

"That is what I should like," replied Kalasiris. "But now it is time to break up the party. First let us remember the spiritual powers and let us each in turn pour a libation for our deliverance."

- 34 Thereupon the libation was passed around the table, and the guests dispersed. Kalasiris was looking out for Charikleia; he watched the people go past but could not see her in the throng. Eventually a woman told him where she was, and he went through into the shrine, where he found her clinging fast to the feet of the holy statue. Exhausted by her protracted prayers and by the ravages of sorrow, she had slipped into a deep sleep. Kalasiris shed a tear or two and implored the god to let her life take a happier turn. Then, gently, he woke her and led her back to their lodgings. She blushed, apparently at having allowed sleep to get the better of her without realizing. Then she withdrew into the privacy of the women's room, but, lying in bed beside Nausikles' daughter, she was unable to sleep for all the fears and anxieties preying on her mind.

Book Six

- 1 Kalasiris and Knemon retired to bed in a room in the men's part of the house. The remainder of the night passed more slowly than they wished, but more quickly than they expected, for the greater part of it had already been spent in feasting and the telling of stories whose length only left their hearers hungry for more. Too impatient even to wait for the day to dawn fully, they went to wake Nausikles and begged him to tell them where he thought Theagenes might be and to take them to him as quickly as he could. He made no demur, and they set off together. Charikleia pleaded again and again to be allowed to accompany them, but was reluctantly persuaded to stay behind by Nausikles' assurances that they did not have far to go and would be back in no time with Theagenes. So they left her there, tossed on a tide of conflicting emotions, midway between sorrow at being parted from them and joy at her hopes for the future.

They were walking along the banks of the Nile soon after leaving the village when they saw a crocodile scuttle across their path from right to left and plunge full tilt into the waters of the river. For two of them this was a common sight and occasioned them no alarm—except that Kalasiris said it was a sign portending some impediment to their mission. Knemon, however, was much perturbed by what he had seen: he had not had a clear view of the creature but had merely glimpsed a dark shape close to the ground slither past him; he very nearly turned tail and ran, much to Nausikles' amusement.

"Knemon," said Kalasiris, "I thought it was only at night that you suffered from a faint heart, and that your attacks of timidity were

confined to the hours of darkness. But it seems that your courage was just as heroic in the daytime all along! And it is not just the sound of names that causes you such agitation, but the sight of everyday, harmless objects too!"

"Which god or spirit-being is it," asked Nausikles, "whose name our bold friend here cannot endure to hear?"

"I cannot say," replied Kalasiris, "whether the names of gods and spirit-beings have the same effect on him; this is the name of a human being—and, what is more, not of a man or any famous hero but of a woman, and a dead one at that, according to him! But he shakes with fear if anyone so much as mentions it. That night when you, my friend, brought back Charikleia safe and sound from the Herdsmen, somehow or other and somewhere or other he had heard a passing reference to this name I am talking about, and he did not let me get a wink of sleep; he was at death's door with fright all night, and I had quite a job to bring him round. And if it were not for the fact that it would cause him great distress and terror, I should tell you the name this very minute, Nausikles. Then you would laugh even more!"

And so saying, he let fall the word "Thisbe."

Nausikles had stopped laughing now; taken aback by what he had heard, he stood awhile lost in thought, wondering what the name of Thisbe meant to Knemon, what association he had had with her to cause him to react in such a way. 2

Now it was Knemon's turn to roar with laughter. "My dear Kalasiris," he said, "now do you see just how great the power of this name is? I am not the only one for whom it holds the terrors of hell¹⁵³—it has affected Nausikles in the same way now. Or rather there has been a complete reversal of roles: now it is my turn to laugh, for I know that she is dead, while our valiant friend Nausikles, who laughs so heartily at other people's expense, has become long-faced and glum."

"Please stop!" said Nausikles. "You have had your own back on me, Knemon; that is enough now. In the name of the gods of hospitality and friendship, by the salt and food with which, I believe, I made you so welcome in my home, tell me, both of you, how you know the name of Thisbe and how you have come either to fear it or use it to make fun of me."

"The tale is yours to tell, Knemon," said Kalasiris. "You have often promised to tell it me, but until now you have always found an excuse of one kind or another to put off doing so. Now is the time for you to tell it, and in so doing you will not only be granting the request of Nausikles

153. Literally "for whom it is a *mormolykeion*," a mythical bogey used to frighten naughty children.

here but also making our journey less arduous and helping us on our way with your story."

