

THE LOVER OF LIES

was thoroughly convinced that nothing of this kind can exist. He shut himself up in a tomb outside the gates, and constantly wrote and composed there by night and by day. Some of the young fellows, wishing to annoy and alarm him, dressed themselves up like dead men in black robes and masks patterned after skulls, encircled him and danced round and round, in quick time, leaping into the air. Yet he neither feared their travesty nor looked up at them at all, but as he wrote said: 'Stop your foolery!' So firmly did he believe that souls are nothing after they have gone out of their bodies."

"That," said Eucrates, "amounts to your saying that Democritus, too, was a foolish man, if he really thought so. But I will tell you another incident derived from my own experience, not from hearsay. Perhaps even you, Tychiades, when you have heard it, may be convinced of the truth of the story."

"When I was living in Egypt during my youth (my father had sent me travelling for the purpose of completing my education), I took it into my head to sail up to Koptos and go from there to the statue of Memnon in order to hear it sound that marvellous salutation to the rising sun. Well, what I heard from it was not a meaningless voice, as in the general experience of common people; Memnon himself actually opened his mouth and delivered me an oracle in seven verses, and if it were not too much of a digression, I would have repeated the very verses for you. But on the voyage up, there chanced to be sailing with us a man from Memphis, one of the scribes of the temple, wonderfully

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learned, familiar with all the culture of the Egyptians. He was said to have lived underground for twenty-three years in their sanctuaries, learning magic from Isis."

"You mean Pancrates," said Arignotus, "my own teacher, a holy man, clean shaven, in white linen, always deep in thought, speaking imperfect Greek, tall, flat-nosed, with protruding lips and thinnish legs." "That self-same Pancrates," he replied: "and at first I did not know who he was, but when I saw him working all sorts of wonders whenever we anchored the boat, particularly riding on crocodiles and swimming in company with the beasts, while they fawned and wagged their tails, I recognised that he was a holy man, and by degrees, through my friendly behaviour, I became his companion and associate, so that he shared all his secret knowledge with me.

"At last he persuaded me to leave all my servants behind in Memphis and to go with him quite alone, for we should not lack people to wait upon us; and thereafter we got on in that way. But whenever we came to a stopping-place, the man would take either the bar of the door or the broom or even the pestle, put clothes upon it, say a certain spell over it, and make it walk, appearing to everyone else to be a man. It would go off and draw water and buy provisions and prepare meals and in every way deftly serve and wait upon us. Then, when he was through with its

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services, he would again make the broom a broom or the pestle a pestle by saying another spell over it.

“Though I was very keen to learn this from him, I could not do so, for he was jealous, although most ready to oblige in everything else. But one day I secretly overheard the spell—it was just three syllables—by taking my stand in a dark place. He went off to the square after telling the pestle what it had to do, and on the next day, while he was transacting some business in the square, I took the pestle, dressed it up in the same way, said the syllables over it, and told it to carry water. When it had filled and brought in the jar, I said, ‘Stop! don’t carry any more water : be a pestle again!’ But it would not obey me now : it kept straight on carrying until it filled the house with water for us by pouring it in ! At my wit’s end over the thing, for I feared that Panocrates might come back and be angry, as was indeed the case, I took an axe and cut the pestle in two ; but each part took a jar and began to carry water, with the result that instead of one servant I had now two. Meanwhile Panocrates appeared on the scene, and comprehending what had happened, turned them into wood again, just as they were before the spell, and then for his own part left me to my own devices without warning, taking himself off out of sight somewhere.”

“Then you still know how to turn the pestle into a man?” said Deinomachus. “Yes,” said he : “only half way, however, for I cannot bring it back to its original form if it once becomes a water-

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carrier, but we shall be obliged to let the house be flooded with the water that is poured in !”

“Will you never stop telling such buncombe, old men as you are?” said I. “If you will not, at least for the sake of these lads put your amazing and fearful tales off to some other time, so that they may not be filled up with terrors and strange figments before we realise it. You ought to be easy with them and not accustom them to hear things like this which will abide with them and annoy them their lives long and will make them afraid of every sound by filling them with all sorts of superstition.”

“Thank you,” said Eucrates, “for putting me in mind of superstition by mentioning it. What is your opinion, Tychiades, about that sort of thing— I mean oracles, prophecies, outcries of men under divine possession, voices heard from inner shrines, or verses uttered by a maiden who foretells the future? Of course you doubt that sort of thing also? For my own part, I say nothing of the fact that I have a holy ring with an image of Apollo Pythius engraved on the seal, and that this Apollo speaks to me: you might think that I was bragging about myself beyond belief. I should like, however, to tell you all what I heard from Amphiloehus in Mallus,¹ when the hero conversed with me in broad day and advised me about my affairs, and what I myself saw, and then in due order what I saw at Pergamon and what I heard at Patara.

¹ A famous shrine in Cilicia. “After the death of his father Amphiaraus and his disappearance at Thebes, he (Amphiloehus) was exiled from his own country and went to Cilicia, where he fared quite well, for he, like his father, foretold the future to the Cilicians and received two obols for each oracle.”—*Alexander* 19.

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“When I was on my way home from Egypt I heard that this shrine in Mallus was very famous and very truthful, and that it responded clearly, answering word for word whatever one wrote in his tablet and turned over to the prophet. So I thought that it would be well to give the oracle a trial in passing and ask the god for some advice about the future—”

While Eucrates was still saying these words, since I could see how the business would turn out and that the cock-and-bull story about oracles upon which he was embarking would not be short, I left him sailing from Egypt to Mallus, not choosing to oppose everyone all alone: I was aware, too, that they were put out at my being there to criticise their lies. “I am going away,” I said, “to look up Leontichus, for I want to speak to him about something. As for you, since you do not think that human experiences afford you a sufficient field, go ahead and call in the gods themselves to help you out in your romancing.” With that I went out. They were glad to have a free hand, and continued, of course, to feast and to gorge themselves with lies.

There you have it, Philocles! After hearing all that at the house of Eucrates I am going about like a man who has drunk sweet must, with a swollen belly, craving an emetic. I should be glad if I could anywhere buy at a high price a dose of forgetfulness, so that the memory of what I heard may not stay with me and work me some harm. In fact, I think I see apparitions and spirits and Hecates!