


MEMNON



SCOTT ODEN



RHODES
YEAR 4 OF THE 105TH OLYMPIAD
(357 BCE)



“Memnon!”

The man who bellowed the name looked out of place on the docks of Rhodes-town, as awkward as a sailor would be in the lecture-halls of the Academy at Athens. Despite the heat he wore a pleated himation of faded blue cloth, pinned at the shoulder with a copper brooch fashioned in the likeness of an owl. His balding head glistened in the sun. The man paused in the shade of a statue of Helios, its surface crusted with gull droppings, and mopped at his brow with the hem of his robe.

“Memnon!” he cried again, waving.

Memnon, son of Timocrates, turned at the sound of his name, the sheaf of javelins balanced on his shoulders ready to be handed up to another of Circe’s crew. Eyes the color of a storm-racked sea glittered beneath a mane of curly black hair kept in check by a leather headband. “By the Dog!” he muttered. “Will he never let me go?”

At the railing above, Patron, a Phocaeen from the coast of Ionia and captain of Circe, scowled. Ten years Memnon’s senior, he carried himself with the gravity of a Spartan elder. “Who seeks you this time?”

“Glaucus, my father’s secretary. No doubt Timocrates intends to fetch me back to his side.” At nineteen, Memnon did not give the impression of a rawboned youth; he had the muscular shoulders and flat abdomen of an Olympian athlete, a man on the cusp of his physical prime. The gods of Sun and Wind left his skin burnished and tough like old leather worn from use. Around him moved a handful of young Greeks, self-styled adventurers, modern day Argonauts — men forever linked by the poetic bond of shared hardship. They were the crew of Circe, the aging

pentekonter that would deliver them to Assos, on the Asian shore, and into the arms of Glory.

“He’s still furious, I take it,” Patron said.

“Father? When is he not furious?”

“Have you not mended the rift between you?”

Memnon shook his head. “Far from it. It’s his opinion that we’re betraying Rhodes, abandoning her in her hour of need by running off to Assos and joining Mentor’s army. He says we should be soldiers of demokratia, not mercenaries in a satrap’s war. Great Helios! I feared for my health when I let it slip that I thought Rhodian democracy a dying beast, caught as it is between the spears of Athens and the swords of Caria. If ever you wish to sample true rage, mention that around father.”

Patron looked askance at Memnon then shook his head.

“What?”

“I think it wasn’t such a slip of the tongue as you let on,” Patron said. “If Mentor were here, he’d cuff your ears for goading your father as you do. I’ve half a mind to do it in his stead.”

Memnon grinned. “Allow me what small pleasures I have left, Patron. Father has tightened his leash about my neck as though I were an errant hound. His spies dog my every step; every morsel of food that passes my lips, every cup of wine, is reported to him. Even Thalia — dear, vivacious Thalia — has been pressed into service by his minion, there.” The young Rhodian indicated his father’s secretary with a jerk of his head. “Zeus Savior! I can’t relieve myself in the bushes without feeling a dozen eyes on me! You ask me, it’s high time my father realizes I am my own man!”

Patron glanced down, his narrow countenance severe. “It must have been Timocrates, then, who had the harbor master look into my doings. Old Herodas wanted to know when I planned to sail, and if I hoped to return. I thought it an odd question, but now . . .” Patron trailed off.

“Forgive my father for his meddling, Patron. It’s not personal.”

“You think it’s not? In truth, Memnon, you’re a smart lad, and handy with a tiller, but I’ll not go against Timocrates. He’s a powerful man, not the sort I’d like to trifle with. If he has other plans for you I’ll not be the one to thwart them. Settle this business with him and get his blessing before we sail or Circe will sail without you. Understand?”

Memnon’s jaw clenched. He nodded as Glaucus bustled up, the secretary’s round face the color of a ripe pomegranate.

“Rejoice, son of Timocrates! Thalia said I might find you here.”

