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MYRRHA OF EPHEBUS.

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At evening, when the sunset was melting over the spires of Ephesus, the crowd hastened toward the temple of Diana. Stately and graceful rose its Pentelican columns, fluted and crowned with sculptured capitals. A broad porch, its floor paved with mosaic, stretched between the colonnade and the wall of the building, and above is the simple door, in Greek letters of inlaid jasper, stood the inscription

GREAT IS DIANA OF EPHEBUS.

Passing the vestibule and entering the body of the temple, the sublime errors of Heathendom showed most imposingly. A soft, diffused light filled the space and mellowed the gleaming of the prophyl columns. Music, scarce heard, but exquisitely sweet, sounded ceaselessly. No altar was visible, but before the purple curtain that veiled it, there stood, upon a simple pedestal of red Egyptian granite, living from the chisel of Phidias, the statue of the goddess. Pure was the smooth forehead, as when she uttered the death sentence of Actæon. Firm and set were the straight brows, as when she watched the desolation of Niobe. Full, warm and impassioned were her lips, as when the kisses of Endymion melted upon their roses.

The veil quivered and light gleamed from its folds, and the voice of the people swelled up like a chorus of seas,

GREAT IS DIANA OF EPHEBUS.

Then the music swelled—flute and cymbal and clarion, higher and fuller till it shook the marble walls. Light burst over all things: the curtain parted and the altar, gleaming with amethysts, flashed upon the worshippers. Slowly the train of purple-robed flammens moved on until they surrounded the shrine. They heaped the altar with wood and white flowers; two beautiful boys held the snowy stag—filleted for sacrifice—with a silken chord; and as the priests prepared the service, they sang their hymn, and for chorus the flute and cymbal and clarion pealed.

HYMN TO DIANA.

Hear, in thy forest shades
Where bounds the golden-footed deer!
Amid the music of thy glades,
Our psalm, huntress, hear!

As on the Latmian hill,
When watchful stars attendant shone,
Thy lips grew warmer with the thrill,
Caught from Endymion:—

As when Actæon's breast
Received the boon of impious pride,
Felt the transfiguring wave, confessed
Thy purity—and died—

As when along the sky
Thou glidest in thy silver car;
When mortal hearts prefer on high
Hymns to the evening star:—

To huntress, lover, maid,
To virgin queen of heaven's blue sphere,
Fond, pure, beloved, and beautiful—
Ephesian mother, hear!

As the hymn ceased, there sounded the warning "EKAS! EKAS! OSTIS ALITROS!" Then for the Romans "Procul, O procul, este profani!" Then followed, at the bidding of the priest, the low murmured prayer of the people; and when they arose from their knees, the victim was led up to the altar: the sacrificial cake was broken and sprinkled between its antlers. Then the axe was swung high in the stalwart hands of the officiating flamen—it fell, and the victim rolled dead upon the pavement. Instantly its throat was cut and the blood caught in the sacred phageion of chased gold. Then the flaying, evisceration and dismembering followed, and the auguries were drawn. The flesh was laid upon the altar; frankincense and wine were poured upon the pile, the torch was applied, and up through the silent air shot the quivering tongues of flame!

When all was over and the multitude had departed, a white-robed figure flitted from column to column until it reached the one nearest the altar, and there, crouched in the shadow, seemed to listen attentively. In a few moments, the sound of a measured footfall was heard, and a tall form issued from behind the shrine and approached the pillar. It was Cleon, one of the priests of Artemis; and as he came near the pillar, a low voice breathed his name—

"Cleon!"

"Ah, Myrrha, it is thou?" he said, and then added, "Reach the door of the temple unseen, there may chance to be spies lurking near. I will join you in the vestibule."

Silently the white robe glided away and disappeared through the portal. Cleon again moved behind the altar, but in a few moments, emerged from its shadow, wrapped in a dark brown robe. Passing the doorway, he found Myrrha in the vestibule awaiting him.

"Dear Myrrha," he said, as she drew near and clasped his arm, "let us go without the city. There are too many eyes here, even ready to watch the priest of Artemis."

"What made thee a priest, Cleon?"

"The first thinking of, the first longing for the pure and the true. The flammens of the huntress deity were held up before me as models of holiness and excellence. With all youth's fire, in my eagerness for good I joined them; and when my mind became matured and the heart with it, I learned too late the falsity of the creed."

