

Cleopatra — Volume 02 eBook

Cleopatra — Volume 02 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER IV.

The house facing the garden of the Paneum, where Barine lived, was the property of her mother, who had inherited it from her parents. The artist Leonax, the young beauty's father, son of the old philosopher Didymus, had died long before.

After Barine's unhappy marriage with Philostratus was dissolved, she had returned to her mother, who managed the affairs of the household. She too, belonged to a family of scholars and had a brother who had won high repute as a philosopher, and had directed the studies of the young Octavianus. This had occurred long before the commencement of the hostility which separated the heirs of Caesar and Mark Antony. But even after the latter had deserted Octavia, the sister of Octavianus, to return to Cleopatra, the object of his love, and there was an open breach between the two rivals for the sovereignty of the world, Antony had been friendly to Arius and borne him no grudge for his close relations to his rival. The generous Roman had even given his enemy's former tutor a fine house, to show him that he was glad to have him in Alexandria and near his person.

The widow Berenike, Barine's mother, was warmly attached to her only brother, who often joined her daughter's guests. She was a quiet, modest woman whose happiest days had been passed in superintending the education of her children, Barine, the fiery Hippias, and the quiet Helena, who for several years had lived with her grandparents and, with faithful devotion, assumed the duty of caring for them. She had been more easily guided than the two older children; for the boy's aspiring spirit had often drawn him beyond his mother's control, and the beautiful, vivacious girl had early possessed charms so unusual that she could not remain unnoticed.

Hippias had studied oratory, first in Alexandria and later in Athens and Rhodes. Three years before, his uncle Arius had sent him with excellent letters of introduction to Rome to become acquainted with the life of the capital and try whether, in spite of his origin, his brilliant gifts of eloquence would forward his fortunes there.

Two miserable years with an infamous, unloved husband had changed the wild spirits of Barine's childhood into the sunny cheerfulness now one of her special charms. Her mother was conscious of having desired only her best good in uniting the girl of sixteen to Philostratus, whom the grandfather Didymus then considered a very promising young man, and whose advancement, in addition to his own talents, his brother Alexas, Antony's favourite, promised to aid. She had believed that this step would afford the gay, beautiful girl the best protection from the perils of the corrupt capital; but the worthless husband had caused both mother and daughter much care and sorrow, while his brother Alexas, who constantly pursued his young sister-in-law with insulting attentions, was the source of almost equal trouble. Berenike often gazed in silent astonishment at the child, who, spite of such sore grief and humiliation, had preserved

the innocent light-heartedness which made her seem as if life had offered her only thornless roses.

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Her father, Leonax, had been one of the most distinguished artists of the day, and Barine had inherited from him the elastic artist temperament which speedily rebounds from the heaviest pressure. To him also she owed the rare gift of song, which had been carefully cultivated and had already secured her the first position in the woman's chorus at the festival of the great goddesses of the city. Every one was full of her praises, and after she had sung the Yalemos in the palace over the waxen image of the favourite of the gods, slain by the boar, her name was eagerly applauded. To have heard her was esteemed a privilege, for she sang only in her own house or at religious ceremonials "for the honour of the gods."

The Queen, too, had heard her, and, after the Adonis festival, her uncle Arius had presented her to Antony, who expressed his admiration with all the fervour of his frank nature, and afterwards came to her house a second time, accompanied by his son Antyllus. Doubtless he would have called on her frequently and tested upon her heart his peculiar power over women, had he not been compelled to leave the city on the day after his last visit.

Berenike had reproved her brother for bringing the Queen's lover to Barine, for her anxiety was increased by the repeated visits of Antony's son, and still more aroused by that of Caesarion, who was presented by Antyllus.

These youths were not numbered among the guests whose presence she welcomed and whose conversation afforded her pleasure. It was flattering that they should honour her simple home by their visits, but she knew that Caesarion came without his tutor's knowledge, and perceived, by the expression of his eyes, what drew him to her daughter. Besides, Berenike, in rearing the two children, who had been the source of so much anxiety had lost the joyous confidence which had characterized her own youth. Whenever life presented any new phase, she saw the dark side first. If a burning candle stood before her, the shadow of the candlestick caught her eye before the light. Her whole mental existence became a chain of fears, but the kind-hearted woman loved her children too tenderly to permit them to see it. Only it was a relief to her heart when some of her evil forebodings were realized, to say that she had foreseen it all.

No trace of this was legible in her face, a countenance still pretty and pleasing in its unruffled placidity. She talked very little, but what she did say was sensible, and proved how attentively she understood how to listen. So she was welcome among Barine's guests. Even the most distinguished received something from her, because he felt that the quiet woman understood him.

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Before Barine had returned that evening, something had occurred which made her mother doubly regret the accident to her brother Arius the day before. On his way home from his sister's he had been run over by a chariot darting recklessly along the Street of the King, and was carried, severely injured, to his home, where he now lay helpless and fevered. Nor did it lessen his sufferings to hear his two sons threaten to take vengeance on the reckless fellow who had wrought their father this mischief, for he had reason to believe Antyllus the perpetrator of the deed, and a collision between the youths and the son of Antony could only result in fresh disaster to him and his, especially as the young Roman seemed to have inherited little of his father's magnanimous generosity. Yet Arius could not be vexed with his sons for stigmatizing, in the harshest terms, the conduct of the man who had gone on without heeding the accident. He had cautioned his sister against the utterly unbridled youth whose father he had himself brought to her house. With what good reason he had raised his voice in warning was now evident. At sunset that very day several guests had arrived as usual, followed by Antyllus, a youth of nineteen. When the door-keeper refused to admit him, he had rudely demanded to see Barine, thrust aside the prudent old porter, who endeavoured to detain him, and, in spite of his protestations, forced his way into his dead master's work-room, where the ladies usually received their visitors. Not until he found it empty would he retire, and then he first fastened a bouquet of flowers he had brought to a statue of Eros in burnt clay, which stood there. Both the porter and Barine's waiting-maid declared that he was drunk; they saw it when he staggered away with the companions who had waited for him in the garden outside.

This unseemly and insulting conduct filled Berenike with the deepest indignation. It must not remain unpunished, and, while waiting for her daughter, she imagined what evil consequences might ensue if Antyllus were forbidden the house and accused to his tutor, and how unbearable, on the other hand, he might become if they omitted to do so.

She was full of sad presentiments, and as, with such good reason, she feared the worst, she cherished a faint hope that her daughter might perhaps bring home some pleasant tidings; for she had had the experience that events which had filled her with the utmost anxiety sometimes resulted in good fortune.

At last Barine appeared, and it was indeed long since she had clasped her mother in her arms with such joyous cheerfulness.

The widow's troubled heart grew lighter. Her daughter must have met with something unusually gratifying, she looked so happy, although she had surely heard what had happened here; for her cloak was laid aside and her hair newly arranged, so she must have been to her chamber, where she was dressed by her loquacious Cyprian slave, who certainly could not keep to herself anything that was worth mentioning. The nimble maid had shown her skill that day.

