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THE SOOTHSAYER

BY VERNER VON HEIDENSTAM

Bertha

from

Vera,

Anna 19.



THE SOOTHSAYER

BY

VERNER VON HEIDENSTAM

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM THE SWEDISH BY

KAROLINE M. KNUDSEN



BOSTON

THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY

1919

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THE SOOTHSAYER

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PERSONS REPRESENTED

APOLLO

As God of Prophecy and as God of Punishment

THE ERINYES

The Fates: many in number

EYRYTUS, *The Soothsayer*

ERIGONE, *his wife*

THEANO, *his mother*

FILEAS, *their servant*

GREY-BEARD, *a herdsman*

PALE-FACE, *another herdsman*

OTHER HERDSMEN

SCENE

Arcadia, near the north-east border

TIME

Some years before the Persian Invasion
The Battle of Salamis, [B. C. 480]

THE SOOTHSAYER

AN ARCADIAN PLAIN

[A laurel-grove.

Between the slender branches, there appears a hilly green-sward.

At the left: a tent.

At the right: a low altar, built up of stones, placed one upon another.

Smoke rises in a column from the sacrificial offering half-burnt.]

* * *

[Eurytus and Eri-gone, with a basket of flowers, are kneeling in front of the altar.

[7]

*Between these two
stands Theano, her
hands upon their
heads.*

*Behind her kneels
Fileas.]*

* * *

THEANO

Eros! Eros!

EURYTUS, ERIGONE, AND FILEAS

Eros!

THEANO

Old am I . . . tottering on the brink of the
grave; but yet have I lips with which to call thy
name, O Eros!

ALL

Eros!

THEANO

My son has taken into his tent a wife; to thee
and to thy care commit I my children and all their
offspring. What more can a mother desire for
her children than their welfare!

EURYTUS

[softly]

What is that, mother? I hear the twanging
of citterns and the tread of dancing feet.

[8]

THEANO

Always thou hearest so much that we others
do never perceive.

FILEAS

Even when Eurytus was so little that I bare
him in my arms, he heard cisterns and dance-
steps.

THEANO

Then oughtest thou, as a faithful servant, to
have admonished him against such delusions.

EURYTUS

Mother!

THEANO

[*more loudly*]

Eros! Much can my children and their off-
spring go without—never without thee.

EURYTUS

Mother!

THEANO

Against other gods may they revolt—never
against thee. Stay thou but near them, and their
lowly tent shall be to them more goodly than all
of earth's splendours.

*[Eurytus tries to
rise but his mother
presses him down.]*

THEANO

So now do we, we three and our servant, greet thee, thou God of Love, thou of heaven and of earth; daily sacrifice shall burn to thee, always, in our hearts.

*[Eurytus releases
himself from his
mother's hand and
springs up.]*

EURYTUS

Mother! Dost thou not hear the dancing on the hill?

THEANO

The herders dance every afternoon now, during the honey-moon festivities.

EURYTUS

But they play the pipes when they dance.

*[He clutches his
mother by the arm
and drags her with
him.]*

[10]

Am I so daft with all this wedding-wine—or
come not the dancers nearer and nearer? Dost
thou not hear their tramp?

THEANO

I hear naught save our own voices.

EURYTUS

Uneasiness has fallen on my heart.

THEANO

Bliss itself can be so great, overpowering,
that it behooves one to fear and to tremble.

*[From the far-
thest distance are
heard citterns and
rhythmic dancing.]*

ERIGONE

[rising]

He mistrusts Love's divinity . . . For me,
all has changed, since it has come to me. . . .
I used to watch the herds, and the one day was
like another.

*[She empties the
basket and wreathes
the altar with the
flowers.]*

[11]

[*softly*]

Eurytus!

*[Eurytus lifts her
in his arms and holds
her, high up, against
the rising column of
smoke.]*

EURYTUS

Mistrust . . . I! Life's gracious benefactor,
thou: thanks and praise unto thee I give. May
mine eye lose its sight; may I, like a starvèd wolf,
fall down upon that day when I shall deny thy
greatness!

