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The Golden Hope: A Story of the Time of King Alexander the Great

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Fuller Robert H. Robert Higginson The Golden Hope: A Story of the Time of King Alexander the Great

CHAPTER I
THREE FRIENDS MEET

Athens was rousing herself from sleep. The beams of the morning sun bathed the rugged sides of Mount Hymettus and lightened the dark foliage that clothed the nearer wooded slopes of Lycabettus. The low, flat-roofed houses of the city were still nothing more than blurred masses of gray in the shadow; but presently a ray touched the point of Athene's spear, and the flood of orange light flowed over the Acropolis. Its temples and statues were enveloped in a radiance which fused the rich, harmonious colors of column and cornice and melted the massive outlines into a resplendent whole, rising immortal from the gloom at its base.

Thin curls of smoke mounted here and there above the

housetops, straight up toward the limitless turquoise vault of the sky. The vivifying freshness of the new-born day was in the air.

There was a clatter of hoofs in the Street of Pericles, and two young men, followed by three mounted servants, swung into view.

"By Zeus, Leonidas!" cried the foremost of the riders, drawing rein and pointing to the Acropolis, "that is worth riding all night to see!"

"You mean the sunrise?" the other asked, also coming to a halt. "Pshaw! You may see that any day without sitting up for it."

"Not I!" said his companion, laughing. "I love the lamps too well."

Leonidas shrugged his square shoulders. "It's not the lamps you love, Chares," he returned dryly. "But why are we idling here? Unless we make haste, Clearchus will be out of bed before we can surprise him."

"Come on, then!" Chares cried, urging his tired horse. "By Heracles! what's that?"

The three servants had ridden forward in advance of their masters. From the direction they had taken, the young men heard a confusion of angry voices, mingled with oaths. In another moment they saw that the street was blocked by a gorgeous litter borne on the shoulders of four sturdy slaves and surrounded by a dozen more, some of whom carried torches which burned pale in the morning light. The litter-bearers had refused to draw aside, and the guard was attempting to turn the horsemen back.

Evidently some youth had been overtaken at his revelry by the dawn and was now being carried home by slaves who had followed his example at the wine-cup.

A bustling little man, with close-cropped hair and the sharp-nosed face of a fox, was shaking his sword in the faces of the riders.

"Back with you! Back!" he shouted. "Do you seek to halt the noble Phradates? Back, while you may!"

The curtains of the litter parted, and a young man's face, crimson with wrath and wine, appeared at the opening. He wore upon his head a wreath of wilted roses, which had slipped sidewise over one ear.

"What is the matter, Mena?" he called thickly. "Cut the rascals down!"

The three servants hesitated, looking back to their masters for instructions.

"Here is sport!" Chares cried, his eyes sparkling. "Let us ride through them! They need a lesson."

Leonidas made no answer, but shook his bridle rein free and plunged his spurs into the flanks of his horse.

"Way! Way!" Chares cried in a mighty voice, as they thundered down upon the obstinate group. "Follow us, my lads!" he shouted to the servants as he swept past.

The officious man with the sharp nose dropped his sword and scrambled up the steps of a house, but before the rest could follow his example the five horsemen were among them, and

they were rolling under foot with their torches. Chares swerved his horse skilfully against the litter in such a manner that it was overturned. Its occupant pitched head foremost into the street, and the litter fell on top of him, burying him beneath a mass of curtains and silken cushions, among which he struggled like some gigantic insect caught in a web.

"You shall pay for this!" he gasped from the wreckage, shaking his fist after the little cavalcade. "I am Phradates!"

Chares laughed until the street echoed, and even Leonidas could not forbear a smile when he glanced back upon the havoc their passage had caused.

"We must ask Clearchus who this fellow is," Chares said. "Here is the house."

He sprang down in front of a dwelling of white marble and ran to the gate.

"Hola!" he shouted. "Let us in! Do you intend to keep your master's guests all day at his door? Open, then!"

After a slight delay there was a sound of falling bars, and the grating swung back, revealing a drowsy slave in the entrance.

"Is it you, my master? Enter; you are welcome," the man said, bowing before Chares.

"Is Clearchus awake?" Chares demanded eagerly.

"I think not, sir," the slave replied.

"Then we will rouse him!" Chares cried, running across the outer court and into the house. Leonidas followed more deliberately, leaving the attendants to care for the horses.

Chares did not stop to return the greeting of the slave who opened the house door for him, but dashed through the corridor that led to the inner court, shouting at the top of his voice: "Clearchus! Wake up, sluggard, and feed the hungry, or the Gods will turn their faces from you! Dreamer, where art thou?"

Just as he emerged from the corridor to the spacious inner court, the young man came suddenly upon a fresh-faced slave girl, who was busied with some early duties about the broad cistern filled with lotus flowers.

"Aphrodite, as I live!" Chares cried, throwing his arms about her and kissing her on the lips with a smack. The girl fled, laughing and blushing, to the women's quarters, and at the same moment the master of the house, awakened by the uproar, appeared on the threshold of his chamber.

"Chares!" he cried, coming forward with outstretched hands. "Who else could it be, indeed!"

"Oh, Clearchus," Chares said, "what hardships and perils we have passed to reach thee!"

"And here is Leonidas," said the Athenian, freeing himself from the embrace of Chares as the second of his guests entered the court. "Both my brothers here! For this I owe a sacrifice of thanksgiving which I shall not fail to pay. But what fortunate chance brings you to Athens?"

"We were sitting quietly enough in Thebes, talking of you," Leonidas replied, "when this madcap declared that he would not live another day without seeing you and that he intended to make

you give him breakfast. Piso, who was with us, fell into dispute with him, offering to wager twenty minæ that we could not ride here before midday. Chares maintained that he would wake you this morning or forfeit the stake, and here we are."

"And so you have ridden all night?" Clearchus asked.

"All night, amid dangers and darkness, only to see you!" Chares replied gayly, throwing his arm around his friend's shoulder. "And now, have you anything to eat in the house? I am like a famished wolf."

"Come with me," Clearchus said, leading the way into a large room opening from the left of the court. The sunlight streamed in from the garden outside, over rich Persian carpets which covered the floor. The walls were frescoed with scenes from the Iliad of Homer, drawn with marvellous skill. Painted statuettes stood in niches of stone. Chairs and tables of ebony, cypress, and cedar were scattered through the room, and soft couches invited rest. Clearchus struck a bell, and a grave man of middle age appeared in the doorway.

"Send us food, Cleon," Clearchus said.

The steward withdrew, and two younger slaves entered. They quickly divested Chares and Leonidas of their riding cloaks and swords and washed their hands in bowls of scented water, drying them upon linen towels. They were followed by other slaves bearing trays of cold fowl, bread, and wine.

"This seems like getting home," Chares exclaimed, throwing himself upon one of the couches and leaning back luxuriously

upon the cushions of down which the slaves hastened to arrange behind him while he helped himself to food from the table. "By the Gods, Clearchus, unless you stop growing handsome, Phœbus will be jealous of you!"

The Athenian flushed like a girl. He was a clean-cut, clear-eyed young man, hardly more than twenty-one years old, with a face and figure that might have served as a model for Phidias himself. Although slender, his form was graceful, with the ease that comes only from well-trained muscles. Brown curls covered his head, and the glance of his dark eyes was steady and straightforward, with a singular earnestness. His expression was thoughtful and his mouth betrayed a sensitive delicacy.

His parents had died when he was still a lad. His father, Cleanor, bequeathed to him an immense fortune, amassed in the mines, which had been managed by his uncle, Ariston, until he became of age. His wealth made him envied by the fashionable young men of Athens, but he had few friends among them. He cared nothing for their drinking-bouts, cock-fights, and gaming, and he had no ambition in politics except to do his duty as a citizen of Athens. Deep in his heart he worshipped the city and her glorious achievements, especially those of the intellect, with fanatical devotion.

Chares, too, belonged to a family of wealth and influence, for his father, Jason, had been one of the foremost men in Thebes. In height he stood more than six feet, and the knotted muscles of his arms indicated enormous strength. He was buoyant, light-

hearted, irresponsible, and pleasure-loving. His affection for the Athenian, whom he had known from boyhood, was the strongest impulse in him.

They had first met Leonidas at the Olympic Games, where he won the laurel crown in the chariot race, and they had there admitted him to their friendship. Different as they were from each other, there seemed little in common between either of them and the swarthy Lacedæmonian who lay eating silently while they chattered gossip of mutual acquaintances. Leonidas was rather below the middle stature, all bone and sinew, practised in arms, and inured to hardships from his childhood by the unbending discipline of Sparta. His dark hair grew low down on his forehead and his black eyes were set deep under overhanging brows. He neither shared nor wished to understand the delight which Clearchus felt in a perfect statue or a masterpiece of painting. He scorned the philosophers and poets. Upon the questionable pleasures to which Chares gave his days and nights, he looked with good-natured contempt. The narrow prejudices of his country were ingrained too deeply in his character to be disturbed by any change of surroundings. He valued more highly the consciousness that in his veins ran a few drops of the blood of the Lion of Thermopylæ than all the riches of the world.

In each of the three young men who met in the house of Clearchus were typified many of the characteristics of the states to which they belonged. Athens, Thebes, and Sparta in turn had held the supremacy in the little peninsula to which the civilized

world was confined. Contrasted as they were, there was still a bond between them that had been welded by centuries of association.

"Tell me," Clearchus said, after their hunger had been somewhat appeased, "what is the news of Thebes? Are the Macedonians still perched in the Cadmea?"

"They are," Chares replied lazily. "We are still in the grasp of the barbarian; but our plotters are at work and they tell me that soon we shall break it."

"Do you mean they are planning revolt?" Clearchus asked eagerly.

"Don't get excited," the Theban responded. "It will give you indigestion. They have revolted already, thanks to the gold your city sent them, and the barbarians are eating their corn in the citadel just at present, waiting for something to turn up."

"But that means war, Chares," Clearchus exclaimed.

"Well," Chares replied, "that will give Leonidas a chance to clear the rust from his sword. You know he is in the market."

"That is true," the Spartan said in response to Clearchus' glance of inquiry. "No man can live on air. I follow my profession where there is work to be done."

There was nothing disgraceful in this avowal. If his own country was at peace, a Greek soldier might sell his sword to the highest bidder, as did Xenophon, without reproach.

"And I suppose you, too, will be fighting, Chares?" said Clearchus.

"As to that, I don't know," the Theban answered, stretching himself with a yawn. "Perhaps the best thing that could happen to us would be to have the Macedonian conquer and rule. It would put an end to our own wars. If matters go on as they have been going, all three of us may be trying to cut each other's throats before the month is out."

"No," Clearchus exclaimed, "that cannot be, because you must promise me to stay here and drink at my wedding feast at the next new moon."

"What, Clearchus! you are going to be married?" Chares cried, springing from his couch. "Who is she?"

"Artemisia, daughter of Theorus," Clearchus answered. "She is the most beautiful – "

"Ho, Cleon, Cleon! Where are you?" Chares shouted at the top of his voice. "Cleon, I say!"

The steward ran into the room in alarm.

"Bring wine of Cyprus, quickly!" Chares cried, waving his arms.

Cleon vanished with a smile, and Chares hastened to embrace his friend with a fervor that threatened to crack his ribs. Leonidas grasped him warmly by the hand, and both showered congratulations upon him.

"We pledge thee!" Chares cried, taking the wine that Cleon brought in a great beaker of carved silver and raising it to his lips, after spilling a portion of its contents in libation.

"May the Gods give thee happiness!" Leonidas said, drinking

deep in his turn.

"Neither war, famine, nor pestilence shall take us from thee until thou art married," Chares cried, half in jest. "We swear it, Leonidas, by the head of Zeus!"

"We swear it!" the Spartan echoed, and each of them again pressed the young man's hand.

"I expected no less of you," Clearchus said, smiling into the faces of his companions. "It makes my heart glad to know that you will be with me. But after your long ride you must both be used up. I will leave you to get an hour or two of sleep before the Assembly which has been called for this afternoon to hear what Demosthenes has to say upon our policy toward Macedon. You will want to hear him, of course."

"Go, Clearchus," Chares said, laughing. "That is a long speech to tell us that you would like to be rid of us while you go to your Artemisia. Come back in time for the bath, that's all."

CHAPTER II
WARNING FROM THE GODS

A few miles west of Athens, in the suburb of Academe, dwelt Melissa, aunt and guardian of Artemisia. She was an invalid, bedridden for the greater part of the year, and she had chosen to live in the country that she might not be disturbed by the city noises. She had never married, and no departure from the routine of her well-ordered house was permitted. She loved her niece; but she was not sorry to have her marry, because, as she said, her own hold upon life was so uncertain, and besides, the match was a brilliant one.

Her household consisted of Philox, her steward, who had managed her affairs for a score of years, Tolmon, her gardener, and a dozen women slaves who, like their mistress, had passed the prime of life.

In Melissa's old-fashioned garden Artemisia, with two little slave girls to help her, was at work over a hedge of roses. She had not yet reached her nineteenth year. Her soft, light brown hair was gathered in a knot at the back of her head, showing the graceful curve of the nape of her neck and half revealing the little pink lobes of her ears. Her forehead was low and smooth and broad, with delicately arched brows, a shade darker than her hair. Her eyes were blue and the color in her cheeks was heightened

by her exertions in bringing the straying rose stems into place. The folds of her pure white chiton left her warm arms bare to the shoulder and defined the youthful lines of her supple figure. As she stooped among the flowers, handling them with gentle touches, she seemed preoccupied, and her glance continually wandered from her task.

Agile as monkeys, the slave girls darted about her, pelting each other with blossoms and uttering peals of shrill laughter. Their short white tunics made their swarthy skins darker by contrast.

The garden was set in a tiny meadow beside the river Cephissus. It was shut in on both sides by groves of olive and fig trees, against whose dark foliage gleamed the marble front of the house to which it belonged. The sunlight swept the smooth emerald of the turf, touched the brilliant hues of the flowers, and flashed back from the rippling river beyond.

"Oh, mistress, there's a beautiful butterfly! Oh, please, may I catch him?" cried one of the little girls.

"Hush, chatterbox," said Artemisia; "come and help me here."

"Ouch, that awful thorn! Look, mistress, how my finger bleeds," the other girl said, holding up her small brown hand.

"Will you never end your nonsense?" the young woman asked in affected despair. "See, Proxena, we have not half finished."

"Don't be angry with us, mistress; see who's coming!" Proxena cried, taking her wounded finger from her mouth and pointing with it toward the house.

Clearchus must have ridden fast to arrive so soon after leaving

his friends. Artemisia, hastily plucking a half-blown rose, went forward to meet him, while the little slave girls remained behind, peeping slyly with sidelong glances and whispering to each other while they pretended to busy themselves with their work.

"Greeting, Artemisia, my Life!" Clearchus said, taking her hands in his.

"Greeting, Clearchus; I am glad to see thee," she replied.

"How beautiful thou art and how fortunate am I, my darling," the young man said radiantly. "Dost thou love me, Artemisia?"

"Thou knowest well that I do, Clearchus," she answered reproachfully. "Why dost thou ask?"

"For the joy of hearing thee say it once more," he said, laughing. "There is nothing the Gods can give that could be sweeter or more precious to me, and to add the last touch to my happiness, Chares and Leonidas came this morning and have promised to stay until our wedding."

They had been strolling toward the grove at the edge of the meadow, where a bench of carved stone, overhung with trailing vines, was set in the shade in such a position as to permit its occupants to look out over the garden and the river. They sat down side by side and Clearchus slipped his arm about Artemisia's waist. Evidently, with the subtle sense of a lover, he detected a lack of responsiveness, for he bent forward and gazed anxiously into her face. He saw that it was troubled.

"What is the matter, my dearest?" he asked in sudden alarm.

She hesitated for a moment. "Oh, Clearchus, I fear that we are

too happy," she said at last in reply.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, drawing her closer to him. "Why should any of the Gods wish us harm? We have not failed in paying them honor, and we have transgressed in nothing."

Artemisia hid her face in her hands and her head drooped against his shoulder. He held her still closer and kissed the soft coils of her hair, awaiting an explanation.

"What is it, Artemisia?" he asked quietly. "You are tired and nervous and overwrought, and some foolish fancy has crept into your heart to trouble you. Tell me, my dearest; thou canst have no sorrow that is not mine as well as thine."

"Clearchus, my husband," she said, without moving from her position or lifting her face, "thou art strong and I am but a weak girl. Whatever may come, I shall always be thankful that thou didst love me. I am thine – heart and mind, body and spirit, here and in the hereafter – forever."

"Why dost thou speak so, my Soul?" Clearchus asked in alarm. "What has happened? Surely we shall be married at the new moon."

"I do not know, Clearchus – all that I know is that I love thee and shall love thee always. A warning from the Gods has been sent to me."

She lifted her face and clasped her hands in her lap. Her eyes were wet and her lips were tremulous as those of a helpless child who awaits a blow.

"What was it, my Life?" Clearchus asked gently.

"I was in a strange house," she replied, looking straight before her as though she could see the things that she described. "It was a house of many rooms, some filled with lights and some so dark I could not tell what was in them. I heard the sound of voices, of laughter, and of weeping, but I could see nobody. Thou wert there, I knew, and I was seeking thee with my heart full of terror; for something told me I would not find thee. It was dreadful – dreadful, Clearchus!"

She paused and clung to him for a moment as though in fear of being torn from his side.

