

## Two Doctors At Akragas

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CHARACTERS

AKRON EMPEDOCLES PANTHEIA

TWO DOCTORS AT AKRAGAS

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*Akron*

She has been dead these thirty days.

*Empedocles*

How say you, thirty days! and there is no feature of corruption?

*Akron*

None. She has the marble signature of death writ in her whole fair frame. She lies upon her ivory bed, robed in the soft stuffs of Tyre, as if new-cut from Pentelikon by Phidias, or spread upon the wood by the magic brush of Zeuxis, seeming as much alive as this, no more, no less. There is no beat of heart nor slightest heave of breast.

*Empedocles*

And have you made the tests of death?

*Akron*

There is no bleeding to the prick, nor film of breath upon the bronze mirror. They have had the best of the faculty in Akragas, Gela, and

Syracuse, all save you; and I am sent by the dazed parents to beseech you to leave for a time the affairs of state and the great problems of philosophy, to essay your ancient skill in this strange mystery of life in death and death in life.

*Empedocles*

I will go with you. Where lies the house?

*Akron*

Down yonder street of statues, past the Agora, and hard by the new temple that is building to Olympian Zeus. It is the new house of yellow sandstone, three stories in height, with the carved balconies and wrought brazen doors. Pantheia is her name. I lead the way.

*Empedocles*

The streets are full to-day and dazzling with color. So many carpets hang from the windows, and so many banners are flying! So many white-horsed chariots, and such concourses of dark slaves from every land in the long African crescent of the midland sea, from the pillars of Hercules to ferocious Carthage and beyond to the confines of Egypt and Phoenicia! Ah, I remember now! It is a gala day--the expected visit of Pindar. I am to dine with him to-morrow at the Trireme. We moderns are doing more to celebrate his coming than our fathers did for Æschylus when he was here. I was very young then, but I remember running with the other boys after him just to touch his soft gown and look into his noble face.

*Akron*

I have several rolls of his plays, that I keep with some new papyri of Pindar arrived by the last galley from Corinth, in the iron chest inside my office door, along with some less worthy bags of gold of Tarshish and coinage of Athens, Sybaris, Panormos, and Syracuse. Ah, here is the door! It is ajar, and if you will go into the courtyard by the fountain and seat yourself under the palm-trees and azaleas on yon bench, by the statue of the nymph, I will go up to announce your coming.

*Empedocles*

All is still save for the far, faint step of Akron on the stair, and the still fainter murmur from the streets. The very goldfish in the fountain do not stir, and the long line of slaves against the marble wall, save for their branded foreheads, might be gaunt caryatides hewn in Egyptian wood or carved in ebony and amber. That gaudy tropic bird scarce ruffles a feather. What is the difference between life and death? A voice, a call, some sudden strange or familiar message on old paths, to the consciousness that lies under that apparent unconsciousness, will waken all these semblances of inanimation into new life of arms and fins and wings. Let me try her thus! My grandfather was a pupil of Pythagoras who had seen many such death-semblances among the peoples of the white sacred mountains of far India. Ha! Akron beckons. I must follow him.

*Akron*

Enter yon doorway where the white figure lies resplendent with jewels that gleam in the morning sun.

*Empedocles*

The arm drawn downward by the heavy golden bracelet is cold, yet soft and yielding like a sleep. The face has the natural ease of slumber, and not the rigid artificiality of death. 'Tis true there is no pulse, no beat of heart nor stir of breath, yet neither is there the sombre grotesqueness of the last pose. But the difference between life and death is here so small that it is incommensurable, the point of the mathematicians only. I shall hold this little hand in mine, and, with a hand upon her forehead, call her by name; for, you know, Akron, one's name has a power beyond every other word to reach the closed ears of the imprisoned soul.

Pantheia! Pantheia! Pantheia! It is dawn. Your father calls you. Your mother calls you. And I call you and command you. Open your eyes and behold the sun!

*Akron*

A miracle, oh, Zeus! The eyelids tremble like flower-petals under the wind of heaven. Was that a sigh or the swish of wings? Oh, wonder of wonders! she breathes--she whispers!

*Pantheia*

Where am I? Is this death? Some one called my name. That is the pictured ceiling of my own room. Surely that is Zaldu, my pet slave, with big drops on her black face.... And father, mother, kneeling either side. And who are you with rapt face and star-deep eyes, thick hair with Delphic wreaths, and in purple gown and golden girdle? Are you a god?

*Empedocles*

Be tranquil, child, I am no god, only a physician come to heal you. You have been ill and sleeping a long time.