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"Any stranger would take her for nineteen," thought her mother. "How becoming the white robe and blue-bordered peplum are to her; how softly the azure bombyx ribbon is wound around the thick waves of her hair! Who would believe that no curling-irons had touched the little golden locks that rest so gracefully on her brow, that no paint-brush had any share in producing the rose and white hues on her cheek, or the alabaster glimmer of her arms? Such beauty easily becomes a Danae dower; but it is a magnificent gift of the gods! Yet why did she put on the bracelet which Antony gave her after his last visit? Scarcely on my account. She can hardly expect Dion at so late an hour. Even while I am rejoicing in the sight of her beauty, some new misfortune may be impending."

So ran the current of her thoughts while her daughter was gaily describing what she had witnessed at her grandfather's. Meanwhile she had nestled comfortably among the cushions of a lounge; and when she mentioned Antyllus's unseemly conduct, she spoke of it, with a carelessness that startled Berenike, as a vexatious piece of rudeness which must not occur again.

"But who is to prevent it?" asked the mother anxiously.

"Who, save ourselves?" replied Barine. "He will not be admitted."

"And if he forced his way in?"

Barine's big blue eyes flashed angrily, and there was no lack of decision in her voice as she exclaimed, "Let him try it!"

"But what power have we to restrain the son of Antony?" asked Berenike. "I do not know."

"I do," replied her daughter. "I will be brief, for a visitor is coming."

"So late?" asked the mother anxiously.

"Archibius wishes to discuss an important matter with us."

The lines on the brow of the older woman smoothed, but it contracted again as she exclaimed inquiringly: "Important business at so unusual an hour! Ah, I have expected nothing good since early morning! On my way to my brother's a raven flew up before me and fluttered towards the left into the garden."

"But I," replied Barine, after receiving, in reply to her inquiry, a favourable report concerning her uncle's health—"I met seven—there were neither more nor less; for seven is the best of numbers—seven snow-white doves, which all flew swiftly towards the right. The fairest of all came first, bearing in its beak a little basket which contained the

power that will keep Antony's son away from us. Don't look at me in such amazement, you dear receptacle of every terror."

"But, child, you said that Archibius was coming so late to discuss an important matter," rejoined the mother.

"He must be here soon."

"Then cease this talking in riddles; I do not guess them quickly."

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"You will solve this one," returned Barine; "but we really have no time to lose. So-my beautiful dove was a good, wise thought, and what it carried in its basket you shall hear presently. You see, mother, many will blame us, though here and there some one may pity; but this state of things must not continue. I feel it more and more plainly with each passing day; and several years must yet elapse ere this scruple becomes wholly needless. I am too young to welcome as a guest every one whom this or that man presents to me. True, our reception-hall was my father's work-room and you, my own estimable, blameless mother, are the hostess here; but though superior to me in every respect, you are so modest that you shield yourself behind your daughter until the guests think of you only when you are absent. So those who seek us both merely say, 'I am going to visit Barine'—and there are too many who say this— I can no longer choose, and this thought—"

"Child! child!" interrupted her mother joyfully, "what god met you as you went out this morning?"

"Surely you know," she answered gaily; "it was seven doves, and, when I took the little basket from the bill of the first and prettiest one, it told me a story. Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes, yes; but be quick, or we shall be interrupted."

Then Barine leaned farther back among the cushions, lowered her long lashes, and began: "Once upon a time there was a woman who had a garden in the most aristocratic quarter of the city—here near the Paneum, if you please. In the autumn, when the fruit was ripening, she left the gate open, though all her neighbours did the opposite. To keep away unbidden lovers of her nice figs and dates, she fastened on the gate a tablet bearing the inscription: 'All may enter and enjoy the sight of the garden; but the dogs will bite any one who breaks a flower, treads upon the grass, or steals the fruit.'

"The woman had nothing but a lap-dog, and that did not always obey her. But the tablet fulfilled its purpose; for at first none came except her neighbours in the aristocratic quarter. They read the threat, and probably without it would have respected the property of the woman who so kindly opened the door to them. Thus matters went on for a time, until first a beggar came, and then a Phoenician sailor, and a thievish Egyptian from the Rhakotis—neither of whom could read. So the tablet told them nothing; and as, moreover, they distinguished less carefully between mine and thine, one trampled the turf and another snatched from the boughs a flower or fruit. More and more of the rabble came, and you can imagine what followed. No one punished them for the crime, for they did not fear the barking of the lap-dog, and this gave even those who could read, courage not to heed the warning. So the woman's pretty garden soon lost its peculiar charm; and the fruit, too, was stolen. When the rain at last washed the inscription from the tablet, and saucy boys scrawled on it, there was no harm done; for

the garden no longer offered any attractions, and no one who looked into it cared to enter. Then the owner closed her gate like the neighbours, and the next year she again enjoyed the green grass and the bright hues of the flowers. She ate her fruit herself, and the lap-dog no longer disturbed her by its barking.”

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"That is," said her mother, "if everybody was as courteous and as well bred as Gorgias, Lysias, and the others, we would gladly continue to receive them. But since there are rude fellows like Antyllus—"

"You have understood the story correctly," Barine interrupted. "We are certainly at liberty to invite to our house those who have learned to read our inscription. To-morrow visitors will be informed that we can no longer receive them as before."

"Antyllus's conduct affords an excellent pretext," her mother added. "Every fair-minded person must understand—"

"Certainly," said Barine, "and if you, shrewdest of women, will do your part—"

"Then for the first time we can act as we please in our own home. Believe me, child—if you only do not—"

"No ifs!—not this time!" cried the young beauty, raising her hand beseechingly. "It gives me such delight to think of the new life, and if matters come to pass as I hope and wish—then—do not you also believe, mother, that the gods owe me reparation?"

"For what?" asked the deep voice of Archibius, who had entered unannounced, and was now first noticed by the widow and her daughter.

Barine hastily rose and held out both hands to her old friend, exclaiming, "Since they bring you to us, they are already beginning the payment."

CHAPTER V.

An artist, especially a great artist, finds it easy to give his house an attractive appearance. He desires comfort in it, and only the beautiful is comfortable to him. Whatever would disturb harmony offends his eye, and to secure the noblest ornament of his house he need not invite any stranger to cross its threshold. The Muse, the best of assistants, joins him unbidden.

Leonax, Barine's father, had been thus aided to transform the interior of his house into a very charming residence. He had painted on the walls of his own work-room incidents in the life of Alexander the Great, the founder of his native city, and on the frieze a procession of dancing Cupids.

Here Barine now received her guests, and the renown of these paintings was not one of the smallest inducements which had led Antony to visit the young beauty and to take his son, in whom he wished to awaken at least a fleeting pleasure in art. He also knew how to prize her beauty and her singing, but the ardent passion which had taken possession of him in his mature years was for Cleopatra alone. He whose easily won heart and



susceptible fancy had urged him from one commonplace love to another had been bound by the Queen with chains of indestructible and supernatural power. By her side a Barine seemed to him merely a work of art endowed with life and a voice that charmed the ear. Yet he owed her some pleasant hours, and he could not help bestowing gifts upon any one to whom he was indebted for anything pleasant. He liked to be considered the most generous spendthrift

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on earth, and the polished bracelet set with a gem, on which was carved Apollo playing on his lyre, surrounded by the listening Muses, looked very simple, but was really an ornament of priceless value, for the artist who made it was deemed the best stone-cutter in Alexandria in the time of Philadelphus, and each one of the tiny figures sculptured on the bit of onyx scarcely three fingers wide was a carefully executed masterpiece of the most exquisite beauty. Antony had chosen it because he deemed it a fitting gift for the woman whose song had pleased him. He had not thought of asking its value; indeed, only a connoisseur would have perceived it; and as the circlet was not showy and well became her beautiful arm, Barine liked to wear it.