Knemon consented, and he briefly told them all that he had already recounted to Theagenes and Charikleia: that his home was in Athens, his father was called Aristippos, and Demainete had become his stepmother. He told them also of Demainete's illicit infatuation with him, and how, when she was thwarted of her desires, she devised a scheme against him, using Thisbe as the instrument of her intrigue. He went on to describe the nature of the trap she had laid, how he was banished from the land of his birth, this being the penalty imposed on him by the popular assembly as a father-killer; how, while he was staying on Aigina, first Charias, one of his contemporaries, had brought him the news of Demainete's death and how it had come about after Thisbe had set a trap for her too, and then Antikles had told him how Demainete's family had united against Aristippos and induced the people to suspect him of murder, with the result that he had been subjected to the confiscation of his property, while Thisbe had eloped from Athens with her lover, the merchant from Naukratis. Knemon ended his tale by telling how he had sailed off to Egypt with Antikles in search of Thisbe, hoping to find her and take her back to Athens, where he would clear his father's name and bring her to book. In the period that followed he had faced many dangers and experienced many adventures, finally being captured by buccaneers; but he had managed to escape, only to be captured for a second time as soon as he set foot in Egypt by the bandits called Herdsmen. That was how he had met Theagenes and Charikleia; he told them also of the killing of Thisbe and everything thereafter, until he reached the part of his story that was already familiar to Kalasiris and Nausikles.

- 3 Knemon's story left Nausikles in a state of utter indecision, by turns disposed to admit the truth about himself and Thisbe and then inclined to put off doing so to another time. In the end he kept his own counsel, though only with difficulty, partly by his own decision, partly because something else occurred to prevent his telling all. They had come just about seven miles, and were drawing close to the village where Mitranes was stationed when they ran into an acquaintance of Nausikles and asked him where he was going to in such a desperate hurry.

"Nausikles," he replied, "you ask the reason for my haste as if you did not know that at the moment my whole life is directed towards a single end—namely, doing as I am bidden in the service of my lady, Isias of Chemmis: I work my land for her; I supply her every need; she allows me no rest by day or night; whatever service Isias demands of me, be it great or small, I accept, whatever the cost to me in money or hardship. Now I am on my way to my beloved posthaste with a particular bird she demanded I should bring her—this Nile flamingo you can see here."

"What a considerate mistress you have got yourself involved with," said Nausikles. "How modest her demands are if it is only a flamingo that she has demanded of you and not the phoenix itself that comes to us from Ethiopia or India."¹⁵⁴

"This is typical of her," he replied. "It is her way to make fun of me and what I do for her. But where are you going? What is your business?"

"We are in a hurry to see Mitranes," they replied.

"Then your haste is pointless and futile," he said. "Mitranes is not there at the moment. This very night he went off to fight the Herdsmen who live in the village of Bessa;¹⁵⁵ he had sent some young Greek he had captured to Oroondates in Memphis—to be taken on from there, I suppose, as a gift to the Great King—but the men of Bessa and their newly chosen leader, Thyamis, mounted a surprise attack and seized the young man, who is now in their possession."

Even before these words were out of his mouth, he was hurrying on his way. "I must not keep Isias waiting," he called. "At this very moment she may be peering around impatiently for me, and I should not want the progress of my love to be obstructed by unpunctuality. She is forever making trumped-up complaints and accusations against me at the slightest provocation and pretending to be indifferent to my attentions."

On hearing these words, they stood awhile rooted in dumb dismay at the way their hopes had been so unexpectedly dashed, but eventually Nausikles tried to raise their flagging spirits by pointing out that there was no need to abandon their enterprise completely because of a momentary setback: now they would have to return to Chemmis and give some serious thought to what they should do next; then they must equip themselves for a trip further afield and go in search of Theagenes among the Herdsmen, or wherever else their inquiries might lead them, secure wherever they went behind a shield of confidence¹⁵⁶ that they would be reunited with him. The hand of god was manifest in what had just happened, for a fortuitous meeting with one of his acquaintances had brought them information guiding them to the place where they must seek Theagenes; their target was the Herdsmen's village, and that was the direction their path should point.

154. There is an untranslatable pun here: the word for "flamingo" is *phoinikopteros* ("crimson-wing"), which suggests the comments on the phoenix. The flamingo is a very easy bird to catch; the phoenix, much harder as (a) it was supposed to appear in Egypt only once every five hundred years, and (b) it is purely mythical. There are several versions of its origins. Herodotos (2.73) says it comes from Arabia; for Ethiopia see Achilles Tatius 3.25; for India, Philostratos *Life of Apollonios* 3.49.

