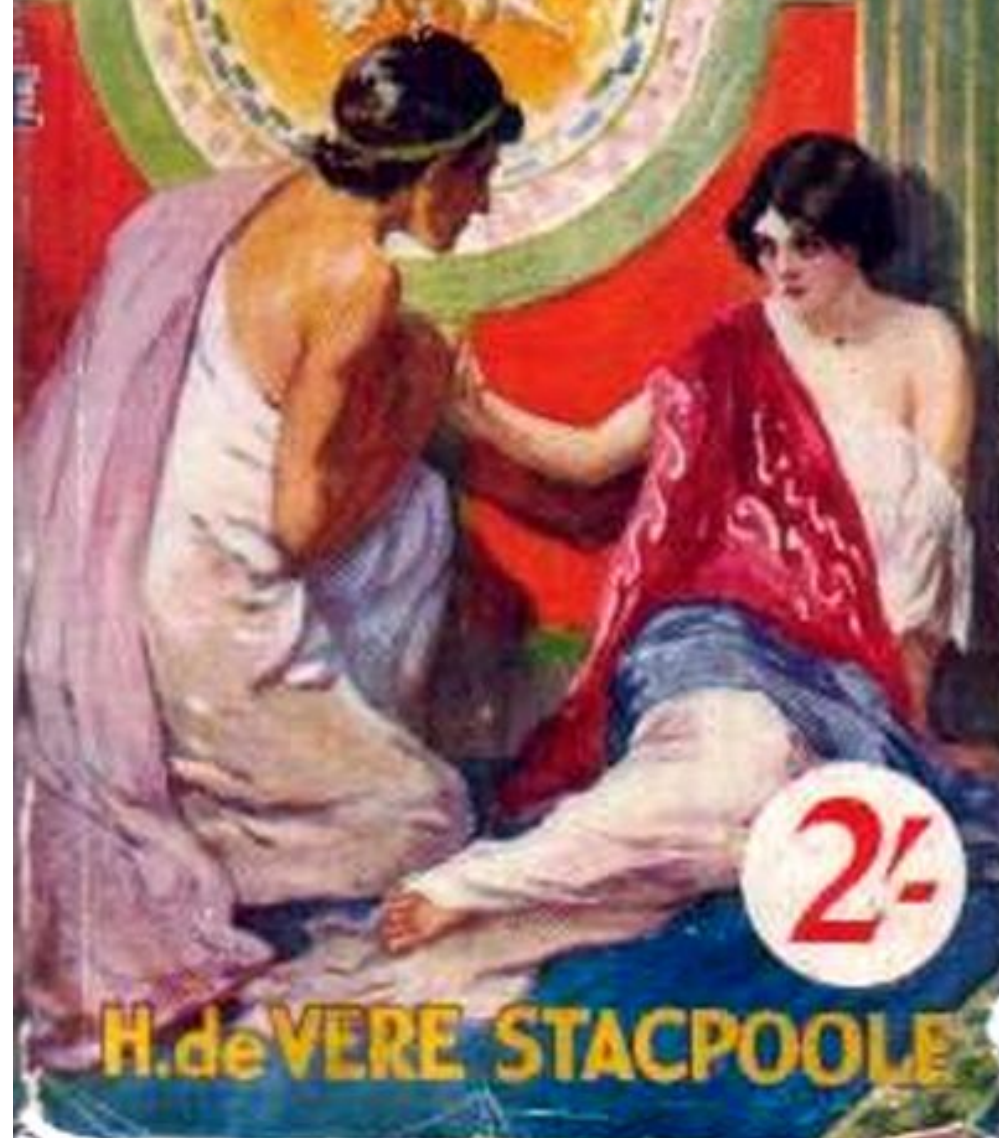


THE STREET OF THE FLUTE PLAYER



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THE STREET OF THE FLUTE-PLAYER

A ROMANCE

BY H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

AUTHOR OF "THE BLUE LAZARUS," "DRUMS OF WAR," ETC.



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YEAR: *The year of the first production of “The Frogs”*

TIME: *The grape harvest*

CONTENTS

PART I

THE MARKET-PLACE

CHAP.	PAGE
I SUNRISE	<u>7</u>
II MULLET FOR THE MARKET	<u>13</u>
III THE BATTLE OF CEPHISUS	<u>17</u>
IV THE JAR OF OLIVES	<u>21</u>
V DIOMED	<u>25</u>
VI THE ROMANCE OF THE CRITICAL SPIRIT	<u>35</u>
VII THE BARBER'S SHOP	<u>40</u>
VIII THE STREET OF THE FLUTE-PLAYER.	<u>44</u>
IX THE HOUSE OF THE METIC	<u>49</u>
X THE VISION	<u>55</u>
XI THE PURSE-BEARER	<u>60</u>
XII THE GRATITUDE OF PHILINUS	<u>68</u>
XIII THE HOUSE OF DIOMED	<u>72</u>
XIV DIOMED PUTS HIS HOUSE IN ORDER.	<u>78</u>
XV THE QUESTION THAT SOCRATES COULD NOT ANSWER	<u>86</u>

PART II

A NIGHT IN ATHENS

I	CLEON SWEARS REVENGE	<u>92</u>
II	THE GUESTS	<u>97</u>
III	THE DINNER	<u>103</u>
IV	THE SYMPOSIUM	<u>108</u>
V	A NIGHT IN ATHENS	<u>112</u>
VI	THE AWAKENING OF DIOMED	<u>119</u>
VII	THE WOMAN AND THE PORTER	<u>123</u>
VIII	WHAT HAPPENED AT THE HOUSE OF GYGES . .	<u>135</u>
IX	HIPPIAS	<u>144</u>
X	THE GODS OF THE COUNTRY	<u>151</u>
XI	THE WARNING	<u>161</u>
XII	THE MOONLIGHT STRIKES THE DOOR	<u>169</u>

PART III

THE GATE OF MYSTAE

I	WHO BELIEVES IN FATE CREATES HIS FATE	<u>172</u>
II	THE SHUTTERED WINDOW	<u>177</u>
III	THE DOG-STEALER	<u>182</u>
IV	THE CHILDREN'S COURT	<u>186</u>
V	THE COMPACT	<u>193</u>
VI	THE SALE OF THE GEMS	<u>197</u>
VII	SUCCESS	<u>202</u>
VIII	THE OPEN DOOR	<u>206</u>
IX	PASICLEA	<u>211</u>
X	THE TRAP LAID BARE	<u>218</u>
XI	THE CUPS	<u>226</u>
XII	THE SHIP	<u>228</u>
XIII	THE ESCAPE	<u>237</u>
XIV	ABBAS.	<u>242</u>
XV	GYGES.	<u>245</u>
XVI	FATE	<u>248</u>
XVII	THE LOVERS MEET AND PART IN THE STREET OF THE FLUTE-PLAYER	<u>251</u>
XVIII	SUNSET	<u>254</u>

THE STREET OF THE FLUTE-PLAYER

PART I THE MARKET-PLACE

CHAPTER I

SUNRISE

THE moon had vanished beneath the horizon, and the boat, running before a steady wind from the west, lifted with bird-like buoyancy to the swell. The swell and the wind were running together, and the great sail cut with its black triangle the sky of stars.

To the north a dim blur told of the land. Simon the fisherman had fallen on luck during the night: the boat was heavy with fish. Mullet and pilchards, rock-fish, all lay flung together in the well forward of the mast; he could see the glitter of them as the stern lifted and the starlight caught them with a splendid flash as of bars of silver.

By the feet of the old man at the steering-oar lay what seemed a bundle, but which was a boy, Pheidon. Pheidon, the shouter of the Piraeus, the stone-thrower, the wicked one who would slip imp-like on board your boat and play tricks with your gear, not from malice but from mischief; Pheidon, curled up like a sea hedgehog, and snoring.

His head almost touched his knees, and his fists were clenched as though he were holding hard on to sleep. A moment ago and the stars had reached down to the eastern sea-level, and now, just in the turning of a head, the lowermost stars were paling out.

Simon, moving, touched Pheidon with his foot, and the boy awoke, uncurled himself, stretched, and sat up.

Even as he did so the steersman hauled upon the rope that did duty for a sheet and shifted the steering-oar. The boat, altering her course and heading now for land, took tongue as the hand of the wind pressed on the sail, and the ripples of the resisting sea loudened at the bow, passed warbling by the midship planking, and hissed away to silence in the wake.

"She is talking of the shore," said Pheidon, still in the bottom of the boat, with his chin on the leeward gunwale and his eyes on the water.

"The sea—the sea—the salt sea unharvested.
Lies it behind us, the sea,
Bend oar, bend sail to the wind of the morning,
Show us, Poseidon, the shore."

He crooned the old boat-song of the Piraeus, the song of the fishermen who give their sails to the wind, the song that the rowers of the war-triremes hum as they haul out from the steps and before the first bird-like notes of the flute give time to the oars.

Then, crawling forward, he crouched, still humming and on the watch for something far ahead.

The water held something in its depths, a luminous something as though dawn were coming from under the sea; the stars were all shivering away, and dissolving, where the East had opened a window into infinite and eternal distance; the wind had suddenly freshened, the song of the ripple had loudened, the boat lay over to the wind deliciously, and dipped deeper in the sea, so that the spray swept inboard over the silver and salt-smelling cargo.

Then, like a black cloud, humping itself in the vague wonderlight that was filling the world, a cape to the left slowly unveiled itself and then changed from a cloud to a promontory, sharp and dark, and the blur directly ahead became land. Dim hills strengthened themselves on the skyline, and as they drew their outlines the sky behind them became luminous with the vaguest blue.

Now the waves were showing up in life and motion, it was as though the unseen brush of some busy painter were at work; and scarcely had the waves given hint of their life and blueness than a broken tracery in the near distance of the shore said to the eye, "Here is a city surmounted by a hill." Magically, and almost at the word of the tracery, the city said, "Behold me!" and scarcely had the city spoken than the sun laid a finger on the far-off hills of Attica.

As the hills took fire a star broke in the blue above the city.

This was what Pheidon had been watching for. The spear top of Athena, the champion, crowning the Acropolis, had caught the first ray of sunlight; and as this star born of art broke to view, the azure above became filled with the dazzle and splendour of morning. Then, and almost as though a veil had been cast down, the great and distant statue stood revealed, and, temple by temple, the Acropolis took the day.

The Pnyx had now caught the light, and now the Areopagus to the west of the Acropolis; and then at a stroke, and as though the wind of the sea

were blowing the shadows away, the conical roof of the Odeum, the temple of Dionysus, the temple of Zeus Olympius, by the gate of Mystae, and the temple of Artemis by the Itonian gate, the Acropolis from the Propylaea to the Eastern Pelasgian walls, from the Parthenon to the foam-white marble steps, all broke out clear and living into the dazzling sunlight. Then the sea flashed to the sun and across the wind-swept blue Pheidon saw Phalerum and the harbour town of the Piraeus, and now the whole wonderful picture, from far-distant purple Hymettus to the flashing sea, lay spread beneath the clear and delicate blue of a cloudless and silent day.

The boat racing for the shore seemed to spring to life with the first touch of sunlight and dipped deeper to the freshening wind; the whole world, distant hills, dazzling city, and blue dancing waves laughed in the face of Pheidon.

He could see the ship-houses of the Piraeus now across the water and the white marble facings of the harbour; other boats were coming in from the fishing, but the boat of Simon was first, for all the weight of its cargo.

The rushing breeze, the dancing waves, the great warm hand of the sun laid on the right cheek of the boy made the shouter of the Piraeus forget little things for a moment, even the triumphant catch of fish, whilst what soul was in him danced and revelled with the waves and breeze and dazzle of early morning.

As they drew nearer the harbour a war-trireme was coming out against the breeze.

“The sea—the sea—the salt sea unharvested.
Lies it behind us, the sea,
Bend oar, bend sail to the wind of the morning,
Show us, Poseidon, the shore.”

Pheidon hummed the song as he watched the great galley coming towards them. Urged by her oars, she would pass to windward of them and within a stone's throw. She was in a hurry, for the whole three banks of oars were at work, and at a distance she seemed stiff, monstrous and crawling heavily over the waves upon innumerable legs; then as she drew on, Pheidon heard her voice, a groan, deep, vibrant and mournful, the groan of the oars. The white foam was breaking from her beak, and the beak flashed fiercely in the sun and then sank, bursting the water to foam, and rose and flashed again, and louder and louder as she drew on came the groan, deeper, more vibrant, more mournful, the groan of the oars. No longer stiff to the eye but living she came, rolling with a gentle motion to the swell, flashing back the sunlight from her girding cable to her sheathing and with the triple bank of oars churning the water to snow. Pheidon could hear now the “op-ooop” of

the rowers and the pounding and rocking of the oar shafts mixed with the groan of the raw hide against the rowlocks, the boom and wash of the oar-blades, and over all the bird-like notes of the flute giving time to the stroke.

But, despite all these sounds, as she passed the little dancing fishing-boat, she seemed fiercely desolate as war itself; taking her way on some mysterious mission across the morning sea, and leaving behind her a broad and turbulent road of foam.

“O Pheidon—dog—dreamer!”

The harbour mouth lay wide and close to them; the great sail was flapping idly; Simon had drawn in his steering-oar and Pheidon, alive in a moment at the voice of his father, was helping to furl the sail. Then they took to the oars and rowed her in.

The Piraeus has three harbours: the Great Harbour, the Harbour of Zea, and the Harbour of Munychia. It was into the Great Harbour that they passed, for here, by permission of the Admiralty, was a slip where the fishing-boats could unload, this harbour being closest to the walled road that led to Athens, four miles distant.

The water here is blue with depth, and it is a wonderful picture of colour, this still sheet of water protected from the wind. You could see the war-triremes, with oars drawn in, rubbing their girding fenders against the quays, the ship-houses busy with life; on the breeze came the mallet-blows from the graving-docks, the call of the sailors, the songs of the fisher-folk, the shouting of boys who haunted the place and the crying of the white gulls for ever fishing. Nowhere else would you find a harbour such as this, nor such strength of ships, nor such strength of defensive works, nor such beauty of colour, joy of sound, and laughter of light; the very gulls were whiter, it seemed, than elsewhere you would find them, and more brisk of movement and assured, as though from the knowledge that they were hovering under the protection of that starlike goddess, Athena the Champion.

Pheidon and the old man pulled across the still surface of the harbour, making for the fishers' slip. The first fisher-boat in of a morning was an event: idle boys, sailors from the navy, the old men long past work who come out like crickets to warm themselves in the sun, women to buy fish, and fishmongers from the market of the Piraeus, all crowded the slip, laughing, talking; the boys, some of them naked, sent their voices shrill beyond the others. Pheidon heard his own name shouted in the derision of envy, but the shouter of the Piraeus, the noisiest boy in the harbour town, was dumb as he pulled at his oar.

It was not till, with way enough on, and Simon turning his oar into a rudder, that the boy turned and faced the crowd:

“First fisher-boat in and heavy with fish!”

Like a flash as he shouted the words he bent, seized a jelly-fish big as an orange, sent it flying in the face of the foremost of the shouting urchins, and next moment, bounding like a ball, was on the quay, forgetful of repartee and laughter in the business of making fast the boat-rope flung to him by his father. This done, his business was finished; he had no part in the selling of the fish; his plain, sturdy, freckled face wore as serious an expression as it was capable of, whilst, heedless of the urchins around him, he looked this way and that through the crowd as if in search of something or some one he could not find. He was looking for his breakfast.

CHAPTER II

MULLET FOR THE MARKET

As he looked about him, in the distance he saw his little brother Cleon. The child, basket in hand, had just come on to the quay from the Street of Zea; he had caught sight of Pheidon and was running towards him, laughing, the sun full in his face, the breeze blowing his curls and fluttering his tunic, a bright little figure fresh as the breeze and gay as the morning.

“O thou— —” cried Pheidon as he took the basket. What reproach he was about to fling at the laughing one was checked by the sight of the basket’s contents, the figs and rye bread and piece of cheese, all covered over with leaves, which he flung to the wind as he took his seat on a baulk of stone, the basket beside him.

As he ate, he watched the fish being landed and flung on the quay; the mullet, the bass, the coloured nameless fish of the Mediterranean and Ægean. The sundazzle on the blue water was blinding, but it was scarcely brighter than the dazzle of the new-caught fish, and the fish were scarcely more varied and coloured than the crowd of buyers, lookers-on, idlers; slaves from the fishmongers who had stalls in the Agora of Athens, Athenian citizens of the harbour town, women of the poorer orders, some quite young, some old and withered; aliens, men of Syracuse, men of Naukratis, men from Euboea and the Negropontine villages, and here and there a farmer from the hills of Attica drawn to the harbour town by business, all moving, laughing, bartering, brilliant against the setting of the gem-like sea.

Chlamys, robe and tunic fluttering to the now strengthening wind, lent an added sense of movement and gaiety to the crowd, just as the flutter of flags or the dancing of leaves lends gaiety to a fête or a forest; and now across the blue harbour came the voices of the fishermen, the fishermen less fortunate than Simon. The wind in freshening had shifted several points, enabling them to come in under sail, and the harbour was studded with boats heeling to the breeze; racing for the shore they came, and as they came the clamour of the crowd redoubled, prices fell, and Pheidon, leaving the remains of his breakfast unfinished, jumped down from his seat and joined with his father in the fish-selling.

“Their fish is stinking—they have caught nothing, else they would not be coming so fast. They taint the breeze; but these are fresh—fresh—fresh from the sea. Look you, this one is jumping still. What! dead? O old woman, he is more alive than thou.”

Even little Cleon had joined in, holding up big fish half the size of himself, echoing the cries of Pheidon: "Look you at this one, fresh—fresh—fresh from the sea. Not fresh? O hard-fist, he is fresher than the breeze."

Then Simon: "Buy, buy! What the children say is truth. Look you at this one, given me by the hand of Poseidon himself—no, by Apollo I rather than sell them for nought I would cast them back whence they came."

"Buy, buy! Then take them for nothing as a gift, and I will shout your meanness through Athens, from the Gate of Mystae to the Tower of the Winds. Not for nothing shall ye call me the shouter of the Piraeus. Ye be all mouths and no purses."

And Cleon: "Here is a fish like a purse. Open him, good men, and see what he holds—but buy him first."

Now, in a flash, the crowd had broken up, spreading itself all along the quay, where boat after boat was fastening up and landing its catch; and Simon, who had secured the pick of the market prices, not ill-pleased with his morning's work, turned to Pheidon and pointed to a basket of red mullet which he had specially reserved for his best customer, Myrmex, whose fish-stall with its great conch shell and its decoration of sea-weed was the best patronized of all the stalls in the Agora.

"Run," said Simon, "so that you may get there before full market. Run, and give my greeting to Myrmex and say that of all the fish I brought to port I send him the best—or say nothing, for the fish will speak for themselves, should you not delay with them. And should he be satisfied, he will doubtless give you something for your trouble."

Pheidon caught up the basket without a word and made across the quay to the Street of Zea, running as long as he was in sight of Simon.

The Street of Zea was broad and well-kept: corn-exchanges, temples and statues lined it. The harbour town could boast many a street like this. Athens, with its crooked and narrow streets, had grown around the Acropolis as fancy took the builders, but the Piraeus, laid out to the plan of Hippodamus, had grown under the rule of a spacious idea.

The early morning sun cast the sharp black shadows of temple and statue right across the way, as though night had lingered here as snow lingers on the country roads before the spring has gained her full power to drive it away.

But when Pheidon turned into the Street of Hermes, which cut the Street of Zea at right angles, a long swath of dazzling sunlight lay before him; a sunlit road set on either side with sunlit statues, houses and temples, and ending in the Gate of Hermes and a glimpse of distant hills.

Right from the Piraeus to Athens, four miles away, stretched two vast walls with a broad road between, so that in war-time communication between the capital and the harbour town might not be interrupted. One could take, if one chose, the road between the walls, a dismal way, despite the blue flashing sky overhead, for one had nothing to see on either side but a wall thirty feet high. The favourite road to Athens was by the outer side of the more northern wall. Here there was a broad and well-trodden path; on the right the wall, severe, lofty, hard as fact, desolate, forbidding; to the left, the most lovely picture that Time has ever shown to man—Attica stretching to the far-off hills under the eternal blue of the sky. Distance in that dazzling air could not destroy detail. The eye travelled from the green of the willows bordering Cephissus to the plane-trees bordering the sacred way to Eleusis: Hymettus and the nearer hills held the gaze for a moment before it travelled to the remote and delicately coloured mountains cutting the fair, blue, tranquil sky. Sharp in detail as a landscape cut upon a sapphire, silent and filled with the spirit of eternal summer, never did the land look happier than to-day.

For the first few hundred yards one saw nothing but this landscape, and then the wall, taking a slight bend, disclosed Athens on its western side and the Acropolis above it burning frost-white in the sun. The river Cephissus crossed the path and passed under the walls to find the sea in the Bay of Phalerum, but it was always fordable, except after exceptionally heavy rains. To-day one could have almost passed it dry-shod. Bushes lined the banks, and, as Pheidon drew near, basket in hand, a cry from amidst the bushes made him start, stand still, and, changing his basket from the right to the left hand, pick up a stone.

CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF CEPHISUS

*"Co-äx, co-äx, co-äx,
Brekekekex co-äx."*

IT was the shouting chorus of a play—*The Frogs*—first performed in the January of that year at the feast of the Lenaea, and every boy in the city and harbour town had caught it up; boys rushing out of school shouted it, you heard it in the Agora and the streets, it was used as a jibe, a rallying song, and a war-cry.

The latter now, for, as Pheidon, stone in one hand and basket in the other, made a dash to ford the river, out from the bushes on the opposite bank broke a boy naked as on the day he was born, thin, with ribs showing like the ribs of a hound, red-headed and impudent-faced. This was the "Dog-stealer"—every Athenian boy had his nickname—a desperate character who by now ought to have been seated in school, stylus and wax tablet in hand. He had played truant this morning, and had come to the banks of Cephisus with two others as bad as himself to play Robbers and jibe at the passers-by. One can fancy their joy at the sight of Pheidon, basket in hand, and not another soul in sight.

The two companions of the Dog-stealer, one snub-nosed and good-natured looking, the other graceful as a little Apollo, and both naked as their leader, now emerged from the bushes, and the three advanced on the enemy, who had gained the northern bank of the stream.

Seeing the stone in his hand, they came towards him courteously—an ominous sign—surrounded him, and asked after the health of his mother.

Then, all at once, and before he could reply, the snub-nosed one called him "lousy-head," Apollo tripped him up from behind, and the Dog-stealer, with a kick, sent the basket of fish flying into the air.

Almost before he had touched ground Pheidon rebounded; the Stealer of Dogs, felled by a foul blow in the pit of the stomach, lay where he fell, delivering up his breakfast to the gods; Snub-nose was in full flight, and Apollo on his back was in the hands of the destroyer.

"Brekekekex co-äx!"

The victor took up the cry as he dragged his victim by the heels to Cephisus bank and began stuffing his mouth with sand and mud, plastering it on his face, pushing it up his nose.

Seated on the stomach of the vanquished, he rose up and dropped again; then, rolling the unfortunate down the bank into the shallow stream, he rushed to his basket, picked it up and began collecting the fish.

Some had been trodden on, all were dusty—ruined. He stuffed them into the basket, intending to show them and tell the whole tale to the fish-merchant; glanced at the Dog-stealer, who was feigning dissolution; and, regardless of the cries of Apollo from the river, or the distant form of Snub-nose, who was signalling for a truce, made off into the bushes, where his quick eye had marked down the spot where the robbers had sprung from. He found it, and there, under a bush, lay the three tunics of the vanquished, some bouncing balls, and a catapult of cloth for slinging stones.

In a moment he had rolled these spoils of war in the tunics, and, with the bundle under his left arm and the basket in his right hand, was making off full speed for Athens.

He ran for a mile and a half, till he reached the spot where the path left the north wall and, skirting the rising ground, led to the Piraic Gate.

Looking back, he could see nothing of his enemies, so, casting the tunics in a bundle by the wall and—after a second's hesitation—the bouncing balls and the catapult upon the tunics, he re-took the path.

He felt jubilant but very sure of reprisals being made, for, between the boys of the city and the harbour town a great gulf of enmity was fixed, the city boys looking down on the harbour town boys, and the harbour town boys, a rougher and more desperate lot, retaliating, Pheidon-versus-Apollo-fashion, when they got the opportunity.

His only chance was that, the battle having been so shameful to the vanquished, the vanquished might hold their tongues.

People were coming towards him now along the path. The daily trickle of folk from the city to the sea, and the sea to the city, had begun. Here came a sea captain, bearded, tanned, still fresh from libations to Poseidon drunk at the house of his owner, with whom most probably he had supped; a woman, old and bearded as the goat she was driving; a merchant fully dressed in tunic and upper robe (*himation*), sandalled, with a big seal ring on the middle finger of his left hand, and bearing in his right a long walking-stick, with which he struck the ground regularly as he went, as though the walking-stick were an extra leg.

Left foot, right foot, walking-stick; left foot, right foot, walking-stick. Commerce, who, by the way, had a corporation which the *himation* could not hide, passed the fisher-boy as a god might pass a beetle.

“Three-legged pot-belly,” thought Pheidon.

To the old woman with the goat he gave good-day, asking politely where they were both going; the sea captain he left severely alone.

Following the path, he passed an angle of the wall and, skirting the cemetery of the slaves, passed the Piraic Gate and entered Athens. It was now nine o'clock in the morning and the city beneath the cloudless sky lay burning in the morning sunlight. The street of the leather-dressers, which lay before him, was aswarm with people; and it was astonishing to turn into it, leaving behind one, like a dropped cloak, the vision of the country, silent as some picture engraved on a gem, the far fields, the trees bordering the sacred way to Eleusis, the distant and delicately coloured hills.

This bustling hive of Athens held few things more surprising than the change from the dreamland at its gates to the commerce ferment within its walls; from the colour of nature to the dirt and noise of the streets.

The west wind blowing through the gate fluttered chlamys and tunic; the last loads of vegetables for the market were being hurried along to the tune of the thumping of the leather-dressers' mallets; all the shutters of the upper windows of the old houses lining either side of the way were flung open, and domestic noises mixed themselves with the noises of the street; the cry of a baby, the cleaning of a brass pot, the sharp voice of a woman cutting across the footfalls, the barking of dogs and the clatter of trade.

Pheidon, slipping his way through the crowd, peeped into the shops as he went, sharp as a needle, inquisitive as a terrier, and always on the look-out for slops flung from the upper windows. He knew the city as well as any of the city-bred boys, could tell a slave from a citizen, even if both, stripped to their tunics, were working on the same job, and knew an alien at sight. He could tell a philosopher by his feet, to say nothing of his hair and beard, and he had shouted "bull-face" after Socrates.

Scarcely a woman was to be seen, and not a boy of his own age, it being school-time.

Leaving the street of the leather-dressers, and entering another street on the left, narrow, evil-smelling, and dark as any *vico* of Naples, he turned the shoulder of a temple and found himself in the Agora.

CHAPTER IV

THE JAR OF OLIVES

THE market-place, immense, bordered by temples, statues, and colonnades, set with plane-trees and blazing with light, sent up a murmur to the flower-blue sky above it like the murmur of a fretful sea.

Though it wanted nearly an hour of full market, the place was crowded, and from the slight elevation where Pheidon stood the sight appealed even to the heedless mind of the boy.

All Athens was here, the aristocrat and the slave, the philosopher and the poet, the alien and the citizen, all robed in chlamys or *himation*, coloured or white, fluttering in the sun-blaze, fretful with movement.

Far away at the other extremity of the market-place, where the booths were set up and the crowds surged thickest, one could hear the cries of the buyers and sellers; the pottery market, the fish market, the flower market, each had a voice of its own, but here all these cries came muted and mixed, a susurrus of sound above the murmur of the mass.

But the soul of the Agora lay neither in the sun-blaze that lit it, nor the marble-white temples and statues that framed it, nor the movement of the crowd, but in its gaiety. The gaiety of morning, the gaiety of a people, young and ever ready for a new thing.

This brightness of life, which the world has never recaptured, shone, even in Athens, only just now, when, in the market-place, men, fresh from sleeping and facing a new day, caught morning by the wings, and held her for a moment as no man will ever hold her again.

“Buy! buy! buy! Fish fresh from the sea, sweet roses from Eleusis, honey from Hymettus!” The crying of the market-men came now heightened by the freshening wind that was bending the plane-trees, shaking the leaves and showering the shadows; white doves in the blue above circled and swept and sank or strutted in the porticoes of the temples. Pheidon could make out the cries from the pottery market; he could see men walking in the colonnades; here a philosopher with a train of disciples, here single figures, here two friends in council; close to him a group of gentlemen were discussing horses, what they said came to him now sharply, and now half blotted out as the gusting breeze piled up the murmur of the multitude as the wind piles the billows of the sea.

Skirting the throng, Pheidon made for the pottery market. As his fish were useless, he was in no hurry to deliver them, and the pottery market was

a joy to a lover of bustle and noise.

This morning it was uproarious. It was the last flush of the season before folk moved to their country houses for the grape harvest; receptions and dinner-parties were the order of the day, and it was here, in the pottery market, that cooks and caterers were hired. And to hire them you had to shout.

Vases, pots, pans, amphorae, mixing vessels, plain or painted, ranging in price from a few obols to anything you please, all were set out in the double row of booths, and every booth was shouting for buyers. The crush was dreadful; the cooks and caterers, all professing to be men of Syracuse, prosperous-looking men and knowing themselves at a premium, were crowded between the booths and sometimes behind them; they were friends of the pottery merchants, often casting business in their way. Pheidon knew the whole tribe, and, half crushed to death, supremely happy, holding his fish basket now over his head to protect it, now under his arm, he went with the throng examining the pottery ware, examining the cooks, shouting ribald criticisms, dodging blows from the stall-keepers, bursting with laughter as some fat citizen, rising for a moment above the crowd on some block of wood, shouted his culinary wants and vanished, pushed down by some wag.

The flower market had no attraction for him, though here the air was heavy with the scent of great baskets of roses, wreaths for the heads of revellers, lilies white as snow; yet he went through it religiously, asking the price of the wreaths and sticking his tongue in his cheek at the answer.

“How much for this one?”

“Ten obols,” the misguided flower-seller would reply, taking him for some servant sent to purchase for his master.

“And this one?”

“Ten obols.”

“And these smaller ones?”

“Five obols apiece.”

“By Zeus! but they are dear at the price. Have you none better? Your very best, for ’tis to grace the head of an ugly man.”

“Faith, then, here is one at fifteen obols that would make the ugliest man beautiful as Apollo—so be that he hide his face.”

“Then hide your face and wear it yourself.”

The booths where olives in jars were sold held him for a while.

Without a single obol he had already done a good deal of marketing and had plenty of fun for no money, but the market was now having its revenge.

He was fond of olives, and the olive-dealers were the hardest-fisted lot in the Agora, just as the fishmongers were the most insolent.

He speculated for a while on this fact, examining the faces of the sellers, and at last selected an immensely fat man who was seated behind his wares, being too weak in the legs to stand.

“How much?” asked this useful customer, placing his finger on one of the smallest of the jars exposed for sale—quite a tiny one.

“Two obols.”

“Two obols for a jar of that size! And how many are in the jar?”

“How many are in the jar?” The fat man gazed open-mouthed at the question and then burst out laughing. He called to a neighbour: “Hi, Cleon! listen to this. He wants to know how many olives are in a jar.” Then to Pheidon, “D’ye think I count them?”

“Why not?”

The fat man stared again, and again broke out laughing; he had evidently more laughter at command than wits, and Pheidon felt he was getting on famously.

“Count them! By Zeus! listen to him. What are children coming to nowadays? Count them!” He burst into another roar of laughter, and a small crowd that had collected drawn by this conversation, began to jeer at Pheidon, who stood quite firm, however, and waited till the olive merchant had laughed himself out.

“Well,” said Pheidon as the other wiped his eyes, “I can tell you how many there are.”

“How many, then?”

“What will you give me if I tell right? Will you give me the jar?”

“Faith, you can have the jar and the olives to boot.”

“It’s a bargain,” said Pheidon, putting the jar under his arm. “When I’ve counted them I’ll come back and tell you how many there are.”

He walked off with it, and the fat one, stricken dumb for a moment, sat with injected eyes amidst the laughter of the crowd, till, catching fire from the merriment, and too obese for anger, he joined in the joke against himself.

Half an hour later, stuffed with olives and with the empty jar under his arm, the wily one returned.

“There were sixty-eight, and you can count the stones; they are in the jar. I make it a present to you—and now I must be off to the fish-market.”

He left the fat man bawling after him to know his name, wishing, no doubt, to obtain the service of so much sharpness; passed the booths where

bread was sold, and entered the fish-market.

CHAPTER V

DIOMED

THE fish market was the most important of all the markets of the Agora. Fish was the staple food of Athens. Sardines, mullet, turbot, skate, cuttle-fish, tunny, those long red ribbon-fish of the Mediterranean whose name I have forgotten, star-fish the size of footstools (eaten only by the common folk), shell-fish, all lay here exposed on the stalls garnished with sea-weeds.

The laws regarding the sale of fish were very severe. No man dared to sell it stale; you might not even sprinkle it with water to give it a fresh appearance. Hence that delightful story of the fat fishmonger pretending to faint and his friends casting water upon him and incidentally upon the fish.

Pheidon's man, Myrmex, owned the third stall on the left of the entrance, and of all the brutal-tongued and bullying fishmongers of the Agora Myrmex was the worst.

His hands were red and rough from handling the fish, he had a hanging underlip and a heavy jowl, a treacherous eye and a reputation to match. Yet, despite these defects, his stall was the most frequented. He had the finest selection and he charged an obol a pound more than his fellows, two facts that gave his goods a *cachet* in the eyes of the aristocracy.

By a stroke of genius he had, on entering business, pinned his faith to high prices and variety; others, seeing his success, had attempted to imitate him and had succeeded only in losing business; he had secured the pick of the customers and he kept them.

As Pheidon drew near he saw, standing before the stall of Myrmex, a young man, tall, slight, graceful as a wand, an aristocrat a league off, beautifully dressed.

Yet his only garment was a *himation*, that is to say, simply an oblong of cream-coloured woollen stuff with an embroidered border, flung over the left shoulder, carried across the back, under the right arm and cast again over the left shoulder.

He wore nothing but this and the sandals upon his feet, yet an Athenian of discrimination looking at him would have said, "How well dressed he is!" and he would have spoken not of the garment but of the grace with which it was worn. His hair, curly and jet-black, was worn long, indicating a blood or a cavalry man; he was holding in his hand a stick, long, made of some white wood, and adorned with a tiny snake thread-thin, made of pale gold, the Sardinian electrum of which Sophocles speaks. His only jewel was a seal ring

worn on the left hand, and had you looked at his hands you would have seen that they were perfect in shape, white, yet not womanly; the finger-nails filbert-shaped and polished, a triumph of the manicurist's art. He looked scarcely eighteen and one associated him still with the hat and the chlamys; he was in reality twenty-one. A man. The manliness which we associate with a black beard and a basso profundo voice was quite absent from the face of this person, which was all delicacy and clear-cut grace. Fire, capriciousness, devil-may-careness, courage and a trace of haughtiness were all there, allied with something charming, some alloy of the mind that made every expression individual to its owner; a thing new-coined, possessed only by him, and unobtainable by any other man.

Diomed the son of Diomed, for such was the glittering name that History had affixed to this gracious specimen of humanity, stood before the filthy fishmonger and his stall, criticizing the contents.

He was one of Myrmex's best customers and reputed to be one of the richest men in Athens, yet he and Myrmex were equals in the eyes of the State, both being Athenian citizens; indeed, they had rubbed shoulders at the theatre and they had voted together at the Assembly. Diomed had come into the market that morning in a pleasant state of semi-obfuscation due to a symposium the night before at the house of Pasion, one of the leaders of Athenian society; it was less the symposium than the Chian wine he had drunk there, the terrible wine that lingers with you as a guest next day; the delightful wine that lingers with you as an opiate. The drinking party had not broken up till dawn. He had wandered home with a companion whose way lay his way, talking philosophy and nonsense, lapsing, momentarily, into the profoundest sense after the fashion of drunkards, dreamers, and philosophers. When they had left Pasion's house in the Street of the Sculptors of Hermes they had been discussing the four best points in a horse; at Diomed's door in the Street of the Temple of Dionysus they parted, divided in opinion as to whether Beauty was an idea of the mind or the recognition by the mind of a concrete entity.

O Youth!

Diomed, in the arms of his servant, had been conducted to bed; he had slept three hours, risen, bathed, dressed, and, fortifying himself with a piece of bread and a cup of wine, strolled out into the sunlit street, followed by a slave, taking his leisurely way to the Agora.

Here he had met friends and made some purchases, which the slave had carried home; so it came about that at the moment he was unattended.

He loathed Myrmex as much as it was in his strange nature to loathe any one, and was now engaged in baiting the fishmonger in a leisurely way.

As yet, he had said no word; the stall was almost empty of fish, for a consignment from the Piraeus, overdue, had not yet arrived. On the marble slab lay only a few sardines and rock-fish and a monster flat-fish, seemingly all mouth, of the type named by the Italian fishermen Diavolo.

“And what is that?” asked Diomed, at length, breaking silence and pointing with the tip of his stick at the monster.

“A fish,” snapped Myrmex, who disliked Diomed as much as ugliness can dislike beauty and grace.

“A fish! And which is the mouth and which is the fish, pray?”

“Buy and find out.”

“How much?”

“He is not for sale.”

“I see—you two are inseparables. Well, ’tis a fair match; and since when have you changed your trade, O Myrmex?”

The fishmonger, who had stooped to pick some little eels from a bucket, rose at this bait, his face crimson.

“What are you talking of? Change my trade? What, do you mean? I change my trade!”

“From fishmonger to marble merchant,” replied the other, tapping the almost empty slab with his stick.

The insult to his stock-in-trade hit the ugly one as nothing else could hit him. He was about to reply, when he caught sight of Pheidon.

“Ho!” cried he, disdaining the aristocrat, “here is something from Simon, fresh and jumping, I warrant. Here is an obol for your trouble. Give me the basket.” He tossed the coin to the boy and took the basket.

Pheidon had intended to explain everything, but Myrmex did not give him time. He glanced at the fish, shouted an oath, and sent fish and basket flying at the head of the bearer.

“Existo!” cried Diomed, bursting with laughter.

It was the cry that preceded the flinging of slops from windows in Athens and meant literally “Stand from under.” Pheidon ducked, and fish and basket went flying into the fair way, and, as luck would have it, into the breast of a passing citizen who had turned to see what the trouble was about.

Diomed stood for a moment watching the altercation that ensued with all the pleasure of an artist glancing at a fair piece of work.

Then he walked away, beckoning to Pheidon to follow him.

“Well, Pert-face,” said the patrician to his follower, “and how many olives were there in that jar?” He had formed one of the crowd at the olive merchant’s booth and had witnessed the whole scene.

“What will you give me if I tell?”

“An obol.”

“Toss me it, then.”

Diomed tossed him the coin, which Pheidon promptly pouched in his mouth.

“There were just as many as it would hold.”

“And how many did you eat?”

“Just as many as there were in the jar.”

“Glutton! Have you breakfasted?”

“Ay, at the Piraeus.”

“You are of the Piraeus?”

“O aïe! What is there of the robber about me that makes you think I belong to Athens?”

“Forked tongue!” laughed Diomed. “Nothing but your face. Follow me if you would earn a piece of silver, for my slave Xanthias has gone home on a message and I may have need of you.”

“Ho!” said Pheidon, following the other, “it seems I am going up in life. A moment ago I was a citizen of the harbour town and now I am a slave. Let’s see how high I will rise before the morning’s done; who knows but I may end in being an aristocrat!”

Diomed heard all this but made no reply. Pheidon pleased him; his plain, freckled, sunburnt face, queer manner, and queerer speech, made him a new thing to the town-worn Diomed.

As for Pheidon, he was enchanted with the adventure, though showing nothing of his feelings. He had never before had dealings with an aristocrat, and the idea of following the gorgeous Diomed, and seeing what he did and how he spent his money, made him even forget that he was taking the place of Xanthias.

It was after full market now, the staff of the public sun-dial showed a length of shadow that, read off in feet and inches, indicated the time to be some fifteen minutes past ten; the crowd was thinning somewhat, and Diomed between the fish-market and the banker’s, whither he was going, was not stopped more than five times by friends and acquaintances.

Athens, despite its marvels of art, its science and philosophy, its trade, and the hold it possessed on the ancient world and ever will possess on the

modern, was still so small a place that every one knew every one. That is to say every one of importance. This wonderful democracy, where all citizens voted on policy in public assembly, by referendum; where the tinker and the noble were equal in all things regarding the State; had, still, its circles of society clearly demarcated as are ours. With this grand difference—titles were not, and to hold one's own in the circles of the aristocracy a man must be neither ill-mannered nor a fool.

As Pheidon followed Diomed he noticed with the sharpness of a boy the easy manner of the latter; every movement, every tone of his voice, the way he held his walking-stick, the way he turned his head, all spoke of a natural grace, unstudied and free.

He spoke to men of his own stamp and quite common men, and his manner to each was the same. So, in the splendid fashion of an Athenian gentleman—different from the later stucco gentility of Rome—he would talk to his slaves. There was no mincingness in his speech, no stilt. Sharp-cut, incisive, full of everyday words, the speech of Athens was like Athenian thought, nervous and clear, humorous, modern; far more modern than the speech of the Georgian era.

“Hullo, Democedes, what are you doing here amidst the cheese?” They were passing the cheesemongers’ booths.

“Where else should I be?”

“Why, amidst the geese.”

“Now, by Apollo, for the sake of a quip you would invent a goose market in the Agora, when you very well know there is no such thing.”

“Then what on earth are you doing here?”

Democedes, a dull-faced person, but now armed with a joke, might have been heard a moment later:

“What ho, Isagoras, what are you doing here?”

“Buying cheese.”

“Why, I would have expected to find you buying geese.”

“Why?”

Mental destruction of Democedes.

To a poor devil called Philinus, one of those unfortunates with whom all things go wrong and who try to right themselves with drink, Diomed was specially civil; at least, he did not use raillery but lent him a couple of drachmae, smiled and passed on. To no man did he bow, nor did any man bow to him, spurious abasement not being in the category of manners.

He was approaching the tables of the bankers when all at once he was seized on by Anetodemus. Anetodemus might have been born, but he would never have existed as a figure of the market-place but for Socrates. He was almost as ugly as Socrates, and upon that broad foundation he had built himself in imitation of the Master. He fell into meditations, he walked bare-foot, he let his beard grow wild, he talked philosophy and he buttonholed you and had the impudence to question you in the Socratic manner. He was Socrates reflected in a cheap mirror, and the Athenians loved him. He was a perpetual mild source of amusement, and he was an innocent and quite unconscious guy of Socrates, a man whom they did not love; and his unconscious buffoonery did Socrates perhaps more harm than all the vinegar of Aristophanes. He was quite whole-hearted and perhaps a little mad, but he gave the Master whom he imitated a wide berth.

Socrates buttonholing Anetodemus and Anetodemus buttonholing Socrates would have been indeed a sight for the gods. But they never could be brought together.

Socrates walked about the world exposing to men their own ignorance, often their ignorance of the true meaning of the common words they used. Anetodemus walked about the world caricaturing the worst points in Socrates and unwittingly turning his wisdom to nonsense. You can fancy his vogue.

“And where are you going, Diomed?” asked Anetodemus.

“I am going in search of pleasure,” replied the wily Diomed, knowing what would follow.

“Pleasure!” Anetodemus took him by a corner of his *himation*, and then began the Socratic examination or *elenchus*.

“Pleasure. Define me the meaning of that word.”

“You ask me the meaning of the word ‘pleasure.’ Shall I give you Socrates’ definition?—Money.”

The absurdity of this was quite lost upon the gas-bag; he blinked cunningly.

“Yes, but let us go a step further. What is Money? Ha! define me that word.”

“Pleasure.”

“By the dog!” cried Anetodemus—he always used the oath that evaded naming deities—“you reason like a child— —”

“Stop!” cried Diomed, laughing, “and define for me that word ‘child.’ You call me a child, yet I am a man. Define me the word ‘child’ which you use so glibly.”

“A child,” said Anetodemus, “is a person who reasons like a fool.” This absurdity was still a score in repartee for Gas-Bag, who chuckled in a most unphilosophic manner, whilst Diomed seemed plunged in thought.

“Ah,” said he. “That explains it, then.”

“What?”

“The reason men call you the child of Socrates, dear Anetodemus.”

Pheidon, who had been listening intently, burst into a laugh. Diomed was a person after his own heart; he followed the latter as he passed on, leaving the Gas-Bag exploded amidst the dust of the Agora.

They drew near the tables of the money-changers and bankers, which made one of the most interesting sights in the market-place. Behind each table sat the bankers, with beards of burnt-up black, and their assistants; Metics—that is to say, aliens—very many of them.

A foreigner like this could come and live in Athens and trade, and make money, but he was not a citizen, and never could be a citizen, unless perhaps he was lucky enough to perform some extraordinary action for the good of the State; though he could make money, he could not buy land, nor could he marry an Athenian woman, and he had to possess a sponsor or patron in the form of a well-to-do citizen.