Had not the war taken him away, Antony's second visit would certainly not have been his last. Besides the singing which enthralled him, the conversation had been gay and brilliant, and in addition to Leonax's paintings, he had seen other beautiful works of art which the former had obtained by exchanging with many distinguished companions.

Nor was there any lack of plastic creations in the spacious apartment, to which the flashing of the water poured by a powerful man from the goatskin bottle on his shoulder into a shell lent a special charm.

The master who had carved this stooping Nubian had also created the much-discussed statues of the royal lovers. The clay Eros, who with bent knee was aiming at a victim visible to himself alone, was also his work. Antony, when paying his second visit, had laughingly laid the garland he wore before "the greatest of human conquerors," while a short time ago his son Antyllus had rudely thrust his bouquet of flowers into the opening of the curved right arm which was drawing the string. In doing so the statue had been injured. Now the flowers lay unheeded upon the little altar at the end of the large room, lighted only by a single lamp; for the ladies had left it with their guest. They were in Barine's favourite apartment, a small room, where there were several pictures by her dead father.

Antyllus's bouquet, and the damage to the clay statue of Eros, had played a prominent part in the conversation between the three, and rendered Archibius's task easier.

Berenike had greeted the guest with a complaint of the young Roman's recklessness and unseemly conduct, to which Barine added the declaration that they had now sacrificed enough to Zeus Xenios, the god of hospitality. She meant to devote her future life to the modest household gods and to Apollo, to whom she owed the gift of song.

Archibius had listened silently in great surprise until she had finished her explanation and declared that henceforth she intended to live alone with her mother, instead of having her father's workshop filled with guests.

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The young beauty's vivid imagination transported her to this new and quieter life. But, spite of the clear and glowing hues in which she described her anticipations, her grey-haired listener could not have believed in them fully. A subtle smile sometimes flitted over his grave, somewhat melancholy face—that of a man who has ceased to wrestle in the arena of life, and after severe conflict now preferred to stand among the spectators and watch others win or lose the prize of victory. Doubtless the wounds which he had received still ached, yet his sorrowful experiences did not prevent his being an attentive observer. The expression of his clear eyes showed that he mentally shared whatever aroused his sympathy. Whoever understood how to listen thus, and, moreover—the prominence of the brow above the nose showed it—was also a trained thinker, could not fail to be a good counsellor, and as such he was regarded by many, and first of all by the Queen.

The wise deliberation, which was one of his characteristic traits, showed itself on this occasion; for though he had come to persuade Barine try a country residence, he refrained from doing until she had exhausted the story of her own affairs and inquired the important cause of his visit.

In the principal matter his request was granted ere he made it. So he could begin with the query whether the mother and daughter did not think that the transition to the new mode of life could be effected more easily if they were absent from the city a short time. It would awaken comment they should close their house against guests on the morrow, and as the true reason could not be given, many would be offended. If, on the contrary, they could resolve to quit the capital for a few weeks, many, it is true, would lament their decision, but what was allotted to all alike could be resented by no one.

Berenike eagerly assented, but Barine grew thoughtful. Then Archibius begged her to speak frankly, and after she had asked where they could he proposed his country estate.

His keen grey eyes had perceived that something, bound her so firmly to the city that in the case of a true woman like Barine it must be an affair of the heart. He had evidently judged correctly, for, at his prediction that there would be no lack of visits from her dearest friends, she raised her head, her blue eyes sparkled brightly, and when Archibius paused she to her mother, exclaiming gaily "We will go!"

Again the vivid imagination daughter conjured the future before her in distinct outlines. She alone knew whom she meant when she spoke of the visitor she expected at Irenia, Archibius's estate. The name meant "The place of peace," and it pleased her.

Archibius listened smilingly; but when she began to assign him also a part in driving the little Sardinian horses and pursuing the birds, he interrupted her with the statement that whether he could speedily allow himself a pleasure which he should so keenly enjoy—that of breathing the country air with such charming guests—would depend upon the

fate of another. Thank the gods, he had been able to come here with a lighter heart, because, just before his departure, he had heard of a splendid victory gained by the Queen. The ladies would perhaps permit him to remain a little longer, as he was expecting confirmation of the news.

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It was evident that he awaited it in great suspense, and that his heart was by no means free from anxiety.

Berenike shared it, and her pleasant face, which had hitherto reflected her delight at her daughter's sensible resolution, was now clouded with care as Archibius began: "The object of my presence here? You are making it very easy for me to attain it. If I deemed it honest, I could now conceal the fact that I had sought you to induce you to leave the city. I see no peril from the boyish insolence of the son of Antony. The point in question, child, is merely to put yourself out of the reach of Caesarion."

"If you could place me in the moon, it would please me best, as far as he is concerned," replied Barine eagerly. "That is just what induced me to change our mode of life, since my door cannot be closed against the boy who, though still under a tutor, uses his rank as a key to open it. And just think of being compelled to address that dreamer, with eyes pleading for help, by the title of 'king'!"

"Yet what mighty impulse might not be slumbering in the breast of a son of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra?" said Archibius. "And passion—I know, my child, that it is no fault of yours—has now awakened within him. Whatever the result may be, it must fill his mother's heart with anxiety. That is why it is needful to hasten your departure, and to keep your destination a secret. He will attempt no violence; but—he is the child of his parents—and some unexpected act may be anticipated from him."

"You startle me!" cried Barine. "You transform the cooing dove which entered my house into a dangerous griffin."

"As such you may regard him," said the other, warningly. "You will be a welcome guest, Barine, but I invited you, whom I have loved from your earliest childhood, the daughter of my dearest friend, not merely to do you a service at Irenia, but to save from grief or even annoyance the person to whom—who is not aware of it—I owe everything."

The words conveyed to both ladies the knowledge that, though they were dear to Archibius, he would sacrifice them, and with them, perhaps, all the rest of the world, for the peace and happiness of the Queen.

Barine had expected nothing else. She knew that Cleopatra had made the philosopher's son a wealthy man and the owner of extensive estates; but she also felt that the source of his loyal devotion to the Queen, over whom he watched like a tender father, was due to other causes. Cleopatra prized him also. Had he been ambitious, he could have stood at the helm of the ship of state, as Epitrop long ago, but—the whole city knew it—he had more than once refused to accept a permanent office, because he believed that he could serve his mistress better as an unassuming, unnoticed counsellor. Berenike had told Barine that the relations between Cleopatra and Archibius dated back to their childhood, but she had learned no particulars. Various rumours

were afloat which, in the course of time, had been richly adorned and interwoven with anecdotes, and Barine naturally lent the most ready credence to those which asserted that the princess, in her earliest youth, had cherished a childish love for the philosopher's son. Now her friend's conduct led her to believe it.