"I do not know how long I wandered through passages and chambers," she resumed, "but at last I reached a corridor that had rows of pillars on either side. At the end was a crimson curtain, beyond which men and women were talking. As I stood hesitating in the empty corridor, suddenly I heard thy voice among the rest. I could not mistake it, Clearchus. Joy filled my heart. Thou didst not know I was there nor what peril I was in. I felt that I had but to lift the curtain – thou wouldst see me and I would be saved. I ran forward, crying out to thee; but before I reached the curtain, rough men came from between the pillars and thrust me back, drowning my voice with shouting and laughter. I threw myself on my knees before them and prayed them not to stop me. They answered in words that I could not understand. My heart was breaking, Clearchus! The light beyond the crimson curtain grew dim, and outside I could hear a roaring like a great storm. The pillars were shaken and the walls crumbled, and I woke crying

thy name."

The young man's face had grown unusually grave and thoughtful as he listened to the recital of the dream. No man or woman of his time who believed in anything ever thought of doubting that the visions of sleep were divine communications to mortals. Statesmen directed the course of nations and generals planned their campaigns in accordance with the interpretation of these revelations.

"What does it mean, Clearchus? You are wiser than I," Artemisia said anxiously. "If I am separated from thee, I shall die."

"The men who halted you seemed to be barbarians?" Clearchus asked thoughtfully.

"Thus they seemed," she replied. "I could not understand their speech, and their clothes were not our fashion."

"I know not what it means, Artemisia," Clearchus said at last. "We are in the hands of the Gods. I shall ask the protection of Artemis and offer her a sacrifice. To-morrow we must be married. I do not dare to wait for the new moon, for I must be near you to protect you. Then, whatever may come, we will meet it together."

"Perhaps the dream was meant for me alone," Artemisia said tenderly. "I cannot bear to bring you into danger."

"Hush, Artemisia!" Clearchus said reprovingly. "I would rather a thousand times die with thee than live without thee."

With a sigh, she let her head rest on his shoulder.

"I care not what may happen so that thou art with me," she said; "then I can feel no fear."

"Artemisia," Clearchus said suddenly, "go not out again to-day. I shall tell Philox to guard thee well until to-morrow. Hast thou told Melissa of the dream?"

"No, for I wished to tell thee first and she is so easily frightened," Artemisia said.

"Then say nothing to her about it," the young man replied.

One of the little slave girls ran up to them at this moment and stood before them, twisting her fingers together and waiting to be spoken to.

"What is it, Proxena?" Artemisia asked.

"The morning meal is waiting, mistress," said the child, and sped away again.

CHAPTER III
ARISTON LAYS A PLOT

Ariston, uncle of Clearchus and formerly guardian of his fortune, sat at his work-table before a mass of papyri closely written with memoranda and accounts. His house stood by itself in a quarter of the city that had once been fashionable but now was occupied chiefly by the poorer class of citizens. Its front was without windows and its stone walls were yellowed and stained with age. Its seclusion seemed to be emphasized by the bustle of life that surrounded it and in which it had no part.

The room in which Ariston sat was evidently used as an office, for rows of metal-bound boxes of various shapes and sizes were piled along its walls. A statuette of Hermes stood in one corner upon its pedestal, and its sightless eyes seemed bent upon the thin, gray face of the old man as he leaned with his elbows upon the top of the table, polished by long use. Lines of care and anxiety showed themselves at the corners of his mouth and about his restless eyes. The light of the swinging lamp that illuminated the small room, even in the daytime, made shadowy hollows at his temples and beneath his cheek-bones.

Little was known of the personal concerns of the old man in Athens. Although he mingled with the other citizens without apparent reserve, he never discussed his own affairs. The general

impression was that he was a good Athenian who had been faithful to the trust reposed in him, and who had won a modest competence of his own for the support of his age. This idea was encouraged by the parsimonious habits of his life and by the trifling but cautious ventures that he sometimes made in the commercial activity of the city. His most conspicuous characteristic, in the minds of his acquaintances, was his mania for gathering information concerning not only Athens and Greece, but distant lands and strange peoples as well. This was looked upon as a harmless and even useful occupation, and it accounted for his evident fondness at times for the company of strangers, who, no doubt, contributed to the satisfaction of his curiosity.

Great would have been the astonishment if some orator had announced to the Athenian Assembly that the humble old man was really one of the richest citizens of Athens, as well as the best informed concerning the plans and hopes of the rulers of the world and of the probable current of coming events. Laughter would have greeted the assertion that much of the merchandise which found its way to the Piræus belonged to him and that the profits realized from the sale of silks and spices, corn and ivory, went into his coffers. Yet these statements would have been true a year before. In Athens the rich were required to contribute to the public charges in proportion to their wealth, and the saving that Ariston was able to effect by making his investments abroad and concealing them through various stratagems from the knowledge

of his neighbors was sufficient, in his opinion, to compensate him for the trouble and the risks that such a course involved. He would rather have suffered his fingers to be hacked off one by one than part with the heavy, shining bars of gold that his prudence and foresight had amassed.

If the history of each separate coin and bar could have been told, it would have revealed secrets which their master had forced himself to forget. Some of them were the price of flesh and blood; some had been gained by violence upon the seas or among the trackless wastes of the desert; some had been won at the expense of honor and truth; for in his earlier years Ariston had been both bold and unscrupulous in his cunning, and his craving for riches had always been insatiable. As his years and his wealth increased he became more circumspect and conservative. He even sought to expiate some of his earlier faults by furtive sacrifices to the Gods, and especially to Hermes, whose image he cherished.

But the Gods had turned their faces from him, and his repentance, if repentance it could be called, had been unavailing. Misfortune had come upon him, and calamity seemed always to be lying in wait for him. If his vessels put to sea, they were sunk in storms or captured by pirates. His factories and warehouses were burned; his caravans were lost; his debtors defaulted; and if he purchased a cargo of corn, its price at the Piræus was certain to be less than the price he had paid for it in the Hellespont. One after another the precious bars which had cost him so much to obtain

were sent to save doubtful ventures and losing investments, until at last all were gone. Sitting in his dingy room, on the day of the arrival of Chares and Leonidas at the house of Clearchus, he was at last in a worldly sense what his neighbors thought him to be; and the marble face of Hermes, with its painted eyes, smiled malignly at him from its corner.

But there was still hope left to him. Although the widespread web of his enterprises had been rent and torn by misfortune, there yet remained enough to build upon securely if he had but a few more of the yellow bars to tide over his present distress. Without them he might keep afloat for a few months longer; but the end would be utter ruin. At least he still owned the great dyeing establishment in Tyre, which had never failed to yield him a handsome revenue. He recalled how he had taken it from Cepheus for one-fourth its real value. It was no concern of his that Cepheus had stolen it from young Phradates. What did the details of the transaction matter now, since they were known only to himself and to Cepheus, who would not be likely to reveal them, and to Mena the Egyptian, the young man's steward? Mena had stolen so much himself from the spendthrift that he would never dare to tell what he knew. And yet the fellow had it in his power to rob Ariston of the last remnant of his fortune.

A discreet knock interrupted Ariston's reflections. He brushed his parchments and papyri hastily into an open box that stood beside his chair and closed the lid. "Enter!" he commanded.

An aged slave opened the door. "Mena, of Tyre," he said.

Cold sweat broke out on Ariston's forehead, but he gave no outward sign of his consternation. "Bring him hither," he directed.

The Egyptian, who had been watching the sluggish goldfish floating in the weed-grown cistern of the court, entered the room with an air of importance. He turned his alert face, with its sharp, inquiring features, upon Ariston.

"Greeting!" he said, extending his hand. "It is long since we have seen thee in Tyre."

"Yes," Ariston replied, leading him to a seat opposite his own, "I am getting too old for travel."

"You have indeed grown older since I saw you last," Mena said, looking at him attentively. "I hope it is not because Fortune has been unkind."

Ariston winced, and the change in his expression was not lost upon the shrewd Egyptian.

"What brings you here?" he asked, shifting the subject.

"We are travelling, my beloved master and I," Mena answered.

"Phradates is with you, then?" the old man asked with an alarm that he was unable to conceal.

The steward paused before he answered, gazing at Ariston with eyes half closed and a faint smile upon his lips.

"Phradates is here," he said at last. "I know of what you are thinking. We have been friends too long to have secrets from each other. You need have no fear. Cepheus is dead and I have

too many causes to despise Phradates to take his part."

He paused again and suddenly his face became convulsed with a spasm of hatred.

"I could strangle him!" he cried, clenching his hands as though he felt his master's throat beneath his fingers.

Ariston breathed more freely. At any rate, his property in Tyre was safe.

"Why don't you do it, then?" he asked coolly.

"Because the time has not yet come!" Mena replied fiercely. "For every insult that he has given me and for every blow that he has made me feel, he shall suffer tenfold! His fortune is dwindling, and in the end it will be mine. Then let him ask Mena for aid!"

"I did not know that you had so much courage," Ariston remarked.

"I have not watched you in vain," Mena replied, "and it is to you that I now come for assistance."

"To me!" Ariston exclaimed.

"To you," Mena repeated. "Be not alarmed, for what I have to propose will be for our mutual benefit. Phradates has been throwing money right and left since we set out from Tyre. Great sums he spent in Crete and still greater in Corinth. Since his arrival here he has been fleeced without mercy. You will understand that I have tried to protect him, but merely to save him from injury. He might have lost his life only this morning had I not been there to guard him from an attack by two desperate

characters with a crowd of slaves, who set upon us while we were returning from the dice. Luckily, I succeeded in beating them off, but the noble Phradates was thrown from his chair and his noble nose was battered. Soon he will be in want of more money. Of the property that remains to him, he has quarries on Lebanon, which employ a thousand slaves, silk mills in Old Tyre, where as many more are kept busy, and a score of ships in the trade with Carthage. He believes the value of the quarries and the mills to be only half what it really is and reports have been made to him that two-thirds of the vessels of his fleet have been lost. All this he will pledge for anything that it will bring when he learns that his money is gone. It is for us to get possession of that pledge. I have a few talents, but not enough. I will take care that the loan is never repaid and our success is certain. What do you say?"

Ariston looked at the statue of Hermes. It was a fancy of his that he could draw either a favorable or an adverse augury from the expression on the face of the God as it showed in the wavering light of the lamp. He could detect no change in the mocking smile that seemed to hover about the marble lips. It left him with no conclusion.

"What you have told me," he said to Mena, "makes it necessary for me to tell you something in return. I am a ruined man."

"Ruined! You!" Mena exclaimed incredulously.

"It is true," Ariston replied. "Of all that I had, nothing remains to me intact except the dye-house in Tyre and a small fleet of

corn ships that has but now arrived from the Euxine. The worst is that I have debts that must be met if I am to save other ventures."

"But you have the property of your nephew to draw upon," Mena suggested.

"I had it," the old man said, "but it was turned over to him more than a year ago. Since then all my losses have befallen."

"But you are his heir," the Egyptian replied meaningly. "Is he married?"

"No; but he soon will be," Ariston replied.

The two men exchanged glances, reading each other's thoughts in their eyes. Neither cared to put into words what was in his mind.

"Leave it to me," Ariston said at last. "I think it can be managed. Clearchus knows nothing of my affairs, and if I can once more get control of the property all will be well. I think we may safely assume that he will not marry. For the rest, we must wait and see. Let us talk of this pledge that Phradates is to make for our security."

He produced his tablets and a stylus and the conspirators were soon buried in a mass of calculations. When Mena took his leave, every detail had been arranged.

Hardly had Mena disappeared in the direction of the Agora when a man of unusual stature, with brawny arms and a heavy black beard, turned into the street in which Ariston lived and stood staring doubtfully about him. There was a hint of the sea in his sunburned face and rough garments.

"If you are looking for the Piræus, my friend, you will not find it here," said a fruit dealer who chanced to meet him.

"What do you know of the Piræus, grasshopper?" returned the stranger, halting and looking at the merchant with contempt. "I am searching for the house of Ariston, son of Xenas. Do you know where in this accursed street it is?"

"Tut, tut; fair words, my friend," the merchant replied, carefully keeping his distance. "What do you want with Ariston?"

"That is his affair and mine, but not yours," growled the stranger.

"I'll warrant it is nothing good," the fruit dealer said, "but you will find his house at the end of the street, near the wall."

Without stopping to thank him, the stranger strode on in the direction that he had indicated. The merchant stood for a moment gazing after him, wondering whence he came and what he wanted; but finding no answer to these questions in his own mind, he shook his head like a man who is assured of the existence of something that should not be and continued on his way to his shop in the Agora to relate his suspicions.

Ariston himself came to the door in response to the stranger's knock. He was admitted at once and without a word. Ariston led him in silence to his own room and seated him in the chair that Mena had occupied half an hour before. Instead of summoning a slave, the old man went himself to fetch a flask of wine and a trencher of bread and cheese.

"Can it be done?" he asked in an eager voice, leaning forward

in his favorite attitude with his elbows on the table while the other ate and drank.

"It can be done, but it will not be easy," his guest replied.

"Not easy to carry off a woman who has only slaves to guard her?" Ariston exclaimed. "Are your men cowards, then, Syphax?"

"No, my men and I are not cowards, old Skinflint," Syphax said, "but you may as well understand now that we do not intend to risk our lives for nothing."

He delivered this speech with the blustering air of a bully, gazing boldly into the old man's face. Ariston, naturally of small stature, looked more than ever shrunken and withered in contrast with his companion; but at the sound of the other's threatening tone, his face hardened and there came a cold gleam into his eyes.

"I am glad you are not afraid, Syphax," he said in a voice so soft that it sounded almost caressing. "Have you forgotten Medon? Your eyes saw his death. He was a brave man, too, your old chief. I think I can hear him yet as he called upon the Gods in his torture. They could not help him. Poor Medon!"

The face of Syphax paled under its tan at the recollection that Ariston had conjured up and an involuntary shudder ran through him. His bold eyes wavered before the persistent stare of the little old man, whom he could have crushed in one of his hands.

"What are you willing to pay?" he asked hoarsely, pushing away his food half finished.

"You would do it for nothing, if I asked you, Syphax," the old

man replied, still in the same soft voice, "but I have no wish to be hard with you. This is a matter in which I have a deep interest and I am willing to pay well for it. When you have taken her safely on board, you will sail to Halicarnassus, where you will search out Iphicrates, son of Conon, and give him this letter. If he finds you have done your work well, he will pay you a talent in silver. But if the girl has been harmed in any way, not a drachma will you get and worse will befall you than befell Medon."

"The work is worth five times as much," Syphax grumbled with downcast eyes, "but I suppose I have no choice."

"None, my dear Syphax, and I am a poor man," said Ariston. "Let us regard the matter as settled. Now, how do you intend to proceed?"

Syphax roused himself like a man whose professional skill has been called upon.

"The house stands thus," he said, indicating its position on the table with a huge finger. "On this side is the grove where I and a dozen of my men will lie hidden with the litter. One of my fellows will scale the roof and let himself down inside. He will open the door to us and the thing will be over in a moment."

"Where will you embark?" the old man asked, nodding approval.

"My ship will be lying off-shore with a boat in waiting. We will carry her in the litter to this spot, about two stadia beyond the Piræus, which we shall have to pass. We shall make the attack soon after the middle watch of the night when the moon will be

low."

"You should have been a general, Syphax," the old man said. "You have a better head for strategy than most of those the Athenians employ. Go to your work and forget nothing. I must attend the Assembly, where Demosthenes is to stir up the citizens against Alexander, son of Philip. They say the boy is dead."

"Alexander dead!" Syphax exclaimed.

"The story is that he was killed by the Illyrians, and Demosthenes has a man who saw him die," Ariston replied indifferently. "I think the man is lying and that Demosthenes knows it. But these affairs have nothing to do with you. Be off to your business."

When the adventurer had gone, Ariston returned to his room and prepared to write. From his expression of content, it was evident that he was satisfied with what had been done.

"To Iphicrates, son of Conon," his letter ran. "I am sending to you Syphax, a freebooter from Rhodes, who will deliver to you a young woman. You will take her into your house and guard her with care until you hear from me again. Syphax will present to you an order for a talent of silver. Defer the payment until you have the girl, and then do with him as you will. As a pirate and a robber, he has richly merited death. May the Gods protect you."

As Ariston was carefully sealing this letter, a gaunt, sour-visaged woman entered the room. She was his wife and the one person on earth in whom he had confidence. Like most secretive men with whom duplicity is a daily study, he sometimes felt the

need of telling the truth, if only to note the effect of his schemes upon another's mind. But even to his wife, whose covetousness was equal to his own, he never revealed all that was in his brain. Her lonely life was spent in a constant endeavor to piece out from what he imparted to her the full extent of his plans. She admired his intellect, but deep in her heart she feared him, and, womanlike, she was tormented by the suspicion that somewhere she had a rival to whom he told what he concealed from her. The consciousness of her own deficiency of charms made her manner all the more harsh and forbidding. As soon as she entered the room she noted that he was in an easy mood, and she made haste to take advantage of it.

"Who were these men?" she asked. "What are you about now?"

"Affairs of state, Xanthe, that are not for women to know," he said mockingly.

"All that concerns you concerns me," she replied. "Am I to do the work of a slave here like a mole in the dark? Who are these women you were talking of with that evil-looking man?"

"So you were listening!" Ariston said with a frown.

"Yes, I was, if you must know it," Xanthe said defiantly. "Do you think I am to know nothing? If you had consulted more freely with me before, we would not now be the paupers that we are, and many times I have told you this, but you will not listen to me because I am a woman."

There was something in this remonstrance that made an

impression upon Ariston's mind, smarting as he was over the loss of his fortune. It might have been better, after all, if he had told her more.

