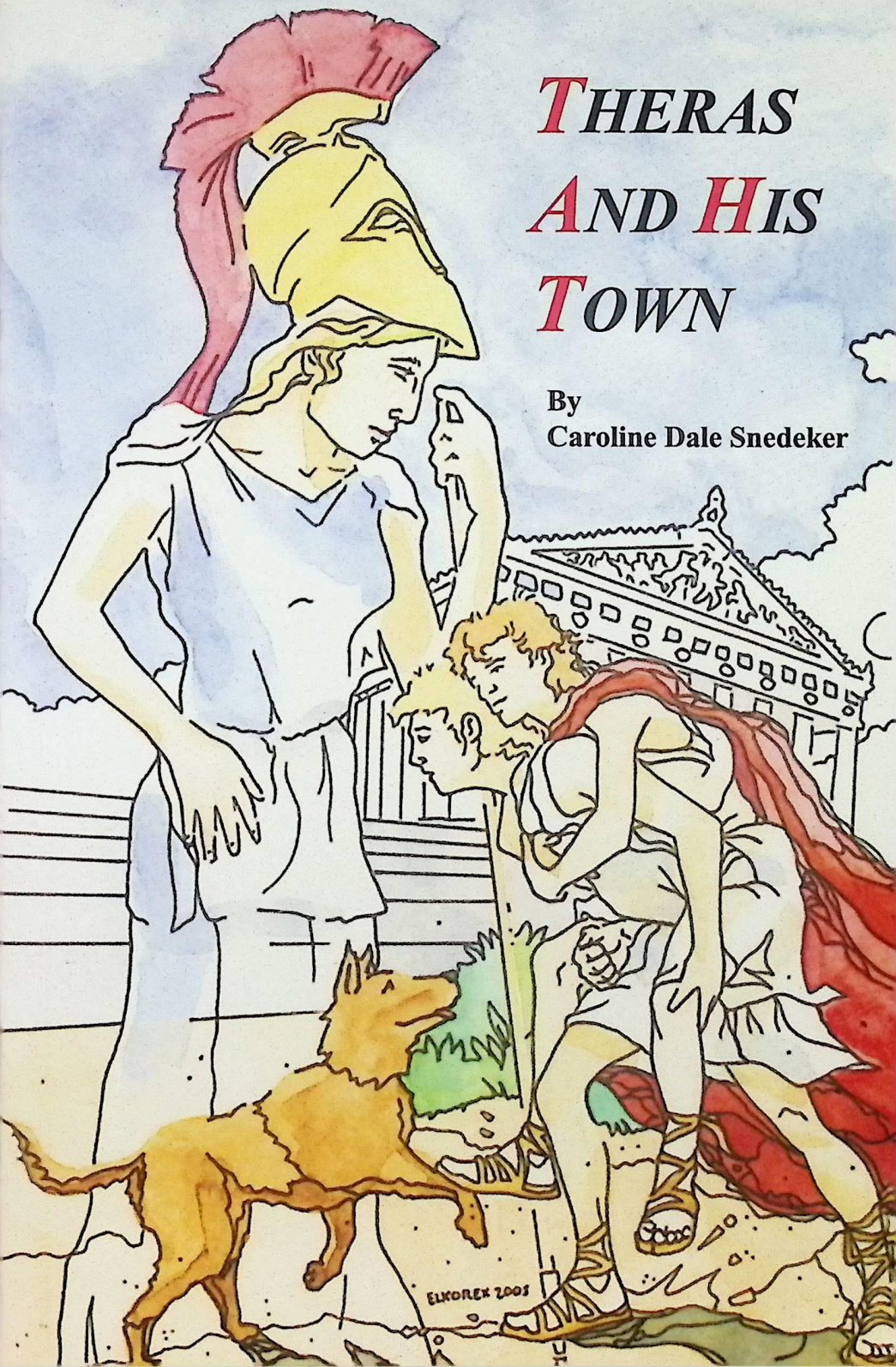


THERAS *AND HIS* *TOWN*

By
Caroline Dale Snedeker



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Part One

ATHENS

CHAPTER I

Seven Years Old

THEERAS was seven years old and because he was seven he was to go to school. For that was the custom in the city in which he lived. It was an exciting day for everybody in the house, most of all for Theras. For until this time he had had to stay at home with his mother and the servants, and was allowed to play only in the house or in the street close by the front door. Now he was to go out to school with the other boys. Now he would often be with his father and would go to and fro in the city. He already felt grown up.