155. The name is attested for a town in southern Egypt, but not for anywhere that would fit with Heliodoros's narrative.

156. This curious metaphor is taken almost verbatim from a speech by Demosthenes (*On the Crown* 97).

5 They were quite happy to fall in with this suggestion, both because his words had, it seems to me, shown them new cause for hope and because Knemon whispered to Kalasiris that he had no doubt that Thyamis would ensure no harm came to Theagenes. So they decided to return—which they did, to find Charikleia in the porch of the house, scanning all points of the compass for their appearance in the distance. When she saw that there was no sign of Theagenes, she gave a piercing scream of sorrow. “So you have come back without him, Father!” she said. “Three of you left this house, and the same three have returned! Theagenes must be dead then! If you have anything to tell me, then in the name of the gods tell it me quickly. Do not make my sorrow more painful by not coming straight to the point. Not to mince words in breaking bad news is a kindness, for it enables the soul to come to grips with its anguish and find a swift remedy for its sorrow.”

Knemon cut short her distress. “That is an annoying habit of yours, Charikleia,” he said. “You are always inclined to divine the worst,¹⁵⁷ and you are always wrong—I am glad to say in this case. Theagenes is alive and well, by the gods’ grace.” And then he explained briefly what had happened and where Theagenes was.

“It is obvious from your words that you have never been in love, Knemon,” said Kalasiris. “Otherwise you would have known that for lovers even perfectly innocent things are full of fear. They trust no evidence but that of their own eyes where their sweetheart is concerned, and separation from the object of their love brings instant dread and anguish to a lover’s heart. The reason is that they are convinced that their beloved would never fail to come to them unless there were a horrible obstacle preventing him from doing so. So, my friend, let us forgive Charikleia, who is displaying all the classic symptoms of love! Let us go indoors and consider our next step.”

6 And with that he took Charikleia by the hand and, with a tenderness betokening a love like that of a father for his child, led her inside. Nausikles, who wished to ease the burden of their cares for a time—though he had a certain other matter in mind too—prepared a banquet of extraordinary splendor, a party at which the only guests were they and his own daughter, whom he had made lovelier to behold than she normally was and had arrayed in exceptionally lavish finery. When he judged them to be of sufficiently good cheer, he started to speak as follows.

157. Compare Agamemnon’s words to Kalchas in the first book of the *Iliad* (106–8):

Seer of evil: never yet have you told me a good thing.
Always the evil things are dear to your heart to prophesy,
but nothing excellent have you said nor ever accomplished.

"My friends—and may the gods bear witness to the truth of what I am going to say—it would be much to my liking if you were to decide to stay and live here in my house forevermore, sharing my possessions and all that I hold most dear. You see, I have come to think of you not just as guests staying awhile in my home but as true friends, who reciprocate my feelings, and thus nothing you may ask of me shall I consider in the slightest as an imposition. I am ready to help you in whatever way I can in your search for your friends, while I am here. But I must tell you quite plainly that my life is that of a merchant: trade is the field I work in. For some time past the west winds have been blowing fair, opening up the sea to navigation and bringing traders the good news that the sailing season has arrived. The clarion call of business beckons me away to Greece. So I should much appreciate it if you could let me know what your intentions are so that I can arrange my own affairs to fit in with your plans."

Kalasiris paused awhile in silence before replying. "Nausikles," he said, "may your sailing be blessed by divine favor. May Hermes the God of Profit and Poseidon the God of Safe Passage be your companions and guides. May their attendance bring you favorable tides and winds on every sea you sail and ensure that you find a safe haven in every port and a warm welcome for merchants in every town. You have discharged the duties of hospitality and friendship to the full, treating us as honored guests while we were staying with you and not seeking to detain us now that we wish to be on our way.¹⁵⁸ Though it is painful to part from you and your home, which you have allowed us to think of as our own, we cannot evade our duty to do everything possible to recover those whom we love most in the world. Such is the intention of Charikleia here and myself, but what Knemon's thoughts are, whether he is willing to give us the pleasure of his company on our long and winding road or has come to some other decision, he is here to tell us himself."

Knemon was on the point of speaking when his intended reply was cut short by a fit of violent sobbing, and a flood of warm tears ran down his cheeks, rendering him incapable of speech, until eventually he gathered his breath and, with a deep sigh, said, "O wheel of human fortune, you are forever turning, never stable! Many men have suffered on many occasions from the delight you take in making misfortune ebb and flow

158. Echoing Menelaos in the *Odyssey* (15.69ff.):

I would disapprove of another
hospitable man who was excessive in friendship,
as of one excessive in hate. In all things balance is better.
It is equally bad when one speeds on the guest unwilling
to go, and when he holds back one who is hastening. Rather
one should befriend the guest who is there, but speed him when he wishes.