"We were talking of only one woman," he said, with an impulse of frankness. "She is Artemisia."

"Artemisia!" Xanthe exclaimed. "Don't try to deceive me. Why should you wish Artemisia to be carried off? Is not Clearchus to make her his wife?"

"It is for that very reason," Ariston replied. "I do not wish him to do so."

"Why not?" Xanthe demanded in a tone of suspicion.

"Sit down and let us talk rationally," Ariston said. "Suppose they marry and have children. His property would be lost to us forever."

"That is true," Xanthe assented. "I had not thought of that, and we need it so much more than he. If he should die, would it belong to us?"

"It would," her husband answered, "and now you know why I wish to prevent the marriage."

He rose, and she aided him to adjust the folds of his himation.

"I am going to the Assembly," he said. "If we have war with Macedon, the price of corn will advance. Look to the house and let none enter while I am away."

It was not until after he had gone that Xanthe began to wonder how she and Ariston were to profit by preventing the marriage, since their nephew would still be alive and in the possession of his

property. It could not be that Ariston intended to have him slain. She shuddered at the thought, for she was fond of Clearchus, and he had always been kind to her. Besides, such a crime could not be committed without almost certain detection. Ariston must have formed some other scheme for bringing about his object. She reproached herself for not having questioned him on this point while he was in a frame of mind to answer. The opportunity might not occur again and she could only guess at what was to come. The half-confidence that he had given her left her more watchful and suspicious than ever.

Syphax meantime had found his way back to the Agora and was about to enter a wine-shop when he felt some one pluck him by the elbow. Glancing back, his eyes met those of Mena.

"Ah, my fox," he exclaimed, "what brings you to Athens?"

"Necessity and my master," Mena replied. "And you?"

Syphax shook his head and made as if to move away, but Mena was not to be denied. An hour later they were still together, sitting side by side in a corner of the wine-shop, and it was fortunate for Ariston that the Egyptian was his ally instead of his enemy, for all that Syphax could tell, he knew.

CHAPTER IV
THE VOICE OF DEMOSTHENES

In the Theatre of Dionysus the citizens of Athens were gathering for the purpose of deciding whether to break their treaty with Macedon and by one stroke revenge upon Alexander the wrongs and humiliations that his father had made them suffer. Ariston walked through the spacious Agora, surrounded by colonnades and embellished by the statues of heroes and the Gods. The shopkeepers and merchants were closing their places of business and joining in the human tide that was setting all in the same direction.

Everywhere Ariston heard repeated the assertion that Alexander was dead. The news was announced in tones of joy, and invariably it was accompanied by an expression of desire for war while the enemy was still unprepared. There seemed to be only one opinion among the people. It was manifested in the clamor of gay and careless confusion that betrayed the nervous tension of the throng.

Ariston's face became more thoughtful as he proceeded. He had no doubt of what the Assembly would do if unchecked, and he foresaw the downfall of his plans. A declaration of war with Macedon would be fatal. Whatever the issue of such a conflict might be, it would certainly delay Alexander's invasion of Persia

and keep Clearchus at home. He must be rid of Clearchus at all hazards, and without violence.

Moreover, he knew that the report of Alexander's death was false. It was impossible that any person in Athens should have been able to obtain information later than that which had been brought to him. He felt assured that the young king was fighting his way out of Illyria, with every prospect of escape, and that the report of his death had been started by Demosthenes as a stratagem to dispose the minds of the people to war. By preventing the success of this plan, he reflected, he would not only be serving his own ends, but also performing a public service. Such a coincidence had happened rarely enough in his career.

But he knew it would be useless to attempt any contradiction of the report at that moment. He was too thoroughly acquainted with the characteristics of his countrymen to think of it. They wished to believe and they would not allow that wish to be thwarted. He must watch and wait.

Pushing through the chattering crowd, he entered the Theatre. Before him, in a great semicircle, hewn partly out of the solid rock of the southeastern pitch of the Acropolis, he saw row on row and tier above tier of his fellow-citizens, – the brilliant, unstable, cowardly, heroic, passionate, generous, cruel democracy of Athens. Above them towered the crag which they had crowned with triumphs of art and architecture beyond the power of the world to equal, guarded by the wonderful Athene,

whose creator they had sent to die in prison. On the left the great temple of Olympian Zeus raised its massive fluted columns. In the Theatre where they sat their fathers had hissed or applauded the masterpieces of tragedy and comedy. The babel of talk and of light-hearted laughter, the shifting of many-hued garments under the intense blue arch of the sky, reminded Ariston of the fickle sunlit waves of the Ægean.

The cloud that for years had overshadowed Athens had been removed. Philip, the tenacious, subtle, resourceful monarch of barbarous Macedon, had fallen under the dagger of Pausanias, who had doubtless been inspired by the Gods to punish him for his crimes against the Athenians. Little by little, with a purpose that never swerved, he had made himself master of their fairest possessions. Time and again they had sought to shake him off with brief outbursts of restless fury; but he held what he had won, and in the lull that followed the storm he had never failed to creep nearer to their citadel. His advance seemed to them as inevitable as fate.

Now he was gone, resigning his power and his ambitions to his son, Alexander, a boy of twenty years, whom all Athens knew as a foolish and rash youth. After laying claim to the honors that his father had forced the states of Hellas to bestow upon him, he had marched into the unknown wilderness of the north with his army and there had perished. His fate had been told only in rumors at first, but had not Demosthenes talked with a fugitive from the Macedonian camp, who had seen him fall

beneath a stone? Every Athenian felt that the time had come to place the name of his city once more at the head of the civilized world. Already the Thebans, aided by their subsidies, had risen against the barbarian garrison and had shut the Macedonians in the Cadmea. The reverses of the past had been forgotten and the lively imaginations of the Athenians had carried them halfway to the goal of their hopes.

Ariston gazed about him at the shifting throng as though in search of some one. The priests of Ceres, Athene, and Zeus stood talking in groups with the officials of the city, or had already taken their places in the cushioned marble arm-chairs, with curved backs, that formed the first row of seats. Presently the old man caught sight of Clearchus, and his friends, Chares and Leonidas. With them sat a young man of singular appearance whom Ariston did not recognize. He wore a splendid mantle of purple, embroidered with gold, a profusion of rings flashed upon his fingers, and the odor of costly perfumes hung about him like a cloud. It seemed as though he sought in his costume to make up for the deficiencies of nature, for in figure he was short and stout, with legs and arms of disproportionate slenderness, and his narrow eyes were set beneath a square forehead from the top of which the hair had been shaved.

"Greeting, uncle," Clearchus said cordially, as the old man forced his way toward them.

Ariston sat down on the broad marble step in the space that Clearchus made for him. He found himself between his nephew

and the stranger.

"This is Aristotle of Stagira, but more recently of Pella," Clearchus said. "He can talk to you by the hour, if he chooses, about Alexander, whom you so much admire."

"Is he really dead, as they say he is?" Ariston asked doubtfully.

"I do not know," lisped Aristotle. "It is his habit always to expose himself in battle."

"Can he make himself master of Hellas?" Ariston asked again.

"Only the Gods can answer that," Aristotle replied. "It is safe to say that what human ambition can accomplish, he will do. He was my pupil, and there are those who maintain that he knows more than his master!"

Although the philosopher spoke with a smile, there was a trace of irony in his tone that did not escape the alert Athenian.

"You hear that?" he cried, turning to Clearchus. "Here is a boy who begins by conquering his instructor. Where will he end?"

"They say he has ended already, up there among the savages," Chares said lazily.

"I'll lay you a box of Assyrian ointment that Alexander is still alive," Aristotle said.

"It's a wager," the Theban cried. "And the box shall be of gold."

"There goes Callicles. Hi, there, old Twenty Per Cent!" cried a youth who was sitting in front of them.

"By the Styx, I wish I had what I owe him!" Chares remarked fervently.

A young man with oiled and curled ringlets, wearing a long silken robe, and carrying a cane inlaid with mother-of-pearl, pushed toward them, followed by a slave laden with cushions for him to sit upon.

"Do you know what Phocus has done now?" he asked in an affected voice.

"No," said Chares, coldly.

"He happened to go to the Lyceum the other day, and he overheard Theodorus, the atheist, say that if it was praiseworthy to ransom a friend from the enemy, it would also be commendable to rescue a sweetheart from bondage. What does he do but buy Tryphonia her freedom from old Mnemon. He vows that he will marry her."

Having imparted this bit of gossip, the youth lounged away to repeat it.

"Who is that young man with the red chiton?" Leonidas asked.

"He is Ctesippus, son of Chabrias," Clearchus replied. "He has spent twenty thousand talents of gold since his father died – he and Phocus together. He thinks he knows more about war than his father knew. He drives poor Phocion almost distracted with his advice whenever there is a campaign; and Phocion endures it because he is his father's son."

Throughout the Theatre rose the hum of gossip and malicious small talk. Chares listened with indolent contempt. Leonidas studied the faces of the men who had won distinction in war, such as Diopethes, Menestheus, and Leosthenes, whom

Clearchus pointed out to him. Aristotle continued to lisp to Ariston concerning Macedon. The attention of the crowd was diverted by the arrival of the Lexiarchs with their scarlet cords. Stretching them across the narrow streets, they had been driving the stragglers into the Assembly like sheep. The laggard whose garments showed a trace of the dye with which the cords were covered was forced to pay a fine.

"Look; there's Phaon with the red stripe on his back!" Chares cried, standing up to get a better view.

A roar of laughter greeted the victim as he entered and his name was repeated from all sides.

"Were you asleep, Phaon? Did your wife keep you at home? You should drink less wine in the morning!" shouted his acquaintances.

Another unfortunate came to divert attention from Phaon, and still others, until all the citizens were accounted for. The tumult was succeeded by a hush as the white-robed priests solemnly advanced into the open space in the middle of the semicircle, carrying a bleating lamb. After an invocation to Athene, they cut the animal's throat before the altar and sprinkled its blood in every direction upon the pavement. The oldest of the priests then stood forth, raised his hands, and looking upward, cried the accustomed formula: – "May the Gods pursue to destruction, with all his race, that man who shall act, speak, or plot anything against this State!"

The priests then slowly withdrew, and a herald mounted the

bema to announce, on behalf of the Proedri, the occasion of the Assembly. He declared the question to be whether the treaty with Macedon should be maintained or set aside, and he added that the Senate of the Areopagus had referred the matter to the decision of the people without expressing its opinion.

He was followed by a second herald, representing the Epistate, who, with a loud voice, called upon any citizen above the age of fifty years to speak his mind, others to follow in accordance with their ages. As he ceased and descended, all eyes were turned toward a portion of the Theatre where sat a gray-haired man, with shoulders slightly stooped, a sloping forehead, and a retreating chin, partly hidden by a close-cropped beard.

"Demosthenes! Demosthenes!" came from every part of the horseshoe.

The man to whom Athens turned in this crisis of her affairs sat unmoved and apparently oblivious to the demand of the crowd. Accustomed as they were to the oratorical combats of the Theatre, the citizens understood that Demosthenes had determined to reserve to himself the advantage of speaking last. They turned, therefore, to his chief opponent and called upon Æschines.

With an affectation of carelessness, Æschines ascended the bema and plunged at once into his argument, like a man who speaks what first occurs to his mind. The burden of his contention was that Athens was bound by her oath to observe her treaty with Macedon. To break it, he declared, would be to sink to

the depth of dishonor and to make the name of the city a byword throughout the world. As he elaborated point after point in his reasoning, all tending to confirm and enforce his conclusions, it was plain that he was making an impression in spite of the fact that all who heard him knew that he had been in Philip's pay. He painted in dark colors the cost and danger of the war that would follow the violation of the treaty and closed with a florid appeal for constancy and forbearance, which he called the first of virtues.

He was succeeded by the dandy, Demades, whose robes of embroidered linen trailed upon the ground, but who sustained the argument against war with sledge-hammer blows of rhetoric. Glaucippus, Eubulus, Aristophon, and other orators, less famous, sat nodding their heads among their pupils and admirers, who clustered about them criticising or commending each period that fell from the lips of the speakers.

Watching the effect of the speeches, the partisans of Demosthenes, fearful that it might be disastrous to permit his opponents to hold the attention of the people any longer, renewed their shouts for him. The Assembly joined them. It had heard enough of the peace party, and it was eager to know how Demosthenes would answer.

There had been hardly any cessation of the talk and laughter. Many persons even moved about through the audience, chatting with their friends, and the Scythians, whose duty it was to maintain order, did not venture to interfere with them.

Everywhere there was talk of the advantages of peace. The fever for war had cooled before the logic of oratory. Ariston, keenly attentive to all that was passing, was among those who left his place and wandered about the amphitheatre, pausing here and there to exchange a few words with an acquaintance. Behind him, like a ripple on the surface of a lake, there spread through the crowd the news that the story of Alexander's death was a falsehood contrived by the friends of Macedon to entrap the republic into war.

Before the old man had returned to his seat, the contradiction had reached Demosthenes, elaborated into every semblance of truth. He saw that it was believed and that he had been robbed of the main theme of his speech; for he could not prove that Alexander was dead. In response to the cries of the multitude, he rose, and there was no pretence in the reluctance with which he walked with head bent toward the benia, considering what he should say. As he ascended, the shouting died away, and for the first time there was absolute stillness in the Theatre.

"Athenians!" he began, in a voice of moderate pitch, but of a resonant tone that carried it to all parts of the circle, "by all means we should agree with those who so strenuously advise an exact adherence to our oaths and treaties – if they really believe what they say. For nothing is more in accord with the character of democracy than the maintenance of justice and honesty. But let not the men who urge us to be honest, embarrass us and our deliberations by harangues which their own actions contradict."

Ariston glanced about him with alarm, which was intensified as the orator, with consummate skill, built up the argument that, having bound himself by the treaty to maintain the liberties of Greece, Alexander had violated his oath by reinstating the tyrants of Messene and by disregarding other specific clauses. Artfully exaggerating the Macedonian aggressiveness, recalling by flattering allusions the great days of Athens, raising the hope of victory if war should be declared, Demosthenes presented the situation to the Assembly in such a light as to make it seem that Athens not only had a right to take up arms against Macedon, but that it was her plain duty to begin the attack. This impression grew out of his words without apparent effort to convey it. There was nothing in his speech to indicate that he was a special pleader presenting only one side of the case. He seemed the personification of candor and fairness. As his voice and gestures became more animated, and the flood of his marvellous eloquence swept over them, it appeared to his fellow-citizens that the men who had given expression to the desire for peace must be charlatans or worse, who had been bribed by Macedonian gold, as in fact many of them had been, to betray them into the hands of the enemy. In words that none but he knew how to choose, he raised the spectre that had been laid by the death of Philip and made it more threatening than it had ever been before.

Under the magic spell of his voice old thoughts and feelings stirred and woke in the hearts of the Athenians. For an hour

they became once more the men of Platæa and Salamis and of the hundred bloody fields upon which they had measured their strength with that of their ancient foes from the Peloponnesus. Their former greatness of soul flamed up like a flash from a dying fire.

While Demosthenes spoke, not a word was uttered in the group around Clearchus. The young man sat with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, tingling with a desire to sacrifice life itself, if need there were, to revenge the wrongs of Athens and crush the insolent Macedonian. Leonidas listened with hands clenched and with every nerve at tension, like a hound of pure race straining at his leash toward the quarry. Aristotle was gravely attentive, and even Chares, though he could not be aroused from his lazy pose, followed the oration with evident enjoyment.

When Demosthenes ended and came down from the bema, the Assembly drew a long breath, and instantly each man fell to discussing with his neighbor what was best to be decided. Suddenly they realized with astonishment that Demosthenes had failed to propose any decree and that they had nothing before them upon which they might vote.

"I thought he was going to tell us how Alexander died!" Demades sneered.

"What has become of his witness of whom we have heard so much?" a leather-dealer asked.

"He is afraid to propose war! He has offered no decree!" another citizen cried.

These questions and a hundred others were discussed on every side with a violence that swept away all semblance of dignity or restraint. The factions quarrelled like children, and more than once came to blows in their eagerness, making it necessary for the Scythians of the public guard to separate them. At last the herald of the Epistate demanded in due form whether the Assembly desired any decree to be proposed. Far less than the required number of six thousand hands were raised in the affirmative, and the gathering was dissolved, eddying out of the enclosure in turbulent disorder.

"Is that all?" asked Chares, rising and stretching himself with a yawn.

"That is all," Clearchus replied sadly.

"With a phalanx of ten thousand brave men I could take your Acropolis," Leonidas remarked, measuring the height above his head.

"Yes, but where could you find them?" Aristotle said.

"Who knows? Perhaps in the camp of Alexander," the Spartan replied.

Ariston had slipped away into the crowd.

CHAPTER V
THE BANQUET

On their way from the Theatre, Clearchus informed his friends of his decision to be married on the morrow.

"Then we must feast to-night!" Chares cried promptly.

"Very well," Clearchus said, "but you will have to make the arrangements for me, as I have other things to do."

"Aristotle will take charge of the food and wine," said the Theban, eagerly, "if he is willing to assume such a responsibility; and I will provide the entertainment and send out the invitations. What do you say?"

"Good," Clearchus replied; "that is, if Aristotle agrees."

"I am willing," said the Stagirite.

"It is settled, then," Chares declared. "Come, Leonidas, I shall need your help. Let us get to work."

It was hardly sunset when the guests who had been bidden by Chares began to assemble at the house of Clearchus. A crimson awning had been drawn over the peristylium and the soft light of scores of lamps shone upward against it. Shrubs and flowering plants partly hid the marble columns. Medean carpets had been spread upon the floor. The tables, each with its soft couch, had been arranged in two parallel lines, joined at one end by those set for the host and the most honored of the guests. At the farther

end of the space thus enclosed a fountain flung up a stream that sparkled with variegated colors.