“You’re a long way from your familiar haunts, Glaucus,” Memnon snapped. “Has father sent you to spy on Circe’s crew? Or will you join us and seek your fortunes among the Persians?”

“Neither, thank the gods. Timocrates asked that I escort you to the Assembly. He’s denouncing the oligarchs today; afterward, he craves a word with you.”

Memnon looked up at Circe's master and made a show of deferring to his judgement.

"We can spare you," Patron said. The look on his face did not invite debate. "Attend to your father. Remember what I've said. With or without you."



Jostling bodies thronged the narrow streets of Rhodes: porters bearing baskets and bales to the marketplace; slaves on errands only they and their masters knew; the travelers disembarking from foreign ships were outnumbered by natives seeking passage to far ports of call. An air of desperation clung to the people of Rhodes, a perfume of fear and uncertainty. Memnon knew its cause.

Rhodes stood on the brink. Democrat fought oligarch in the Assembly, an inflammatory war of words that trickled down to real violence on the streets. Memnon had heard stories of whole families slain for speaking out against tyranny, of oligarchs knifed in their sleep, and of innocents abstaining from either side burned out of house and hearth. And his father, noble Timocrates, orator, statesman, a Rhodian Pericles in an age of gilded tyrants, only added to the discord with his pro-Athenian rhetoric.

Glaucus cleared his throat. "What did that fellow mean, 'with or without you'?"

"Stay out of my business, Glaucus," Memnon barked over his shoulder. "You're my father's secretary, not mine. Nor do I count you as a friend. It's bad enough you've charmed Thalia into divulging my dealings . . ."

"A lovely girl, Thalia. You are lucky to have her."

Memnon lengthened his stride, forcing Glaucus into a half-run just to keep up. The secretary huffed and puffed, blowing like a winded horse as they ascended a steep, cobbled road lined with columns, each bearing the names of men lost to Poseidon.

"Have I offended you?"

"You presume too much," Memnon said.

Glaucus shrugged. "I only seek to understand you, young sir. It's all Timocrates desires, as well."

Memnon stopped and rounded on the secretary. "How could either of you understand? Zeus! You're both cut from the same cloth! Bureaucrats to the marrow who have dreamed of nothing else since the womb! How could you understand the attraction of distant shores when all you desire can be found in the soil of Rhodes?"

"Now who is presumptuous?" Glaucus said. "All young men would rather pursue the path of Achilles, the path of glory and immortality. I was no different. But if every man could be Achilles, then the mystique of the son of Peleus would lessen, would it not? Warriors are noble and

enviable, but they haven't the sole claim to Glory's rewards. A secretary can carry himself with as much nobility; an orator is no less enviable. The only difference being poets don't compose odes to secretaries and orators."

"I'm not a glory-hound, Glaucus. It's just . . ." Memnon trailed off. He walked to the road's edge and stood between two of the columns. At this height, Rhodes-town seemed small and of little consequence against the vast sea of blue. From the mole-protected Great Harbor, with its crowd of ships, Rhodes crawled up the hillside in steps, like seats in an amphitheater. Whitewashed walls and red-tiled roofs stood cheek-by-jowl with crude timber sheds and old thatch. Up the hillside, on a three-hundred-foot spur of rock, towered the acropolis. The High City. Terraced and unfortified, its temples and public buildings were shaded by groves of sacred olive, knotty sycamores, and dusty green poplars. Red-tinted limestone winked in the noonday sun.

Despite its beauty, Memnon saw in that city of rose-red stone the outlines of a prison, a place where his youth would be snuffed out by endless hours of discourse, where his dreams would wither and rot like fruit left overlong on the vine. "Can you truly see me up there," he gestured to the acropolis, "standing atop the plinth in the Assembly declaiming the ills of society?"

"If that's what the Fates decree, then yes.

