

PAUSANIAS: A DRAMATIC POEM

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Pausanias: A Dramatic Poem by Charles William Kennedy & James Southall Wilson

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BY

CHARLES WILLIAM KENNEDY
JAMES SOUTHALL WILSON

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PAUSANIAS

ACT I

SCENE I

PAUSANIAS' apartments in Byzantium. An audience chamber near PAUSANIAS' sleeping-room. The pillars are of dark green marble and the hangings are of a deep red. At the back are windows looking out on the streets of Byzantium. There are a few heavy state chairs of shining ebony, but for the greater part the room is marked by a military simplicity. It is entered by doors to right and left.

Between the windows at the rear is a balcony looking out over the houses of Byzantium toward the distant hills. A divan to the left is of ebony like the chairs.

MYRON and DRACA stand by the door at the left, talking.

Draca. Methinks, good Myron, that upon thy brow
There hangs a darker gloom than huntsmen feel,
Who straying on Taygetus mountain seek
For game, but lose, deep in the forest shades,
Their way. Speak, Myron, wherefore art thou sad?

Myron. Ah, would I might put all my grief in words
So none of it were left within my heart!
This is a world that changes with the wind,
And in the affairs of men 'tis ever autumn.

To-day the flowers bloom, the zephyrs stir
Soft as the breathing of a sleeping maid:
The air is full of gladness and of song,
Where leaf-embowered the birds are. Who would think
The night of such a day could other be
Than starry-eyed and lit by friendly moon-beams?
Cold from the north a blasting wind has come,
And white with hoar-frost are its shimmering wings.
It hovers like some giant death-moth o'er
The earth, and sucks its honey-beauty from it.
The shivering birds are mute, the flowers gone;
And like the whisper of dead secrets sounds
The falling of the leaves among the trees.
Ah, Draca, thou art right. I am most sad.

Draca. Hadst thou in death some kinsman lost, yet still
It would behoove thee to receive it better.
Or has a mistress been to thee unkind?

Myron. Or kinsman or a mistress grieve me not.
'Tis something nearer, Draca. Has thine eye,
Dimmed from its olden brightness, not to see
Cause for a deeper sadness than I show?

Draca. Speak not in riddles: what thou dost unfold
Shall be thrice locked in my heart of hearts.
Friendship to thee and loyalty to him
We serve and to the state: may not these bolts
Secure against all comers? Then be plain.
Meanst thou Pausanias?

Myron. Ay, in sooth, I do.
We knew him, Draca, when his fame was bright
As beaten gold beneath an Asian sun,
Fresh-forged on Plataea's hard-won field.

There like a war-god charging at his foes
He led his Spartans on. And after that
His glory like a twilight star yet grew
And still shone brightest through the clouds of war.
But now— Oh, Draca, thou hast seen the change.
A mist has risen and the star grows dim:
And if it set or rise we scarcely know.
Doubts and dark apprehensions make us dream
Of things we dare not speak on. Thou hast noted
The pleasant smile wax evil and the mouth,
Wont in Laconic firmness to be set,
Curl downwards day by day as if 'twere mocking
And scorning all things. Him we knew of old—
These snowy locks were black when first I knew him—
Too kind and modest to a fault, now grows
Puffed with unsoldier-like, disdainful pride.

Draca. Ay, and too oft of late the ruddy wine
Hath demon-like peered from his o'er-bright eyes.

Myron. Thou knowest also how a sudden love
Hath burnt him with unseemly passionate fire
For that Byzantian maiden Cleonice:
Which yet, I fear me, shall lead on to deeds
He must repent of. Hermione, chaste
As driven snow, his wife, whom once he deemed
As dearer than his soul, has he forgot;
And all that binds him to his nobler self
Is now his son, the sweet youth, Pleisanaxus,
The darling of our camp. Would this were all!
But, Draca, hast thou heard no more than this
In muttered whisperings hovering o'er the camp,

Like black-winged birds that smell afar the prey,
And flap their wings in omen of mishap?

Draca. True: I have heard the whispers that thou
nam'st,

And seen a deeper dread within men's eyes:
But him I serve I trust, and I would spurn
The man who uttered aught about his name
That savored of dishonor, as a toad
E'en viler than the vermin that he feeds on.
Thou art not one, good Myron, who believest
The rumors of the camp?

Myron. That he hath aught
In common with King Xerxes? No. Nor shall
Believe it ever. Yet do I bewail
The time when such reports as this can spread
By subtle innuendoes, and yet find
Men who can e'en believe them. Oh, 'tis base!
Rumors like this, born of a great mistrust,
Have sneaked about the camp e'en while we slept,
Like black-browed thieves, and stolen from men's hearts
That treasure, dearer than gold or gem,
Mutual good-will, trust interlinked with trust.
Athenians and Ionians both are moved
By vile suspicion of our Spartan hosts,
Nor Aristeides loveth nor our lord,
Nor Cimon do I rate Pausanias' friend.
All is awry. I fear me lest— But see!
Pausanias comes.

Enter PAUSANIAS.

Pausanias. Myron, take this at once
To my lieutenant, Bion. Bid him do
Its mandates quickly. Draca, have spread out
Within the council chamber charts of Persia.

[*Exeunt MYRON and DRACA.*]

I feel three natures battling in my breast
And know not which shall conquer. Visions rise,
Three visions, diverse-faced, and beckon on.
The man within me, which o'ercomes the rest,
Shall follow after that which pleases him.
Ambition, Love, Fidelity—these three—
Divide my soul. One to the future points;
The clinging, passion-throbbing arms of one
Entwine the present; but the other stands
And coldly bids me to the past be true.
Oh, has it come to this! That ere I take
The path, which yet so plainly honor shows,
I must be racked with questionings? Oh, think,
Pausanias, on thy past, how men were wont
To point thee out, a cold and stainless star,
Still traveling on the road of honor, when
Mere fire-fly comets blazed themselves to atoms.
And is it thou who think'st on treason now?
Ye gods! Tut! How I speak in children's prattle.
Shall I yet trust in gods—I, who long since,
Had there been gods, had shamed them with my thoughts
To nothingness; and yet I prosper still.
The Past— Oh, haunt me not, ye phantom eyes,
I have not yet betrayed you. Wait until
The deed is done—if it indeed be done.