*[Passionately kis-
sing Erigone, he low-
ers her again to the
ground.]*

All that I desire in this world, has come
with thee, Erigone. Easily and smilingly, I see
the years pass on.

THEANO

Let us gather more flowers before it grows
dark.

[12]

FILEAS

[*rising*]

I know where to find some . . . over there,
upon that knoll.

ERIGONE

If only thou wert not so homely and old, dear
Fileas.

FILEAS

Homely and old, and a good-natured fool; yet
limber in back, despite my full-sixty years.

[*He bends and kisses
the hem of her
tunic.*]

Praises be to Eros!

[*The citterns and
dancing now sound
much nearer.*]

ERIGONE

Come, Eurytus!

EURYTUS

Mine offering have I right here.

[*He draws, from
under his mantle, a*

[13]

*twig with dried and
brittle leaves.]*

THEANO

Still hiding that twig?

FILEAS

It was I tucked that in thy hands, whilst thou wast lying asleep, one morning, when thou wast only a baby . . . and nobody guessed whence it came!

THEANO

Therefore, we thought, perchance, that the twig was the gift of good-luck . . . thy safeguard against the evil-eye.

EURYTUS

No longer need I such protection!

*[He fastens the
twig between the
stones of the altar.]*

THEANO

[to Erigone]

Let not night come before we shall have changed these bare stones into a mound of flowers. Eurytus! Pass me thy knife, that I may snip off the flower-stalks.

[14]

ERIGONE

Come with us!

EURYTUS

Thou, most beautiful amongst the flowers! Is it not enough that I have gathered thee!

[He hands over his knife to Theano.

Theano gazes at the knife, then raises it.]

THEANO

The knife says: The most beautiful amongst the flowers will I cut down, upon the day thou forsakest thy god.

ERIGONE

Who is that man who is coming, there, over the meadow? He has wrapped his mantle about him, as though he were freezing, at mid-day, this warm autumn-month.

FILEAS

Wedding-gifts! Wedding-gifts! They will fill the tent!

[He beckons eagerly and goes away, followed by the women.]

* * *

[15]

[The citterns now sound much nearer and the rhythmic measure of the dance quickens to a jubilant chorus.

Twilight falls.]

* * *

[Eurytus looks longingly after the others as they go away; lies down; puts his ear to the ground and listens; beats time with his hands.

After a while, he gets up.]

* * *

EURYTUS

So dance no herders . . . Let but a dead man hear that dance and he will lose his soul's peace.

[He follows the dance-step and hums the tune.]

* * *

[Apollo strides forward. He is clad in a goatskin mantle; his arm is wreathed with laurel; his bow and arrows are slung across his shoulders.]

APOLLO

Hapless man!

EURYTUS

A strange salutation, that, to a man who, just now, in good-luck overflowing, has been kneeling in front of Love's altar.

APOLLO

Thy tongue sayeth one thing, thy heart another.
A man in love doth lie.

EURYTUS

Hast lost thy way, O herdsman?

APOLLO

There is no path, I know not. Oft before, just as I have done this day, I have watched the sheep upon the hillside, where the muses dance.

[17]

EURYTUS

[*in greatest excitement*]

The muses dance . . . Thou jokest, not badly.

[*He laughs.*]

Surely, thou art both hungry and tired. Wilt not sit down and await the women? A wooden cup I own . . . wine thou doubtless hast thyself. Yesterday, another herder came with wedding-gifts; he had disguised himself as a buck, and so came near to meeting death at the hands of old Fileas.

[*He laughs.*]

The muses dance . . . My mother said, it was the herders at their play.

APOLLO

Thy mother heard nothing. Thou alone wast called.

[*Eurytus pretends to feel around in the air with his hands, as though to find a support.*]

EURYTUS

Wilt not show me thy gift . . . before the women come?

[*He laughs.*]

[18]

APOLLO

I have come to demand accounting for a gift
that thou hast had already. Bow thy head!

*[Eurytus, as though
struck by lightning,
bows low.]*

EURYTUS

Thou art Phœbus Apollo!