Memnon sighed. "If the Three Sisters themselves came to father and told him my destiny lay elsewhere, he would dispute them. I want to join Mentor at Assos, to serve Artabazus in his rebellion against the Great King. What is so distasteful about that? Artabazus is a good man; I've heard father say as much. Good enough to marry my sister, Deidamia. Am I any better than my sister? Than Mentor? Zeus Savior! I cannot understand why . . ."

Glaucus gave a start as if, in a brief moment of clarity, he glimpsed the inner paths of Memnon's heart. "Truly, you cannot see it, can you? I had thought you were only playing a game with Timocrates, keeping him at loggerheads to satisfy some childish whim, but you honestly have no idea what his motives are."

Memnon frowned. "And you do?"

"Listen to me, young sir. For once pay heed to my words. It is on you that Timocrates has pinned his hopes."

"On me? But, Mentor is the eldest, he —"

Glaucus silenced Memnon with a terse gesture. "Yes, yes! Eldest though he may be, Mentor cuts a rough figure in your father's eye, uncouth and unpolished. Timocrates praises his competence as a soldier, while mourning the realization that his eldest son will never amount to anything more than a mercenary in Persia's service. And Deidamia, the very image of her mother, is lusty, loyal, and as fertile as Ephesian Artemis. But she, too, will never rise above her station. It is you he would groom to carry on his legacy. He sees in you another Socrates, another Pericles, another Alcibiades, if only you'd come to your senses and forget these foolish dreams of yours."

“I am not so remarkable,” Memnon said, as he felt the invisible noose about his neck tightening.

“I would agree, but I am not Timocrates,” Glaucus said. “Come. We are lagging. Your father will be mounting the plinth any moment now.”



The Assembly met in the shadow of the temple of Athena Polias, Athena of the City, in hopes that the wisdom of the goddess would guide their dealings. Constructed of the same rose-colored limestone as Athena’s shrine, the circular Assembly building boasted a sunken floor and marble seats that rose in tiers around the plinth, a platform of polished stone from whence orators spoke. Instead of walls, Doric columns supported a tiled roof that kept the sun off while allowing the cooling sea breezes to flow unimpeded. Memnon turned and glanced north, shading his eyes. From here, he could see the vibrant blue waters of the Gulf of Marmaris and, beyond, a line of purple hills demarcating the frontiers of Caria and Lycia.

“I should have sent word for Bion to reserve us a place,” Glaucus said, glaring at the press of men before him. Latecomers, full citizens of every station leavened with a smattering of curious non-citizens and foreigners, circled the Assembly building, each jockeying for a better position so they could hear the man speaking within.

Memnon scanned the crowd and did a quick tally in his head. Three thousand citizens were needed to pass laws. Easily, Memnon counted a quorum. “Is there to be voting today?”

Glaucus shook his head. “Only debate. They’ll put it to a vote next week.” The secretary clutched at his cloak and elbowed his way through with cries of “Pardon” and “Make way”. Memnon followed, slower, shuffling like a man bound for the gallows. They inched down the stairs of the entryway and found a place to stand beneath a statue of Dorieus, the far-seeing statesman of Lindos whose dream of a united Rhodes brought the city into being.

Dusty sunlight slashed through the artificial gloom, falling like divine light on the man atop the plinth. Timocrates of Rhodes stood tall and loose, his gestures exaggerated as though he performed his speech at the theater. A slender line divided the two, actors from orators: where one played to the audience for the sake of entertainment, the other played for higher stakes, for the fate of nations. Today, with his fringe of silver hair and close-cropped beard, with his flowing white robe modestly bordered in Tyrian purple, Timocrates could have outplayed even silver-tongued Hermes. Memnon gave an ear to his speech.

“ . . . The oligarchs rule Chios and Cos now, and they threaten Rhodes; they are seducing you into what amounts to slavery. Slavery! It surprises me that none of you have conceived of the danger to our constitution, to our freedom, posed by these braggarts, these men who would suborn

your ancestors sacrifice and bring their lives to naught. I urge you to regard them as the common enemies of all who love freedom.