Gyges of Naukratis, for instance, the banker of Diomed, had, for patron, Pasion, the man who had been Diomed’s host the night before.

Pheidon, following Diomed, and vastly interested by the prospective money-dealings of the latter, took in the whole scene to the minutest details. He had never ventured into the money market before, and the bankers seated in their glory seemed to his somewhat material mind gods of a sort—as, indeed, they were. The burnt-up black of their beards, their faces indolent to all things but business, their leisurely manner and Oriental indifference, marked them at once as men apart from the other merchants and men of the Agora. On the tables were piles of silver, silver drachmae and gold staters, and bags containing more, piles of copper money and papers with seals attached, for every money order or letter of credit had its seal to back its signature.

Diomed approached the table of Gyges.

Behind it, engaged in the examination of some bills of exchange, sat a young man with a patient and inscrutable face. This was Abbas, the clerk of Gyges.

“And where is Gyges?” asked Diomed, glancing about him in search of the banker.

The clerk explained that Gyges was at his office in the harbour town that morning, and would not be able to attend in the Agora—Gyges, in fact, being that merchant with the stick whom Pheidon had passed on his way to Athens, and christened.

Diomed grumbled at this news.

“Always the way! I come into the Agora every morning, and here I see Gyges sitting waiting to do business with me. I don’t want him, and I pass him by. This morning, when I want him, he is not here.”

“But he did not know.”

“But he ought to have known. What is the good of being an Egyptian if you can’t tell the future?”

“But my master is a Persian,” smiled the clerk.

“Then that accounts for his running away. Well, I will call at his house later in the day about the business I wish to see him on; and now to my immediate business. I want some money.”

“How much?”

“Zeus! what a question! Do you think I calculate beforehand what I am going to spend?”

The clerk, before this perplexing customer, only smiled. He took a pen made from a split reed, dipped it in ink, and made out a receipt form on a piece of paper, put a blob of wax on it, and handed it to Diomed, who made an impression on the wax with his seal ring, affixed a signature that was wildly illegible, and handed it back. The clerk glanced at the signature, and then pushed a little bag of silver across the table to Diomed, who took it and handed it to Pheidon to carry.

“I will call upon Gyges at his house,” said Diomed. “Will he be in at noon?”

“Yes,” replied the other, “for his business at the Piraeus will not detain him long, and he is sure to return to his house to rest after the journey.”

“He lives in the Street of the Temple of Artemis, does he not?”

“Oh, no,” said the clerk. “He has changed his residence. He lives now in the Street of the Flute-Player.”

“The Street of the Flute-Player?” cried Diomed.

“Yes, the Street of the Flute-Player.”

CHAPTER VI

THE ROMANCE OF THE CRITICAL SPIRIT

At this moment a young man who was passing by stopped and, seeing Diomed, came up to him. It was Pasion, the patron of Gyges, the man of the symposium of the night before.

Pheidon, astonished at the splendour of Diomed's money transactions, and holding the bag of silver tight clasped in his fist, almost forgot it at the sight of this new-comer.

Pasion was not older than Diomed in years, he was good-looking and well dressed, yet, whilst to look at Diomed gave one pleasure, to look at Pasion gave one pause. The mind drew back from him.

There was something negative in that face, something cold beyond utterance in its expression. Looking around one in the Agora, filled with its typical Athenian crowd, one saw the hardness and treachery, the "push" and deceit of the Athenian character well represented in the faces of the citizens, no less than the intellect, the sensitiveness to beauty, the feeling for humour and the ambition for greatness which made the Athenian what he was.

You saw many handsome and graceful men, many ordinary and ungraceful men, but few ignoble faces. The face of Pasion almost belonged to the latter class, and was saved only by its correctness of feature. Pheidon, at the sight of this man, felt a prompt repugnance to him. One can fancy some faithful souls having premonitions about those whom they serve. To Pheidon for a moment it seemed that a flight of crows flew over the head of Diomed, casting their black shadows upon him. His mind was simply riddled with superstitions and beliefs in omens; when he was taken this way he thought in omens, and the evil face of the new-comer and the comely and kindly face of Diomed acted as positive and negative poles upon his mind. Who knows but with the intuition of children and savages and dogs and dreamers he saw in Pasion the evil genius of his new friend?

"Why," said Pasion, "here is Diomed, in the money market! Fie! I thought you never handled the filthy thing."

"Nor do I—my friends handle it for me." He was the most borrowed-from man in Athens, and Pasion owed him huge sums. "But it is not of money I am thinking, but of a problem which I shall set before Socrates when I meet him next; or, better still, Anetodemus."

"And what is your problem?"

“Simply this. Has one’s banker the right to change his address? Here has Gyges, who lived in the Street of the Temple of Artemis, gone off to live in the Street of the Flute-Player.”

“And why should he not?”

“Because,” replied Diomed, “I wish to visit him, and his new address displeases me.”

“In what way?”

“Did you not hear Aristophanes saying last night that whenever he entered Athens by the Itonian Gate some evil befell him?”

“Yes, but he was half drunk.”

“Still, he spoke the truth. Well, my dear Pasion, whenever I pass through the Street of the Flute-Player some evil befalls me.”

Diomed, though he did not believe in the gods, was as full of superstitions as Pheidon, and he said this quite seriously, as though he were talking of some matter-of-fact subject.

“And what were those evils that happened to you?” asked Pasion, casting his dark, cold eyes over the figure of Diomed and envying for the thousandth time the sit of his *himation* and the grace of its wearer.

“The first time I passed through I was leading my squadron of cavalry; my horse fell and all but killed me; the horse broke its leg, and I had to kill it with my own hand—and I loved it. The second time was at night; I was attacked by robbers. I beat them off, but so injured my arm that I was unable to take my place in the chariot race at the Olympic Games. The third time I was passing through it I heard my name called, and turned to find a slave who brought me news of the death of my dearest friend. I always avoid that place, and now Gyges has gone to live in it.”

“Well,” said Pasion, “it has not been unlucky for him. He has just received a cargo from Naukratis which he has sold at a huge profit.”

“Just so,” replied Diomed, “but a place that is lucky for one man may be unlucky for another, and I must see him to-day.”

“Send for him.”

“Pah! Do you think I play hide-and-seek with the Fates? I will go.”

Pasion laughed.

“Remember,” said Diomed as he turned away, “you dine with me to-night. Moschion and Niceratus are coming too, and my cook hopes to surpass himself.”

“You do not hire your cook by the day any longer?”

“No, I have hired so many varieties of impudence and theft without finding a cook in the mixture that, having found a cook, I keep him.”

He turned away, glanced back to see that Pheidon was following him, and walked to the nearest colonnade.

This was a delightful place, shaded from the sun, where you could walk and idle and talk to friends, and still have the full movement and blaze of light and bustle of the market-place at your elbow. There were barbers' shops here,^[1] and shops where they sold cosmetics; the place was perfumed with them; and the men you met here were all well dressed, with the exception of an occasional philosopher or two. Well dressed and attended by their slaves and enjoying that idleness which was less idleness than the atmosphere of Athenian intellectual life.

^[1] This was the only colonnade where such shops were found.

These men were all critics of life and art. Contemplative and creative idlers. Within sound of the fish-bell and the uproar of the pottery market you might hear the level-toned and weary voice of Aristophanes, the most ferocious critic that the world has ever seen, complaining of the increased price of vegetables. Ictinus, a young man of singular beauty, with a voice like the tones of a dulcimer, holding up the last work of Aristophanes to a friend, admiring it, but riddling it with arrows of thought; sucking it, taking the last pleasure out of it, recreating it, and making it appear glittering and splendid, almost a new thing after its passage through the mind of Ictinus.

You might have heard the “After all, what is it compared to the perfect curve of a lip?” of Niceratus confronting a friend of Plato (who was then but twenty-four years of age) and his words about Plato's indefinable Being.

Mixing with this astounding crowd of fashionables, you would have listened to the strangest variety of things, ideas, phantasms. The price of a slave, the story of a dinner-party, grumbles about a cook, and mixed with all the everyday discussion like the fire in the opal, making a gem out of “potch,” vigorous and luminous words, criticisms in a flash.

That was the essential genius of the place. What Sophocles wrote, what Pindar sang of, what Pheidias cut, what Ictinus the architect completed, all these were nothing to what men said of them, imagined from them, drew out of them by virtue of the critical spirit.

Diomed, who was going now to be shaved and who paused to nudge Iphicrates and ask him what possible manner of bootmaker invented the red boots he was wearing; Diomed, whose life was filled with trivialities and futilities, who prided himself on the manner in which he led his cavalry squadron, on the way he could doctor a horse, on the way he folded his *himation*, on the cut of his sandals; Diomed, in a few words, could reveal the artistic meaning of a statue or damn it inexorably, touch just the point in a sophist's reasoning that made the sophist squirm, talk to a fishmonger and find the only true way to hit him with repartee—for he was a critic of life no less than of art. A Greek, and the mental brother of Aristophanes.

Pheidon, also a critic in his way, snuffed the perfume of the scent-sellers and barbers and felt keenly the atmosphere of this aristocratic world in which he suddenly found himself.

He had seen it at a distance, and had mentally jibed at the loungers and the walkers and talkers, who seemed slow of movement as flies on a south wall. But Diomed had captivated him. For the first time in his life he had seen Aristocracy and elegance and grace close to him and had talked to it. The thing had humour as well as opulence, sense as well as beauty. But, let us be quite plain, it was the opulence that appealed most strongly to the mind of the boy, though the other factors were not far behind. Diomed walking before him seemed to have the command of everything by his tongue no less than by his position and purse; yet the tongue and bearing of the man had more influence with the boy than the purse.

Pheidon would never have followed a pot-bellied plutocrat; Pheidon had no need for money, opulence of purse alone had no hold on him; and such an one would have suffered severely for the command that Diomed laid on him; he would have found a critic whose voice would have followed him through the market-place and very possibly through his life.

Diomed, on the contrary, had found a faithful follower. And there is a lot of criticism in that.

CHAPTER VII

THE BARBER'S SHOP

CEPHISOPHON'S shop was the Truefitt's of Athens, just as the colonnade of the Temple of Hermes in which it was situated was the Bond Street.

He was a huge man and one of the characters of the day; an incessant talker, a living newspaper, and a worshipper of Aristophanes.

That adder in genius form had introduced Cephisophon, the friend of Euripides, into one of his plays, hinting that Cephisophon had assisted in the writing of the poet's verses. The young bloods of Athens, you may be sure, were not long in confounding the two, and heaping on Cephisophon the barber inquiries as to the progress of his poetical works, even though Euripides was now two years dead. The delighted barber seized the advertisement with two hands, worshipped Aristophanes as the unconscious giver of it, learnt by rote passages of Euripides (he was as ignorant as a parrot) and quoted them sometimes with a fine assumption of frenzy as he lathered chins.

Molière would have loved him.

The shop had three marble seats for customers under operation, and a marble bench for customers waiting their turn and loungers. Marble basins like baptismal fonts stood before each chair, and as Diomed entered, Cephisophon, immense, in a tunic that showed huge length of sturdy legs and arms like the arms of an athlete, and wielding a razor shaped like a half-moon, was just completing the shaving of a dandy. His two assistants were equally busy. Several men were waiting their turn, but Diomed was in no hurry; he preferred being shaved by one of the silent assistants.

"Ah, my Lord Diomed!" cried the great man as Diomed languidly took his seat on the bench, "one moment, and I am yours."

"Go from me," said Diomed. "Would you lay hand on a body that is not for thee?" He was quoting from the *Electra* of Euripides, where Electra is speaking to Orestes; and pat from the mouth of Cephisophon came Orestes' reply, "There is none I would touch more righteously." He rolled the words, delighted at the aptness of his reply and his own chance knowledge of the master's work, and the squash for Diomed, who, quite unmoved, laughed silently.

"Repeat those lines again," said Diomed, quoting this time from *The Frogs*, the words put into Euripides' mouth during his dispute with Æschylus.

Cephisophon, washing his razor and dabbling rosewater on the young blood's chin, fell into the trap and repeated the lines.

"Orestes speaks those words, I take it, standing on his dead father's tomb," said Diomed, still quoting from *The Frogs*.

"Exactly," replied the rememberer of snippets.

Moschion, the critic, who was sitting by, laughed, seeing the jibe of Diomed, and the others laughed because Moschion laughed.

"A strange place to address his sister from, or was it his father's ghost, perchance?" asked Diomed.

"Next customer, please," said Cephisophon; and the next customer, tittering, moved to the chair.

Pheidon, standing at the doorway and listening without comprehending, could tell from the amusement of the customers and the irritability of the barber's manner that Diomed had scored off him.

Close to the doorway and not heeding the boy, two gentlemen were talking in a leisurely undertone.

Said one, "You would think that Diomed were Lord of the world the way he carries himself. Only amongst men do you find broken reeds holding themselves like that."

"Yes, they say he's near his end."

"End! He's reached it; he has no more money than what he owes."

"Or what he has given away."

"Flung away, you mean. He is broken, and he has a thousand enemies."

"A thousand debtors, you mean."

"It's the same thing. Besides, there is a very bad feeling about him. He denies the gods."

The other laughed.

"He does worse than that; he denies the common sense of others; his tongue is always turning men into fools. You have heard him just now with Cephisophon. Socrates shows men their folly by sense, Diomed by nonsense. They are both nearly equally disliked."

"At any rate," said the other, "he makes noise enough in Athens."

"So does the fly in the spider's net, or the top that has ceased spinning and is rolling on the marble."

They passed away, and Pheidon stood wondering at what he had just heard. He felt alarmed. He had only known Diomed an hour or less, but the

personality of Diomed so dominated him that his partisanship might have been the growth of years.

Now came the voice of the barber, who was operating on Diomed.

“Puff out your cheek that the razor may have full play.”

“’Tis like the wit of your beloved Aristophanes, that razor of yours.”

“My razor?”

“Your razor. A man must be contorted before it has full play upon him.”

“You will admit that they are both as keen, one as the other, ha! ha!”

“Yes, in splitting hairs.”

“’Tis the blunt razor that cuts the face.”

“Then sharpen yours, I pray you, for you almost cut me then.”

Laughter from the loungers on the bench and silence from the barber, whose grunts were audible to Pheidon.

He could hear the others conversing now on all manner of topics, for the shops were the clubs of Athens, more especially the shops of the barbers.

Then, after a while, came Diomed’s voice:

“Ho, there, my purse.”

He entered. Diomed, shaved and manicured, was standing up, preparing to go and twitching his *himation* into its proper sit.

“Help yourself,” said he to Cephisophon, pointing to the purse. “My hands are clean and I do not wish to dirty them.”

He walked out, and the barber took a silver drachma from the bag Pheidon held to him, tossed it in the air, flung it into the cup where he put his money and laughed. He had taken many times his due.

“Empty head and heavy purse,” said Cephisophon, “soon make empty purse and heavy head.”

“With the aid of light fingers,” said Pheidon.

Then he left the shop and followed Diomed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STREET OF THE FLUTE-PLAYER

THE ATHENIAN kept his body in a hovel and his soul in the Acropolis.

Aristocrats like Diomed and Pasion, rich Metics like Gyges the banker, might possess houses of beauty and taste; but the houses of the ordinary Athenian citizens, the potters, the bootmakers, the weavers, and so forth, were mean and ill-kept, without comfort, and forming streets that in many cases were a disgrace to a high civilisation.

But in Athens no man felt that depression of spirit which comes from sordid surroundings. Dirty and narrow the streets might be, and small and dirty the houses; yet houses were shone on and streets were lit by that living sunlight which lingers still about the ruins of the Acropolis, and bathed in that crystal air whose breath is life.

Again, wherever you might go, in the Street of the Potters, in the Street of the Tripods, glancing up you would see, sharp-cut against a sky of unutterable blueness, some frost-white angle, some marble triumph of the presiding Acropolis.

The Acropolis rode the city like a dream; white, triumphant, pure as snow; immortal in its grace and loveliness, the city of temples and statues stood above the city of mean streets and poor houses, blazed above it as a flame above a lamp.

Seen as a white glint of marble in the Street of the Potters; as a glittering spear-tipped statue in the Street of the Tripods; as a sky-fretting temple with fluted pillars in the Street of the Winds, in the Street of the Sculptors of Hermes one could stand facing the great marble splendour and see it as its architects meant it to be seen.

Right from the guarding towers the white steps, seventy feet wide, swept upwards to this fortress-city of art; beyond the angle of whose western marble bastion, armed with shield and spear, stood Athena the Champion, triumphant, sea-gazing, bathed in azure.

Right from the guarding towers the eye was caught and carried upwards to the storm of light bursting upon marble bastion and fluted pillar, star-beauty of statue and splendour of temple all isolated, lifted up above the common world, a marble city, here coloured, here white as the doves that circled in the blue.

Seen from the Street of the Sculptors of Hermes, it had the heart-breaking beauty of the unattainable, and a whisper of Distance stole from its

silence and its snow.

One heard its isolation from the common world! Ah! to mount those marble steps, to pass between those Propylaeon pillars, to lose oneself in that city of whiteness and colour and mystery! What might not one find there, and with whom hold converse? Dreams I have had of splendour, beauty, and love, but this is the dream I would die dreaming, for then I would be immortal.

This was the effect that the builders worked for, that Pheidias wrought for, that Ictinus completed. The decision of a great conception, the indeterminateness of a dream.

So it struck the heart of the gazer who saw it for the first time and held him, were he the commonest man; and, gaze as he might, the eye would never grow tired, for asymmetry robbed the vision of all monotony.

Less an art city than the realisation in marble of the peace and contemplation of the gods, Demosthenes spoke truly when he said of it, "the Acropolis is all sacred." Far from being the mere work of mortal hands it was born of the spirit of the nation, as Alaric knew, centuries later, when he turned, defeated by the very sight of the far-off Champion Goddess.

And the men who had paid for this wonder were the common men of Athens no less than the rich: Cleon the bootmaker, and Myrmex the fish-merchant, and Pasicles the potter, voting in the Assembly, had voiced it into being; it was the concrete form of their religion, a religion that held by gods and worshipped Beauty.

Like a snow-capped hill it was visible from far at sea, to Pheidon the fisher-boy no less than to the distant ships opening Athens from Cape Sunium. The exiled Greek saw it in his dreams; distance could not dim its splendour, nor time, for in our dreams we see it still.

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Diomed, leaving the Agora, took the Street of the Temple of Apollo, walking carefully in the middle of the way and followed by Pheidon.

The aristocrat as he walked conversed with his follower, talking over his shoulder.

"Well," said he, "how much did you give him?"

"Nothing," said the follower.

"Nothing!"

"No, he took it—a piece of silver."

"And the change?"

"I gave him the change," laughed the follower.

"For what?"

"His impudence."

"I believe you, serpent-tongue!"

"Aïe!" cried Pheidon, "listen to that!"

"What?"

"The brass pot crying out, 'Brazen.'"

Disregarding this piece of daring, Diomed turned from the Street of the Temple of Apollo into the Street of the Winds, a street long and narrow and crooked; here blazing with light, here black with shadow. There were three fountains in this street, flowing from lions' heads; and at every fountain girls were waiting to fill their pitchers, hard-working girls of the people, graceful and statuesque, grave of face and beautiful. The hilarity of Athenian life seemed far removed from these women, born to toil and little consideration, secondary figures, self-effacing, gracious, and silent.

Sandal-makers and shoe-makers carried on their trade in this street; you could hear the sound of their hammers beating the leather into shape, mixed with the sound of the fountain waters; the street cries; the cry of the wine-seller, the oil-seller, and the man with olives. A blind man, bronzed, bare-footed, and staff in hand, was chanting a fragment of Homer; it was all his stock-in-trade, and it had carried him through Thessaly and Attica, serving him for food, drink, lodging and raiment.

The doings of the heroes and gods mixed themselves with the scraping of pots, the beating of leather, and the barking of dogs.

Pheidon, whose worldly possessions consisted of two obols, dropped one of them into the shell of the rhapsodist as he passed. Even in Athens it was the poor who were the mainstay of the poor, just as they are to-day and ever will be.

The Street of the Winds had its share of the splendour of the Acropolis. You could see from it the Parthenon, cut clear against the sky; the fluting of the pillars could be distinguished in that clear air, and the delicate-coloured tracery of the frieze.

Half-way down the Street of the Winds Diomed turned to the left and entered another street, broader than the Street of the Winds, silent, clean, and dark.

It was as if a door had been closed behind them. The old houses in the street leaned forward in their upper part, and all the windows were heavily shuttered; the place had a discreet and secret look, and the people who dwelt

there were evidently of the better class; a fountain, old and so coated with lichen that the fauns of the marble were half-blurred in outline, gushed its water from a wall on the right.

Diomed paused to look for some one to give him direction; and Pheidon could hear the “weep-weep” of the fountain water echoed by the walls, a faint murmur from the Street of the Winds, and the flapping of a loose shutter.

This was the Street of the Flute-Player.

One of the oldest streets in Athens, rebuilt in the time of Pericles, taking its name from some story or tragedy or dream, some secret of Reality or Romance.

A man approaching them stopped and gave Diomed the direction he required, and they passed on till they reached the sixth house on the right. A house which fronted the street, with a blank wall and four upper windows, one of which was open.

The door of dark wood had a knocker consisting of a heavy ring of bronze hanging from the mouth of a bronze lion-head; on either side of the door stood a Hermes and an Apollo of the street. The Hermes consisted of a square pedestal of marble, surmounted by a bust of Hermes, honey-yellow with age. The Apollo of the street was just a phallus-shaped stone.

Diomed, lifting the bronze ring, knocked, and, Pheidon, standing in the middle of the way, glanced over the house with no very complimentary expression on his sunburnt face.

The place displeased him, street and house both.

The silence, the respectability, and the comparative cleanness were all antagonistic to his ideas of freedom and noise and joviality. The house displeased him more than the street.

What manner of people could live in that mumchance building? Deaf and dumb folks, surely! He was about to turn on his heel and seek a new view, when his roving eye caught a glimpse of a face at the open upper window.

The face of a girl dark, different from the face of any girl he had ever seen, almost the face of a child, beautiful, yet, to him, startling and almost repellent. The face appeared for a moment, and vanished.

Perhaps it was the veil of dusk in the room, or possibly the repulsion he felt towards the house, that caused the feeling in the mind of the boy. He knew nothing of girls beyond the bronzed and vigorous girls of the harbour town, and he knew not in the least why the glimpsed face was different from the faces of any of these, or why that difference vexed his mind.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOUSE OF THE METIC

DIOMED was raising the ring to knock again, when the door flew open and the porter appeared—a burly Egyptian, with black eyebrows that almost met, thick lips, a bangle on his left wrist, and a scarabaeus dangling from it; a plum-coloured tinge beneath the skin told of some strain of Nubian blood, and Diomed, who with one glance could take in the most minute details, noticed that the hands of this man possessed spatulous fingers and enormous thumbs, that his feet were splay and his arms hairy. He felt certain that if his tunic could be twitched open a chest hairy as the chest of a faun would be revealed.

Gyges was not yet returned.

Diomed, standing before the porter, could see past the gloom of the little entrance hall the inner courtyard, which was open to the sky; a great splash of sunlight lay upon the pavement of the courtyard.

On the pavement a swallow was fluttering, and a yard from the swallow was crouched a black cat with amber eyes fixed on the bird.

He thought for a moment that the bird was injured, then he saw that it was simply spell-bound, held by the gin-like gaze of the cat.

Then, in a flash, cat and bird were gone, the bird in the mouth of the cat.

“When do you expect him to return?” asked Diomed, with a little shiver of pity for the bird.

The porter expected him to return immediately; in fact, he was overdue.

Diomed paused for a moment. It was nearly luncheon time, his house lay a good distance off. He did not feel, however, in the least hungry, and a quarter of an hour or so would not make any difference.

“I have business with him,” said he, “and I will come in and wait.”

The porter stepped aside, Diomed entered, and the door was closed. With the absolute indifference of the man to little things, he had completely forgotten Pheidon and the purse, and the latter, seeing the door closed in his face, whistled. Only for the purse which he held in his hand, and which he looked upon as a trust, he would have given a couple of good bangs on the knocker and run away; he was an ill person to treat with indignity. But Diomed he recognised as being different from other people. What other man in Athens would leave a fistful of silver with an utter stranger? The compliment to his integrity soothed the neglect of his person, and he sat

down upon a ledge of stone jutting from the house wall by the doorway and waited.

Diomed, following the porter, passed through the hall and into the courtyard.

The courtyard was set round with pillared colonnades, where one could walk sheltered from sun or shower, and rooms opened off these colonnades; the doors of these rooms were all closed.

Several chairs stood close to the colonnade on the right. Diomed took his seat on one of these, and the porter, returning to his lodge, left the visitor to his meditations.

The place was absolutely silent except for the occasional twittering of a bird and the far-away occasional flap of the loose shutter. There was no furniture other than the chairs, no altar to the Zeus of the home, nothing to amuse the eye but the strict pillars of the opposite colonnade and the passing of an occasional bird through the blue sky overhead.

Diomed drew his chair slightly back, so that he could sit with his head in the shelter of the roof of the colonnade, and his feet in the sun.

Then he fell to thinking of the business he had come about—money.

Diomed never touched money with his hands if he could help it, nor with his mind. He looked upon it as the dung which manured the lilies of pleasure; his gardeners did all that work. Gyges was one of these gardeners; Cleon, his cook and caterer, was another.

For three years now Diomed had lived the life of a man about town, a notability of Athens; rivalling Alcibiades—now in exile—in his vagaries, but, unlike Alcibiades, remaining single. He had squandered and lent vast sums; his house in the Street of the Temple of Dionysus was the most beautiful house in Athens, and the treasures of art he had collected—engraved gems, statuary, paintings, and metal-work—were alone worth a fortune.

And now, all of a sudden, and during the last few weeks, money had appeared before him in all its naked vulgarity, and said impudently, “You want me.”

Creditors had suddenly pushed their claims, scenting disaster as these people do. Gorgias the jeweller had appeared only yesterday with his bill of fifty minae—over two hundred pounds; Gonippus the horse-dealer was pressing for payment on account of two Thessalian horses sold only a month ago—and Gonippus, up to this, had always seemed as indifferent to money as Diomed himself. There were other creditors, all strangely anxious about their accounts. One might have fancied that Rumour had been rushing hither

and thither about Athens, crying “Havoc to the affairs of Diomed!” She had. In the Agora, the streets, the shops, she had been babbling, whispering, tapping men on the shoulder.

“Have you heard about Diomed?”

“What?”

“I hear he cannot pay his bootmaker.”

“By the Dog of Egypt, I always said it would come to that. But what would you have? All the water of nine pipes will never fill a sieve, though a sieve would take all its water.”

“Wine, you mean?”

“To be sure; he is a drunkard.”

“Worse than that—an atheist.”

“So it is rumoured.”

“Pah! it’s a fact. He swears by the works of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, says the sun is a stone and the moon earth.”

“Impious dog!”

Moral bankruptcy on the heels of metal, as it has been from the beginning of the world.

But Diomed knew little of all this, nor did he worry. He felt sure of money, for the men he had lent to, would they not return his loans, or rather lend him money in return, at the first whisper of request? Pasion owed him a thousand minae, Meletus two hundred, Evenus two hundred; other men, numerous other men, were his debtors as well. But these were all friends, and a last resort. To Gyges he had lent four hundred minae over seven months ago, not as a loan between friends, but as a business transaction to help in some speculation, the details of which Diomed did not know in the least.

Gyges had come to him requesting the loan. Gyges was his banker, and at that time held six hundred minae of Diomed’s. Diomed had lent the money without question.

He had come to-day to recall the loan. Having thought for awhile upon the matter, he sat lulled by the silence around him, his mind straying over pleasant things.

It dwelt on a little Hylas he had purchased but three days ago—on credit—Hippias the sculptor had sold it to him; a statuette lovely as a dream, delicate as a rose-leaf.

Art is both the child and mother of reverie—thought in the form of dream—and by the extent of its dream-compelling power you may judge the

worth of any work of art. There is no other test so absolute; and by his capacity for reverie you may judge the worth of any critic of art, or artist.

Diomed, before the vision of Hylas, forgot the place where he was and the reason of his being there; lost his own identity and became merged with phantasy. He heard the plashing of the water-nymphs and the drone of the dragon-fly and the whisper of the river.

Laughter came to him, and then a voice singing. A girl's voice, bell-like and golden, shattering the vision of Hylas, withering the rushes and willows, and drying from its source the river of dreams. He started in his chair like a man suddenly awakened from sleep. A shadow passed over the courtyard; it was the shadow of a dove, flying marble-white against the gem-like blue of the sky.

The bird vanished, but he did not lower his eyes; he was listening.

The song ceased and then went on, and ceased and went on; now clear, now just a murmur. Then it ceased, and he heard the splashing of water. The sounds came from beyond the large door that led to the second portion of the house, the women's quarters, and Diomed, with his eyes fixed on the door, rose from his chair.

He walked towards the door, moving as if under the spell of the voice which had now again broken into song, and opened it.

Before him lay a courtyard almost as large as the one behind him. In the centre of the courtyard a circular fountain basin flashed back the sunlight from its water; a naked girl, standing knee-deep and bending, was splashing the water into diamond spray with her hands. Her long jet-black hair hung on either side of her neck, hair of that burnt-up black which we associate with the builders of the Pyramids; hair which holds in its darkness night and mystery, and in its perfume forgotten desires; her limbs, wonderfully moulded, had the golden tinge of fruit that has ripened in summer suns, her profile was beautiful, but with nothing of the Greek; it might have been the profile of Isis bending amidst the water-lilies in search of the missing limb of Osiris. The darkness of the Nile flowed through her beauty; the mystery of the labyrinth surrounded her; and the sun, blazing upon her, was no longer the sun of Athens but the sun of Moeris and the Mareotid lakes. She changed the light of the sun.

A moment, and, warned by some instinct, she turned, saw Diomed, and dashed from the bath, making diamond drops of the water. With a shake of her head, out flew her hair like a black mist; and now she was crouching on the flags, squatting, with the black hair covering her like a tent.

One knee peeped through; her hands were resting on the flags before her; she seemed as if crouching for a spring and, exactly as the black cat had held the swallow in the grasp of its eyes, so her wonderful dark eyes held Diomed.

He could neither speak nor move.

Crouching, without moving a muscle, she held him with her steadfast eyes; neither alarm nor anger could be read on that mysterious face, beautiful yet inimical. The face of the priestess of some mystery who had been disturbed in her rites and who had crouched to allow the gods to strike the intruder over her head.

A moment she held him like this, then, in a flash, he stepped back and closed the door.

He re-took the seat he had left and wiped his brow. Not a sound came from the courtyard he had just peeped into; he could still hear the twittering of birds, the flap of the loose shutter, and the flirt of wings overhead as a swallow passed through the blue above, casting its tiny shadow on the pavement.

CHAPTER X

THE VISION

TAKING a broad survey of Humanity, the most startling fact in life is the difference between the idea of Love as conceived by the mind of Diomed and the idea of Love as conceived by the modern world.

Eros, god of love for him, was also Eros, god of wealth and power.

Love to a man like Diomed was the passion of life for all things beautiful; for power, whether the power of swiftness, strength, or wealth; for all things grand. Plato's theory of unity in the objects of desire might have been inspired by a study of the mind of Diomed, which was typically Greek, and to the typically Greek mind the subjective desire was all-important, the object of secondary consideration.

All things pleasing to the senses were legitimate objects of love to the Greek, no less than all things pleasing to the intellect.

The desire of the senses for a statuesque form was the same desire with which the Greek pursued Wisdom. Romance, as we know it, was not; for with us Romance has ever a woman for its centre. Romance with us is inconceivable without the sexual element. With the Greeks this was not so: with them Romance supposed either the passion for form and colour, swiftness, grace, and youth, or—wonder of wonders—the passion for Wisdom (the passion of the Reason).

"I think earth is as beautiful as heaven, and I believe that virtue consists in the correction of shape. I prefer a statue to a phantom, and midday to twilight. Three things please me: gold, marble, and purple; brightness, solidity, and colour. My sky has no clouds, or, if it has, they are solid clouds, cut out with a chisel, made from fragments of marble from the statue of Jupiter, and everything is bright, smiling, and splendid." So, in the words of Gautier, might have spoken Alcibiades in a romantic mood.

"But Diotima, the prophetess of Mantinea, whose sacred and superhuman character raises her above the ordinary proprieties of woman, has taught me far more than this about the art and mystery of love. She has taught me that love is another aspect of philosophy. The same want in the human soul which is satisfied in the vulgar by the procreation of children may become the highest aspiration of intellectual desire."

So, paraphrasing Jowett, might have spoken Socrates. Seen from this standpoint, the greatest love-story in the world is the love-story of Socrates and Truth, and how he died for her; it alone does much to redeem the

monstrous stories which make up a large portion of Greek romance, gives us a new light to view them by, and a perception of the stellar distances dividing the mentality of the modern and the ancient worlds on this point.

Diomed had never loved a woman, nor, in his few years of brilliant life, had he sought the acquaintance of one, with the exception of Evadne the hetaera, at that moment the bright star of her kind in Athens, and whom he frequented more for the sake of her conversation than her person.

From his earliest childhood he had been brought up in that exclusion and with that particular care which fell to the lot of the male children of the aristocracy. Guarded as carefully as a girl by a tutor who had no ears for anything but the Homeric hymns, no eyes for anything but the people who might corrupt his pupil, Diomed developed without any of that buckram which the brutality of school life gives to the character, without any of the blindness it gives to the soul, yet without any loss of manliness, fed as he was on the deeds of the heroes and the gods (concerning which latter he was a disbeliever), and made superperfect in horsemanship, the use of the sword, and the exercises of the gymnasium. Faultless and absolutely unstained by the world, he found himself, on the death of his father, a man free of the world, possessed of large estates, and the citizen of a republic where morals, as we know them, did not exist; possessing a supersensitive feeling for form and colour, a passion for beauty and everything beautiful in life and art, an intellect clear and critical, and a person stamped with elegance and grace.

Here, indeed, was a debauchee of the time, ready-made, and only waiting for the key of Athenian life to wind it up and set it in motion.

Yet Athens and the corruption of Athens had no effect upon Diomed. He lived oddly apart from life whilst mixing with it. His super-sensitiveness saved him from grossness. His life was almost entirely subjective; passion with him had never developed beyond an instinctive philosophy; he had never brutalized it on an object, yet his world was radiant with romance.

Like a butterfly his mind hovered in the clear air between the romantic world of Alcibiades and the romantic world of Socrates. He saw beauty of form and loved it, and beauty of intellect and loved it. For the rest, he was a man who amused himself with little things and had a wit and manner of speech caustic to fools and kindly towards the humble.

His only vice was wine; and with him it was scarcely a vice, for he was never brutal under its influence, though sometimes hilarious and noisy.

Sitting in the courtyard of the house of the Metec and dreaming of the statue of Hylas, Diomed had risen, opened a door and seen a vision.

As he resumed his seat now, and sat listening to the silence and the twittering of the birds, he saw neither the pavement before him nor the pillars of the opposite portico.

Like the breaking of Bubastes into the temple of the virgin goddess, into his mind had broken the vision of Woman. He had never seen her before. The nude figure of Evadne had been for him a lovely shape less beautiful than his own, wanting as it was in strength and the lines of swiftness; the Canaephori, water-pitchers on head, the flute-players, the wives of his friends, all these had been phantoms and subordinate figures, charming enough, but leaving him cold.

Opening the door of the inner courtyard of Gyges, he had surprised the Vision of Woman hot from the source of life, Nilotic, new to him, yet old as the Nile itself. Beside this vision Evadne and all the women he had known were as beautiful empty vases, shapes more or less correct, statues without the breath of life. Crouching before him and gazing with that sphinx-like gaze, she had questioned his soul and repelled it.

"You who have surprised me naked, what do you here? Dreamer of correct forms, philosopher of the beautiful, behold what you have never seen before: Life, Passion, which has nothing to do with beauty; Beauty, which is nothing to the passionate life burning at its core. I have kissed the lips of Osiris, and danced at the feasts of Bubastes and offered my body for a sacrifice in the Temple of Ma. From my body the first man came, and my spirit shall light as a Drukh upon the body of the last man born. I shall make and ruin men when Greece is a pale phantom, as I ruined and made them ere Heliopolis was a city. I am Woman. What art thou?"

Diomed, repelled and startled, sat for awhile, listening.

Not a sound came from the inner courtyard. Was she still crouched upon the stones, or had she vanished into some room of the mysterious house? He had quite forgotten Gyges and the object of his visit, and had the banker appeared before him at that moment, he would have been at a loss for words.

As he sat like this, suddenly, and as if from nowhere, the black cat appeared, stalking along in the shadow of the opposite colonnade, silent-footed, sleek, fed, and evidently content.

It came into the sunshine, played for a moment with a leaf lying on the flags, and then cast itself down in the warmth, with its amber-coloured eyes fixed on the visitor, considering him and undisturbed by his presence, as though the courtyard were some precinct of the Temple of Pasht.

Diomed remembered the fate of the beautiful swallow, and shivered; then he rose to his feet, twitched his *himation* into its proper sit, and crossed the courtyard to the entrance hall.

The porter, hearing his step, came from his lodge.

“Your master is late,” said Diomed. “I shall return another day, or perhaps I may meet him in the Agora to-morrow. Give him my name and tell him that I called.”

The porter opened the door, and he entered the street, where Pheidon was waiting for him. Pheidon was asleep, and Diomed had to stir him up with his stick to arouse him.

CHAPTER XI

THE PURSE-BEARER

PHEIDON awoke from sleep, dropped the little bag of silver which he was holding on his lap, picked it up, and rubbed his eyes.

"By Zeus!" cried Diomed, remembering the bag, which he had completely forgotten, "but here is Honesty."

"At the door of a banker!" grumbled Pheidon, rising and preparing to follow, "and shut out, as usual."

He noticed that Diomed was flushed and that his eyes sparkled as though he had been drinking. He said nothing more, but followed down the Street of the Flute-Player and the Street of the Winds to the Street of the Tripods. Here, at the door of a house, Diomed paused and knocked. It was the house of his sister Rhodopis, his only living relative.

Scarcely had Diomed released the knocker than he turned to Pheidon as if remembering him.

"Ah," said he, "I had forgotten. I shall be here some time, for I shall take my midday meal here, so you need not wait. For your trouble take a piece of silver out of the bag and the bag to my house. Knock at the door and ask to see my caterer, Cleon, and give him the money."

As the last word left his mouth the door opened, disclosing the porter, a bull-headed Scythian, and behind the porter, in the passage, clean-cut against the sunlight of the courtyard, Rhodopis herself and her little daughter, Elpinice.

Rhodopis was the female counterpart of Diomed; graceful, beautiful, dark-haired, draped in a saffron-coloured mantle, which, as she was dressed for the street, enveloped her head, she stood in the twilight of the passage between the sunlight of the courtyard and the sunlight of the street. She was starting to pay a visit to a friend, but at the sight of Diomed, with a single movement of her arm, she undraped her head. The action said not only, "Welcome," but, "Now that you have come I will abandon my projected visit."

Elpinice, scarcely six years of age, a delicious little figure, the miniature counterpart of her mother, did the same.

Diomed entered, caught the darling up in his arms, and the porter shut the door.

Pheidon had been so taken up with the vision of the great lady and the little girl that he had forgotten to shout after Diomed to inquire the name of

the street where he lived.

“Take the money to my house,” Diomed had said, but where in all Athens was that house? Did this Diomed imagine that his address was known to every chance passer in the street? Pheidon, the practical-minded, asked the question of the garlanded Hermes by the doorway. Then, seizing the knocker, he gave a bang.

The door opened and the bull-headed porter appeared. The Athenian hall-porter was not a person to be trifled with. “Rough to the humble, mild to the strong,” was his motto, and the porter of Rhodopis was a typical example of his class.

“Well,” said he, “what do you want, knocking at the door like that?”

“What do I want?” asked Pheidon with an air of surprise.

“What did you knock for—hey?”

“What did I knock for? Why, to make you open the door.”

The porter slammed the door in his face.

“Bull-head!” cried Pheidon.

He waited a for few minutes, considering the position. It was pleasant enough cheeking the porter, but it was not business. He had to get Diomed’s address at any price, even humility. So he knocked again, humbly enough this time, and then stood waiting and preparing his address.

The door opened and the porter reappeared, this time with a stick in his hand.

Pheidon did not wait. He reached the corner of the street a hundred yards away, turned, hurled an unprintable remark, directed, this time, not at the porter’s head, and made off down the Street of Hermes.

A nice position truly to be in for any one but a thief! It was like a thing one would dream. He sat down on a little ledge by a fountain and considered the whole position, going all through the adventure in his mind; the meeting with Diomed at the fish-stall, the visit to the banker’s and the barber’s, the visit to the Street of the Flute-Player, and the last vision of Diomed vanishing into the house in the Street of the Tripods. Pheidon began to laugh and chuckle to himself. He was laughing at Diomed, laughing with him too, for he remembered the dagger thrust at Myrmex, the slaying of Anetodemus, and the way Diomed had shaved the barber with his wit; what a man! Everything that came to him he turned into a joke, and this last unconscious practical joke was the crown of all, for Pheidon dared not leave Athens and return to the Piraeus until the money was safely delivered up, either to Diomed himself or to Cleon, his caterer.

Pheidon might have returned to the Street of the Tripods and hung about till Diomed reappeared, but he had had enough of waiting; besides, most likely the porter was on the watch with the stick, perhaps at the street corner. Waiting was not for his adventurous soul, and if the worst came to the worst, he could go to the barber, or even to Myrmex, either of whom would be able to direct him, neither of whom he was particularly anxious to visit, however.

Before starting he opened the bag, took the drachma which was his due, and put it into his mouth to keep company with the obol already there. He had never been so rich. Considering that the pay of an Athenian juryman was only three obols a day, a silver drachma for three hours' attendance was not so bad. Yet Pheidon, as he took his way along the Street of Hermes, was not entirely happy; there is always some fly in the ointment. Diomed's splendid liberality and neglect of money was tainted by his neglect of his follower. Here was a man who laughed with you and sharpened his wit on yours, an aristocrat who talked to you just as a common man might talk to you, raising you to his own level without lowering himself; and then forgot you utterly, as though you had never been.

Pheidon had always filled his own circumference up to this, and his circumference was the visible world; the admirals and captains of the war-tremes, the great men of Athens, had walked small as flies on the outer edge; he had shouted after philosophers and watched the citizens flocking to the Areopagus quite unmoved. The splendour of the Panathenaic festival and the procession bearing the painted robe to the Acropolis had awakened no spirit of reverence in his mind. Diomed alone had moved him more than all the things he had ever seen, all the people he had met, for Diomed had lifted him up to his own level, made him an aristocrat for a couple of short hours; brought him into his own world, made him see the warmth, and elegance, and grace, and wit of it.

Ah, the splendid Diomed, whose every movement was unstudied and natural, whose tongue was a rapier, whose wit was as polished as his fingernails, who thought no more of a bag of silver than of a bag of nuts! What a man to follow, to imitate, to be friends with! And to be dropped by and trodden on as dirt!!!

In the Street of the Disc-thrower he stopped a young man of the artisan type.

"I am looking for the house of Diomed."

"Which Diomed?"

"There is but one of the sort I am looking for. A great man—an aristocrat."

“Ho!” said Democracy, “you want to know where Diomed the aristocrat lives?”

“Yes. Didn’t I say so?”

“Well, he lives in the Street of the Dog.”

“I know,” retorted Pheidon. “Next to the street of your mother the b— — h.”

Then he took to flight.

The business seemed hopeless. He made for the Agora, but the barber had closed his shop. The market of the Agora had closed, and Myrmex was nowhere to be seen. Clearly there was nothing to be done for the present, but amuse oneself and trust in the gods to put things right.

Between the Colonnade of Hermes and the Temple of Dionysus ran a passage-way leading to a piece of waste ground from which opened several streets. School children congregated here after school hours, played their games, bartered with one another, and aped their elders. It was a sort of children’s Agora, and full market now, to judge by the hubbub coming from it.

Pheidon came down the passage-way and entered the place. Cut in two by the black shadow of the Temple of Dionysus, swarming with children and ringing with their voices, this miniature of the Agora, with its background of white temple columns and its dome of blue sky, made a picture as vivid and interesting as any in Athens. Naked children were playing leap-frog, with their tunics twisted round their necks like huge mufflers, for to cast your tunic off here was to have it stolen; children playing a game, the great-great-grandfather of Prisoner’s Base, made the echoes of the temple walls ring with their shouts. At the far end a great uproar was going on; the market was there, and cabbage stumps and odds and ends and leavings from the real market were having a glorious and fictitious existence as objects of worth. There were children playing with tops and knuckle-bones, but the strangest game was being conducted in silence in the shadow of a wall that formed part of the back of the Colonnade of Hermes.