so violently, but none more than I. You took from me my family and my father's home, dispossessed me of my homeland and the city of my loved ones; you drove me ashore in Egypt (to say nothing of what intervened) and delivered me into the clutches of the bandits known as Herdsmen. Then you let me see a glimmer of hope when through your agency I met some people who for all their sorrows were at least Greek. I hoped to live out what was left of my life with them, but now, it seems, you are cutting short even this solace. Which way should I turn? What ought I to do? Am I to abandon Charikleia before she has been reunited with Theagenes? What a cruel and sinful thing to do, O Earth!¹⁵⁹ Should I go with her then and join her quest? If we were assured of finding him, efforts spent in the expectation of success would be efforts well spent. But on the other hand if the future is uncertain and merely holds yet more misfortune, then it is also uncertain what end there will ever be to my wanderings. Why do I not crave forgiveness from you and from the gods of friendship and, at long last, begin to think about returning to my homeland and my family? Particularly as, thanks to one of the gods, it seems, such an excellent opportunity has presented itself, Nausikles here having voiced his intention of sailing for Greece. Otherwise something might happen to my father while I tarry here, and then my home would be left with no one at all to inherit in due line of succession. Even if I am to be destitute, it is a proper and sufficient end in itself that at least some remnant of my family should survive in me.

"Charikleia—for it is to you above all that I am seeking to justify myself—I offer you my apologies, which I beg you to accept. If Nausikles will agree to wait a little longer, despite his urgent haste, I shall go with you as far as the Herdsmen, in the hope that I shall be able to return you to Theagenes in person. Then he would be able to see that I have conscientiously looked after the charge he entrusted to my safekeeping, and I should be able to take my leave of you with a clear conscience and high hopes for the future. But if—which heaven forbend—we do not find him, even then I could still be excused, for even then I should not be abandoning you to a lonely fate but entrusting you to the sure protection and fatherly love of Kalasiris here."

A lover is quick to discern another who has fallen prey to the same passions as himself; many signs had already led Charikleia to suspect that Knemon was enamored of Nausikles' daughter, and now Nausikles' words had made it clear to her that he would welcome the match and had busily been working to this end for some time, expending all man-

159. Knemon invokes Ge, a personification of earth, regarded as protector of oaths and often linked with Themis (Right); here the word translated "sinful" is *athemiton*, "against *themis*." Knemon feels himself bound to Charikleia by obligations as strong as sworn oaths and overseen by the same powers.

ner of inducements to purchase Knemon's compliance. In any case she thought that Knemon was no longer a seemingly or wholly trustworthy traveling companion.

"As you please," she said. "I am grateful and deeply indebted to you for your kindness in doing what you have done for us. But as far as the future is concerned, you are under no obligation whatsoever to concern yourself about us or to stay with us against your will and face the dangers of a destiny that is not your own. I hope you will win back Athens, your home and family, and embrace with all your heart our friend Nausikles and the pretext which, to use your words, has presented itself to you in his person. Whatever befalls, Kalasiris and I shall fight on until we reach the end of our wanderings, confident that even if no human being should join our quest, we have the gods as our traveling companions."

At this point Nausikles intervened. "May Charikleia's prayers be granted," he said, "and may the gods go with her as she asks; may she be reunited with her kin, as she deserves, for she is spiritually noble and intellectually able. 8

"As for you, Knemon, you must not be disappointed if you are returning to Athens without Thisbe, especially as you have found in me the culprit responsible for abducting her and spiriting her out of Athens. Yes, the merchant of Naukratis, Thisbe's lover, is none other than myself! And you need not think that you will have to beg for a living and bewail your penury. If you are as agreeable to the idea as I am, I shall make you a rich man and restore you to your home in your own country; if you will consent to marry her, I betroth my daughter, Nausikleia here, to you; she brings with her a magnificent dowry from me, and I ask nothing in return, for I consider that your obligations were met on the day that you told me of your family, your standing, and your nationality."

Knemon did not hesitate an instant in accepting this proposal. Everything that he had long prayed for and desired but never expected to have was now, contrary to all expectation, being granted him in a manner surpassing his prayers. "Consider it done," he said. "I accept everything you offer with great joy."

As he spoke, he held out his right hand, whereupon Nausikles presented him with his daughter and formally pronounced the betrothal. Then, instructing his servants to sing the marriage hymn, he led off the dance himself, turning the festivities they were already enjoying into an impromptu wedding feast.

