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Charon in Tears, or the Reconciliation

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(The writer asks the reader to suppose that Charon and Hermes, though engaged together in the same business, have not met since their last encounter on earth. Probably Hermes has been away on business to some other planet, say Mars.)

(Charon and Hermes meet on the University Tower)

Hermes—Why weepest thou, O Charon?

Charon—Why should I not weep, O Hermes, seeing the great cloud that has come over my reputation and that I am now in hiding like Achilles before Troy lest the eyes of men should discover me. Here I am travelling incognito not as Charon, the prince of ferrymen, but the Duke of Styx-Phlegethon.

Hermes—Most appropriate since you come of watered stock. But why weep, even if you do bear two rivers on your escutcheon?

Charon—Shame on you nimble Hermes, friend of light-fingered gentry, god of thieves, it is through you I weep. You have stolen from me my good name, you have made me outcast and accurst among gods and men, you have almost cost me my captain's certificate, you have put an end to all my social ambitions. Thanks to you, O smooth-tongued wingfoot, none of the Asphodelian 400 will now receive me. But yesterday I kicked my heels for hours in Poseidon's ante-room while every slave-dealing, tar-smelling, bottled-nose shade that ever sailed from Aegina and committed murder in the Cyclades was given audience. The Argonautic heroes have expelled me from the Navigators' Club, every dockyard in Hades has raised its prices for naval supplies 200 per cent., the Olympic Victor's Aquatic Association no longer asks me to be judge at their water sports and refused the entry of my yacht in the annual race for the acanthus-wreathed cup given by our leading ambrosia manufacturer. The Holy-Horror Priesthood of the Festive Bowl have passed a vote of censure on me, The Acherontian Monthly refuses my stories, men ostracize me, children throw stones at me from the bank and every young water-nymph whom I used to chuck under the chin and call 'pretty dear' now runs from me as from a satyr and cries, "Fie on you, old bald-head!"

Hermes—Stop, stop for Pluto's sake! Sailors to the pumps! Such a tide of raging grievances sweeps over you that, methinks, unless you and I set briskly to work bailing, you will sink boat and all! Pray tell me how this came about and how am I to blame?

Charon—O Socrates, lock thy doors henceforth, Hermes has stolen thy irony. My prince of messengers it needs no messenger to tell you this. Were your ears stuffed with wax like the sailors of Odysseus the augur of Nemesis had long ago let in the truth of thy crime. Thou art no blameless Bellerophon, no falsely accused Palamedes but a lying Sinon, a Mars caught red-handed. Did you not, 15 short months ago, lead me to this cursed spot, my guide but not comforter or friend? Did you not lead me in safety through the purlicious of the water-front and the mazes of the market, only, like a Prometheus vulture to tear my vitals upon this Caucasian rock?

By your cunning answers you lured me on to flout the archons of this land, insult their priests and blaspheme their gods. This coming to their ears drove them to fury, sedition and, worst of all, litigation. The whole land seethed and foamed like the sea stirred by Poseidon's fork, wigs danced on the green and harpies and birds of prey from neighboring states day after day flew over the land with shrill cries, befouling the holy places and scenting blood and slaughter. And for this they blamed old Charon, honest, innocent old Charon, virtuous, upright old Charon, the foe of all sedition! Alas! Alas! Now I know the truth of what you said to me years ago when I climbed up on Pelion and Ossa. "A man cannot see sights and not run dangers."

On my return home I was disgraced. No Hades brass band turned out to welcome me, no deputation received me with an illuminated address. I went to my lonely house saddened, unattended, discountenanced. The next day I was summoned before Rhadamanthus and Aeacus on a charge that I "did as chief plenipotentiary of Hades to earth behave so scurrilously and indiscreetly as to endanger the diplomatic relations of two great states and to further the belief that Pluto's subjects were shady characters and not gentlemen of delicacy and tact." I pleaded innocence, but it was with difficulty that I escaped free of the law, but blasted in reputation. The Harbor Commissioners thought of cancelling my license, but were content with depriving me of my pension. Hades ostracized me, the Olympi-