APOLLO

Thou knewest who I was, when thou sawest
me cross the meadow; and thou knewest that I
would come, as soon as thou heardest the muses
. . . because thou art a seer.

Once upon a time, whilst I was herding the
sheep, and passed this way, I saw a child who
lay in a tent-opening and slept. Its elders were
out in the fields. Then broke I off a laurel-twigg
from my wreath and laid it between the little one's
fingers.

EURYTUS

How had that child aroused thy wrath that
thou shouldst present it with so unlucky a gift!

APOLLO

The gift was a symbol that I chose him, from
his very childhood, to be my priest and bestowed

upon him the power to read the oracles. Upon him, from that time, the gods have kept their eyes fixed.

EURYTUS

And kept him awake at night.

APOLLO

After many years of wandering, I come upon the self-same path. There I find an altar raised—not in my honour nor in that of the goddess—but to that small boy amongst the gods . . . to him who plays with his fillet . . . that half-grown boy who will never become a man. That was the seer's thanks.

EURYTUS

Name to me one of all thy priests who has not, sometime in his life, committed the same offense.

APOLLO

And did not each one, because of it, live to see the day of retribution?

EURYTUS

My belovèd Erigone!

APOLLO

That least and most dissolute amongst the gods, thou settest up over the mighty and right-

eous. In the one hand, thou holdest the hand of a woman ; in the other, lieth the world, as a ball—and thou throwest the world. I gave unto thee immortality—and thou liest upon the grass that thou mayest gaze upon an opening blossom.

EURYTUS

Let me stay in the humble station in which I was born. Let me be a faithful husband and a good father, and may mine eyes be closed, some day, by two grateful hands.

[He goes to the tent, and draws aside the overhanging flap.]

Our abiding-place, where we should live for one another, wherein no sorrow should dwell! Methinks, in truth, there is little need of all these wedding-gifts.

[He lifts and looks at several of the gifts and shows them to Apollo.]

How quickly has day changed into night! Here is the staff I use when tending the herds. Upon the crook, Fileas, faithful old man, has carved the most graceful designs of plants

and of animals . . . Let me stay with my beloved Erigone, far from earth's turmoils and honours!—Here is our simple hollywood cup, oft filled with water, seldom with wine, always drained in gladness. Only the one cup we own . . . that is enough for us. Here is the sheepskin, our bed . . .

*[From far away,
a murmuring blends
with the sounds of
citterns and dancing.]*

VOICES

The Barbarians! The Barbarians!

EURYTUS

What's the matter?

APOLLO

Thy mother would say: The herders are playing in the honey-moon festival.

*[Eurytus shuts his
eyes and covers them
with his hands.]*

EURYTUS

I see the ocean. It is no longer blue.

[22]

APOLLO

Hath the water lost its heavenly colour?

EURYTUS

[stepping forward]

Myriads of brownish sails hide the water, as far as eye can see; in the corner of every sail is a black square.

*[Shouts and cries
are heard far away.]*

APOLLO

Thou seest ships, not yet built, in sooth, but that soon will anchor off the coasts of Hellas. Tidings have just reached the people that the Persians are arming. The populace cry for a seer and a hero.

EURYTUS

I see a great battle . . . Many thousands of ships . . . Now, I no longer see them . . . My beloved Erigone! Is it thou who cometh walking on the water, with thy basket?

*[He awakes from
his trance and seems
bewildered.]*

APOLLO

I force no one. Choose, in thy youth, a god after thine own desire. Choose Love, and remain in thy quiet tent; or, choose thy god from amongst the mighty and awesome; but choose only one. Serve him wholly, glorify him in all ways, and hold fast to him thou glorifiest.

*[He wraps himself
in his goatskin and
goes away.]*

* * *

*[The sounds of
citterns and dancing
die away in the dis-
tance. .Silence falls.]*

* * *

*[Eurytus follows a
few steps, then stands
still.]*

EURYTUS

Phœbus Apollo, hast thou left me? . . .
Citterns tinkle, muses dance! The ground shakes
with their footsteps. Trees and plants and rocks
sing.