“But indeed, it is not difficult to find fault with these demagogues or reproach the rest of you for your ambivalence, but our real task is to find by what arguments and by what course of action may our democracy be salvaged. Perhaps it does not suit the present occasion to deal with every facet of the question, but mine own view is that we ought to grapple with these problems vigorously, and act as becomes Rhodians. Remember, brothers, how it gladdens your hearts to hear a stranger praising your ancestors, describing their exploits and enumerating their trophies. Reflect, then, that your ancestors set up those trophies, not that you may gaze at them in wonder, but that you may also imitate the virtues of those men who earned them.”

And with a small bow, Timocrates concluded his oration. A heartbeat later raucous applause echoed through the Assembly. The delegates from Ialysos and Kamiros clambered to their feet, jostling to be the first to acclaim the orator. The men from Lindos nodded their heads and stroked their beards in graceful approval. Only the oligarchs, the followers of Philolaus, abstained. These glowered at Timocrates with undisguised contempt as he stepped down from the plinth.

Beside him, Memnon could feel Glaucus vibrating with excitement. “Brilliant! Without a doubt, his most persuasive speech!”

“You heard but a fragment and you can judge it thus?” Memnon said. “You’re more discerning than I, Glaucus.”

“I had the opportunity to listen as he drafted it, as could you if only you spent less time carousing.”

Memnon ignored him. Timocrates noticed them and threaded toward where they stood, his face an expressionless mask. Memnon saw movement from the corner of his eye, a swirl of blue cloth and flash of gold. He half-turned as a man thrust his way between him and his father. Short and barrel-chested with a swarthy face accentuated by his Persian-style beard, this newcomer smiled at Timocrates. Memnon could sense no warmth in the gesture. Beside him, Glaucus stiffened.

“Philolaus,” he hissed.

This newcomer bowed low before Timocrates, a gesture full of scorn. “You’ve scored a small victory for your precious democrats, today,” he said. “But all you’ve really done is bandage a dying beast. Your allies are hemorrhaging daily, their strength and the strength of your cause ebbing. How long will it last, Timocrates? How long will democracy be in its death throes?”

“You make assumptions without merit, slave of Mausolus. What you really should ask yourself is how long can the Carians play at empire before their master, the Great King, checks their ambitions? A month? A year? Your master cannot dabble long in the affairs of the Hellenes before the Great King makes an end of him.”

“He must needs make an example of your son-in-law Artabazus, first,” Philolaus said, grinning. “And your eldest, I’m told. By the Hound, Timocrates! For a staunch, Athenian-loving democrat, you’ve had excellent relations with tyrants of all stripes. Why, you yourself once served old satrap Pharnabazus in his war against the Spartans, even as your son serves his, now! By what right do you condemn tyranny when it’s part and parcel of your own kin? Are you a leaf blowing on whatever political wind is fashionable these days?”

Timocrates only smiled, saying, “It’s one thing to serve tyrants and oligarchs when it’s expedient; it’s another thing to live under their thumb. Rhodes is free, and should remain thus. If Mausolus of Caria hungers for more, let him take it from the Great King’s plate, if he dares.”

All around them, democrats and oligarchs began snarling at one another, hurling shouts and curses, and emulating the leaders of their respective movements. The chairman of this Assembly, old Diogenes, rapped his staff on the floor and cried: “Come to order! Who wishes now to speak?”

“Philolaus!” someone called. Shouts of “Aye! Let Philolaus speak!” warred with the voices of those who wanted his blood. Philolaus acknowledged them with a wave, then leaned close to Timocrates.