Here a philosopher and his train of disciples were pacing to and fro, all wheeling like one when he turned, and making way for him that he might again head the procession. There was some method in this game other than imitation, for Pheidon noticed that the children were counting as they walked, and that if the philosopher got out of step he was instantly deposed, a disciple taking his place. There was a barber’s shop where a barber like a cherub was shaving a customer with a sharpened stone and no pretence at soap or oil, whilst a group of six-year-olds were squatting near by, waiting

with delightful patience their turn. Market-folk, game-players, idlers, all were boys; not a girl was to be seen.

As Pheidon entered the place by way of the Passage of the Temple of Dionysus, a man, stout, bearded, with a fat, good-natured face and a dark, roving eye, entered it from one of the streets.

He paused close to Pheidon to look at the barber and his customers. Then he laughed and said something in a language the boy did not understand. Pheidon shook his head.

“What!” cried the big man, speaking in excellent Attic Greek, which was evidently his native tongue. “You do not understand the Doric! By Hestia, but Athens grows more ignorant every time I enter it.”

“I can well believe that,” said Pheidon, moving out of arm’s reach. But the stranger showed no offence; his eye, roving hither and thither, fell upon the bag that Pheidon was holding. The boy, in moving, had changed it from one hand to the other, and the faint chink of silver struck the stranger’s ear.

Then he fell into conversation with such affability and with such an air of talking to one of his own age and station that Pheidon was quite held.

He was a physician from Syracuse, no less (so he said); hence the Doric Greek, for physicians and cooks and caterers in Athens used the Doric just as old-fashioned English doctors used dog-Latin and present-day cooks use French. His name was Meletus, and he numbered among his patients the most distinguished men in Athens. He had a remedy for rheumatism taken from a flower that grew on a particular mountain in Thessaly and nowhere else; he had searched for it for six years before discovering it. No man had ever discovered it before.

“But,” said Pheidon, “if you were searching for it on the mountain, how did you know it was there?”

Meletus laughed.

“How did I know it was there? Who told me? Who but the gods themselves, in a dream.”

“Told you it was on the mountain?”

“Assuredly.”

“Then why were you six years searching for it?”

“Why? Because the gods, to test my faith, and to render the finding of more virtue, made me blind.”

“Then how did you find it if you were blind?”

“By my nose.”

Pheidon laughed and Meletus laughed. The rogue winked as though to take the boy into his confidence; it was as much as to say, "See what an impostor I am." Pheidon could not help liking him, despite his roguery, he had such a jolly way with him.

"And do you sell much of your stuff?"

"I sell it everywhere. But that is only one of my cures; all the best men in Athens are my customers."

"Then," said Pheidon, a bright idea striking him, "you may be able to tell me the address of one Diomed, whom I met to-day and who gave me this bag of silver to carry to his house. I do not even know his father's name or the quarter he lives in. He left me in the street with the thing in my hand, and before I could get the name of his street he was gone."

Meletus, who had started at the name of Diomed, recovered himself.

"I have a—patient named Diomed," said he. "A young man."

"Yes."

"Good-looking."

"Yes."

"A great noble."

"That is he."

"Free with his tongue and purse?"

"That's he."

"Then follow me and I will lead you to his house."

They turned as the barber, having finished his second customer, committed some mistake in the ritual of the game and was deposed with clamour, taking his place on the marble block that served for a chair and submitting his chin to the scraping he had inflicted on the others.

"So he trusted you with a bag of money," said Meletus. "And you a stranger."

"And why not?" replied Pheidon. "Are strangers always thieves?"

Meletus burst out laughing.

"Ask that of some man wiser than myself."

"Then I will ask the first man I meet," said Pheidon.

Meletus laughed again.

"By Zeus!" cried he, "'tis truly said the boys of Athens have tongues. Where do you keep it that 'tis so sharp?"

"Where I keep my money."

"And where is that?"

“In my mouth.”

He spat the obol and the silver drachma into his hand and repouched them in his cheek.

Meletus laughed again. They had crossed the Agora and entered the Street of the Tanners, an odorous place.

“And had you never seen this Diomed before to-day?” asked Meletus.

“Never. I belong to the harbour town.”

“Well, should you lose your money before you get to the house of Diomed, take my advice and get back to the harbour town, otherwise they might say you had stolen it.”

They were passing down a narrow and crooked lane leading out of the Street of the Tanners; not a soul was in sight.

“Lose it?” said Pheidon. “How could I lose it?”

The answer came from the fist of Meletus. Stricken in the pit of the stomach, the unfortunate Pheidon, on his back, breathless, unable to move or cry out, lay watching the sky whirling round like a wheel. Then he turned on his side and was sick.

The obol and the drachma had jumped, by good fortune, out of his mouth instead of down his throat; they lay on the flags near by. The bag of silver, needless to say, was gone.

CHAPTER XII

THE GRATITUDE OF PHILINUS

THE situation, to Pheidon, was appalling. To him the bag was a little fortune. Diomed would no doubt hold him accountable for it, perhaps his father's boat and fishing-gear would be seized and the family brought to ruin. The boy did not know. Athens and the harbour town were always fermenting with litigation; the very fishermen had the law of each other on the least occasion; and Pheidon had been brought up with a wholesome respect for the property of others.

As bad as the loss of the money was the blow to his pride. He had reckoned himself so sharp, and all his sharpness had brought him to this; his confounded tongue that loved to match itself against the tongues of others had proved a poor defence against the wit of the first rogue he met.

He gathered himself up, recovered the obol and drachma and crawled to the corner of the Street of the Tanners. Here he sat down in the doorway of a house and tried to think things over.

There was a force of over a thousand police in Athens, but they were no use to Pheidon. Their duties were mainly to keep order at the games, at the meeting of the Assembly, and so forth; to arrest men when directed to do so by the magistrates, and to attend the magistrates at the courts. They did not patrol the streets.

Whilst he was sitting like this, who should pass by but Philinus, the ne'er-do-well to whom Diomed had given the money that morning in the Agora!

Philinus was muddled with drink, having spent the money in a low public-house; a place where a slave, even, would not enter; but he was able to walk fairly straight and to talk when he could control his hiccough.

At the hail of Pheidon Philinus turned his boozy face and recognised the boy who had been following Diomed that morning.

"What ho!" said Philinus, and hiccoughed.

Pheidon, seeing that this gentleman was not in a state to receive confidences, said nothing about the loss of the money, but asked for Diomed's address.

Philinus scratched his head.

"I know where he lives and could lead you there, but I have forgotten the name of the street." Hiccough.

"Then lead me."

“Ay”—hiccough—“but I’m not going in that direction.”

“I will give you an obol to take me there.”

The penniless drunkard took the coin, turned, and led the way back along the street in a reverse direction to that taken by Meletus the smooth-tongued. They recrossed the Agora, which was now deserted and blazing in the full light of afternoon. Philinus had been in rather a despondent mood before meeting Pheidon. He had drunk enough to make him wish for more, and was sober enough to see the impossibility of getting it. The obol in his hand, however, had pulled him together and restored his cheerfulness.

Half-way across the market square he stopped and glanced back at the Acropolis.

Philinus had assisted in the building of the Parthenon. Thirty-three years ago he had assisted as a mason under the direction of Ictinus at the last strokes of work upon it. Philinus was now fifty-three; he had shed everything worth having in life, but he still clung to the Parthenon. He looked on it as his own work. Just as a broken-down Irish gentleman talks of his once estates, so did this gentleman, when in his cups, talk of his Parthenon. He loved it as a child, he loved it as only a Greek could love a beautiful work of art, he worshipped it as the home of the Virgin Goddess (he was deeply religious), and he was uplifted in his own mind above all other men who had not a share in its construction.

The Athenians, with that terrible sense of humour of theirs, endured Philinus on account of this oddity of his. They laughed at him and gave him the alms that men give to the soft-witted, this marble-mason who had chipped a column and talked with the pride of a temple-builder. Yet the pride of this old drunkard had more wit in it than all the wit of the scoffers. “I chipped a column of the Parthenon.” The murmur of Philinus comes to us down the ages immortal—with his hiccough.

He nodded to the Acropolis as though to say, “Stay there till I get a drink”; and, leading the way, passed down the passage of the Temple of Dionysus.

The children were all scuttering back to school, barbers, merchants, philosophers, and game-players. In the Street of Apollo, into which Philinus turned, you could hear their hurrying feet and their voices above the sounds of the city, and mixed with the voices of the quails perched on the house-tops and filling the warm afternoon with the call of summer. Half-way down the street Philinus stopped at the door of a public-house; a dark and shadowy place utterly disreputable, as all Athenian public-houses were.

“But this Diomed,” said Philinus, as if continuing a conversation, “why do you seek his house?”

“That is my business,” replied Pheidon, “and none of yours.”

“Ay, but it is, for am not I thrice your age?” hiccough—“and I tell you this is a man of evil repute, a disbeliever in the gods.” Hiccough.

“Ho!” said Pheidon, “you did not tell him that in the market-place this morning when he gave you money—Son of Ingratitude!”

Philinus flung up his hands.

“Hark at him! At my age! At my age! Old enough to be his father. Well, go”—hiccough—“take your road, if you will not take the advice of Philinus. The memory has come to me—he lives in the Street of the Temple of Dionysus. ’Tis but three streets from here.”

He dived into the tavern and was lost to sight. Pheidon, too dispirited by the events of the day to follow him or rail at him, turned away to find the Street of the Temple of Dionysus. He felt bound to go to Diomed’s house and tell of his loss, or bound at least to make the attempt. If Philinus had betrayed him in the address, well, then, there was nothing more to be done.

Pheidon, till to-day, had never seen Athens; though he had come there a hundred times from the harbour town, never till to-day had he seen Athenian life as his chance meeting with Diomed had shown it to him. The ingratitude of Philinus, the treachery of Meletus, the face of Pasion, the words of the men at the barber’s shop casting discredit on Diomed, all these things were new to him; none of them could he have seen or heard without following in the train of Diomed. Money, like a powerful lamp, had given him a faint glimpse of Athens as it really was.

Against the dazzling background of Diomed, Philinus and Meletus were like the crooked and dirty streets set against the dazzling background of the Acropolis. Athens the cruel and mean, Athens the tricky and whispering, appeared against the background of Athens the splendid.

The thoughts of youth, far from being long, are in fact terribly short and direct. Pheidon, who could sum up a stranger and nickname him with a name absolutely applicable and definitive, summed up the city from the sample of it he had seen. More than ever he felt attracted towards Diomed, whom he guessed by knowledge and instinct to be deeply surrounded by enemies.

Inquiring his way as he went, he found at last the Street of the Temple of Dionysus; a fairly broad thoroughfare and perhaps the best residential street in the city.

A passer-by pointed out the house of Diomed, and Pheidon knocked.

The house had a broad frontage, and the upper windows had shutters of bronze. The Hermes of the street, crowned with a fresh wreath, was an exquisite piece of work from the chisel of Hippias, god-like, benign and contemplative. The door, of some rich, dark southern wood, was absolutely plain, save for sunken centre panels; the knocker, with the inevitable lion's head, was plain and solid as the door.

The whole house from the outside had an appearance of simplicity, with a hint of contained and quiet splendour.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HOUSE OF DIOMED

THE door opened, soundless on its hinges, and revealed the porter, a young slave, joyous and innocent-looking as spring.

There was an irresponsibility and grace about this individual that struck the key-note of the house even before one crossed the threshold. He was part of the Design. Beyond him and the shadowy passage shone the sunlit courtyard.

Pheidon inquired for Cleon, the caterer of Diomed; and the porter said, "Enter."

After the first glance he scarcely looked at Pheidon, but closed the door, said "Wait," and went off tripping. Pheidon could hear his voice singing as he went, till voice and vision were swallowed up in the silence of the house.

The passage, walled and roofed with marble, had on its pavement the word "Happiness." A statue of Demeter facing a statue of Dionysus, stood on either side: and beyond these dreamers, speechless and beautiful, lay the peace and sunlight of the courtyard, a hint of blue sky, the murmur of a dove.

Nothing more. Art could do nothing more. The snow of marble, the gold of sunlight, the liquidity of shadow, silence, and the voice of a bird made the daydream complete.

Happiness.

Surely she was sleeping in that sunlit courtyard; beyond the shadow of the passage Loveliness herself was surely hiding, laughing, with her finger to her lip.

Pheidon, now, through the silence could distinguish a confused murmur like the murmur of a multitude of little weak-voiced birds. Before the door opened he had felt frightened at the business before him; the weight of the lost money hung upon his spirits; but there was something about this place that took all fear from his heart.

After a moment's hesitation he advanced into the sunlight of the courtyard.

The pillars of the colonnades surrounding the courtyard were of white marble, fluted, and graceful as the stalks of flowers. The walls of the colonnades were painted with the sapphire of sea and sky, touches of foam and white cloud, the forms of Eros and the Oceanides, vague, blowing dolphins, traces of far-off sails; the confusion of the waves, the freedom of

the sea, wind-blown robes and distance all blending to make the charm complete.

Yet so unobtrusive were these pictured walls that one scarcely noticed them. One said to oneself, "All round there is the sea; caught in the net of some dreamer, hauled by Art to the colonnades of Diomed; sea-waves, and sea-maids, and sea-shells, and blueness: everything—even to the breeze."

In the shadow of the right-hand colonnade stood a great cage of little birds, tiny red-tinted African birds, a hundred of them, all whispering and chatting, gossiping and preening themselves, filling the air with the subdued sound of their voices.

In the centre of the courtyard, severely simple yet beautiful, stood the altar to the Zeus of the home; and in the shadow of the colonnades stood some marble chairs cushioned with blue.

There was nothing else but the silence which seemed the genius, and the sunlight which seemed the spirit, of the place.

In those rooms opening off the colonnades you would find bronzes and statuary, lamps of silver, engraved gems, treasures of art; but here there was nothing to distract the eye from the designed effect—a place empty, yet full of dreams.

Pheidon had scarcely looked round him, when the door leading to the inner courtyard opened, and the youthful porter appeared, beckoning.

The inner courtyard of Diomed's house would have been devoted to the women-folk had Diomed been a married man. It served Diomed as a bathing-place and gymnasium. Most Athenian gentlemen patronised the public baths, but the luxurious Diomed preferred a bathing-place of his own; occasionally, however, using the public swimming-bath near the Temple of Dionysus.

There was no bath here, just a marble trough from which slaves splashed water over their master. The place was severely simple, almost ugly; the rooms opening off it belonged to the servants and slaves, and a doorway opposite the entrance door led to the kitchen.

A confused murmur of voices could now be heard, and as the slave opened the door the view of the kitchen burst upon Pheidon, and the noise of it.

Baskets of vegetables stood on the floor; a tray of fish showed all the colours of the rainbow beside the vegetables; slaves were hurrying hither and thither, polishing pans, pouring oil from jars into smaller vessels, beating sauces up in shallow earthenware vessels, plucking fowls and getting in one another's way; talking, laughing, and singing; whilst in the

midst of all, above all supreme as Zeus amidst the gods, stood Cleon the caterer and cook, stout, black-bearded, and paternal.

He had an eye for everyone and a voice for everyone, and he talked the whole time; now, for grandeur's sake, in the Doric, which the creatures around him did not understand in the least; now, sharply enough, in the Attic.

"Ho, Pyrrhias, you call that pan clean! Polish it till it shows the full ugliness of your face. And what are you doing there with that oil? You are putting thrice too much into your bowl. Fling it out and measure again."

The waste going on was frightful. A basket of leeks would be condemned and flung into the midden almost, one might say, if the shape of the basket displeased the lordly Cleon.

As he got a big commission on all things purchased, the waste was not without a reason. And you may be sure the slaves were not behindhand in the business; tossing oil that ought to have gone back into the bottle down the sink, leaving things to spoil in the sun, breaking crockery, spilling wine; helping to ruin their master with the charming gaiety of children and the heedlessness of slaves.

The entrance of Pheidon had the effect of a cloth flung over a cage of chattering birds; almost complete silence took place.

A small slave squatting on the floor and pounding some herbs in a mortar continued his noise, however, and Cleon, walking over to him, gave him a tip with his toe; then he turned to the new-comer.

"Well?" said Cleon, measuring the boy with his eye. "You wish to see me? What is your business?"

Pheidon made no reply; he was petrified. The slaves gaped at him as he stood there gaping at Cleon, literally with his mouth open.

Cleon was Meletus.

"Well," said Cleon, perfectly unmoved by the confrontation, "what is your business? Have you swallowed your tongue?"

"Thief!" cried Pheidon, his anger suddenly blazing up and overmastering him. "Thief! Thief! Where is the purse of your master that you stole from me?"

Cleon looked round about him with a face of blank surprise.

"Clearly," said he, "this boy is mad. No, do not harm him or hold him"—to several of the slaves about to seize the imprudent one, who, flushed and with eyes bulging with anger, stood, suddenly brought to check by the coolness of the other.

"Either mad or mistaken. Let us see. Come, who is it that you seek, and why do you come here and, in the name of Hestia, what purse do you speak of? And what manner of person are you to come into the house of my master Diomed and speak such words in his kitchen? Answer!"

"Aïe!" cried Pheidon, recovering his calmness, "it is easy to say 'Answer.' I am looking for Meletus the robber, who, within the last hour, met me and robbed me of the purse of Diomed."

"Meletus the robber! There is no such person here."

"He is here, standing before me."

"Where?"

"In your person."

Cleon at this burst into such a peal of laughter, laughter so genuine and frank and unassumed that Pheidon for a second felt shaken. Only for a second, however. The man was Meletus. Figure, form, and voice were the same; and a wart which Pheidon had noticed above the right eyebrow of Meletus grew exactly in the same place above the right eyebrow of Cleon. There could be no mistake.

Everyone in the kitchen laughed, and the two slaves were again advancing officiously to seize the accuser, when the calm and kindly Cleon waved them back.

"Let him be. I doubt even if he is mad; there is some mistake. Let us inquire." Then to Pheidon: "Answer me, that we may get this matter right. You lost a purse. When was it taken from you?"

"Thou knowest; within the last hour."

"And you say—the gods defend me!—that I took it from you?"

"I say so."

"And where did you lose it?"

"Thou knowest; in the lane off the Street of the Tanners."

"And how could I have taken it from you, seeing that ever since noon I have been here in this kitchen?"

Pheidon made no reply.

Cleon called to one of the slaves in his mild voice. "Have I not been here in this kitchen ever since noon?"

"Yes, master," replied the slave with an air of absolute truthfulness mixed with astonishment at having been asked such a self-evident question.

"Pyrrhias," said Cleon, "have I not been here in this kitchen since noon?"

“Yes, master.”

He called each slave in turn, and they each made the same reply. Then he sent for the hall-porter, and the joyous and innocent one came and added his evidence to that of the others.

Pheidon had known liars in his short lifetime; he had lied himself on occasion, but lying like this was unknown to him. These slaves seemed to him not human beings but machines. Shame or truth they surely had never known. This was another phase of Athenian life demonstrated by Money. Smooth-tongued and smiling corruption in the very centre of a man's home.

Ah! the beautiful house and the atrium of Happiness, the smiling face at the door, the courtyard and the little soft-voiced birds, the beautiful and soft-voiced slaves—what a dream on what a foundation! What a home for Falsehood, Injustice, Treachery, and Theft!

Pheidon, like most boys, did a good deal of thinking, with sensual perceptions for counters of thought. The thing spoke to him in the language of the sense of touch rather than that of the sense of morals. He felt as though he had grasped something slimy, and snaky, and soft; something that was, yet, fanged and poisonous.

A cave filled with hairy thieves would not have affected him in the manner of this kitchen full of sweet-faced and silky-tongued slaves.

“Well,” said Cleon, “what have you to say to that?”

Cleon drew close to Pheidon as he asked the question, and Pheidon made no reply. He stepped back fully expecting a blow. He was frightened now, for he felt that if he were murdered here the slaves—so strong a hold had Cleon upon them—would neither attempt to help him nor tell of the deed.

“He is dumb,” said Cleon. “Come, seize him and drive him out, and see if a stick can make him talk as he goes.”

A stick with a thong attached stood in one corner of the kitchen.

In a second Pheidon, seized by two of the slaves, was being dragged along through the bathing-place, whilst a third, armed with the stick, was belabouring him from behind. Though he struggled, he would not cry out, and the fool with the stick, not knowing the wiles of a harbour town boy, getting too close just as the door opened, received the kick of a heel in a portion of his anatomy where the kick of a heel was most exceedingly painful.

The next moment Pheidon was in the street, and the door shut on him.

CHAPTER XIV

DIOMED PUTS HIS HOUSE IN ORDER

DIOMED, after the midday meal at the house of his sister, took his way homeward.

The Street of the Triremes would have been the quickest route, yet he went back and out of his way to pass through the Street of the Flute-Player. The street which he had hitherto avoided as being inimical to him had all of a sudden put forth its attraction. It was as though a stone sphinx, hitherto repellent, had of a sudden become a sphinx of flesh gazing upon him and drawing him with its gaze.

He had always felt the place to be antagonistic. Who is there that has not felt the same about certain houses and places? Just as Aristophanes felt that the Itonian Gate cast some spell upon his luck, so Diomed felt that the Street of the Flute-Player cast some spell upon his life.

"To linger here is to be lost," said Superstition; and he had lingered there.

As he passed the house of Gyges he glanced up at the windows, all now closely shuttered. Gyges would no doubt be home by now. He stopped, as if undecided whether he should knock at the door or not; then he passed on.

His whole being was filled with unrest. His mind, so clear, so keen, so perceptive, had lost something of its sureness of vision, his will something of its power, his decision something of its strength.

The swallow, perching for a moment in the courtyard of Gyges and falling under the spell of fascination, had known with the brain of a bird that very same dimness of vision, loss of will power, disturbance of decision, troubling now the brain of the man.

As Diomed passed the little fountain weeping like some city-chained Naiad, the flapping of the loose shutter came again just as he had heard it on first entering the street.

He paused, half turned as though a voice had called to him, and then, with a movement as though he were breaking free from some trammel, passed on into the Street of the Winds.

At the corner of the Street of the Temple of Dionysus whom should he meet but Pheidon!

"Ho," said Diomed, "my purse-bearer! Well, scamp, where are you off to now?"

“Aie!” cried Pheidon, “to the harbour town, where men are honest. Did I ask for your purse?”

Furious with the treatment he had received, he began to tell his story, standing before the astonished Diomed and suiting a gesture to almost every word.

Diomed, with his instinctive perception for truth, knew that the boy was not lying.

“Well,” said he. “Meletus got my purse—what then?”

“Then,” said Pheidon, “I met the man to whom you gave money in the market-place this morning, and I asked for your address.”

“Philinus. And what did he say?”

“He was half drunk— —”

“Only half drunk! By Hestia! but he must be reforming.”

“And he told me to beware of you—that you did not believe in the gods.”

A shade passed over the face of Diomed, yet he laughed.

“Had I given him two drachmae instead of one, he would have been whole drunk and speechless, and so would have left my reputation alone. One should never give charity by half. Go on.”

“He gave me your address at last, and I went to your house to tell of my loss to Cleon your caterer.”

“Yes?”

“And Cleon—was Meletus.”

“You are sure?”

“He was the very same man, even to the wart over his eyebrow.”

“True,” said Diomed. “He has a wart over the eyebrow.”

“I accused him, I called him names— —”

“You lost your temper.”

“Ay! lost my temper! Why, he robbed me!”

“He has often robbed me, yet I never lost my temper. Did he deny the act?”

“He swore he had not left his kitchen since noon.”

“Ah!”

“And all your slaves swore the same.”

“Ah!”

Diomed paused for a moment in thought. Then he turned towards his house.

“Follow me,” said he.

Pheidon followed to the door of the house. Diomed knocked, and the smiling and joyous slave opened. When the joyous one saw Pheidon behind his master, he made a grimace.

“Come,” said Diomed.

He entered the passage, followed by the boy. In the courtyard he took his seat on one of the blue-cushioned chairs, and motioning Pheidon to stand beside him, ordered the slave to fetch Cleon.

Diomed had not relinquished his walking-stick, and as he sat waiting for the culprit and engaged in thought, he drew on the pavement little patterns with the point of the stick. He knew that Cleon had robbed him in commissions and endless ways; he knew that the slaves were untruthful; he knew that the city was corrupt, that men whom he befriended like Philinus were the first to talk evil of him, that boon friends might be the bitterest enemies: all this he had known in theory, had enjoyed as food for cynicism. The Fates had, however, conspired to make this gentleman prove in practice what he had laughed at in theory. And Cleon and the slaves were appointed, it seems, as his first humble instructors.

In a moment the door leading to the inner offices opened, and Cleon, burly, business-like, and beaming good-nature, appeared. He showed no sign of surprise at the sight of Pheidon, and that fact sealed Diomed’s conviction of his guilt.

“Cleon,” said Diomed, “of those flowers for the banquet to-night—did you order them?”

“Assuredly,” replied Cleon, “since it was your wish.”

“But,” said Diomed, “did you see them before purchasing, as I ordered you to do?”

“I inspected them one by one. There is not a withered leaf— —”

“At what hour did you call at the flower-merchant’s booth?”

“At full market.”

“Yet at full market I happened to pass the flower-stalls on my way to the banker’s, and the stall of Gigas, with whom I always deal, was empty of everything but a few miserable wreaths; and at noon, chancing to pass again, it was in the same condition. How, then, did you inspect the flowers?”

“When I called at full market, Gigas requested me to call again an hour after noon, for the consignment he expected from the country would not

arrive before that time.”

“But an hour after noon the market-place would be empty.”

“Assuredly; but I was to call at his shop in the Street of the Flower Merchants.”

“And did you call?”

“I did.”

“An hour after noon?”

“An hour after noon.”

“How, then, were you in your kitchen at that time?”

“But I was not in my kitchen.”

“Then how about the story of this boy?”

Cleon looked puzzled.

“He says that you swore to him that you had not left your kitchen since noon.”

“*I swear to him!*” Cleon burst out laughing. “Why, this is the very first time I have ever set eyes on him. I swear to him! Never. Well, by Hestia, this beats all! Swear to him that I did not leave my kitchen! Why should I do such a thing?”

Diomed turned to Pheidon.

“You hear what he says?”

“He is a liar!” replied Pheidon, quite simply.

“He tells me he has never seen you before.”

“He is a liar!”

“But,” cut in Cleon, who seemed passing from amazement to amazement, “is the boy mad? What is the meaning of it? What sense is there in this thing?”

“He says that, meeting you in the street, you got into conversation with him and robbed him of a purse of silver; that he called here and accused you of the theft —”

“He call here!” cut in Cleon. “Never.”

“That the slaves supported your statement.”

“Never!”

“Well, we will see. Call the slaves.”

Cleon, laughing, went off through the door leading to the inner offices. A moment later he returned, followed by the slaves, from the boy who acted as kitchen-maid and washer-up to the hall-porter.

Diomed, with a sweep of his stick, ranged them in a half-circle. They were all there except Xanthias, his personal attendant, the only one whom he could really trust. Xanthias, after his return with the parcels that morning, had been despatched by Cleon to Diomed's house in the country to fetch grapes for the forthcoming banquet. He would not return till dusk.

"Have you ever seen this boy before?" asked Diomed.

"Never!"

The answer came like one word uttered by one mouth. The porter chimed in, "Master, a boy like him was loitering about the door some hours ago, but I warned him away, thinking he was there for no good."

He examined them singly and one by one, and one by one they answered him with all the appearance of truth and honesty.

Then he dismissed them, retaining only the hall-porter.

When they were gone, he sat for a moment in thought.

If Pheidon had spoken the truth, then Cleon and all these slaves were liars. He could believe them to be liars, but he could scarcely believe as yet that they were capable of such absolute and perfect dissimulation.

He rose to his feet and, calling Cleon, the porter, and Pheidon to follow him, passed from the courtyard to the servants' quarters.

He passed directly to the room of Cleon, a bare apartment, containing little else but a stone bed on which lay a mattress.

He glanced round, pointed with his stick to the mattress, and said to the porter, "Lift it!"

The slave did as he was bidden, and there, beneath the mattress, lay the bag of silver.

The thing seemed like magic to Pheidon; it even surprised Diomed himself. He had simply ordered the mattress to be raised as it seemed the only likely place where money could be hidden.

But the most surprised person of all was Cleon.

He cried out, started back, clasped his hands and turned to Diomed.

"I have been betrayed."

Diomed checked his anger to see what new development was about to take place. He felt like a person fishing for reptiles and half dreading what new monster his hook might bring up.

"Then you did not put this purse here?"

"Never—a thousand times never." He turned on the porter.

“Scamp, what is the meaning of this? You are all in league, and one is as bad as the other. Who has done this thing?” He twitched the trembling wretch down on his knees, stood over him, and, seizing his hand, twisted it up and backwards till the unfortunate nearly shrieked with the pain.

“Who has done this thing?”

“Pyrrhias,” cried the tortured one.

“Did the boy give him the purse?”

“Yes.”

“Did he tell him to place it where it has been found?”

“Yes.”

“Why did he do this?”

“Because a man told him who hated you.”

“And why did Pyrrhias obey the boy?”

“Because he hated you. You know yourself you ordered him to be beaten yesterday.”

Cleon turned to Diomed.

“You see for yourself the net in which I am enclosed.”

“It is of your own making,” replied Diomed, “and you may thank the gods that in it you are not haled before the magistrates. You have not deceived me once since you entered my service, in which you are no longer.”

“I am dismissed?”

“From this moment. You need not even complete the preparations for my dinner-party to-night. Pyrrhias, whom you have accused wrongfully, is as good a cook, and he will take your place.”

“And my wages?” asked Cleon impudently.

“The wages of a road robber is death. Stay another moment in my house, and I will have you taken before the magistrates. *Begone!*”

“I go,” said Cleon. It was strange to see the change in him and the ferocity that suddenly appeared beneath the veil of suavity. He left the room.

Diomed turned to the kneeling slave.

“Why did you swear falsely against Pyrrhias?”

“Master,” replied the slave, “I was afraid.”

Diomed picked the purse up off the bed, called Pheidon to follow him, and left the room.

He led the way to the front door and opened it with his own hands for the boy to pass out.

“You took the piece of silver I told you you might have?”

Pheidon spat the drachma into the palm of his hand, showed it, and repouched it in his cheek.

Yesterday Diomed would most likely have flung the purse of silver to the boy, telling him to keep it for his honesty, but all of a sudden, now, Honesty appeared before him new-painted and new-lit by the scoundrelism of Cleon and the weakness of the slaves, and the sturdy Pheidon had suddenly acquired dignity where, before, he had only possessed the art to amuse.

“You say you live in the harbour town?”

“Yes, in the Street of Munychia.”

“Where is that?”

“It is the street that opens upon the No. 1 Quay of the war-triremes.”

“And your full name?”

“Pheidon the son of Simon the fisherman.”

“Is he a free man?”

“He is a citizen.”

“I would like to have you in my service, but that is impossible—your trade is the sea.”

“Ropes and sails and oars,” replied Pheidon. “I will serve you in that way any time you like, but I would not carry your purse after you through Athens again, not for the contents of it.”

“Well,” said Diomed, “you have carried it better than any of my slaves would have done. You are honest, and, should I be able at any time to give you help, call upon me.”

Pheidon laughed. At the bottom of his queer nature lay a grain of bitterness, a grain of the salt of the sea.

“Who knows,” said he, “the man who needs help? Even you yourself may need it some time. If you do, call upon me.”

He walked off.

Diomed, astonished at the reply, was about to call after him, but he checked himself and closed the door.

It was the first time in his life that he had acted as hall-porter.

The thought came to him and made him laugh.

“No matter,” said he. “’Tis the first time perhaps that my door has opened to let out Honesty. Strange that I should have opened it for that purpose myself!”

He turned to the courtyard.

CHAPTER XV

THE QUESTION THAT SOCRATES COULD NOT ANSWER

THE guests whom he expected to dinner that night would not arrive before half-past eight. It was now four o'clock.

On an ordinary day at this time he would go to the gymnasium, or exercise his horses, or take himself to the painted portico to meet friends; but to-day he felt inclined for none of these things. As he re-took his seat in the courtyard he had already dismissed Cleon and Pheidon and all the business of the past half-hour from his mind.

Definitely before him, now, the thing that had been disturbing him as a mist of thought became materialised into an image.

The girl of the courtyard of Gyges stood before him.

He could hear the splashing of the water, he could see her bending to catch up the water in her hands, springing from the bath, crouching, cloaking herself in her hair.

Again he fell under the mesmerism of that gaze, steadfast, inimical, surprised, as though some antagonist who had been his antagonist from the beginning of time had suddenly come face to face with him, some spirit caught in its nudity, taken by surprise.

Like a man who, when under the influence of wine, recognises his mental disturbance, but does not speculate upon it, Diomed, under the influence of this new emotion, had, up to this, scarcely questioned himself.

Now, however, he was attempting a self-examination, hopeless as all examinations of the sub-conscious by the conscious mind must be.

He still held his walking-stick in his hand, and, as he sat drawing patterns with the point of it on the pavement an idea came to him. He rose, crossed the courtyard, and, for the second time that day acting as his own hall-porter, left the house.

He passed from the Street of the Temple of Dionysus through the Street of the Triremes to the Street of the Fountain.

In the Street of the Fountain Diomed paused at a door and knocked.

The door opened, disclosing a passage; and the portress, a woman of sixty, wrinkled and brown as parchment, recognising him at once, bade him enter.

It was quite a small house, but almost as beautiful as the house of Diomed; a faint, faint odour of burning spice tinged the air, and in the

courtyard, sky-roofed and sunlit, two great cages filled the place with the murmuring of doves.

The portress led the visitor to a door on the right of the courtyard, motioned him to wait, went in, and in a moment returned. She held the door open for him, and he entered a room quite small, with walls painted exquisitely—coloured walls whose panel pictures were love-stories in colour.

The furniture of this room consisted of a couch covered by a heavy cloak of fur, and a chair of bronze cushioned with crimson.

On the couch a woman was lying, half raised and supporting herself on her elbow; by the chair, motionless, bare-footed, in the attitude of a person in deep thought, stood a man of extraordinary ugliness, unkempt, poorly clad, and holding a heavy and roughly fashioned stick in his hand.

The woman was Evadne the hetaera, and nothing could form a sharper contrast than her beauty with the ugliness of the man beside her.

Born in Mitylenae, she held the colour of the Ægean in her eyes, a gift from the island of her birth. Her face was lovely, spiritual, and filled with the light of thought. In a few more years she would be benign with the benignity of Demeter gazing on the fields of ripening corn. Nothing had spoiled her in all her strange experience of the world, nor stained her—not even the love of man.

“Welcome,” said she as Diomed entered. She glanced side-ways at the man beside her, who, still immersed in thought, had not even lifted an eyebrow at the intrusion of the new-comer.

Diomed, taking his cue from her glance, said nothing, but took his place at the foot of the couch, standing with his hands resting upon his stick.

The bare-footed man came out of his reverie.

“It is so, Evadne,” said he. “You at least do not think in words.”

The philosopher and the woman had evidently finished some discussion, and the former, now that the matter was off his mind, recognised Diomed and gave him good-day.

Now Diomed, much as he respected philosophy, had come to talk with Evadne, and knew quite well that if he once became entangled in the meshes of the bare-footed man, once he allowed himself to fall into the trap of the elenchus, he was lost.

“Good-day,” said he. Then, turning to Evadne, “Tell me, is it not strange that philosophers, who spend their time questioning men, are, when questioned themselves, often at a loss?”

Evadne, without answering, looked at the philosopher beside her and smiled. The latter was gazing at Diomed with a benign expression; this was his nearest approach to a smile, and just as a smile alters an ordinary person's face, so did this beam of benignity wipe away the ugliness from his.

Diomed's youth and grace and wit pleased him. He knew the young man well, and this attack, the attack of a butterfly upon a rock, amused him.

"You know that I know nothing," said he. "I question only to learn—What would you ask?"

"Only this," replied the other. "Answer me. What is Woman?"

"A woman?"

"No—that is not my question. I ask you, what is Woman?"

The bare-footed one paused for a moment in thought. Then he raised his head.

"There is only one answer to that question."

"And that answer?"

"Is—Do not ask a man."

He passed towards the door, opened it and was gone.

Evadne laughed.

Diomed took his seat upon the couch beside her, took her hand, held it in his, and admired it as though it were some exquisite work of art.

"Evadne, sweet philosopher, you heard my question as you heard his answer. I am disturbed at heart. I thought I knew all things in life, but to-day the question you have just heard was put to me — —"

"By a woman?"

"Yes, though she never spoke."

"Then beware, my friend," said Evadne, half laughing, "or you are lost."

"Lost?"

"The questioner who puts such a question to you without speech will have dominion over your life."

"Why?"

"Because you will spend your life in trying to answer her."

She paused for a moment.

"All that is good in woman finds a ready response in the heart of man."

"And all that is evil?"

"Not so."

“What, then, is woman?”

“I have only one answer to that question — —”

“And the answer?”

“Is—Do not ask a woman.”

“Why?”

“Because she does not know.”

“Yet you speak with assuredness of her evil.”

“Because I am a woman, and I know.”

“Yet you spoke of her good.”

“Because I am a woman, and I know.”

Diomed caressed her hand in silence for a moment. Then Evadne spoke.

“Who is this woman, my friend?”

“I do not know.”

“You saw her — —?”

“I opened a door in the house of Gyges the Egyptian; I saw her; she held me with her eyes, and it seemed to me that I saw a new thing, a creature unknown—yet whom I knew.”

“The house of Gyges?”

“In the Street of the Flute-Player.”

“How old was she?”

“I do not know.”

“Was she beautiful?”

“I do not know.”

“Was she alone?”

“She was bathing.”

“Did she resent your intrusion?”

“I do not know.”

“All of which should tell you to beware of her.”

“Why?”

“I do not know.” Evadne laughed as she said the words; then she became serious. “Listen, my friend. Where did you first see me?”

“At the Panathenaic festival.”

“You could have described me after the first glance?”

“Yes.”

“Then why blindness about this woman of to-day?”

“I do not know.”

“You see she has already dimmed in you the critical eye. You, an Athenian; you, the first art critic in Athens, the worshipper of form, the worshipper of colour—were you an Egyptian or Persian, I would not trouble to warn you, but you are a Greek of the Greeks. Woman has never dominated your passions; you have cared for me because my form pleased you; you are descended from men of a like nature—you have disdained women and, unless I am mistaken—shall I say what is in my mind?”

“Yes.”

“Woman is about to have her revenge.”

“How?”

Evadne laughed.

“How? By blinding you and leading you in chains behind her chariot.”

Diomed caught the laugh from her lips.

“Have you not done that?”

“Never. Ask your own heart.”

“I will forget her,” said Diomed, dreamily gazing before him and still almost unconsciously toying with the hand of the hetaera.

She laughed.

“Forget her! Why, even now you are gazing at her image.”

He started, for the words were true.

Then he rose up, made a movement as if freeing himself from a cloak, and sat down again.

“Let us talk of men for a change— —”

Half an hour later he left the house of Evadne and took his way home.

PART II

A NIGHT IN ATHENS

CHAPTER I

CLEON SWEARS REVENGE

CLEON, dismissed, disgraced, and robbed of his stealings, returned to the kitchen furious, yet perfectly calm. What hit him hardest was not the loss of the money, nor the dismissal, nor the disgrace, but the fact that Diomed knew him.

One of the greatest injuries you can inflict on a man of Cleon's type is to know him. If you are a rogue, you have disarmed him, if you are an honest man, you have shamed him—filled him, not with the honest shame that leads to repentance, but with the shame that hates you for its existence.

Diomed had shamed Cleon, and not only that, he held him in the palm of his hand.

For the crime of robbery with violence the law prescribed a very drastic punishment, no less than beating to death with clubs.

Cleon entered the kitchen and glanced around him at the preparations for the dinner. The slaves knew him for what he was, but that did not cause in him the slightest stirring of shame.

He called Pyrrhias to him.

"I leave to you the finishing of the preparations for dinner to-night," said Cleon. "I will no longer remain in the service of one who respects neither men nor the gods. But I call you all to witness that I have no grudge against this Diomed. I respect the gods, however, and I will no longer remain in the house of a blasphemer against them. You hear me?"

"We hear you."

Then this highly religious man began a tour of the kitchen. Though he was leaving the house, he determined to leave everything in order. Diomed might be a wicked man, but it was not the business of the virtuous Cleon to call him to account; the gods and the magistrates would do that, no doubt, later on. The wicked are always punished in the end.

He inquired if the snow had arrived for the cooling of the wine; he superintended the preparation of some quail by one of the under-cooks. He inspected the vegetables and the fish, which he knew to be fresh. Then he turned.

The slaves feared this man, dreaded him, and admired him. They were absolutely his, though nominally Diomed's. They had no respect for the easy-going Diomed; Cleon was their real master.

"Should at any time the gods fall on this house, you will remember the words of Cleon, and that he leaves it with no ill-will, but because he is faithful to the gods."

"We will remember."

"Should the magistrates call you before them, you will remember nothing of Cleon but these words."

"We will."

"So will the gods remember you."

He turned from them and marched out by the passage leading to the back way of entrance.

At the door he turned and spat upon the lintel.

In the Street of the Temple of Dionysus he paused.

Had Diomed read the villain in the man as clearly as he read the rogue, this human hornet would now have been marching to prison under the safeguard of two Scythian policemen, instead of free and capable of using his sting.

But Diomed, obsessed by his vision, had completely forgotten Cleon, just as men forget the ever-presence of Death.

Cleon turned to the right, walking slowly as a man walks who is deeply considering some subject of importance.

He knew the affairs of his late employer intimately; to whom he owed money and who owed him money; his enemies and his friends.

He knew all the gossip about Diomed, and the popular feeling that was steadily growing against him.

He was making now in the direction of the Street of the Sculptors of Hermes, where Pasion lived; but he had not gone more than a hundred yards, when he changed his direction, and took a by-street that led to the public baths.

The late afternoon sun was shining on the pillars of the Bath Colonnade; men were going in attended by their slaves, and men who had just come out were loitering in the sunshine, taking its last warmth, gossiping, and exchanging news.

Cleon, arriving at the colonnade, waited. He was a man who knew how to wait; leaning against a pillar still warm from the heat of the day, he listened to the gossip around him, contemplated the pigeons wheeling in the

air or strutting on the ground, always with his eye, however, on the two entrances to the building.

Presently his patience was rewarded. The man whom he sought made his appearance from the left-hand entrance: after him came his slave, carrying the towels, the scraper, and all the implements used in the bath.

Pasion, wearing his *himation* gracefully, shod with sandals of red leather, and carrying a stick of some black wood adorned with a gold band a shade too broad for perfect taste, came down the steps, walking daintily as though the common earth jarred his susceptibilities.

No sooner did he see Cleon than he recognised him.

“Ho, Cleon,” said the aristocrat, “what are you doing here, outside the public baths? Tell me, is it true that cooks and caterers ever bathe?”

He laughed as he spoke, and would have passed on utterly disdaining the other, but Cleon stopped him.

“I would speak with you for a moment on a matter of importance,” said he; “but humility forbids me detaining you in the public street.”

“By the Dog!” cried Pasion; “you can say what you want. I talk to every one, blackguards and all; otherwise I would not extract so much amusement from the city.”

This was the pose copied from Diomed; the very words had been once used by Diomed. The difference between the two men lay in the fact that, whereas Diomed was genuine in his disdain for social fetishes, Pasion was a snob.

“Come,” said he, “you can walk close to me and tell me what you wish to say. I must keep moving, for I feel a chill after the bath.”

He turned to the left, towards the Agora, and Cleon, marching beside him and half a step behind, began:

“You must know that I have left the service of Diomed.”

“Ah! you have left his service?”

“Indeed, yes, for no other reason than my hatred of the man—not, mind you, the man himself, but the evil in him.”

“Aha!” said the wily Pasion, pricking his ears; “and what has he been doing to give you offence?”

“Nothing—unless with his tongue.”

“And what has his tongue been doing?”

“Blaspheming—denying the gods, ridiculing them.”

“You have heard him?”

“Times out of number.”

“Then why,” said Pasion, “did you only leave his house to-day?”

Cleon, taken off his guard, and recognising that not only was Pasion a bitter enemy of Diomed’s but also a rogue equal to himself, pretended not to hear the question so as to gain time.

“Why, then, did you only leave his house to-day?”

“Because,” said Cleon, “I thought to myself, ‘Let us watch this man; he is dangerous to the State and dangerous to all whom he meets; he no doubt corrupts others with his opinions. Let us watch him.’”

“And did you?”

“I did.”

“And what did you see?”

“I saw what I suspected.”

“And what was that?”

“What I could hardly believe.”

“And what was that?”

“What the gods will punish him for.”

“And what was that?”

“The corruption of youth.”

“Ah!” said Pasion. “They say he corrupts young men with false opinions,^[2] teaches them to ridicule the gods, says that the moon is earth and the sun a stone—have you ever heard him make these statements?”

^[2] The same charge was made against Socrates.

“Assuredly.”

“When?”

“Often.”

Pasion paused, turned, and fixed Cleon with an eye as cold as ice and as pitiless as death.

“Often! Is that any answer to my question? You should have your story ready, with dates and places complete. You talk like a woman.”

“I will talk in any way you please,” said Cleon, with a sudden ring of mirth in his voice.

Pasion started.