"Falsity! Cleon, may the goddess forgive thee!"

"Yes, falsity, Myrrha. There I looked for good, there I found abundant evil: where I looked for purity, there the most loathsome depravity; where I sought religion, there—but my oath! my oath!" And he clenched his hands and strode forward fiercely.

"Cleon," she murmured, and the music of her utterance calmed him; "Cleon, you are now enraged at something: let it pass and you will soon be at peace again."

"Myrrha, that is no true creed which parts what nature hath joined."

"You speak in riddles, Cleon."

"I mean the hearts of man and woman."

And then the young priest poured into her ear the confession of his love for her. The knowledge of himself had smouldered in his bosom, but the torch of Eros had kindled it into flame. It was nothing new to Myrrha. Her quick woman's wit had long been ready for it. They had attained the outskirts of the city and had been for some hours walking on in silence.

"See, how lonely yonder light appears," said Myrrha. "None others are visible round us. Let us walk towards it, Cleon."

As they approached they saw that it proceeded from the low, humble tenement of an artisan; and drawing nearer they heard a low chant of music, so sweet and mournful that they stood still until it had finished. Then they went forward to the house. The doorway was vacant, its gate had been torn from its hinges and now lay broken upon the ground. Here—themselves concealed by the shadow without—they could easily see all that passed within. It was a low and somewhat dilapidated room, lighted up by two waxen torches. About twenty people were assembled there. A long table, covered with a snow white cloth, occupied one end of the apartment, and behind it stood an old man, with hands and eyes uplifted, uttering a fervent prayer. At his side was a smaller stand whereon lay some manuscripts and a simple cross. In front the people were gathered. One tall figure attracted the notice of the flamen and his companion, standing erect with the head bowed and the face concealed in the robe—you could trace habit of command in the very stateliness of the figure.

When the prayer ended, the head was raised, the robe fell, and Myrrha started with astonishment. It was her father, governor of Ephesus!

Then again at a sign from the old man—evidently, from his simple white robe, the priest of this worship—for that it was worship the gazers could not doubt—at a sign from him again rose the notes of a hymn. It was sung: and then lifting the manuscript reverently, the priest read a single sentence from it. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another."

The words thrilled through the heart of the flammens of Diana. Could this be that which was wanting in his creed? He listened while in simple eloquence fell from the lips of the old man the pure doctrine of love due from man to man, and from man to his Creator. The soul of the young man grew full of the beauty of the only beautiful faith; a faith not then inculcated by terror and denunciation, but made alluring past expression by its winning affectionateness;—not then deprived of the glorious poetry which is its very soul, and urged only upon the ground of uninviting reason; but spoken to the inner heart of man, and claiming from the fast-rooted affections the adherence which it sought. And when the old man ended again they sang a hymn.

AGNUS DEI.

Lamb of God, who bearest
Earthly sin relieve us!
In thy heaven Thou hearest,
From Thy heaven forgive us!

Though the Father's curses
Fell for human errors,
Thou, with endless mercies,
Hast destroyed their terrors.

Let the storm and trouble flee;
Dona pacem Domine.

Lamb of God, the billow
Of despair rolls o'er us;
As with thee, no pillow
Offers rest place for us!

Desolate and dreary
Stands the holy city.
Hear our miserrere
Jesus, and have pity!

Let the storm and trouble flee;
Dona pacem Domine!

Night after night did Cleon direct his steps toward the assembling place of the Ephesian Christians: and soon he was one of their number.

But the priest was missed from the Artemisian shrine; his voice was no longer sounded in the Hieric chorus; his form no longer was recognised in the sacred processions.

One night as he came from the humble church and walked slowly toward the city, he was seized by a band of men, gagged, bound and carried away. Myrrha, who had lingered behind him, to speak for a moment to the

"The Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

aged presbyter, issued from the doorway in time to see this. She uttered no shriek, but nerved for the moment by the peril of her beloved, she followed at a distance and saw them enter the temple of Diana of Ephesus.

Instantly she flew to her home, and asked for her father. He had left the city.

She sought her own chamber and sunk half-fainting upon a couch. After some moments a happy thought occurred. She remembered her father's lieutenant, a man bound to him by many kindnesses and only second to him in power.