Everyone was dancing; in festive procession they went to sing an extemporaneous marriage hymn at the door of the bridal chamber; the lights of the wedding vigil illuminated the house. Only Charikleia did

not join in; she stole away from the company and withdrew to her room; she locked the doors securely behind her; now she could be sure that no one would disturb her. Possessed by a frenzy of despair, she untied her hair without inhibition; she tore her dress and said: "Come then, let us dance too, in a manner befitting the malign power that controls our destiny. Let us sing him a song of mourning and dance him a dance of sorrow! Let us smash this lamp to the ground and veil our performance in the black gloom of night! So this is the nuptial chamber our guiding deity has built for us! This is the bridal room he has appointed for us! There is no one in it but me, no husband beside me. The room is empty, widowed of Theagenes, my husband in name only. Knemon is getting married, but Theagenes is wandering the world, a prisoner what is worse, perhaps even in chains. Even that would be a supreme happiness, so long as he were alive. Now Nausikleia is a bride, and I am parted from her who until this night shared my bed; Charikleia is alone and forsaken. It is not on their account that I reproach you, Destiny divine—I hope that they will achieve the happiness they wish for—rather on our own, because you have not been as kind to us as you are to them. The drama in which you have cast us is infinitely protracted, more tragic than anything on stage.

"But what am I doing? This is not the time for such an outcry against the gods: may their will be done in what ensues. Theagenes, the thought of whom is the one thought that brings me any joy, if you are dead, if I am brought to believe the news that I pray never to hear, I shall not hesitate to join you in death. For the present I make you this offering"—as she spoke, she tore her hair and laid the tresses on the bed¹⁶⁰—"and I pour you this libation from the eyes that you love"—and straightway the rain of her tears watered her bed. "But if you are alive, as I hope, come and sleep beside me, my love; appear to me in my dreams at least. But even then respect me, my friend, and preserve your bride's virginity for lawful wedlock. See, I pretend I can see you here with me, and I embrace you!"

- 9 And so saying, she flung herself face downwards on the bed. She held the mattress clasped tight in her arms, sobbing and moaning from the depths of her heart, until her sorrow grew past bearing, and a swirling mist stole over her, plunging her conscious mind into darkness and causing her to slip, despite herself, into a slumber in which she remained till long after daybreak. Her failure to appear as normal surprised Kalasiris, whose search for her led him to her room. He knocked loudly on her door and called Charikleia repeatedly by name until he roused her from sleep. She awoke so abruptly that she had no time to collect her wits and

160. Hair was given as an offering to the dead (most notably offered by Elektra on the tomb of Agamemnon), but hair-offerings were also connected with marriage ritual (Herodotos 4.34; Pausanias 1.43.3, 2.32.1). Charikleia's action thus has a double aspect.

mend her appearance: she hurried to the door, drew back the bolt, and opened the door to let the old man in; but when Kalasiris saw her hair disheveled, her dress hanging in tatters over her breasts, her eyes still swollen and bearing the marks of the delirium that had preceded her sleep, he understood the cause and led her straight back to the bed, where he sat her down and wrapped a mantle around her.

Now that she was decently covered, he said: "What is the meaning of this, Charikleia? Why this extravagant and unseemly anguish? Why this senseless submission to adversity? Till now I have always admired your stalwart devotion to propriety in the face of circumstances, but now I hardly know you. Please, let us have no more such silliness! Kindly remember that you are a human being, a creature of change, subject to rapid fluctuations of fortune for good or for ill. So why hasten yourself to an untimely death when possibly a brighter future awaits you? My child, have pity on me; have pity, if not on yourself, at least on Theagenes, who has no desire to live if he cannot share his life with you, who counts his existence a gain only if your life is preserved."

Charikleia blushed, partly at Kalasiris's words, but more at the thought of the condition in which he had found her. For a long time she made no reply, but as Kalasiris pressed her for an answer, she said: "Your censure is well founded, father, but perhaps I may be forgiven; for it is no depraving desire such as ordinary people feel that makes me act as I did in my distress, but rather a pure and chaste longing for one who, in my eyes, is nonetheless my husband for never having consummated our love, for a man of Theagenes' quality. His absence from my side causes me anguish, but, even more than that, doubt as to whether he is alive or not fills me with dread."

"On that count," replied Kalasiris, "you need have no fears. He is alive and will soon be beside you. Such is the gods' will, if we are to believe—as we must—the prophecies that have been made about you, and the man who told us yesterday that Theagenes had been captured by Thyamis while being taken to Memphis. If he has been captured, then he must be safe, for there already exist ties of acquaintance and friendship between him and Thyamis. Now we have no time to lose. We must hurry as fast as we can go to the village of Bessa, where you must search for Theagenes, and I must in addition seek my son—for you know full well from what you have already heard that Thyamis is my son."¹⁶¹

Charikleia grew pensive and said, "If Thyamis really is your son, if this is your Thyamis and not a different son of a different father, then we are headed towards a most dangerous situation."