To go to and fro in the city was what Theras prized. For he lived in the most beautiful city in the world.

It was not such a big city. Everybody knew everybody else, and who were his father and mother and cousins. Nor was it so very rich. Theras's father lived in a plain, simple house and all his family and cousins lived simply, too. But in this city were the wisest and most famous men that the world has ever known, and the most beautiful buildings.

It was called Athens. And though it flourished

many years ago, no people since then have been able to make so lovely a city.

No wonder Theras was excited and danced up and down.

"Isn't it time to go?" he said. "Isn't it time to go?"

His mother looked at him wistfully. Glad as she was to have him go she knew she would miss him sorely. For in Athens when once a boy went to school he began to be part of the city life. He was no longer of the house.

"Yes, it is time," she said.

Now into the room came Pheidon, Theras's father, bringing with him a tall man named Lampon.

"Lampon is to be your pedagogue," said Pheidon, and Theras ran to the man, who laughed proudly and took the boy's hand.

"Mind, Lampon, you mustn't be too easy with the boy," said Pheidon. "You are pedagogue now."

By that he meant that Lampon was to take Theras to school, carry his wax tablet which was his writing pad, his stylus (or pencil), and his lyre which was his harp. Lampon was to see that no harm came to Theras, and if necessary he must punish him. Even a boy of fourteen or fifteen in Athens would have his pedagogue.

Lampon was a slave. That means, of course, that Pheidon had bought him in the market just as you would buy a horse or a cow. Lampon was a white man not unlike the Greeks themselves. All people in the whole world bought slaves in those days. The

only difference was that the Athenians were kinder to their slaves than were other people. Lampon had been in the house before Theras was born. He loved his master, Pheidon, and his mistress; but his "little master," Theras, he adored, and indeed he was most likely to spoil him.

"Look, Theras, here is your lyre," said his father, and handed him the beautiful little Greek harp. It had bright strings and under the strings was a picture of the god Apollo playing. Every boy must have a new lyre the day he went to school.

"Is it mine?" cried Theras unbelievably. "My very own?"

He held it out to his little sisters standing near, and when Opis plucked the strings with her baby fingers the harp gave forth a thin sweet sound.

CHAPTER II

A Walk in the City

BUT NOW they must start. Theras's mother put on him his long outdoor cloak; for in the house he wore only one garment, like a shirt, reaching to his knees. She also put on his sandals, for he was barefoot. Then Aglaia and Opis, his two little sisters, kissed him. His mother kissed him. You might have thought he was going miles away.

Now his father took his hand, for this being the first day he wanted to take the boy to the schoolmaster himself. Out they went into the bright sunshine, Lampon, the pedagogue, following them. The streets were very narrow in Athens and the houses had no windows, so they seemed to be walking between two high walls with doors in them. The Athenians did not build stately houses for themselves, but only for their gods. The streets were crooked and turned this way and that. It would be easy to get lost.

But high over the city they could see the rocky hill called the Akropolis with the marble temples which Athens had instead of churches. These temples were

painted red, blue, and gold and had winged, dragon-like creatures on the roof corners. They looked wonderfully bright up there in the sunshine.

"Father," said Theras, "take me to the Akropolis. I am plenty old enough to go to the Akropolis."

"I'll take you, never fear," said his father, "but today you are going to school."