"I will see Cleobulus," cried Myrrha, "he can intercede and perhaps save Cleon."

Acting at once upon her resolution she called a slave and despatched him to crave audience of the lieutenant. In a few moments he appeared.

"In what can I serve the lady Myrrha," he asked.

"Excellent Cleobulus, I am in a narrow strait; a dear friend is in danger, and aid less powerful than yours will scarcely avail to set him free."

"I am at your service, beautiful Myrrha. May I ask in what danger your friend is placed?"

"I know not how he is charged: he is in the hands of the flammens of Diana."

"Ah! and his name?"

"Cleon."

The brow of the officer darkened as he asked.

"Thou lovest the renegade priest?"

The daughter of Anaxander raised her eyes haughtily to the face of the questioner: but the crimson blush gave plainer answer than words could have given.

"My power does not extend to sacred matters," he said coldly. "Those who sin against the goddess, I cannot save."

She looked up, saw his coldness of manner, and obeying first impulse, flung herself passionately at his feet.

"Save him! save him! Cleobulus, or I die! You owe much to my father. You will cancel all the debt, if by your means Cleon is rescued."

An expression of most intense passion passed over his face, as he gazed upon the great beauty of the young Greek girl, as she knelt at his feet, with her hands clasped and her large, exquisite eyes turned imploringly upon him. Suddenly he fell upon his knees beside her, caught her in his arms and pressed a kiss upon her lips.

"I—I also love thee!"

And Myrrha rose, speechless with indignation. That instant a resolve immovably stern entered her breast. Her cheek was pale, her eye flashed with light as without a word, but with a look of most unutterable haughtiness, she pointed to the door.

And already alarmed, the officer shrunk from her presence.

Myrrha clasped her hands, and one of her maidens entered.

"Bid Sosia attend me," she said.

Sosia was soon found, and entered bearing a letter in his hand.

"What have you there, good Sosia?" asked his mistress.

"A letter for the noble Cleobulus, lady," said the slave.

"Give it to me."

And Myrrha took from his hand the missive, loosened the wax and unrolled the parchment. It was a request for a file of soldiers from the Arch-flamen of Diana. Many of the younger members of the priesthood had been openly expressing resolutions to resist any attempt upon the life of Cleon; and the sterner among them had therefore requested the assistance of the civil power.

"May I trust thee Sosia?" asked Myrrha.

"Trust me, Lady Myrrha."

"Nay, I did wrong to ask. But can you find, among my father's ancient soldiers, any who will do a service for love of him and me?"

"I will get a hundred, noble lady, who will die for you."

"Get twenty, good Sosia, and contrive to have them outside of the palace, to meet me at dark beside the obelisk of Hercules."

And Myrrha strengthened herself with her newly found faith. When the day was past, and the dusky wings of twilight began to overshadow the world, she disguised herself in the dress of a freedman, a long brown robe, and stole cautiously from the palace. She found the soldiers awaiting her, and advancing to the side of Sosia she bade him give the word, and they moved forward.

They soon reached the temple, and at its porch found a flamen awaiting them. He glanced suspiciously at Myrrha.

"Who is that youth?" he asked of Sosia.

"A favourite freedman of the noble Cleobulus," was the reply, "the men will scarcely obey me. This young man bears his master's signet, which they will respect."

"Well," said the flamen, "follow me then!"

So, they entered the temple by the usual porch, but turned aside in the vestibule, and passed through a side door into a long narrow passage which conducted them at length into a spacious apartment, upon one side of which a massive curtain fell from the ceiling to the floor.

"That," said the priest in a low tone to Sosia, and pointing to the curtain, "that conducts to the recess behind the altar and in it the trial of this infidel Cleon will take place." As he spoke, the priest slipped behind the curtain and disappeared.

Myrrha drew the folds of the drapery slightly aside and looked through. Between the altar and the wall there intervened a space some thirty feet square. The wall was cover-

ed up to the roof almost, with richly carved wood work, upon which was hung the "vestimenta votiva," mentioned by Horace: the garments, &c., customarily deposited at the shrine by the worshipper. At the foot of this wood work were tanged jars of the rich gums, leucase, myrrh and camphor, used in the temple service. Upon the other side of the space was the altar whereon a large fire burned brightly, and over its top hung the solemn darkness which filled the temple beyond. A throne was erected beside the altar.