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When Archibius paused, the young beauty assured him that she understood him; and as the alabaster hanging lamp and a three-branched light cast a brilliant glow upon the portrait which her father had painted of the nineteen-year-old Queen, and afterwards copied for his own household, she pointed to it, and, pursuing the current of her own thoughts, asked the question:

“Was she not marvellously beautiful at that time?”

“As your father’s work represents her,” was the reply. “Leonax painted the portrait of Octavia, on the opposite side, the same year, and perhaps the artist deemed the Roman the fairer woman.” He pointed as he spoke to a likeness of Octavianus’s sister, whom Barine’s father had painted as the young wife of Marcellus, her first husband.

“Oh, no!” said Berenike. “I still remember perfectly how Leonax returned in those days. What woman might not have been jealous of his enthusiasm for the Roman Hera? At that time I had not seen the portrait, and when I asked whether he thought Octavia more beautiful than the Queen, for whom Eros had inflamed his heart, as in the case of most of the beautiful women he painted, he exclaimed—you know his impetuous manner—‘Octavia stands foremost in the ranks of those who are called “beautiful” or “less beautiful”; the other, Cleopatra, stands alone, and can be compared with no one.’”

Archibius bent his head in assent, then said firmly, “But, as a child, when I first saw her, she would have been the fairest even in the dance of the young gods of love.”

“How old was she then?” asked Barine, eagerly.

“Eight years,” he answered. “How far in the past it is, yet I have not forgotten a single hour! “Barine now earnestly entreated him to tell them the story of those days, but Archibius gazed thoughtfully at the floor for some time ere he raised his head and answered: “Perhaps it will be well if you learn more of the woman for whose sake I ask a sacrifice at your hands. Arius is your brother and uncle. He stands near to Octavianus, for he was his intellectual guide, and I know that he reveres the Roman’s sister, Octavia, as a goddess. Antony is now struggling with Octavianus for the sovereignty of the world. Octavia succumbed in the conflict against the woman of whom you desire to hear. It is not my place to judge her, but I may instruct and warn. Roman nations burn incense to Octavia, and, when Cleopatra’s name is uttered, they veil their faces indignantly. Here in Alexandria many imitate them. Whoever upholds shining purity may hope to win a share of the radiance emanating from it. They call Octavia the lawful wife, and Cleopatra the criminal who robbed her of her husband’s heart.”

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"Not I!" exclaimed Barine eagerly. "How often I have heard my uncle say that Antony and Cleopatra were fired with the most ardent love for each other! Never did the arrows of Eros pierce two hearts more deeply. Then it became necessary to save the state from civil war and bloodshed. Antony consented to form an alliance with his rival, and, as security for the sincerity of the reconciliation, he gave his hand in marriage to Octavia, whose first husband, Marcellus, had just died—his hand, I say, only his hand, for his heart was captive to the Queen of Egypt. And if Antony was faithless to the wife to whom statecraft had bound him, he kept his pledge to the other, who had an earlier, better title. If Cleopatra did not give up the man to whom she had sworn fidelity forever, she was right—a thousand times right! In my eyes—no matter how often my mother rebukes me—Cleopatra, in the eyes of the immortals, is and always will be Antony's real wife; the other, though on her marriage day no custom, no word, no stroke of the stylus, no gesture was omitted, is the intruder in a bond of love which rejoices the gods, however it may anger mortals, and—forgive me, mother—virtuous matrons."

Berenike had listened with blushing cheeks to her vivacious daughter; now with timid earnestness she interrupted: "I know that those are the views of the new times; that Antony in the eyes of the Egyptians, and probably also according to their customs, is the rightful husband of the Queen. I know, too, that you are both against me. Yet Cleopatra is in reality a Greek, and therefore—eternal gods!—I can sincerely pity her; but the marriage has been solemnized, and I cannot blame Octavia. She rears and cherishes, as if they were her own, the children of her faithless husband and Fulvia, his first wife, who have no claim upon her. It is more than human to take the stones from the path of the man who became her foe, as she does. No woman in Alexandria can pray more fervently than I that Cleopatra and her friend may conquer Octavianus. His cold nature, highly as my brother esteems him, is repellent to me. But when I gaze at Octavia's beautiful, chaste, queenly, noble countenance, the mirror of true womanly purity—"

"You can rejoice," Archibius added, completing the sentence, and laying his right hand soothingly on the arm of the excited woman, "only it would be advisable at this time to put the portrait elsewhere, and rest satisfied with confiding your opinion of Octavia to your brother and a friend as reliable as myself. If we conquer, such things may pass; if not—The messenger tarries long—"

Here Barine again entreated him to use the time. She had only once had the happiness of being noticed by the Queen—just after her song at the Adonis festival. Then Cleopatra had advanced to thank her. She said only a few kind words, but in a voice which seemed to penetrate the inmost depths of her heart and bind her with invisible threads. Meanwhile Barine's eyes met those of her sovereign, and at first they roused an ardent desire to press her lips even on the hem of her robe, but afterwards she felt as if a venomous serpent had crawled out of the most beautiful flower.

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Here Archibius interrupted her with the remark that he remembered perfectly how, after the song, Antony had addressed her at the same time as the Queen, and Cleopatra lacked no feminine weakness.

“Jealousy?” asked Barine, in astonishment. “I was not presumptuous enough to admit it. I secretly feared that Alexas, the brother of Philostratus, had prejudiced her. He is as ill-disposed towards me as the man who was my husband. But everything connected with those two is so base and shameful that I will not allow it to cloud this pleasant hour. Yet the fear that Alexas might have slandered me to the Queen is not groundless.

“He is as shrewd as his brother, and through Antony, into whose favour he ingratiated himself, is always in communication with Cleopatra. He went to the war with him.”

“I learned that too late, and am utterly powerless against Antony,” replied Archibius.

“But was it not natural that I should fear he had prejudiced the Queen?” asked Barine. “At any rate, I imagined that I detected a hostile expression in her eyes, and it repelled me, though at first I had been so strongly attracted towards her.”

“And had not that other stepped between you, you could not have turned from her again!” said Archibius. “The first time I saw her I was but a mere boy, and she—as I have already said—a child eight years old.”

Barine nodded gratefully to Archibius, brought the distaff to her mother, poured water into the wine in the mixing vessel, and after at first leaning comfortably back among the cushions, she soon bent forward in a listening attitude, with her elbow propped on her knee, and her chin supported by her hand. Berenike drew the flax from the distaff, at first slowly, then faster and faster.

“You know my country-house in the Kanopus,” the guest began. “It was originally a small summer palace belonging to the royal family, and underwent little change after we moved into it. Even the garden is unaltered. It was full of shady old trees. Olympus, the leech, had chosen this place, that my father might complete within its walls the work of education entrusted to him. You shall hear the story. At that time Alexandria was in a state of turmoil, for Rome had not recognized the King, and ruled over us like Fate, though it had not acknowledged the will by which the miserable Alexander bequeathed Egypt to him like a field or a slave.

“The King of Egypt, who called himself ‘the new Dionysus,’ was a weak man, whose birth did not give him the full right to the sovereignty. You know that the people called him the ‘fluteplayer.’ He really had no greater pleasure than to hear music and listen to his own performances. He played by no means badly on more than one instrument, and, moreover, as a reveller did honour to the other name. Whoever kept sober at the

festival of Dionysus, whose incarnate second self he regarded himself, incurred his deepest displeasure.