Suddenly they came into the bright open space of the market, noisy, bustling, full of life and color. "Buy my flowers," the flower girls were calling. And all that part of the market bloomed with their pretty wares. "Buy my himations," bawled a great fellow who had white and purple cloaks for sale. "Buy my toys," yelled another who had balls and tiny carts and gilded nuts on his booth. It was the noisiest place Theras had ever seen; and how he loved the noise! Over on one side was a long colonnade, a row of marble pillars roofed like a porch, and with a wall on its farther side. On this wall were painted pictures of warriors taking the city of Troy. Also woman warriors on horseback charging upon men who were fighting them with spears.

Theras had never seen a picture book and these were the most wonderful pictures he had ever seen. Indeed men journeyed for days over rough roads and rough seas to behold these paintings by Polygnotus.

"Father, stop! Oh, do wait a moment," pleaded Theras. But his father only paused to buy two dolls of baked clay for the small sisters at home, and then they hurried on.

"The market is no place for boys," he said.

"Hail, Pheidon," called a friend, "where are you going so fast?"

"I'm taking my son to school," answered Pheidon proudly.

As they came out again among the narrow streets another friend, Epikides, greeted them.

"Come up to the Pnyx, Pheidon. Phidias is going to speak to us all about buying new ships."

"I will certainly come," said Pheidon, "but first I must take my son to school."

"Your son! How fine!" exclaimed Epikides who had only daughters in his house.

Theras felt his father clasp his hand more tightly.

What a lovable, bright world it was!

At School

They reached the school. It was a little place with only about thirty boys in it; for there were many different schools in Athens, and all were small. They usually consisted of one large room, but this one was a wide porch open to the sunshine with a room to one side where the pedagogues sat waiting for their charges.

The Athenians had everything in the open air—schools, law courts, theatres, everything. The sun shone almost every day of the year. Their sunshine and open-air life made them very healthy and happy people.

On the wall of the school hung the lyres of the boys, the tablets, and the cloaks. The boys sat on

benches and the teacher faced them. He was a grim-looking man. Theras was sure he could give a whipping when it was deserved, and perhaps when it was not.

The teacher frowned down on Theras.

"Can your boy sing?" he asked Pheidon.

"Well, I taught him the skolion of Harmodius and Aristogeiton," answered Pheidon. "That was a year ago. He's just a boy. He loves to romp and play."

Now it was very important in Athens for a boy to sing. For if he could sing he could get into one of the boy choruses. That meant he would march in the processions on holiday festivals, and the father of such a boy would say, "Yes, my boy is in the chorus of Dionysos" or "the chorus of Apollo."

Perhaps the chorus would win the prize for the best singing. Then all the family would be proud. Even Athens itself considered that the boys had done honor to the city.

Therefore the master asked first of all, "Can he sing?"

"But I *can* sing, Father," said Theras in his high, distinct voice. "I know the whole story of Telemachus going to sea."

The boys all nudged each other and giggled. How silly the new boy was, to be sure!

"Silence!" thundered the master. "Theras, if you can sing, sing it. Klinias, you play the lyre."

And Theras, only thinking that he must do the best he could, began at once.

He sang the story—quite a long one, too—of the

boy Telemachus in far-away Ithaca whose father, Odysseus, had been wandering the sea for many years. Wicked men thinking his father was dead came into the house and took everything they wanted, ate up all the food, and frightened the boy's mother, Penelope. This troubled Telemachus greatly. What could he do—a boy—among a company of wicked men?

Then the dear goddess Athena came to Telemachus in the likeness of a tall man and talked to the boy about his father. Telemachus, encouraged by her words, went down to the shore and got a ship. He persuaded many honest young men to go with him, and when the sun was set and all the ways were darkened, they slipped away secretly in the ship. Telemachus was going over the sea to find Odysseus, his father.

Theras sang all this in his high, clear voice, sometimes not fitting the words properly to the notes but singing in time and very earnestly. As he finished he leaped toward his father, crying out:

“And oh, Father, if you were lost on the sea, I'd take a boat and come out to find you, no matter if it took me years and years.”

“Theras, Theras,” said Pheidon, “how did you learn that song?”

“I heard you sing it,” said the boy.

“But I never sang it for you.”