Cleon had, suddenly, by his words and the inflection of his voice, disclosed his knowledge of Pasion's enmity to Diomed, and at the same time had proposed an alliance against him, suggesting an infamy: all these things being contained in the compass of those eight words.

"You will talk in any way you please," replied Pasion, "and it will please me as long as you speak the truth."

"Just so," said Cleon; "and much as I should like to protect the innocent and punish the guilty, in the case of Diomed it is very likely I shall not speak at all."

"Ah?"

"I am leaving Athens."

"When?"

"To-night."

Pasion said nothing for a moment. He knew exactly what Cleon wanted—a post in his (Pasion's) household till such time as he should need him.

He felt astonished that Cleon should have read his mind and come to offer his services; he felt disturbed as well. An alliance with such a clear-sighted and unscrupulous person was a thing fraught with danger. His antagonism to Diomed was compound. He hated the man superior to him in all things, and he felt the necessity of clearing the creditor from his path.

He paused for a moment in thought. Then he turned.

"Follow me," said he, "and I will see what I can do."

He did not see the expression on Cleon's face as the latter turned and followed him.

CHAPTER II

THE GUESTS

DUSK fell upon Athens, and the sky above the courtyard of Diomed showed a trace of stars. In another hour the moon would hold the world from the distant hills of Attica to the Ægean Sea.

Before the altar to the Zeus of the home a fire burned in a cresset supported by bronze dolphins. The fire, which cast a perfume of incense on the air, lit the patient and benign face of the god, the flickering light of the flames lending a life-likeness and variation to the expression of the statue, so that now it seemed to smile, and now, as if touched by the destiny of the house, to dream and brood.

The colonnades were lit by lamps burning the Egyptian palm-oil, chairs were arranged by the right-hand colonnade for the reception of the guests; two gorgeous Sardian carpets were flung upon the floor before the chairs, and upon one of the carpets stood a table of metal-work on which lay some musical instruments. The lamps lighting the colonnades were fashioned in the form of sea-shells, dolphins, and sea-horses; their light, mixing with the faint glow of the central fire, lit the sea-suggesting walls, touched the milk-white marble of the pillars, indicating vaguely the splendour and richness of the carpets, and cast veils of shadow upon the common-place.

No interior could be more beautiful, more tranquil, more touched with the poetry of the summer night—which windows could not admit—and more home-like.

Here was Peace. The true spirit of Dreamland, lost to the common world, here sat beside you, Reverie at your feet, the stars above your head, the faint voice of the city calling you to listen to a world unreal and far removed.

Here sat Diomed waiting for his guests. The spirit that dwelt in the courtyard of his beautiful house had for a moment caught him to herself. The events of the past day had, for the moment, passed from his mind like smoke: the courtyard had him in possession. It was the fashion for a host to receive his guests in the dining-room, but Diomed, when he chose, forgot fashion, and used convention only when he could not improve on it.

As he sat waiting for the guests he had forgotten, dreaming of things he had never seen, listening to the faint and far-off sounds of Athens murmuring beneath her veil of dusk, a knock came to the door, followed by the sound of the porter's greeting and a voice.

It was the first of the guests, Nicias the critic, a young man with a beard, black and well trimmed; well dressed, and carrying himself with an extraordinary assumption of elegance. Extraordinary, for, though it was obviously put on, it fitted him so well that one almost admired him for it. His cream-white *himation* had a border of crimson; he wore shoes of red leather; and as he entered the courtyard he walked delicately, carrying himself with such grace that, seeing him, one cried almost involuntarily, "Oh, the elegant person!"

Diomed rose to greet him, and as they took their seats they fell into conversation on the topics of the day, Nicias as he talked glancing round him at the place he knew so well, as though he saw it for the first time.

"And whom are we expecting this evening?" asked Nicias.

"Moschion, for one, and Niceratus; it is quite a small party. Moschion the painter, who has just arrived from Elis. You know him?"

"I know his pictures."

"If so you know the man, for the man is the picture of his pictures."

"Then, my dear Diomed, I will at once take my departure."

"Why so?"

"Because he will shout at me, and you know my horror of a loud voice."

"I will give you wool to put in your ears."

"He will offend my eyes with his face, which I am sure is as badly painted as his pictures."

"Oh, you may rest easy on that point; his valet paints his face."

"Then why on earth does he not employ him also to paint his pictures?"

"I don't know. Ask Niceratus."

"Never."

"Why not?"

"He would lie to me."

"Why, of all men in Athens, Niceratus is the man you admire most; at least, you said so to me only yesterday."

"And I say so still."

"Yet — —"

"Pardon me — —"

"I will not," laughed Diomed. "You have called Niceratus a liar."

"And so he is—yet at the same time he is one of the few men in Athens who invariably speak the truth."

Diomed was opening his mouth to reply to this impudent paradox, when a knock came to the door, followed by the greeting of the hall-porter and a voice.

“Now if this is the portrait of Moschion’s pictures, I am like a sheep in June.”

“How so?” asked Diomed.

“Without my wool.”

“I will get you it—but it is Niceratus.”

It was.

Niceratus entered. He was also dressed in white; his *himation* was blue-bordered, and he wore dress sandals. His dark hair framed a face that would have been beautiful but for the sensuality of the mouth; yet withal, it wore an expression of bonhomie that redeemed many things.

The gentlemen saluted one another without bowing, and took their seats, whilst Nicias, as though uninterrupted, went in:

“Now, about this Niceratus of whom I was speaking —”

“You said he was a liar,” cut in Diomed.

“I said he was the greatest liar in Athens and at the same time one of the few men who always speak the truth.”

“Ah!” said Niceratus, laughing, “when Nicias talks like this, one knows at once he is following his true vocation.”

“And that?” asked Nicias, interrupting himself.

“Is—talking nonsense.”

“Now you are spoiling yourself for once by speaking the truth,” replied the critic, “for how could Socrates himself speak sense were the subject of his discourse Niceratus? Peace, a moment, my dear Niceratus; I am paying you the highest compliment when I proclaim you a liar. Great artist that you are in words, talker that can hold men and charm them and make them forget the world, if you spoke Facts—those things which the vulgar confound with truth—where would you be? And how would you ever charm men with facts? And what would you do with facts? It was warm to-day and fish were four obols the pound, the Agora was crowded with fools, Socrates was walking about bare-footed, and I heard Aristophanes spitting his venom in the colonnade of the Temple of Hermes. There is a bunch of facts like a bunch of onions—uneatable till cooked. Now comes the cook in the form of the artist. I swear to you I saw ice this morning in the Street of the Tripods. Fish four obols a pound! Oh lord! how you have been swindled! Why, man, there was a glut of fish just after full market, and I got mine for two. No?

Assuredly, I will bring a dozen witnesses. And think what I saw—What? Socrates going about in a pair of green shoes—*Socrates!*—Socrates himself, and, more marvellous still, I saw Aristophanes giving an obol to a beggar-man. There you have stuff to keep a dinner-party amused for an hour. Your own imaginative mind has made the world what it was meant to be—amusing and, supreme artist that you are, you discover the truth at the heart of social life—Farce. Were you a sculptor you would be supreme also, for you are a liar, a great man in Art, who loves you, being herself a liar.”

All the time he was talking he held himself “delicately,” and made little movements with his hands, and caressed his beard.

Diomed laughed.

“What now? Art herself a liar!”

“Assuredly—and the mother of all pleasant lies. Only the bad artist speaks what the vulgar call the truth.”

“Pheidias— —”

“The prince of liars, who boiled fifty women together to make one, and then said, ‘This is a woman.’”

“No, a goddess,” cut in Niceratus.

“My friend,” replied Nicias, “at heart he said, ‘This is a woman.’ I know it.”

“How?”

“Because I am a critic.”

A knock came to the door; they heard the porter’s greeting, a voice, and Moschion the painter, fleshy, heavy, a sybarite a league off, entered.

“But you as a critic are an artist; are you not, then, a liar?” asked Niceratus of Nicias as they rose to greet the new-comer.

“A liar—certainly. Ah, my dear Moschion, though this is the first meeting with you, take my compliments on your wonderful, wonderful pictures.”

Diomed, suppressing his mirth, indicated a chair, and the delighted Moschion, only come to Athens three days ago from Elis and not knowing in the least the depth of the Athenian spirit of raillery, swallowed the sugary compliment and looked around him.

“’Tis pleasant to find oneself in a city like Athens, where men understand Art,” said the unfortunate. “You have seen my pictures— —”

“At the house of your friend Hippodamus,” replied Nicias, “and what struck me most was their fidelity to truth.”

“I have always striven for that.”

“They hit one like facts.”

“Ah!”

“And leave one stunned.”

“Ah!” The delighted Moschion expanded his hairy nostrils as if to sniff up this incense; he tried to get in a word, but the infernal Nicias, still preening himself and strutting in his chair, would not let him.

“I was attempting to explain to my friends before your arrival my views on the absolute necessity of truth in Art, but they would not listen to me. Diomed here, has proclaimed the extraordinary paradox that to speak truly in Art you must speak falsely.”

“But surely — —”

“More than that, he proclaimed Art herself to be a liar!”

Moschion turned his heavy face towards Diomed, whilst Niceratus took up the ball.

“Do not, my dear Nicias, let such statements be carried back to Elis, where, at least, they know the value of truth.”

“You are right,” said Nicias. “As witness the pictures of Moschion. His ‘Eros’ and ‘Æolus’ are examples of that.”

Moschion smiled.

“They cost me a world of trouble,” said he. “My model for ‘Æolus’ alone cost me a year of search.”

“True,” said Nicias, “wind is the most difficult thing to catch. But had you come to Athens you would have found a much better model than the one you employed.”

“A much better model?” replied the fat man, bristling at the slight to his picture.

“Chariclides.”^[3]

^[3] A predecessor of Demosthenes.

“I have seen him,” replied the matter-of-fact one, “but I do not agree with you.”

“Have you heard him?”

“No.”

“Ah, that accounts for it. But, Diomed, it seems to me that some one is knocking at your door.”

“It is Pasion,” said Diomed. “I had quite forgotten him. I met him this morning and invited him to be one of us.”

As he spoke Pasion made his entrance. He too was dressed in white, he wore numerous rings, and his hair, worn long, was crimped and scented.

“Here comes the barber’s shop,” murmured Niceratus.

“Shopman and all,” replied Nicias, also in an undertone, as the new-comer greeted Diomed and was introduced to Moschion. “My dear Pasion, you are late.”

“But not the less welcome,” said Diomed.

As he said the word, a burst of light came from behind them and the sweet tones of a flute filled the air.

The door of the banqueting-room had been flung open.

CHAPTER III

THE DINNER

ON either side of the doorway stood slaves holding wreaths of myrtle; and, as the guests entered, the flute-player, dark-eyed and beautiful, was passing away from the room, the twin flutes still at her lips and her eyes cast back at the guests as she vanished through a doorway on the left, the lost echoes of the flute and the perfume of her garments lingering like a charm over the roses and the glitter of the service.

The paintings on the walls of this room represented foliage and peeping fauns, Pan, pipe to mouth, and the dreams of the Dryads. Lamps were ranged along the walls; lamps of silver and bronze stood on either side of the two doorways, and a great lamp of Aeginetan metal-work swung from the ceiling, burning perfumed oil from a reservoir of coloured crystal.

At this moment a quirk of fashion dictated a single table at which all might recline, rather than the usual method of dining one's guests each pair at a little table of their own. Diomed's latest extravagance, a table of thya-wood, very low and so exquisitely polished that one could see one's reflection in it almost as easily as in a mirror, occupied the centre of the room; on either side were placed the couches for the guests, cushioned with blue cushions, embroidered with dragon-flies done in gold and silver thread.

The table was glorious with flowers and fruit upheld in dishes of crystal and silver; the floor was strewn with roseleaves.

Everything was exactly as it should be, exactly as fashion decreed, with an added touch, a charm undiscoverable, but potent as though the spirit of the master of the house had entered into the sparkle of the crystal, the perfume and arrangement of the flowers, and the colours of the pyramids of fruit.

It had. The dinner-parties of Diomed were unapproachable, works of art, individual, and the despair of imitators such as Pasion.

As the guests entered, slaves appeared through the doorway by which the flute-player had vanished, each bearing a bowl, a towel with a crimson edge, and a ewer of scented water.

Moschion, astonished at the elegance and captivated by the spirit of the place; assured in his mind of a dinner fit for the gods and delighted by the mark he felt he had made amongst these highly placed Athenians; took his seat on the side of the couch allotted to him and relinquished his big feet to a

slave, who removed his sandals, bathed his feet in perfumed water, and dried them in the warmed towel.

Then he took his place on the couch, reclining on his left side as did the others, whilst another slave, also carrying a bowl, a ewer, and a towel, bathed his hands and dried them.

The night was warm, and Diomed, with a movement of his shoulders, freed himself of his robe; the others, with the exception of Moschion, followed suit, and, naked to the waist, leaned on their elbows whilst the first course of eels, stewed in wine sauce and garnished with herbs, was served.

There were no knives and forks; a piece of soft bread placed beside each guest served the double purpose of table roll and napkin; and Moschion, when the first course was removed, was observed by Nicias wiping his fingers covertly on the cushions beside him; he had devoured his napkin.

Dressed crabs and mustard sauce led the painter of Elis on to other indiscretions, to the amusement of the guests and the agony of Diomed. He talked loud, grunted over his food, and, worst of all, turned to Niceratus and held him in a *tête-à-tête* conversation—criminally bad manners in a society which ordained that general conversation should be the rule at table.

“At Elis,” said Moschion, “we have seventeen distinct methods for the dressing of crabs: with wine sauce, with honey, with honey and thyme, plainly baked with oil and pepper, with spice, of which there are eight methods, according to the spice that is used; with coriander seeds, with milk—How many is that? Let me see—where am I?”

“You have forgotten, I think, that you are in Athens,” said Nicias.

“Roast upon hot stones,” went on the enthusiast, not in the least perceiving the jibe, “boiled plain and eaten only with salt, stewed with finely shredded tunny fish. That is the seventeenth method. But there is an eighteenth—”

“Why, you said there were but seventeen.”

“I know, but this is a secret method known only to my cook and myself.”

“Ah, he must be a great artist if you share your secrets with him.”

“He is.”

At this moment the door of the dining-room was opened by a slave, and an unbidden guest made his appearance. A person whose black hair was obviously darkened by art, whose face showed extraordinary suggestions of youth and age, whose eyes were bright and restless, and whose manner was self-contained to the point of indifference, stood in the doorway.

"Why, Diomed," cried the new-comer, glancing at the host and his guests, "you have begun dinner without me."

Diomed laughed and bade him welcome; there was just room for him at the table, opposite to the place where Moschion was reclining; and, when the slaves had removed his shoes and bathed his feet and hands, the new guest, refusing the suggestion of fish, took up the dinner at the course that was now being served, quails with wine sauce.

"Who is he?" asked Moschion of Niceratus in an undertone. "I have seen him in the Agora surrounded by a crowd of acquaintances."

"You do not know his name? Why, how long have you been in Athens?"

"But three days."

"Ah, that accounts. Why, 'tis Socrates."

"Socrates! The famous Socrates!"

"None other."

"The man who questions men?"

"He himself."

Nicias had managed to start a general conversation with Diomed and the new-comer, so that these words, spoken in a low tone, were unheard. But the stranger noted with that eye which saw all things the *tête-à-tête* between the Elian and Niceratus, and it surprised him. Next moment he caught a glance from Niceratus, but could not in the least tell the meaning of it.

"I must be on my guard lest he should question me," said Moschion with a chuckle, finishing the back of a quail and wiping his fingers this time, fortunately, on some new bread that had been supplied to him.

"You must, or he will perhaps get that eighteenth method of dressing crabs from you; and, should he speak to you, do not call him by name; he hates to be addressed by name almost as much as he hates Aristophanes the playwright."

"'Tis easy to be seen that he is a great philosopher. I would like to paint his portrait."

"It would be the making of you. Get into his good graces."

"How?"

"When you get the chance, abuse the works of Aristophanes."

"I know them well. Before coming to Athens I read *The Clouds*, in which this Aristophanes held him up to ridicule."

"Should you hear any one calling him Aristophanes, do not be surprised. People call him that sometimes in raillery; it is a way we have in Athens."

Moschion was much too astute a man to attack the philosopher whom it was his object to paint directly. Socrates at Elis was a great figure by repute; to be his painter was a great ambition.

He began to show off, and over the roast kid, which he was now devouring, attacked Diomed directly.

“’Tis easily to be seen that your cook knows his work,” said Moschion. “This kid is delicious. But tell me, now, have you ever eaten kid as I will describe it to you? First, the whole kid is taken and its bones are removed; then ’tis placed in a mixture of honey and salt for a day, washed thoroughly in wine, stuffed with ambergris, pepper, spices, the backs of larks, quails, and other small birds, its own liver carefully minced, and a sprig of thyme; then ’tis stitched in parchment, carefully oiled, and baked.”

Diomed laughed. This vulgarian was spoiling his dinner-party, yet he did not show in the least his irritation, but, complimenting the painter on his knowledge of gastronomy, tried to turn the subject.

“Is this man a cook?” muttered the stranger to Nicias.

“No, a character. Observe him.”

The dinner proceeded to its end, and Moschion, stuffed more completely than his hypothetical kid, leant heavily on his arm whilst the slaves swept the floor. Were small separate tables the order of the day, the tables would now be removed, and the second tables, laden with dessert, introduced. To-night, simply the crumbs were removed; the dishes of fruit already on the table were supplemented by dishes of cheese and salt and salted almonds; slaves brought round water to wash the hands of the guests; and the flute-girl, accompanied by three others, appeared.

A chant was sung to the sweet and thrilling accompaniment of the flutes, and the girls vanished; a libation of wine was poured out to the good health of the guests, and a slave appeared, bearing a large and beautifully fashioned bowl, which was placed at the end of the table nearest to the door by which the flute-girls had vanished.

This was the vessel in which the wine and water of the symposium would be mixed.

CHAPTER IV

THE SYMPOSIUM

AFTER the bearer of the mixing-vessel came another slave, with a large jar of water and a smaller of Chian wine.

It was impossible to drink the heady wines of Greece pure. A mixture of one-half water and one-half wine was considered strong, but at the symposium the strength of the mixture and the amount drunk was entirely at the direction of the President whom the guests might elect.

Whilst half-a-dozen slaves bearing garlands of myrtle entered, and began to wreath the heads of the guests, Diomed, leaning gracefully on his side, turned his eyes from the slave who stood before the mixing vessel, the wine-jar in one hand, the water-jar in the other.

Diomed, as host, made the proposition of the election, and called upon Pasion to vote first.

“Moschion,” said the evil genius of Diomed with a twinkle in his eye; “he who mixes colours so boldly, let him preside at the mixing of our wine.”

Diomed turned to the new guest.

“Moschion,” said he, with a curious little laugh. “He has stuffed us with his kid, let him quench our thirst.”

Diomed’s eyes fell on Nicias.

“Let Elis decide.”

“And you?” said Diomed, turning to Niceratus.

“I agree,” replied Niceratus, little dreaming of the terrible drinker he was helping to let loose upon the party.

The delighted painter, puffed up with pride, looked around him, smiled, expanded his nostrils, and turned to Diomed.

“The strength?” said Diomed.

“Why,” said the Elian, “I have broken the law in my time, and drunk my wine pure and simple, but I bend to custom, and I decree two-thirds of Chian and one of water; that, at least, is not a frog’s drink.”

The slave, at the words of the President, began mixing the wine and water, whilst other slaves filled the broad, shallow drinking vessels. The vulgarity of Moschion, as it showed itself in the strength of his tipples, completed the disgust of Diomed, who, however, showed absolutely nothing of his feelings, not even when the portly Elian half-emptied his cup at a

draught. For the President of the symposium not only decreed the strength of the wine, but the amount to be drunk.

“You drink deeply in Elis?” asked Nicias, following suit.

“Why, if truth be said, we are large drinkers, though it never affects us, at least in my set—and as for eating— —”

“Why,” cut in Niceratus, “you may pride yourself on that—you eat like Heracles.”

Moschion finished the drink in his cup, and laughed complacently, taking this doubtful compliment for good coin. The stranger, who scarcely spoke, was absorbed by the study of this new character; as for the rest of the guests, Moschion had destroyed their power of conversation just as an onion destroys one’s power of appreciating the smell of violets; but they were beginning to enjoy him, and, as cup followed cup, the haze of intoxication spread amidst these brains so critical and cool, each man’s pet subject or hobby began to ride him, the rules of good society were forgotten, conversation ceased to become general, and the party broke up into couples, Nicias still clinging to Moschion, Niceratus engaging Pasion in a most libellous discourse on the drunken habits of a highly placed lady of Athens; the stranger, with one eye on Moschion, teasing the ear of Diomed with a detailed account of his household expenses, complaining of the ruinous price of vegetables, fish, and meat.

Diomed was slightly flushed, the powerful drink decreed by Moschion was taking hold of him; he heard the babbling of the man who was talking to him, and replied to him, but his mind was far away.

And still the slaves, beautiful, white-robed, cool as the snow whose white flakes were clinging to the new wine-jar which had just been brought in to replenish the mixing vessel, passed with the silence of shadows from guest to guest, replenishing the cups.

Flute-girls appeared and played unheeded and half unseen, voices were raised above proper pitch, and laughter rang out cracked and hard. The grossness of Moschion, like some coarse spirit, dominated the party.

Pasion alone showed no sign of hilarity. Drink did not affect him. Nicias was comparatively cool, managing with astuteness to make the appearance of drinking equally with the others—till, the strength of the unaccustomed mixture taking hold of him, emptying his cup at a draught, he became as bad as the rest.

All at once the stranger, who had arrived at the “I mean to say” stage of fuddlement, and who had harked back to his domestic troubles, found himself being held in conversation by Moschion.

Diomed was drinking in silence; Nicias, Niceratus, and Pasion were engaged in a triangular duel of tongues, and heard nothing of the discourse of Moschion.

The painter’s face was now more brilliantly coloured than one of his own pictures, the veins on his forehead were standing out; gorgeous with wine, smiling, and feeling as though he were throned on clouds, Moschion leaned forward.

“We know you well at Elis. You are much honoured there.”

“Indeed?” said the other, whose arrogance had become inflated by the wine. He gazed at the vulgar Moschion with a contemptuous expression utterly lost and thrown away on that gentleman.

“Yes, truly, though men belie you. Now, what do you think they say about you? They say you walk about bare-footed.”

“Ho!”

“That you never drink, live on porridge, and never comb your hair.”

The other, confounded, listened without reply, the essential acid in his nature, so biting to other men, was in ferment.

“I have read *The Clouds*,” went on the Elian. “They played it at Elis.”

“Ho—and what did you think of *The Clouds*?”

“Think of it? I thought what every Elian thinks. Ho, there, fill my cup.”

“And that?” asked the other, raising his eyebrows slowly, as though lifting upon them his heavy contempt for Elis.

“And that,” said Moschion—“why, I thought it the work of a man who would be a wise man—a very wise man, mark you—if he were not a fool.”

The stranger clutched his drinking cup as though he were going to fling it at the head of the unconscious critic.

“I wish to take your portrait back with me to Elis,” went on the painter, half emptying his newly filled cup. “I have some fidelity of touch, and I bargain to show the Elians with a dozen touches of my brush not only your portrait, but—Ho, there, my cup is empty!—but to show them the exact sort of without-sense liar Aristophanes is.”

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Diomed, who had been listening to the turmoil around him very much as a person listens to the noise of a waterfall, became suddenly aware that dissension had seized upon his guests.

Not only had the wine got into the heads of the company, but the painter and the man whom he had been speaking to seemed about to come to blows.

Niceratus, who guessed the meaning of the quarrel, was almost senseless with laughter.

The Symposium had broken up.

CHAPTER V

A NIGHT IN ATHENS

THE moon had risen and was lighting Athens, and the guests of Diomed had no need of lanterns and torches to show them their way home.

The quarrel between Moschion and the outraged one had resolved itself into speechlessness. The outraged one had gone off, scarcely bidding good-night to his host. He suspected the thing had been a put-up affair; in the explanations which the extraordinary insult of the painter had called for the truth about the hoax had come out—that made things worse.

To be placed in a comic situation was gall to this man who dealt so freely in gall. The thing would be all over Athens next day. He would be laughed at.

Moschion, so fuddled that he had not comprehended the joke, was now taking his leave; and Diomed, accompanied by Pasion, Nicias, and Niceratus, went to the door with him, and then into the street.

Diomed was flushed; the cool air of the night completed what the wine had begun; he took Pasion's arm to steady himself.

"Why, the night is young," said he. "Let us go and beat some one up. I want some more wine. Wine that is not my own." He called to the slave who was waiting at the door to fetch him his stick;—Nicias and Niceratus, who had said good-night, had slipped away, foreseeing the chance of riots and brawls; they were half-way down the moonlit street.

"Let them go," said Diomed, taking the stick from the slave. "No one need come with me who does not want to."

"I am with you," said Moschion. "Let us finish the night. I am as thirsty as an empty jar."

He spoke thickly and swayed in the moonlight, whilst Diomed, calling to the slave, ordered a flute-player to be sent out.

In a moment she appeared and, led by her, they passed down the street, Diomed and Pasion walking together, whilst Moschion followed unsteadily behind.

The Street of the Temple of Dionysus was deserted; the flute-girl and her companions, followed by their black shadows, and led by the music of the flute, passed from the Street of the Temple of Dionysus by a side street into the Street of the Sculptors of Hermes. From far away, somewhere in the city, they could hear the noise of other revellers, though just here not a soul was to be seen.

The Acropolis showed the white of marble and the black of pillar and temple shadow, whilst the great statue of Athena, poured upon by the moonlight, stood triumphant above the city.

“Which way?” asked Pasion. “And to whose house do you propose to go?”

“Listen to me,” said Diomed, whose intoxication belonged to that order wherein the speech is free, the limbs capable of performing their duties, but the mind influenced by and capable of the maddest ideas.

“Yes?”

“I am going to the house of Gyges.”

“The banker?”

“Yes.”

“He is away from home.”

“I will go and see.”

“I tell you he is at the harbour town.”

“I will go and see.”

“But he never drinks.”

“No matter. You are my friend— —”

“Yes?”

“Well, listen to me. Gyges has a daughter.”

“Ah! Who told you that?”

Diomed laughed.

“A daughter—a woman—a girl—I do not know—no one told me. I saw her.”

“You saw the daughter of Gyges?”

“In her bath. Say nothing of this.”

“Not I. You know I am your friend. I will say nothing. Tell me all.”

“My friend,” broke out Diomed, “I have seen her—I must see her again. It is like the thirst for wine—I must drink her.”

“Ah!”

“Take her in my arms. I am burning; she alone can quench my thirst.”

“And you are going to see her now?”

“I am going to see her now.”

“But Gyges?”

“What do I care for Gyges—a Metic!”

“True,” said Pasion with a little laugh.

He saw at a glance that Diomed was labouring under something more than drunkenness. He stopped and looked back.

The valiant Moschion was no longer following them; away down the moonlit street they could see him sitting on the ground, with his back to a house wall, his chin on his breast, overcome, and no doubt snoring.

The flute-girl had paused and stopped playing, and the sounds of the revellers blown about the city on the night wind had ceased. Only the murmur of a fountain's water broke the stillness of the silent street, empty and filled with the spectral moonlight.

Pasion, having glanced at the stricken reveller in the distance, laughed, turned to the flute-girl, and, giving her a piece of money, ordered her to return.

Then he took Diomed by the arm.

"Come," said he, "let us go to the house of Gyges."

"True," said Diomed. "The house of Gyges; let us go."

For a moment, falling into one of those lacunae of thought, those pits of nothingness which wine prepares for the mind of the drunkard, he had forgotten Gyges and his house and the girl of the courtyard. The words of Pasion, however, recalled him to his purpose.

They took their way by the Street of the Triremes, a narrow and dark and crooked passage which led directly into the Street of the Tripods; and, as they went, Pasion, whose mind was quite clear and who was deeply interested in what Diomed had just told him, tried to make him talk.

"You saw her to-day?"

"Who?" asked Diomed. He had forgotten the revelation of five minutes ago; now he remembered it faintly, and with the recollection Cunning, who was as drunk as himself, whispered, "Say nothing of the business."

"Who? Why, the daughter of Gyges."

"I don't know. I am going to see Gyges."

"Why?"

"To get some money."

"At this hour?"

"All the same," replied Diomed.

Pasion was silent as they turned into the moonlit Street of the Tripods. He knew quite well that Gyges was from home; the banker was passing that night at his office in the harbour town, as he sometimes did, owing to pressure of business. He wished to superintend the unloading of the cargo which Pasion had mentioned to Diomed when meeting him in the Agora that

morning. As the unloading would begin before daybreak, it was necessary for him to be on the spot.

The mind of Pasion, ever watchful, ever planning, amused itself with speculations as to what would happen with Diomed in his present state, Gyges away, and the Egyptian porter guarding the house. He knew the temper of the Egyptian.

He knew that Gyges had a daughter, but, though he was the patron of the Metic, he had never seen this daughter, who was more carefully secluded than even the daughters of the Athenian aristocracy.

Gyges being an alien, it was impossible for his daughter to marry an Athenian citizen, and the banker had quite determined in his mind that, till his return to Egypt, she should be sealed from the world as carefully as precaution could do the business.

They passed down the Street of the Winds, turned the corner, and entered the Street of the Flute-Player. The left side of this street was black with shadow, the right side brilliantly lit.

By moonlight the place seemed even more discreet and silent than when seen by day. It seemed, also, more deeply steeped in the past, and had a touch of Romance, as though the legend which had named it walked there.

The fountain water dancing in the moonlight made echoes that answered to the footsteps of the two revellers. The house of Gyges, shuttered and closed, seemed asleep.

As Diomed approached the door, Pasion, drawing away, hid himself in a deep corner of shadow on the other side of the street. Diomed lifted the knocker, and the sound raised echoes, coarse, brutal, and clamouring, an insult to the quietude and the moonlight. Faint echoes came from the interior of the house, died away, and silence returned.

Diomed, as he waited, looked around, and found himself alone. He called out to his companion, but received no answer. This seemed to irritate him and, turning and seizing the knocker, he rapped again. Pasion, watching, saw now, suddenly, a shutter of one of the rooms above quietly open and a face, shaded by a hand against the moonlight, peeping out and down at the white-clad figure at the door.

He could not see the face distinctly, for the hand sheltering the eyes cast a shadow. But the hand was the hand of a woman, and the bangles on the arm shone in the moonlight.

Then the face withdrew, but the shutter was not closed.

He watched.

Diomed, having waited for a minute, seized the knocker again.

This time he beat on the door as if he would beat it in, and he had scarcely dropped the bronze ring, when the door, as if resenting the insult, flew open, and Bartjas, the brutal-looking hall-porter, appeared, with the moon full upon him and a snarl on his thick lips.

“What now?—what now?—who are you, coming breaking the door down at this hour? Begone!”

“Scamp!” came Diomed’s voice. “Show me in to your master.”

“Begone! He is from home. You are drunk.”

Scarcely had the words left the porter’s mouth than Diomed’s white stick flew up; but the man was too quick for him. He banged the door in his face, the stick struck the panelling and broke; and Diomed, unsteady with wine and over-balancing himself, fell, striking his head against the ledge of stone on which Pheidon had taken his seat the morning before. Pasion caught back his breath.

He saw the white figure lying in the road as though the house had cast him out; lying without the slightest movement, stunned or dead.

The watcher contemplated this spectacle for a moment without stirring. The street was still deserted.

Then the watcher in the shadow, attracted by a flutter of white at the still open window, saw again the woman’s head, the glitter of the bangles on her arm and the hand shading her eyes from the moonlight.

She gazed down at the figure lying on the pavement and held this position for fully a minute, motionless as though she were carved from stone. Then she vanished.

Some instinct told Pasion that more was about to happen. He was right.

A few minutes passed, and then, to the sound of a bolt carefully drawn, a side door, so unobtrusive that the ordinary passer-by would not notice it, opened and a form appeared. It was the form of a Nubian woman, powerfully built, bare-footed and dressed in a robe of some striped material. He saw the glitter of the silver bangles on her arms and ankles as she left the shelter of the doorway and came into the full light of the moon. Having glanced up and down the street, she advanced to the prostrate figure in the roadway and bent over it. She stood up, shaded her eyes, and glanced up and down the street as if to make sure that she was unobserved; then, bending, she picked the motionless figure up in her arms as though it had been the form of a child, and vanished with it through the doorway. He saw the door close and heard the bolt slid back as though some unseen person had been waiting to help in the business.

Presently a faint glimmer of lamplight shone at the unshuttered window, an arm bronzed and powerful as the arm of a female Hercules appeared, the shutters were drawn to, and the grim and silent house took on the aspect of a taciturn individual who, having spoken more than his wont, closes his lips firmly against further speech.

There was still lying on the ground Diomed's stick, broken in two pieces. The watcher could see the moonlight on the little thread-thin golden snake that adorned the upper part of it. He waited for a moment, to be sure of no further developments, then, stealing from the shadow where he was hidden, he took the two pieces of the stick, and, carrying them in his hand, vanished with them round the corner that gave entrance to the Street of the Winds.

CHAPTER VI

THE AWAKENING OF DIOMED

THE first rays of returning consciousness brought to Diomed the sensation of being smothered under a pall of darkness. He flung up his arms and the darkness vanished, giving place to a pale light upon a white surface above him.

It was the light of dawn shining on the ceiling of the room where he was.

For a moment he thought he was in his own house. He yawned, sighed, flung his right hand backwards across his eyes, glanced about him, and instantly recognised that he was in a strange place. The fumes of the wine of the night before had vanished utterly; the blow that had stunned him had done him no real injury; he remembered leaving Moschion seated in the moonlight with his back to the house wall; it was the first recollection that struck him.

He imagined for a moment that in his intoxication he had been taken to the house of a friend. He remembered that Pasion had been with him. Pasion had doubtless looked after him. Content with this explanation of his strange whereabouts, he lay overcome with a pleasant and dreamy laziness, too indifferent for the moment even to raise himself on his elbow and take a fuller view of his surroundings.

He went back in mind over the events of the evening before: the dinner, Moschion's vulgarity and the fatality of drunkenness that had followed on the elevation of that dubious person to the post of President of the Symposium.

He remembered the parting with Nicias and Niceratus, the flute-girl, the moonlight on the streets.

Then he remembered his declaration to Pasion, his determination to go to the house of the Metic and the fact that he had told Pasion about the girl in the house of Gyges. Recollection ceased here; all else was a blank. He comforted himself with the vain imagination that Pasion had been no doubt equally tipsy and would forget all about it. Whilst these thoughts were passing through his mind, the rapidly coming day had brightened, destroying his laziness. He turned over on his left side, and for the first time had a full view of the room.

It was very bare. The window, unshuttered now, showed the housetop across the way; a cock was crowing from some street near by, and above the housetop lay the ice-blue sky of a perfect dawn; on the white marble floor,

close to the window space, was spread a gorgeous Sardinian rug, and on the rug, curled like a feather and overcome with sleep, lay a girl.

It was the girl of yesterday. Though her face was half hidden in the folds of her white robe, he knew her at once, and the sudden clash of cymbals and blare of trumpets could not have shaken him as much as that astonishing vision.

What had happened? He glanced swiftly around. A lamp that had evidently been burning all night on a little table by the door was flickering out, the bed on which he lay, soft, and pillowed with luxuriously embroidered pillows, was evidently her bed. She had given it to him and had contented herself with the floor.

He put his hand to his head in his astonishment, and a sharp pain made him draw it away again; there was blood on his hand, the wound beneath his hair and just above his forehead was oozing slightly, and in a flash the truth came to him that he had been wounded; some accident had befallen him; he had been carried here unconscious and placed upon the bed.

He slipped from the bed and stood upon the floor, dizzy and swaying from the effects of the previous night. Then he crossed the room and, kneeling down by the sleeper, placed his hand upon her shoulder.

She moved, murmured, raised herself and, opening her eyes, gazed upon the man kneeling beside her. Half blind with sleep, she did not see him for a moment, then, seeing him, she did not recognise him; then, recognising him, she gave a little sharp cry, drew back as far as the wall permitted her, and thrust out her hand as if to push him away.

It was as though some frightful vision had suddenly appeared before her.

“You!”

“It is I.”

As he spoke, and as her senses returned fully to her, the terror left her face and an expression of wonder filled it.

“But—you were dead.”

She spoke in the Attic, but with a foreign accent strange as the perfume of champak diffused by her dark hair; her eyes, dark and liquid and deeper than the sea, held him for a moment, so that he was lost, voiceless, forgetful of everything, answering her mechanically as a person who answers when questioned in his sleep.

“I am living.”

“You were dead; you were cold. I tried to warm you with my body; to breathe into your lips.”

“Ah!” said Diomed, breaking from his dream, breaking from his past, breaking from himself into a new world of happiness. “I was dead, and you have given me life.” He spoke without metaphor. He had awoken into a new life. He sank down beside her on the rug; she stretched out her hand and laid it upon his shoulder as if to test the truth of his words.

He took her hand and held it to his breast. She could feel the beating of his heart.

Had he come from the great white star that the dawn had just washed away from the eastern sky, and she from some red star of the night that had vanished, the strangeness of one to the other could not have been greater.

He took her hands in his and, holding them, began to question her as a man wrecked on some desert island might question his rescuer.

“Tell me; how did I come here?”

She told him, speaking in a low tone, with that accent which was a language within a language, a charm within a charm.

She told him how Barejas, the Nubian servant, had brought him in at her direction; how they had laid him upon the bed; how he had seemed lifeless; how she had tried to bring him to life; how she had wept.

“Why did you weep?”

“I do not know.”

“I do not know.” It was the answer of Evadne to the question, “What is Woman?”—the eternal answer of woman to the questioning of her heart.

“You have given me life.”

Her eyes, whose gaze had seemed turned inwards; those eyes, liquid and dark, that yesterday had held him with a gaze almost inimical, and in which he had read a vague antagonism, softened. With her breath caught back in a little sob, and just as a child holds out its arms to a mother, or a mother to a child, she held out her arms to him. Arms that would have warmed a statue to life.

Outside, the ever-brightening dawn was stripping the shadows from the street; the first rays of the sun were touching the Champion Goddess, and the Acropolis at her feet showed ghost-white against the blue of morning. Pillar by pillar the Parthenon broke out like a temple of frost, and the spar-white pillars of the Propylaea were tinged with a reflection of the dawn.

In absolute stillness the city of Art was taking form, a miracle in the clear and crystal air, above a city where love was miraculous as a rose in a world of marble.

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN AND THE PORTER

As he entered the Street of the Winds, the shoe-makers were already at work; girls, water-pitchers on their heads, were making for the fountains; all sorts of early morning noises from the street and the streets around filled the air; and on the wind from the sea, fresh and filled with the spirit of freedom, one could hear the call of the early morning wine-sellers, the hawking of oil and figs, women's voices and the voices of children.

The children were running to school, playing snatches of games as they ran, gathering in knots at the street corners, disputing, and loitering in doorways.

At the corner of the Street of the Tripods the blind rhapsodist of yesterday, bronzed, and starting again on his endless travels, had taken his stand and, facing the sun, was declaiming the deeds of the heroes and the gods.

Diomed, bearing scarcely a trace of the night before, paused for a moment to listen, and then passed on; he had no money, else he would have filled the rhapsodist's hands with silver.

"Be on the opposite side of the street to-night, and when the moon strikes the door it will open for you." He kept repeating the words to himself. Her last words, spoken as the Nubian was leading him down the stairs.

How and in what manner it was all to end, was a question he did not put to himself. The daughter of a Metic was beyond the pale, he knew this as well as he knew that the sun was in the sky and would rise to-morrow. But the rising of the morrow's sun was nothing to him, so long as the moon rose that night.

Bartjas the porter was of more importance to him than any abstract consideration. He was the only cloud that might obscure the rising moon.

The household of Gyges was a household divided, almost, one might say, against itself. On one side stood Gyges and Bartjas, on the other the Nubian woman and her charge, the girl.

In many of these secret households, shut away from the fresh air of the world, hatred grew like a weed; and in the small household of Gyges poisonous hatred flourished between the Nubian woman and the porter. Growing from two such stems, the flower was wonderful and worth preserving between the leaves of a story, and it had grown from a tiny seed.

A pudding of millet, no less, which the woman had cooked, which the man had found not to his taste, and which the woman in a moment of anger had flung in his face.

This had happened a year ago.

Gyges knew nothing at all of this business; the two antagonists said nothing to him, they were content to wait and brood and watch till one could get a firm hold on the other.

The Nubian, being a woman with full exercise for her capacity to hate, had a necessity for something to love. The daughter of Gyges supplied it.

She loved the girl in her charge with the idolatrous and slavish love of a savage for a higher being. There was no one else in the world for her. Gyges, though her master, was a phantom; Bartjas a thing she hated; the girl was everything.

The girl had ordered her to bring the stricken man in; she had brought him. Had she been ordered to kill him, she would have killed him. Diomed pleased her charge—so be it. Gyges did not enter into her consideration at all, nor the thought of consequences.

The Street of the Temple of Dionysus, as Diomed entered it, was full of sunlight. He knocked at his door and was admitted.

He found the unexpected waiting for him in the form of an early morning visitor. Had you given him a hundred guesses he would have chosen any man in Athens but the man who was standing in the courtyard admiring the cage of birds.

It was Gonippus, the horse-dealer, nicknamed Hierax, from his likeness to a bird of prey. He was a Thessalian, black-bearded, slender, oily-voiced, and with an evasive eye; and he turned from the innocent birds and saluted Diomed as though he had come to ask a compliment, not the payment of a bill.

“You are early,” said the master of the house, without inviting the visitor to be seated.

“Truly I am,” replied Gonippus, “but my business must serve as an excuse. A client, who has ordered a pair of Thessalian horses from me, requires that I should bring them to his stables before noon, and as I have to fetch them from a distance I am pressed for time.”

“Just so.”

“So I came to see you, knowing that you kept early hours and hoping to find you at home.”

“Yes.”

"The horses I speak of are superb. I would that I could have submitted them for your approval, for the first judge of horses in Athens would, I am assured, have pronounced them second to none."

"They are very fine, then?"

"Without comparison."

"And why did you not submit them to me for inspection?"

"I am a very poor man. I have to buy these horses from a dealer, and you know that when a dealer is poor, other dealers act towards him as the rich always act to the poor."

The rascal was the richest of his class, but Diomed did not show his amusement by as much as the lifting of an eyebrow.

"And how, pray, do the rich always act to the poor?"

"How? Why, by mistrusting them, swindling them, and pestering them for money."

"So you have found it out, then?" asked Diomed.

"What?"

"That I am poor. Come, how much is your bill?"

Hit, but happy to get the business through at any price, Gonippus named the amount.

"I had forgotten it was so large a sum," said Diomed, "and I have not a tenth of it in the house. Send this evening, and I will pay you."

"But I want money."

"So do I."

"I have need of a large amount."

"Why, it seems to me we are both in a like situation."

Diomed turned.

A knock had sounded at the door, and the porter now approached him. He announced that Gorgias the jeweller had called.

"I am out," said Diomed. "Tell him to begone and to come again this evening." Then, turning to the horse-dealer, "I am beset with rich men this morning. Come, what are you waiting for?"

"You promise—?"

"If you stay in my house a moment longer I promise you this—I will borrow money from you."

"This evening, then."

"You shall be paid this evening, on the word of Diomed."

The horse-dealer withdrew, and Diomed, raising his voice, called for Xanthias.

Xanthias was a slave, dark-eyed, dark-haired, with an inscrutable face, and a talent for doing everything. He could cook; he was something of a physician; an artist in hair-dressing and manicure; a chiropodist and a fortune-teller. He had been taken prisoner when a child, in one of the Athenian wars; he had forgotten his father and his mother, and their very names.

He had the art of knowing always what was wanted, and he now appeared with towels over his arm and all the instruments of hair-dressing and manicure. When Diomed had bathed he came to his dressing-room, followed by the faithful Xanthias, took a seat in a chair, and delivered himself up to the hands of the slave.

Diomed pointed out the wound beneath his hair; and Xanthias, examining it carefully, declared it to be nothing, and better left alone.

“A physician would have declared my life in danger and smothered me in ointments; yet you pride yourself on the healing of wounds.”

“Yes, but I am not a physician.”

“A month ago, when I had that fever, you cured me with a draught of herbs boiled in wine.”

“Because I know herbs and what they are useful for.”

“Where did you gain your knowledge of herbs?”

“Master, I was once in the service of a physician of Syracuse.”

“Ah, that was where you learned to speak in the Doric—for you can, can you not? or at least it seems to me I heard you speaking in it to Cleon the other day.”

“Yes, master, but I learned more than the Doric in Syracuse; how to make cosmetics, potions for the sleepless, draughts to make men amorous, and to stupefy them.”

“Do not pull my hair; you are not combing a horse’s tail. Well, about Syracuse—are they, then, so much above us in learning of this sort?”

“The art of life is known in Syracuse as it is not known in Athens.”

“True; our cooks come from there—they have at least the art of rascality. Well, and what else did you learn?”