“We will continue our discourse later. For now, the body politic needs true guidance.” With a sinister wink, Philolaus brushed past Timocrates and ascended the plinth. He held up his arms, exhorting the crowd to silence. “Men! Men of Rhodes! Your duty, when debating such weighty matters, is to allow freedom of speech to every one of your counselors, be they fair or foul. Personally, I never thought it a difficult task to point out to you the best policy, since you all seem to me to have discerned it already. No, the difficulty lay in inducing you to put it into operation; for when you have approved and passed a resolution, it is no nearer accomplishment than before you approved it!”

Timocrates turned away, motioning for his son to follow.

“Do you not wish to hear him out?” Memnon said.

“He speaks nothing new.”

Memnon nodded and followed his father out into the sunlight.



Down the slope from the Assembly a grove of olive trees afforded shade and solitude to those who wearied of political theatrics. Here, servants of Athena’s temple maintained a sliver of paradise, a magnet for poets and lovers seeking the embrace of their particular muses. Wide gravel paths meandered under the boughs. Other, smaller trails branched off, leading to leafy grottoes that offered privacy from prying eyes; bordering the path, the generosity of grateful suppliants

provided for a handful of stone benches carved with prayers of thanks to the Goddess. Timocrates sat on one of these and motioned for Memnon to join him. Farther down, at a bend in the trail, a young orator practiced his gestures to an audience of trees.

“You’re looking well, son,” Timocrates said. “Living with a common prostitute seems to agree with you.”

Memnon checked his anger. “Thalia’s many things, but common she’s not, as I’m sure your sycophant, Glaucus, has told you.” He nodded back toward the Assembly. The secretary had lingered there, listening to Philolaus. “If you’ve only sent for me so you can insult my friends, I’ll take my leave, then.”

“No, I sent for you because I have good news,” Timocrates said. “My guest-friend, Androtion, has agreed to sponsor you in the Academy at Athens. You will travel back with him, once he has concluded his embassy to the Carians.”

Memnon blinked. “Athens? The Academy?”

“A happy compromise, don’t you think? It answers your need to see the world while addressing my concerns for your future. I cannot claim the idea as mine, of course. It was Androtion who —”

“No, father.” Memnon said, his tone one of a man who wearied of explaining himself over and over again. “Thank Androtion for his hospitality, but tell him I cannot accept.”

The older man’s face went livid. “What? What do you mean you cannot?” His voice carried down the path; the young orator turned in mid-exclamation, frowning.

“Circe leaves at weeks’ end. I mean to be on her.”

“Why are you so intractable?” Timocrates said, lurching to his feet. “I have arranged an opportunity that would make you the envy of most men, and yet you throw it back in my face!”

“Because it’s not what I want! Yes, I want to see something of the world before I settle down, before I take a wife and raise sons of my own. Yes, I want to see the glory of Athens. But all of this I will do on my own terms, not yours! I appreciate all you’ve offered, but you withhold the one thing I ask of you. Your blessing. It costs nothing; requires nothing of you save a smile and a kind word, yet you refuse. Why?”

Timocrates shook his head. “I’ll not bless you as you depart down a road I know leads to nothing but ruin and death!”

“How do you know this?” Memnon said, frustration driving his voice up an octave. “How? Have the gods suddenly gifted you with the vision?”

Timocrates leaned against the bole of a tree. “All my life I’ve seen it, Memnon. The same tragedy played out on a thousand different stages. You will go off to war full of tales of glory and return a broken man, or you’ll not return at all. ‘With your shield or on it’ is a fine sentiment for poets and demagogues, but it means nothing in the real world.”

Memnon said nothing for a long while, his head bowed in thought. Finally, he looked up. “You admire men such as Alcibiades, Pericles, Socrates? They are great men in your esteem, aren’t they? Peerless politicians and statesmen?”

“Yes, and you could be their equal, if only you’d listen to me!”

Memnon stood and caught Timocrates by the shoulders. He wanted to shake him. “These men, father, were all soldiers first! They knew the value of blood spilt in the cause of glory; they knew the horrors of war, which made them, in later life, never enter into it lightly. I cannot hope to rise to be their equal by sitting at the feet of dried out demagogues. I must strike out on my own, see the world for myself and decide my own fate. Surely you understand?”

