

Nature has its own Laws

Short Story Cycle

Von Jyll

Kapitel 4: The nature of a letter

The mightiest Kings have had their minions
Great Alexander loved Hephaestion,
The conquering Hercules for Hylas wept,
And for Patroclus stern Achilles droop'd.
And not kings only, but the wisest men;
The Roman Tully loved Octavius,
Grave Socrates wild Alcibiades.
Then let his grace, whose youth is flexible,
And promiseth as much as we can wish,
Freely enjoy that vain lightheaded earl;
For riper years will wean him from such toys.

Mortimer, Edward II, by Christopher Marlowe

Syracuse, 400 BC

There once lived a man, who upheld the principles of love and honesty very accurately. His name was Damon and he was a Pythagorean. Damon had a friend, with whom he spent much time and shared all his ideas and principles. Never had the reciprocal agreement with another man been of such perfection. For thus there was little they had not done together or did not know of each other, and over the years a very dearly love between them had developed.

One year around the turn of the century they decided to travel to a small island, one of Greeks colonies near Italy. The Mediterranean island was ruled by a tyrant named Dionysius. He was told to be bloody and remorseless with his enemies. Any man, who insulted him, had to face death.

When the two friends stayed in the capital city of the island, they often held their fervid conversations in taverns, and since they, as Pythagoreans, did not concur with the politic of the despot, there were soon rumors spreading through the inns. It took not a long time for the gossip to reach the court of Dionysius, and the same took

immediate reaction.

The tyrant ordered to capture Pythias, of whom he thought to be the head of the resistance, and boiling in rage he enacted to punish him with death.

Meanwhile the two foreigners were strolling and chatting in the centre of the city and suddenly got disturbed by the guards, who caught the two men, but let Damon free, for they had no orders of dealing with Pythias' beloved friend. Pythias was drilled to court.

In front of Dionysius the accused did not deny his words, nor did he beg for his life. The only thing he asked for was a delay, because he wanted to adjust his affairs at home. The ruler, distrustful in nature, refused to give the allowance.

Unawares, a man stepped forward from between the guards and bowed down. "I am Damon, my lord. May you allow me to make a suggestion? Accept me as a pledge and I will replace my true friend Pythias!"

Dionysius still hesitated and asked Pythias, how far away his home was. The home of the questioned was many miles distant and he would need several days for his intention.

It looked as if the tyrant would refuse a second time, but then he claimed for a tradeoff.

Damon would stay in prison for the exact period of time Pythias needed to arrive at home and return to Syracuse. If Pythias did not fulfill this requirement, Damon would be sentenced to death.

The exact day and hour was fixed and Damon was sent to prison, while Pythias took his long journey.

Day after day passed by and there was no sight and no message of Pythias.

But Damon was not worried. Contrary, he hoped that Pythias would never return and therefore would survive. When the guards were teasing him, he always repeated one sentence: "Perhaps he has met with some accident along the way."

Damon's room was quite small and empty except for a pallet and a bucket. He spent the hours with looking out of the window, where the world as he had known it seemed so foreign and distant. Damon had not much need of sleep and often enjoyed himself in the nights reading old letters of Pythias, he had kept.

Some of them were just dealing with ideas and discussions about their ethic belief, proposals and complaints. Others were of much more intimate content.

Pythias had always been a dedicated writer and soon began to devote filling pages of letters to Damon. The receiver was less enthusiastic to write, but enchanted to read them. And he could remember every single one of them.

There was one he especially loved:

Dearest

After our discussion today in the ambulatory, I came up with another idea to solve the problem of the diversion but I will tell you this when we next meet tomorrow. This will be soon enough, for I want to write to you about a matter of different nature.

As always I agree with you and accept your proposal you made in the night two days ago. Why not having a journey, it's been so long since we last went on a sustentative travel.

You would like to go to an island as I learned of your whispering. Well, I heard about the one colony gaining fame of his, let's call it, interesting ruler.

I could not discuss it with you since your hands were carrying me to a place where I was not able to think anymore. I'm talking about the island Sicily, you certainly know where it is. The ruler I mentioned is Dionysius, a man of malicious character. A shame that a Greek can be of such ill nature, this is not honorable! Can't more men be like you are?

But we are not going to the island just to examine the politics there as you would tell me, and you are right. I promise to give you my best attention, I promise. As you have given to me the last time the moon was full. Appreciation to your new technique. It was quite delightful.

However, I'm looking forward to experiencing a new part of Greece, especially with this different form of state. And enjoying a new landscape with you by my side.

So many days have passed since our last journey. I remember exactly the details. And where we first met. You were so young of age and I was a little bit younger. I will not repeat that I chose you the first time I saw you, since you always start a discussion at this point, because you do not believe me.

You had just reached the bloom and were in need of a philetor. I wonder if we'll see philetors and their kleinos, too.

We sure visit some taverns, won't we?

Well, I caught sight of you in this very thin cloth and you know that I aimed a question at you. Certainly you were astonished. Ah, I have the expression of your beardless face still in mind. And soon you became my eromenos.

You often told me I was a good teacher. And I agree since I see all the virtuousness, honesty and braveness a Greek should have in you.

I assume Dionysius wasn't as lucky to own an erastes to make him an honorable man.

I ought to go and arrange our journey

Erastes

The day of the execution was approaching fast and there still had not been any sign of Pythias. Damon was imperturbable and did not fear the path to his death, if so his dear friend could be saved.

With his head held high Damon stepped out of the prison and paced in front of the tyrant. His hands were captivated behind his back, but his glance was full of pride and relief.

Dionysius on his throne leaned forward and examined the moribund man. "So, Damon, where is your friend, whom you were so confident of? I fear you have allowed him to take advantage of your simplicity."

"It is impossible for me to doubt my friend's constancy," replied Damon. "Perhaps he has met with some accident along the way."

Of course Pythias had not, because Damon was absolutely sure he would have felt, if Pythias had been hurt.

Dionysius was gradually annoyed by the cheerful face of Damon's and commanded to fulfil the obligation. Damon did not move, for he was determined to die.

At the very same second the pattering of hooves rose and a white horse suddenly appeared, squirted with mud. The crowd scattered screaming in all directions. The man with waving hair half jumped, half fell out of his saddle, when the animal abruptly stopped. He ran towards Damon, who looked at him in shock.

"I am here!" Pythias flung his arms around Damon's neck. "I am in time!" Damon tried to step back. "No! No, you fool! Go back! I am going to die. It's fine!"

But the other man shook his head. "I hurried – to come in time! My family refused to let me go, but you may not be killed!" He gasped. "It is my place and I am going to face it!"

Damon turned his head to Dionysius. "Kill me instantly!", he claimed.

"No! I am here to save you! Kill me!" Pythias took the sword from a guard, but Damon went in between.

"Hold on!" Dionysius' voice sounded over the dusty place. He had stood up and approached. The discussion between the two men and their will to die for the other one as a matter of course had moved Dionysius.

"Never in my life have I seen such loyalty. I hereby set both of you free."