Xanthias, running his comb through the hair of his master, did not reply for a moment, going over, no doubt, his stock of knowledge; then he spoke.

“Cookery I learned; how to tell fortunes, and how to evade bad fortune even with the secret draught.”

“The secret draught?”

“That which they use here for men condemned to die.”

“Ah! the hemlock.”

“Yes, master, but there is more than hemlock in it.”

“And you have the secret of that?”

“I have the secret.”

“Tell me it.”

“Master, I had more truly said I have the herbs; some of the names of them I do not know, but I know how to mix them in right proportion.”

“Where did you get them from?”

“I stole them.”

“Stole them?”

“From the physician of Syracuse; they in themselves were not worth an obol, so the theft was not great.”

“And this draught—when you drink it?”

“Death steals on one like a shadow, rising from the feet up; one lies down on a couch, talks to one’s friends, and then one forgets the world.”

“So they say,” said Diomed, who knew the action of the hemlock draught by repute, “but I have always doubted; there must be some pain.”

“There is none,” replied Xanthias, completing his master’s hair and taking up the manicure instruments.

“Why did you steal these herbs?”

“It is always well to have a way of dying easily,” replied Xanthias, simply.

Diomed laughed.

“Rascal! if you attempt such a thing in my house I will have you flogged. But I promise you one thing—”

“Yes, master?”

“You shall only be flogged after you are dead. Your life is your own, only your services are mine. Still, one must keep up appearances. And, by the way, I hold that draught at my service should these creditors of mine dun me to suicide.” He laughed as he spoke, but Xanthias did not smile. He was a deeply serious person.

“Master, I would obey you even in that.”

“You are faithful to me. Tell me, have you ever lied to me as the others have done?”

“I have lied to you, but not in large things. I am not like the others, for they do not know truth at all.”

“Are all slaves, then, liars?”

“Every man is a liar at some time, and slaves find it easier sometimes to lie than speak the truth; but these have been corrupted by Cleon, he who has just left—the King of Liars.”

“But one man, how could he corrupt so many?”

“Just as one rotten fig will corrupt a whole bale.”

“Are all Athenian slaves like mine?”

“No, master, for where would you find half-a-dozen men like Cleon in the whole of Athens?”

Diomed rose from the chair, and Xanthias went off, and returned with a cup of wine and a piece of bread upon a plate.

Having drained the cup, Diomed passed into the courtyard, and from thence to the front door, calling to the porter for his stick.

The porter answered that he had not brought back the stick which he had taken out on the preceding night.

“True,” said Diomed; “I must have left it at the house of a friend. Fetch me another.”

He left the house and passed into the sunlit street. The world, for Diomed, had altered since yesterday. Though always in possession of equable spirits, rarely depressed, and more rarely put out, he had never till now known the true meaning of the joy of life. Spring had reached him across the snows of Art, the frosts of intellect and convention; his garden of flowers carved from marble had become a garden of flowers.

Before leaving the courtyard he had paused to look at the cage of little birds. They had pleased him yesterday; they charmed him to-day. The brightness in his heart touched everything with its iridescence, and, as he walked, the street before him was now blazing in sunlight, now filled with the light of a spectral moon and the music of the flute-girl.

“Be on the opposite side of the street to-night, and when the moon strikes the door it will open for you.”

The words were less words than the links of a charm, an incantation holding all the magic of the East.

It was now eight o’clock, and the streets were filled with people; the market gardeners, flower-sellers, fishermen from the harbour town, olive merchants, and all the hundred variety of dealers, had long ago passed

through the streets with their wares, bound for the Agora, where the wicker-booths were set up and waiting for customers.

The Agora, like a great mouth, was now sucking at the population, drawing people towards it from every street. Well-dressed men and market-porters; slaves carrying jars and baskets, and *élégants* attended by their slaves; the banker and his client; the money-lender and the man who would come to borrow money from him: all were passing towards the market-place through the brilliant streets whose houses had cast their shutters open to the sun and the morning wind from the Ægean.

At the corner of the Street of the Sculptors of Hermes whom should Diomed meet but Nicias? Nicias looked just the same as on the night before, just as elegant, just as mincing.

The paradox-monger greeted Diomed with a laugh.

“Ah! Diomed, where are you off to?” asked he.

“I am looking for money.”

“Then for heaven’s sake do not look at me—I am out for the same business.”

“Then for heaven’s sake do not look at me!” laughed Diomed. “Let us look at the back of that fat banker who is walking before us. It is Pyrrhis, or I am much mistaken.”

“It is, and they say his bath-man is worth a fortune.”

“Worth a fortune! Does Pyrrhis pay so well then?”

“No, but they say he sweats gold. But is it true what you say?”

“What?”

“That you are in want of money.”

“I! No, I don’t want money at all.”

“Then why are you looking for it?”

“For other people. My horse-dealer wants money; my jeweller wants money; and half-a-dozen other people with low tastes want money—and they come to me, of all the people in the world, asking me to supply them with it!”

“Humour them, humour them,” said Nicias, falling into the vein of his companion. “We must have pity on poverty, even if it is poverty of taste. These wretches have beautiful horses, lovely jewels, scents, cosmetics, flowers, and have not the taste to keep them—they are blind, but let us have pity on the blind.”

“That is why I am going now to the Agora on a business I detest.”

“To visit your banker?”

Diomed burst into a laugh. For the first time that morning he remembered that Gyges was his banker. He could not face Gyges on the business of money. Go to her father on business? He would as soon that morning have pelted the Virgin Goddess with obols and drachmae.

“No. I must borrow elsewhere.”

“You have estates.”

“I have land; but you know very well, Nicias, that to me my land is like my cloak; I would sooner walk naked than landless through the world.”

“You can mortgage your land.”

“Never. My estates are my future. They are not large: a few farms, vineyards, olive-trees; but they are enough for me. I shall leave Athens and take up life in the country, unless this war calls me.”^[4]

^[4] At this moment there was a lull in the Peloponnesian War, the war that had been in progress on and off for twenty-seven years.

“*You!*”

“Yes, I. Since a few hours ago I have drawn up a new plan of life. Nicias, the gods have spoken to me.”

“Did they rate you for disbelieving in them?”

“No, for I have always believed in them without knowing it.”

“Who were they, then, these gods who spoke to you?”

“I do not know.”

“Zeus, Apollo, Poseidon, perchance?”

“I do not know.”

“Aphrodite?”

“I do not know.”

“And what did the viewless ones say to you?”

“I do not know.”

“They spoke in a strange language, perchance?”

“Yes.”

“Then how did their speech convey any meaning to you?”

“Listen to me, Nicias. What language does music speak?”

“None.”

"Yet it is full of meaning and can make men laugh or weep—even so the gods have spoken to me in a tongue I cannot understand, making trees more desirable to me than statues, and flowers than wine; and the voice of a river than the voice of the Agora."

"Truly you are mad."

"Then let me always be mad, for I am happy."

They had entered the Agora by this, and Nicias, taking leave of his companion, went off and was lost in the crowd.

Diomed walked along in the direction of the booths, saying a word to this man and that as he passed, stopping to speak to no one.

He was feeling now the first pull of the bit. To ask a man for money was as painful to his pride as plunging his hand into boiling water would have been painful to his body. He passed two men to whom he had lent large sums only some three months ago, but for the life of him he could not stop to ask them for a return of the loan. He dreaded the words; he felt he had no language to use; the language of a creditor was an alien tongue to him, he would be sure to falter and stumble in his speech. Had they been friends, it might have been different, but they were only acquaintances; so he passed on and presently, near the figs, he saw the man he wanted—Pasion.

Pasion had come to the Agora that morning, urged by habit, but also with a hope of meeting Diomed. The events of the night before had interested him deeply. Diomed's confession about the girl, the vision of her at the window, the sight of Diomed carried into the house: all these things had given rise to a deep and fateful interest in his mind. He had determined, if Diomed did not turn up in the market-place, to go to his house and make inquiries. But he was saved that journey, for here came Diomed himself, bearing no trace of the night before, walking easily and with a smile on his lips.

Even had Diomed accused him of his desertion, Pasion had a reply ready-made, but Diomed evidently had forgotten all that.

"Ah, there you are! Where did you leave me last night?"

"Leave you? Why, in the Street of the Triremes. You were flown; you said you would be followed by no one. Where did you go?"

"I? Nowhere. I found my way home—but I lost my stick."

The untruth and the beaming happiness of his friend told Pasion everything.

"You certainly lost your temper," said he. "No matter; you seem to have found it again. Shall we take a walk?"

“Certainly.”

They passed side by side through the crowd; and, as Diomed looked about him, he saw away over at the bankers’ quarter of the market Gyges, seated behind his table, beside his clerk. The swarthy face and the burnt-black beard of the Metic caused a little shiver to the aristocrat. Could that possibly be *her* father?—can the fawn be the daughter of the bull? The swallow the child of the vulture? The butterfly of the beetle? Only amidst human beings do we find a hint of this.

“I wished to see you especially this morning,” said Diomed, “for I am troubled.”

“What with?”

“Tradesmen.”

A chill went to the heart of Pasion. So it was coming at last, the request which he had long foreseen and dreaded, for the return of the loan.

“Well?” said he.

Diomed did not reply for a moment.

“Be at the opposite side of the street to-night, and when the moon strikes the door it will open for you.” The words were ringing in his ears; they had pursued him even amidst the noise of the Agora.

“Well?” said Pasion.

“Ah, yes. I was talking about these tradesmen. They are troubling me for money.”

“Yes?”

“And, as a matter of fact, I am so driven that I am compelled to ask you for the return of my loan.”

Diomed was surprised at the ease with which he made this request. He had dreaded it, yet it was simplicity itself. And when he had made it and put the demand in words, the creditor who lives in every man’s nature, in however attenuated a form, woke up and gave him extra courage.

“Ah, the loan!” said Pasion, as though suddenly remembering it. “Why, it is strange. I was dreaming of that last night. You want the money?”

“Yes, or I would not ask you.”

“I know that. Let me think—Zeus, but it is unfortunate. Only the night before last I lost so heavily at dice that I had not money enough this morning to pay my bills for quails. But you shall have the money. It will take me a little time, however.”

“That is unfortunate, for I have a creditor coming this evening to my house. He is the horse-dealer Gonippus, and I have promised to pay him.”

“What is the sum?”

Diomed named it.

“That is a trifle,” said the other. “I will send the money to your house before this evening. I can borrow it.”

“Thank you; but that debt is only one in many, so you see that, when I ask you for the return of the loan in full, I am pressing you because necessity presses me.”

“I know that. Well, I will propose this. Give me a fortnight, and you shall have the full amount.”

“Thanks; I will be able to manage on that, for I can trust in your word.”

They parted, and Pasion, waiting till Diomed was out of sight, approached the bankers’ quarter of the market.

Gyges was still seated at his table, his money-bags before him and his clerk at his side.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE HOUSE OF GYGES

THE banker was engaged with a client, and Pasion, leaning on his stick, waited till he should be free.

Men passed and exchanged greetings with him; the cries from the pottery market filled the air, and, though it wanted nearly an hour of full market, the crowd was dense, and Pasion, waiting and watching the moving throng, was in his element.

He was what was called an Agora man. He haunted the place; a crowd was a necessity to him. Absolutely indifferent to all that concerned other people as far as their welfare went, he was a slave to them and their companionship. He could not be alone. At his own house, if company were not present, he would surround himself with slaves and flute-girls; in the Agora he always chose the most densely packed quarters, and in the Assembly you always found him where the crowd was thickest. Noise and the near presence of life were essential to his strange organisation, solitude appalling.

Standing thus, Nicias and Niceratus approached him. These gentlemen generally hunted together after amusement; keen as a pair of well-matched polo ponies, they kept the ball rolling in the Agora, generally managing to secure a goal, no matter who their opponents might be. They had just met Moschion, had introduced the unfortunate to Anetodemus, and had left him in the grip of that philosopher.

"Why, it is Pasion," said Nicias. "I thought at a distance it was Diomed."

Pasion, ignoring this sarcasm, which was all he wanted to increase his hatred of Diomed to fever-point, glanced Nicias over with a downward and upward sweep of his dark eyes.

"Why, it is Nicias! And what are you doing in the money market?"

"We have come to have a snuff at the bankers," said Niceratus, answering for his companion.

"And a sniff at you," said Nicias. "We are like the schoolboys outside the bakers' shops when the new bread is taken from the oven."

"Fie," said Niceratus. "What a comparison! He smells like a flower-garden where all the flowers are golden. Pasion, man of wealth and patron of Gyges, lend me a mina of silver, for I am going to a quail fight, and have not time to visit my banker; he lives at the harbour town, and the road is as long as a sentence of Chariclides."

“And as arid and windy,” cut in Nicias.

“I have no money to hand,” replied Pasion. “I lent my last obol but a moment ago to a friend.”

The face of Nicias assumed an expression of wonder and surprise—the meanness of Pasion was a by-word. Seeing a man he knew passing close to him, he called out: “Hi, Cleomines, think what has happened!”

“What?”

“Pasion has lent an obol to a friend.”

The gentleman laughed and passed on; and the two wags walked off in search of further prey, whilst Pasion, pale with anger, turned to Gyges, who was now disengaged.

Gyges was only forty years of age, yet he looked fifty. He belonged to the type of man who is never young; born in Naukratis of an Egyptian mother, he inherited his business and his instincts from his Persian father, who had also been a banker.

His playthings had been obols and drachmae, and they were his playthings still. Bearded like Darius; heavy, and with jet-black eyebrows that nearly met, he glanced up as Pasion approached him, rose a couple of inches from his seat by way of salutation, and sat down again.

Pasion gave him good-day.

“So you have got back from the harbour town,” said Pasion, after a few minutes’ conversation about things in general.

“Yes, I reached the Agora about half an hour ago.”

“Have you been home yet?”

“No.”

“Well, I have called at your table for two objects: I wish to send a messenger with a sum of money to the house of Diomed in the Street of the Temple of Dionysus.”

“Yes?” said Gyges, raising his thick eyebrows.

“It seems he is in want of money, and as I owe him a small debt I have agreed to come to his assistance.”

He named the sum required, and Gyges made a note of it.

“My second object is some conversation with you.”

“You wish to speak with me in private?”

“Yes.”

“Then, for that purpose let us go and walk in one of the colonnades.”

"No," said Pasion. "What I have to say to you must be spoken at your own house."

"At my house?"

"Yes."

"But I am full of business."

"That does not matter."

"Would it not do this evening?"

"No."

Gyges gave a deep sigh and cast his eyes over the papers and money-bags on the table. Several important clients were due to call upon him that morning, hence his haste back from the Piraeus and the fact that he had come straight to the Agora without returning home.

However, Pasion was his patron, and he knew the latter well enough to be aware that when he spoke in this fashion the business was urgent.

Turning to his clerk, he gave that sphinx-like individual long and detailed directions in an undertone; then, rising and taking his stick, which was resting against the table, he signified his readiness, and they departed.

"What is it?" asked he when they had cleared the crowded market-place.

"Wait till we reach your house and I will tell you," replied Pasion.

He did not say another word till they had reached the house of the Metic.

Bartjas opened the door. Bartjas knew nothing of the events of the night before, and was in absolute ignorance of the treat in store for him.

Gyges led the way into the courtyard, and, turning to the colonnade on the right, opened a door. He disclosed a room barely furnished, containing some chairs, a huge chest with a lock that was, itself, as large as a modern cashbox, and a table littered with parchments. Pasion shut the door.

"What I have to say is about Diomed."

He took a seat, and Gyges, placing his stick in a corner, also sat down.

"Diomed?"

"None other. He is interesting to us because, if I am not greatly mistaken, we both owe him money."

"A trifle, a trifle," said Gyges with a grandiloquent air. "He advanced me a small sum some time back — —"

"Just so," cut in Pasion. "It is not the sum he advanced so much as the fact that you covenanted with him to give him half profits in the speculation for which the sum was advanced."

Gyges, surprised at this knowledge of his private affairs by his patron, said nothing.

“The speculation has been successful and the profits are large, so, as a matter of fact, a large sum is due from you to Diomed.”

“Why,” said Gyges, “what you say is true, but the fact remains that he never asked me what the speculation was — —”

“Don’t imagine you will evade him. He has been careless of money up to this, but he is now feeling the pinch of his creditors. He met me in the Agora this morning, and I assure you he spoke to me in a very business-like way. There are two sides to Diomed, and we are beginning to see the other side now.”

Gyges moved uneasily in his chair. He had always looked on Diomed as an easy prey a fig to be devoured, a fool absolutely devoid of business instincts.

“Diomed,” went on Pasion, “is on the verge of ruin. It is true that he has some land, but when he pays what he owes he will have nothing left but his land.”

“I know that.”

“He is a spendthrift.”

“I know that.”

“A man good for nothing but looking at statuary or painting, dressing himself, and lounging in the Agora or the painted portico.”

“I know that.”

“He drinks, he gambles, and, worse than all, he is an atheist who not only denies but laughs at the gods.”

“I know that.”

“The feeling in Athens is strong against him. Cleon, his late caterer, who is now in my service, is his bitter enemy. The downfall of Diomed is sure.”

“That also I know.”

“Well, then, how would you like to have this man as a husband for your daughter?”

Gyges did not grasp the monstrous proposition for a moment. When he did, he burst out laughing.

“Why, even if he were as rich as I am myself, the thing would be impossible. You know yourself he is an Athenian citizen, and you know it is impossible for an Athenian citizen to wed the daughter of a Metic.”

“Just so,” said Pasion.

“Why do you talk of such an absurdity?”

“Why?”

“Yes; the thing is without sense.”

“Listen,” said Pasion. “I am your patron, yet I have never seen your daughter.”

“You know — —”

“Yes, I know; it is perfectly right that, living in a city like Athens, you should keep her carefully guarded; but have you done so?”

Gyges laughed again. “I have made that my business.”

“Then, you will excuse me for saying so, but you are a very bad business man.”

“Perhaps,” laughed Gyges.

“There is no ‘Perhaps.’ Diomed knows your daughter; he loves her, and she loves him.”

Gyges’ face suddenly became injected with blood, as though filled by a syringe; his eyes under their black brows became brilliant with a light that Pasion had never seen in them before.

“Diomed has seen my daughter!—Diomed has seen my daughter! But Diomed— —” He ceased. The recollection came to him of the fact that Diomed had called upon him yesterday when he was out. Bartjas had told him of the visit, but he had dismissed it from his mind.

Now he rose up, opened the door, and called the porter.

When the latter appeared, Gyges addressed him furiously.

Though Pasion did not understand a word of what was said, he could follow the trend of it by watching the gesticulations of the speakers.

“He was here, and he waited in the courtyard,” said Gyges, turning at last from the servant. “It is impossible, for the women’s quarters — —”

“My friend,” said Pasion, “you are wasting time.”

“What do you mean?”

“You have not heard me out.” He told of the dinner-party of the night before, and of what Diomed said to him in the street; how Diomed had knocked at the door, and how he (Pasion) had watched from the shadow across the way.

Gyges turned to Bartjas and spoke to him; then he turned to Pasion.

“What you say is truth. A drunken man knocked here last night, but Bartjas could not distinguish his face fully, as the moonlight was in his eyes. He says, however, that the man was like the visitor of the morning.”

“He struck at Bartjas,” continued Pasion; “the door was closed in his face, and his stick broke on the door. I have the fragments of it. As he struck he overbalanced himself and fell, and lay on the ground without moving. Still watching, I saw a shutter pushed back up above; a woman looked out. I could not clearly see her face, for her eyes were sheltered by her hand. She withdrew, and presently the side door opened. A Nubian woman came out and, picking up Diomed, carried him into the house by the back way; then the door closed.”

“You saw that!”

“Yes. I do not know your household affairs. Have you a Nubian woman in your service?”

Gyges did not reply for a moment. He was combing his black beard with the fingers of his right hand, whilst the left hand resting on the table before him was clenched as though he were gripping in fancy the throat of some enemy.

“It is impossible—and still, it must be as you say. Ah! woe to Barejas, if this is true.” The door was half open, and he called to Bartjas, who had left the room.

Then he began speaking to the porter. Pasion, watching, saw a blaze come into the eyes of the porter. He grew animated, he began to gesticulate, and then, all of a sudden, he left the room.

“What now?” said Pasion.

“Wait,” said Gyges, “and you will see.”

He did not retake his seat. He stood rigid as a bull-god of Nineveh and black as Asiz the spirit of Death.

Pasion was filled with amazement. The Gyges he knew, the portly banker dull of mind to all things but money, the man he despised, had vanished. This terrific figure had taken his place.

After the lapse of some minutes the porter returned, followed by the Nubian woman.

Barejas entered the room, walking with an assured step; seeing Gyges, she paused and made obeisance to him. Then she folded her hands, and Gyges began to speak to her in a low voice.

Pasion, as he watched, could tell that the woman was denying everything, returning a blank “It is not so” to all the accusations of her master. Gyges ceased speaking at last, stood for a moment in silence, and then said something that made the woman cry out.

In a moment she was on her knees, with hands clasped, gabbling, chattering, rolling the whites of her eyes, confessing, most evidently, the whole business.

She finished and rose to her feet, and Gyges began speaking to her and pointing to the doorway as he spoke.

Pasion, who was watching intently, saw a dusky pallor stealing over her face; it was as though the skin had lost its oil, becoming dull and dead and grey. Her head sank as though the words of Gyges were a weight greater than she could bear.

Then, when he had finished, she turned and left the room.

Bartjas glanced after her. He was avenged.

“She has told you — —?”

“All,” replied Gyges. “She lied till I threatened her that, if she did not confess, I would turn her from my house and that she would never see her charge again. Stay, what is that noise?”

“It is the cistern in the courtyard,” said Bartjas hurriedly. “It gurgles and gulps at times as though it were a person strangling.”

“Then when she confessed — —” said Gyges.

“Yes?”

“I ordered her from the house.” He listened intently as he said the words.

Pasion listened too, but the cistern had evidently recovered itself, for the sound had ceased.

“So you see I was right,” said Pasion.

“You were right.”

“And you are going to act?”

The eyes of the Metic turned themselves slowly upon Pasion.

“I am going to act. We will talk of that another time.” He turned to the door and, followed by Pasion, left the room.

They made for the doorway. The little hall upon which the door opened was so dimly lighted that they did not see a bundle lying at the doorway.

Gyges tripped upon it. Then he called the porter, who seized it and, putting out all his strength, dragged it into the light of the courtyard.

It was Barejas, and she was dead.

She had died most evidently by strangulation, but neither rope nor cord could be seen.

Gyges, quite unmoved, stood looking at the body.

“How did she do it?” he asked of Bartjas, who was kneeling beside the corpse.

“Master,” said Bartjas, “she has strangled herself by swallowing her tongue.” He opened the mouth wide to convince the others; and Gyges, turning to the door, ordered him to apprise the authorities and have the body removed.

He opened the door for Pasion.

“You are not coming, then?”

“No,” said Gyges, “I have business that detains me at home.”

CHAPTER IX

HIPPIAS

WHEN DIOMED left Pasion in the Agora he strolled through the throng, speaking a word to this man and that, but not stopping. He saw the unfortunate Moschion in the grip of Anetodemus, and he met Nicias and Niceratus, who had just introduced the pair.

“Where are you going, Diomed?” asked Niceratus.

“I am busy.”

“What about?”

“Looking for a man.”

“Why, there are two thousand men in the Agora—and you, with your nose in the air, looking for one!”

“Yes; for the man I am in search of is above all others.”

“Who is he, this man?”

“Hippias.”

“The painter?”

“Yes.”

Nicias simpered. “Do you know, my dear Diomed, that remark of yours reminds me of the story of the man who declared that, in his opinion, Aristophanes was above all other men. He said, as an excuse for this opinion, that he had only seen him in the Clouds. He was a man of limited knowledge, you see.”

“In that case,” cut in Niceratus, “I declare Hippias above Aristophanes, for he is always in the clouds. He is a dreamer who forgets to brush his hair; remembers his hair and starts to wash his hands; forgets his hands and falls to polishing his teeth; opens his mouth before a mirror and cries out, ‘Hello! there’s Artemis!’; drops the mirror and starts to paint a picture; puts his foot through the picture and starts to make a statue; makes it and breaks it in disgust; and starts to brush his hair—using the back of the brush instead of the bristles.”

Diomed laughed and walked off. Niceratus had described Hippias to a T—that delightful genius, for ever dissatisfied, for ever kindly to others and ferocious to himself, for ever walking between the delicacies of Dreamland and the difficulties of life, forgetful of his personal appearance to the point of turning up at the Assembly with a red shoe on one foot and a blue on the other!

And, as Diomed approached the colonnade of the Temple of Hermes, there he was, approaching it too—a plain-looking man, rather stout and rather unkempt. He was carrying a roll of papyrus under his arm.

“Oh, Hippias, where are you going?”

“To be shaved.”

“To be shaved! What a waste of time! I want to talk to you.”

“What about?”

“Nothing.”

“There you are, wasting my time worse than the barber,” said Hippias with his friendly smile.

“But he talks to you about nothing.”

“True, but he shaves me at the same time.”

“Why do you not grow a beard?”

“I have tried, but I always forget.”

“Forget!”

“Habit, my friend. I forget, and go and be shaved.”

“You actually do that?”

“Alas! my friend, yes. I am very forgetful.”

Diomed, in high spirits, was leading him all the while away from the barber’s shop across the Agora. Hippias, in his present condition of mind, was the only man in Athens he cared to talk to. This child with a sprouting beard and the music of friendliness in his soul was at once a companion and a confidant.

They left the Agora; and Hippias, who had now quite forgotten the barber and the trouble about his beard, let himself be led till, all at once, he found himself ascending the great white marble steps of the Acropolis.

“Let us get away from the dust of the Agora,” said Diomed. “The fish-bell and the pottery market annoy me to-day; besides, there is something I wish to see.”

“What is that?”

“I will show you presently.”

They passed through the triple colonnade of the Propylaea into the silence and sunlight of the city of the gods. The whisper of Athens, two hundred feet below, did not break the spell; coloured sea-gazing caryatides, fluted pillars, temples, and coloured statues were all in the secret of that tranquillity. The cry of a wandering seagull blown by the sea wind, the

“cheep” of a passing swallow, the shadow of a flying quail, these things only broke the silence and stained the sunlight.

Diomed leading the way, they passed beneath the shadow of Athena, they skirted the Parthenon, and reached one of the fragments of the old Pelasgian wall. Here, taking his seat, Diomed sat down, motioning his companion to do likewise.

Beneath them lay Athens, stretching to the Acharnian Gate; and, beyond the city walls, the country stretching to the distant hills.

A graver’s tool seemed to have chiselled the outline of those hills, bright, crystalline, shadowless; or showing only shadow-traces of a luminous blue, amidst their remote mauves and purples. Not a shadow in all the scenery, only hints of shadow, vapoury, and tinted with azure beneath the diamond-bright azure of the sky.

Hippias and his companion had little regard for the scene before them. Athenians born and bred, the most beautiful landscape might have moved them to pleasure, but not enthusiasm.

“My friend,” said Diomed, pointing with his stick across the living light of the plain towards the delicately coloured hills, “my future home lies there.”

Hippias, who had fallen into a reverie, started.

“Your home?”

“I am leaving Athens.”

“Leaving Athens!”

“Yes; I am tired of the city; I have had my fling. Hippias, have you any debts?”

Hippias groaned.

“Debts! Don’t talk to me of them.”

Diomed laughed.

“I was about to call on you to help me mourn for my debts, and I only just remember, I owe you for the little Hylas. No matter. I will pay you for it. I am settling up my affairs. Then I go to my farm.”

“You are leaving Athens!” said Hippias stupidly, as though the words did not convey a meaning to him.

“Yes; I am going to live in the country.”

“You cannot do that.”

“Why?”

"You cannot live out of Athens, you are an Athenian. You are part of Athens, you — —"

"Yes, I know; all the same, Athens is going to lose part of herself, and it is going to live in the country."

"But why?"

"For one thing, I have spent all my money, or nearly all; for another thing, I am tired of Athens."

"Tired of Athens!"

"Be on the opposite side of the street to-night, and when the moon strikes the door it will open to you." The words ringing in Diomed's ears made him forgetful of Hippias for the moment.

"Tired of Athens," he at length replied. "Are not you?"

"I? No; I could not live away from it. I know every street, every fountain, every legend — —"

"Yet you have such a bad memory!"

"I never forget what is worth knowing. I only forget what is not worth doing."

"You know all the streets?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the Street of the Flute-Player?"

"Yes."

"It is strange; I once avoided that street, for it seemed to bring me ill-luck."

"Do you not avoid it any longer?"

"No. I would sooner live there than anywhere else. Why is it called by its name?"

"From Eunoe, a flute-player who lived many years ago, and died unhappily."

"How?"

"She killed herself. She was about to be married."

"Why did she kill herself?"

"Who knows? But they say her flute is heard there still, sometimes, at night. The old women tell the tale. It is a bad omen to hear it."

"Do you believe that?"

"I believe that the spirits of the dead are able to mar our lives or help us," said Hippias evasively. He was a religious man, not believing in the Homeric gods, but in a single God, after the fashion of a few intellectuals

and a number of the simple-minded country folk. He had a firm belief, too, in a future life, though he had very vague ideas as to its conditions.

“What is that manuscript you are holding under your arm?” asked Diomed after a pause.

“It is the story of the Halcyons,” replied Hippias. “I have just painted a picture from it.”

Diomed knew the beautiful story of the Halcyons, the snow-birds who are so devoted one to the other, that when old age and weakness takes the male, he is borne for ever on the wings of the female; inseparable spirits, blessed by Zeus, and favoured always by blue seas and gentle breezes.

“I should like to see it.”

“You shall buy it.”

“I cannot pay for it.”

“You can, some time. That picture I would not sell to any one but a friend. It is a panel, and you can find a place for it.”

“We will see,” said Diomed, rising to go. “It is early in the day, and I intend riding to my farm. It is only a two hours’ journey. Come with me.”

“I, on a horse!” cried Hippias, rising and following his friend.

“Why not?”

“I have only been once on a horse, and that time — —”

“Yes?”

“I fell off.”

“You simply forgot to hold on.”

“Oh, no,” said Hippias. “It was the horse who forgot to stand still.”

“What did he do?”

“He stood on his hind legs.”

“Yes?”

“Then he stood on his front legs.”

“Yes?”

“I remember nothing more.”

“You have such a terribly bad memory, you see.”

“Yet I remember the oath I made on that occasion.”

“What was it?”

“Never to get on a horse again.”

They had reached the Propylaea, and were passing down the steps. As they went, something fell from a fold of Diomed’s *himation*.

It was a girl's bangle of silver, narrow and engraved with the letters of a name. Before Diomed could recover the thing, Hippias had picked it up.

NITETIS.

"That is a girl's name," said Hippias; "but it is not the name of a Greek."

"O wise man!" laughed Diomed, who had flushed all over his face and neck, just as young children flush. "Since when have you become so learned in the names of girls?"

"I have nothing to do with girls," replied Hippias, as Diomed recaptured and hid the bangle in the folds of his robe. "I am a married man—Zeus!"

He struck himself on the forehead.

"What is it?"

"I had forgotten!"

"What?"

"My wife, she charged me to purchase her — —"

"Yes?"

"To purchase her — —"

"Yes?"

"I have forgotten."

"Think!" laughed Diomed, leading the way in the direction of the Street of the Temple of Dionysus. "Was it something to eat, perchance?"

"No, for she told me to let no one see me buying it."

"Ah! that is a different matter."

Hippias was silent for a moment as they walked along side by side. Then he burst into a fit of laughter.

"I have remembered what it was!"

"Oh, have you? What was it, then?"

"I would like to tell you, but it is not proper."

"Then don't tell me."

"Yet it is so funny."

"Then do tell me."

"But, my friend, it is scarcely decent to tell such a thing of one's wife. If Aristophanes were to hear of it he would put us both into one of his abominations, the things he calls comedies. You know my wife."

"I have seen her."

"You know that she is older than me; she is wrinkled, in fact; and we are childless; though, for all that, I would not part with her for worlds of gold

and silver.”

“Well, this joke?” asked Diomed. He was simply dying to hear the secret that was now convulsing Hippias with its contained mirth. He felt that there was something shady in it as well as humorous; and the combination had that attraction which it ever has for the imperfect heart of man.

“You will never tell her I told you?”

“Never.”

They had by this time reached Diomed’s door.

“You will never tell any of your friends?”

“Never.”

“I was to bring it home hidden under my cloak — —”

He ceased speaking to wipe his eyes, and then he stopped wiping his eyes to laugh.

“Will you tell me what this thing was your wife ordered you to buy?” cried Diomed, half exasperated, half laughing, and catching the other by a fold of his *himation*. “Otherwise, begone and buy it.”

“Your ear, my friend.”

Diomed lent his ear.

“It was — —”

“Yes?”

“A pot of rouge.”

Diomed watched him as he went off down the street, still chuckling, not at having “sold” Diomed, but at the joke, such as it was.

“Child!” muttered the Athenian as he raised the knocker.

He expressed in the word all that made Hippias so different from his fellow-citizens, and so much more lovable.

CHAPTER X

THE GODS OF THE COUNTRY

HALF-AN-HOUR later Diomed, having ordered a horse to be brought from his stable, was on the road. He had exchanged his *himation* for a short cloak. The horse, deep-throated, dappled-grey, a true Thessalian, the very incarnation of spirit and fire, stepped as though proud of its master.

The head might have served Pheidias as a model for that head of the horse of Selene which he carved for the frieze of the Parthenon; and, as horse and rider passed through the streets towards the Acharnian Gate, not a citizen passing on his way, or a slave at his work, but turned to glance at this flower of the Athenian cavalry.

Outside the Acharnian Gate were tombs lining the road for some distance. The Acharnian Gate, the Gate leading to the Academy, the Gate of Mystae, the gate leading from the potters' quarter, all these took you from the city to the country by roads lined with tombs—mausoleums of marble, some beautiful, many plain, but all well cared for and lovingly kept, and every tomb telling its tale. Not an epitaph was to be seen, only sculptured bas-reliefs. The parting of husband and wife; the little child holding up its hand to its mother; the old nurse saying good-bye to the children she loves and whom she is leaving. Here, nothing but plain marble, a name, and a sculptured water-jar telling the passer-by that a virgin lies below.

It was now a little before noon, and the day would have been hot but for the wind from the sea. The road, leaving the silence of the tombs, took up the silence of the country; olive-trees lined the way, and here and there a plane-tree cast its shade. He passed vineyards where the purple grapes hung heavy and where the harvest had just begun. Bending figures were at work, and voices called a greeting to him across the vine-leaves. He passed little gardens carefully tended, where quince-trees exposed their fruit to the sun and the sapphire-green lizards basked, gorged and content. He passed a grove of fig-trees; and then the road, leaving this fruitful strip of country, struck a desolation, where the limestone of Attica, hard, white, and relentless, like the basic character of the people, broke through the thin soil which gave sustenance to little but bushes, thin grass, and stunted trees.

An hour from the gates of Athens the country around Diomed had quite changed. As though a god or a giant had drawn a dividing line between the country that was poor and the country that was rich, suddenly, as though called up with trumpets, the armies of the forests appeared. Dryad-haunted groves, vineyards where the Bacchus-heads were swinging to the wind

above rows of green leaves and purple grapes, fig-trees heavy with fruit, woods where the trees all bending to the breeze bowed as if to Diomed and sighed as if with regret for his long absence. The tune of a river led him now, till, turning the shoulder of a bosky grove, he came upon the river itself and a house by its bank.

The house was built of wood; it was surrounded by a veranda or colonnade, and had shuttered windows, the shutters of which were closed.

The door was also closed.

Diomed, dismounting, led his horse to a post which stood near the doorway. The post had a catch-ring, for the purpose of holding a bridle. He tethered the horse and went to the front door. It was fastened and immovable. He knocked; there was no reply. He had not been here for a year. This was his house, and all the land around was his. He had known the place from childhood.

The place was haunted by recollections. He remembered the summer pilgrimages thither, those country holidays so dear to the cooped-up women of Athens. He remembered the ox-carts, laden with luggage—baskets, amphorae, pots, pans. He remembered his mother, and Ion, his little brother—a bright little form snatched away years ago by death.

Diocleides the bailiff, who lived here and looked after the house and the estate, where was he?

Diomed raised his voice and called out, but no one answered. He pressed again upon the door of the house of his fathers, thus closed in his face; it was still immovable. Filled as he was with belief in omens, his heart became heavy, and, turning from the house to the river, he sat down upon the bank and watched the water glassing and jetting over the little fall that gave the river tongue.

Above the tune of the water he could hear the murmur of bees—a sound that filled Attica in summer from the Ægean to Hymettus, and from Hymettus to the far-off hills; the calling of cicadas came from beyond the trees; and beyond these sounds, so trivial yet so filled with summer, lay the great silence of the country.

Gauze-blue dragon-flies floated across the water, and, watching them, he forgot omens of evil and fell to dreaming of the future.

“To-night—and when the moon strikes the door it will open for you.”

The Metec still stood a barrier in his path; but, with the deep contempt of the Athenian aristocrat for the alien, the figure of Gyges scarcely troubled him.

He had slipped the bracelet on his left wrist, and, as he lay by the river-bank, he glanced at it, turning the inscription upwards to the light:

NITETIS.

As he glanced at it he felt a warm arm slipping snake-like round his neck; he smelt the champak odour that mixed with, without destroying, the hot, gorse-like perfume of her hair; he felt her breath upon his cheek.

Nothing—only the warm wind swaying the rushes—a great vacancy—a pain at the heart scarcely to be borne—a prompting to fling out his arms towards Athens away there in the south.

The leagues he had travelled were calling to him: “She is far away—she is far away.” The water took up the refrain, the wind in the trees repeated it. It was as if he had come this journey to prove to himself the fact that, go where he would or do what he would, divorced from the object of his desire, pain and sorrow would be his portion, and life a vacancy.

That triumphant mind so keen, so polished, so critical, had nothing at all to say. It could no more give comfort to the heart crying for its mate than a philosopher could give comfort to a child crying for its lost mother.

“But, consider, my child, a mother: yes, undoubtedly, she has her uses, and it is no doubt grievous to lose her; yet it is the common fate, and time will soothe you. Besides, she is but a foster-mother. Earth alone is our mother; from her we sprang, and to her we go at last— —”

“I do not know what you say. I want her!”

“I want her!” It is the cry of the child and the lover through the ages. The god of Athens, the god of swiftness, and beauty, and grace, and wealth, and power; the god of poisonous loves, might hold a civilisation in thrall for a thousand years without entirely silencing his blasphemer, the unreasonable one who rules the love of man for woman.

Across the river, across the rushes, upon the wind, came a sound that drew Diomed from his thoughts. The sound of a shepherd’s pipe.

Mixed with the sound of the pipe came the murmur of voices, and, blending with the voices and the sound of the pipe, there was a note unmistakable—the note of festivity.

Cypress-trees and a grove of olives separated the revellers from the listener. The grove of cypress lay on the left of Diomed’s line of vision, the grove of olives on the right.

These olive-trees were very old; bent and twisted into all forms of distortion, they inevitably called up in one’s mind the idea of skeleton shapes, tortured forms crying out against their torturer. The grass of the

orchard in spring and autumn would be blue-stained with violets, and the wind blowing over the grass, scented, for it is always in the olive-groves that the violets grow sweetest. As Diomed raised his eyes, he saw a flicker of white away amidst the olive-trees. He rose and crossed the little river at a place where stepping-stones gave a dry footing; then he came through the grove of olives till he reached the shoulder of the cypress-grove, turned it, and found himself face to face with a marble altar, set with the cypress-trees for a background and a shelter against the wind. The altar was old and smoke-stained; for years he had forgotten it, and for years it had lurked here behind the cypress-trees, giving its smoke and flame to the air at the festivals of the grape harvest. To-day it was garlanded with flowers.

It stood alone, but approaching it along the wood's edge were coming, now, led by the sound of the shepherd's pipes, shepherds and vine-tenders; girls; old, old men and women; little children with chaplets and wreaths of flowers, running and laughing deliciously as they ran; married folk, sunburnt as the shepherds and vine-tenders; all were advancing towards the altar, led by a patriarch whose white beard reached to his waist. He carried a jar in his right hand, and in his left a basket of herbs. He was crowned with a wreath of laurel, and the whole band of his trooping followers, crimson with sunburn, looked as though summer had been pelting them with flowers, clinging to them, and embracing them with the green arms of her vineyards, filling their hands with great purple clusters of grapes.

Amidst the advancing crowd Diomed recognised Diocleides, who, on recognising Diomed, broke from the procession and ran towards him.

Diocleides was a bit lame, and rather stout, his hair was beginning to grizzle; he generally had a smile on his face, looked rather stupid, and held his head up when he was speaking, in a deaf sort of way, though he was not in the least hard of hearing.

Diocleides, having expressed his astonishment at the sight of Diomed, and his joy, apologised for having left the house shut up and deserted; but it was the festival preceding the grape harvest—what could one do? Every one wanted to be at the festival, even the little children. He could not possibly tell that his employer was coming, otherwise, the house would have been open and a feast spread. Had Diomed eaten? No! Ah, well, that would soon be put right; directly these people had finished with their worship he would return to the house with Diomed and spread a feast.

“Do not trouble about me,” said Diomed. “A piece of rye bread is all I want, and a drink out of the river. But I have some particular things to say to you.”

He told of his intention to come out and live in the country, and, as he talked, Diocleides answered him with one eye always on the crowd now grouped about the altar. He seemed to regard them as a father regards his children; pleased to find them amused with the game they are playing, yet anxious that they should not quarrel or get into mischief.

Diocleides was, in fact, an ex-townsmen. He had brought freedom of thought into the freedom of the country, and the combination had left him frankly cynical. From the little child with its chaplet of flowers to the old man in his second childhood, all the crowd now grouped about the altar were desperately in earnest; they had come to offer a libation to Bacchus, just as at the sheep-shearing they would offer homage to Pan. Yet here, in this quiet country place, you would find amidst these worshippers all grades of religious belief; the half-concealed and tolerant scepticism of the once town-man Diocleides, the simple and reverent inclination to a belief in a single God of some of the middle-aged men, the full belief in the whole gamut of the gods and evil spirits possessed by the majority of the worshippers. And yet, on occasions like the present, mono-theists, believers in the full Pantheon, and even sceptics like Diocleides would all join in the worship of Bacchus, or Pan, or Demeter, personal shades of opinion vanishing when the prosperity of the wine, or the sheep, or the corn were concerned.

The crowd, amidst which stood a young girl holding in her hand a lighted lantern, had now drawn up in a semi-circle about the altar, heedless of the stranger looking on. The patriarch with the jar poured out a libation of wine and water mixed. This he cast upon the ground, and as he did so the pipes shrilled out and a chant was sung.

Deep-throated, rich, as though the good earth so faithful and brown were itself offering its praise to the vine-god, starred with the voices of little children as though the daisies and wild flowers were lending their trebles to the hymn, this chant seized Diomed, so that his eyes became moist and his lips trembled. He had heard it before, years ago, in the remote past; standing as a child, clasping his mother's hand, he had joined his voice in the chorus, a true and implicit believer.

And it had never died out; harvest after harvest, year after year, it had risen to the blue sky, just as it was rising now. It was as though he had picked up a chaplet of flowers dropped in his youth, long thought to be withered, yet fresh and still moist with the dew.

The chant ceased and the shrill notes of the accompanying pipes had scarcely died away, when the branches of the cypress wood shook as though stirred by a hand, and out flew a black bird.

Consternation! An earthquake would have been a more acceptable omen, for Poseidon, the god of earthquakes and the sea, though rough-handed, was generous and a god.

But a black bird—and the shadow of the thing had crossed the altar!

Diocleides the sceptic pursed his lips, a sound impossible to describe arose from the worshippers; it was as though they had all drawn in their breath at the same moment.

Then, suddenly, out burst a clamouring of voices; it ceased, and the patriarch, who, during the chant, had been spreading the altar with the dried herbs from his basket, took the lantern from the hand of the girl.

The incident of the bird had been too much for him. Diomed, who had drawn closer, saw his trembling old hands fumbling with the thing; saw the light applied to the fuel and a pale blue spiral of smoke rising against the dark background of the cypress-trees.

It rose steadily, wavered, broke and vanished. The fire had gone out!

The light had been badly applied. Age and Fear were the real culprits, yet the crowd, after another long intake of the breath, turned like one man and, to the indignation of Diocleides, stared at the stranger.

They had never seen him before; they were shepherds from the hills, vine-dressers, labourers, humble folk whom the lordly Diomed, on his rare visits to his country house, had never seen. The patriarch and some of the older men had indeed seen him as a boy, but they did not recognise him as a man.

To Diomed it was as though the country which he sought had turned upon him a chilling and inimical face. All those sunburnt faces seemed saying to him, “What do you here? Nature will have none of you. Go back to Athens, dream your dreams, live your life, but leave the gods of the country in peace.”

“O foolish ones!” suddenly broke out Diocleides. “Do you not recognise your master? A bird flies out of the wood—do you think he brought it here under his cloak?”