All had been prepared under the direction of Aristotle in such a manner as to gratify the senses without jarring upon the most sensitive taste. The masses of color and the contrasts of light and shade were grouped with subtle skill to create a pleasing impression. Slaves walked noiselessly across the hall, appearing and vanishing in the wall of foliage, bearing dishes of gold and of silver and flagons filled with rare wines. Softly, as from a distance, sounded the music of flutes and citharse.

Clearchus and his guests, crowned with wreaths of myrtle, reclined upon the couches. Their talk ran chiefly upon the events of the day and the contest of oratory in the Assembly.

"You Athenians ought to pass a law banishing all your speakers," Chares drawled. "Then there might be some chance that you would adopt a policy and stick to it. As it is, the infernal skill of these men makes you believe first one thing and then another, until you end by not knowing what to think."

"You mean we have plenty of counsellors but no counsel," Clearchus replied.

"That's it, exactly," Chares said. "And that man, Demosthenes, will bring you to grief yet, some day."

"All your states have had their turn of power," Aristotle said, "and none has been able to keep it. There is another day coming and it will be the day of the Macedonian. He dreams of making you all one."

"Let him keep away from my country with his dreams," Leonidas remarked.

"There spoke the lion!" laughed Clearchus. "Stubborn to the last."

"Did you hear what old Phocion said when he came out of the Theatre?" asked a young man with a shrill voice who sat on the right.

"No; what was it?" Clearchus inquired.

"Demosthenes wanted to know what he thought of his oration," the narrator said. "You know Demosthenes likes to hear himself praised and he would almost give his right hand for a compliment from Phocion, the 'pruner of his periods,' as he calls him. 'It was only indifferent,' the old fellow told him, 'but good enough to cost you your life.' You should have seen how pale Demosthenes grew; but Phocion put his hand on his shoulder and said, 'Never mind; for this once, I think I can save thee.'"

"They say Phocion is an honest man," Chares remarked.

"So he is," Aristotle replied. "And one of few."

The young men who had assembled to honor the occasion listened eagerly to every word that fell from the lips of the man whose keen deductions and daring speculations had begun to open new pathways in every branch of human wisdom. The rivalry between the philosophers in Athens was even more keen than that between the orators, and each had his school of partisans and defenders.

"Honesty is truth," said Porphyry, a young follower of

Xenocrates, who had succeeded Plato in the Academy. "But what is truth? Have you Peripatetics discovered it yet?"

"We are seeking, at least," Aristotle replied dryly, feeling that an attempt was being made to entrap him.

"Democritus holds that truth does not exist," Porphyry ventured, unabashed.

"Yes, and Protagoras maintains that we are the measure of all things and that everything is true or false, as we will," the Stagirite rejoined. "They are unfortunate, for if there were no truth, there would be no world. As for the Sceptics, they have not the courage of their doctrines; for which of them, being in Libya and conceiving himself to be in Athens, would think of trying to walk into the Odeum? And when they fall sick, do they not summon a physician instead of trusting to some person who is ignorant of healing to cure them? Those who search for truth with their eyes and hands only shall never find it, for there are truths which are none the less true because we cannot see nor feel them, and these are the greatest of all."

"We might know the truth at last if we could find out what animates nature," Clearchus said. "Why do flowers grow and bloom? Why do birds fly and fishes swim?"

"The marble statues of the Parthenon would have remained blocks of stone forever had not Phidias cut them out," Aristotle responded. "It was Empedocles who taught us that earth, air, fire, and water must form the limits of our knowledge; but who believes him now?"

"Do you hold, then, with Anaxagoras of Clazomene, that all things are directed by a divine mind?" Porphyry asked.

This question was followed by a sudden hush while Aristotle considered his answer. All present had heard whispers that the Stagirite in his teaching was introducing new Gods and denying the power of the old divinities. This was the crime for which Socrates had been put to death and Pericles himself had found it difficult to save Aspasia from the same fate when a similar charge was preferred against her. Aristotle felt his danger, for he knew that the jealous and powerful priesthood would be glad to catch him tripping, as indeed it did in later years.

"It was Hermotimus, I think, who first proposed that doctrine," he said slowly, "and I have noticed that Anaxagoras employs it only when no other explanation of what he sees is left him."

There was a murmur of applause at this reply, which suggested the necessity for supposing the existence of an overruling intelligence without committing the philosopher to such a belief. The young Academician seemed crestfallen, but by common consent the topic was abandoned as too dangerous and the conversation became more general.

Clearchus could not wholly conceal the anxiety that filled his mind. He started at every unexpected sound and turned his face toward the entrance, where he had posted a slave with orders to bring him word instantly should any message for him arrive. His mood did not escape his friends, who, without knowing the

reason for it, urged wine upon him in the hope of raising his spirits and for the same reason themselves drank more freely than usual.

Chares had promised something new in the way of amusement, but he refused to tell what it was to be. Consequently there was a flutter of expectation when the attendants removed the last course, washing the hands of the guests for the seventh time, and leaving only wine and sweetmeats before them.

First came a Scythian with a trained bear, which performed a series of familiar tricks. Aristotle watched the animal with the most minute attention, directing notice to several of its characteristics and explaining their meaning. The music then struck into a louder and livelier air and six young girls, in floating garments of brilliant hue, performed a graceful dance of intricate figure. There was no novelty in this and Chares became the target for good-natured reproaches, which he received smilingly. The dancing girls gave place to a swarthy Indian juggler, whose feats of magic delighted the spectators and evoked cries of wonder and admiration.

As the juggler retired gravely, it was noticed that Aristotle, unused to so much wine, had dropped quietly off to sleep. By command of Clearchus, two stalwart slaves carried him away to bed, while his companions at the board drank his health.

"All this is very well, Chares," Porphyry complained, "but I thought you were going to show us something new."

"Pour a libation to Aphrodite!" the Theban replied, sprinkling

a few drops from his goblet and draining what remained.

The others followed his example, nothing loath.

From behind a mass of blossoms came a young woman and stood before the sparkling fountain with her chin slightly raised and a smile upon her lips. She wore a chiton of shimmering, transparent fabric from the looms of Amorgos. The coils of her tawny hair were held in place by jewelled pins which were her only adornment. There was a confident expression of sensuous content on her face and a slight smile parted her lips as she saw the involuntary admiration that she inspired.

Through the golden cobweb that covered without hiding it, her firm flesh glowed warmly. The curves of her shoulders and breast and the rounded fulness of her lithe limbs were as perfect as a statue. As Clearchus gazed upon her with the delight in pure beauty which was so strong in him, he was beset by an elusive sense of familiarity for which he tried in vain to find some explanation. He was certain that he had never seen the girl before. Had there been nothing else to assure him of this, he knew that he never would have forgotten her eyes. Like the eyes of a predatory animal, they shot back the light in reflected gleams of fleeting topaz.

Crouched at her side lay a leopard, his body pressed flat against the rich carpet in which her white feet were buried. He wore a golden collar with a slender chain, the end of which she held between her fingers. The beast glanced restlessly from side to side in his strange surroundings, twitching his tail with nervous

uneasiness.

In the light that bathed her from head to foot, the young woman posed for a moment to allow the spectators to feel the full effect of her beauty.

"Thais! Thais!" cried several of the guests, in accents of intense astonishment.

"Is it really Thais?" Clearchus asked, turning to Chares. "How did you ever persuade her to come?"

The Theban smiled, but made no reply. Thais had only recently begun to attract attention, but her fame had already eclipsed that of other popular favorites in Athens. Sculptors and painters had declared her the most beautiful woman in all Hellas. Poets had made verses in her honor, likening her to Hebe and Aphrodite. Her house was thronged daily with the youth of fashion. She had become the latest sensation in a city greedy for all that was new.

Little was known of her beyond the fact that she had been reared and educated in all the accomplishments of her profession by old Eunomus, one of the most skilful of all the Athenian dealers in flesh and blood. Where he had found her he refused to tell. Everybody had heard that Alcmæon had purchased her freedom a short time before his death, paying Eunomus half her weight in gold, and that he had made comfortable provision for her when his last illness seized him and he knew that he must die. The only regret that he had expressed was that he must leave her behind him.

Left in an independent position, Thais had shown herself capricious. None of the young men who hung about her could boast of any successes. A few had ruined themselves in their efforts to gain her favor, and one had even drunk hemlock and crept to her door to die. Clearchus, although he had never before seen her, had heard enough of her to feel astonished at her presence. He could not understand how Chares had been able to induce her to come, like a mere dancing girl, for their amusement, unless he had offered her an enormous sum of money. Knowing the reckless character of his friend, the thought alarmed him.

"You have ruined yourself!" he whispered to the Theban. "What did you promise the woman?"

"Not an obol, on my honor, O youth of simple heart!" Chares replied, laughing.

"Then how did you get her to come?" Clearchus asked. "You do not know her."

"I invited her," Chares replied; "and she accepted. I suppose it was a woman's whim. I did not ask her."

Slaves ran forward with a number of sword blades set in blocks of wood in such a manner as to enable them to stand upright. These they arranged symmetrically upon the carpet at equal distances from each other, so as to form a lozenge pattern with its point toward Thais. Dropping the end of the chain by which she held the leopard, as the music changed to a rhythmic cadence, the young woman began to tread in and out between the swords.

Her movements were so light and graceful that she seemed hardly to touch the carpet, threading her way from side to side to the quickening measure. The leopard crept closer to the line of steel and watched her with glowing eyes. Faster and faster grew the measure, and faster grew her motions, until she was whirling among the blades, which flickered like blue flames as her shadow intercepted the light. A misstep would have sent her down to her death upon one of the points which she seemed to regard no more than if they had been so many flowers. The company watched her with a suspense that was breathless. Suddenly the music ceased, and she stood before them unharmed at the upper point of the lozenge. There was a glow on her cheeks and her bosom panted from her exertions. The guests broke into cries of admiration, casting their wreaths of myrtle at her feet; but she had eyes only for Chares, who lay looking at her with a lazy smile. She frowned and bit her lip.

"Did I not do it well?" she demanded.

"Excellently well," Chares replied.

"Is that all?" she asked in a tone of disappointment.

Before he could make any reply there came a frantic knocking at the door outside the house. Clearchus started forward with an exclamation of alarm. The man whom he had placed on guard ran in, terror stricken, followed by Tolman, one of the slaves from Melissa's house in Academe.

"Oh, my master!" Tolman cried, throwing himself at the feet of Clearchus.

"Artemisia!" the young man demanded.

"They have carried her off," Tolman said, "and Philox, the steward, is slain!"

"Horses, Cleon! Bring swords and armor!" Clearchus shouted.

"Who has done this?" Chares asked.

"I know not," Clearchus replied; "we were forewarned; but it would be better for them had they never been born."

"Fetch me a jar of water," Chares cried, pushing aside the guests, who had left their places and were crowding around Clearchus to learn the news. When a slave brought a jar of cold water, the Theban plunged his head into it to clear his brain and shook off the drops from his yellow hair. "Now my armor!" he said.

Leonidas was already occupied in putting on the light accoutrement of a horseman, and, although he said nothing, there was a look of expectant joy on his harsh face.

Thais, who had drawn to one side, stood for a moment, and then seeing that she had been forgotten, slipped away unnoticed. Some of the guests hastened to their homes to arm themselves and follow the three friends, while others remained behind to discuss the event. Clearchus said a hasty farewell, and in a few moments from the arrival of the slave the three young men, followed by Cleon, were racing down to the city gate.

Into the open country they dashed, Clearchus leading the way, while the others spurred madly in their effort to keep pace with him. The sun had not yet risen when they wheeled into

the gateway and drew rein at Melissa's villa. The place seemed deserted, for the terrified servants had closed and barred the doors, fearing a renewal of the attack. It was several minutes before they were able to gain an entrance.

The frightened women pressed around Clearchus, wailing and beating their breasts and trying all at once to tell him the story of what had happened. The young man waved them aside and ran to the room where Philox lay. The faithful old steward had received a dagger thrust in the breast and was unconscious. Clearchus then sought Melissa; but in the extremity of her fright she had locked herself in her apartments and refused to open the door.

Finding that nothing was to be learned in that quarter, Clearchus sternly commanded the women to be silent and answer his questions. Trembling, they obeyed, and he managed to make them tell how the marauders had scaled the walls of the house with a ladder and how Philox had fallen while trying to prevent them from admitting their confederates. They had pillaged the house of everything that they could carry. Artemisia had fainted when they laid their hands upon her to take her away, but they had placed her in a litter which they seemed to have ready for the purpose. As nearly as the women were able to judge, they had gone southward, and as soon as they were out of sight, Tolman had ridden to the city to give the alarm.

"They are making for the harbor," Leonidas cried. "We shall catch them yet!"

Clearchus felt two small cold hands clasp his own, and

glancing down he saw Proxena, one of Artemisia's little slave girls, with her tear-stained face upturned to his.

"Please, master," she sobbed, "bring back our mistress, Artemisia!"

The young Athenian could not speak, but he lifted the child quickly and kissed her. In another moment they were off in the pursuit.

CHAPTER VI
SYPHAX EARNS HIS REWARD

Clearchus led the way through brake and thicket and across tilled fields, bearing off slightly to the southwest so as to avoid the Long Walls that joined the city to the Piræus, where he knew the robbers would not dare to venture. They crossed the winding Cephissus by the Sacred Way, skirting the hills that overlook the harbor. It seemed hours to the young man before they emerged upon the brow of a slope that fell away to the rocky beach.

Directly below them was a small inlet from which a boat filled with men was putting out toward a weather-beaten galley that lay a short distance offshore.

"There she is!" Chares cried, pointing to a blotch of white in the bow of the boat.

"We are too late!" Clearchus groaned, as he measured with his eye the widening gap between the boat and the shore. Despair and helpless rage surged up in his heart as they dashed recklessly down the slope.

"Come back!" he shouted desperately. "Twenty talents of ransom!"

The distance was too great for his words to be distinguished, although his voice evidently reached the boat. Artemisia heard it and stretched her arms toward him. She struggled to rise, but

the sailors held her in her seat. The steersman turned his bearded face toward the shore and shouted out a rough command. The boat continued on toward the galley, whose sails were already spread for flight.

"They are not all gone!" Leonidas cried eagerly. "See there!"

A second boat lay in the inlet with its nose in the sand, while its crew hurriedly stowed away the litter. As Clearchus looked, they completed this task and prepared to push off.

The three young men leaped from their horses, but the boat was now launched. One of the mariners waded into the water, pushing at her stern to give her headway, while the others got out their oars.

"You come too late, idlers!" the seamen cried mockingly as their pursuers leaped down over the rocks to the narrow strip of sand that fringed the inlet. "You should rise earlier in the morning."

The man who had been pushing at the stern of the boat was up to his waist in water. "Pull me in, lads, she has way enough!" he said; but as he gathered himself to spring, Leonidas plunged in after him and clutched him by the ankle. Paying no more attention to his struggles than he would have given to those of some fish that he had taken, the Spartan dragged the spluttering wretch back to the beach. The crew of the boat hesitated for a moment as though doubtful whether to attempt a rescue, but Leonidas settled their doubts by thrusting his sword into the man's throat.

A cry of rage and a volley of threats came from the boat as the sailors witnessed the fate of their comrade. In giving vent to their indignation, they lost valuable seconds of time. So narrow was the inlet that the boat was still within easy javelin cast of the shore. Clearchus ran along the beach abreast of it, promising a fabulous reward to the men who should bring back the captive.

"Seek the girl in the slave markets," was all the reply that he could get, "and see that you come not too late a second time!"

"I promise that you shall not be punished!" the Athenian cried in despair. "At least lend us your boat, or take us with you to the galley."

"If you want our boat, come out and get it!" one of the sailors cried in derision.

The words were still on his lips when a great stone fell into the water close beside the prow, dashing the spray into the faces of the crew. Clearchus looked up in astonishment and saw Chares standing on the crest of the ledge of rock that rose behind the strip of sand. The Theban held another huge and jagged missile poised above his head. With a mighty effort he hurled it at the boat. Uttering cries of terror the sailors attempted to sheer out of the way, but in their confusion, their splashing oars neutralized each other. The great stone, which a man of ordinary strength could not have moved, turned ponderously in the air and struck the gunwale amidships with a crash that tore out the planks in splinters. In an instant the boat filled and went down, leaving the crew struggling among the floating fragments of the litter.

Several of the men, who seemed unable to swim, disappeared beneath the surface. Others struck out for the beach, only to meet death on the swords of Chares and Clearchus on one side, and of Leonidas, who had run around to the opposite shore of the bay to intercept those who sought to escape in that direction.

One man only, a fellow of powerful frame, seeing the fate that awaited him on land, swam boldly for the open sea, preferring to take his chance of being picked up there rather than face death upon the sand.

"Leave him to me!" Chares cried, stripping off his chiton.

Without hesitation, he plunged into the sea, holding his sword in his left hand and swimming with his right.

"Take him alive!" Clearchus shouted. "We may learn something from him!"

The chase was short, for although the Theban carried a weapon, the sailor was encumbered by his garments.

"Wait, my friend, I have something to say to thee," Chares said, pricking the man with his sword point.

Like a wild beast, the sailor turned in desperation as though to make a struggle for his life. He looked with bloodshot eyes into the Theban's smiling face.

