



THE DEATH OF MELEAGER

(FROM *ATALANTA IN CALYDON*)

MELEAGER

LET your hands meet
 Round the weight of my head ;
 Lift ye my feet
 As the feet of the dead ;
 For the flesh of my body is molten, the limbs of it
 molten as lead.

CHORUS

O thy luminous face,
 Thine imperious eyes !
 O the grief, O the grace,
 As of day when it dies !
 Who is this bending over thee, lord, with tears and
 suppression of sighs ?

MELEAGER

Is a bride so fair ?
Is a maid so meek ?
With unchapleted hair,
With unfileted cheek,
Atalanta, the pure among women, whose name is as
blessing to speak.

ATALANTA

I would that with feet
Unsandalled, unshod,
Overbold, overfleet,
I had swum not nor trod
From Arcadia to Calydon northward, a blast of the
envy of God.

MELEAGER

Unto each man his fate ;
Unto each as he saith
In whose fingers the weight
Of the world is as breath ;
Yet I would that in clamour of battle mine hands
had laid hold upon death.

CHORUS

Not with cleaving of shields
And their clash in thine ear,

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When the lord of fought fields
Breaketh spearshaft from spear,
Thou art broken, our lord, thou art broken, with travail
and labour and fear.

MELEAGER

Would God he had found me
Beneath fresh boughs !
Would God he had bound me
Unawares in mine house,
With light in mine eyes, and songs in my lips, and a
crown on my brows !

CHORUS

Whence art thou sent from us ?
Whither thy goal ?
How art thou rent from us,
Thou that wert whole,
As with severing of eyelids and eyes, as with sundering
of body and soul !

MELEAGER

My heart is within me
As an ash in the fire ;
Whosoever hath seen me,
Without lute, without lyre,
Shall sing of me grievous things, even things that were
ill to desire.

CHORUS

Who shall raise thee
From the house of the dead ?
Or what man praise thee
That thy praise may be said ?
Alas thy beauty ! alas thy body ! alas thine head !

MELEAGER

But thou, O mother,
The dreamer of dreams,
Wilt thou bring forth another
To feel the sun's beams
When I move among shadows a shadow, and wail by
impassable streams ?

GENEUS

What thing wilt thou leave me
Now this thing is done ?
A man wilt thou give me,
A son for my son,
For the light of mine eyes, the desire of my life, the
desirable one ?

CHORUS

Thou wert glad above others,
Yea, fair beyond word ;

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Thou wert glad among mothers ;
For each man that heard
Of thee, praise there was added unto thee, as wings to
the feet of a bird.

ENEUS

Who shall give back
Thy face of old years,
With travail made black,
Grown grey among fears,
Mother of sorrow, mother of cursing, mother of tears ?

MELEAGER

Though thou art as fire
Fed with fuel in vain,
My delight, my desire,
Is more chaste than the rain,
More pure than the dewfall, more holy than stars are
that live without stain.

ATALANTA

I would that as water
My life's blood had thawed,
Or as winter's wan daughter
Leaves lowland and lawn
Spring-stricken, or ever mine eyes had beheld thee
made dark in thy dawn.

CHORUS

When thou dravest the men
Of the chosen of Thrace,
None turned him again
Nor endured he thy face
Clothed round with the blush of the battle, with light
from a terrible place.

CENEUS

Thou shouldst die as he dies
For whom none sheddeth tears ;
Filling thine eyes
And fulfilling thine ears
With the brilliance of battle, the bloom and the beauty,
the splendour of spears.

CHORUS

In the ears of the world
It is sung, it is told,
And the light thereof hurled
And the noise thereof rolled
From the Acroceraunian snow to the ford of the fleece
of gold.

MELEAGER

Would God ye could carry me
Forth of all these ;

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Heap sand and bury me
 By the Chersonese
 Where the thundering Bosphorus answers the thunder
 of Pontic seas.

CENEUS

Dost thou mock at our praise
 And the singing begun
 And the men of strange days
 Praising my son
 In the folds of the hills of home, high places of
 Calydon ?

MELEAGER

For the dead man no home is ;
 Ah, better to be
 What the flower of the foam is
 In fields of the sea,
 That the sea-waves might be as my raiment, the gulf-
 stream a garment for me.

CHORUS

Who shall seek thee and bring
 And restore thee thy day,
 When the dove dipt her wing
 And the oars won their way
 Where the narrowing Symplegades whitened the straits
 of Propontis with spray ?

MELEAGER

Will ye crown me my tomb
Or exalt me my name,
Now my spirits consume,
Now my flesh is a flame ?
Let the sea slake it once, and men speak of me sleeping
to praise me or shame.

CHORUS

Turn back now, turn thee,
As who turns him to wake ;
Though the life in thee burn thee,
Couldst thou bathe it and slake
Where the sea-ridge of Helle hangs heavier, and east
upon west waters break ?

MELEAGER

Would the winds blow me back
Or the waves hurl me home ?
Ah, to touch in the track
Where the pine learnt to roam
Cold girdles and crowns of the sea-gods, cool blossoms
of water and foam !

CHORUS

The gods may release
That they made fast ;

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Thy soul shall have ease
 In thy limbs at the last ;
But what shall they give thee for life, sweet life that is
 overpast ?

MELEAGER

Not the life of men's veins,
 Not of flesh that conceives ;
But the grace that remains,
 The fair beauty that cleaves
To the life of the rains in the grasses, the life of the
 dews on the leaves.

CHORUS

Thou wert helmsman and chief ;
 Wilt thou turn in an hour,
Thy limbs to the leaf,
 Thy face to the flower,
Thy blood to the water, thy soul to the gods who divide
 and devour ?

MELEAGER

The years are hungry,
 They wail all their days ;
The gods wax angry
 And weary of praise ;
And who shall bridle their lips ? and who shall straiten
 their ways ?

CHORUS

The gods guard over us
With sword and with rod ;
Weaving shadow to cover us,
Heaping the sod,
That law may fulfil herself wholly, to darken man's face
before God.