*[He kicks aside the
wooden cup and the
other gifts.]*

Dead things for meat and drink! Give me living tones, give me strings on which to play!

[*He listens, with his ear to the ground.*]

Farther and still farther away. His whirling court follows him. Now, I no longer hear the citterns, only the tapping of sandalled feet . . . Now, silence. It is as though I had been breathing in a purer, lighter day than ever before in my life—then should be buried beneath a shower of heavy earth. Father of Light! Why hast thou forsaken me?

* * *

ERIGONE
[*outside*]

Eurytus!

[*Eurytus turns and opens his arms.*]

EURYTUS
[*softly*]

Erigone, my beloved Erigone!

[*He picks up the sheepskin and buries his head in it.*]

[25]

Good-night, Erigone!

*[Overcome with his
ecstasy, he hurries
away.]*

Avenging God! I come to serve thee, and to
pay the penalty of my sin!

* * *

ERIGONE
[outside]

Eurytus!

*[Erigone and The-
ano enter the tent.
Erigone lifts the bas-
ket from her head.]*

Why does he not answer me?

THEANO

[with the knife still in her hand]

He is no longer here. He has gone to the hill
to play with the herders.

ERIGONE

The tent is up-turned . . . The gifts are
thrown all around.

[26]

THEANO

My child!

ERIGONE

Mother! Look, mother! The wreaths have been torn from the altar . . .

THEANO

Alas! May this presentiment that falls upon me be but a delusion!

ERIGONE

What has happened? Eurytus! Dost thou not hear me any longer?

THEANO

[drawing Erigone to herself]

For a woman, her love spurned, there is but one thing!

* * *

*[Night draws near.
The Erinyes and
their followers glide
forth, all alike, clothed
in black, with fury-
bulging eyes.*

*They stand so close
to one another, in a*

*long row, that, when
they lift their wings,
along which their
mantles have grown
fast, they shadow
everything behind
them.*

*Motionless, . their
eyes partly averted,
they linger in that
position.]*

* * *

*[Far off, in the
shadows, Erigone ap-
pears—bemoaning and
distraught.]*

* * *

ERIGONE

Eurytus!

*[A long silence.
A single drum-beat.]*

ERINYE

[the one farthest to the right]

A withered leaf fell from Time's Tree.

[28]

ERINYE

[the one farthest to the left]

A Year of Darkness.

[A long silence.]

ERIGONE

[still farther away]

Eurytus!

*[A long silence.
A single drum-beat.]*

ERINYE

[on the right]

Again, a leaf fell from Time's Tree.

ERINYE

[on the left]

Again a Year of Darkness.

[A long silence.]

ERINYE

[on the right]

She calleth no longer.

* * *

*[The Erinyes lower
their wings.]*

[29]

*One after the other,
they slowly continue
their wanderings.*

*As they disappear,
the darkness of night
lightens back to
twilight.]*

* * *

*[Where the tent
stood formerly, there
now is seen a grass-
grown mound.*

*The altar is upbuilt
to the height of a
man. At the front, a
flight of steps reaches
to the top.]*

* * *

*[Fileas comes with
the last stone and fits
it into the corner, at
the top of the altar.]*

* * *

FILEAS

The years pass—years of darkness . . . Eros!
Thine altar I have finished—I, humble man

though I be, yet good enough to serve thee . . .
Never can I forget her, even though I be but a
fool and a poor old wretch who scarcely durst
crawl forward on my knees to kiss the hem of her
garment! Eros! Blessèd be thou, for the
fragrant autumn thou hast sown in my heart!

* * *

*[Herdsmen enter—
stealthily, crouchingly.*

*They are armed
with boor-shields,
poles and spears.*

*They swarm around
the altar and super-
stitiously press their
fore- and middle-
fingers, first against
the stones, and then
against their breasts.]*

* * *

A GREY-BEARDED HERDER

Can he protect us from Xerxes—thy Eros?

FILEAS

He can help you so that, even with spears run
through your bodies, still you can rejoice that you
have lived.