"You have only one chance of seeing to-morrow's sun," Chares said coolly. "Swim before me to the shore and make up your mind on the way to tell all that you know of what has happened."

"Will you spare my life?" the man asked.

"That depends," Chares replied, "but I promise you that I will not spare it unless you obey without question."

"There is no help for it," the man muttered, and he swam sullenly back to the beach, where Leonidas quickly secured his arms behind him.

"There is still a chance of capturing the galley," the Spartan said to Clearchus. "Ride quickly to the Piræus and hire a vessel to put out after her. We will bring this fellow in."

Clearchus dashed away toward the harbor, but, as it happened, there was no vessel that could take up the chase with any chance of success. The galley was running before a fresh southwest wind, and although still visible, she was already distant. Of the ships in port, some were newly arrived and were heavily laden, while others were discharging their cargoes. Clearchus offered any price to the captain who should overtake the fugitive and bring Artemisia back, but the offer was made in vain. The best that he could do was to charter six of the swiftest ships that were available to take up the pursuit as soon as they could be made ready.

While he was concluding these arrangements, Chares and Leonidas arrived with the prisoner. The man said that the galley had just returned from a piratical cruise on the coast of Lucania and was under the command of Syphax. He had joined the crew at Locri, he said, and knew nothing about the abduction excepting that they were all to be well paid for it. He was unable to tell what port the galley expected to make after leaving Attica.

Although he was examined later under torture, the man could reveal no more. He was thrown into prison to be used as a witness against his companions should they be caught. The last of the vessels that Clearchus sent on the chase was out of the harbor before nightfall, and the young man, feeling that he had done all that he could do, rode back to the city overwhelmed by his loss. Chares and Leonidas sought in vain to comfort him. His self-reproach at having left Artemisia unguarded after the warning of the dream was too poignant. He shut himself up to avoid the acquaintances who flocked about him to offer their sympathy and to learn the details of his sorrow. They questioned the slaves when they found the doors closed against them and then ran to tell what they had learned in the baths, the barber shops, and the gaming houses, greedy of gossip. Ariston, after making certain that his part in the plot had not been discovered, came to visit his nephew and was admitted.

"We have no defence against the will of the Gods when it falls heavily upon us save one," he said.

"What is that?" Clearchus asked.

"Patience," the old man responded.

"Patience!" Clearchus exclaimed, striding back and forth with clenched fists. "Yes, I will have patience! I will have patience to seek Artemisia to the ends of the world until I have found her! And I will have patience until every man who is concerned in this attack upon us has paid for it with his life. I will be patient!"

Ariston blanched at this outburst, but immediately recovered

himself. "Alas! What can you do alone?" he asked mournfully.

"He will not be alone, for Chares and I will be with him," Leonidas said quietly. "We have sworn it."

"I will not advise against it," Ariston said with a sigh. "But it may be that the galleys you have sent out will bring the robbers back. You must not forget that you have duties to the State. The times are troubled and your fortune is great."

"My own affairs must come first at present," Clearchus said bluntly. "As for my fortune, of what use is it to me without Artemisia? I must ask you to take charge of it once more for me. I shall give you full power, and if I come not back I desire that it shall be devoted to the public good as you may see fit."

"I am an old man," Ariston said, with mock hesitation, "but I cannot refuse the trust under the circumstances if you require it of me. Yet, why dost thou leave Athens?"

"How can I remain here?" Clearchus exclaimed. "My suffering is too great. But I knew you would not refuse me," he added in a calmer voice, clasping his uncle by the hand.

"Doubtless they have carried her to some one of the Eastern cities," Ariston said reflectively. "That is where this Syphax would most naturally go, as it seems his hope is to get money. I will write to such friends as I have there to be on the watch."

Clearchus groaned. "It will be too late, I fear, before thy letters can reach them," he said. "I know not what to do nor where to turn."

"Here is Aristotle; let us consult him," Chares said as the

philosopher entered.

Aristotle listened attentively while Clearchus and his friends related all the circumstances of Artemisia's abduction. He asked many questions regarding the particulars of the dream of warning that had preceded the attack.

"Some things we know and others we can guess," he said at last. "Only the Gods know all. The world is wide. I pity thee, Clearchus, my friend, with all my heart, and I wish that I might aid thee. It is clear that the warning came from Artemis. I advise thee to seek counsel from Phœbus, her brother. Thou art not an unworthy disciple of his, for thy heart is pure and thy hands are clean. Thou lovest the poets and music. Go to him with faith and perhaps he will aid thee."

Hope appeared upon the face of the young Athenian. "I will go," he said. "The great God himself loved Daphne and lost her. He may take compassion on me. Chares shall remain here and set all things in order so that we may act quickly if a sign should be given. Will you come with me, Leonidas, to Delphi?"

"I will," said the Spartan, "and let us go at once; for I can see that thy heart is sick."

CHAPTER VII
THE RESPONSE OF THE ORACLE

Clearchus and Leonidas rode out of Attica across the olive-bearing plains, and up the rugged spurs and ridges which flank the mountain of Cithæron, upon whose rocky slopes Antiope wailed as an infant, and the rash Pentheus was torn to pieces by women to the end that the power of Dionysius might be established. They halted for a brief space at the fortress of Phyle, the key that had opened to Thrasybulus his native land and enabled him to give it freedom. Leonidas admired the great walls built of square blocks of stone laid one upon another without mortar and fitted so exactly that the joints would scarcely be seen.

Teleon, captain of the guard which was stationed at this gateway, was a friend of Clearchus. He gave them bread and wine, while the young Athenian told him of his misfortune. After expressing his sympathy, Teleon inquired eagerly for the news of Athens.

"Will the Assembly send troops to the aid of Phœnix and Prothytes, who have raised the revolt in Thebes?" he asked. "You know they now hold the city, and my spies tell me that they are preparing for any attack that may be made upon them."

Clearchus gave him an account of the indecisive meeting of

the Assembly on the preceding day.

"All Athens believes the boy king is dead," he said, referring to Alexander. "What is your opinion, Teleon?"

"That, too, is the belief in Thebes," the captain replied. "I know not; but if it proves to be so, Thebes is free."

"And if not?" Clearchus asked.

"If not, there will be fighting," Teleon predicted, "and may Zeus inspire the Macedonian to attack us here!"

From the slope beyond Phyle the young man saw the Bœotian plain spread out before them, and beyond, in the purple distance, the rocky ramparts of Phocis. There, glowing rose-colored in the evening light, shone the snow-clad crest of Parnassus. Clearchus' heart swelled as he looked upon the goal in which his hope was centred.

"We must be there to-morrow," he said eagerly.

"The God will not run away!" Leonidas replied.

They plunged down the mountain slope into the shadows, which deepened under the plane trees as they advanced, until the winding track was almost hidden before them. The moon rose as they emerged upon the plain that had so often drunk the life-blood of Hellas. At Thespiæ their horses could go no further, and they halted for the night.

Although the road from Thebes was better, they had purposely avoided the city, fearing that the disturbances there might delay them. They found Thespiæ full of rumors of the Theban uprising. Some said that the Macedonians in the Cadmea had been put

to the sword; others that the peace party had gained the upper hand and was awaiting the arrival of Alexander. Leonidas, who listened eagerly to all that was said, was surprised to find that the report of the young king's death was discredited in the town. There were even men who insisted that he was on his way through Thessaly at the head of his army, ready to strike.

The Spartan sighed and looked wistfully over his shoulder in the direction of Thebes as they took horse at sunrise. At evening, begrimed with dust, they toiled up the last ascent that led to Delphi, the terraced city among the sacred cliffs – the Navel of the World.

As Clearchus gazed upward at the twin columns of the Phædriades rising side by side a thousand feet above the temple in the cool gray twilight, the fever of anxiety in his blood left him and his pulses beat more slowly. The strong masonry of the outer wall, which enclosed and seemed to hold from slipping down the mountain side the buildings clustered about the lofty terrace, on which the temple stood close under the towering cliffs, shut in the shrine that for centuries all Hellas had looked upon as hallowed. Awe came upon him in the presence of the great Mystery. There were scoffers in Athens who laughed at all religion. There were philosophers in the world who taught that the existence of the Gods was a foolish dream. Why had Phœbus permitted the Phocians to seize his treasure and to profane his altar, they asked, if he really existed?

Clearchus put the same question to himself as he looked down

upon the Cirrhæan fields that had been consecrated to the God and condemned to lie waste forever in his honor. The Phocians had desecrated them by cultivation. When condemned by the Amphictyons at the instance of their enemies, the Thebans, they had seized the shrine and the treasure-houses. Though they had prospered for a time, in the end Philomelus and Onomarchus had been slain and the Phocians broken and scattered. The sacrilege had been punished, but Philip had been brought into Hellas as the champion of the God and the chief instrument of his wrath. Thebes had been placed beneath his feet.

What was to be the end? Was the fate of the city that had driven the Phocians to their crime to be worse than that of their victims? Clearchus, as he thought of these things, was chilled with an indefinable dread of the Invisible Presence whose home was among the silent and Titanic crags that made the utmost triumphs of human art and skill laid at their feet seem as transitory as the work of children fashioned in sand. He felt that here the mighty purpose of the Unseen was being worked out, deliberate and irresistible, before which the races of men were as nothing.

They did not enter the city that night, but turned aside to the house of Eresthenes, who had been a guest-friend of Clearchus' father. The old man was overjoyed to see them. After the evening meal he sought the priests of the temple and brought back word that the oracle might be consulted next day if the sacrifice proved propitious.

Clearchus slept soundly. In the morning he purified himself, according to the rule, in the clear, cold waters of the Castalian Font hung about with votive offerings in marble and bronze placed there by grateful pilgrims to the shrine. Eresthenes gave him fresh garments, with the garland of olive and the fillet of wool which suppliants were required to put on.

Guided by the old man, the two friends ascended the wide marble staircase that led to the great stone platform at the southeast corner of the lower terrace, where ceremonial processions were accustomed to form before entering the sacred enclosure. Passing through the gate, they advanced between treasure-houses upon which the most famous sculptors of the world had lavished their skill. Among these and the dwellings of the priests and the chief men of the place were set scores of columns and statues, the offerings of centuries from kings and princes. Across the lower terrace the way led them to the next higher, with a sharp turn to the right at the great stone sphinx which guarded the passage through the second wall. They continued up the slope to the final platform, on which the temple stood resplendent with color.

Entering between the great columns, Eresthenes and Leonidas left Clearchus to the care of the priests – grave men of advanced age who were under the direction of Agias. They led the Athenian to the apartment of the chief priest, a venerable minister whose age had passed one hundred years. He sat in his marble arm-chair, propped by cushions. His white beard flowed over his

breast, and his thin hands lay crossed in his lap. He raised his dim eyes and fixed them upon the face of his visitor.

"What wilt thou, Thrasybulus, who comest back to me from beyond the tomb?" he asked in a quavering voice.

The attendant priests glanced at each other in surprise, but none of them dared to reply.

"Speak, Thrasybulus; I am an old man," the chief priest said.

"Thrasybulus has been dead these fifty years, Father," Agias said. "This is Clearchus, an Athenian, who comes as a suppliant to the oracle."

"He is like Thrasybulus!" the old man muttered, bowing his head. "It seems but yesterday that he stood before me." He paused for a moment and then continued with an effort: "Art thou pure of heart? Art thou free from the sins of the flesh?"

"I am," Clearchus replied firmly.

"Then pass into the presence of the God who knoweth all and who doth not forget!" said the patriarch, closing his eyes wearily.

Clearchus bowed and was about to turn away, when the old man roused himself once more.

"Come hither, boy, and let me look at thee!" he said. "My sight is growing dim."

Clearchus knelt at his feet, and the aged priest placed his hand on his head, stroking his hair and peering into his face.

"So like Thrasybulus! It was only yesterday!" he said to himself. "The storm comes and the world is changing. Thou shalt see thrones made empty and nations perish; but the God will

remain until a greater cometh. Clearchus art thou called? It may be so; but to me thou art Thrasybulus. Go thy ways. The God will be kind to thee."

Although the other priests were evidently struck by this unusual scene, they made no comment, but led Clearchus into the dim interior of the temple. On every hand, between the columns and against the walls, gleamed statues and vessels of precious metals, exquisite in design and workmanship, that the Phocians had not dared to remove from the house itself of the God. Before them stood a group of young women in snowy robes with fillets in their hair. They were chanting a hymn of slow and solemn measure.

They ceased their chant as the priests entered with Clearchus, and two of them advanced, leading between them one of the three priestesses of the temple. The Pythia was a woman of middle age, slender of figure, with large gray eyes that seemed to look at Clearchus without seeing him. Her thin cheeks still retained the fresh color of youth, and her lips, of a deep red, moved gently as though she were whispering to herself.

Looking about him with eyes grown accustomed to the semidarkness, Clearchus saw a slightly raised platform of white marble toward the rear of the temple. Three shallow steps led to a broad slab, in the middle of which was a cleft. Through this orifice curled a pale, fleeting vapor, which rose like transparent smoke for the height of a man above the platform before it vanished. It came from the stone in puffs and spirals which

swayed, now this way, now that, with a peculiarly irregular and capricious impulse like the balancing of a coiled serpent.

Over the cleft was set a low tripod, the legs of which were formed of intertwined snakes wrought in gold so cunningly that every scale seemed reproduced in the bright metal. The jewelled eyes of the reptiles twinkled through the vapor which alternately hid and revealed them.

Slowly and solemnly the priestesses led the Pythia to the foot of the platform, where they gave her hands to two of the most venerable of the priests, whose office it was to conduct her to the tripod. Her lips formed themselves into a smile as she mounted the steps and the women resumed their chanting.

As she took her place upon the tripod and the priests descended, leaving her alone, a sudden thunderstorm burst above the towering crags which overhung the shrine. The wind roared down between the Phædriades with mighty strength, and a crash of thunder, leaping and reverberating from rock to cliff, shook the temple to its foundations.

"Zeus is speaking to the son of Latona!" murmured Agias, and all bowed their heads in reverence.

Filled as he was with awe, Clearchus felt reassured by the calm demeanor of the priests. He fixed his eyes on the Pythia, who remained seated on the tripod with her hands loosely folded in her lap, oblivious alike to the storm and to her surroundings. The chill vapor seemed to grow more dense. At times it hid her entirely, wrapping her in its cold embrace. The color deepened

in her cheeks and the smile left her parted lips. With dilated pupils she gazed over the heads of the little group before her. Gradually her face assumed a troubled expression and her tongue began to frame broken words and fragmentary sentences the purport of which Clearchus could not understand. Suddenly she half raised her hands as though she would cover her eyes and her face contracted as with a spasm of pain.

"Evohe! Phœbus!" she cried in a wailing voice.

"Ask thy question – the God is here!" Agias whispered, pushing Clearchus toward the platform.

The young man found himself standing alone in the dread Presence, gazing upon the Pythia, who was no longer a woman, but an instrument in the hands of the God. The vapor curled about her and encircled her in swiftly changing, fantastic forms. Her gray eyes looked out into his, fixed and steadfast, and the tension of the influence which possessed her convulsed her features. Dead silence reigned throughout the vast and shadowy interior of the temple.

Clearchus tried to frame the question that he had prepared but the words refused to come. The awe of his surroundings paralyzed his speech.

Suddenly the dear, wistful face of his love seemed to appear to him amid the folds of the rolling mist, filled with sorrow and yearning. His fear left him. All else, even life itself, was as nothing before the fierce desire of his heart.

"Where shall I find Artemisia?" he cried, stretching out his

arms before the whirling cloud which hid the priestess in its embrace.

There was a moment of suspense, in which he could hear the dull rushing of the torrent that filled the sluices, overflowing with the rain, on either side of the temple. The priests leaned forward attentively to catch the reply, each holding a tablet of wax and a stylus with which to record any words that the Pythia might utter. Clearchus stood motionless, his arms still outstretched, gazing with straining eyes upon the lips of the priestess. She writhed upon the tripod as though in agony. Her eyes were set and glassy and a slight foam showed itself upon her mouth. Then came her voice, strained and strange, through the eddies of the vapor: – "Seek in the track of the Whirlwind – there shalt thou find thy Beloved!"

Her eyes closed, and a shuddering sigh issued from her bosom. The two priests who had placed her upon the tripod hastened forward and bore her from the platform. She had lost consciousness completely. Her head drooped upon her shoulder and her face was as pale as death. The old men gave her in charge of the women, who ran forward to receive her and quickly carried her into their own apartments.

A great joy filled Clearchus. "She is safe! She is safe! And I shall find her!" he said to himself, following the silent priests out of the temple. As they passed out into the portico he looked back over his shoulder at the platform where the God had manifested himself. The swift storm had swept over and the sun

was shining again. A gleam of his light fell upon the curling mist and Clearchus saw it tinged with the prismatic colors of the rainbow.

CHAPTER VIII
THE THUNDERBOLT FALLS

Leonidas and Eresthenes stood in the portico of the temple awaiting the return of Clearchus.

"All is well!" the young man cried, throwing his arms around Leonidas in the excess of his joy.

"Shall we find her?" the Spartan asked anxiously.

"Yes; the God has promised it," Clearchus replied.

"Where is she?" Leonidas asked quickly.

Clearchus hesitated and his face fell. The oracle had not told him where she was.

"What did the God mean when he spoke of the Whirlwind's track?" he asked, turning to the priests.

"We know no more than thou," Agias replied. "The answer given to thee is more definite than any we have had in these later times. That is a good omen. Be content and doubtless the God will choose his own way to make all clear to thee."