The crowd evidently did, but they were abashed. They turned their eyes away, spoke to one another in an undertone, whilst one of the little children, knowing nothing and caring nothing about omens, and pleased with the look of the stranger, ran towards him and showed him a bunch of grapes it was carrying.

Diomed caressed the child, whilst Diocleides gave the crowd, gently enough, the whip of his tongue. Then he turned away with Diomed, leaving the worshippers to their worship.

They turned the shoulder of the cypress-grove and came towards the house.

“They are foolish,” said Diocleides. “All the same, it is an ill omen for the wine. Something is sure to happen at the press or in the gathering.”

Diomed laughed.

“Make your minds easy. If the omen was for any one, it was for me, for it seems to me it is my wine that is threatened.”

Diocleides said nothing more; the idea seemed to ease his mind, and they passed across the little river and went to the house, where Diomed inspected the rooms and ordered some alterations in the arrangements.

“I am thinking of marriage,” said he, “and I am tired of Athens. You, who have known Athens and known the country, which do you prefer?”

“Athens,” replied Diocleides, without a moment’s hesitation.

He was moving about preparing some food for his visitor, limping here and there, and always with his sunburnt face half cast up as if to catch some sound he expected to hear.

“Athens. Oh yes, Athens. I would sooner live there.”

“Yet you are happy here?”

“Oh, one is happy anywhere if one has a contented mind, but I would be happier in Athens.”

“Why?”

“Why?” Diocleides paused, as if searching for the reason. “Well, you see, in Athens one sees people, one hears them talking; talking of affairs, and men, and distant places. Why, I have talked in the Agora to sailors from Egypt and men from Sparta, and men who have seen many places I have not seen. I have heard other men talking, and have listened to their words; and then there is the noise of the market, which always puts one in good spirits. Now, in the country one sees people, and one hears them talking; but they talk as the trees talk.”

“The trees?”

“Yes; when you live long enough in the country you will know that the trees talk to you, but what they have to say is always about the weather. Some trees talk of it in one way, some in another, just by the way they carry their leaves, or just by the sound they make to the wind. Well, the country people are like that. If we are not talking of the weather, we are talking of the corn, or the sheep, or the grapes. Then the shepherds come in sometimes from the hills, and tell of things they have seen. One has seen Apollo, and another has heard Pan amidst the rocks; there is much madness in the lonely

places of the hills, and with nothing to do but watch the sheep grazing, men dream dreams. The young girls too. But we country folk are not all fools; we think less, that is all, and we often foresee the weather where men are concerned. You will not come here to live.”

“Why?”

Diocleides laughed. “You are part of Athens; your foot was made for the Agora and the painted portico; why, the kitchen of your house where I bring your rents is larger than three of the largest houses about here.” Diocleides shook his head. “No, I cannot feel it.”

“What?”

“That you will come to live here. It is not in the nature of things.”

“You forget, I am not coming here alone.”

“Truly, I had forgotten that,” said the countryman.

After he had finished eating, Diomed, having given more directions as to the preparation of the house, mounted his horse, which Diocleides had watered and fed, and, bidding good-bye to the countryman, turned away.

As he turned, he saw beyond the cypress-grove a thin wreath of smoke rising in the blue air; he heard the shrill sound of the shepherd’s pipes and the chorus now triumphant and assured. It was as though the gods of the country, veiled by the black-green trees, were holding festival over the departure of an alien whose presence had disturbed their rites.

For a moment he felt that between him and the life he had designed a door, adamant, but clear as crystal, had been closed for ever. He was not of these people, whose lives and whose traditions had, yet, formed part of his childhood.

In less than half an hour he had left the rich lands behind him. Before him in the far distance lay the city.

The Acropolis, Mars’ Hill, the Pnyx, all outlined against the sky, ringed with silence and leagues of crystal air.

CHAPTER XI

THE WARNING

Two hours before sunset he reached the Acharnian Gate. During the journey the country had followed him, and the gods of the country perplexing him with mocking questions.

“Do we exist? Have you vexed us by denial of our existence? Why do you dream of us at all; and what change is this that has come over your heart, leading you to think of us?”

As he passed through the Acharnian Gate, just as though the Spirit of Athens had driven back the questioning ones, these voices ceased, his spirits rose, and he turned his horse, not towards home but in the direction of the Diomean Gate, which led to the Lyceum.

The Lyceum and the Academy were the principal of the three great gymnasia of Athens; Athenian citizens alone might enter them, men of doubtful birth and Metics having access only to the gymnasium of Cynosarges.

Diomed drew rein at the entrance to the Lyceum, dismounted, and gave his horse to the care of one of the gate attendants.

The gate-keepers, knowing him, let him pass without question; and, turning the corner of the bath-houses, which lay at this end of the grounds, he found himself fronting a vast open space, sunlit and gay with movement. At the far end a double row of plane-trees cast their shade; and on either side of the vast space raised terraces, colonnades, and walks were crowded with men, lounging, talking, playing games, such as draughts, and watching the athletes.

The whole of the open space was a vast playground. Not the playground of a school, or a college, or a university, but the playground of a nation. Here men were casting the disc. From that far-away group you see stepping forth a young man; he raises his arm and a spangle of light streaks the air; he retires and another steps forward, and another, and another, and every time the air is riven by a flashing barb—they are spear-throwers. Over there to the left you see two white figures locked together and motionless, the whole combination rigid as one of the statues that adorn the colonnades. They are wrestlers. You see them suddenly swaying as though shaken by a powerful wind; but, before the fall, your eye is caught and led away by a race which has just begun; and the race beguiles the eye for a moment, till it is seized by a group of boxers, so well-defined in the crystalline air that you can see the

swelling muscles of the neck and arms and thighs, everything but the blow, swift as light and felling as a thunderbolt.

Diomed crossed an angle of the ground towards a colonnade on the right.

The Lyceum was not only a gymnasium, it was also a club. The most democratic club in the world, and also the most conservative. You might meet your bootmaker there, your fishmonger, any tradesman as long as he was a citizen; but most probably you would not meet your banker there, for most probably he would be a Metic.

Like most clubs, it was composite, composed of multitudes of circles. Your bootmaker, were he a dull man, would belong to a circle of other dull tradesmen; were he an entertaining man, he would rise into higher circles. Money had little value here; and a poor man, were he a genius or a wit, found a place anywhere.

Another thing. Your unpopular man found out his unpopularity, not in the Agora, where all men might walk and where business was the order of the day, but in the Lyceum or at the Academy. It was as though the spirit of Society stood at the gates, touching this man and that, now with a white wand of peeled willow, now with a wand of ebony.

To-day she had touched Diomed with the ebony wand. He had not been to the Lyceum for some days, and as he went up the two steps leading to the colonnade, he spoke to several acquaintances, who replied civilly. Very civilly—but they did not stop to jest or banter, they turned to converse one with the other, and he found himself suddenly in the cold. Nicias, with whom he had parted that morning, found, after a few minutes' conversation, that he had business elsewhere; and the strange thing was that this light conversationalist's conversation was heavy and rather pointless.

Moving along the crowded colonnade, Diomed, talking to this man and that, began to wonder at the dulness that had fallen upon his fellow-citizens. If two men were laughing together, their laughter ceased when he formed one of the group.

Then, almost in a moment, the feeling came upon him that he was isolated; a frozen barrier seemed to separate him from the others, and at once, on this feeling came the idea that they were turning their backs on him.

He approached Gorgas, a glutton, who spent his life hunting for dinners. Gorgas had always filled him with aversion; he was accounted the meanest man in Athens, and he looked it, despite his bull neck and protuberant belly.

Diomed invited him to dinner on the following night, fully determined to put him off if he accepted.

Gorgas refused, alleging a prior engagement.

“With whom are you dining?”

But Gorgas had turned away, hailing with vehemence a friend near by.

That was final.

Diomed felt the sweat tingling through the pores of his face. He was being cut by every one—or, to speak more exactly, cold-shouldered.

What had he done? Up to this, assured of his position, feeling himself above the majority of men, deafened by self-love to any murmur against himself, he had walked upon the heads of others as though that were his natural pavement. He would talk to a butcher or a flower-seller almost as though they were his equal, but just in that “almost” lay a world of perpendicular division, with the butcher at the bottom.

He had been sought after, flattered by flatterers, toadied to by toadies, copied by the aristocracy of Athens. And now Gorgas refused his invitation to dinner!

White-hot anger suddenly filled him, as, turning away, he cast his eyes over the gymnasium-ground. Had he been a wiser man, all this would have filled him, not with anger but apprehension.

He came down the steps and, crossing the ground, approached a group of disc-throwers. A young man, graceful as Apollo and naked as the morning star, had just thrown the disc, which was being brought back by the disc-carrier; a man, hairy, muscular, and ugly as a satyr, was stepping forward for the next throw.

It was Myrmex the fish merchant.

He spat on his palm and wiped his palm on his thigh, and was in the act of taking the disc, when his eye lit on Diomed.

He turned to the onlookers, holding the disc in both hands.

“Now, by Apollo, to whom I swore to give a wreath should I win to-day, the disc has grown heavier in my hands. What omen is this, or who is there present who has displeased the gods?”

“It is your hand which is at fault, oh Myrmex.”

The Hairy One turned at the voice of Diomed. He stared at him.

“My hand?”

“Assuredly. Is it not accustomed to short weight?”

The joke convulsed the onlookers, more by reason of their dislike for Myrmex than anything else; and Diomed was turning on his heel, when he caught sight of Hippias. One of the chief race-tracks of the Lyceum passed close to the disc-pitch, and along the track now a race was in progress. Eleven runners were taking part in it, and the foremost was Hippias.

Hippias, though you would have scarcely judged it from his appearance, was one of the swiftest runners in Athens. He was leading by a good way, the race was practically his, when, approaching the disc-throwers and catching sight of Diomed, he did what had never been done before in the precincts of the Lyceum, broke from the track and, leaving the others to finish without him, ran to his friend.

“Why, Hippias,” cried the astonished Diomed, “what ails you? You were winning!”

Hippias, out of breath, not from running, but from the sudden stoppage and change from violent exertion, waved his arm to indicate that the race was not a short one, but would have taken him all round the track—in other words, all round the border of the gymnasium grounds.

“I might not have found you again,” said Hippias, recovering his breath, “or you might have left the Lyceum before I could find you. Ho, there, hurry yourself!” He was beckoning to his slave.

The slave appeared, running. He was bearing his master’s tunic over his arm, and Hippias, having covered his nakedness, turned and led the way to the gates.

“Well?” said Diomed, who knew by the manner of his companion that something of importance was weighing on his mind.

“My friend,” said Hippias, “I have a message for you.”

“A message for me!”

“Yes.”

“From whom?”

Hippias was silent for a moment.

“I promised not to tell, but this at least I can say—it was not from a man.”

“From a woman, then?”

“Yes, from a woman. It was given to me almost immediately after I parted with you to-day, and I promised to search for you and give you it without delay. I went to your house, and then I remembered you had gone to your place in the country. However, I determined to call upon you this evening.”

“A woman?” said Diomed, scarcely listening to the other. “And what was this message she charged you to give me?”

Hippias was silent for a moment.

“You have forgotten it?” laughed Diomed.

“Alas! my friend,” sighed the painter, “I wish that I could. The message is simply this. You are to beware of the enemies that surround you, for they have sworn to ruin you.”

“Enemies who have sworn to ruin me! But why should they swear to ruin me? Enemies? What enemies have I? It is true that to-day some people seem to avoid me: that bloated shark, Gorgas, Niceratus, half-a-dozen others turned the shoulder to me when I came into the colonnade just now. Who has been speaking against me, Hippias?”

“Many people. You know the Athenians.”

“Why did you not tell me this before?”

“Even had I known it earlier,” replied Hippias, “I am not the man to say to a friend, ‘You are disliked.’” As he said the words, he turned away his face.

“Disliked!” the word struck Diomed like a lash. He had fancied himself liked by the large number of men to whom he had given his friendship; he could fancy himself hated by a few; he could fancy himself envied by many—but disliked! The word was half-brother to Despised.

They had reached the gates, and he had taken the reins of his horse from the gate-keeper. He stood for a moment caressing the horse’s neck, then, leading the horse, he turned away from the gates, Hippias walking beside him.

“Tell me, Hippias,” he broke out suddenly, turning to his companion, “speak truly. What have I done to these men and how have I conducted myself? Have I ever been found wanting in liberality? Have I ever promised what I did not perform? Have I not fought for Athens? And in good citizenship have I ever failed? Answer me.”

“My friend,” replied Hippias, “I am your friend, and that is my only answer to your questions, for a man who was mean, or a liar, or a coward, or a bad citizen, could never have drawn me to him by the bonds of friendship. But you have struck many men— —”

“Struck them!”

“With your tongue. If I were not your friend I would not say this. Your tongue, unknown to you, bites men just where they are weakest and just where they are most base. You strip them naked and expose their sores, and

you give them no covering but laughter. If you were old and ugly and poor you would be the most popular man in Athens, for your age and ugliness and poverty would be a foil to your wit. But you are brilliant and beautiful and young, and yet you bite men instead of caressing them.

“You stand aloof from the Athenians; you do not love after their fashion; and, though you have admirers by the marketful, by reason of your coldness they are your bitterest enemies.

“To men you are as brilliant and cold as a diamond. Alas! they have never seen, as I have seen, your heart; and they do not know, as I know, your goodness; nor can they guess, as I have guessed, your soul.”

Diomed glanced at Hippias. Tears were trickling down that good and friendly face; and, for the first time in his life, Diomed was moved so that he had to swallow against the choking in his throat.

“When you speak like that,” said he, “I scarcely know myself. And have you watched me, then, so closely during the four years I have known you? It would have been better had you warned me even six months ago, even yesterday—not that I care an obol about the Athenians, but still—”

“Warned you!” cried the extraordinary Hippias. “I knew nothing of it. Do you think I go about noticing the tattle of the market-place?”

“Yet you have heard men speaking against me.”

“Never. Had I done so I would have struck them.”

“You knew I was unpopular.”

“I did not, till a few hours ago.”

“Who told you, then?”

“My wife.”

No sooner had the words escaped from him than he struck himself on the mouth with the palm of his hand. Diomed burst into a laugh.

“She it was who told you to warn me?”

“You have said it.”

“How did she know that these people are against me?”

“Oh! how?” said Hippias. “Can you not guess how women talk together? Why, there is nothing done in the Agora or said in the Assembly that is not discussed in the women’s quarters. Why—”

“Yes?”

Hippias blushed—at least, reddened.

“I once forgot myself and appeared at the Assembly shod indifferently. Well, my friend, that same evening my wife had the news.”

Diomed was silent for a moment; then he began to laugh.

“And my character that you drew for me just now—my tongue, my personal appearance, my coldness—had you all that from your wife?”

“She knows all things,” said Hippias, evasively.

“And she takes an interest in me, though she has only seen me twice?”

“Twice! Why, repeatedly she has scolded me for my neglect of my personal appearance, saying, ‘Why do you not copy your friend Diomed, whom I saw passing this morning on the way to the Agora looking as unlike you as a clean-swept room looks unlike a midden.’ Ho—twice! A thousand times. You know our house is in the Street of Apollo, and you know that it is through that street you pass frequently on your way to the Agora. Twice!”

They had reached Diomed’s door by this; and Diomed, giving his horse to a slave, invited Hippias to enter. But the painter refused.

He had promised to return home early; and Diomed watched him walking away down the street, this genius of whom Aristophanes once said, “His life is a comedy played by one man.”

As Diomed entered the courtyard, his eye was struck by something propped against one of the pillars. It was a panel picture representing two birds in strenuous flight, upwards, through a sky of azure.

CHAPTER XII

THE MOONLIGHT STRIKES THE DOOR

At ten o'clock, just as the eastern stars were paling to the rising moon, Diomed left his house and took his way along the Street of the Temple of Dionysus, in the direction of the Street of the Tripods.

He had forgotten the incident at the Lyceum; he had forgotten Hippias, and even the picture of the halcyons, which had come to him like a good omen.

Filled with the one supreme desire of his life, he did not hear the sounds of the city, nor notice the people who passed him. Blind to everything but the absorbing idea which filled his mind, he did not notice that he was being followed.

A hundred paces behind him, now in the starlight, now in the dark, came a figure which, pausing when Diomed paused and quickening its steps when he resumed his way, kept always at the same distance, with the fidelity of Fate and the silence of a shadow. It followed him down the Street of the Tripods, through the Street of the Triremes, and along the Street of the Winds.

The Street of the Flute-Player was still in darkness, though the moon, which had broken above the hills, had just touched the house-tops.

Diomed entered it; and he had scarcely passed the fountain, weeping and slobbering its waters in the gloom, when the pursuing one turned the corner.

Diomed, taking his way along the street, paused opposite the house of the Metic. Next moment he had concealed himself in the very same coign of shadow that had given hiding to Pasion the night before.

At the same instant the pursuer made himself invisible, and the street, now deserted, became wrapped in silence, broken only by the breathing of the wind and the murmur of the fountain water. The wind had risen, and was blowing strong from the sea, blotting out all sounds from the landward and bringing with it sounds from the seaward streets. Not a light showed from the house of Metic; all the windows were tightly shuttered; and the Hermes and the Apollo of the street, standing on either side of the closed doorway, showed vaguely in the darkness, like figures veiled but watchful.

Then, as the wind-swept moon crept higher, and her light, striking the white house-walls, spilled into the street, the street, from a trough of shadow, became a street touched with moonlight.

Diomed, as he crouched and listened, could hear the sound of a flute; it was blown on the wind; it came with the other sounds of the city, yet it seemed as though it might be in the street itself. One might have fancied Eunoë passing again and pausing before the house where she had lived, flute to lips, beneath the star-strewn sky.

A door clapped to, and the form of a man appeared from one of the houses; he was followed by another man—probably a slave—bearing a lantern. They passed away, the lantern-light dimming to a spark and vanishing as they turned the corner into the Street of the Gate of Mystæ.

The roof, the shutters, the whole upper part of the house of Gyges stood out, now, bathed in the light, brilliant almost as the light of day; and the house-front, as it thus became revealed, seemed more than ever like a hard, and blind, and callous face.

Nothing good could surely come from there; the tomb itself could not seem less kindly to hope than this house with the shuttered windows and jealously closed door.

For a moment a chill came to the heart of Diomed, and then again the voice that had been haunting him all day stole to him with the warmth of a caress:

“Be on the opposite side of the street to-night, and when the moon strikes the door it will be opened to you.”

Listening to it, he watched till the moonlight touched the door.

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He saw the copper bosses of the nails holding the planking to the cross-pieces—the light was so brilliant that he could distinguish the graining of the wood as clearly as though it were shone on by the light of day; then, leaving his place of concealment, he crossed the street, and, taking his stand by the door, listened.

He knew that it opened upon a passage, and that the passage led to a stone stairway, and that the stairway led to her room. Even now she might be on the stairway—standing undecided, debating with herself, torn between passion and fear.

He struck on the panelling with his knuckles; and, like a reply to his summons, came a burst of laughter.

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A band of young men, followed by slaves carrying unlit torches, had entered the street from the Street of the Winds. Their laughter woke the echoes, and as they passed Diomed, who had slipped back to his place of concealment, they broke into song.

They had evidently been dining together, and were now going to beat up some friend. They vanished, and again he approached the door.

This time he struck more loudly, listened, and then, hearing not the slightest sound, pressed on the panelling. The door was solid as a wall.

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He turned from it, and for a moment madness seized him, urging him to knock at the main door, summon the porter, fell him if need be, and force his way into the house. It passed; and for an hour, crouching in the shadow across the way, he watched and waited—hopeless, yet held by hope. Then, by degrees, the sounds of the city died away; and now, from the distance of the night, came a sound chill as the voice of Indifference, and fatal to hope—the far-off crowing of a cock.

PART III

THE GATE OF MYSTAE

CHAPTER I

WHO BELIEVES IN FATE CREATES HIS FATE

THE children were running to school through the early morning, flocks and flights of them, their voices blown by the sea wind from street to street. Men bearing baskets of live quail; men driving carts laden with country produce; women bowed beneath the weight of vegetables, flowers, and fruit; fish from the harbour town and roses from Eleusis: all were pouring into Athens by the Piraic and Acharnian Gates.

Had you looked down at the city from the sun-gilded Acropolis you would have seen the theatre like a pond of shadow, and beneath the sunlit roof-tops night still clinging to the streets; you would have seen the huge semi-circular sweep of the Street of the Tripods, half blazing white, half black; the Agora empty of everything but the black shadows of the plane-trees and statues; and, beyond the city walls, like traces of snow beneath the brilliant blue of the sky, the tombs marking the road tracks leading to the country.

But above all things you would have noticed the press of people at the gates, and more especially at the Piraic Gate, where, now, Diomed, mounted on the horse he had ridden yesterday, was patiently making his way through the crowd.

You could have told nothing, from his face, of the event of the night before. That face so delicate, so sensitive to the impressions of the mind, might express all things, but never the sense of personal injury or pain.

Up to this he had taken Fortune's gifts in both hands; the gods had given him everything, and he had taken their gift without thanks, disbelieving in them, or not troubling to believe; and now that the gods had turned their backs upon him, now that they had closed their coffers, and chilled his friends, and embittered his enemies, shown him Love, and barred the door to it, he did not curse them, not believing in them.

But deep in his heart, inherited from sources older than the days of Priam, there was a profound belief in Fate, and a capacity, almost unnatural, to accept all things from those cold hands without a murmur.

He had returned to his house before dawn, baffled, chilled to the heart, dazed as if by a blow. Had the servants of Gyges attacked him, rent his

clothes and cast mud upon him, the indignity would have been less painful than the speechless derision of the closed door.

Even as he rode, now, clear of the gates and making in the direction of the harbour town, the door was still in front of him. It had become an obsession, a symbol, an omen: deaf, blind, voiceless, and barring him from that other being whose existence now dominated his life.

At the earliest ray of dawn he had sent Xanthias to the house of the Metic, asking that Gyges might call upon him without delay. He had determined on the desperate course of taking the banker into his confidence; no better instance could be given of the confusion of his mind, knowing, as he knew, his own position as a citizen of Athens and the position of Gyges as an alien.

Xanthias had returned with a message that the banker was at his office in the harbour town, where he had spent the night.

Diomed did not believe this message. When Love overthrows reason, Nature, to defend her creatures, gives them instinct. Instinct told Diomed not only that Gyges had spent the night in Athens, but that it was his hand which had closed the door.

He was journeying to the Piraeus now to prove his disbelief.

The morning was bright and strong as he passed the gates of the Piraeus and entered the broad sunlit Street of Hermes. The place might have been a hundred leagues from Athens, so different were the streets, the people one met, the very air one breathed. The Piraeus had a tang of its own; sawn pine, pitch, sea-salt, all lent something to the fresh breeze from the sea; even from the Street of Hermes one could hear, at times, the crying of the gulls from the harbour, the dockyard mallets, and the sounds from the quays.

The Piraeus was not only a harbour town, it was a business town. For every drachma that changed hands in a business way in Athens five changed hands in the Piraeus. Here the corn-merchants, the chief bankers, and the wholesale dealers in provisions had their offices. The quays of the harbours of Munychia and Zea were coloured and perfumed and vibrant with trade; olives, figs, oil, corn, carpets from Sardis, spices from Egypt, wine from Chios and Lesbos, cheese from Lemnos, perfumes and cosmetics, metal-work from Ægina, all were to be found here unloading from the ships or stored in the warehouses lining the wharves. On the other side of the peninsula the Great Harbour, half a mile wide and nearly a mile in length, gave shelter to the war fleet, some anchored in blue water, some moored to the quays, and others drawn bodily up into the covered ship-houses.

Diomed, turning his horse from the Street of Hermes, rode into the Street of Zea. It was here that Gyges had his place of business, and, as though the god who rules events wished to save him time and trouble in disclosing fully his hand, whom should he see standing at the door of one of the houses on the right but Abbas, the clerk of Gyges; the same who had served him with money at the banker's table in the Agora.

Diomed reined in and, without dismounting, addressed the clerk.

"This is fortunate. Can you direct me to the office of Gyges?"

"This is his office."

"I wish to see him."

"He is not here."

"Not here? Where is he, then?"

"In Athens."

"Did he not pass the night here?"

"No; he is still in Athens."

"But they told me in Athens that he spent the night here."

The sphinx-like one made no reply.

"Come, what have you to say?"

"I do not know—I am only his clerk."

Diomed checked his anger. It was the case of the door again—the barrier, deaf, blind, and dumb, which Fate had placed before him.

"Will he be here this morning?"

"I do not know."

"But surely you must know your master's movements?"

"I do not know."

"Would I find him at his table in the Agora?"

"I do not know."

"Has he told you to say nothing about his movements?"

"He has told me nothing."

"Well, then, without disobeying him, you can tell me where he is to be found. Come, I will fill your hands with silver."

"I know nothing, so how can I tell?"

"You lie," said Diomed.

He touched the horse with his heel and passed on.

He had come to the Piraeus to confirm his belief in the trickery of Gyges, and now that he had done so he felt as though the thing had only just

been exposed. The manner of the clerk, too, verging on the insolent, had put a completion to that sense of universal opposition which, since the incidents in the Lyceum yesterday, had been growing in his mind. It was as though a wizard's wand had suddenly touched him, chilling his friends, embittering his enemies, raising viewless barriers between him and the desire of his life, marking him as a man apart, and to be shunned.

The thing had been coming for months; with the fading of his fortune it had grown. Hippias, voicing his wife, had explained it; but it was left to that genius of evil which Fancy had associated with the Street of the Flute-Player to bring it home to him in the bitterest manner possible; to show him the being he loved, and the whole world as a barrier between him and the desire of his soul. That Gyges had closed his hand on the affair, that Gyges would use all his power to thwart him he felt certain, and of the fact that the world would side with Gyges he felt assured.

And there was no one who could help him. Pasion, the man he had befriended most, was the patron of the Metic, their interests were identical; Hippias had neither power nor cunning; Nicias had turned away from him. Should he seek help from Philinus the sponge, or Anetodemus the fool, Gorgas the glutton, Niceratus the conversationalist? Ah! if he had only been in search of a statue, a comedy, a picture, an epigram, how easily he could have turned to a hundred men who would have served him; but for friendship in adversity he could only turn to one man, Hippias—and Hippias he felt to be impossible.

Such a man would be wax in the hands of Gyges.

Scarcely knowing whither his horse was taking him, he turned the corner of the Street of Zea; the blue harbour flashing in the sun lay spread before him; the boats from the fishing were in, and the catch was being sold on the quay.

He reined in, and sat watching the bright and moving picture. The gaiety and brightness of it troubled his soul, yet held him; and, as he sat and watched, a figure detached itself from the crowd and came in the direction of the Street of Zea.

It was Pheidon, and he was carrying a basket upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER II

THE SHUTTERED WINDOW

HE had forgotten Pheidon. But, at the sight of that freckled and astute face, a whole train of recollection caught fire, and instantly, like a flash, came Hope.

Had the gods conspired to construct a creature to be at once a spy, a messenger, and a friend, they could not have improved upon this harbour town boy, constructed by an old fisherman and his wife, and salted with the salt of Attica and the salt of the sea.

Pheidon, with the basket on his shoulder, did not recognise the horseman till he was within ten paces of him. Then, seeing who it was, he grinned.

“Ha,” said Diomed, as though he had only just perceived him, and adopting that tone of banter which he felt to be the road towards the regard of the other; “so we meet again. And where are you off to, you and your basket?”

“We are going in the same direction.”

“To Athens, perhaps?”

“Ay, to Athens—worse luck.”

Diomed turned his horse.

“I, too, am going back to Athens. It is fortunate we have met, for I have need of you.”

Pheidon made a face.

“I have my fish to carry to market; they are heavy enough, but I would rather carry them and Myrmex on top of them than carry another purse.”

“By the Dog of Egypt,” laughed Diomed, as he started the horse, whilst Pheidon tramped beside him, “you would find my purse light enough now. I want you to carry no purse—only a message.”

“A message?” grumbled the other. “My business is to carry fish—I am no slave.”

“No slave could carry my message, or do for me what I want to be done; only a friend. I will tell you all. Are we not both sons of Athenian citizens; and, when you are old enough, if I am living, will we not both some day vote together at the Pnyx, where, without doubt, I have already rubbed shoulders with your father? You are younger than me by many years, and Fortune has given us each a different lot in life. No matter; the gods have

given you more sharpness than they have given to most men, and you can help me.”

They had passed the gates by this, and Diomed, dropping from his horse, walked beside the other.

“You remember the house of Gyges the banker?”

“Where you left me outside with the purse?”

“Yes. Well, Gyges has a daughter whom I would marry, but he is my enemy; he has turned against me, as all men seem to have turned against me now; he has lied to me; when I send to his house he is at the Piraeus, when I come to the Piraeus he is in Athens. I was to have seen her last night, but the door never opened to me as she promised. He is holding her a prisoner. You are carrying that basket of fish to the market-place. I will buy it from you; take it to the house of Gyges as a present. Tell the porter it is from a friend, get in talk with the porter, put your wit against his, and, should he seem a man who will take a bribe, give him my name and offer him what you will, even to fifty minae of silver, should he help me in the matter.”

“And the daughter of Gyges?”

“Should you manage by any chance to see her, say to her that I am waiting and watching—she will know.”

“But the porter, how is he to help you?”

“I do not know yet. I only want one of two things from him—either to admit me to the house secretly by that side door which was closed to me last night, or to open it to her, unknown to Gyges, so that she may escape.”

Pheidon was silent for a moment.

“I will do as you ask,” said he at last, “and most likely get my head cracked by that same porter, who, it seems to me, will want to see his money before he places himself in your net.”

“Tell him it is Diomed who promises it, and show him this ring as a proof of what you say.”

Diomed took the seal ring from his finger and handed it to Pheidon, who placed it on his thumb.

“The money will be ready for him. I am even now going to sell my gems and arrange my affairs for my departure. Bring me news of how you succeed, and may you prosper, for I swear on the tomb of my father that, if you fail, I will break the door of Gyges’ house by force, even should I be killed in the attempt. Come to my house with news of how you succeed, and may it be good news, for no man ever needed good news more than I at this moment.”

He took leave of the boy, mounted, and started for Athens at full speed; swerving from the path at a gallop, he took the broken ground as the shorter cut, heedless of every obstacle, horse and man seeming the component parts of the same creature and both gifted with viewless wings.

Pheidon, trudging along with the basket on his shoulder, grumbled; he had to do the journey on foot for one thing, the basket was heavy for another, and, for a third, his practical mind told him that he had bound himself to a fool's adventure. Diomed wanted to take the daughter of the Metic away from her father; that was the plain fact of the matter, and if the enterprise failed, and—a hundred to one—even if it succeeded, there would be hard knocks for every one who had a hand in the business.

He remembered the conversation of the two men outside the barber's shop and how they had prophesied the speedy downfall of Diomed.

Having cursed himself for his stupidity, he forgot it, shifted the basket from his right to his left shoulder, and plunged into the glorious idea of the adventure on hand just as a bather plunges into the sea.

It was after nine o'clock when he passed through the Piraic Gate, and ten minutes later he was standing in front of the house of Gyges. But he did not knock at once; before doing so he cast his eyes carefully over the front of the place, numbered the windows all closely shuttered, and took stock of the unobtrusive side door.

Then he approached the front door and knocked.

He could hear the sound echoing from the passage; he waited, but no answer came, and he was in the act of raising his hand again to the bronze ring, when, without warning of footstep or any sound of human movement from the inside, the sound of a bolt sliding back came to his ears.

The door seemed unbolting itself.

Then it opened and Pheidon found himself standing before Bartjas.

"Well," asked the porter, glancing the other up and down suspiciously, "what do you want?"

"Nothing. I have brought your master some fish as a present."

"Who from?"

"A friend."

Bartjas held out his hand and took the basket.

"What is his name?"

"He gave me no name. But, look you here — —"

"Yes?"

"I would speak a word with you myself."

“Then speak it, and begone.”

“I cannot say it here in the street.”

“Then save yourself the trouble of saying it at all.”

Bartjas clapped the door in the boy's face and Pheidon, who had got what he wanted but not what he liked, stood for a moment biting his thumb.

He had got the knowledge that Bartjas was unapproachable, a barren enough gain, yet still a gain, as it gave him the lie of the land. There was no use in wasting time over Bartjas.

He stood for awhile in thought. Then he came into the middle of the street and glanced again over the house front.

Pheidon, unlike Hippias, never forgot anything. He had not forgotten the girl's face glimpsed at the open window on the occasion when he had accompanied Diomed to the house of Gyges. He had not forgotten the window. There were four windows, and it was at the third window, counting from the Street of the Gate of Mystae, that he had seen the face.

The girl most probably was the girl for whom Diomed was seeking; the room to which the window belonged was most probably her room; and if Gyges had locked her up it was most probable that he had locked her up in her room.

He glanced up at the shuttered window, stooped, picked up a pebble from the roadway and flung it at the shutters.

The pebble was small and the tap of it on the wooden shutter was like the tap of a bird's beak. He watched the shutters narrowly. At the place where they joined there was a narrow opening about an inch wide, extending upwards for about three or four inches from the sill. This opening was common to all the solid shutters of the city, admitting a ray of light and some air.

Having waited for a moment without receiving any sign, he glanced around, picked up three more pebbles from the roadway and cast them one after the other at the shutter.

At the last tap the shutters shook slightly, and from the opening appeared three fingers of a woman's little hand.

The fingers closed upon the woodwork, the hand seemed shaking the solid shutter as if in a vain attempt to open it; failing, the fingers withdrew.

CHAPTER III

THE DOG-STEALER

PHEIDON was on the point of calling out Diomed's name so that the prisoner might know whence the summons had come, but he checked himself, turned, and made off in the direction of the Street of the Winds.

He had gained all the knowledge that he wanted, and it would be folly to shout out a name which, if overheard, would perhaps ruin any plan he might form.

Besides, there would be nothing gained by it except, perhaps, to give comfort to the girl, and of the girl he was not thinking at all. He had small capacity for sentiment, and, had the prisoner been a bale of goods instead of a living girl to be abstracted from the house of Gyges, his interest in the game would have been no less keen.

In the Street of the Winds he took a drink from a fountain, sat down on a ledge of stone projecting from one of the house walls, and fell to thinking of the problem before him.

It was a horribly difficult problem, for he had made up his mind not only to release the prisoner, but to do it unaided; and not only that, but to deliver this bundle of living goods safe and unobserved at the house of Diomed.

The thing would have to be done under the cover of darkness, in the hour before the moon rose; and to do it he would have to enter the house and secrete himself there before nightfall.

He did not know the number of servants in the house of the Metec, nor did he know the lie of the rooms, yet he felt sure of success if he could only find a hiding-place. Were he discovered he would be certain of a thrashing, and perhaps be hauled off before the magistrates; but he had been thrashed so often by the sea and the wind and his father that he cared little about that; and as for the magistrates, he relied on Diomed's protection and his own wit to escape with a light punishment.

He knew enough of the construction of Athenian houses to be aware that there was no back way to the house. The side door and the front door were the only means of entrance, and both were seemingly impracticable, yet he did not despair. Having cudgelled his brains hopelessly for a method, he stopped thinking of the matter, knowing from past experience that if he forgot the thing for a while completely, when he remembered it next he would most likely find some solution.

He had the whole day before him, and, under these conditions, he was not the person to refuse enjoyment.

The cheapest, and often the most amusing, show in Athens was a law court, and, as there were a dozen law courts sprinkled all over the city, and every court always employed, one had a fine range of choice.

“This, Attica?” cries a character of Aristophanes who has been shown Attica on a map. “Why, I can’t see any lawsuits going on there. Attica! Never.” Not only Athens, but the whole country from the Piraeus to the hills, fed the courts with litigants.

It was so delightfully easy to go to law; failing arbitration, one had only to summon one’s adversary before a magistrate, swear his character away, bring witnesses to combat his witnesses, and, evidence having been written down, sworn to, and sealed up in a box, the thing was half over. Nothing was left to do but bring the whole mass of evidence before a jury of free and independent citizens, who cared not twopence for the letter of the law, who were presided over by no judge, who listened to hearsay evidence, and whom you could influence, were you defendant, by weeping and snivelling in the course of your speech.

Little knowing how surfeited with law he would be in the course of the day, Pheidon took himself off to the Hole and Corner court which was nearest to the Street of the Winds. He did not stay there long. A deadly-dull case was in progress concerning the purchase of some land. He left hurriedly and sought amusement in the Agora.

He had still the silver drachma which Diomed had given him, and he was still carrying it in the same purse—his mouth. He was hungry, but he had no desire to waste his money on food, so he looked about him for a friend. It was often easy to pick up a little money in the Agora by running messages for the stall-keepers, helping them to take down or put up their stalls, and so forth. Pheidon, turning his attention to the bread market, managed to secure a loaf of rye bread without stealing, working, or paying for it; by the same alchemy he left the fruit and vegetable market richer by a bunch of grapes; made a restaurant out of the shady side of a booth in the flower market, and proceeded to dine.

It was eleven o’clock.

In full view of every one, but unnoticed as a sparrow, he had a full view of every one. The marvellous crowd held him by its movement, vivacity, and colour; just like a person who reads a book whilst eating, he read the crowd; watched friends meeting and parting, slave girls laden with parcels making for home, Gorgas hunting for an invitation to dinner, and Niceratus evading

Gorgas; the banker with a bundle of papers clasped up tight in a fold of his robe, and the clerk of the banker scuttering along on an errand; market-porters, young bloods, horse-dealers, philosophers, idlers, critics, artists, sculptors, aliens, slaves, he marked them all, sorted them with his eyes, and could pick out nearly every man by his profession or calling, just as one might pick out the different fruit from a basket laden with apples, dates, quinces, figs, nectarines, and pears.

Now, and almost at a stroke, as though touched by some wand, the crowd began to thin, and the uproar of the markets to die out; buying had ceased, or nearly so, and the stall-keepers were counting up their profits, calling to the porters to remove empty baskets; whilst the "Hi! hi!" of the market sweepers, who were already busy getting rid of the litter lying about, filled the air. With the emptying of the market-place the very sounds had altered, and Pheidon, leaving the shelter of the booth, stretched himself in the sunshine and glanced about him. Children just released from school had rushed into the Agora, chasing each other, shouting, and picking up odds and ends from under the very brooms of the sweepers; from their playground behind the colonnade of Hermes you could hear their shouts, and as Pheidon listened and looked, the idea for which he had been cudgelling his brains in the Street of the Winds, the idea he had hopelessly sought for, suddenly rose in his mind alive and potent.

He had found out a way of entering the house of Gyges.

True, to put his idea in action, he would have to return to the harbour town, ferret out some bright spirit of his own age to help him, and return to Athens. It would take him more than an hour to reach the Piraeus, and it might take him three hours to find the help he wanted, and more than an hour to return; say six hours altogether, and it was now noon.

He would have to return to the Piraeus at once. Meanwhile, what about Diomed? He had promised to call at the house of Diomed with news of how he had succeeded on his mission. To call with such an unsatisfactory story as he had to tell did not appeal to him. No, he would wait till the matter in hand was accomplished; and with this resolve he was about to turn and make off towards the Piraic Gate, when a hand seized his arm. He turned, and found himself face to face with the Dog-Stealer.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHILDREN'S COURT

HE had scarcely recognised his enemy, when another hand seized his left arm. He turned, and found himself face to face with the snub-nosed boy; somebody struck him on the back, and, twisting his head round, he saw Apollo.

The stall-keeper who was preparing to take down his booth, and who was witness of this dramatic arrest, laughed. There was no help to be got from him: there was no help to be had from any of the grown-up people of the market-place—the children's affairs were the children's affairs, and a quarrel amongst them attracted no more attention than a quarrel amongst a flock of sparrows. To resist was hopeless, for a yell from his captors would have called up hordes of assistants, so he let himself be led like an ox to the slaughter straight across the Agora towards the infernal playground opening by the Colonnade of Hermes. It was his own fault; he might have known there was danger for him in the market-place when the schools were free. But he was much too philosophical to waste time in blaming himself, his whole mind for the moment was engaged on the problem of how to hide the ring on his thumb and how to conceal the drachma in his mouth, should it come to the question of torture.

No sooner had they turned the Colonnade of Hermes than his captors, breaking into a run and dragging him with them, began to yell their triumph. Games ceased, and the players came running to this greater attraction, so that Pheidon in less than half a minute found himself the centre of a solid crowd of children, some yelling "What is it?" and others, better informed, shouting "To the Archons with him! To the Archons!"

Suddenly, and as though silence had been poured over the mob with a ladle, the shouting died down and ceased. The Dog-Stealer had mounted on the back of the snub-nosed one, and from this elevation was addressing the crowd, explaining the situation in language terse, and breathing, and very much to the point. He told how Pheidon, this dog of a harbour town boy, had robbed him and his companions of their tunics, bouncing balls and catapults; but the story he gave it was very different from the story as I have given it, thus bearing out the truism that with one event and two describers of it, you will always get two different descriptions.

The Dog-Stealer, according to his own story, having successfully routed Pheidon and half-a-dozen other boys from the Piraeus, was celebrating the victory with his companions, when the said Pheidon, creeping like a snake

amongst the bushes, had annexed the property in question. He proposed instant punishment, but in this he reckoned without taking into consideration the game-playing instincts of the mob. His words were drowned in a yell, "To the Archons with him! To the Archons!" And, as though some viewless president of games had taken the whole thing into his hands, the crowd split, surged; and in a trice one of the dominant spirits had elected himself to the post of magistrate and taken his seat on a pillar. An old fig-box was fetched to act as hedgehog,^[5] and Pheidon, held on either side by his captors, found himself face to face with the law.

^[5] The box in which the evidence against the accused was sealed to await the trial.

He could have wept. By this he ought to have been clear of the city and speeding on his way to the harbour town; this horrible buffoonery might last an hour, for after the magistrate would surely come the trial before a jury, and after the trial the punishment. He did not care so much about personal chastisement, what terrified him was the thought that these wretches might ruin his plans by imprisoning him in a drain-pipe or locking him up in a cellar. There was no such thing in Athens as imprisonment used for punishment pure and simple; a man was only held in prison to await his trial or his punishment, whatever it might be. Pheidon's dread was that he might be condemned to death, locked up, released after school hours, made to drink some noxious stuff in imitation of hemlock, and then drummed out of the city.

The magisterial trial was in full swing in half a minute, witness after witness shouting his evidence, and a cherub with curly hair busy stuffing the hedgehog with imaginary documents. They had to be quick, for school-time waits for no one, and in the course of ten or twelve minutes Pheidon found himself accused not only of the original offence, but of impiety, arson, and murder, of treason against the State and of having seduced the Dog-Stealer's wife and daughter. Then the hedgehog was closed in pantomime and the whole hundred and twenty or so present formed themselves into a jury. The hedgehog was opened, and the Dog-Stealer, as the chief accuser, then proceeded to make his speech.

Fortunately for Pheidon, the empanelling of the jury and the rest of mumbo-jumbo had taken so long that before his accuser had finished his address the yell of "Time's up!" cut him short. The schools were opening,

and almost before the cry had cut the air Pheidon found himself on the ground, being pummelled by his enemies, whilst the free and independent jury, having danced around the victim, broke, ran and vanished, followed by the snub-nosed one and Apollo. But the Dog-Stealer found himself a prisoner. Pheidon had caught him by the ankle.

He had taken his punishment without crying out, and now, as he held on to his enemy with one hand, he spat the silver drachma into the other.

“Yours,” gasped he, showing the coin, “if you will help me.”

The Dog-Stealer gazed at the coin till his eyes grew as round as O’s.

“Wasting my time,” grumbled Pheidon, struggling to his feet, “playing with children when a man’s work is to be done. Come on—a drachma is worth losing school for—or, if you like, leave it. I have only to run down to the harbour town to get a dozen who will help me to do the business.”

“Who gave it you?” asked the other, who had expended all his animosity against Pheidon in the exercise of drubbing him.

“Who gave me it? One who can give me a handful more.”

He took him by the arm and led him out of the Court of Miracles into the Agora, now nearly deserted. As they went, he explained his project and what had to be done, and by the time they had reached the narrow Street of the Triremes the Dog-Stealer was entirely his.

When they reached the Street of the Flute-Player Pheidon concealed himself by the Apollo of the street, which stood on the left-hand side of Gyges’ doorway; and the Dog-Stealer, having given six great bangs at the knocker, ran away thirty yards or so, and concealed himself behind a house corner.

Pheidon had paid over the drachma, assured from his intuitive knowledge of the other that he would play the game for the love of it.

A minute passed, and then came the stealthy unsliding of the bolts. He heard the door opening and, though he could see nothing, he knew that Bartjas was on the step, looking up and down the street. He heard a grunt of dissatisfaction. The door closed and the bolts were shot.

Several minutes passed, and then the Dog-Stealer’s ugly face appeared peeping round the corner of the house. Pheidon made a sign, and he approached, bare-footed and soundless as a shadow.

He seized the knocker, rapped twice, and vanished like a streak of lightning.

This time the door opened almost immediately, and a bellow like the roar of a bull woke the echoes of the street. Bartjas was cursing in his own

language, and if Pheidon had not been holding his heart with anxiety he would have split with laughter. He heard the door close, but this time his quick ear noticed that the bolts were not slid.