“No, but when you have a feast in the aula I come down and listen at the door. That is how I learn.”

“But you are in bed.”

“I jump out of bed,” said Theras, laughing.

Now, of course, it was disobedient of Theras to

come down to his father's feasts when he was supposed to be fast asleep, but Pheidon was so pleased with what the boy had learned that he could not scold him.

However, the master noted it and determined to watch Theras sharply and punish him if he did not obey.

CHAPTER III

Learning

THEN Pheidon went away and school began. It must have been easy learning. They had no history, no geography, no drawing, no language except their own language, the Greek. They must learn to read and write, to play the lyre and sing poems. The poems were all from the two great poems of Homer.

One of these poems, the Iliad, was the story of an army of Greek fighting men who went across the sea. They had breathless adventures. When they reached Troy there was great fighting with the Trojans and many were killed. The boys loved the story. Two of the older boys knew the whole Iliad by heart. This was like knowing the whole New Testament by heart, but as the boys had little else to do, many a boy in the city learned to do that much.

The very morning Theras came, a big boy named Perimedes recited, or rather sang (for they always sang it), the whole story of the Wooden Horse. Theras grew so excited that he could hardly sit still in his seat. Now he kicked his feet against the bench, now he sat

perfectly still leaning forward to listen.

When the story was finished Theras had to write on his tablet. This was a little square board covered with smooth wax. To write upon it you had to scratch it with a sharp point. The master wrote "A B G" which is the Greek "A B C," or rather, Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, for they did not say their alphabet just as we do. Theras tried and tried, but he scratched the whole face of his tablet without making one good letter. Then the master held the tablet over burning charcoal, warmed it, and smoothed it all fair again. This was like washing a slate to begin anew. Then he rapped Theras's knuckles with his stick and told him he must do it right. So this time, beginning very carefully, Theras wrote his "A B G."

He was very glad when lunch time came, for his back was aching from sitting on the hard bench.

Athletics

For lunch the boys ate cheese and bread and honey cakes. Then came the fun of marching through the city, all of them together, to the athletic field. Each boy walked with his pedagogue. All wore their long cloaks, or himations, and walked quickly with down-cast eyes. Some of the older boys were splendid fellows and often the men they passed would notice them.

"Look at Perimedes," they would whisper. "They say he is famous at the long jump. He will jump at the Olympic Games next year."

And another man would say:

“There’s Klinias. He won a prize at Delphi playing the lyre and singing. And Telamon yonder, he’s the fastest runner of his age in Athens.”

The boys blushed at this and their pedagogues hustled them along, so that they would not hear the praise and become vain.

They passed out of the city and onward to a shady grove of olive trees. Here was a running track and some little mounds from which the boys would leap.

As soon as the boys saw these they gave a great shout. They kicked off their sandals, threw off their himations and chitons. Then they were stripped ready for their exercise. They were brown as berries, every one of them, tanned all over by the sun as most boys are tanned on neck and arms after the summer at the seashore.

The gymnastic teacher, “gymnasiarch,” they called him, was waiting.

“Come, Klinias and Telamon,” he said. “You are to run a race today.”

Now Theras had taken a fancy to Klinias. He was a handsome chap with a free-and-easy way about him. Whenever Theras had looked up during the morning he had found Klinias ready to smile at him in friendly fashion. When the other boys laughed at Theras, Klinias did not laugh. Now he stood with Telamon with foot on the line, stooping, ready for the word.

“Ready! Go!” called the gymnasiarch, and off they flew down the track. How their brown heels twinkled in the sunshine. The dust rose behind them.

Poor Klinias! Of course he could not win against Telamon. Had not those men said that Telamon was the best runner in Athens? The boys tore the air with yells.

“Telamon, Telamon!”

“Go it, Telamon!”

“Ho! *Klinias!* Look at Klinias! By Hermes, look at him!”

Sure enough, Klinias had come up even with Telamon. On, on they flew, shoulder to shoulder.