[31]

GREY-BEARD

The alarm from Salamis has reached even here. The townsfolk have gathered their gold into bags and have gone board the ships with their wives and their children. Us, they have left in the lurch.

A PALE-FACED HERDER

It was Eurytus the Soothsayer who frightened them to leaving the town—when the serpents at the temple of Pallas refused to eat.

GREY-BEARD

Us herders, he forgot and betrayed.

FILEAS

Therefore, they have crowned him.

PALE-FACE

His name flies as an eagle over Hellas.

GREY-BEARD

Yet not so high but that a stone can reach him.

PALE-FACE

All day, he has stood on a rock by the ocean. In a trance, he has told what future shall come.

FILEAS

What advice has he given?

PALE-FACE

To flee—over the ocean—to flee to a distant isle and to found there a new realm.

FILEAS

With new temples; wherefore not new gods as well?

PALE-FACE

Comes that battle—so runs his oracle—shall not one Hellene survive the night.

GREY-BEARD

Even now, the battle is raging before Salamis—even since the break of day. Come here, thou canst see the masts of the ships. Soon will the Barbarians overrun us. My wife and her children I have hidden in a hollow tree.

FILEAS

I have no faith in any oracle of Eurytus.

PALE-FACE

Thou art a fool, old man Fileas.

FILEAS

That, I have been called always. Blessèd be thou, O Eros, for all that thou hast given me in my life of foolishness.

GREY-BEARD

There comes a man, running across the field.

FILEAS

[*without turning*]

Mayhap, a messenger of victory.

GREY-BEARD

He seems more like a king; still more like the ghost of a king. His mantle flutters and he has a bloody wound at the temple.

PALE-FACE

He is followed by a crowd of men, who are throwing stones; they are bent over, as though tired; they have fallen behind.

[*suddenly*]

It is Eurytus the Soothsayer!

THE OTHER HERDERS

Eurytus?

FILEAS

[*without turning*]

They have been victorious. He has prophesied falsely.

[*Eurytus, crowned with laurel and fillet, but bleeding from a wound in his temple, runs up.*]

EURYTUS

Help me, ye good men, friends! They will take my life!

GREY-BEARD

Should any take thy life, should we . . . Welcome to thy native-place, thou celebrated priest—crowned at Delphi, at Athens, at Olympia—stoned before Salamis.

EURYTUS

Always, in repentance, one returns in the after-glow to those deserted whilst the sun was high.

FILEAS

A false soothsayer returns when he needs a hiding-place.

*[He turns and stays
Eurytus, approaching
the altar.]*

This is hallowed ground, on which such as thou mayst not put foot.

EURYTUS

Dear old Fileas! Dost thou no longer remember me? At least, let me give thee an alms, as thanks, for old time's sake.

*[He puts his hand
into the pouch hang-
ing from his girdle.*

*He brings up sev-
eral pieces of money.*

*He lays back a pair
of Three.*

*He offers the others
to Fileas, who throws
them away.*

*The money falls to
the ground.*

*Eagerly, the herds-
men gather up the
pieces.]*

Thou forgettest thyself.

FILEAS

Thou didst lay the first stones. The dear leaves cried thine enchanted tongue; but thou didst deceive. It was the poor old man who, in his solitude, day after day, has laid stone on stone. This he has done because his heart has never stopped longing for something not vouchsafed him to reach. All honours thine; here, thou art but a stranger and nothing more. Execration, thou dost not require; that, thou bearest deep within thine own self.

GREY-BEARD

Like the faithful servant that he is, Fileas has finished his work, as a memorial.

EURYTUS

Of me? Speak, Fileas!

FILEAS

Soon will the perjurer Eurytus think there exists naught in the world save himself. Has anyone here willed him aught save his fame, it will be to a friend gone astray—an enemy: one to praise, in the open speech; to revile, in whispers. Two gods has he served and both has he deceived.

EURYTUS

But never her whom he hath held apart, in his thoughts, always. Lift ye your staves and strike—if anyone here begrudge me peace again.