Bartjas, guessing that his tormentor had not finished, was ready to pounce.

This was the moment of moments. If the Dog-Stealer were to fail in courage now, all would be lost. A minute passed without a sign, and then the ugly face reappeared, showed its teeth in a grin, and the body belonging to it came into view.

He knew by the instinct that God has given to boys the condition of mind of Bartjas. He knew just as well as Pheidon that Bartjas was now standing all ready to pounce, and the fearful pleasure of the knowledge made his ribs stick out as he drew a deep breath, paused, flashed towards the door, banged at the knocker, and bolted.

The ruse was wildly successful. Bartjas, armed with a stick that would have felled an ox, burst from the house like a tornado, saw the flying figure, and followed it, whilst Pheidon, slipping from the shelter of the Apollo of the street, made for the unguarded doorway and entered the house.

He passed the porter's lodge and found himself in the courtyard, saw the doors of the colonnade on the left, made for the nearest door, opened it, closed it behind him, and found himself alone, in a room with a corpse.

Upon a bier, laid out and ready for burial, lay the body of Barejas. The authorities had been notified of the death of the slave and Bartjas had testified that no foul play had occurred; she would be buried in the slaves' burial-ground outside the Piraic Gate; and she lay now, a terrific figure, huge, bloated, with thick lips puffed out and eyes wide open and staring at the ceiling.

Pheidon, at the sight of this monstrosity, cried out, clapped his hand to his mouth, and turning ran from the room. He saw the door leading to the women's quarters and made for it, and was in the act of opening it, when a shout from behind told him that Bartjas had returned and had caught sight of him.

In a moment he was through the door, which he slammed behind him, and making for the door which led to the women's rooms; he tried to open it and failed. It was tightly shut, and he had no time to seek for means of undoing it.

He glanced around him. There was no other door or means of exit, nothing to catch the eye but the circular fountain basin in the middle of the tiled floor, and as Bartjas, stick in hand, made his appearance, Pheidon, more

by instinct than by reason, put the fountain basin between himself and his pursuer. Bartjas was frightful to look at, for, though he had suppressed his anger, it was there alive and glowing; his face, still swollen from excitement, had taken on a fixed expression; he breathed short, scarcely glanced at the boy, and, bending down, picked up a wedge of wood that was lying fastened to a string by the door.

It was the wedge which, driven under the door, kept the door tightly closed, and which Nitetis had forgotten to insert in its proper place on that fateful day when Diomed had caught her in the act of bathing.

Bartjas inserted the wedge and drove it home with a blow of his stick; then he stood up. Pheidon was now entirely in his power, every outlet from the place was closed, and the Egyptian, shooting out his lips, bending so that his back became arched and straightening himself like a released bow, made for his prey with a whistling intake of breath more terrible in its ferocity than the wildest cry.

He chased him round the fountain basin; and had Pheidon, losing his head, left the protection of that magic circle, he would have been caught; he clung to it, and Bartjas found himself in the position of a boar chasing a cat round a tree. He could not turn as quickly as the boy, and realising it, he dashed through the water at him; but when he reached half-way across Pheidon was behind him; the water was two feet deep, the raised rim of the basin was a foot high; just these two obstacles stood between Pheidon and the wrath of Bartjas, and as long as the boy's breath and energy lasted they would remain.

Bartjas saw this, flung up his arm and sent his stick flying at the boy.

It caught him across the ribs, almost breaking his sternum and felling him as though he had been swept down by a scythe, and the next moment the Egyptian was on him like a great mad cat, choking him and attempting to beat his head upon the floor. Pheidon, half strangled and nearly senseless, managed to twist side-ways every time the other made this attempt, so that his shoulder broke the force of the impact, but he was weakening and nearing his end, for the ferocious nature of Bartjas, pent up by years of servitude, had broken loose; he was no longer a man but an automaton, the lust of killing was on him, and, furious at the resistance and mad to end it, he loosed his hold upon his victim's neck, seized him by the arms and, dragging him to the fountain basin, plunged his head beneath the water and held it there. He would hide the body in the women's quarters and fling it into the street at dark, or, better still, down the disused well which opened off the passage leading from the side door.

A few bubbles rose to the surface, but the drowning one made no struggle at all; fortunately for himself and unknown to Bartjas, he had lost consciousness as he was being dragged along the floor.

Bartjas held the head patiently down, gazing at the bubbles rising and breaking on the water's surface; the boy was an Athenian.

Athenian boys had shouted after Bartjas in the street, sneering at his colour and his face. Athenian citizens had flouted him; the hatred of Hades was in his heart against everything Athenian.

Here was one, at least, to pay the debt, with no one to see the payment.

Suddenly, loud on the stillness of the house and waking the echoes, came three strokes upon the closed door, given with a stick, followed by a voice crying. "Ho there! Bartjas!"

CHAPTER V

THE COMPACT

THE murderer, dragging the body on to the pavement, squatted beside it. The tiger-cat had vanished, the slave only remained. He remembered now, too late, that he had forgotten to close the street door. Returning, filled with rage from his unsuccessful pursuit of the Dog-Stealer, he had caught a glimpse of Pheidon, and had forgotten everything else.

Again came the stroke of the stick and the voice. He knew it now. It was the voice of Pasion, his master's patron. Freed at once from his terror, he sprang to his feet.

"I come! I come! A moment till I open the door."

He extracted the wedge, opened the door, and would have pushed his way out and closed it behind him, but Pasion, whose suspicions were aroused, peeped over his shoulder, caught sight of the figure on the floor and the water splashed around, and laid his hand on the other's arm.

Before he could speak, Bartjas turned and pointed to the body.

"A nice thing, truly! This scamp came twice to-day prowling about the house; once with a basket of fish, which he pretended to be a present for my master, and again with a companion, who allured me into the street whilst this one crept in. I chased him and he fell into the water, and so angry was I that I held his head under to cool him."

"By Zeus," said Pasion, who had now entered the women's courtyard, "he looks cool enough. He is dead!" He came to the body of Pheidon and touched it with his foot.

"He got into the house, you say? Why, he is too young to be a robber."

Catching sight of the ring on the boy's thumb, he went down on one knee, raised the hand, and looked at the ring.

"Why, this is the ring of Diomed, or I am a blind man. I have seen it twenty times. Diomed! Ah, it's easy to be seen on what message he came here."

He paused, and placed his hand on Pheidon's heart, and felt a slight movement.

"No, he is not dead."

Bartjas looked on. His rage had expended itself like a tropical storm. If he had not killed Pheidon, at least he had had all the pleasure of doing so.

“His heart beats. Get him on his belly so that the water may run from him, rub his limbs, and when he is able to speak get his story from him. He must not see me. I will wait in the outer courtyard. Come, get to work.”

Pasion turned and left the place, closing the door, and Bartjas, kneeling down beside the boy, turned him over on his face, rocked him from side to side, and chafed his limbs. Then he turned him over on to his back and rubbed his stomach, pressing upon the ribs every now and then.

In the course of a few minutes Pheidon, who had swallowed scarcely any water owing to the fact of his being unconscious when submerged, drew a deep breath, opened his eyes, and stared at Bartjas, who was now sitting back on his heels, satisfied that further effort was unnecessary.

The instant that Pheidon recognised the other he made a movement as if to get on his feet, but Bartjas pressed him back.

“You need not fear,” said he. “I will not touch you any more; you have had your dressing, and you will remember not to play with Bartjas again. Come, now that you have got your mind back, answer me; what did you come here for?”

Pheidon did not reply for a moment. Then, as his mind cleared, and he saw that he had been entirely at the mercy of the other without being killed, he lost the fear of Bartjas and remembered Diomed’s business. He raised himself on his elbow, but lay down again immediately; the place seemed revolving round him like a wheel.

Bartjas sprinkled him with water.

“Come, speak; what was your business here?”

Then Pheidon began to speak, and as he spoke the dizziness left him, as if driven away by the sound of his voice.

He raised himself again on his elbow.

“I came to speak to you from one who would make you rich. You would not hear me.”

“I hear you now. Come, speak; we are alone. Who is the person who would enrich me, and what does he ask of me?”

For a moment Pheidon said nothing. He was trying to consider in his mind the wisdom of telling about Diomed’s offer; but he had embarked on the business, and was too confused and weak to find an excuse for drawing back.

“One who would offer you a large sum to do what he asks you.”

“And that?”

“It is simple. He only asks you to open the side door of this house to him to-night after dark.”

“And his name?”

“He offers to fill your hands with silver.”

“But his name?”

“His name is Diomed, the son of Diomed, and he lives in the Street of the Temple of Dionysus. See, this is his ring. He told me to show you it as a token that he will keep his promise.”

Bartjas looked at the ring as though he had seen it for the first time.

“But what does he need here that the door should be opened to him?”

“Your master has a daughter.”

“Ah,” said Bartjas; “’tis simple to see his meaning. I will consider.”

He rose up and went out, shutting the door and drawing a bolt on the outside.

Pheidon, left to himself, turned on his stomach and held his head between his hands. He was thinking less of Diomed than his own position. The vision of the dead woman rose up before him. He was trapped in this place, and utterly at the mercy of the people there. What would be the result of having told Bartjas this secret? Then his mind wandered over the most trivial things. He called up the face of the Dog-Stealer peeping round the corner; he remembered the silver drachma he had given his accomplice, and wondered how he was spending it. Then he listened.

There was not a sound. The house seemed the abode of silence—silence masked and armed, and ready to lay.

Five minutes passed; and then, without any sound of approaching footsteps, the bolt of the door was pushed back, the door opened, and Bartjas appeared.

CHAPTER VI

THE SALE OF THE GEMS

ALMOST at this moment Diomed, in that room where we have seen him banqueting with Moschion, Nicias, and Niceratus, was making the sacrifice of his life. Though it was full day, the lamps were lit, and on the long, low table of polished thya-wood half-a-dozen cases were lying, spread open and exposing to the lamplight the gems that they contained. Exquisite intaglios; sards, sapphires, cornelians; stones, jet-black by reflected, honey-coloured by transmitted, light, and every stone a revelation of art.

On a low chair drawn up by the table was seated Demades, jeweller, money-lender, and art critic; an old man with a white forked beard, veined and trembling hands, and an eye still brilliant with youth.

On a chair opposite to that of Demades, Diomed was seated. He had a bored and listless air, and he seemed to be paying more attention to his favourite dog, which was curled up at his feet, than to the old man seated in the chair opposite to him.

Demades was equally oblivious to the presence of the other. He was examining the last of the gems, or rather, re-examining them. He was here on business. Diomed, on returning from the Piraeus, had sent for him. Demades was the only man in Athens who could buy such a collection and pay ready cash for it. There were richer men by the score, but in this line none who would not have taken days to consider the matter, called in appraisers to help them to decide, and published the matter broadcast on the Agora.

Diomed not only wanted a large sum of money for the plans he had in view, but he wanted it promptly, and he wanted the affair kept secret. The sale of his jewels was a blow to his pride. More than that, he loved these things; their beauty was his chief treasure, and the parting with them was a little death.

Yet to look at him, as he sat there, one might have fancied him quite unconcerned.

Demades, having replaced the last of the gems, ran his fingers through his beard, murmured to himself as though he were making some calculation in his mind, and then said:

“Eight thousand drachmae—and at that price I am robbing myself.”

“I do not part with them for less than ten thousand drachmae,” replied Diomed. “I mentioned that price to you as the least I would take. Come

“True,” replied Demades; “and knowing the gems and their worth, I collected all my resources, eight thousand drachmae. Even now my slave, waiting there in your courtyard, has the sum in gold and silver coins. It is a fortune.”

At this moment a slave appeared with the announcement that Hippias had called and was waiting outside.

“Let him come in,” said Diomed.

“Eight thousand drachmae,” repeated the old man in his level, monotonous voice; “and at that price I am robbing myself.”

“Ah, Hippias,” said Diomed as the painter made his appearance at the doorway; “come in. You are in time to see a strange sight. Here is Demades robbing himself!”

Hippias glanced at the gems and the figure of the old man without understanding.

“It is true,” went on Diomed. “He is about to do to himself what he has been doing all his life to others.” Then, turning to Demades, “Bring in your slave and complete the business. I wish to talk to my friend, and I pay you two thousand drachmae for the privilege.”

Demades, delighted with the insults, could scarcely close the cases for the tremor of his hands. Good though the bargain was, his love-hunger for the gems was greater even than his business instincts; he could have kissed each one of them.

Having piled the cases one on top of the other, he called in the slave who was carrying the money-bags, and began to count out the sum in gold and silver. He would have counted it coin by coin, but Diomed, who knew his man and the fact that, though he was a swindler in driving a bargain, he was rectitude itself in carrying out the terms, stopped him, took the money-bags one by one, placed them in a cupboard of the wall, sealed it, and then, glancing at the formal receipt which Demades had brought, accepted it.

The slave carried the cases out and Demades prepared to follow them.

“Should you care to part with any of your statuary— —”

“I will remember you,” said Diomed.

Then, as the old man went out, Diomed turned to Hippias.

“So, you see, Hippias, I have sold my gems; it is my first preparation for that journey to my country house which perhaps I shall never make.”

“I do not know what affects me,” said Hippias, “but it is as though some one had cast a black veil upon my soul.”

“And upon mine. Those gems of my fathers have carried away with them something from me. I have seen acquaintances fall away and friends turn cold; I am surrounded with coldness, whereas once I was surrounded with warmth; but I have not felt the chill till now. Yet it was necessary for me to sell them; not only had I to find money for the plan about which I have to tell you, but I have tradesmen to satisfy.”

Scarcely had he completed the words than a slave entered, announcing Gorgias the jeweller. Gorgias came behind the slave, and was holding on to his robe; the slave had a startled look.

Diomed very rarely betrayed emotion, but when he saw the obese Gorgias entering in this fashion and absolutely pushing the slave before him, his eyebrows drew together, his nostrils spread, and, rising from his chair, he took one step forward towards the unfortunate slave, addressing him and absolutely ignoring the other.

“Who is this that you have allowed to enter in such a fashion?”

“Master,” said the slave, “he seized me like this and drove me before him.”

“He speaks the truth,” said Gorgias. “I am weary of calling for my account and receiving no answer but ‘My master is from home.’ Come, you are at least at home now, and my account is a thousand drachmae.”

“Ah,” said Diomed, “it seems that I owe you a thousand drachmae? Well, come here.” He unsealed and opened the cupboard, beckoned Gorgias to approach and, taking out a bag of gold, handed it to him.

“There is your money. Look, see, all these bags are filled with silver and gold, yet you come to me with your pitiful account and force yourself into my presence, tradesman that you are! Look at the money-bags; feast your eyes on them; smell them!” In a flash he seized Gorgias by the neck, thrust his head into the cupboard, and rubbed his nose on the bags. The jeweller cried out, struggled, broke free from his captor, and ran from the room, his nose streaming blood.

Diomed laughed. “By Zeus,” cried he, “but it was worth the sale of the gems to do that.”

But Hippias, who had risen from his seat too late to interfere, shook his head.

“You have only made another enemy. And look! He has gone off with your money, yet he has given you no receipt.”

“At least he has left his seal,” said Diomed, pointing to a spot of blood on the floor.

Before Hippias could reply the slave, who had followed Gorgias out, returned.

“Master,” said the slave, “the boy you spoke of has arrived.”

“Ah!” said Diomed. “Pheidon. Leave us; I will call the boy in myself.”

The slave vanished, and Diomed, turning to Hippias, told him, in a few words, of Gyges, of the girl, and of Pheidon’s mission. Hippias listened, and as he listened his face grew longer. Diomed’s affairs had been troubling him ever since his wife had opened his eyes to the difficulties and dangers that beset his friend, and now on the top of these came this new thing.

The unfortunate Hippias, who in worldly matters was helpless as a child, could formulate no argument against the vehement declaration of his friend; he could only clasp his head and wish that his wife were by him to do the talking.

“But is it wise? No, it is not wise. I see danger in this.”

“I see only the danger of failing. I do not even know yet what success the boy has had. I almost fear to meet him. Wait.”

Diomed went out, and in a moment returned, followed by Pheidon.

CHAPTER VII

SUCCESS

DIOMED'S face was flushed and his eyes were sparkling.

"Success!" he cried to Hippias. "Here is her messenger. Bow before him."

He pushed Pheidon towards one of the chairs and bade him take his seat and tell his tale, whilst, taking his own seat in the chair beside which Hippias was standing, he clasped Hippias round the body just as a beautiful woman might clasp an ugly dowager. It was as though he wished to hold Hippias' ear to the tale that Pheidon had to tell.

Pheidon had only just recovered his breath. He had run all the way from the house of Gyges, and the wild events of the day had made such a turmoil in his mind that he struck into his story at the point where the Dog-Stealer and he had inveigled Bartjas from the house, quite forgetting to tell of his first visit and of the fingers that had appeared at the opening in the shutters.

He told of the dead woman he had seen, of how Bartjas had chased him and almost drowned him, and of how at last, getting the ear of the Egyptian, he had told him of Diomed's proposal.

"He left me," said Pheidon, "and then he came back and said to me, 'Tell Diomed, the son of Diomed, that Bartjas will do as he wishes; the door shall be open to-night from full dark to dawn. He has only to press upon it and it will yield to him.'"

"And his payment?" said Diomed. "Did you promise him that?"

"I told him you would fill his hands with silver; and he said, 'I will call secretly to-morrow at the house of Diomed; his promise to pay me is as good as a written bond. Ask him to let the money be ready for me when I call.'"

"That it shall," said Diomed; "and though I may be far from here when he comes, I will place the money in your hands, Hippias, to give him." He went to the cupboard in the wall, took a bag of silver from it, weighed it in his hand, and approached Pheidon.

"So much for Bartjas; and now for you. You have served me as a friend; friend, take your reward, though my thanks you could never carry away—they are so great."

"Heu!" said Pheidon, looking at the bag of silver. "Why, if I were to go home with that thing in my hand my father would turn me from the house. He would say, 'Who have you been robbing?' No, pay me for the fish a

drachma and return me the drachma I earned and which I paid the Dog-Stealer— —”

Diomed opened the bag and took out two drachmae, which he handed to Pheidon, who promptly put them into his mouth.

“Let it be so,” said Diomed. “There are things for which one cannot pay, and it seems to me they are always the best things in life. Come; no slave shall open the door for you to let you out.” He led the way from the room and presently returned.

Hippias, who had taken his seat in one of the chairs, seemed plunged in thoughts of a gloomy nature. Diomed struck him on the shoulder in a light-hearted manner, and Hippias looked up.

“I do not like this,” said Hippias. “I do not know at all what is the matter with me. It is as though some voice were whispering to me that should you go out to-night, should you go to this house, something terrible will befall you.”

“My friend,” said Diomed, “nothing more terrible could befall me than that which befell me last night. I have only one fear.”

“And that?”

“Is the fear that the door may be closed.”

“Alas!” said Hippias, “it may be opened to you only that you may enter and find death.”

“I would sooner that than it should be closed, leaving me outside with despair.”

“Remember that dead woman of whom the boy spoke. In a house where such happenings occur may not one find something even worse than death?”

“The question remains to be proved.”

“You are determined, then?”

“I am determined.”

“Have you any plan other than what you have told me?”

“Oh, yes; I have a plan. Do you think, once having touched her again, I would leave her in that accursed house in that accursed street? Hippias, I have told you how that street has always been evil to me. It has shown me, now, all I desire in life, yet it would withhold it from me.”

“So does Fate.”

“It is Fate; yet am I not a living man, and should I fear a dead thing made of stone?”

“If it is as you say, be warned. You have money; you are free. Leave Athens, and leave your friends to work for you with Gyges.”

“And leave her? Not if the street were to fall on me to-night when I enter it.”

“But this plan you spoke of?”

“I shall take her away. The door that lets me in will let us both out. Xanthias shall follow me with a horse and be in waiting for me in the Street of the Winds. Before dawn we will be at my country house, but we will not stay there long. I shall press on, even to Thebes, where I have friends who will shelter me till the storm has blown over.”

“How will you pass the gates to-night, you on a horse and with a woman before you?”

“I have a silver key for the Acharnian Gate.”

“Will you take a slave?”

“I will take Xanthias. He will carry my money, and, should anything happen to my horse, I can take his.”

Hippias considered this plan for a moment, and brightened. A consuming desire possessed him to get Diomed away from Athens; leaving aside the warnings of his wife, the instinct of the faithful told him of the storm that was gathering about his friend. This plan, mad though it seemed, might after all prove his salvation.

“Come,” said Diomed, “let us go into the courtyard. You will dine with me; and at dark you will watch my departure, so that I will carry with me the last good wishes of a good and faithful friend.”

The mellow light of late afternoon filled the courtyard, and as Diomed entered it the great cage of little birds set up a rustling and whispering and chattering. Hated by Athens, yet loved by a cage of little birds, Diomed, for a moment heedless of hatred or love, stood in the colonnade breathing in the fresh air, almost one might say, the golden light.

CHAPTER VIII

THE OPEN DOOR

THREE hours later, Diomed and Hippias, reclining at the table in the banqueting-room, were drinking a last cup together.

Hippias was fuddled. Temperate, as a rule, and rarely depressed, Hippias, to-night, had taken shelter from Depression under the leaves of the vine. His face was flushed and his eyes were fixed, and when the slave entered with the announcement that Xanthias and the horses were ready, Diomed had to repeat the words to him before he understood.

"Ah, then, you are going?" said Hippias, rising up. "Good. I will go with you. I can at least wait with the horses."

"You will go home," said Diomed. "Wait there for me, and, should I need you, I will send. You would spoil all if you were to follow me. Hippias, my friend, you are drunk."

Hippias spread out the fingers of his right hand, and looked at them as though questioning them.

"Drunk? Well, let it be so. I am drunk. But I will not go home; I will go to the house of a friend. It is easy to be seen that I am not wanted here."

"You are always wanted and welcome here, drunk or sober; but you will spoil my plans if you come with me. Be reasonable."

"Be reasonable!" said Hippias, with the strange logic of intoxication. "How can I if I am drunk?"

"Then be unreasonable, and do not follow me, and so, by the sacrifice of your reason, you will help my plans."

"I would sacrifice anything for you."

"Then come to the door and see me off."

Hippias, who, despite his mental obfuscation, could walk quite straight, followed Diomed to the door.

In the street Xanthias, holding two horses by the bridle, was waiting for his master. Dark was just closing upon the city, and the stars, like the points of silver needles, were just piercing the sky.

Hippias, confused, oppressed, held from following by some tie which he knew not, some request which he had forgotten, saw Diomed, the horses and Xanthias passing away down the street; half an hour later he appeared at a friend's house, where, finding a dinner-party in progress, he joined in the

symposium and, bounding from the depths of vinous gloom to the heights, talked brilliantly, but with absolute unconsciousness of what he said.

At midnight, Hippias, the most intoxicated man in Athens, was dropped by a number of good friends at his door, where the porter received him—and his wife.

Meanwhile, Diomed, followed by the slave leading the horses, made his way to his destination. At the corner of the Street of the Temple of Dionysus he paused, gave orders to Xanthias to follow at a greater distance, and then walked on, passing through the western section of the Street of the Tripods, the narrow Street of the Triremes, to the Street of the Winds. A hundred yards from the opening of the Street of the Flute-Player he stopped and waited for the slave and the horses.

There were few people about; the fine night had emptied this business street, and men had taken themselves off to the broad and gay Street of the Tripods, or to the plaza where the Street of the Sculptors of Hermes ended at the entrance to the Acropolis.

Diomed, having spoken a few words to Xanthias, ran his hand over the horses' legs, and examined the money-bags strapped to the horse of the slave; then he paused for a moment in thought.

He had forgotten nothing. The bag of silver containing Bartjas' payment he had entrusted to a slave, giving him instructions to take it to the house of Hippias. He had arranged with Hippias at dinner about the settlement of Bartjas. He had forgotten nothing, and turning, followed by Xanthias leading the horses, he led the way to the opening of the Street of the Flute-Player.

Here he stopped, gave his last instructions to the slave, and entered the street.

It was the moment of darkness just before the rising of the moon, and the house walls were scarcely discernible in the faint light of the brightening stars; he passed the fountain and heard the sound of its unseen waters; then he paused in indecision.

Where was the door?

By a common trick of obscurity the darkness of the street had deluded him; he had not reached the house of the Metic, yet it seemed to him, now, that he had passed it; he tried back, and the fountain water, brought within ear-touch again, seemed laughing at him. Then he went forward.

Here was the door.

It had been playing hide-and-seek with him, evading him in the gloom as if to prolong his anxiety and torment, and, as he ran his fingers over the

panelling, so personal a thing had it become that he scarcely dared press on it, lest he should discover that it had played another trick upon him.

He pressed, and it yielded. It moved on its hinges without a sound; from an enemy it had become a silent confederate, and, slipping through whilst it was yet but half-open, he closed it gently behind him, leaving himself in the darkness of the pit.

On his right his hand touched the cold stone wall of the passage, and, stretching out his left hand, he touched the other wall. Then he began softly to advance towards the steps down which he had been led by the Nubian woman. He wore shoes of soft leather and walked as soundlessly as though he were bare-foot, yet he paused every moment and listened as if he dreaded that his footfall might awaken the silent house. There was something disturbing and inimical in the black darkness before him, and as he ascended the steps it was as though he were pushing his way against some hand that was pressing him back. In the passage above he paused, held his breath, listened, and then began feeling along the left-hand wall for the door of the room he knew. He found it, and as his fingers touched it he felt it yield. In a moment he was in the room.

Full daylight could not have made him more certain that it was her room than the scent of champak that clung to the place, so faint as to be almost imperceptible, yet so thrilling, so overpowering, that for a moment he stood half-stifled, unable to move. The perfume of her hair, her body, her breath, came to him by association with the champak; like a rose blossoming in the dark, she told him of her presence by her sweetness. He took a step forward and his knee touched the bed; he fancied that he heard her breathing in her sleep, bent, stretched out his arms, sought for her, and found—nothing.

As he bent, suddenly, sharp as a blow, hard and fierce with energy, came the sound of a bolt being shot; immediately on the first came a second and similar sound, and Diomed, springing towards the place from whence it came, struck himself against the door. He tried to open it; it was fastened.

He was on the point of crying out, but he checked himself.

He listened. Not a sound. Then he passed his hand over the door, seeking for some projection so that he might try his strength against the bolts. There was none. The door from the inside was fastened by the device of the wedge, from the outside by bolts. He turned, and as he turned something breaking the darkness caught his eye. It was the first rays of the rising moon at the opening in the shutters through which Pheidon had seen appear the little imploring fingers of Nitetis. Baulked, trapped, and betrayed, Diomed, searching for the bed, found it and sat down upon it.

Even as he did so, a noise came from the street outside. He heard the cry “Robbers!” he heard the sounds of feet running; a red glare shot through the shutter chink—it was the light of torches. He knew quite well what was happening. In a few seconds the door would burst open, and the Scythian police enter to arrest the man who had broken into the house of Gyges. As he listened the noise increased; the street that had slept so many years in tranquil obscurity seemed suddenly to have flung off its cloak of disguise, dropped its mask of silence, and proclaimed itself the assassin it was.

He listened, and heard, and scarcely heeded. Then, turning, he plunged his face amidst the pillows of the bed, kissed them, bit them, and drank in their perfume; heedless of Gyges, or life, or death, or shame, or earth, or anything on earth but the passion that devoured him.

CHAPTER IX

PASICLEA

THE house of Hippias in the Street of Apollo was small and unpretentious, yet famous in its way. Ictinus had lived here.

Athens, like every other city in the world, suffered from that strange disease—the decay of streets, the decadence of quarters. Twenty years ago the Street of Apollo had been one of the most famous streets in Athens, but to-day it had fallen into desuetude. The condition of the roadway was as bad, almost, as that in the Street of the Wines or any of those narrow business streets whose dirt and disorder were a disgrace to this, the centre of the world's civilisation. Slops were flung from windows, and the roadway was a common midden for the rubbish from the houses. You took your way delicately, with one eye on the pavement and one eye upwards, till you came to a clear space before a clean-looking house, and thanked the gods that there was at least one housewife in Athens who had a respect for the passers-by, and knew, if you were an Athenian, that she was Pasiclea, the wife of Hippias. The most untidy man in Athens had the tidiest wife, and a house whose tidiness, like the rays of a lamp, shone even into the roadway.

Pasiclea was of a type frequently met with to-day, but historical and always existing, the type of the clever woman with a mind of her own and a capacity for affairs. Tall, middle-aged, with traces of beauty; always dressed in the latest fashion; not disdaining to show an incompetent slave how to wash a dish, and quite capable of breaking it over his head to cure him of stupidity or insolence; this lady, tied down by the necessities and conventions of Athenian life, found many outlets for her energy. The seclusion of Athenian women in their own houses was the result of convention arising from the bad policing of the streets. The street in Athens was considered not the place for a woman, even if she were attended by a slave. In pre-Periclean days this idea was fully justified, but even to-day, when no man ever appeared in the Agora or street with arms in his hand or by his side, the convention clung to society, as only convention can cling.

Pasiclea, however, was not the person to be tied beyond reason by convention; she visited her friends, and as often as not went out unattended. These friends of Pasiclea, married women all of them, were the victims of a worse convention than that which ruled exclusion from the street. Daughters condemned to a narrow lot, they were supposed to have no interest in life other than their household affairs and their children; yet it would be wrong

to suppose that they had no hunger for the life beyond their house walls, no ears to hear, and no tongues to tell of what they heard.

It was from the wife of Niceratus—the eternal talker—that Pasiclea first had wind of Diomed's falling fortune; it was from the wife of Aeschines, whose porter was a friend of Xanthias, the slave of Diomed, that she learned of Cleon's dismissal, and the fact that Cleon had been engaged by Pasion. From the wife of Pasion, a mindless creature with a ready tongue, she had learned a great deal; and more from her guardian, Archilochus—for every Athenian woman, no matter how long married, had her guardian, either father, son, or nearest male relative—a true Agora man who knew everything about everybody and their affairs.

This morning, very late, that is to say towards noon, Pasiclea, having arranged her household matters, ordered the dinner, cuffed Pyrrhias, a red-headed slave, for breaking a wine-jar; touched her cheek with a spot of rouge and glanced at her hair in a mirror; opened the door of the women's quarters, and came into the domain of Hippias.

The unfortunate artist was seated sunning himself in a chair; before him, propped against one of the pillars of the colonnade on the right, stood a panel picture nearly completed. It represented Silenus followed by dancing satyrs. Hippias' hair was tousled, and his face bore striking evidence of the debauch of the night before. This happy and innocent soul was never intended for the evil companionship of Drunkenness, who, when she seized him, used him terribly.

Pasiclea, catching sight of the dejected one, suppressed a smile; she floated towards him, walking divinely, her tall, graceful figure looking even taller and more graceful in its robe, of which every fold seemed an expression of the grace half seen beneath.

Her hair, ebony-black, and showing scarcely a thread of silver, was worn simply, drawn back, rippled as if blown by a wind, and confined in a knot; a huge, graceful ebony knot speaking of her richness in this, a woman's greatest wealth.

But, ah! the years! the sorrow of all this grace, living still, but speaking only one language now, the language that possesses only nine words, only one sentence: "You should have seen me when I was twenty!"

To Hippias this morning she was still eighteen, despite the fact that he recognised her age, and sometimes made jokes about the rouge-pot; still eighteen to his heart if not to his understanding, and he himself unworthy of her, a pig who had wallowed in the wine-trough as well as drinking from it.

He expected a scolding.

“Well,” said Pasiclea, “how are you after your fine doings last night?”

“Bad,” said Hippias.

Pasiclea turned to the picture to hide her mirth.

“So, you have not done with Silenus even yet, and the hairy-legged ones running after him! Why, ’tis you to the life. Could you have but seen yourself with the moon on your face, calling for wine like a full wine-skin crying ‘Fill me!’ Fie!—and your companions, the satyrs, they clung about the door even after you were brought in, like bees to a hive, banging at the knocker till I emptied a pot of water on them; and none too clean water, I’ll warrant you. Nice doings at your time of life!” She turned the picture face to the pillar, contemplated the debauchee, suppressed her laughter by a violent effort, and then floated off.

In a moment she returned with a cup of wine and water—half-and-half—in one hand, and a comb in the other.

“Come, drink this up, and put on a more cheerful face. Oh, what a head! To think that I should have married it!” As Hippias drank his wine she combed his locks. The scolding was over, and the poison of the dog that had bitten him was succumbing to the alchemy of the hair.

“And who were you with, may I ask, when you fell in with these rowdy ones?”

“Aïe,” said Hippias, “it was not they that led me to it; I dined with Diomed, and drank too much, so that I might forget. He was in great trouble. Stay your hand; you are pulling my hair out by the roots. Zeus! you know how tender my skull is.”

“I know how thick it is. Well, what was this trouble?”

“What trouble?”

“This trouble of your friend Diomed’s.”

“Oh, that! He had to sell his gems. He sold them for eight thousand drachmae, and, behold, scarcely had the buyer gone, than in walked a jeweller with his bill, as impudent as brass—pushed his way in. It is easy to be seen that Diomed is lost when the tradespeople treat him so.”

“And what did Diomed do?”

“Paid him, and then caught him by the neck and thrust his head into the cupboard full of money-bags, and rubbed his nose on them till it bled.”

Pasiclea, in delight, gave such a rap with the combback on her husband’s head that the unfortunate jumped in his chair.

“Would that I had been there to see! And then?”

“And then we had dinner. Diomed was very sad; the things he had sold seemed to haunt him. Yes, he was very sad, and that is what made me drink. He spoke of his father, to whom they had belonged, and of his mother, whom he scarcely remembered.” Hippias looked up at the sky, and then wiped his cheek. “I felt a spot of rain, though the sky is clear enough. What does that portend?”

“A tear for Diomed,” said the woman, gently running the comb through the now smooth hair. “And did you advise him to leave Athens, as I told you to?”

“Oh, as for that, he has left Athens.”

“Left Athens!”

“Alas! I do not know—I hope so. It was a desperate venture, and I do not know yet how it has turned out. I have passed the morning waiting for news of him.”

“A desperate venture! What do you mean?”

“True,” said Hippias. “I forgot to tell you of the girl.”

“The girl! What girl?”

“The daughter of Gyges, whom he loves.”

“Whom he loves?”

“Ay, and whom he carried off last night to Thebes. She is the daughter of Gyges the banker, and lives in the Street of the Flute-Player. If all went well with him he ought now to be safe and beyond pursuit. Have you finished with the comb? Why, what ails you?”

“I am laughing. There, ’tis over. Bend your head that I may get the comb beneath the hair. When did you go to the barber’s last?”

“I do not remember.”

“Did you ever see her?”

“Whom?”

“Whom? Why, this daughter of Gyges.”

“Never. But she is very beautiful.”

“How do you know *that*?”

“Diomed told me.”

“How old is she?”

“Very young—almost a child—and very beautiful. His description of her made me long to have her before me so that I might paint her— —”

“So that you might paint her! You have lied to me—you have seen her—you speak as though you loved her. You love her! Oh, brutes that men are!”

Brute! Brute! Brute!”

She had twisted her hand in his hair, and at every repetition of the word she gave such a tug and twist combined that the vicarious sufferer cried out with the short, sharp cry of a dog that is being beaten.

Then she released him and fled away towards the women's quarters, a tempest of grief and anger.

Hippias, who had been nursing the wine-cup on his knee, and who had dropped it, stared at the fragments and then rubbed his aching head. What on earth had he done! If she had pulled his hair for being drunk he could have understood it, but on account of this girl whom he had never even seen! He rose to his feet and began to walk up and down. He felt angry. Injustice always made him angry. He talked to the pillars of the colonnades as he passed them, stopping with hand out, after the fashion of an orator addressing the Assembly.

“But what have I done? In the name of Apollo, I ask you what have I done? And what are women? Tell me that. To accuse me of such a thing, at my age, and with a face like mine! Not that I am so very old, nor have I lost my activity, but I am not that sort of man. Surely she ought to know.”

In the midst of all this the door reopened and the storm reappeared, transfigured to a calm. It swept across the courtyard, seized Hippias' head, caressed it, and led him back to the chair.

“It is I who am wrong—wicked. Aïe, aïe, aïe! I have treated you badly, you who are the best. I have told you I suspected you, you who were never suspicious of me—the best husband in Athens. Would that I were as good as you. Aïe, aïe, aïe!”

He pressed her into the chair, where she rocked and sobbed whilst he comforted her, wondering what on earth had happened to her that morning. First a storm of anger, then a glacial calm, then a storm of tears. He tried to get her away from herself by caresses and mild jests.

“At my age do you think I would run after girls? When I was twenty—ho, ho!—that was a different matter. Did I ever tell you of the girl from Ægina who was once my model? Zeus!” He rubbed his face where she had smacked him, laughed, and went on: “And as for this girl of Diomed's— —”

“Do not speak of her,” said the woman harshly. “The daughter of an alien; and to carry her off! Why, if he were caught— —”

“Ay,” said Hippias, “that is what troubles me; for I do not know in the least if he succeeded in his plan. I told him, if he were in trouble, to send for me; but no message has come.”

“Ah!” said Pasiclea. “Why did you not tell me that? If he has not sent for you, who knows what has happened?”

“I shall go to his house and see if there is news,” said Hippias.

“Go, then, and go quickly; for my heart tells me — —”

“What?”

“I do not know; but some evil shade seems to have entered the courtyard since you told me this. Go, and bring me back word; for the welfare of Diomed is to me as the welfare of a brother.”

“And to me,” said Hippias.

He left her and went to his room and put on a pair of red boots, cast off his tunic and wrapped himself in an *himation*, took his stick and returned to the courtyard.

When Pasiclea saw the boots she began to laugh in a mirthless way.

“What ails you now?”

“Why, to what festivity do you suppose you are going?”

Hippias glanced down at the boots.

“Surely I must be distraught! I would have sworn that I put on my sandals. Stay—I will change them.”

But, before he could turn to go back to his room, she had taken him by the arm and was leading him to the hall door.

“Boots or sandals, what does it matter! Go; for time flies so swiftly that, once lost, you never can catch him. Go, and return.”

She opened the door for him herself, and watched him picking his way down the street in his marvellous boots.

She would not have cared for him at all perhaps had he not been so forgetful and untidy—she who hated untidiness.

CHAPTER X

THE TRAP LAID BARE

AT the corner of the Street of the Triremes he met a friend returning from the Agora.

"Hullo, Hippias!" cried the friend. "Have you heard about Diomed?"

"Diomed! What about him?"

"Why, 'tis all over Athens. He has been arrested—"

"Arrested!"

"Last night."

"What for?"

"What for? Why, robbing his banker, Gyges—Hi!"

But Hippias had vanished—at least, was vanishing down the street as hard as he could run.

Into the Street of the Tripods he turned, almost upsetting a burly citizen; along the Street of the Tripods he ran, barked at by dogs, cursed at by the people he fell foul of, and shouted after by idlers. He turned into the Street of the Temple of Dionysus; nor did he slacken his speed till he reached Diomed's door.

The porter opened to him.

"Your master!"

"He has just returned—"

Pushing the slave aside, Hippias, casting ceremony to the wind, strode through the passage to the courtyard, where Diomed was seated resting himself, his dog at his feet and his walking-stick lying on the pavement beside him.

There was nothing at all in Diomed's appearance out of the ordinary, yet the first glimpse of this quiet and contained figure raised a feeling of alarm in the heart of Hippias. He knew that everything must be wrong; he knew that everything must have failed—and he knew Diomed.

Diomed turned his head at the new-comer's approach. He looked older and, as he rose to meet his friend, the smile of greeting which Hippias knew so well was no longer there.

"You have not succeeded?" said Hippias, fearing to ask any direct question, and resting his hand upon the back of the chair from which Diomed had arisen.

"I have returned," said Diomed with a little laugh. He took a chair from the colonnade and drew it close to the chair upon the back of which Hippias was still leaning. They sat down, and Diomed, so far from explaining matters, seemed to forget the presence of the other. One might have fancied him a somnambulist, acting when touched, speaking when spoken to, yet separated from his fellow-men by the mysterious distance that lies in sleep.

"My friend," said Hippias, "I have heard something of what has happened. Tell me all, that I may help you if possible."

Diomed shook his head.

"Only treachery," said he. "It happens to all men to meet it. Last night I fell into a snare. Well, why complain? Of what use is it? I passed the night in prison; this morning I was brought before the Eleven, charged with breaking into the house of Gyges the Metic for an unlawful purpose; it was all planned and prepared for me."

"Yes?" said Hippias, breathless with excitement. "And then?"

"Listen," said Diomed, seeming to break from the ice of the reverie that held him and speaking with warmth, or rather as if urged to speak by some hidden fire that burned his vitals. "You know for what purpose I went to the house. Well, she was not there. I was trapped in a room, and handed over to the Scythians by Gyges himself. This morning, when I was released from prison and brought into the presence of the magistrates, I found a host of witnesses, of whom I had never dreamt. And do you think that the charge of breaking into the house of Gyges was the main charge against me? Well, listen. During the hearing of it, who should appear as a witness but Cleon, my late caterer? He testified that one night he was passing Gyges' house and saw me shut out by Bartjas the porter, that I abused the gods and struck the Hermes of the street with my walking-stick. He produced the two pieces of my stick which he had picked up. He testified that whilst in my service I frequently abused and ridiculed the gods, that at my dinner-parties I spoke of them in a slighting manner, that he left my service, not choosing to remain in the house of an atheist. Many of the people who once called themselves my friends were in the court, and Cleon indicated them as witnesses he could call to support his charges."

"Why did Cleon leave your service?"

"I cast him out of the house for theft. Then Gyges spoke and said that he had reason to suppose I had come to the house in search of his daughter."

"And the end of it all? Tell me quickly."

"I was fined two thousand drachmae. My enemies thought that I would not be able to pay the fine. They did not know I had sold my gems and had

more than enough to pay the fine thrice over, for Xanthias, who had charge of the horses and the money, waiting in the Street of the Winds for me, and hearing the uproar of my arrest, returned here with them, attended me at the court this morning, and brought me the money to pay my fine.”

“So you are free?”

“Wait. As I was leaving the court I received a summons to appear tomorrow morning before the King Archon.”^[6]

^[6] All cases of impiety were tried before the King Archon.

“Ah! ah!” cried Hippias, as though some one were striking him.

“But that is nothing,” continued Diomed. “I do not think of that, but of the words of Gyges when he was giving evidence against me. He said, ‘I testify on oath that he came to my house last night in search of my daughter—a useless quest, as she is married already to my clerk Abbas, and sailed from the Piraeus with him this morning for Naukratis.’”

Diomed, as he said these words, rose up and walked over to the great bird-cage standing in the shelter of the colonnade. He looked at the birds, who, at his approach, fluttered their wings and cheeped their greeting. The dog which had followed him was looking up into his face. Hippias, who cared nothing about the daughter of Gyges, was dumb for a moment with the news about the summons.

He knew quite well what it meant, and what it would mean if the King Archon were to refer the case to a jury and Diomed were to go for trial. A jury of perhaps four hundred citizens who would accept hearsay evidence; a jury emotional and touched with fanaticism, and of whom nine out of ten would believe that if they did not avenge their gods their gods would revenge themselves.

He rose up, went towards the other, and took him by the arm.

“You must leave Athens. You have still time; you have money. My friend, listen to me; you must leave Athens, or you are lost.”

Diomed turned to him.

“I shall leave Athens; but only when I have news of the truth of what Gyges said.”

Hippias struck himself on the brow.

"Ah, you must know the truth about her. But listen: you must leave at once—to-day. You cannot wait for news; you ought now to be on your horse and beyond the gates— —"

"Listen to me, Hippias," said Diomed, resting his hand upon the shoulder of the painter. "Gyges may have lied; there may be still a chance that she is here in Athens, perhaps hidden, that I may find her. Listen: the other night I had a dream. I dreamt that you brought me a white bird, and that when you placed it in my hands I released it, and it flew away straight for the sun and freedom. You are the only man to whom I can turn. Go, my friend; you who have warned me already of what was coming against me may find out the truth about this. Bring me hope; if not, bring me the confirmation of Gyges' story; then I will leave Athens, never to return again."

Hippias stood for a moment without speaking; then an inspiration struck him. "I will go," said he. "You will wait for me here?"

"I will wait for you here."

Hippias turned from his friend and hurried towards the hall. The porter opened the door for him, and he found himself in the street.

The street was crowded with men all trooping in the same direction—the Street of the Aqueduct of Pisistratus, which led to the Pnyx.

For a moment Hippias thought that the crowd had something to do with the affairs of his friend; then he remembered that there was a meeting of the Assembly to-day, and he made his way along against the crowd, seeking a side street that would take him to his destination by a short cut.

Athens was sending up six thousand citizens to-day to her great parliament on the hill; there, under no roof but that of the blue sky, within sight of the ship-houses of the Piraeus, the blue sea, and the purple hills of Attica, to vote on some question of the war. Sculptors, dramatists, stonemasons, fishmongers, bootmakers, and aristocrats were wending their way by different roads to equality within the magic semi-circle of the Pnyx; Diomed and his affairs might be the theme of gossip in the Agora, but the men passing up to the Assembly gave little thought to the scandal of the morning. He was not a public man; pleasure had been his business, not politics; and the misconduct of this butterfly of fashion left little mark on the thoughts of these serious men, who were quite capable, however, of crushing him without mercy at the proper time and in the proper place.