Theras shouted wildly, lost his breath. Then shouted again. Now Klinias shot ahead. Theras began to dance up and down. There was Klinias at the goal! Ho! Klinias! Klinias!

“He’s been practising like everything lately,” the boys were saying to each other. “Think of it! Beat Telamon!”

Theras was so happy he could only keep shouting, “Klinias, Klinias!” until one of the boys said:

“Listen to little Whiteback.” They called him this because he was not tanned like the rest. Theras resolved to stay out in the sun every moment until he should grow as brown as Klinias.

CHAPTER IV

Another Race

“COME, boys,” said the gymnasiarch. “Each to your own work. You younger boys come throw the disk.”

The disk was a round bronze plate. Each boy threw it in turn. He would stoop, holding the disk low; then with a short, quick run and a glorious swing of the right arm, send it flying. A pedagogue marked with a spear where each disk fell.

All this was new to Theras. Each time his turn came his disk fell short of the shortest throw.

“Oh, Whiteback, Whiteback, now watch Whiteback.”

“A cat could throw as well as that. A hen could, a chicken! A chicken just out of its shell!” The boys jeered until Theras could hardly throw at all.

After this the younger boys had to run up the little mounds and leap off. This was a great contest. But here, too, Theras’s leap was the poorest of all, and every try he made brought him a chorus of laughs and jeers. Theras felt like crying, but of course he did not

let anybody see how he felt.

"Now you are to run races, you younger boys," ordered the gymnasiarch. "Theras, you and Dryas and Koretas run first."

Suddenly Klinias was at his side.

"Look here, Theras," he said in a low voice, "haven't you ever practised running?"

"Oh, yes," answered Theras. "Lampon showed me how. I practise almost every day."

"You look as if you could run," said Klinias. "Those two boys the master has put against you are the poorest runners in the school. You ought to beat them if you try."

"Come now, hurry," called the gymnasiarch, and in an instant the three boys stood with feet on the mark.

"On your mark! Ready! Set! Go!"

With a leaping heart Theras sprang forward. He knew he must save his strength at first and run steadily. He kept his eyes on the goal.

"Klinias says I can win. I can." He did not say this but something inside of him kept saying it for him. He ran abreast with Dryas, but Koretas was still ahead.

Theras had not really tried yet. He was neither winded nor tired. He loved to run.

"Great Hermes," he thought suddenly, "there is the goal. Now I must sprint."

And with one push he shot far ahead of Koretas.

"Ho, Whiteback! Whiteback!" yelled the boys, but Theras did not hear them. He was too busy run-

ning.

“By Zeus, well done, well done,” said the gymnasiarch, patting him on the back. “A second Pheidon.”

Theras knew what he meant; for his father, Pheidon, had won the running race at Olympia before Theras was born.

Klinias came running up.

“I knew you could do it!” he cried delightedly. “You’ve got the legs and the grit.”

Surely Klinias was the most wonderful boy in the world.

Theras Tells About It

After their practice each boy had a cold shower under the fountain and the pedagogues rubbed them all down. Then, glowing warm, they put on their clothes again and walked back to the city.

“Your father said you might give these to your sisters,” said Lampon, giving Theras the two dolls which Pheidon had bought in the market.

The little girls were waiting in the aula, the sitting room of the house, an open court which had no roof. They came running with outstretched arms. They were so delighted with the dolls that they did not think to ask about school.

But his mother, Arethusa, asked, and Theras began to talk just as fast as he could.

“Oh, Mother, I wrote on the tablet—

“Oh, Mother, I ran a race—

“Oh, Mother, there’s a boy named Klinias—”

ANOTHER RACE

All through the supper he talked. Just as if a little bell were being shaken till its clapper tinkled all the time—so went Theras's tongue.

But the minute he had taken the last bite, his eyes drooped and he began to nod.

"I think I'll go to bed," he said. "I'm not exactly sleepy, but I must be up at five o'clock to go to school."

The last part of this sentence was true. School began early in Athens.

CHAPTER V

The Potter's Wheel

ONE DAY as Theras and Lampon were coming from school, whom should they meet but Pheidon.