*[Quickly, he turns
and speaks to Fileas.]*

Where are the two women?

[No answer.]

A hiding-place! Yea. I seek a hiding-place, where no one listeth to a seer and where the laurel-bushes have been cut down, to burn beneath

the pot . . . a shady spot beneath the oaks, where invisible lyres sough through the foliage, and where Erigone standeth, gazing wonderingly, over the field toward that world she knoweth not.

FILEAS

And for her wouldst thou confess that thou art as one shipwrecked, in thy greatness?

EURYTUS

Yea.

FILEAS

A false soothsayer?

EURYTUS

Yea.

*[He draws his arm
across his bloody
forehead, to dry it.]*

Give me a drink.

*[Fileas takes the
wooden cup out from
his pouch.]*

FILEAS

Dost thou recognize this cup?

*[Eurytus attempts
to take it.]*

[38]

EURYTUS

Let me, just once more in my life, lift that up.

FILEAS

That passes not to lips profaned by oracle-
words. It is mine, now.

*[He returns it to
his pouch.]*

EURYTUS

Wherefore cometh not Erigone?

[No answer.]

She knoweth not that I am here.

FILEAS

I believe that, surely.

EURYTUS

I could go for days and for months, and not
weary, until I should reach the place where she is.

FILEAS

Prepare for a long journey.

EURYTUS

Whenever I would soothsay, I had the same
vision, always. I seemed to be looking down into

[39]

that ice-clear, ice-dashing pool, wherein were reflected the pointed leaves of the laurel-bush, like letters graven in stone. Whilst I would be reading the riddles, suddenly, Erigone would peer forth. Bending forward beneath the branches, she would speak to me quite other words . . . words of the lesser gods and of Love. Always, I heard, in this way, two voices that gainsaid one another. I spoke with double-tongue, so never was I in the wrong.

FILEAS

And now, before Salamis?

EURYTUS

I stood upon a rock—in a trance, that I might the future foretell. Then, for the first time, I heard but the one voice, and that was not the voice of the God of Light. Erigone came, walking upon the water, and she cried unto me:

“Declare thou victory, and victory come, never again may I receive thee in my lowly herder’s tent. Soon will other women, then, twist for thee thy wreaths. But speakest thou, instead, for flight, then shalt thou, till the end of time, no longer be able to withstand thy memories of me, but will fetch me and take me with thee. Let us flee, flee!”

Before I had time to consider, I lifted my arms, and loud—so my voice was heard over all the shore, over all the gathered ships—I uttered that basely-false interpretation:

“Let us flee, flee!”

FILEAS

When thou wentest away from thy mother and thy young wife, it was, nevertheless, by thine own free choice.

EURYTUS

A seer loseth his power of insight, when with a loving woman . . . insight for that which is and for that which is to come; he seeth only the day that shineth upon him. He should walk along solitary paths; Love becometh for him forbidden fruit.

FILEAS

Therefore ten times as enticing.

EURYTUS

He who once hath possessed good-luck can never forget that time. There, thou hast the gloomy tale of a false seer.

FILEAS

For many a year, I have seen the black troop of Erinyes watch over the land, where, of yore, the

twittering of birds awoke me to the day's task. The shivering that now shakes us portends that they stand around us still. A cold wind is blowing but the grass lies still and the leaf stirs not.

*[The herders draw
their mantles closely
around them.]*

EURYTUS

My beloved Erigone!

FILEAS

She called thee a long time.

EURYTUS

O hill that hath separated us! I would call her name, until even this hill should answer! Stone me, and I will drag myself forward, that she may wipe the blood from my forehead.

Give me a drink!

[No answer.]

Why keep ye all silence? Deny me, an ye will, a cup of water, but put an end to my yearning. Hath my torment not paid, in full, the debt of a wandering man? . . . Nothing deserve I from you, nothing, but this alone: tell me, where

leadeth the shortest, the nearest, the quickest path to that tent wherein which Erigone now abideth.

FILEAS

Wilt thou give up all for the sake of finding her?