Timocrates sighed, his resistance crumbling. “I forget sometimes that you are a child no longer. Perhaps my blessing . . .” he trailed off. The sound of sandals crunching on gravel brought a frown to the older man’s face. Memnon followed his gaze and saw Glaucus running full out down the path toward them. He skidded, nearly falling.

“Peace, Glaucus. What goes?” Timocrates said.

The secretary, his racking breath flecked with spittle and sweat, pointed back to the Assembly building. “Come quickly! It’s Philolaus! He’s trying to force a vote!”



“Is it not the hallmark of a democracy to allow the people to decide their own fate?” Philolaus stood atop the plinth, surrounded by a sea of upturned faces. Their voices threatened to drown him out. He gestured to the impassioned crowd. “To deny the people their right to vote, when a quorum is present, is tantamount to dismissing the basic premise of your beloved democracy!”

Diogenes, perched on the highest riser in order to be seen, thrust his staff at Philolaus. “I will not allow you to mock our greatest institution! There are rituals to observe before a vote can be taken! Traditions to follow! We — ”

“Ritual and tradition? Fear and sloth, more like! Are you too afraid, Diogenes, or are you simply too lazy to fulfill your obligations to the people?”

“He is neither!” Timocrates thrust his way through the Assembly, Memnon and Glaucus in his wake, and took the plinth beside Philolaus. “Diogenes is wise. He’s forgotten more about the inner workings of democracy than you or I will ever know! The law is plain, Philolaus! The Council can vote upon no measure or decree without prior deliberation! To suggest otherwise is to risk exile, or worse!”

Diogenes nodded, vindicated, but Philolaus only laughed.

“Which is why it takes the word of Zeus Savior himself to accomplish anything in a

democracy! A council of old men fattened on spoils stolen from the people decides what can and cannot be discussed? Tell me, how is that any different from an oligarchy? Drop this pretense of freedom and admit . . .”

Memnon felt the crowd’s agitation; he felt the heat, the pressure of their anger. He glanced up at his father. Timocrates and Philolaus stood toe-to-toe, so caught up in their own feud that they were oblivious to the effect their words had on their followers. Like oxen with blinders, they plowed on, shouting each other down, debating esoteric points of law at the tops of their lungs. Beneath the plinth, scuffles broke out. Men shoved one another, cursed, spat, and struggled like leashed dogs.

“Can they not see what they’re doing?” Memnon said, clutching Glaucus’ arm. “We’ve got to separate them before they cause a riot!” Glaucus, though, could only stare, his eyes wide, his fist upraised in defiance of tyranny. Memnon released him, turned . . .

Something whistled past his ear. A rock, smaller than a child’s fist, missed Timocrates by a finger’s breadth and struck Philolaus above his right eye. The oligarch reeled, clutching at his forehead.

“No!” Memnon yelled. But, at the sight of the oligarch’s blood, the simmering crowd boiled over in a frenzy of rage. All semblance of order fled as men turned on one another, punching, biting, and kicking in an effort to voice with violence what they could not with words. Only the ancient prohibition against weapons at an assembly kept this from becoming a bloodbath. Memnon watched as partisans of each faction rushed the plinth; both orators vanished under a riptide of grasping hands.

“Father!” Memnon surged forward, riding the crest of a human wave. Some fought for their cause; others fought to get away. Underfoot, a shoal of trampled bodies made each step treacherous. Memnon grabbed two men by the scruff of their necks and flung them aside. A fist grazed his cheek. A heel bruised the meat of his thigh. A walking stick cracked across his shoulders. Memnon snarled at this last, turned, and wrenched the stick from an old man’s hand.