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“The flute-player’s wife, Queen Tryphoena, and her oldest daughter—she bore your name, Berenike—ruined his life. Compared with them, the King was worthy and virtuous. What had become of the heroes and the high-minded princes of the house of Ptolemy? Every passion and crime had found a home in their palaces!

“The flute-player, Cleopatra’s father, was by no means the worst. He was a slave to his own caprices; no one had taught him to bridle his passions. Where it served his purpose, even death was summoned to his aid; but this was a custom of the last sovereigns of his race. In one respect he was certainly superior to most of them—he still possessed a capacity to feel a loathing for the height of crime, to believe in virtue and loftiness of soul, and the possibility of implanting them in youthful hearts. When a boy, he had been under the influence of an excellent teacher, whose precepts had lingered in his memory and led him to determine to withdraw his favourite children—two girls—from their mother’s sway, at least as far as possible.

“I learned afterwards that it had been his desire to confide the princesses wholly to my parents’ care. But an invincible power opposed this. Though Greeks might be permitted to instruct the royal children in knowledge, the Egyptians would not yield the right to their religious education. The leech Olympus—you know the good old man—had insisted that the delicate Cleopatra must spend the coldest winter months in Upper Egypt, where the sky was never clouded, and the summer near the sea in a shady garden. The little palace at Kanopus was devoted to this purpose.

“When we moved there it was entirely unoccupied, but the princesses were soon to be brought to us. During the winter Olympus preferred the island of Philae, on the Nubian frontier, because the famous Temple of Isis was there, and its priests willingly undertook to watch over the children.

“The Queen would not listen to any of these plans. Leaving Alexandria and spending the winter on a lonely island in the tropics was an utterly incomprehensible idea. So she let the King have his way, and no doubt was glad to be relieved from the care of the children; for, even after her royal husband’s exile from the city, she never visited her daughters. True, death allowed her only a short time to do so.

“Her oldest daughter, Berenike, who became her successor, followed her example, and troubled herself very little about her sisters. I heard afterwards that she was very glad to know that they were in charge of persons who filled their minds with other thoughts than the desire to rule. Her brothers were reared at Lochias by our countryman Theodotus, under the eyes of their guardian, Pothinus.

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“Our family life was of course wholly transformed by the reception of the royal children. In the first place, we moved from our house in the Museum Square into the little palace at Kanopus, and the big, shady garden delighted us. I remember, as though it were but yesterday, the morning—I was then a boy of fifteen—when my father told us that two of the King’s daughters would soon become members of the household. There were three of us children—Charmian, who went to the war with the Queen, because Iras, our niece, was ill; I myself; and Straton, who died long ago. We were urged to treat the princesses with the utmost courtesy and consideration, and we perceived that their reception really demanded respect; for the palace, which we had found empty and desolate, was refurnished from roof to foundation.

“The day before they were expected horses, chariots, and litters came, while boats and a splendid state galley, fully manned, arrived by sea. Then a train of male and female slaves appeared, among them two fat eunuchs.

“I can still see the angry look with which my father surveyed all these people. He drove at once to the city, and on his return his clear eyes were as untroubled as ever. A court official accompanied him, and only that portion of the useless amount of luggage and number of persons that my father desired remained.

“The princesses were to come the next morning—it was at the end of February—flowers were blooming in the grass and on the bushes, while the foliage of the trees glittered with the fresh green which the rising sap gives to the young leaves. I was sitting on a strong bough of a sycamore-tree, which grew opposite to the house, watching for them. Their arrival was delayed and, as I gazed meanwhile over the garden, I thought it must surely please them, for not a palace in the city had one so beautiful.

“At last the litters appeared; they had neither runners nor attendants, as my father had requested, and when the princesses alighted—both at the same moment—I knew not which way to turn my eyes first, for the creature that fluttered like a dragon-fly rather than stepped from the first litter, was not a girl like other mortals—she seemed like a wish, a hope. When the dainty, beautiful creature turned her head hither and thither, and at last gazed questioningly, as if beseeching help, into the faces of my father and mother, who stood at the gate to receive her, it seemed to me that such must have been the aspect of Psyche when she stood pleading for mercy at the throne of Zeus.

“But it was worth while to look at the other also. Was that Cleopatra? She might have been the elder, for she was as tall as her sister, but how utterly unlike! From the waving hair to every movement of the hands and body the former—it was Cleopatra—had seemed to me as if she were flying. Everything about the second figure, on the contrary, was solid, nay, even seemed to offer

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positive resistance. She sprang from the litter and alighted on the ground with both feet at once, clung firmly to the door, and haughtily flung back her head, crowned with a wealth of dark locks. Her complexion was pink and white, and her blue eyes sparkled brightly enough; but the expression with which she gazed at my parents was defiant rather than questioning, and as she glanced around her red lips curled scornfully as though she deemed her surroundings despicable and unworthy of her royal birth.

“This irritated me against the seven-year-old child, yet I said to myself that, though it was very beautiful here—thanks to my father’s care— perhaps it appeared plain and simple when compared with the marble, gold, and purple of the royal palace whence she came. Her features, too, were regular and beautiful, and she would have attracted attention by her loveliness among a multitude. When I soon heard her issue imperious commands and defiantly insist upon the fulfilment of every wish, I thought, in my boyish ignorance, that Arsinoe must be the elder; for she was better suited to wield a sceptre than her sister. I said so to my brother and Charmian; but we all soon saw which really possessed queenly majesty; for Arsinoe, if her will were crossed, wept, screamed, and raged like a lunatic, or, if that proved useless, begged and teased; while if Cleopatra wanted anything she obtained it in a different way. Even at that time she knew what weapons would give her victory and, while using them, she still remained the child of a king.

“No artisan’s daughter could have been further removed from airs of majestic pathos than this embodiment of the most charming childlike grace; but if anything for which her passionate nature ardently longed was positively refused, she understood how to attain it by the melody of her voice, the spell of her eyes, and in extreme cases by a silent tear. When to such tears were added uplifted hands and a few sweet words, such as, ‘It would make me happy,’ or, ‘Don’t you see how it hurts me?’ resistance was impossible; and in after-years also her silent tears and the marvellous music of her voice won her a victory in the decisive questions of life.

“We children were soon playmates and friends, for my parents did not wish the princesses to begin their studies until after they felt at home with us. This pleased Arsinoe, although she could already read and write; but Cleopatra more than once asked to hear something from my father’s store of wisdom, of which she had been told.

“The King and her former teacher had cherished the highest expectations from the brilliant intellect of this remarkable child, and Olympus once laid his hand on my curls and bade me take care that the princess did not outstrip the philosopher’s son. I had always occupied one of the foremost places, and laughingly escaped, assuring him that there was no danger.



“But I soon learned that this warning was not groundless. You will think that the old fool’s heart has played him a trick, and in the magic garden of childish memories the gifted young girl was transformed into a goddess. That she certainly was not; for the immortals are free from the faults and weaknesses of humanity.”

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“And what robbed Cleopatra of the renown of resembling the gods?” asked Barine eagerly.