"What, home so early?" asked the father.

"Yes, it's a half-holiday," answered Theras.

"All right," said Pheidon, laughing, "you shall spend it with me."

They were in the Street-of-the-Marble-Workers where everybody was making statues. *Clink, clink, clink*—you heard the hammers everywhere.

Pheidon led him out of this and into the Kerameikos or Potters' Quarter. Here he stopped before a shop which was open all along the front of it. What fun it was to see the man squatting at his wheel and making a pot out of soft clay.

The wheel, made of solid wood (no spokes), lay flat before him like a table, and all the while the potter kept whirling, whirling it. Then he slapped down a handful of clay on the middle of the wheel and smoothed the whirling mass into a round shape.

With both hands the potter pressed its sides, and

it grew tall; then he put one fist in the middle, and it grew hollow. All the time it quivered and trembled. The clay certainly seemed alive.

"Oh, look, look," cried Theras. "It's beginning to be a vase."

Already it had a base and a pretty slender neck. Then the man squeezed it boldly.

"Oh, Father, he's spoiled it," cried Theras.

The potter smiled.

"Do you think so, little master?" he asked, and with one more touch he changed it into a pitcher.

Surely that was magic!

Back of the potter stood many vases drying on shelves.

In the next booth was a big oven with flaming red wood fire under it. Pheidon told Theras that vases were baking in the oven as though they were so many cakes.

Farther along the street they came to a shop of finished vases painted black. A painter with a fine brush was drawing outline pictures upon the red clay vase. Afterward he would paint all the background black leaving the figures red. To Theras it was like a story book. For there was Telemachus getting into his boat and the goddess Athena standing at the prow to help him. And on the other side of the vase Telemachus had already reached Sparta and was asking old Nestor if he had seen Odysseus anywhere.

"Oh, Father, buy me that vase," said Theras.

"You mustn't want everything you see," answered Pheidon firmly. "I am going to buy that big jar over

yonder for Mother.”

This was huge, as tall as Theras, and wide-throated. It had only a black border and no pictures.

“What do you suppose Mother will do with it?” asked Pheidon.

“She’ll keep grain in it to make flour for us,” answered Theras, and strange to say, he was right.

CHAPTER VI

Two Brave Men

IT WAS a good two weeks before Pheidon could keep his promise to his son and take him to the Akropolis. Pheidon was a very busy man, and yet he really had no business. No full Athenian citizen had any business, or work of money getting, to do. To be sure, Pheidon owned a good farm at the foot of Hymettos Mountain and he owned several ships. But the farm was worked by slaves and a faithful slave superintended it. Pheidon went once a week to see it. His two ships were sailed by two shipmasters who were paid by Pheidon for doing it. Yet Pheidon worked. All his work was for the city, and for it he got no pay. This year he was judge. He must decide fairly all the disputes which came before him, for if he did not decide wisely he could be punished for his failure when his term was up.

Pheidon was also paying for the training of a chorus which would sing at the next festival, and he was helping to train it in singing. When the boys would sing, everybody in Athens would hear and enjoy the

music.

Above all Pheidon was a soldier, and had to practise running and wrestling every day, so that if Athens went to war he could fight for her. Greek fighting was all hand to hand. The strong, quick man was the best soldier.

Pheidon loved all these duties. His work was his great pleasure. He was busy all day long.

But early one bright morning he came to Theras.

"Theras," he said, "put on your sandals and your himation. This morning we go to the Akropolis. My good ship *Daphne* has come back safe to land. I am going to thank Athena."

Soon they were out among the winding and interesting streets. At every corner and turn was a statue. In front of every door was a curious Apollo statue (Apollo Agueius they were called) to guard the house and keep the folk inside from harm.

Presently in an open space they came upon statues of two men beside each other leaping forward with their swords.

"Oh, Father, are they alive?" asked Theras foolishly. For they were painted in living colors.

"Don't you know them?" asked his father. "Harmodios and Aristogeiton?"