Kalasiris was taken aback and asked her why she said that.

161. We must presume that Kalasiris has on some unnarrated occasion mentioned to Charikleia that he has a son named Thyamis.

"You know," she answered, "that I was taken prisoner by the Herdsmen; while I was with them, my physical beauty, the possession of which seems to bring me nothing but ill fortune, provoked Thyamis too to desire me. Now I am afraid that if we meet him in the course of our search, the sight of me might remind him that I am the woman he loved, and he might consummate by force the marriage that he proposed to me then and that, by various artifices, I managed to fend off."

Kalasiris replied: "I hope that he would never succumb so far to carnal desire as to pay no heed to the visible presence of his father, so far that a father's look could not shame his son into repressing whatever illicit desire he might have. All the same, there would be no harm in your devising some ploy to circumvent your fears. You seem to be adept at thinking of clever ways to deflect and defer unwelcome advances."

- 10 Charikleia brightened a little at these words and said: "At this moment I shall not pause to ask whether you are being serious or just poking fun at me! Theagenes and I tried a ruse once before, though the events of that day cut it short. I propose that we make use of it again, with better hopes of success this time. Having determined to make good our escape from the Herdsmen's island, we decided to change into the shabbiest clothes we could find and disguise ourselves as beggars before venturing into the towns and villages. If you do not object, let us adopt this guise now and start begging for a living. That way we shall have less to fear from the people we meet, for in circumstances like ours there is a certain security in slender means, and penury is a closer neighbor to compassion than to envy. And we shall find it easier to obtain our daily bread,¹⁶² for in a foreign land food to buy is hard for strangers to find, but food requested is given generously by those who feel compassion."

- 11 This suggestion met with the approval of Kalasiris, who was now impatient for their wayfaring to begin. So when they met Nausikles, Knemon, and the others, they informed them of their intention to depart. Two days later they set off, having dispensed with the offer of a pack animal and with all human company. Their departure was attended by Nausikles, Knemon, and everyone else in the house, including Nausikleia, who had pleaded incessantly with her father to be allowed to join the throng, for the modesty she felt as a newly wedded bride was outweighed by the spell of love that Charikleia had cast on her.

Half a mile outside the village, they embraced for the last time, Kalasiris the men, Charikleia the women, and clasped right hands, praying, amid a flood of tears, that better fortune would attend their parting. Knemon asked them to forgive him for not accompanying them, having but recently embarked upon the estate of matrimony; he said he would

162. The whole phrase is taken from Thucydides 1.2.2.

catch up with them if the opportunity arose—but he did not mean it. Then they parted. Knemon, Nausikles, and the rest returned to Chemmis, but the first action of Charikleia and Kalasiris was to change their clothes and adopt the guise of beggars, using rags they had ready for this purpose to turn themselves into paupers. Then Charikleia befouled her face, smearing soot and daubing mud on it to make it dirty, and arranged a filthy shawl skew-whiff on her head so that the edge of it hung down over one eye like a crazy veil. Under her arm she slung a pouch, apparently to serve as a receptacle for bits of bread and scraps of food, though in fact it had the more important function of containing her sacred Delphic robe and crown and the treasures and tokens of recognition that her mother had laid beside her when she was abandoned. Kalasiris wrapped Charikleia's quiver in some tattered bits of sheepskin and carried it slung crosswise over his shoulders as if it were merely another bit of baggage. He unstrung her bow, and, as soon as it had straightened out, he held it like a staff, leaning on it with all his weight; and whenever he saw that he was about to encounter someone on the road, he assumed a stoop even greater than his years compelled and developed a limp in one leg; sometimes he had Charikleia lead him by the arm.

When they had applied the finishing touches to their charade, they teased one another a little, telling each other in jest how well the costume became them, and entreated the power that guided their destinies to make these rags the limit of their suffering and inflict no further pain on them. Then they set off in haste towards the village of Bessa, where they hoped to find Theagenes and Thyamis. But it was not to be. 12

It was nearly sunset, and they were close to the outskirts of Bessa when they saw a host of newly slain bodies lying on the ground. Most could be identified as Persians by their apparel and equipment, but there were a few Egyptians too. The scene was clear evidence that there had been fighting, but who the adversaries had been they could not guess. But as they picked their way through the corpses, looking at them closely as they went in case there was someone close to them among the dead—for the heart is ever in dread for those it loves the most, ever quick to divine the worst about them—they came upon a little old woman clasping one of the Egyptian dead in her arms, making all manner of mournful lamentations. They decided to try to get some information from the old woman, if they could; so they sat down beside her and began by trying to console her and reduce the excesses of her grief. This produced the desired effect; so they asked the old woman (Kalasiris speaking to her in the Egyptian tongue) who it was she was grieving over and what this fighting had been about. In a few words she told them everything: her grief was for her son, who was among the dead, and she had come to the battlefield in the express hope that someone

would run her through and release her from life. In the meantime, however, she was making her son the customary offerings, so far as circumstances permitted, though she had nothing to give but tears and lamentation.