A subtle smile, not wholly free from reproach, accompanied Archibius's reply: “Had I spoken of her virtues, you would hardly have thought of asking further details. But why should I try to conceal what she has displayed to the world openly enough throughout her whole life? Falsehood and hypocrisy were as unfamiliar to her as fishing is to the sons of the desert. The fundamental principles which have dominated this rare creature's life and character to the present day are two ceaseless desires: first, to surpass every one, even in the most difficult achievements; and, secondly, to love and to be loved in return. From them emanated what raised her above all other women. Ambition and love will also sustain her like two mighty wings on the proud height to which they have borne her, so long as they dwell harmoniously in her fiery soul. Hitherto a rare favour of destiny has permitted this, and may the Olympians grant that thus it may ever be!”

Here Archibius paused, wiped the perspiration from his brow, asked if the messenger had arrived, and ordered him to be admitted as soon as he appeared. Then he went on as calmly as before:

“The princesses were members of our household, and in the course of time they seemed like sisters. During the first winter the King allowed them to spend only the most inclement months at Philae, for he was unwilling to live without them. True, he saw them rarely enough; weeks often elapsed without a visit; but, on the other hand, he often came day after day to our garden, clad in plain garments, and borne in an unpretending litter, for these visits were kept secret from every one save the leech Olympus.

“I often saw the tall, strong man, with red, bloated face, playing with his children like a mechanic who had just returned from work. But he usually remained only a short time, seeming to be satisfied with having seen them again. Perhaps he merely wished to assure himself that they were comfortable with us. At any rate, no one was permitted to go near the group of plane-trees where he talked with them.

“But it is easy to hide amid the dense foliage of these trees, so my knowledge that he questioned them is not solely hearsay.

“Cleopatra was happy with us from the beginning; Arsinoe needed a longer time; but the King valued only the opinion of his older child, his darling, on whom he feasted his eyes and ears like a lover. He often shook his heavy head at the sight of her, and when she gave him one of her apt replies, he laughed so loudly that the sound of his deep, resonant voice was heard as far as the house.

“Once I saw tear after tear course down his flushed cheeks, and yet his visit was shorter than usual. The closed ‘harmamaxa’ in which he came bore him from our house directly to the vessel which was to convey him to Cyprus and Rome. The Alexandrians, headed by the Queen, had forced him to leave the city and the country.

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“He was indeed unworthy of the crown, but he loved his little daughter like a true father. Still, it was terrible, monstrous for him to invoke curses upon the mother and sister of the children, in their presence, and in the same breath command them to hate and execrate them, but to love and never forget him.

“I was then seventeen and Cleopatra ten years old. I, who loved my parents better than my life, felt an icy chill run through my veins and then a touch upon my heart like balsam, as I heard little Arsinoe, after her father had gone, whisper to her sister, ‘We will hate them—may the gods destroy them!’ and when Cleopatra answered with tearful eyes, ‘Let us rather be better than they, very good indeed, Arsinoe, that the immortals may love us and bring our father back.’

“‘Because then he will make you Queen,’ replied Arsinoe sneeringly, still trembling with angry excitement.

“Cleopatra gazed at her with a troubled look.

“Her tense features showed that she was weighing the meaning of the words, and I can still see her as she suddenly drew up her small figure, and said proudly, ‘Yes, I will be Queen!’

“Then her manner changed, and in the sweetest tones of her soft voice, she said beseechingly, ‘You won’t say such naughty things again, will you?’

“This was at the time that my father’s instruction began to take possession of her mind. The prediction of Olympus was fulfilled. True, I attended the school of oratory, but when my father set the royal maiden a lesson, I was permitted to repeat mine on the same subject, and frequently I could not help admitting that Cleopatra had succeeded better than I.

“Soon there were difficult problems to master, for the intellect of this wonderful child demanded stronger food, and she was introduced into philosophy. My father himself belonged to the school of Epicurus, and succeeded far beyond his expectations in rousing Cleopatra’s interest in his master’s teachings. She had been made acquainted with the other great philosophers also, but always returned to Epicurus, and induced the rest of us to live with her as a true disciple of the noble Samian.

“Your father and brother have doubtless made you familiar with the precepts of the Stoa; yet you have certainly heard that Epicurus spent the latter part of his life with his friends and pupils in quiet meditation and instructive conversation in his garden at Athens. We, too—according to Cleopatra’s wish—were to live thus and call ourselves ‘disciples of Epicurus.’

“With the exception of Arsinoe, who preferred gayer pastimes, into which she drew my brother Straton—at that time a giant in strength—we all liked the plan. I was chosen master, but I perceived that Cleopatra desired the position, so she took my place.

“During our next leisure afternoon we paced up and down the garden, and the conversation about the chief good was so eager, Cleopatra directed it with so much skill, and decided doubtful questions so happily, that we reluctantly obeyed the brazen gong which summoned us to the house, and spent the whole evening in anticipating the next afternoon.

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"The following morning my father saw several country people assembled before the secluded garden; but he did not have time to inquire what they wanted; for Timagenes, who shared the instruction in history—you know he was afterwards taken to Rome as a prisoner of war—rushed up to him, holding out a tablet which bore the inscription Epicurus had written on the gate of his garden: 'Stranger, here you will be happy; here is the chief good, pleasure.'

"Cleopatra had written this notice in large letters on the top of a small table before sunrise, and a slave had secretly fastened it on the gate for her.

"This prank might have easily proved fatal to our beautiful companionship, but it had been done merely to make our game exactly like the model.

"My father did not forbid our continuing this pastime, but strictly prohibited our calling ourselves 'Epicureans' outside of the garden, for this noble name had since gained among the people a significance wholly alien. Epicurus says that true pleasure is to be found only in peace of mind and absence of pain."

"But every one," interrupted Barine, "believes that people like the wealthy Isidorus, whose object in life is to take every pleasure which his wealth can procure, are the real Epicureans. My mother would not have confided me long to a teacher by whose associates 'pleasure' was deemed the chief good."

"The daughter of a philosopher," replied Archibius, gently shaking his head, "ought to understand what pleasure means in the sense of Epicurus, and no doubt you do. True, those who are further removed from these things cannot know that the master forbids yearning for individual pleasure. Have you an idea of his teachings? No definite one? Then permit me a few words of explanation. It happens only too often that Epicurus is confounded with Aristippus, who places sensual pleasure above intellectual enjoyment, as he holds that bodily pain is harder to endure than mental anguish. Epicurus, on the contrary, considers intellectual pleasure to be the higher one; for sensual enjoyment, which he believes free to every one, can be experienced only in the present, while intellectual delight extends to both the past and the future. To the Epicureans the goal of life, as has already been mentioned, is to attain the chief blessings, peace of mind, and freedom from pain. He is to practise virtue only because it brings him pleasure; for who could remain virtuous without being wise, noble, and just?—and whoever is all these cannot have his peace of mind disturbed, and must be really happy in the exact meaning of the master. I perceived long since the peril lurking in this system of instruction, which takes no account of moral excellence; but at that time it seemed to me also the chief good.

"How all this charmed the mind of the thoughtful child, still untouched by passion! It was difficult to supply her wonderfully vigorous intellect with sufficient sustenance, and she really felt that to enrich it was the highest pleasure. And to her, who could scarcely

endure to have a rude hand touch her, though a small grief or trivial disappointment could not be averted, the freedom from pain which the master had named as the first condition for the existence of every pleasure, and termed the chief good, seemed indeed the first condition of a happy life.