Armed now with a truncheon of bronze-capped olive wood, Memnon waded through the flailing mob. Oligarch or democrat, he did not care; he left a path of broken bones, teeth, and heads in his wake. He gained the plinth and found Timocrates on the ground, struggling with a wild-eyed young democrat whose hands were knotted around Philolaus’ throat. A callous man might have left the oligarch to his fate — is he who incites rebellion not deserving of death? — but Memnon believed in the rule of law, in justice. A man should face trial before his execution. With a savage blow of his cudgel, Memnon broke the zealot’s grip and dragged him, cursing and screaming, off Philolaus. A second blow sent him plummeting into oblivion.

Memnon crouched and helped his father to his feet.

“Have they lost their minds?” Timocrates muttered, disoriented. “Violence only begets

violence!”

“Orators beget violence with their loose tongues!” Memnon said. Through the wrack he spotted Glaucus, his face scratched and bloody, his robes torn. “Here, Glaucus!” Seeing Timocrates alive bolstered the secretary’s flagging spirits. He rushed to his master’s side.

“Thank the gods! I thought —”

Memnon cut him off. “Your people are getting the worst of it! Take father home and keep watch over him. Keep him safe! I will come when I can.”

“As you wish,” Glaucus said. Like a Spartan general, the secretary gathered a phalanx of democrats around Timocrates and hustled him from the Assembly building. Memnon watched them leave, then turned his attention to Philolaus. The oligarch, on his knees now, clawed at the edge of the plinth as he sought to find his footing. Blood smeared his face, dripping from his beard to stain his blue robes. He coughed and struggled for breath.

“Get up, you damn fool!” Memnon knelt, looped Philolaus’ arm around his neck, and pulled him upright. “Get up before someone kills you!”

“They’ve tried,” the oligarch gasped. “I owe you my life. To which faction are you pledged?”

“Neither, and you owe me nothing.” Memnon noticed a half-dozen of Philolaus’ men nearby, watching as one of their number kicked a fallen democrat in the ribs. Memnon’s proximity to their leader, and Philolaus’ reliance on him, registered in their minds as the actions of an ally. The young Rhodian gestured to one of them.

Philolaus shook his head. “No. I never forget a debt, or a face. Seek me out when all this is over. I could use a man of your talents.”

Memnon dropped his bloody cudgel, shrugged himself free of the oligarch’s arm, and entrusted him to the care of his men. “My talents, as you call them, are pledged elsewhere.” He turned and walked toward the door. Clumps of men dotted the floor of the Assembly, moaning, crawling. Some of those trampled would never move again.

“Wait!” he heard Philolaus croak. “At least tell me who I am to be indebted to?”

Memnon paused at the head of the stairs, under the statue of Dorieus. For a moment, he flirted with the idea of a lie. No. He had no reason to be ashamed of who he was. With a nod, he said: “Memnon, son of Timocrates.”

Philolaus’ face paled beneath its veneer of blood. “I sense the hand of a god in this,” he said. “Very well, son of Timocrates. Go in peace with my thanks. Perhaps someday the gods will allow me to discharge my obligation to you.”

Memnon turned and ascended the last few steps. “I said you owe me nothing.” But, his voice was lost amid the cries of victory that arose from the Assembly building. They could only claim dominance by the slenderest of margins, but claim it they did.

Memnon imagined word of the battle had already reached the harbor. The oligarchs have risen! Death to the democrats! Both factions would arm themselves with spears and javelins, swords and knives, arrows and slingstones. Old soldiers would take their shields down from the hearth; young soldiers would don their bronze panoplies. Merchants would beat a hasty retreat to their country manors, or load their wealth onto ships bound for secluded beachheads on the western shore of the island. The threat of civil war, of stasis, would paralyze the city. Memnon glanced back over his shoulder at Philolaus, who held court amid the wounded like a conquering king. All of this, because I spared you.

Memnon had not reckoned that his act of conscience might cost Rhodes its life.