Clearchus was troubled, but he thanked the priests and arranged for the bestowal of an offering of ten talents of gold. He was about to take his leave when a man with mud-stained garments came running up the steep incline to the temple. He was one of the agents or messengers that the priests maintained in every large city of Greece to keep them informed of events. The

knowledge which they brought, added to that which came with visitors to the oracle from all parts of the world, made Delphi the centre of intelligence and enabled the servants of the God, if need there was, to supplement his answers from their own understanding.

The man halted breathless before the white-clad group that stood in the sunlight between the columns awaiting him.

"It is Cimon," Agias said. "What news dost thou bring – speak!"

"Alexander is before the walls of Thebes with his army!" the messenger panted.

"Whence came he?" Agias demanded.

"Out of the mountains of Thessaly – like a whirlwind!" Cimon replied. "Before men had time to learn of his approach, he was there."

"Like a whirlwind, you say?" Agias repeated, glancing at Clearchus.

"Like a whirlwind, indeed," the messenger replied, "and panic holds the city!"

"Thy question is answered, my son," said Agias, quietly.

Clearchus was amazed. He had believed that the words of the Pythia were to be taken in their literal sense, and he had resolved to consult Aristotle in the matter on his return to Athens. But when Agias called his attention to the reply of the messenger, who could have had no knowledge of the prophecy, he could not doubt that a metaphor had been intended. The plans of the young

Macedonian monarch at once acquired a new and intense interest in his mind and he listened eagerly to Cimon's story.

"The Thebans are divided," said the messenger. "They know not whether to surrender their city and earn their pardon, or to give defiance to the young king. The last they had heard of him was that he had been slain in battle at Pelium by the blow of a club. You know already that the citizens rose when Phœnix and Prothytes came back from Athens and that they besieged the Macedonian garrison in the Cadmea. Athens sent money and promised an army. The Bœotarchs ordered the walls to be made strong and a barricade to be built inside so that even if the walls should fall, they would still be able to defend themselves. Fugitives from Onchestris brought the first news that Alexander and his army were there. Even then the city would not believe it was the Hegemon himself, but maintained that it must be Antipater or the Lyncestian namesake of the king. For how, they asked, could the dead come to life?"

"Nothing is beyond the power of the Gods," Agias said sententiously.

"We expected a swift attack," Cimon continued, "but it was not until the next day that the army came within sight of the city and encamped north of the walls. The Thebans sent their cavalry and light troops to meet them. This was only a skirmish, but the soldiers brought word that Alexander, indeed, was there. Some of them who knew him had seen him directing the Macedonian troops.

"We found this to be true when the Macedonians moved their camp around to the main gate. The soldiers of the garrison in the Cadmea recognized their king and cried out to us that Alexander had come to avenge them. Still he did not attack, but sent a herald to say that he would forgive all that had been done if the city would yield itself and send him Phœnix and Prothytes to be punished."

"And what was the answer?" Agias asked.

"There were many who favored accepting the terms," Cimon replied, "especially since aid from Athens had been cut off; but the exiles who had returned to raise the revolt declared that the king was afraid. Should he have the boldness to attack the walls, they promised that he would be beaten and that Thebes would send a garrison to Pella instead of having one in the Cadmea."

"They are desperate men," the old priest said.

"But they won the people," Cimon replied, "and it was resolved to fight. So matters stood when I slipped out of the northern gate last night to bring you word."

"You have done well, Cimon," Agias said. "Dost thou think the city will escape?"

"That I cannot tell," the messenger answered. "It has corn enough for a siege; but Alexander's army contains thirty thousand footmen and a troop of horse, besides ballistæ and battering-rams which they were setting up when I left."

"The walls are strong," Agias said, reflecting. "Well, go to thy rest. Thou hast need of it."

Clearchus and his friends had enough to talk about as they walked down from the temple.

"One thing is certain," said the young Athenian. "We must go at once to Thebes."

"That we must do if only to see the fighting," Leonidas replied.

"What if the Dragon's Teeth should win?" Eresthenes suggested.

"They cannot," Leonidas said. "The man who could make the march that Alexander made is a general as well as a king. There is no Epaminondas in Thebes now."

"What will become of Chares' mother and his family if the city falls?" Clearchus exclaimed, stopping short.

"Have I not heard him say that his father formed a guest-friendship with Philip when the Macedonian was left in Thebes as a hostage?" Leonidas replied.

"Yes," Clearchus admitted, "but that may be forgotten by his son if all they say concerning Philip's death be true."

"Then we must remind him," Leonidas said, "and that is another reason why we must go to Thebes."

Eresthenes gave the young men a cordial good-speed when they left him in the morning to set out for the beleaguered city. They descended from the mountains and entered the fertile plains of Bœotia, through which they rode all day without finding a sign of war. The farmers went about their work and the shepherds were pasturing their flocks as peacefully as though there were no

such things as armies and slaughter. More than once they stopped to ask news of the siege, but the people of the plain could tell them nothing. Many of them had not heard that Alexander was before the city; others had indeed heard the rumor, but convinced that they themselves were safe, they took no interest in it.

Evening was drawing on and they had approached to within a few miles of the city when they met a rider whose horse was dripping with sweat.

"Ho, there; what news of Thebes?" Leonidas shouted as he passed.

The man looked at them, but made no answer. He bent low on the neck of his horse and his cloak flew out behind him like the wings of a huge bird.

"There has been a battle," Leonidas said. "Was he Theban or Macedonian?"

Burning with impatience, they urged their horses to the crest of a low hill, where they came suddenly upon half a dozen cavalrymen, who had halted in a small grove to bind up a wound which one of their number had received in the shoulder.

"What has happened?" Leonidas asked, drawing rein beside them.

"Know you not that the city has fallen?" one of the soldiers replied. "The accursed Macedonians forced us in through the gates and came in with us. Not a soul is left alive in Thebes, and my wife and children were there!"

"And that is where you should be," the Spartan replied

contemptuously.

The poor fellow burst into tears at this reproach as he thought of the fate of his little family. Clearchus, touched by his grief, drew out his purse and gave it to him.

"If they are still living, this may aid you to ransom them," he said.

As the two friends proceeded they now began to meet other bands of fugitives straggling along the road. Most of them fled silently, often looking back over their shoulders as if in dread of pursuit.

"Cowards!" said Leonidas, scornfully.

"Life is sweet to all of us," Clearchus remonstrated, thinking of Artemisia.

"To such as these it should be bitter!" the Spartan replied.

They were rounding a turn in the road as he spoke, and before the words were well out of his mouth they found themselves entangled in a rabble of horsemen, who were retreating before a fierce attack.

"In here, quickly!" Leonidas cried, urging his horse back among the trees beside the road.

They had barely time to gain this shelter before the rush of plunging horses and shouting men went past them. The Thebans were evidently making a desperate attempt to rally, and just beyond the spot where the two were concealed they halted, wheeled, and stood at bay.

But before they had accomplished this manœuvre the

foremost of the pursuers, headed by a young man riding a powerful chestnut horse, swept into sight. The leader, in his excitement, had distanced his troop. Clearchus and Leonidas, who, from their position in the elbow of the road, were able to see in both directions, realized that he was galloping straight into an ambush. Leonidas started forward to warn him, but it was too late. The Thebans had regained their order, and with a wild shout they charged back around the curve.

Either the unexpectedness of the onset caused the chestnut to swerve, or his rider tried to pull him up too suddenly, for he stumbled and went to his knees. The young man was pitched headforemost into the underbrush and fell almost at the feet of Leonidas.

Some of the Theban troopers saw the accident and rushed upon him with cries of triumph. They were confronted by Leonidas and Clearchus, who stood over the prostrate figure with drawn swords. Surprise caused the Thebans to hesitate, and this saved the lives of all three; for the Macedonian riders, thundering down upon the Thebans at full speed, struck them and tore them to pieces. Horse and man went down before that fierce charge, which left nothing behind excepting the dead and a handful of wounded, whose cries for mercy were cut short by a sword-thrust. The survivors fled without looking behind them.

"Where is Ptolemy?" shouted one of the Macedonians, a bearded man who seemed to be second in command. "Who has seen the captain?"

"He rode in advance," one of the troopers replied.

"If we do not bring him back, we shall have to answer for it to the king, and you know what that means," the first man said.

"He is here!" Clearchus called from the thicket.

The bearded lieutenant and several others hastily dismounted and carried their captain out into the road. He was still unconscious.

"Who are you?" the lieutenant demanded gruffly, looking at the two young men with suspicion.

"I am Clearchus of Athens, and this is Leonidas of Sparta," Clearchus replied.

"Of Athens!" the man said sneeringly. "Go back to your city and tell the cowards who live there that we are coming!"

"As you came once before – with Xerxes!" the young Athenian answered quickly.

The lieutenant's face grew livid and he whipped out his sword.

"Cut their throats! Kill them!" the troopers cried angrily, pressing closer.

Like a flash, Leonidas bestrode the form of the captain, sword in hand.

"I am of Sparta!" he cried boastfully. "My country never saw the face of Philip, nor shall it look upon that of his son, who calls himself the Hegemon of all Hellas. Put away your swords, or here is one whose funeral you will celebrate to-morrow!"

He placed the point of his blade at the captain's throat as he spoke. The men of Macedon dared not move.

"Listen to reason!" Clearchus said hastily. "We are without armor, as you see. We saved the life of your captain, and we are on our way to Thebes to see Alexander on matters of importance. Take us with you and let your king deal with us. This is no time nor place for brawling."

"You are right," the lieutenant said sullenly. "Let it be as you say."

He sheathed his sword, and the others followed his example, though with an ill grace. The captain had begun to recover his senses. His skull must have been tough to have resisted the shock of his fall without cracking.

"Why are you letting me lie here?" he demanded. "Where is the enemy?"

"Scattered and gone, excepting these that you see," the lieutenant replied, pointing to the bodies.

"Then get me on a horse and back to camp," the captain ordered.

As they rode the lieutenant explained the presence of Clearchus and Leonidas. The captain frankly gave them thanks when he learned that they had protected him while he lay helpless.

"I am Ptolemy," he said, "and since you desire to see Alexander, I will take you to him. I owe you much and the day may come when I shall be able to repay you."

CHAPTER IX
THE DOOM OF THEBES

The plain where once the sons of Niobe lay weltering had borne its last harvest of slaughter. On every side Leonidas and Clearchus noted the ghastly evidences of battle. Darkness fell before Ptolemy's troop reached the shattered gates of Thebes. Men with torches in their hands wandered through the streets strewn with corpses, seeking plunder among the dead or searching for the bodies of friends. Neither sex nor age had been spared when Perdiccas hewed his way into the city. The very altars of the Gods were crimsoned with the vengeance taken by the Phocians, the Platæans, and the Bœotians for the centuries of cruel oppression that they had suffered from the rapacious brood of the Dragon.

Mothers lay dabbled in blood, with their infants beside them, struck down in flight. The market-place was heaped with bodies, showing how desperate had been the final stand of the Theban soldiers. The streets were littered with household gear that had been dragged in wantonness from despoiled homes.

The plundering was not yet finished. Bands of soldiers were still searching for booty in the remoter quarters of the city, where their progress could be traced by the sound of their drunken laughter, mingled with the screams of their victims.

Macedonian guards paced the walls and cut off all hope of escape. The wretched inhabitants, driven into the highways, sought concealment in dark angles and narrow lanes, cowering in silence.

Here and there a woman, rendered desperate by her anguish, walked with dishevelled hair, heedless of insult, seeking her children among the slain in the hope that she might find them still alive.

Clearchus felt his heart grow faint at the thought that Artemisia might be exposed to the frightful chances of such a sack. Phœbus himself, he thought, might be unable to protect her, since here the temples of the Gods had been profaned. An old man in priestly robes stood out before them with trembling hands upraised.

"Vengeance, O Zeus!" he cried aloud. "Vengeance upon those who have violated the sanctuary of Dionysus, thy son! May they – " "Silence, Graybeard!" growled a soldier, striking him across the mouth with his fist.

The old man reeled from the blow and shrank away into the shadow.

"You'll choke if you ever try to drink wine again, Glaucis!" a comrade cried, laughing.

"Dionysus will forgive me soon enough for a sacrifice," Glaucis returned. "Never fear!"

Ptolemy learned that Alexander had gone to the Cadmea and thither he led Clearchus and Leonidas after he had dismissed

his men, eager to take their share in the pillage. They found the young king in a large, bare room in the lower part of the citadel. He had not yet laid aside his armor, which was dented and scratched by use.

When they entered, he was giving orders to his captains, who stood grouped about him. Clearchus looked at him with eager interest. He saw a well-proportioned, athletic figure, no taller than his own. The handsome beardless face glowed with the warm blood of youth and a smile parted the full red lips. There was no trace of fatigue in the young king's attitude, despite the labors of the day, and his movements were alert and decisive. He looked even more youthful than his twenty-one years as he stood among his leaders, some of whom were veterans of Philip's campaigns, grizzled with service. But in spite of his youth, there was a confidence in his bearing that left no doubt of who was master.

Clearchus felt himself strangely drawn to the young man whom all Hellas, with the exception of Sparta, acknowledged as its champion, and who was about to assail that great power beyond the Hellespont, whose limits were unknown and before whom Greece had stood in dread since the days of Great Cyrus. The Athenian found the "boy king" very different from the arrogant, mean-spirited upstart that the orators of his city had painted him.

"Stop the plundering," Alexander said to his captains. "Even the Bœotians must be satisfied by this time. Let the men go back

to the camp, and see that order is maintained. The Ætolians and the Elæans are on the march and reënforcements are coming from Athens. There may be more work to do to-morrow."

As the officers left him to execute his commands, Alexander turned to Ptolemy with hands outstretched.

"I am glad to see you safe!" he said. "You charged bravely before the gate, and I feared that something might have happened that would deprive me of your aid when we march into Persia."

Ptolemy's bronzed face reddened with pleasure as he heard the praise of the young king.

"I went in pursuit of the enemy's cavalry," he said.

"Is it likely that any of those who escaped will be able to rally?" Alexander asked.

"They are scattered in every direction and think only of flight," Ptolemy replied.

"That is well," Alexander said. "We shall be the better able to deal with the others when they come. Who are these that you have brought to me?"

He turned toward the two young men, who had been standing at a little distance, and looked them frankly in the eyes.

"This is Clearchus, an Athenian, and this, Leonidas of Sparta," Ptolemy replied, presenting them in turn.

Alexander's face clouded at the names of the two most powerful of the states that opposed him in Greece, and Ptolemy hastened to add: "They saved my life when my horse stumbled in the pursuit, and they have a request to make of you."

"You have done me a great service," Alexander said kindly. "What is it that you desire?"

"We ask clemency for the family of Jason, on behalf of Chares, his son, whom we left behind in Athens," Clearchus replied.

"And why is he not in Thebes?" Alexander asked quickly.

"Because he did not know that you were coming," Clearchus said. "Had he been aware of the danger, he would not have been absent. We heard of your arrival while we were in Delphi, and we made all haste to remind you that Jason was a guest-friend of your father, Philip."

"Orders have been given that the guest-friends of Macedon shall be spared, both in their lives and their property," Alexander replied. "What did you in Delphi?"

Clearchus told him briefly how Artemisia had been stolen and of the response of the oracle.

"Love must be a strong passion," the young king said thoughtfully.

"I would give all that I possess to recover Artemisia," Clearchus replied. "Nor would I be willing to exchange my hope of finding her for the wisdom of Aristotle or even for the hopes of Alexander."

"So you know Aristotle," Alexander said. "He is a wonderful man. Were I not Alexander, I would envy him." He looked curiously at Clearchus as he spoke, as though he were considering something that he did not understand. "So that is what they call

love," he continued, "and I and my army are the Whirlwind of which the God spoke." He beckoned to an attendant. "Call Aristander!" he said.

He made Clearchus repeat his story to the famous soothsayer. Aristander listened attentively, stroking his chin with the tips of his fingers as his custom was.

"What do you think of it?" Alexander asked, when Clearchus had finished. Everybody knew the confidence that he placed in the words of the prophet and that he never took an important step against his advice.

"Full credit must be given to the oracle," Aristander said, turning his blue eyes upon the young king, "and I think that the priests of the temple were right in their interpretation, since the message brought and the title given could have had no other meaning. As the maid was carried away by sea, she was probably taken to some island or to one of the cities on the coast of Asia. The Whirlwind's track must needs lead thither, and since the maid is to be set free, it is clear that the Whirlwind shall prevail."

"Then the oracle is propitious!" Alexander exclaimed. "What is your plan?" he added to Clearchus.

"I shall obey the oracle and follow in thy track," the Athenian replied. "If thou wilt permit me, I myself will become a part of the Whirlwind."

Alexander looked at him with the unquenchable fire of enthusiasm in his eyes.

"Thou art welcome!" he said. "And you, my friend of stubborn

Sparta?" he continued to Leonidas.

"I go with Clearchus," the Spartan responded briefly.

"You shall be of my Companions," Alexander cried, placing his hand upon a shoulder of each. "The world grows old and we have been wasting our strength in foolish quarrels with each other while the tiger has been lying there across the water, waiting to devour us. We shall show him that the spirit of Hellas still lives, although Troy has fallen, and we will do deeds that shall be sung by some new Homer as worthy too of a place beside those of Achilles and Ajax and Agamemnon. Yes, and we will bring back a fleece more precious than that which the Argonauts sought. I promise you that the Whirlwind's track shall be long enough and broad enough to lead you to your heart's desire, whatever it may be. Ptolemy, I count these men among my friends and I give them into your charge."

Clearchus and Leonidas felt their hearts swell at the young king's words and his lofty generosity, but before they could thank him, they were interrupted by a commotion at the door.