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“Yet this child, whom my father once compared to a thinking flower, bore without complaint her sad destiny—her father’s banishment, her mother’s death, her sister Berenike’s profligacy. Even to me, in whom she found a second brother and fully trusted, she spoke of these sorrowful things only in guarded allusions. I know that she understood what was passing fully and perfectly, and how deeply she felt it; but pain placed itself between her and the ‘chief good,’ and she mastered it. And when she sat at work, with what tenacious power the delicate creature struggled until she had conquered the hardest task and outstripped Charmian and even me!

“In those days I understood why, among the gods, a maiden rules over learning, and why she is armed with the weapons of war. You have heard how many languages Cleopatra speaks. A remark of Timagenes had fallen into her soul like a seed. ‘With every language you learn,’ he had said, ‘you will gain a nation.’ But there were many peoples in her father’s kingdom, and when she was Queen they must all love her. True, she began with the tongue of the conquerors, not the conquered. So it happened that we first learned Lucretius, who reproduces in verse the doctrines of Epicurus. My father was our teacher, and the second year she read Lucretius as if it were a Greek book. She had only half known Egyptian; now she speedily acquired it. During our stay at Philae she found a troglodyte who was induced to teach her his language. There were Jews enough here in Alexandria to instruct her in theirs, and she also learned its kindred tongue, Arabic.

“When, many years later, she visited Antony at Tarsus, the warriors imagined that some piece of Egyptian magic was at work, for she addressed each commander in his own tongue, and talked with him as if she were a native of the same country.

“It was the same with everything. She outstripped us in every branch of study. To her burning ambition it would have been unbearable to lag behind.

“The Roman Lucretius became her favourite poet, although she was no more friendly to his nation than I, but the self-conscious power of the foe pleased her, and once I heard her exclaim ‘Ah! if the Egyptians were Romans, I would give up our garden for Berenike’s throne.’

“Lucretius constantly led her back to Epicurus, and awakened a severe conflict in her unresting mind. You probably know that he teaches that life in itself is not so great a blessing that it must be deemed a misfortune not to live. It is only spoiled by having death appear to us as the greatest of misfortunes. Only the soul which ceases to regard death as a misfortune finds peace. Whoever knows that thought and feeling end with life will not fear death; for, no matter how many dear and precious things the dead have left here below, their yearning for them has ceased with life. He declares that providing for the body is the greatest folly, while the Egyptian religion, in which Anubis strove to strengthen her faith, maintained precisely the opposite.

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“To a certain degree he succeeded, for his personality exerted a powerful influence over her; and besides, she naturally took great pleasure in mystical, supernatural things, as my brother Straton did in physical strength, and you, Barine, enjoy the gift of song. You know Anubis by sight. What Alexandrian has not seen this remarkable man? and whoever has once met his eyes does not easily forget him. He does indeed rule over mysterious powers, and he used them in his intercourse with the young princess. It is his work if she cleaves to the religious belief of her people, if she who is a Hellene to the last drop of blood loves Egypt, and is ready to make any sacrifice for her independence and grandeur. She is called ‘the new Isis,’ but Isis presides over the magic arts of the Egyptians, and Anubis initiated Cleopatra into this secret science, and even persuaded her to enter the observatory and the laboratory—

“But all these things had their origin in our garden of Epicurus, and my father did not venture to forbid it; for the King had sent a message from Rome to say that he was glad to have Cleopatra find pleasure in her own people and their secret knowledge.

“The flute-player, during his stay on the Tiber, had given his gold to the right men or bound them as creditors to his interest. After Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus had concluded their alliance, they consented at Lucca to the restoration of the Ptolemy. Millions upon millions would not have seemed to him too large a price for this object. Pompey would rather have gone to Egypt himself, but the jealousy of the others would not permit it. Gabinius, the Governor of Syria, received the commission.

“But the occupants of the Egyptian throne were not disposed to resign it without a struggle. You know that meanwhile Queen Berenike, Cleopatra’s sister, had been twice married. She had her miserable first husband strangled—a more manly spouse had been chosen by the Alexandrians for her second consort. He bravely defended his rights, and lost his life on the field of battle.

“The senate learned speedily enough that Gabinius had brought the Ptolemy back to his country; the news reached us more slowly. We watched for every rumour with the same passionate anxiety as now.

“At that time Cleopatra was fourteen, and had developed magnificently. Yonder portrait shows the perfect flower, but the bud possessed, if possible, even more exquisite charm. How clear and earnest was the gaze of her bright eyes! When she was gay they could shine like stars, and then her little red mouth had an indescribably mischievous expression, and in each cheek came one of the tiny dimples which still delight every one. Her nose was more delicate than it is now, and the slight curve which appears in the portrait, and which is far too prominent in the coins, was not visible. Her hair did not grow dark until later in life. My sister Charmian

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had no greater pleasure than to arrange its wavy abundance. It was like silk, she often said, and she was right. I know this, for when at the festival of Isis, Cleopatra, holding the sistrum, followed the image of the goddess, she was obliged to wear it unconfined. On her return home she often shook her head merrily, and her hair fell about her like a cataract, veiling her face and figure. Then, as now, she was not above middle height, but her form possessed the most exquisite symmetry, only it was still more delicate and pliant.

“She had understood how to win all hearts. Yet, though she seemed to esteem our father higher, trust me more fully, look up to Anubis with greater reverence, and prefer to argue with the keen-witted Timagenes, she still appeared to hold all who surrounded her in equal favour, while Arsinoe left me in the lurch if Straton were present, and whenever the handsome Melnodor, one of my father’s pupils, came to us, she fairly devoured him with her glowing eyes.

“As soon as it was rumoured that the Romans were bringing the King back, Queen Berenike came to us to take the young girls to the city. When Cleopatra entreated her to leave her in our parents’ care and not interrupt her studies, a scornful smile flitted over Berenike’s face, and turning to her husband Archelaus, she said scornfully, ‘I think books will prove to be the smallest danger.’

“Pothinus, the guardian of the two princesses’ brothers, had formerly permitted them at times to visit their sisters. Now they were no longer allowed to leave Lochias, but neither Cleopatra nor Arsinoe made many inquiries about them. The little boys always retreated from their caresses, and the Egyptian locks on their temples, which marked the age of childhood, and the Egyptian garments which Pothinus made them wear, lent them an unfamiliar aspect.

“When it was reported that the Romans were advancing from Gaza, both girls were overpowered by passionate excitement. Arsinoe’s glittered in every glance; Cleopatra understood how to conceal hers, but her colour often varied, and her face, which was not pink and white like her sister’s, but—how shall I express it?”

“I know what you mean,” Barine interrupted. “When I saw her, nothing seemed to me more charming than that pallid hue through which the crimson of her cheeks shines like the flame through yonder alabaster lamp, the tint of the peach through the down. I have seen it often in convalescents. Aphrodite breathes this hue on the faces and figures of her favourites only, as the god of time imparts the green tinge to the bronze. Nothing is more beautiful than when such women blush.”

“Your sight is keen,” replied Archibius, smiling. “It seemed indeed as if not Eos, but her faint reflection in the western horizon, was tinting the sky, when joy or shame sent the



colour to her cheeks, But when wrath took possession of her—and ere the King's return this often happened— she could look as if she were lifeless, like a marble statue, with lips as colourless as those of a corpse.