*Pantheia*

Yes, I feel weakness, hunger, and thirst. I remember now that I was well, when suddenly a strange thought came to me on my pillow. I thought that I was dead. This took such possession of me that it shut out every other thought, and being able to think only that one thought, I must have been dead. It seemed but a moment's time when the spell of the thought was broken by an alien deep voice from the void of nothing about me, calling me by name, calling me to wake and see the day. With that came floods of my own old thoughts, like molten streams from *Ætna*, that were rigid as granite before the word was given that loosed them.

*Empedocles*

Did you not see new things or new lands or old dead faces, for you have been gone a month? I am curious to know.

*Pantheia*

How passing strange! No, I saw neither darkness nor light. I heard no sounds, nor was conscious of any silence. I must have had just the one thought that I was dead, but I lost consciousness of that thought. I remember saying good night to Zaldu, and I handed her the quaint doll from Egypt and bade her care for it. Then the thought seized me, and I knew no more. My thoughts which had always run so freely before, like a plashing brook, must have suddenly frozen, as the amber-trader from the Baltic told me one day the rivers do in his far northern home. Oh, sir, are you going so soon?

*Empedocles*

Yes, child. You must take nourishment now, and talk no more. But I am coming again to see you, for I have many earnest questions still to put regarding this singular adventure.

*Akron*

Let me walk with you. I will close the great door. Already the gay streets are silent, and the people crowd this way, whispering awe-struck together of the deed of wonder you have done this day. You have called back the dead to life, and they make obeisance to you as you pass, as if you were in truth a son of the immortals. Your name will go down the ages linked with the miracle of Pantheia. You are immortal.

*Empedocles*

Nay, 'tis not so strange as that, and yet 'tis stranger.

*Akron*

I would know your meaning better.

*Empedocles*

The power of a thought, that is the real wonder! We just begin to have glimpses of the effects of the mind upon the body. To me, Akron, the faculty has set too great store upon herbs and bitter drafts, and cutting with the knife. I would fain have the soul acknowledged more, our therapy built on the dual mechanism of mind and substance. For if an

idea can lead to the apparent death of the whole body, so might other ideas bring about the apparent death of a part of the body, like, for example, a paralysis of the members, or of the senses of sight, feeling, hearing; and in truth I have seen such things. Or a thought might give rise to a pain, or to a feeling of general illness, or to a feeling of local disorder in some internal organ; and I feel sure I have likewise met with such instances. And if an idea may produce such ailments, then a contrary idea implanted by the physician may heal them. I believe this to be the secret of many of the marvels we see at the temples and shrines of Æsculapius and of the cures made by the touch of seers and kings.

But this teaching goes much deeper and further. If we could in the schools implant in our youth ideas which were strong enough, we should be able to make of them all, each in proportion to his belief in himself and his ambition, great men, great generals, thinkers, poets, a new race of heroes in all lines of human endeavor, who should be able by their united strength of idea and ideal finally to people the world with gods.

I have among my slaves, who work as vintners and olive-gatherers, a physician of Thrace, as also a philosopher of the island of Rhodes, a member of the Pythagorean League. These I bought not long ago from the Etruscan pirates. Every evening I have them come to me on the roof after the evening meal, and there under the quiet of the stars we discuss life and death, the soul and immortality, and all the burning problems of order, harmony, and number in the universe. What surprises me is that this Thracian should be so in advance of the physicians of Hellas, for he holds as I do that the mind should be first considered in the treatment of most disorders of the body, because of its tremendous power to force the healing processes, and because sometimes it actually induces disease and death. And we have talked together of the incalculable value of faith and enthusiasm so applied in the education of the child, this new kind of gardening in the budding soul of mankind, and of what new and august races might thereby come to repeople this rather unsatisfactory globe.

I am minded to free these slaves, indeed all my slaves, and I have the intention of devoting the most of a considerable fortune, both inherited and amassed by me, to the spread of these doctrines and to

the public weal, particularly in the matter of planting in the souls of our youth, not the mere ability to read and write Greek and do sums in arithmetic, but the seeds of noble ideas that shall make this Trinacria of ours a still more wonderful human garden than it has been as a granary for the world's practical needs. From this sea-centre we send our freighted galleys to Gades in the West, Carthage in the South, Tyre in the East, and to the red-bearded foresters of the Far North. I would still send on these same routes this food, but also better food than this, stuff that should kindle and feed intellectual fires in all the remote places of the earth.