Even while Myrrha gazed, a door opened and from it issued an array of purple-robed priests; amidst whom, clad in the full priestly robes but with cords upon his arms, she saw the pallid face but clear eye and calm brow of Cleon. Myrrha turned and whispered to Sosia, and he to his companions.

The Arch-hiereus (high priest) seated himself upon the throne, and at a nod, Cleon was placed so as to confront him.

"Dost thou know why thou art arraigned here?" asked the Arch-hiereus.

Cleon fixed his eyes calmly on the questioner as he replied.

"For worshipping the true God."

"And farther," said the priest sternly, "for recantation or torture. Behold!" and he pointed to the altar whereon lay certain instruments of torture; "wilt thou renounce these new infidel opinions and return penitently to the shrine of Artemis? If so, there stands the goddess: kneel and worship!"

"It is written, there is but one true God," was Cleon's reply.

"Yet bethink thee! Thou art young, too young to die by the torture."

"But not too young to be strong with strength from above."

"We are not met to argue now. During your imprisonment the wisest of your former brethren have waited on you; have pled you with argument and entreaty; but you have remained obstinate. Yet there is still time for recantation, if you are willing. Will you renounce this new faith?"

"Never!"

The Arch-hiereus frowned darkly, but spoke no more: he nodded to his attendant brotherhood; and they advanced and stripped from Cleon's form the robes of the profession. Piling these garments upon the floor, they poured the liquid gums and threw handfuls of frankincense upon them.

"Let the hand," said the Arch-hiereus "which signed the oath of our order, be shrivelled in the flames which shall consume these desecrated garments."

The face of Cleon grew pale as he raised his eyes to heaven and his lip moved slightly. Two priests seized him, and leading him toward the pile unbound his right hand; while a third flamen lighted a torch at the altar. But at this moment a voice from the crowd of priests exclaimed, "This must not be!"

"Ah! who dares this impiety?" thundered the Arch-hiereus, rising.

"I" answered fully two thirds of those present.

The Arch-hiereus signed again; the torch was applied to the robes, and quick and lurid up sprang the flames. At the same moment the curtain was swept back and the light flashed upon the arms of the Greek soldiers.

"Draw forward the infidel!" cried the Arch-hiereus and he was obeyed.

"Now!" cried a clear sweet voice from amid the soldiers; and at the word they sprang from the ranks and dashed toward the fire. In an instant the priests who held Cleon were stretched upon the floor, stunned; the torch-bearer was struck down; the cords upon the young man's arms were cut, and he was borne to the door.

"Betrayed!" said the Arch-hiereus, and for a moment amazement deprived him of the power of motion. The next, however, he sprang to his feet; seized the sacrificial axe, and sent it crashing through helm and brain of the nearest soldiers. Then the knives of the priests and the swords of the soldiery were drawn. But, before another blow could be struck, there arose a shout.

"The shrine is on fire!"

And it was so. The burning garments had been scattered about; the flames had been communicated to the *amphoræ* of gums, and to the long-dried and tinder-like relics hung upon the shrine. When the combatants turned to look, they saw the quick vivid tongues of flame ascending rapidly, winding amid the rich tracery of the carved work and soaring momentarily higher and higher. It was useless to attempt quenching the conflagration, and each thought but of saving himself. When they reached the outside, the flames were bursting from the caves. Ah! it was a strange and an awful sight. The sentinels upon the city walls began to cry of "fire!" The trumpet sounded "to arms" from the gubernatorial palace; and as the soldiers issued from its gates, each shouted "fire!" And the thousands within the city started, affrighted from their dreams, hastily donned their clothes and issued from their homes to swell the tide of the human ocean, that poured through the streets pealing with its countless voices, "fire!"

Soon, in the great square before the temple they were gathered; mute with awe as they watched the mighty element exulting in its work of devastation, wreathing round pillar and capitol; glaring from within the temple through the gateless door-ways; splitting the white marble of the stately walls; and sending up its dim smoke, enamelled with pointed tongues of flame, to the sky.

And over all spread the calm heaven with its solemn stars. Then the roof swayed and the cracking of its mighty timbers arose above the roar of the fire. Fiercer and fiercer it grew, and the quivering of that great roof was like the quivering of a town shaken by an earth-