Sure enough, they were the ones about whom Theras had sung the little song, or skolion, when he was only six years old. They had lived long ago when Athens had had a terrible king. The king, called the Tyrant, would allow no one to vote. He made all the

TWO BRAVE MEN

laws himself and everyone had to obey him. To the Athenians this was a dreadful thing. For they loved to be free, just as we Americans do.

The two young men, Harmodios and Aristogeiton, hid their swords in myrtle boughs which they carried for the festival, and standing at this very corner, sprang out and killed the Tyrant. They themselves were instantly killed by the Tyrant's guard. But all Athens was free again.

"Oh, yes—yes, I know them," answered Theras, and at once he began to sing in his strong, clear voice:

*'In a myrtle bough shall my sword be hid.
This Harmodios and Aristogeiton did,
The day they struck the Tyrant down
And made our Athens a free man's town.'*

All the way Theras kept singing and humming to himself, "a free man's town, a free man's town."

CHAPTER VII

Climbing the Akropolis

INDEED, Theras's very heart was singing this morning. He was so happy that he did not walk, but kept skipping and leaping along at his father's side. If the schoolmaster had been there he would surely have punished him.

Now the Akropolis rose up close before them and seemed to reach the sky. They began to climb it.

The Akropolis is not just a hill. It is one solid, big rock with cliffs like the sides of a house and it is flat on top like a table. Only the front side of it slants and here are marble steps.

As Pheidon and Theras mounted, the air grew fresher and sweeter. The winds from the mountains blew upon them.

"Look back now," said Pheidon. "There's our city."

Sure enough they could see the houses as small as toys and the streets winding among them. Around it a wall enclosed the city as though it were in a nest.

This wall made Athens safe. No one had guns or cannons in those days. Fighting was done with

swords, spears, arrows, and slings. So when at night the great gates of Athens were closed, no one could hurt Athens.

They climbed higher. They could see the plain and the farms beyond the city, the groves of olive trees. Olive leaves are gray, so that a grove of them seen from above looks like gray, shimmering silk.

Beyond the eastern plains rose a splendid mountain, dark blue now, the color of a ripe plum. At the top was a rim of red; for the sun was rising beyond it.

“Oh, see, see Hymettos,” cried Theras, “and the rosy-fingered dawn. Good-morning, Honey Mountain.”

He called it Honey Mountain because Hymettos’s slopes were full of bees and almost all the honey came from Hymettos. There was no sugar in those days. All Theras’s cakes and candy were sweetened with honey. Now if you have never eaten honey candy I beg you to make some. It’s so much sweeter and more delicious than sugar candy.

Never was a sea so blue, so blue. And islands were there. Oh, so many of them, lying “like polished shields on the glancing deep.” These islands belonged to Athens.

And now—oh, now, they were at the top! There they were among hundreds of statues, painted so that they looked alive, among temples with columns, among all the treasures of Athens.

Right before them stood the goddess Athena herself, giant high, made of bright bronze, five times taller than a mortal man. She wore a helmet on her

head, and carried aloft a spear. The sunlight touched the helmet so that it shone like a mirror, and the tip of the spear seemed to be afire.

"Athena, Athena!" cried Theras, stretching up his hands in prayer to her. "My dear goddess."

Shivers of delight ran up and down his back. Pheidon knew that it was only a *statue* of Athena, but to Theras it seemed the goddess herself.

I do not blame him, for so beautiful was this Athena that I would willingly go twice around the world to see her.

Young Theras, born an Athenian, is taken to Sparta by a relative when his father is lost at war. He is forced to live like a Spartan, a brutal life with no pity for those who are not physically perfect and totally obedient to Spartan control. After enduring rigorous training and repeated cruel incidents, he escapes with a Perioikoi boy and heads for his beloved Athens. Here is the story of a hard and dangerous journey including an escape from slavers.

Caroline Dale Snedeker, twice a Newbery Honor winner, captures the authentic flavor of ancient Greek culture in a story of adventure and excitement that fully illustrates the differences between the Athenian and Spartan cultures. (Grades 5+)

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