- 13 What she told them about the fighting was this. "A foreigner, an exceptionally tall and good-looking young man, was being taken to Oroondates, the Great King's governor-general in Memphis; I think he had been taken prisoner by Mitranes, the commander of guards, who had sent him as some sort of special gift, so they say. The men of our village here"—pointing to the nearby settlement—"seized him in a holdup. They said he was a friend of theirs, though I do not know whether they were telling the truth or inventing a pretext. When Mitranes got to hear what had happened, he was naturally very annoyed and so, the day before yesterday, mounted an assault on the village. Now, the people of the village are great fighters: brigandage is a way of life to them, and they hold death in all its forms in contempt, because of which they have many times over left many women without their husbands or sons, as has happened now to me. There had been signs that the attack was imminent; so they laid a number of ambushes in advance. When the enemy attack came, our men emerged victorious, some fighting the foe directly, face-to-face, while those in the ambuscades, with a great yell, surprised the Persians from behind. Mitranes died fighting valiantly, and virtually all of his men died with him, for they were completely encircled and had no way of escape. A few of our men were also killed, and it was heaven's stern decree that my son should be among those few, with, as you can see, a Persian arrow through his heart. And now in sorrow I weep over his dead body, but I think I shall soon be weeping too for the only son who is left me, for yesterday he marched off with the rest against the city of Memphis."

Kalasiris asked the reason for this expedition, and the old woman, adding that this was what she had been told by her surviving son, explained that the men of Bessa, having killed some royal troops and one of the Great King's commanders of guards, could see all too clearly that as a result of their regrettable action this affair would have dire consequences, imperiling their very existence; for as soon as the news reached Oroondates, the governor-general at Memphis with a whole army of men at his disposal, he would brush all opposition aside, subject the village to the "dragnet,"¹⁶³ and exterminate the entire population in reprisal.

"Seeing that their lives were at stake, they decided to attempt to find the cure for their rash action in an action even rasher, namely, by pre-

163. This Persian technique is described by Herodotos (6.31):

The men join hands and make a chain right across the island from north to south, and then move from one end to the other, hunting everyone down.

emptying Oroondates' preparations, mounting a surprise attack, and if they found the satrap at Memphis, adding his blood to that already spilt; but if he happened to be out of town—for there is a rumor that at present he is busy fighting a war of some kind with the Ethiopians—it would be relatively easy for them to compel the city's submission when there was nobody there to defend it, thus winning themselves a temporary respite from danger and incidentally achieving a second success by restoring to their leader, Thyamis, the office of high priest, which had been usurped by his younger brother. Should they fail, they intended at least to die in battle rather than endure the ignominy of capture, followed by humiliation and torture at the hands of the Persians.¹⁶⁴ But, strangers, where are you headed for now?"

"To the village," replied Kalasiris.

"It would not be safe," said the old woman, "for you, as total strangers, to present yourselves at this hour of the night to the villagers who were left behind."

"If you came with us to introduce us," answered Kalasiris, "our safety would be guaranteed."

"I cannot at the moment," replied the old woman. "I have certain rites for the dead to perform that can be performed only at night. But if you care to wait—though in fact you have no choice in the matter—move off a little way, find some spot not too far away clear of dead bodies, and wait there. At daybreak I shall accompany you to the village, and my protection will ensure your safety."

Kalasiris repeated to Charikleia all that the old woman had said, and together they moved away. After stepping over the corpses for a short distance, they found a little hillock, and there Kalasiris stretched himself out, pillowing his head on the quiver, while Charikleia sat, using her pouch as a seat. The moon had just risen and was bathing the whole scene in bright light, for it was the second night after full moon. Kalasiris, naturally enough for an old man, especially one fatigued by his travels, lay fast asleep, but the anxieties that beset Charikleia kept her awake; and thus she found herself witnessing a performance which, abominable as it may be, is common practice among the women of Egypt. 14

Supposing herself now secure against any intrusion or observation, the old woman began by digging a pit, to one side of which she lit a fire. After positioning her son's body between the two, she took an earthenware bowl from a tripod that stood beside her and poured a libation of honey into the pit, likewise of milk from a second bowl, and lastly of

164. Persian punishments and executions were notorious for their prolongation and cruelty.

wine from a third.¹⁶⁵ Then she took a cake made out of fine wheat flour and shaped into the effigy of a man, crowned it with bay and fennel, and flung it into the pit. Finally she picked up a sword and, in an access of feverish ecstasy, invoked the moon by a series of grotesque and outlandish names, then drew the blade across her arm. She wiped the blood onto a sprig of bay and flicked it into the fire. There followed a number of other bizarre actions, after which she knelt over the dead body of her son and whispered certain incantations into his ear, until she woke the dead man and compelled him by her magic arts to stand upright.