"Out of the way! I will see him! I care not how late it is," an angry voice exclaimed.

"It is Chares, son of Jason," Clearchus said. "How comes he here?"

Alexander quietly signed to the guard, and the Theban strode into the room, clad in armor that clashed noisily as he walked. He looked neither to the right nor left, but went straight to Alexander.

"I am come to remind the King of Macedon of the ties of

hospitality," he said boldly, in a voice more fitted to a demand than a petition.

Alexander measured his great stature with admiration in his glance, noting that the armor, gold-inlaid, was crusted with mud and grime like his own.

"Thy name might be Hector," he said.

The Theban, ignorant of the young king's train of thought and of what had gone before, imagined that he saw mockery in this remark. His face flushed darkly.

"My name is Chares!" he said haughtily. "Jason, my father, was the friend of Epaminondas, who furnished thy father with the weapons that thou hast used against us this day. I come not to thee on my own behalf, but on that of my mother and sisters, who were shut in here when the attack came."

"You are too late!" the young king said composedly.

Chares staggered and his face blanched. "Too late!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Does Alexander, then, make war upon women?"

"I say you came too late," Alexander replied, "and doubly so; for your friends, here, were more prompt than you, and yet even they were tardy."

"My friends!" Chares cried in bewilderment, seeing Leonidas and Clearchus for the first time.

"Alexander speaks the truth," Clearchus said quickly. "We are all too late, because he had already given orders for the safety of your family."

"I ask your forgiveness; I spoke without understanding," Chares said, turning to the king.

"Thou hast courage," Alexander said with a smile, "but I would not choose thee as my envoy on a delicate mission. Thou wert not here to defend thy home?"

"Because I knew not that there was need," Chares admitted. "I am sorry."

"And I am glad," the young king rejoined, "for hadst thou been inside the walls, I fear I might have lost men whom I cannot spare. Didst thou come from Athens?"

"I left Athens with the army," Chares answered, "but it halted on the frontier when news arrived that Thebes had fallen."

"Then there will be no more fighting!" Alexander exclaimed, turning to Ptolemy. "I am glad of it. Greet thy mother for me, Chares, and tell her to fear nothing. Ptolemy will conduct you."

Escorted by the Macedonian captain, the three friends descended from the citadel. Order had been restored in the city as though by magic. Only the military patrols and the bodies of the dead remained in the streets. The living had been driven into their houses, taking the wounded with them. The plunderers had retired to the camp outside the walls.

Chares strode eagerly in advance, asking many questions regarding the experiences of his friends in Delphi. The house of Jason, a mansion built near the northern end of the city, had been saved by its location from the desperate fighting that had taken place about the southern gate and in the market-place.

They found a guard stationed at the door.

"You see that the king is as good as his word," Ptolemy said. "You will find nothing disturbed here."

"How could he have remembered his friends in the heat of the attack?" Chares asked.

"He forgets nothing," the captain replied, "neither friend nor enemy."

Chares urged the Macedonian to enter, but Ptolemy declined on the ground of fatigue and left them. The slave at the gate went wild with joy when he caught sight of his young master. He had been waiting in momentary expectation of being summoned forth to the death that he was convinced awaited everybody in the city.

Chares hastened to the women's court, where he found his mother and sisters robed in white and surrounded by their maids, who were trying to spin, although their fingers trembled so that they could hardly hold the distaff. The widow of Jason, a woman with silvery hair and a face that was still beautiful, sat calmly in the midst of the group, awaiting with quiet courage what might befall. She rose with composure to greet her son and his companions.

"You are safe, mother!" Chares exclaimed, clasping her in his arms. "Alexander has given his word that you shall be unharmed!"

"You have seen him?" she returned. "That is well. You may go to your rest. Nothing shall harm you," she added, dismissing

her maidens.

CHAPTER X
CHARES BARTERS HIS SWORD

What was to be the fate of Thebes? The minds of the wretched inhabitants of the city were diverted from their sorrows as they asked each other this question on the morning after the battle. The dead had been removed from the streets. The wounded had been cared for. The enemy had withdrawn outside the walls, after posting guards in sufficient numbers to suppress any rising that the Thebans might be desperate enough to attempt.

All eyes were directed toward the Cadmea, within whose gray walls the punishment that was to be visited upon the city was being discussed. One citizen suggested that a heavy fine would be exacted. Another declared he had heard that the Thebans would be forbidden to bear arms. A dozen similar conjectures were made and canvassed before news came from the Cadmea that Alexander had left the Phocians, the Platæans, and the Bœotians, his allies, to impose the sentence. This announcement was received in gloomy silence; for more than one Theban recalled how his city in her day of pride had blotted out Orchomenus and Platæa and sold their people into bondage.

The anxious watchers in the streets at last saw a stir in the crowd that waited outside the gates of the citadel. The portals opened, and the victorious generals, surrounded by waving

standards, came out and began to descend from the rock. The spectators below saw the Thebans scatter before them, tossing their arms above their heads and rending their garments. A hush full of dread fell upon the city.

"Thebes must perish! Her walls must go down!" cried one from above with a despairing gesture.

"We are to be sold for slaves!" shouted another, halting upon a parapet and making a trumpet of his hands.

The tidings were received with incredulity, followed by stupefaction. The blow had fallen, and it was worse than even the least sanguine prophet had predicted. The generals, as they rode toward the gates of the city, were followed by men who fell on their knees and begged for quarter. No heed was paid to their prayers, and the escort of soldiers thrust them back with jeers.

Alexander remained in the Cadmea, where Chares and a handful of the most prominent Thebans, who had been able to establish guest-friendship with the royal house of Macedon, sought him to intercede for the city. They found him alone, sitting with his chin in his hand. They recalled to him the glorious deeds of Thebes, dwelt upon the misery that the sentence would inflict upon the innocent, and warned him that all Hellas would reproach him if he permitted it to be carried into effect. They admitted the fault of the city and asked forgiveness.

The young king heard them through without stirring.

"All that you have said to me," he replied when they had finished, "I have already said to myself. Thebes has been false to

her oath. I pardoned her as did Philip, my father. The sentence is not mine, but that of my allies, and what cause they have, you know. Can I ask them to forget?"

Terror ran with the news through all Greece. The Athenians, the Ætolians, and the Elæans, who had encouraged the rebellion with money and promises of further aid, hastily recalled their troops and sent ambassadors to sue for mercy. Demosthenes was chosen to plead for Athens, but when he had advanced on his journey as far as Mount Cithæron, his courage failed him and he turned back. The young king sent a messenger to Athens calling upon the Athenians to deliver eight of their orators who had been foremost in stirring up the people against Macedon, and the name of Demosthenes stood at the head of the list.

In the Assembly that was called to consider this demand Demosthenes won the day by repeating the fable of how once the wolves asked the sheep to deliver to them their watch-dogs and how, when the demand had been granted, they fell upon the defenceless flock. But so great was the fear of Alexander among the people that they might, after all, have sent the orators to Thebes had not the men who were threatened hired Demades with a fee of five talents to offer himself as an intermediary. The offer was accepted and Alexander yielded.

The escape of Demosthenes through the intercession of his inveterate enemy and the mysterious disappearance of Thais were the talk of the city when Chares arrived with his two friends, bringing his family with him. Clearchus received them

into his house, where they were to remain during his absence from Athens in search of Artemisia, following the directions of the oracle. Ariston was much disappointed when his nephew refused to exact any rental from his friend. He had taken charge of Clearchus' fortune again, and it grieved him that any possible source of income should be neglected. But Clearchus knew that Chares had need of all his resources; for his mother had drawn up a list of the friends of the family who had been forced to remain in Thebes, telling him that he must purchase them and thus save them from slavery, even if it should take all they possessed in the world. As the list was long, Clearchus deemed it wise not only to place his house at the disposal of Jason's widow, but to make provision for its maintenance out of his own income while he should be away.

He paid no attention to the grumbling of his uncle, who affected to look upon this generosity as little short of madness. He said so much to dissuade the young man from his plan, that Clearchus at last was forced to remonstrate with him.

"One would think that you were on the brink of ruin," he said, "instead of being one of the richest men in Athens, if reports that I have begun to hear lately are true."

"Who says that?" Ariston demanded sharply. "He lies, whoever repeats such things. Whenever you hear it, if you love me, say that it is not true. If such stories should get to be believed, that accursed Demosthenes will be forcing me to fit out a trireme for some of his wild schemes. The times are so troubled that what

little I have been able to save by my frugality for the support of my age I am likely to lose."

He was not unwilling to have his nephew believe that he was at least moderately rich, for had Clearchus known the straits his uncle was in, his suspicions might have been aroused. With his mind full of the loss of Artemisia, there was small chance that he would discover anything.

Like vultures upon a deserted field of battle the slave-dealers gathered at the great market of flesh and blood at Thebes. The sale of the population of the city had been delayed so as to insure a good attendance; for Alexander had need of the money that it was expected to yield with which to defray the cost of his expedition against the Great King. Speculators, traffickers by wholesale, and agents from every considerable mart in the world, to say nothing of amateurs, flocked to the city. It was not so much the fact that thirty thousand men and women were to be offered and the consequent probability of low prices that drew them as the quality of the victims. It was easy enough to purchase slaves in almost any number, but there was a vast difference between ignorant barbarians, captured in distant raids, and the population of one of the oldest and most cultured of the Grecian cities. And no comparison was to be made between girls who had been destined to slavery from their cradles and the Theban maidens reared in the shelter of luxury and ease.

It had been expected that it would take several days to dispose of the prisoners, but so numerous were the buyers that the

Macedonians decided to attempt it in one day. For greater convenience, the captives were separated into companies of about five hundred and brought out upon the plain before the city, where most of the dealers had pitched their tents. Each division was guarded by a squad of soldiers commanded by an officer, whose duty it was to conduct the auction of the group under his care.

No outcry was permitted among the hapless population. Mothers clasped their children in their arms, weeping softly over them. Some awaited their fate with sullen resignation. Others looked for a prodigy to restore them to freedom and their city. A report had gone abroad that Dionysus would appear in person and forbid the sale. On all sides rose the murmur of his name in tones of entreaty or reproach. With anxious eyes, the believers scanned the sky and the barren hillsides for some sign, they knew not what. None was vouchsafed. Their God had deserted them.

In order that the friends whom he was to ransom might not be lost in the confusion, Chares had obtained consent that they be assembled in one group. They came last out of the city, clad in garments of mourning and moving in heavy-footed procession. Lest he should raise false hopes, Chares had made a secret of his plans. The prisoners fully expected to pass into the possession of strangers. Old men of grave face and dignified bearing, who had spent their lives in the service of the city and whose names were known throughout Greece, led the way. Behind them walked their women, proud of bearing and accustomed to the privileges

of rank and wealth. Some of the matrons led daughters who looked with terror upon the strange scenes that met their eyes. Orphaned children clung to each other in fear, while here and there new-made widows, whose husbands had been slain when the strength and vigor of the city were cut off in a day, walked sadly and alone.

When all had been herded within the ring formed by the guard, the Macedonian captain who was to conduct the sale of the group that contained Chares' friends mounted briskly upon a block of stone and announced the terms prescribed for buyers. Payment was to be made in all cases in cash, and the purchaser was to have immediate possession. Chares took a position facing the auctioneer in a knot of dealers who were searching for some fortunate speculation. These men looked upon the unhappy Thebans with professional keenness, exchanging comments among themselves.

"That's a fine old fellow with the white beard," said one. "He looks as though he might have money out at interest somewhere."

"Probably he's only a philosopher," another said scornfully. "For my part, I shall buy that thin one. He has been living on bread and water all his life and he must have a snug sum buried. Trust me to make him dig it up!"

"There seem to be some marketable girls here," observed a third. "I find the Medes will pay a better price for them if they have a pedigree as well as good looks."

Mena, the Egyptian, prying about through the crowd,

examined the captives with speculative eyes. Suddenly he caught sight of a figure that caused him to stop and stare. It was that of a young woman, veiled, who seemed to be seeking to conceal herself behind the other prisoners.

"Who is she?" he asked of one of the guard when he had recovered from his astonishment.

"She is down on our list as Maia, daughter of Thales," the man replied.

Mena seemed puzzled. "I must find out more about this," he said to himself, taking his stand at a point of vantage. "Besides, there may be a chance here to turn a profitable investment."

The chatter ceased as the captain opened a roll of papyrus containing the names of the prisoners and announced that the sale was about to begin. The old man with the white beard was the first to be brought forward. He proved to have been one of the Bœotarchs.

"How much am I offered for him?" the captain cried. "He is old, but his wisdom is all the greater for that."

"Five drachmæ!" shouted a countryman in a patched and faded cloak. "He gave a decision against me once in a lawsuit."

Everybody laughed at this reason for making a bid, but the farmer seemed in deadly earnest.

"Five minæ!" Chares said quietly. There was no other bid and the sale was made.

Then came a slender girl with yellow hair and blue eyes that were swollen with weeping. Her chiton of fine linen clung in

graceful folds to her slim figure, and she trembled so violently that she could scarcely stand.

"She ought to fill out well if she lives," said one of the merchants, stroking his beard, while he examined her carefully. "But it's always a risk to buy them so young."

"She might be trained to dance," said Mena, who had elbowed his way into the crowd. "It's worth trying if she goes cheap. Fifty drachmæ!"

"Five minæ!" Chares said again.

"That's ten times what she is worth!" Mena exclaimed, turning angrily upon the Theban. "Are you trying to prevent honest men from making a living?"

"Let honest men speak for themselves," Chares retorted.

The laugh that followed filled the Egyptian with rage. He was cunning enough to wait until Chares had made several more purchases, and at prices far above the market value of the captives. Mena guessed that the Theban intended to outbid all who opposed him. He resolved to be revenged by making him pay dearly for his purchases. It happened that the next offering was a man whose name was not on Chares' list. Out of mere good nature he bid two hundred and fifty drachmæ for him.

"Five minæ!" the Egyptian shouted, doubling the bid with the intention of forcing Chares to go higher.

But Chares was silent, and no other bidder appeared. Mena, who did not have the money that he had offered, shifted uneasily, looking at Chares.

"I see you have some sense," he cried at last. "You are afraid to bid against me!"

Chares made no reply.

"He is yours," the auctioneer said, addressing Mena. "Step this way with your money!"

"Wait!" screamed the Egyptian. "I withdraw the bid! The man is lame!"

"Do you mean to accuse me of trying to cheat you?" roared the Macedonian captain.

"Perhaps you didn't notice it," the Egyptian faltered.

"Away with him!" cried the soldier.

While the prisoner was being awarded to Chares, two men led Mena out of the circle, amid the jeers of the spectators. At a safe distance, under pretence of seeing whether he really had the money he had offered, they took from him all that he possessed and divided it between themselves before they let him go.

"I'll make him sorry for this!" Mena said, shaking his fist at Chares. "I know what I know; but why do they call her Maia?"

Burning with rage, the Egyptian slunk away in search of his master, Phradates, whom he found wandering idly among the scattered groups of captives.

"Oh, Phradates, thou hast been insulted!" Mena cried, breathlessly.

"How so, dog?" Phradates demanded, his face darkening as he spoke.

The Phœnician's figure was tall and well knit, although the

profusion of jewels and golden chains that he wore, and his garments of rich silk, woven with gold thread, gave him an effeminate look. His face might have been handsome had it not been marred by an expression of haughty insolence which betrayed the weakness upon which Mena intended to play.

He had been sent into Greece by Azemilcus and the Tyrian Council in the guise of a rich young man on his travels, but with the real object of discovering the plans and strength of Alexander. Tyre was nominally tributary to the Great King, but the only sign of her dependence was the payment of a small annual tribute. In all matters of moment she managed her own affairs. It was important, therefore, for her rulers to have exact knowledge of what was going forward in Greece, so that they might shape their course as seemed best for their own advantage.

Mena noted the flush on his master's cheek and foresaw the success of his scheme of revenge.

"It occurred to my poor mind," he explained volubly, "that your Highness would be pleased with a slave from this city of rats, which, nevertheless, contains some charming maidens. I learned that they had assembled all the prisoners of gentle birth in one place together. I went there and examined them for you. Among them I found a girl of rare beauty and when I asked concerning her, they told me she was Maia, daughter of Thales, one of the chief men in the city. Such a form as she has! – with hair like copper and a glance that would – "

"Will you never finish?" Phradates asked angrily.

"I chose her for your Highness and gave command that she be reserved until I could find you to claim her," Mena continued. "But it seems a Theban, whom they call Chares, had resolved to buy her for himself. I told him that I had spoken for the girl in your name. 'Let the Tyrian hound go back to his dye-vats,' he said. 'The girl is mine and he shall not have her while I have an obol left!' He said much more against the people of Tyre and yourself in particular that I will not offend your Highness by repeating. I am sorry that I lost the girl, for there is no other like her among the captives."

"Where is she?" Phradates demanded abruptly.

"If your Highness will deign to follow, I will conduct you to her," Mena replied with alacrity.

"Lead on!" Phradates commanded. "And then fetch quickly the gold we borrowed from the old Athenian."

Chares had purchased all the prisoners on his list excepting the girl called Maia, and the soldiers were leading her forward when Mena and Phradates arrived. The young woman's face and head were muffled in a silken scarf, and her figure was concealed beneath a cloak.

"Give place!" cried Mena, bustling officiously into the crowd. "Make way for the noble Phradates!"

One of the soldiers raised the scarf long enough for the Phœnician to see the young woman's face. Her beauty evidently made a deep impression upon him, for his expression changed and he seemed hardly able to take his eyes from her.