Hippias, having freed himself from the crowd, took to his heels, and in less than five minutes reached his house.

He found Pasiclea still waiting in the courtyard. She had brought her spinning-wheel there, and, when she heard him enter, without rising, she turned her head.

She guessed at once by his face that he brought serious news, yet she showed no emotion, only pausing in her spinning whilst he told his tale.

"He is lost," she said, when he had told all. "They have taken him in a net. Gyges and his patron and Cleon have got him at last amongst them. So are fools taken by their own folly."

"But there is one chance."

"And that?"

"He must leave Athens."

"He will be pursued."

"Not if he leaves to-day. To-morrow, yes; but not to-day. He has swift horses in his stable; he has money enough. He can rest at his country house and, should he reach Thebes, he will find friends to shelter him."

"Diomed will never do that," said the woman with conviction.

"And why?"

"Because, should he do so, he can never return, and he is an Athenian. Besides, I cannot think that he would run from his enemies."

"But he has promised."

"Promised!"

"He said to me, 'Go and find out the truth of this matter. If what Gyges said is true, if his daughter is indeed married and has left for Egypt, then I will leave Athens and never return.'"

"He said that?"

"He said that."

Pasiclea rose to her feet, then she sat down again; she played with the thread of her spinning-wheel as one may fancy Fate playing with the thread of a human life. Her fingers, twisting the thread into loops and knots, seemed imitating the complexity of her thoughts. Then they were still—she had broken the thread. But she did not heed the fact.

"He said that?"

"Should the tale be true, and should he have no more chance of meeting the girl, he will leave Athens to-day. I came to you, thinking you would have some means of finding out. Should you not, then I will go straight to Gyges himself, or to Pasion, his patron."

She laughed.

"Pasion, the man who has plotted most of this! Gyges, who helped him! You would go to them for truth?"

"One can but try."

"You need not go to them. I can tell you all."

"Ah, you know, then?"

"Yes; the tale is true."

"You have heard— —"

"No matter how I have heard it. The daughter of Gyges sailed at dawn with the man who is her husband. Go to him and tell him this. Let him save himself, even should we never see him again."

"Ah!" said Hippias, twisting his hands together like a child in grief. "I would rather the gods had smitten my house than that I should have to bring him this tale."

"And why?"

"He loved her."

"Then," said Pasiclea, "bring him a lie; tell him that the woman is still in Athens, and that Gyges is spreading the wedding-sheets."

"If I told him that," said the simple Hippias, "he would stay only to meet his death."

"There are things more terrible than death—which, it seems to me, is the end of all terrible things," said Pasiclea.

"Who knows?" answered Hippias. "But I cannot see him die. Time will pass, and he will forget; the war is beginning again. He may return."

"If he loves, he will never forget. No matter, tell him the lie and let him depart."

"The lie?"

"I mean—the truth."

"And should he ask me who told me?"

"Tell him it was an old woman who watched him pass in the street."

Hippias left the house and returned to the Street of the Temple of Dionysus, not running this time, but walking slowly.

Diomed was waiting for him in the courtyard, and when Diomed saw his face he knew at once what Hippias had to tell.

"It is true, then?"

"Yes, it is true. I had it from a person who is never mistaken."

"So be it," said Diomed. "It only remains for me now to depart."

He took a paper from a little table by the chair on which he had been sitting.

“Look; whilst you have been away I have been writing this. It is a deed leaving you in full charge of my affairs, so that my effects may be sold for the satisfaction of my creditors. You will do this for me?”

Hippias nodded his head, not trusting himself to speak.

“They are many, but the statuary, the slaves, the horses, and the house itself will satisfy them. I leave you, in the event of my not returning from this journey, my property in the country to be yours — —”

“No, no,” said Hippias; “that I will not have.”

“To be yours,” went on Diomed, without heeding him, “inasmuch as my sister Rhodopis is wealthy. You will not refuse this gift — —” He paused, and then, as though he had suddenly discovered some new truth, “Ah, what a thing is friendship! I, who am divorced from happiness, touch her again, feeling that these vineyards and fields and trees will know your presence should I, by chance, see you no more. May the vintage be always lucky, and the trees always green, and the fields pleasant to walk in; may age come to you there as softly as autumn, and with a full cup in her hand, that you may pledge the memory of Diomed the son of Diomed, who was once your friend.”

Hippias, with bent head down, could make no reply.

“Lastly,” said Diomed, “I leave you my dog to be cared for in my absence. He loves me, so you will love him. And my birds—you will see to them?” He took Hippias by the arm and led him to the cage, explaining to him the wants of these little African birds, their necessity for sunshine and warmth, the food they needed, and the water; then, talking indefinitely of his journey, he accompanied his friend towards the door, promising if possible to send news of what befell him, laughing to keep the other’s spirits up.

“And tell me, Hippias, a thing I had forgotten, but which I am burning to know.”

“Yes, yes?”

“Did you remember that pot of rouge your wife told you to buy, or—addle-head that you are—did you forget it?”

Looking back, Hippias saw Diomed at the door, laughing, and with the sun on his face.

He looked back again, and the door was closed.

CHAPTER XI

THE CUPS

DIOMED returned to his courtyard and called for Xanthias, who came almost immediately on the summons.

"Xanthias," said his master, "have you prepared what I told you?"

"I have done as I was bidden."

"Then bring me a couch here from the colonnade, for I am tired with my day's work; the sun is not too strong to lie in; it is chilly to-day."

"It is the wind from the sea," said Xanthias, bringing the couch and placing it in the desired position. "Besides, the shadows are lengthening."

"Now place me that table by the couch."

Xanthias did as he was ordered.

"And now fetch me what I told you."

Xanthias disappeared by the door leading to the slaves' quarters. He returned, bearing a cup in each hand.

"What!" said Diomed, "two cups! Why, this will be a symposium."

"Master," replied the slave, placing the cups on the table, "it is customary to prepare two cups; sometimes one is not sufficient, and you told me to make sure."

"You have done right," said Diomed.

"Besides," said Xanthias, "I have increased the strength at your order."

Diomed examined the cups curiously, standing over them, but not touching them.

"You have done well," said he. Then to Xanthias, yet speaking as though he were communing with himself, "I have found many things here: wealth, and flatterers and wine; statuary, the words of the poets, and the wisdom of the philosophers; and, better than them all, the friend that loves me, the dog that loves me, and Xanthias my faithful slave."

He touched the liquid in the nearest cup with his finger and tasted it.

"It is not unpleasant. Leave me now. I shall call if I require you."

"Till you call," said Xanthias, turning.

He left the courtyard by the door leading to the slaves' quarters. No sound broke the silence of the courtyard but an occasional flutter from the cage of birds. The dog lying at full length by the couch was asleep.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHIP

PHEIDON that morning found himself with his hands free, for, Simon having to attend the Assembly, there would be no fishing that day. At dawn the old man was up and about. He was a great politician, and a fighter as well as a fisherman. He had served in the war-triremes, and had felt the crash of the ram and heard the cries of the drowning and the roar of the water to the backing oars. For him the sea and Athens were one and indivisible; and his burning patriotism had only one dream—that great blue flame, the sea. The sea-routes to Ægina, and Paros, and Andros, and Lemnos were, for Simon, Athenian roads, streets, as much part of the city as the Street of the Winds or the Street of the Potters. He knew and cared little for city life, and the orators of the city left him dull till by chance they turned and pointed to the ship-houses visible from the Pnyx and the Ægean blue beyond the harbour town, calling to the Assembly to remember the greatness of the past.

To him the gods were the gods, and the Acropolis the visible home of the gods. To him the whole complex life of Athens was a thing unguessed; art wonderful, yet only as it might be to a little child; Euripides, Aristophanes, Socrates, names heard amidst the blowing of the sea wind; the aristocrat, a thing seen in a vision.

Yet, greater than them all was he whose left hand fed the city, whose right hand drove the oar that drove the ram, whose pure and simple mind saw with clearness the truth that all things to Athens were as nothing compared to the sea. That the sea was her arm and the breast that gave her children suck; her shield the wave, her sword the sheering ram, her road the sea-routes, her breath the breeze.

In the old fisherman lay the spirit of Athenian greatness pure and undefiled, the spirit that took Art from the hands of Egypt, freed it from its swaddling bands, and led it to the heights where it breathed and grew; the spirit that, stretching out its hand, left Salamis a welter of foam and broken ships; the spirit that, rising through Athens as sap mounts in a tree, gave wit to Aristophanes and tears to Euripides, vision to Pheidias and space of idea to Ictinus, to Diomed his grace, swiftness, and strength, and enthusiasm even to old drunken Philinus.

And without the sea that spirit would never have been born; nor Athens, that dream of the sea.

Simon having overhauled his boat and fishing-gear, so that everything might be right for the next day's fishing, returned to his house and began to overhaul his best tunic and sandals. An hour before noon he started, and Pheidon and little Cleon, his brother, found themselves free to amuse themselves as they would.

Pheidon had said nothing of the doings of the day before, nor of the fact that he had sold his fish to Diomed instead of Myrmex. He knew quite well that his father would find out the fact from Myrmex, and he was in no hurry for the thrashing with a rope's end which was a practical certainty.

He played about for awhile with some other boys, and then made off for the nearest quay, Cleon following.

War-triremes were rubbing their girding cables against the quay-side, the green water of the incoming swell slobbering around their bronze rams. Some had come in to refit, and others were preparing to start. Triremes were anchored out in the blue water; triremes were moored to the quays a mile away on the other side of the great harbour; a forest of main- and foremasts showed at the north-western angle; and the roofs of the ship-houses were legion. Over three hundred and fifty warships, each drawing a fathom or more, were, at full muster, to be found here, anchored, or moored, or hauled up into the shelter of the ship-houses—a vast navy, requiring over fifty thousand men to drive and fight it.

A trireme a hundred and thirty feet long was moving across the harbour towards the mouth under a single bank of oars. Even at that distance one could hear the “op-ooop” of the rowers, marking the stroke and recovery, and the thin, bird-like sound of the flute. As she neared the harbour mouth she found the breeze. The great square sail of the mainmast burst out to the wind, the topsail, and then the sail of the foremast. Then, bounding to the swell, she passed away like a gull and became a specie in the sun-blaze on the water.

Pheidon and his brother, having superintended the work of some men who were lading one of the ships with stores, and managing to secure a couple of handfuls of dried figs from a broken bale, made off towards the nearest street in search of other amusement. They found what they were seeking in the Street of Zea.

Scarcely had Pheidon entered the street, when he paused, glanced at a figure that was just leaving a house on the opposite side of the street, hid himself in a doorway, and made a motion with the heel of his left foot at Cleon.

The child understood, drew back a few paces, and pretended to be engaged hunting among the rubbish of the roadway.

The man who had left the house was Bartjas. Pheidon had never seen Gyges, to his knowledge, but he knew that many of the bankers of Athens had offices in the Piræus, and, putting two and two together, he came to the conclusion that Gyges' office was situated in the house that Bartjas had just left.

His mind was still full of the affair of the day before; the thing had haunted his sleep. He had seen in his dreams the house of the Metic and the closely shuttered window; the fingers of the girl at the space in the shutter seemed beckoning him in, and, when he entered, Bartjas had seized him and dragged him again towards the fountain to drown him.

Notwithstanding all the fair words Bartjas had used at the dictation of Pasion, Pheidon, from experience and by instinct, loathed the Egyptian, and would have given all he possessed for a chance of playing him a trick. Even without this temptation, the fearful pleasure of following him was not to be denied.

With a gesture or two, but without a word, he signified his intention to Cleon, and began the stalk, Cleon following close behind.

Bartjas passed along the Street of Zea, then, turning, he struck into the Street of Acte, which led to the harbour of Zea. The street rose to a hill and then fell towards the harbour, and Pheidon, following the Egyptian, kept him well in view, certain of being able to outrun him should he give chase. But Bartjas, unconscious of the fact that he was followed, kept on without once looking back, and, reaching the harbour side, approached a ship that was moored to the quay.

The harbour of Zea was quite small in comparison to the great harbour; scarcely six hundred yards across in its widest part, shaped like a round bottle and with a narrow bottle-neck entrance, through which entering and outgoing ships had to be towed. Here you found merchant ships always lading and unlading, for the trade of the whole Ægean and Mediterranean poured in here as well as into the Great Harbour and the Harbour of Munychia. Corn might be imported, but not exported; all sorts of laws regulating trade in favour of the Athenians were in force, and were continually being altered, yet the business done was large.

The ship for which Bartjas was making lay by the quay-side, moored fore and aft to stone bitts, and apparently deserted. She might have been twenty feet in width, and a hundred and twenty feet in length; larger than a war-trireme and, like the war-trireme, possessing only two masts, fore and

main; she was looped for a single bank of oars and, like the war-trireme, she had a deck-house on the poop and a raised deck at the bow.

Forward of the deck-house a square hole in the deck gave entrance to the hold, and the hatch closing this hole was a simple lid of heavy wood hinged with great strips of hide.

Pheidon, taking his place behind a bale on the quay, watched Bartjas approach the vessel and cross the single sloping plank that led from the quay wall to her deck. From the position where he was he could see nothing more, and, turning to Cleon, who had crept up close beside him, he whispered some words in his ear. Cleon nodded, hopped out of shelter, and began to play amidst the bales and boxes littering the quay; gradually he approached the vessel, and then took his seat plump on the quay-side just forward of the ship's stern.

There were few people about; for one thing, it was the dinner hour; for another, work was slack to-day, as many of the stevedores and officials were drawn to the Assembly. In any case, the vessel Bartjas had boarded would have been deserted, as she was fully loaded and only waiting her captain and crew to sail.

Pheidon watched whilst his little brother sat, the breeze blowing his curls and fluttering his tunic. Then he saw the child turn his head away and begin flinging stones into the sea. Next moment a form appeared mounting the plank. It was Abbas, the clerk of Gyges. Pheidon had seen him only once, on the morning when he had followed Diomed to the banker's table, but he never forgot a face.

The clerk crossed the plank and then struck off across the quay towards the Street of Acte.

At the same moment Cleon deserted his post and came running back, forgetful of subterfuge, and with a serious look on his bright little face.

"Well?" said Pheidon.

"There is some one on the ship crying out," said the child. "Not loud, but like this: 'Aïe— aïe— aïe!'"

"I can hear nothing."

"It is not loud; just like this: 'Aïe— aïe— aïe!'"

"Did you see any one?"

"No one but the yellow-faced one who came up the plank."

"What part of the ship did he come from?"

"The after-house."

Pheidon said nothing for a moment.

“Was it a man’s voice crying out?”

“No; ’twas more like a cat, or a woman; a little voice, such as Mother cried with when the sea took Pasicles in the storm of last winter.”

“It’s she,” said Pheidon, suddenly speaking his thoughts.

“Who?”

But Pheidon did not answer. He sat down and took his chin between his hands.

Bartjas must, then, have lied to him. The girl must have been taken from Athens and brought here; the clerk had been guarding her, and now Bartjas had come to relieve guard. The thing was plain to his mind, and the fact that he had been duped into bearing a lying message to Diomed.

He pursed his lips at the ground before him, wrinkled his brow, and scratched at one of the interstices of the pavement with his naked toe. Cleon looked on in admiration, waiting to take orders, but not daring a word.

Then Pheidon looked up.

“Off with you,” said he, “back to the edge there, and get as close to the after-house as you can; then shout out ‘Bartjas!’ Can you say the word?”

“Bartjas!” said Cleon.

“That’s right—it’s the name of that hairy good-for-nothing I was following. If he doesn’t answer, call again, and keep on calling till he does.”

“And then?”

“You are outrunning the wind. He will say to you, perhaps, ‘Who are you?’ and if he said that, what would you answer him?”

“Cleon, the son of Simon,” replied the child.

Pheidon picked up a piece of stick near by and struck Cleon, the son of Simon, a rap on the knuckles that would have caused an ordinary boy to cry out; but Cleon, swallowing the pain in big gulps like a nasty medicine, uttered no sound. He knew that Pheidon never struck for cruelty’s sake, or even as punishment for a fault, only to make people remember.

“You would say that, and perhaps bring him to our door, should my plans not miscarry. Wooden-head, never give a stranger your name. How know you that he may not be Death walking about dressed up as a man, and only awaiting to know your address so that he may call? Should he ask who you are, say, ‘I am Simon, the son of Cleon, who lives round the corner; and Gyges has promised me an obol to run to you and say that you must come to him at once in the office in the Street of Zea. He says you may leave the ship, as he will not keep you long. I can’t wait, for guards are drawn all around the office, and I want to see the fun.’ Having said that, you must turn

and run, and you mustn't come near me. You must run straight up the Street of Acte to the Street of Zea; then go home and wait for me. Now repeat what you have to say."

Without faltering, or a dropped word, the child repeated the whole of the foregoing, a triumph of memory entirely due to the training of Pheidon, and a greater triumph considering the fact that he had taken in the meaning of every sentence.

"Again," said Pheidon. "He may not ask your name, but simply say, 'What do you want?' You will know what to answer."

"I go," said the child. "Is that all?"

"That is all—and see—"

"Yes?"

"Remember, run your hardest, and as you run do not look back, for a messenger who has left his message does not look back to see what is being done with it."

Cleon nodded and started off.

Pheidon saw him pause at the quay edge. Then he heard his treble:

"Bartjas!"

No reply.

"Bartjas! Ho, Bartjas!"

This time there came the sound of wood scraping against wood, and the voice of Bartjas:

"Who calls me? Was it you? Well, what do you want?"

"Are you Bartjas? Gyges has promised me an obol to run to you and say that you must come to him at once in the office of the Street of Zea. He says you may leave the ship, as he will not keep you long. I can't wait, as the guards are drawn all round the office, and I want to see the fun."

Off he shot, leaving Bartjas so demoralised by this surprising story and command that the Egyptian did not think of calling after him. Pheidon watched Cleon making for the Street of Acte and grunted his approval. In its small way it was a perfect piece of acting, a representation of the messenger who has delivered his message and is returning in haste for his reward.

Then Pheidon turned his attention to the ship. Bartjas was just crossing the plank. On the quay-side he paused and looked back at the deck as if to make sure that he had left everything secure, then he hurried off in the direction of the Street of Acte.

The moment he had passed from sight, Pheidon rose to his feet, and springing from bale to bale, reached the ship side and paused at the gang-

plank.

Cleon had not been mistaken. Faint and muffled came the sound that he had described, the long, low, interminable wail of the Eastern woman in trouble. Aïe! aïe! aïe! the very voice of hopelessness, grief that knows nothing but grief.

The boy listened for a moment, then he came down the plank, to which transverse bars of wood were nailed for security of footing, and reached the deck. Ah! that ship, built at Andros, and worn with sun and salt and the buffeting of the Ægean, who can describe her mystery! her age and quaintness, the masts of dressed pine, the heavy yards and rigging, born of the earliest teaching of the wind and the sea; the perfume of old cargoes still clung to her, spice and wool and oil, faint as though the Romance who rules over trade were lurking unseen in the shadow of those strangely fashioned bulwarks, ready to grasp the stern oar and steer with breeze-blown hair in the track of Cadmus.

The deck was sunken and uneven, but solid and secure, and the dowels of the planking, as though they had been driven home only yesterday by the mallets of the black-bearded shipwrights. The huge mooring bitts of solid oak showed still the marks of the axes that shaped them, and the standing ropes were joined to the rudimentary channels by rings of copper or bronze; the main-yard was immense, giving a great spread of sail to the wind, and the sweeps, used in case of calms, narrow straits, and head-winds, were stacked by the port bulwarks, secured and held together by bands of raw hide.

The setting sail of such a ship from port partook of the fabulous; of the dream and the legend; with no compass but the sun and stars, no chart but the water colours and the glimpses of far-off capes and islands, to the tune of the flute, the slatting of canvas, and the *rhup-pa-pai* of the hauling chorus; captained by a bearded believer in Zeus, and manned by a crew to whom the wind was the breath of Æolus, she went on her voyage, less a ship than a dream of the youth and the morning of the world. She would be glimpsed, as a gull is glimpsed, far north amidst the Sporades or southward amidst the Cyclades; and vanish from sight as the sea-gulls vanish. Dolphins would play about her in the blue, not as dolphins but as the embodiments of those transformed sailors whom Bacchus punished for their wickedness; and should Euboea heave in sight in a calm sea, not one on board but knew that Oceanus was peacefully dreaming in his palace beneath. Bowed over by Iris; haunted by the tune of Proteus blowing his conch to the flocks of ocean; blown far, maybe, from her course, the day would at last come when, storm-beaten and sun-blistered, the port she sought was reached.

So far away and so wonderful, the ship and her voyage belong neither to this world of ours nor its dreams—myths of a forgotten dawn.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ESCAPE

PHEIDON, having reached the deck, paused for a moment to listen.

The Ægean to-day was under-run by a swell. A storm somewhere beyond the Sporades had sent this message to the south past Euboea and Andros, and the water of the harbour of Zea heaved to it. The ship moved slightly to the moving water; the faintest groan of hide and rope, the faintest thrill of straining hawsers answered to the almost imperceptible movement of the ship; and now, far louder and more lamentable than the groan of the ship, came the subdued lament of the woman. "Aïe—aïe—aïe!" Little Cleon had not lied. It came from the after deck-house, and Pheidon, having ascertained this fact, made for the deck-house door.

The door was barred by a broad, flat beam. A huge slat of wood fitting into sockets; to open the door one would have to move the slat bodily, a task almost beyond the strength of the boy.

As he attempted it the noise he made was heard by the prisoner, whose lamentation became sharper in tone. It only wanted that to give him the extra strength needed. Next moment the bar was clattering on the deck and the door pushed open.

It was so dark that for a moment he could see nothing; then he made out a form crouching on the floor. It was Nitetis.

Kneeling, with forehead on the planks and head covered by her robe, she neither ceased her lamentation nor looked up till Pheidon caught her by the shoulder, shook her, and drew the robe away from her face.

"What ails you, squalling like a cat? Come, look up. It is I, Pheidon—a friend. I am not Bartjas."

She raised herself, and, sitting up on her heels, stared at him without speaking.

"It is she," said Pheidon, speaking to himself, and contrasting her face with the face he had glimpsed at the window. "Come, get up and follow me. I am sent by Diomed to free you and bring you to him."

"Diomed!" At the word she flung out her arms and clutched him by the tunic, almost dragging him down beside her. "Diomed! Is he not dead? Speak, or I die! They told me he was dead. O thou whom the gods have sent to me, do not deceive me in this."

"He is not dead. They lied. If you would see him come with me before Bartjas returns. Even now it may be too late."

She made a movement as if rising to her feet, then she sank back on the deck. Her ankles were tied together by a strip of hide.

Pheidon, sweating and fumbling in the gloom, felt the knot; it was cleverly tied, and it would take time to undo it. He knew that when Bartjas reached the office in the Street of Zea and found that he had been fooled he would return running. He might even now be close to the quay. Instant action was necessary, and a plan of action. He found it. Bending down, he seized her under the knees and round the waist. He was just able to lift her, and, carrying her in his arms, he staggered out of the deck-house into the sunshine.

The square hole of the cargo hatch yawned black to the daylight. He reached it, rested his burden on the edge, and looked down.

The cargo reached to within four feet of the deck, and, panting, without a word, he pointed below, lifted her legs so that she was sitting on the hatch edge, jumped down, and dragged her after him. He pulled her along beneath the deck some five feet aft of the hatch opening; then, for a moment, they lay side by side, too breathless even to whisper. Only for a moment, till, breathless and panting, he twisted round, caught at her feet, and began the work of undoing the knot. His breath was coming in long gasps; the exertion of carrying her, the excitement, and the knowledge that if Bartjas were to catch him this time Bartjas would surely kill him almost paralysed his fingers. He was frightened as he had never been frightened before, yet he worked stubbornly at the knot till it yielded, gave, and she was free.

Then, for a moment, he flung himself on his right side and lay without movement, recovering his breath. The girl did not stir; one might have fancied her in a swoon, but her dark eyes were wide open and watchful, and fixed on the light shining through the hatch. She guessed that Pheidon had brought her here to hide her from Bartjas, and she seemed straining her ears for the footstep of the Egyptian. It came. Pheidon suddenly heaved up on his elbow; a step sounded from the gang-plank, a cry of astonishment, and then the deck planking shook as though a bale had been flung on to it!

They heard him searching furiously in the dark deck-house. Then all sound ceased.

Pheidon scarcely breathed. His moment-begotten plan had been based on the hope that Bartjas, finding the girl gone, might imagine that she had left the ship. He waited with passionate anxiety for the sound of the Egyptian's step on the gangway, but no sound came. Instead, a black shadow suddenly broke the light pouring down through the hatch, and the fingers of a hand appearing clasping the hatch edge.

Pheidon, turning, lay flat on his face; he glanced round; the girl had evidently done the same, for he could see nothing of her in the gloom. Then he watched.

A pair of feet suddenly appeared, then the legs and the whole figure of Bartjas as he dropped on to the cargo. They saw the sunlight on his bent back as he stooped; then he vanished, crawling forward under the deck.

Pheidon knew that it would take the Egyptian several minutes to search the forward part of the hold; he knew that, failing there, he would certainly search the after-part. There was a chance to escape. With a sudden dash it was possible to reach the hatch edge and scramble on deck; nothing held him but the girl. With her it was impossible, yet without her it was impossible.

He did not reason on the matter. Instinct held him to his post; an instinct inherited from Simon his father and the sea.

Then Bartjas' face appeared from beneath the forward-deck, sweating, creased with fury and fear; he had not been made by nature for activity and pursuit; he was of the type of the sedentary slave; powerful, yet unaccustomed to exercise, ferocious, yet unaccustomed to exercise his ferocity, and knowing nothing of self-restraint.

He rose up, paused for a moment to take breath, and then came diving beneath the after-deck. He had not reached a yard from the hatch edge, when he saw Pheidon's face and recognised him in the gloom. The next moment he had seized Pheidon by the arm. The paralysis of that grip seemed laid on the boy's heart, but only for a second. Striking out and biting like a mad animal, he fought the ensnaring hands, but to no purpose. They seized his shoulders and sprang to his neck. His brain felt bursting, and concussions, loud and rapid like the sounds of a trip hammer on an anvil, rang through his head; stars rose and swelled and broke before his eyes; unconsciousness was about to seize him, when all at once the choking hands left his throat.

Nitetic, seizing the thong that had bound her ankles, had cast it round the throat of Bartjas from behind, twisted it tight, and was clinging to it with all her strength. The Egyptian, held by the strangling thong, was making mad efforts to free himself. He tried to strike backwards; he sprang half erect so that his head hit the planking of the deck above, and the girl, clinging like a panther to the neck of a bull, was lifted with him, both hands clinging to the thong, her heels round his thighs, her teeth fixed in his hair. He fell on his face and tried to roll her off, but now Pheidon had joined in the fight and the thong was doing its work. Bartjas no longer struggled; he was unconscious, yet he jumped and sprang and kicked after the fashion of a man who is hanging, and whose neck has not been broken by the drop.

They thought he was still fighting against them; and Pheidon, now fully recovered, pushing the heroic girl aside, seized the thong and twisted it tighter. The body of Bartjas heaved and trembled under him with a boiling movement, every muscle seemed alive and working on its own account, so that the movement of one counteracted the movement of the other; then he lay still. Pheidon released the thong. Dragging the girl along by the arm, he made for the hatch, scrambled up it, pulled the girl after him and, calling on her to help him, seized the hatch lid. It was heavy. A man's strength was necessary to lift it, yet between them they managed to raise it to the perpendicular. It fell with a boom that echoed through the ship, and Pheidon on his knees fastened the primitive locking bars. All this was waste of precious time, for Bartjas, with the widest open hatch, would have troubled them no more.

Scarcely had they turned from the work, when, bounding down the gang-plank, came the clerk!

CHAPTER XIV

ABBAS

HE had passed his life at the money table; thin-shanked, yellow, with hair black as ebony shavings and glossy with palm oil, and fingers crooked with clutching at drachmae, he was less clerk to Gyges than confidential adviser and go-between. His father was wealthy, and he would inherit much of his father's wealth; he had an eye and a nose for business, alone worth a fortune. It was he who, sitting at the banker's table, had handed the bag of money the theft of which had made Cleon Diomed's enemy; it was he who had directed Diomed to the Street of the Flute-Player; it was he who, hearing Pasion's story from Gyges, had suggested the locked door; and it was he who had prepared the trap of the night before.

Pasion's enmity, Gyges' wrath, and Cleon's hatred might all have failed of their purpose but for this artificer, cool and cunning, and old of brain, though young in years. He was the black star appointed by Fate to cross the bright star of Diomed. He had entered into Diomed's life, at first unconsciously, and then, without hating Diomed, he had worked with all his might for Diomed's downfall. Why? Because Nitetis was his objective, and he knew quite well that Diomed would balk him of it.

His marriage with Nitetis had long been an understood thing between him and Gyges. It was advantageous to them both; Gyges wished to tie this brilliant financial genius to his interests, and the genius was passionately desirous of being tied to so much money by such a delightful bond.

His passion for Nitetis was real, and they had been married the night before, almost immediately after Diomed had been trapped and taken to prison by the Scythians. Nitetis, believing that Diomed was dead, "calmed" by a drug and hopeless, had passed through the ceremony as one passes through the Valley of Death. At dawn she had been brought to the harbour town by her husband. It was considered that the ship in which they were about to sail was the safest prison for her; and Bartjas, after Diomed had been brought before the magistrates, had hurried to the Piraeus to assist in guarding her.

When Bartjas, betrayed by little Cleon, arrived at the office in the Street of Zea he had found that Abbas was not there, but would be back presently; recognising that he had been fooled, he left a message and hurried back to the ship, and Abbas, on receiving the message, had run the whole way, up the steep Street of Acte, down the steep street of Acte, across the quay to the gang-plank. He was bounding down the plank, when his eye caught sight of

Nitetis, and, missing his footing, he came on deck smash! arms and legs outspread, sprawling like a frog and half stunned.

Before he could recover, Pheidon was sitting on his back. To Pheidon the whole of this business was now like a dream; he had reached that stage of obsession with Action during which men do miracles and boys the work of men.

Raising himself up, he dropped his full weight on the back of Abbas, just at that point where the lower ribs join the spine.

It was a foul trick, and he would never have used it against Abbas had he not been driven by the force that drove him to free Nitetis. He had learned it from the blackguard harbour-town boys. Scarcely ever did a big fight occur between the fisher-boys and the town boys, or the boys of the Munychian harbour and the Great Harbour, without several of the combatants being laid up for a month with broken lower ribs. Not only that, but the concussion of the spine placed the maltreated one absolutely out of action for hours.

Abbas felt as though a mountain had fallen on his back peak foremost. Next moment he was in darkness. Pheidon had dragged him by the feet into the deck-house and closed the door.

He seized one end of the big bar, and Nitetis, shaking, white, and wild-eyed, lifted the other end. They got it in its place, and then, supporting the girl, he got her up the gang-plank on to the quay-side.

He led her to the corner amidst the boxes where he had hidden whilst Cleon lured Bartjas from the ship. She sank down into it, felt that she was saved for the moment, and then lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XV

GYGES

PHEIDON stood for a moment in dismay. Then he leant down, felt her heart, and found that it was still beating.

The same thing had happened to his mother when the news of Pasicles' drowning had come out of the great storm; the remembrance eased his mind. She would recover. Then he sat on the side of one of the bales, watching her and waiting for her to wake up.

Beyond the desire to score off Gyges and put himself right with Diomed a force unknown was dragging him towards Athens, urging him not to lose a moment. A deep unrest filled him, yet he could do nothing. Midday had passed, the wind had fallen dead, and the hot sun blazed upon the quay, drawing up like a licking tongue all sorts of scents from the merchandise and shipping. The place was fairly busy now, only the ship that held Bartjas in her hold and Abbas in her deck-house lay deserted. Yet at any moment her captain and crew might arrive, or Gyges himself, her owner, coming to say good-bye to his daughter.

The girl's head lay in the sheltering shadow of a huge bale; she was hidden from sight, yet he knew that, should Gyges arrive, a search would begin, every stevedore and slave on the quay would join in it, and capture would be inevitable.

He was thinking this, when Nitetis stirred, lifted herself on her arm, sat up, and then struck out with her arm as if warding off a blow. She was still fighting the vision of Bartjas; then the dream-blindness fell from her eyes; she saw Pheidon and remembered all.

"Come," said Pheidon, "rise up if you can. We must leave here, and Diomed is waiting for you."

"Oh, where?"

"In Athens."

She stretched out her arms as if taking Athens in her embrace; colour had come to her cheeks and light to her eyes.

"Can you walk?"

"Ay." She rose to her feet, erect as a reed rises that has been bent by some hand and then released.

Pheidon looked at her admiringly. She was worth his admiration, this girl who had saved him from Bartjas, and who could do something else beside

weep and wail and carry on after the fashion of women. He led the way between the cases and bales, across the quay, and up the steep Street of Acte.

He knew there was a chance that at any moment they might meet Gyges, but he said nothing; and when she tried to question him about Diomed he told her sharply enough he had no breath to waste in talking. Several sailor folk they passed looked curiously at them, for she was evidently no girl of the harbour town, and one man who had been drinking called after them, but his voice died away on the windless air as they passed the crest of the hill and made downwards to the Street of Zea.

Here there were few people, but Pheidon's heart leapt towards his mouth at the vision of a man leaving the very house that Bartjas had come out of. He had never seen Gyges to his knowledge, and as this individual came towards them he scarcely dared to look at Nitetis—but the individual, a portly man, took no heed of them but passed them by, and minute a later they were through the gates and on the long road to Athens.

They were nearing Cephissus, when Nitetis stopped and gazed ahead with dilated eyes. Far away and coming towards them from Athens the form of a man was visible. It was Gyges.

“What is it?” said Pheidon.

“My father.”

“Your father! Are you sure?”

“It is my father.”

“Then come quickly.”

He led her away from the path, striking across the waste ground towards the river. When they reached its banks they paused.

The figure came striding along the distant path; even at that distance it seemed familiar to the boy, who never forgot a face or a figure. It was, indeed, the pot-bellied merchant he had passed that morning after the encounter with the Dog-Stealer.

Left foot, right foot, walking-stick.

How it covered the ground! Now it had reached the ford; now it had stopped.

Gyges' roving eye had caught sight of the figures of the boy and girl.

He was shading his eyes.

“Look!” said Pheidon. “He has seen us!”

“He is looking at us,” said Nitetis.

As she said the words she slipped her robe and stood naked in the sun. Then, stepping down into the river-bed, she began to splash the water about.

Pheidon, who had turned from her swiftly, seeing her nakedness only as one sees a flash of lightning, kept his eyes fixed on the distant figure of Gyges. He could have worshipped her for her action, more especially when Gyges, at the sight of the bather, passed on, believing himself mistaken.

Pheidon kept following him with his eyes, his back turned to the girl who had done for the sake of Diomed what she would not have done for the sake of life.

When he turned again she had resumed her robe. Gyges was now beyond recognition, and they started.

As they turned in at the Piraic Gate the sun cast their shadows before them, as though to show them how far the day had advanced. Nothing stopped them, nobody knew them; it was as though some hand that had been holding them back, had been withdrawn.

They reached the Street of the Temple of Dionysus, and stopped before the door of Diomed.

Pheidon knocked.

CHAPTER XVI

FATE

DIOMED, seated upon the couch in his courtyard, heard the knock.

He had given orders to the porter that, should any friends seek to see him, they were to be admitted. He half thought, almost hoped, that some friend of former times, Nicias, or Niceratus, or even old drunken Philinus, might be drawn to him despite, or even because of, the disaster of the morning and his impending downfall. He would have liked a chat with them before his departure, and the knock at the door made him turn his head with a half-smile of derision at the lateness of this caller. He heard the little birds whispering and chatting in their cage; the sunlight of early evening cast his shadow and the shadow of the couch upon the tiles and lit with a reflected rose tint the pictured sea of the colonnade walls. His eyes, as he listened, travelled from his shadow on the floor to the pictured walls.

He heard a step, and then he saw Nitetis.

The girl had stepped from the atrium past the guarding statues, the sunlight was upon her face, but he did not for a moment think her to be real, but some dream of the hemlock, whose poison was now rising about him like a cold tide.

He smiled at the vision, and his eyes lighted up. He stretched out his arms to it, and it rushed towards him. He clasped it, and it was real!

Ah! that divine moment; those lips that fed on his, speechless with passion, yet telling everything! Athens and the world were forgotten, one desire only possessed him—to seize her and carry her away in her arms, carry her away with her lips to his and her arms clinging about his neck to some place where no man might reach them.

Just as in a dream one tries to escape from some half-remembered, half-guessed danger, clasping her more tightly in his arms he tried to rise, and just as in a dream he was held. From the waist down, the hemlock, like a wizard, had turned his body to marble. He cast his eyes upon the empty cup standing by the full one, as the gambler casts his eyes upon the fatal hand that is sweeping away his fortune.

He cast his eyes upon Nitetis, and she knew. Knew as though he had carefully explained to her all the details of his betrayal by man and by Fate.

Then, leaning upon one arm, and clasping the girl with the other, he called in a loud voice for Xanthias.

He called twice, and at the second summons the door leading to the slaves' quarter opened, and Xanthias appeared. His fellow-slaves were supporting him on either side; he could no longer walk, and his wild and wandering gaze contrasted strangely with the noble calmness of Diomed.

"O Xanthias," said his master, "I have drunk of the cup, and from the waist downwards I am like one dead; but life has called to me again, and I would return."

"Master," babbled Xanthias, "when I prepared for you the two cups, so that if one were not enough you might drain the other, I did but obey the custom, for the strength of one would overcome the strongest man. I am even like you—we have passed beyond the gate."

As he spoke he failed and drooped and fell together, and as they carried him out, Diomed felt Nitetis slip from his grasp.

Before he could reach to seize her she was beside the little table; then, as though she saw the vision of Gyges shading his eyes at her, and just as she had cast off her robe on the bank of Cephisus, she cast off her body, as, raising the full cup to her lips, she drained it slowly to the dregs.

He could do nothing. Lost and unable to move, he could only watch her preparing to cast herself into the icy sea that was bearing him away, blinding him, till amidst the cold waves he felt her warm arms clasping him, and heard her voice calling upon him to wait.

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In the porter's lodge Pheidon sat talking to the slave, and waiting and waiting. Every moment he expected to be called into the courtyard for the triumph that would be so dear to his boyish heart. It had been a day of delays. Bartjas, Abbas, and Gyges had held him back—who was interfering now? A long time passed. Sometimes Pheidon fancied he could hear voices from the courtyard; now he could hear the lisping of the birds; now faint noises from the street outside. Then, as they sat for a moment in silence, the howl of a dog came from the courtyard, and the startled slave rose to his feet; again it came, and the slave, leaving the lodge, entered the atrium.

Pheidon followed, and at the entrance to the courtyard, across the shoulder of the slave, he saw the sunlight on the pillars, the sun reflection on the sea-swept walls, and in the golden light that filled the centre of the courtyard, the vision of Diomed and Nitetis clasping one another in the sunlight beneath the blue evening sky.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LOVERS MEET AND PART IN THE STREET OF THE FLUTE-PLAYER

ON the second night, an hour before dawn, the mourners assembled in the courtyard of the house of Diomed. Rhodopis and her husband, and Hippias and his wife, a few distant relatives, Nicias and Niceratus, and a few other friends who no longer dreaded to meet once more the man they had so often met in life. The courtyard was fragrant with wreaths.

Great wreaths of roses and sweet-smelling late summer flowers. People quite unknown and quite humble had sent their tribute; market-folk and potters from the cerameicus quarter, marble-hewers, leather-workers. The moon, which would not set till dawn, cut the pillars of the courtyard in half with her light; lamps burned from the pillars; and in the centre, on a couch gorgeous with colour, feet towards the door and robed in a white *himation*, lay Diomed.

The leaping and licking light of the lamps and torches lit his face and the chaplet of flowers on his brow, and his hands crossed on his breast, and the sprigs of marjoram upon the coverlet.

On tables close by were set out the vessels and vases to be deposited in the grave: a honey-cake, the little statue of Hylas, of which he was especially fond, and a few other articles.

By the couch lay his dog, mute but watchful; muzzle resting on paws, and mournful eyes wide open and fixed.

By the door were grouped the mourners, all in black, the tall figure of the wife of Hippias, veiled, yet eloquent of grief; Rhodopis, veiled, and leaning for support on her husband; Hippias, a drooping figure, clasping a fold of his *himation* to his breast with one hand; Nicias and Niceratus, pale and silent; Pheidon, a half-seen figure in the background, and Simon, his father, invited by Rhodopis, and seeming to bring a tribute from the sea.

The slaves, who had been standing in a group by the door leading to the slaves' quarters, now advanced in two lines, and, under the direction of the husband of Rhodopis, raised the couch and its burden upon their shoulders, and moved with it towards the door. Other slaves followed with wreaths and tables bearing the vases. Slowly, and as if fearful of waking the dreamer from his sleep, they passed through the doorway, through the atrium, brushing the statues with their robes and treading the legend "Happiness" with their sandals, through the house doorway to the street.

The mourners followed, and the dog.

In the street were grouped the professional dirge-singers, wailing women from Asia Minor, the torch-bearers, the flute-players, seen strangely in the light of the torches and the black and white of moonlight and shadow.

The night was windless and clear; and the pine scent of the burning torches mixed with the perfume of the flowers as the whispering procession ranged itself, the men leading, the women following the bier, the dirge-singers leading all.

It moved away from the door, and, as it moved, the voice of the dirge-singers rose in a low, piercing lament—"Aïe—aïe—aïe!" It passed into the Street of the Tripods, and the dreamers in the houses heard through their dreams the crying of the mourners—"Aïe—aïe—aïe!" Slowly and like a procession of sleep-walkers it turned from the curving Street of the Tripods, and the Street of the Winds caught the cry, now louder and more piercing, and accompanied by the beating of breasts and the rending of garments—"Aïe—aïe—aïe!"

The cry rose above the house-tops, and echoed from the coigns of shadow, and was borne by a faint breeze that had just risen, heralding the dawn. Followed by the piercing lamentation of the flutes, it was heard in the Street of the Triremes and the Street of the Sculptors of Hermes and the Street of the Aqueduct of Pisistratus; it touched the steps of the Acropolis, and Athena the Champion heard a whisper of it as she watched the wandering lights of the dim procession turn from the Street of the Winds into the dark street opening to the East. For to reach the tomb of Diomed, beyond the Gate of Mystae, there was only one way—the Street of the Flute-Player.

As they entered the street and approached the house of Gyges, of a sudden the notes of the flute and the wailing of the women ceased. Another procession was approaching them—the funeral of a young girl, starting, obedient to custom, in the hour before dawn, and making westward in the direction of the cerameicus quarter and the graveyard of the aliens.

As the processions passed one another a shudder ran through all, for had the sleeping Diomed stretched out his arm he might have touched his beloved Nitetis, who knew him not, but passed on, coldly indifferent as he.

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The last rays of the moon were touching the Gate of Mystae as they passed through it and reached the large open space where, in view of the hills and the sea, tombs stretched on either hand, marble-dressed and casting black shadows in the level light.

On a mound by the grave the pyre was set, and when all was prepared the first rays of sunlight were upon the world.

The wailing of the women had ceased, and, as the low, clear-cut, purple hills stood out against the blueness of the horizon, no sound could be heard but the licking of the flames and the purr of the fire, whose smoke rose straight and steadfast to the azure of the sky.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUNSET

IT was evening, and Simon at the steering-oar was heading the boat for the fishing-grounds. They had passed the harbour-mouth and were taking the full swell of the Ægean, bending to the north-west wind. Behind them half-a-dozen fishing-boats with the sunset on their sails were following, and far away across the tumbling tourmaline of the sea, three great triremes from the direction of Ægina were making for the harbour, the wet oars showing in the sunset like banks of flashing light.

Pheidon watched these hawks of the sea, and, as he watched, his sharp eyes caught the glint of the bronze rams dashing the foam and the sunlight back, imperious as the city upon which the legions of Lysander were to break in the following year.

Then his eyes swept back towards Athens. Across Salamis the last rays of the sunset were lighting the city.

Away beyond the tumbling waves it lay, the sunset touching the whiteness of the Acropolis to faintest rose; so far away that all things mean were hidden, all things great revealed.

And then, as Pheidon watched, he noticed again that which he had often noticed before—the fact that dusk and night do not fall from the sky, which is eternal, but rise from the earth, which is mutable.

He saw the rising tide of night take the harbour town and spill over towards the city; he saw the roofs of the Odeum and the Temple of Dionysus crumble to dusk, and the flood of twilight blotting out the Acropolis.

The Parthenon and the temples of the city of Art passed from his sight, and of the city nothing now remained but a star: the spear-point of the Virgin Goddess, burning above the darkness even as we see it still.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Street of the Flute-Player: A Romance*, by H. de Vere Stacpoole.]