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“My father said that the blood of Physkon and other degenerate ancestors, who had not learned to control their passions, was asserting itself in her also. But I must continue my story, or the messenger will interrupt me too soon.

“Gabinius was bringing back the King. But from the time of his approach with the Roman army and the auxiliary troops of the Ethnarch of Judea, nothing more was learned of him or of Antipater, who commanded the forces of Hyrkanus; every one talked constantly of the Roman general Antony. He had led the troops successfully through the deserts between Syria and the Egyptian Delta without losing a single man on the dangerous road by the Sirbonian Sea and Barathra, where many an army had met destruction. Not to Antipater, but to him, had the Jewish garrison of Pelusium surrendered their city without striking a blow. He had conquered in two battles; and the second, where, as you know, Berenike’s husband fell after a brave resistance, had decided the destiny of the country.

“From the time his name was first mentioned, neither of the girls could hear enough about him. It was said that he was the most aristocratic of aristocratic Romans, the most reckless of the daring, the wildest of the riotous, and the handsomest of the handsome.

“The waiting-maid from Mantua, with whom Cleopatra practised speaking the Roman language, had often seen him, and had heard of him still more frequently—for his mode of life was the theme of gossip among all classes of Roman men and women. His house was said to have descended in a direct line from Hercules, and his figure and magnificent black beard recalled his ancestor. You know him, and know that the things reported of him are those which a young girl cannot hear with indifference, and at that time he was nearly five lustra younger than he is to-day.

“How eagerly Arsinoe listened when his name was uttered! How Cleopatra flushed and paled when Timagenes condemned him as an unprincipled libertine! True, Antony was opening her father’s path to his home.

“The flute-player had not forgotten his daughters. He had remained aloof from the battle, but as soon as the victory was decided, he pressed on into the city.

“The road led past our garden.

“The King had barely time to send a runner to his daughters, fifteen minutes before his arrival, to say that he desired to greet them. They were hurriedly attired in festal garments, and both presented an appearance that might well gladden a father’s heart.

“Cleopatra was not yet as tall as Arsinoe, but, though only fourteen, she looked like a full-grown maiden, while her sister’s face and figure showed that in years she was still a child. But she was no longer one in heart. Bouquets for the returning sovereign had

been arranged as well as haste permitted. Each one of the girls held one in her hand when the train approached.

“My parents accompanied them to the garden gate. I could see what was passing, but could hear distinctly only the voices of the men.

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“The King alighted from the travelling chariot, which was drawn by eight white Median steeds. The chamberlain who attended him was obliged to support him. His face, reddened by his potations, fairly beamed as he greeted his daughters. His joyful surprise at the sight of both, but especially of Cleopatra, was evident. True, he kissed and embraced Arsinoe, but after that he had eyes and ears solely for Cleopatra.

“Yet his younger daughter was very beautiful. Away from her sister, she would have commanded the utmost admiration; but Cleopatra was like the sun, beside which every other heavenly body pales. Yet, no; she should not be compared to the sun. It was part of the fascination she exerted that every one felt compelled to gaze at her, to discover the source of the charm which emanated from her whole person.

“Antony, too, was enthralled by the spell as soon as he heard the first words from her lips. He had dashed up to the King’s chariot, and seeing the two daughters by their father’s side, he greeted them with a hasty salute. When, in reply to the question whether he might hope for her gratitude for bringing her father back to her so quickly, she said that as a daughter she sincerely rejoiced, but as an Egyptian the task would be harder, he gazed more keenly at her.

“I did not know her answer until later; but ere the last sound of her voice had died away, I saw the Roman spring from his charger and fling the bridle to Ammonius—the chamberlain who had assisted the King from the chariot—as if he were his groom. The woman-hunter had met with rare game in his pursuit of the fairest, and while he continued his conversation with Cleopatra her father sometimes joined in, and his deep laughter was often heard.

“No one would have recognized the earnest disciple of Epicurus. We had often heard apt replies and original thoughts from Cleopatra’s lips, but she had rarely answered Timagenes’s jests with another. Now she found—one could see it by watching the speakers—a witty answer to many of Antony’s remarks. It seemed as if, for the first time, she had met some one for whom she deemed it worth while to bring into the field every gift of her deep and quick intelligence. Yet she did not lose for a moment her womanly dignity; her eyes did not sparkle one whit more brightly than during an animated conversation with me or our father.

“It was very different with Arsinoe. When Antony flung himself from his horse, she had moved nearer to her sister, but, as the Roman continued to overlook her, her face crimsoned, she bit her scarlet lips. Her whole attitude betrayed the agitation that mastered her, and I, who knew her, saw by the expression of her eyes and her quivering nostrils that she was on the point of bursting into tears. Though Cleopatra stood so much nearer to my heart, I felt sorry for her, and longed to touch the arm of the haughty Roman, who indeed looked like the god of war, and whisper to him to take some little notice of the poor child, who was also a daughter of the King.

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“But a still harder blow was destined to fall upon Arsinoe; for when the King, who had been holding both bouquets, warned Antony that it was time to depart, he took one, and I heard him say in his deep, loud tones, ‘Whoever calls such flowers his daughters does not need so many others.’ Then he gave Cleopatra the blossoms and, laying his hand upon his heart, expressed the hope of seeing her in Alexandria, and swung himself upon the charger which the chamberlain, pale with fury, was still holding by the bridle.

“The flute-player was delighted with his oldest daughter, and told my father he would have the young princess conveyed to the city on the day after the morrow. The next day he had things to do of which he desired her to have no knowledge. Our father, in token of his gratitude, should retain for himself and his heirs the summer palace and the garden. He would see that the change of owner was entered in the land register. This was really done that very day. It was, indeed, his first act save one—the execution of his daughter Berenike.

“This ruler, who would have seemed to any one who beheld his meeting with his children a warm-hearted man and a tender father, at that time would have put half Alexandria to the sword, had not Antony interposed. He forbade the bloodshed, and honoured Berenike’s dead husband by a stately funeral.

“As the steed bore him away, he turned back towards Cleopatra; he could not have saluted Arsinoe, for she had rushed into the garden, and her swollen face betrayed that she had shed burning tears.

“From that hour she bitterly hated Cleopatra.

“On the day appointed, the King brought the princesses to the city with regal splendour. The Alexandrians joyously greeted the royal sisters, as, seated on a golden throne, over which waved ostrich-feathers, they were borne in state down the Street of the King, surrounded by dignitaries, army commanders, the body-guard, and the senate of the city. Cleopatra received the adulation of the populace with gracious majesty, as if she were already Queen. Whoever had seen her as, with floods of tears, she bade us all farewell, assuring us of her gratitude and faithful remembrance, the sisterly affection she showed me—I had just been elected commander of the Ephebi—” Here Archibius was interrupted by a slave, who announced the arrival of the messenger, and, rising hurriedly, he went to Leonax’s workshop, to which the man had been conducted, that he might speak to him alone.

ETEXT EDITOR’S BOOKMARKS:

Shadow of the candlestick caught her eye before the light
Soul which ceases to regard death as a misfortune finds peace

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