"Where is this Chares?" he inquired, at last, staring about him.

Mena indicated the Theban with a nod, and then, noticing that all eyes were turned upon his master, he bawled out: "Make room for Phradates of the royal blood of Tyre!"

"Do you want to sell him?" asked the auctioneer.

The Phœnician's face became purple and he turned angrily upon Mena, but the alert Egyptian had slipped away to fetch the gold.

"Three talents for the girl!" Phradates cried.

"Five talents!" Chares answered.

The spectators, who had long ago ceased to think of bidding against the Theban, drew a deep breath and looked from one contestant to the other. Maia alone seemed indifferent. A tress of her hair had fallen upon her shoulder. She twisted it back into place. Chares had not seen her face when the soldier lifted her veil and his attention was now centred upon his opponent.

"Seven talents!" Phradates shouted, fixing his eyes defiantly upon Chares.

"Eight!" the Theban answered, without hesitation.

This was more than all the other captives in the group had brought. The crowd began to hum with excitement. Phradates looked over his shoulder and saw Mena leading four slaves who carried bags of gold.

"Ten talents!" he cried.

"All bids must be paid in cash," the auctioneer said warningly.

Every face was turned toward Chares, who had called his

steward and was consulting with him. "How much have we left?" the Theban asked. The man made a rapid calculation on his tablets.

"You have ten talents and thirty minæ," he replied. "That is the end."

"I bid ten talents and thirty minæ," Chares said promptly, addressing the auctioneer.

It was evident to all that he could go no further. Would Phradates be able to outbid him? The Phœnician hesitated and turned to Mena.

"He has won," the slave whispered. "You have only ten talents. If you had beaten him, we should have starved to death."

"Then we will starve!" Phradates replied. "I demand that the gold be weighed!"

"You have that right," the auctioneer admitted. "Bring out the scales."

The scales were brought and the gold was poured into the broad pans which hung suspended from their framework of wood. The glittering heaps increased until each pan overflowed with the precious coins and ingots. When all was in readiness for the test, they held a fortune such as few men in all Greece possessed. The spectators devoured it with their eyes, pressing against the soldiers in the hope of getting a better view. The maiden, Maia, who was the object of the rivalry, was forgotten.

The scales oscillated slowly and at last settled deliberately on the side toward Chares. The tale was correct and his last thirty

minæ had given him the victory. The crowd broke into a cheer.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the Macedonian captain.

"No!" Phradates shouted. A red spot glowed on his cheeks and his fingers trembled as he stripped off his rings and his chains of gold. He placed the ornaments on his side of the scales. "I bid thirteen talents," he declared.

"Payments are to be made in money," Chares remonstrated. "Who can tell what these trinkets are worth?"

"We may accept them at a true valuation," the captain decided.

He summoned a jeweller of Corinth, who examined the rings with care, and announced his readiness to take them at a sum sufficient to make up the total of the Phœnician's offer.

"Phradates wins!" shouted the spectators, cheering the Tyrian with all the enthusiasm that they had shown to his rival a moment before.

The Theban stood silent. He had nothing more to offer. He raged inwardly at his defeat, for he felt that his honor was involved. While he stood hesitating, nobody seemed to notice a young Macedonian soldier of athletic figure and fresh complexion who had stopped on the outskirts of the crowd and stood listening, with his head slightly inclined to one side.

Suddenly Chares strode forward and threw his sword upon the scales. The weight of the steel caused the balance to sway decisively toward him.

"I bid fifteen talents!" he cried. "Let my sword make up the weight of gold that is lacking."

Phradates laughed mockingly. "Let me have the girl," he said. "It is time to end this child's play. There is no place in the world where a sword is worth three talents."

"Except here," a voice behind him said quietly.

Phradates turned, and his eyes met those of the soldier who had been lingering on the edge of the ring of spectators.

"Here!" the Phœnician exclaimed angrily. "And who is there here to give such a price for it?"

"I will," the soldier replied with a smile.

"You will, indeed!" Phradates echoed. "And who are you?"

"My name is Alexander," the soldier said.

Phradates turned to the crowd, which had fallen back a little and now stood strangely silent.

"Who is this insolent fellow?" he cried. "Why do you allow him to interfere here?" he demanded of the captain.

The captain made no reply, and nobody in the throng ventured to answer. Phradates felt deserted. He stood with Chares and the soldier beside the gold-laden scales, beyond which waited Maia, with her eyes fixed upon the face of the newcomer.

"Is there no fair dealing in this land of thieves?" Phradates cried, losing his temper absolutely. "The girl is mine! Deliver her to me in accordance with your agreement and let me go. You have your price and it is enough!"

He made a step forward as though to seize Maia, but the soldier blocked his path.

"I am Alexander, as I told you," he said, slightly raising his

voice. "I will tell you more. You are Phradates of Tyre, sent here by your king and your Council to spy out my strength and learn my plans. You have used the eyes and ears of your slaves. Take what you have learned to King Azemilcus, and with it take also this message: Alexander, King of Macedon, sends word that he is coming with his companions to offer sacrifice to Heracles in his temple, known in the city of Tyre as the temple of Melkarth. Let him prepare the altar."

Phradates read in the faces of the crowd that the youth who spoke so confidently to him was indeed the king. Nevertheless, he could not wholly stifle his rage.

"Has your army wings, Macedonian?" he asked insolently. "The walls of Tyre are both high and strong."

"What is the fate of spies in your country?" Alexander replied. "You are spared to bear my message. Must I choose another?"

There was something in the tone of these words that brought Phradates to his senses like a plunge into cold water.

"We shall meet elsewhere," he said, casting a look of hatred at Chares, who stood smiling at his discomfiture.

"If we do not, I shall never cease to regret it," the Theban replied.

Mena had been hurriedly putting his master's gold into the sacks in which he had brought it. The waiting slaves took it up and followed Phradates back to his tent.

"What was it all about?" Alexander asked, glancing from Chares to Maia.

"I wished to buy her as a present to my mother, as I have bought nearly five hundred of our friends to-day," Chares replied.

Alexander took up the sword from the scales and drew it from its sheath.

"It is a good blade," he said, "and I would not deem its price too high if your arm was to wield it in my cause."

"Was not that included in the purchase?" Chares asked, surprised. "I have made my bargain and I will live up to it."

"No," said Alexander, gently, "I will not have such an arm at a price. I am no Cyrus to attack the power of Persia with hired weapons. The spirit and the hope that goes with us are not to be bought with gold. Come to me at Pella, if you will, with Clearchus and the Spartan, as soon as your affairs will permit. But if you come, let it be of your free will and not in payment of a debt."

"I will come," Chares said simply.

Day was drawing to a close over the plain where the people of Thebes had paid the final penalty for their rebellion. The multitude that had assembled to witness the last scene was melting away. Some of the unfortunates had found friends like Chares to rescue them; but the greater part of the thousands who were sold that day had become the property of strangers. On every side rose the sound of wailing and lamentation. Wives clung sobbing to their husbands until torn from them by their masters. Children wept for mothers they would see no more.

In the gathering twilight camp-fires began to glow. Slave-dealers bargained and chaffered over their purchases. Melancholy processions moved away into the darkness. Men fettered together gazed back silently but with bursting hearts upon the dark mass of the Cadmea, where it rose, black and huge, against the crimson sky. The air reverberated with the crash of falling houses and walls as the soldiers labored by the light of torches to level the city to the earth. A pall of dust and smoke hung suspended above them. Thebes had become a memory.

The captives purchased by Chares had been led away by his attendants as fast as each sale was made. When Alexander and the Macedonian soldiers moved off he was left alone with Maia. He had scarcely glanced at her during his duel with Phradates. She stood before him now with bent head, submissively, and he fancied that she was drooping from weariness.

"Come," he said kindly, extending his hand toward her.

The girl did not move, but as he approached she raised the scarf that hid her face and her eyes met his.

"Thais!" he exclaimed. "How did you get here? Where is Maia?"

There was a tone of displeasure in his voice, and the smile faded from the young woman's lips.

"Maia is safe enough," she returned, raising her head proudly.

"But where is she?" he persisted.

She hesitated and her eyes fell. A warm flush mounted to her cheeks.

"I bought her place," she murmured, "and you have bought me."

The Theban stared a moment in bewilderment, but as her meaning dawned upon him he threw back his head and laughed, a little recklessly. Thais bit her lip and then suddenly burst into tears.

CHAPTER XI
THAIS

Chares sat in the house of Thais in Athens, idly watching the lithe motions of the tame leopard as it worried an ivory ball. Its mistress lay at full length on a low couch of sandalwood looking at the Theban with eyes half closed.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked.

"What do you mean?" he replied.

"Am I not your slave?" she said softly. "Have you not ruined yourself to buy me?"

"That is true," he said, stroking his chin and examining her reflectively. "You are my most costly possession!"

"Well?" she insisted.

"And I shall not be here to guard you," he continued. "Who knows what may happen?"

She drew through her slender fingers the silken fringe of the crimson shawl that was twisted about her waist.

"You have not asked me why I went to Thebes," she said at last.

"No," he replied, looking at her inquiringly.

"I wanted to see Maia," she said, looking at him innocently. "I had heard so much of her beauty."

"Oh," he said, smiling. "What did you think of her?"

"I did not see her," Thais replied. "Is she beautiful?"

"Let me see," Chares said, studying the walls as though in an effort to remember. "She has black hair and her eyes too are dark, I think. Her forehead is low and broad and her nose is straight. Perhaps her mouth might be thought a little too wide, but her chin is beautifully rounded and her shoulders and neck are perfect. Yes, I think she might be called beautiful."

"Chares," Thais said timidly, "do you love her?"

Chares laughed. "How can a man make love without an obol that he can call his own?" he replied.

"Are you wholly ruined, then?" she asked.

"I haven't enough left to buy you a singing thrush," he replied gayly.

"But you have me and all that is mine," she said softly.

"Not even you!" he answered. He drew a scroll from the folds of his chiton and tossed it into her lap. She opened it slowly and read a release legally executed, giving her back her freedom and placing her in the enjoyment of all her possessions. Chares watched her with an expectant smile as her eyes followed the written lines. When she had ended, she raised herself on her elbow and gazed earnestly at him for a moment with dilated eyes. Then, without a word, she buried her face in the cushions and her form was shaken with sobs. As the scroll fell from her hand the leopard pounced upon it and began tearing it with his teeth.

"What is the matter with you, Thais?" Chares asked in a tone of displeasure.

"Why did you buy me?" she replied, without lifting her head.

"To save you from falling into the hands of the Phœnician, of course," he replied impatiently.

"Then I wish you had not done it," she sobbed.

"Listen to reason, Thais!" Chares said in a graver tone. "It is I who am no longer free. I have sold my sword and I am in bonds to the Macedonian."

He paused, but she made no answer, although her weeping ceased.

"Were it not so," he continued, "why should I stay here? This is not my city and these are not my people. I have neither, now that Thebes is no more. Clearchus and Leonidas are going with Alexander, as I have told you. Would you have me lag behind? There will be fighting and danger, glory and spoil. Shall I not share them?"

"You may be killed," Thais said faintly, showing her tear-stained face.

"Zeus grant that it be not until I have met Phradates on the field of battle!" he exclaimed.

"Is there nothing, then, that you care for in Athens?" she asked dolefully.

"Thou knowest well that I love thee, Thais," he replied. "Thou knowest that it will tear my heart to leave thee behind. But it is the Gods who have decided for us and we have no choice. Were there no other reason for my going, Clearchus will have need of me in his search for Artemisia, and that would be enough to

forbid my remaining here."

"Then I will go, too!" Thais cried, leaping from the couch and standing defiantly before him.

Chares returned her look with an indulgent smile. Her exquisitely moulded form was outlined under the clinging folds of her garment. Her tiny feet, with their pink little heels, looked as though they had never rested upon the earth. Her hair fell about her rounded neck and dimpled shoulders like spun copper. Her red lips and pearly teeth seemed made to feast on dainties. Physically she was as sensitive and delicate as a child; but her eyes shone with a fire that betrayed indomitable spirit.

"What will you do when it snows?" the Theban asked mockingly.

She threw herself down on her knees on the floor beside him, taking his hand in hers and pressing it against her glowing cheek.

"Chares! Chares! My master! I love thee!" she murmured. "The blind God at whose power I laughed so often when I was in his mother's service has stricken me through the heart. My soul is naked before thee. I cannot have thee leave me. If thou dost, I shall die. I will go to the ends of the earth with thee. I will suffer hardships to be near thee. Thou art all I have. I am thy slave, and I do not wish to be free."

Chares felt her tears upon his hand. He lifted her face and kissed her.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet and began to pace backward and forward on the many-colored carpet that was spread upon the

floor. The leopard stopped tearing at the parchment and followed her with his eyes.

"Is it my fault that I am – what I am?" she cried. "Am I to blame because my life has not been like that of other women? They are shielded from the world and ignorant of what is good and what is bad. Have I committed a fault in fulfilling the will of the Gods, from whom there is no escape? For the evil done by others must I pay the penalty?"

"Of course not," Chares said consolingly, scarcely knowing what she meant or how to answer her. Her passion took him by surprise. She stood before him glowing in every limb with youth and beauty, her chin raised and her lips parted in scorn, as though defying the world to accuse her.

"Who cast me adrift?" she went on vehemently. "You talk of going into Asia to aid Clearchus in his search for Artemisia. Very well, I will go with you and search too, for I also wish to find Artemisia. She is my sister!"

"What do you mean, Thais? Are you mad?" Chares exclaimed.

"It is the truth," she replied. "I forced old Eunomus to tell me only last night. He has the proofs and he has promised to deliver them to me, for a certain sum, of course. I am the daughter of Theorus, who caused me to be exposed because I was a girl. The old pander found me, as he has found many another in his time, and – and – he made of me what you see me."

She threw herself once more upon the couch to ease her grief

among the crimson cushions. Chares knew not what to say. He distrusted the story told by Eunomus, for he knew the wretch was capable of doing anything for money. But, after all, what if the tale were true? He was fond of Thais, of course. How could a man help being fond of a young and beautiful woman who loved him? There was Aspasia, who had ruled Athens and all Hellas through Pericles. There was the son of Phocion, who had actually married a girl no better than Thais. Still, what had been could not be changed; and even if Thais was the daughter of Theorus, that fact could make no difference.

Thais raised her head from the pillows as though she had read his thoughts. Her eyes were softened with tears.

"Is it my fault," she pleaded, "that my sister has the love of an honorable man and will be married to him, while I – I can never hope for such a marriage? I know it, Chares, and I do not ask it. All I ask is that you will permit me to go with you. I am tired, since I knew you, of my life here. Without meaning to do so, you have opened my eyes to new things. I am what I am; but, in spite of all, I am still a woman – more a woman perhaps, than Artemisia, my sister, whom I have never seen. Let me go with you, Chares, to share your dangers and your glory, to nurse you if you are wounded, and to stand beside your funeral pyre and watch my heart turn to ashes if you are killed. I cannot bear to be left behind. The weariness and the waiting would surely kill me. Let me go with thee, my Life, for I think neither of us will see Athens again."

Chares felt deep pity for the unfortunate girl stir in his heart. The strength of his emotion troubled his careless nature.

"There, there," he said, anxious to pacify her. "Don't make gloomy predictions. You shall come."

She nestled into his arms and laid her head upon his shoulder.

"I shall never know greater happiness," she said, with a sigh of content; and then, changing her tone, "They say the women of the Medes are very beautiful. You will not make me jealous, will you, Chares?"

He laughed and kissed her, looking into her eyes. "Small need have you to fear the Medean women!" he said.

CHAPTER XII
MENA READS A LETTER

"They have gone," said Ariston, on his return home one evening.

"Who have gone?" his wife inquired.

"Clearchus and his two friends, Chares and the Spartan," the old man replied. "They set out for Pella this afternoon to join the Macedonian army. Fortune has smiled upon us once more and I think there will be a turn in our affairs."

Ariston made no attempt to hide his satisfaction. His shoulders no longer stooped, and his step was light. A hundred schemes were running through his head for repairing the disasters that had brought him so low. For all practical purposes he was again the richest man in Athens, and with the gold at his command he imagined that it would be easy for him to regain his feet.

"You must be cautious," Xanthe said anxiously. "You know that at any time Clearchus may demand an account."

"Yes, but he will not," Ariston replied, pinching her withered cheek. "He will never return to trouble us. I have news of what the Great King is doing and unless the Gods themselves interfere to save Alexander, he will be crushed as soon as he has crossed the Hellespont. The Persians will meet him there in such numbers that there can be no escape for him. None who follow him will

return. By Hermes, I feel almost young again!"

He entered his workroom briskly and sat down at the table. Producing a roll of papyrus, he broke the seal, slipped off the wrapping, and spread the document out before him.

"Iphicrates to Ariston," he read. "Greeting: I have obeyed your instructions. Syphax brought me the girl. I dismissed him with promises after she had told me that she had no complaint to make against him. I am convinced that he is a rogue and that he will live to be crucified. For Artemisia, she remains in my household. I have told her that I am awaiting a suitable opportunity to send her back to Athens; but I have put her off from time to time with excuses. She has lost flesh since she came hither, and if she is to be sold, I think it would be best not to delay too long, as her value will be less than if she were offered now. She has written many letters, which I promised to forward for her. One of these I send you with this; the others have been destroyed.

"It is expensive for me to maintain her as you directed. It has cost me already one talent and twenty drachmæ, which leaves me in your debt six talents, eleven drachmæ, and thirty minæ. Please make this correction in our account.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.