladly and gratefully he would pay homage to it with his art!

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The hope that he might enjoy it once more now grew stronger, for the glimmer of light became brighter, and one day, when his skilful nurse again took the bandage from his milk-white pupils, he saw something long appear, as if through, a mist. It was only the thorny acacia tree at his tent; but the sight of the most beautiful of beautiful things never filled him with more joyful gratitude.

Then he ordered the less valuable of his two rings to be sold to offer a sacrifice to health-bestowing Isis, who had a little temple in Clysmia.

How fervently he now prayed also to the great Apollo, the foe of darkness and the lord of everything light and pure! How yearningly he besought Aphrodite to bless him again with the enjoyment of eternal beauty, and Eros to heal the wound which his arrow had inflicted upon his heart and Daphne's, and bring them together after so much distress and need!

When, after the lapse of another week, the bandage was again removed, his inmost soul rejoiced, for his eyes showed him the rippling emerald-green surface of the Red Sea, and the outlines of the palms, the tents, the Amalekite woman, her boy, and her two long-eared goats.

How ardently he thanked the gracious deities who, in spite of Straton's precepts, were no mere figments of human imagination and, as if he had become a child again, poured forth his overflowing heart with mute gratitude to his mother's soul!

The artist nature, yearning to create, began to stir within more ceaselessly than ever before. Already he saw clay and wax assuming forms beneath his skilful hands; already he imagined himself, with fresh power and delight, cutting majestic figures from blocks of marble, or, by hammering, carving, and filing, shaping them from gold and ivory.

And he would not take what he intended to create solely from the world of reality perceptible to the senses. Oh, no! He desired to show through his art the loftiest of ideals. How could he still shrink from using the liberty which he had formerly rejected, the liberty of drawing from his own inner consciousness what he needed in order to bestow upon the ideal images he longed to create the grandeur, strength, and sublimity in which he beheld them rise before his purified soul!

Yet, with all this, he must remain faithful to truth, copy from Nature what he desired to represent. Every finger, every lock of hair, must correspond with reality to the minutest detail, and yet the whole must be pervaded and penetrated, as the blood flows through the body, by the thought that filled his mind and soul.

A reflected image of the ideal and of his own mood, faithful to truth, free, and yet obedient to the demands of moderation—in this sentence Hermon summed up the result of his solitary meditations upon art and works of art. Since he had found the gods

again, he perceived that the Muse had confided to him a sacerdotal office. He intended to perform its duties, and not only attract and please the beholder's eyes through his works, but elevate his heart and mind, as beauty, truth, grandeur, and eternity uplifted his own soul. He recognised in the tireless creative power which keeps Nature ever new, fresh, and bewitching, the presence of the same deity whose rule manifested itself in the life of his own soul.

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So long as he denied its existence, he had recognised no being more powerful than himself; now that he again felt insignificant beside it, he knew himself to be stronger than ever before, that the greatest of all powers had become his ally. Now it was difficult for him to understand how he could have turned away from the deity. As an artist he, too, was a creator, and, while he believed those who considered the universe had come into existence of itself, instead of having been created, he had robbed himself of the most sublime model. Besides, the greatest charm of his noble profession was lost to him. Now he knew it, and was striving toward the goal attainable by the artist alone among mortals—to hold intercourse with the deity, and by creations full of its essence elevate the world to its grandeur and beauty.

One day, at the end of the second month of his stay in the desert, when the Amalekite woman removed the bandage, her boy, whose form he distinguished as if through a veil, suddenly exclaimed: “The white cover on your eyes is melting! They are beginning to sparkle a little, and soon they will be perfectly well, and you can carve the lion’s head on my cane.”

Perhaps the artist might really have succeeded in doing so, but he forbade himself the attempt.

He thought that the time for departure had now arrived, and an irresistible longing urged him back to the world and Daphne.

But he could not resist the entreaties of the old sheik and his daughter not to risk what he had gained, so he continued to use the shade of leaves, and allowed himself to be persuaded to defer his departure until the dimness which still prevented his seeing anything distinctly passed away.

True, the beautiful peace which he had enjoyed of late was over and, besides, anxiety for the dear ones in distant lands was constantly increasing. He had had no news of them for a long time, and when he imagined what fate might have overtaken Archias, and his daughter with him, if he had been carried back to the enraged King in Alexandria, a terrible dread took possession of him, which scattered even joy in his wonderful recovery to the four winds, and finally led him to the resolution to return to the world at any risk and devote himself to those whose fate was nearer to his heart than his own weal and woe.

ETEXT EDITOR’S BOOKMARKS:

Forbidden the folly of spoiling the present by remorse
Two griefs always belong to one joy

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