EURYTUS

All that thou demandest . . . And yet I tremble at the thought of seeing her again. She was young, when I went, and I remember her as young. She hath sorrowed and become old.

FILEAS

Fear not, Eurytus. A woman knows how to restore that she has lost. Erigone will not haste to meet thee in the light of day. She will hide herself under a covering.

EURYTUS

But, now darkness beginneth to fall . . .

FILEAS

When it shall grow dark around you both, and the cold stars shall flicker over the grassy mound, then shall you both, between yourselves, take balance of your life-account, as guilt or debt. Sun's Priest! Thy way went upward, not over striking enemies, but over the graves of women.

*[He points to the
grass-covered mound.*

*Eurytus, stunned,
stares down at it.]*

For a long time, we saw about the town two women, one young and one old, who, deserted, hunted from place to place—begging outside the tents. The wandering became too much for them. They put out their lives.

*[Eurytus totters
forward and throws
himself down on the
grass-grown mound.*

*He calls down into
the ground.]*

EURYTUS

Erigone!

*[All the herdsmen
stone him.*

*Eurytus, half-sit-
ting, lifts off his
wreath and shakes
out his long hair, that
has become grey.]*

Under my wreath and my fillet, I have hidden from the world this greying hair. Avengers! Doth it not content ye that I suffer!

*[They stone him.
Citterns and rhyth-
mic dancing are heard
in the distance.*

*Eurytus talks down
into the ground.]*

Thou canst no longer answer me.—There, she stood by the spring . . . Who was she? I had never seen her before. So then I should have said:

“Let me pass my hand over thy hair. My pretty child, thou shalt not follow me into my tent . . . I cannot make any woman happy. That master I serve is cold as marble and hard as steel; and he hath no wife. Hold thou me ever so fast, I must tear myself loose and wash myself clean from earthly love.”

*[He comes out of
his trance.]*

Even upon her grave, I hear citterns and dance-steps.

FILEAS

May he, purified by repentance, find peace.

*[He pulls out the
cup from his pouch
and goes away.]*

EURYTUS

A false priest to Apollo—who played with holy things and who played with earthly—wholly with neither. A Sun-God's Herald, who longed to lie in the shade, with his head upon a woman's lap, watching the clouds come and go.

[Fileas comes back, holding carefully before him the cup, filled with water. He stretches it out to Eurytus.]

FILEAS

I little thought that misfortune would have bowed thee so low. Eurytus! Forgive me! I hate thee no longer.

EURYTUS

Dost thou need to tell me that? Whosoever hateth can no longer avenge!

[He clutches the cup in his hands.]

Simple cup! How well I remember thee!—Oft filled with water, seldom with wine, always drained in gladness.

[He tries to drink but spills some of the water.]

I cannot.

*[Fileas helps him
steady the cup.]*

FILEAS

Drink of the water from thine own spring.
That will give thee a good sleep.

*[The citterns and
dancing-steps sound
nearer.]*

EURYTUS

Always before, I thought that it tasted so delicious . . . Fileas! Hearest thou not something . . . like the twanging of a cittern and a tramp of feet?

FILEAS

It is but the beating of thine own heart.

EURYTUS

Mine heart . . . Talk with wolves of doves' eyes, with the dead of our heaven. Father of Light! Let me fall by thine arrow to sleep with her I forsook. Thy humming terrifies me. My feet bear my weight no more—and I cannot weep.

*[Fileas drags with
him the other herds-
men and they all go
quickly away.]*

[47]

FILEAS

This is no longer a place of peace. Agony abides here.

EURYTUS

Could I but awake thee from thy sleep, Erigone . . . awake thee for a single short hour and hear thy voice . . . To mother I would say: "Wherefore dost thou listen so anxiously? That is only the herders playing and dancing."

* * *

[Apollo strides in, clad in his goatskin mantle, with his bow and arrows slung over his shoulders.

He shoots down at Eurytus.

In the same moment, the sounds of the citterns and the dancing stop.]

* * *

APOLLO

Son of dust! Thou didst try to serve two gods; therefore, thy power became thy doom.

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