

"Yes, Malchus, follow your own devices. Carthage, when she flung you in prison and would have put you to a disgraceful death, forfeited all further claim upon you. You have rendered her great services, you have risked your life over and over again in her cause, you have repaid tenfold the debt which you incurred when she gave you birth. You are free now to carry your sword where you will. I shall deeply regret your loss, but your father has gone and many another true friend of mine, and it is but one more in the list of those I have lost. Follow your own wishes, and live in that freedom which you will never attain in the service of Carthage."

The next day the marriage of Malchus and Clotilde took place. Hannibal himself joined their hands and prayed the gods to bless their union. Three weeks later Hannibal arranged that a body of a hundred Carthaginian horse should accompany Malchus to the north, where he would endeavour to raise the Gaulish tribes. They were to cross into Apulia, to travel up the east coast until past the ranges of the Apennines, and then make their way across the plains to the Alps. A dozen officers accompanied him; these were to aid him in his negotiations with the chiefs, and in organizing the new forces, should his efforts be successful.

To the great joy of Malchus, on the very evening before he started Nessus arrived in the camp. He had, when Malchus was at Rome, been employed with the other Carthaginian soldiers on the fortifications. Malchus had once or twice seen him as, with the others, he was marched from the prison to the walls, and had exchanged a few words with him. He had told him that he intended to escape, but could not say when he should find an opportunity to do so; but that if at any time a month passed without his seeing him, Nessus would know that he had gone.