Even before this Charikleia had been somewhat alarmed by the scene she was observing, but now her horror at this appalling ritual became so great that she began to tremble with fear. She shook Kalasiris awake so that he was able to see with his own eyes what was taking place. Positioned as they were in the darkness, they were invisible but could observe with little difficulty all that took place in the light cast by the fire, and were also close enough to hear distinctly what was being said, particularly as the old woman had now begun to question the corpse in a somewhat louder voice. What she wanted to know was whether the corpse's brother, her one surviving son, would live to return home.

The dead man made no reply, merely nodded his head in a way that left some doubt as to whether his mother could expect her wishes to be fulfilled or not. Then he suddenly collapsed and fell flat on his face. The old woman rolled the body over onto its back and persisted with her questions. Employing apparently more powerful spells of compulsion this time, she repeated her string of incantations into his ears, and, leaping, sword in hand, from fire to pit, from pit to fire, she succeeded in waking the dead man a second time and, once he was on his feet, began to put the same questions to him as before, forcing him to use speech as well as nods of the head to make his prophecy unambiguous.

While the old woman was engaged in this, Charikleia desperately sought Kalasiris's permission to draw closer and put a question themselves concerning Theagenes. But he refused, saying that the mere sight of such things was unclean and that he could only tolerate it because he had no alternative; it was not proper for a priest either to take part in or to be present at such rites; the prophetic powers of priests proceeded from legitimate sacrifices and pure prayer, whereas those of the profane

165. This scene is intended to recall the episode in the *Odyssey* (11.24ff.) when Odysseus summons the spirits of the dead:

I, drawing from beside my thigh my sharp sword,
dug a pit, of about a cubit in each direction,
and poured it full of drink offerings for all the dead, first
honey mixed with milk, and the second pouring was sweet wine,
and the third, water, and over it all I sprinkled white barley.

were obtained literally by crawling upon the ground and skulking among corpses, as the accidents of circumstances had permitted them to see this Egyptian woman doing.

Before Kalasiris could finish, the corpse spoke, its voice a hoarse 15 whisper, sinister and cavernous, as if rising from some infernal abyss.

"Till now I have been merciful to you, Mother," it said. "I tolerated your transgression of the laws of man's nature, your affront to the ordinances of destiny, your use of the black arts to move the immovable, for even in the afterlife we continue to respect our parents so far as we may. But the respect I had for you is now forfeit by your own actions: not content with the first sin of compelling a dead body to stand upright and nod its head, you are taking your sinfulness to the extreme of extorting speech from me as well. With no thought for anything but your own concerns, you neglect the rites that are my due in death and keep me from the company of the other souls. Learn now what I have hitherto kept from telling you! Your son shall not return alive, nor shall you escape death by the sword. The whole of your life you have spent in sinful practices such as this, but soon you will meet the violent end that awaits all such as you. These are forbidden mysteries, cloaked in secrecy and darkness, but you have had the audacity to perform them, not in solitary privacy but in the presence of others, and you even parade the secrets of the dead before witnesses such as these: one is a high priest—and in his case the offense is of lesser importance, for he is wise enough to lock such secrets away in the silence of his heart and never divulge them; besides, the gods love him: his sons are armed; they are facing one another ready to fight to the death, but if he makes haste, his arrival will stay their hands on the very point of joining single combat. What is worse is that a young girl is also witness to your necromancy and can hear every word that is spoken, a young lady distraught with love and wandering over virtually the whole face of the earth in search of some loved one; but after hardships and dangers beyond counting, at earth's farthest boundaries, she will pass her life at his side in glorious and royal estate."

With these words the corpse fell limp to the ground. The old woman realized that it was the strangers that had been spying on her, and there and then she launched herself after them, sword in her hand and madness in her heart. She scoured the battlefield, suspecting that they were hiding among the dead bodies and meaning to kill them if she discovered them, for she presumed that they had spied on her necromancy from malicious and hostile motives. But her fury was so great that she did not look where she was going as she hunted through the corpses, and ended by accidentally impaling herself through the groin on a broken spear that stood upright in the ground. So she died, bringing instant and fitting fulfilment to the prophecy that her son had given her.