

Cleopatra — Volume 06 eBook

Cleopatra — Volume 06 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XIII.

During these hours of rest Iras and Charmian had watched in turn beside Cleopatra. When she rose, the younger attendant rendered her the necessary services. She was to devote herself to her mistress until the evening; for her companion, who now stood in her way, was not to return earlier. Before Charmian left, she had seen that her apartments—in which Barine, since the Queen had placed her in her charge, had been a welcome guest—were carefully watched. The commander of the Macedonian guard, who years before had vainly sought her favour, and finally had become the most loyal of her friends, had promised to keep them closely.

Yet Iras knew how to profit by her mistress's sleep and the absence of her aunt. She had learned that she would be shut out of her apartments, and therefore from Barine also. Ere any step could be taken against the prisoner, she must first arrange the necessary preliminaries with Alexas. The failure of her expectation of seeing her rival trampled in the dust had transformed her jealous resentment into hatred, and though she was her niece, she even transferred a portion of it to Charmian, who had placed herself between her and her victim.

She had sent for the Syrian, but he, too, had gone to rest at a late hour and kept her waiting a long time. The reception which the impatient girl bestowed was therefore by no means cordial, but her manner soon grew more friendly.

First Alexas boasted of having induced the Queen to commit Barine's fate to him. If he should try her at noon and find her guilty, there was nothing to prevent him from compelling her to drink the poisoned cup or having her strangled before evening. But the matter would be dangerous, because the singer's friends were numerous and by no means powerless. Yet, in the depths of her heart, Cleopatra desired nothing more ardently than to rid herself of her dangerous rival. But he knew the great ones of the earth. If he acted energetically and brought matters to a speedy close, the Queen, to avoid evil gossip, would burden him with her own act. Antony's mood could not be predicted, and the Syrian's weal or woe depended on his favour. Besides, the execution of the singer at the last Adonis festival might have a dangerous effect upon the people of Alexandria. They were already greatly excited, and his brother, who knew them, said that some were overwhelmed with sorrow, and others ready, in their fury, to rise in a bloody rebellion. Everything was to be feared from this rabble, but Philostratus understood how to persuade them to many things, and Alexas had just secured his aid.

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Alexas had really succeeded in the work of reconciliation. During the orator's married life with Barine she had forbidden her brother-in-law the house, and her husband had quarrelled with the brother who sought his wife. But after the latter had risen to a high place in Antony's favour, and been loaded with gold by his lavish hand, Philostratus had again approached him to claim his share of the new wealth. And the source from which Alexas drew flowed so abundantly that his favourite did not find it difficult to give. Both men were as unprincipled as they were lavish, and experience taught them that base natures always have at their disposal a plank with which to bridge chasms. If it is of gold, it will be crossed the more speedily. Such was the case here, and of late it had become specially firm; for each needed the other's aid.

Alexas loved Barine, while Philostratus no longer cared for her. On the other hand, he hated Dion with so ardent a thirst for revenge that, to obtain it, he would have resigned even the hope of fresh gains. The humiliation inflicted upon him by the arrogant Macedonian noble, and the derision which through his efforts had been heaped upon him, haunted him like importunate pursuers; and he felt that he could only rid himself of them with the source of his disgrace. Without his brother's aid, he would have been content to assail Dion with his slandering tongue; with his powerful assistance he could inflict a heavier injury upon him, perhaps even rob him of liberty and life. They had just made an agreement by which Philostratus pledged himself to reconcile the populace to any punishment that might be inflicted upon Barine, and Alexas promised to help his brother take a bloody vengeance upon Dion the Macedonian.

Barine's death could be of no service to Alexas. The sight of her beauty had fired his heart a second time, and he was resolved to make her his own. In the dungeon, perhaps by torture, she should be forced to grasp his helping hand. All this would permit no delay. Everything must be done before the return of Antony, who was daily expected. Alexas's lavish patron had made him so rich that he could bear to lose his favour for the sake of this object. Even without it, he could maintain a household with royal magnificence in some city of his Syrian home.

On receiving the favourite's assurance that he would remove Barine from Charmian's protection on the morrow, Iras became more gracious. She could make no serious objection to his statement that the new trial might not, it is true, end in a sentence of death, but the verdict would probably be transportation to the mines, or something of the sort.

Then Alexas cautiously tested Iras's feelings towards his brother's mortal foe. They were hostile; yet when the favourite intimated that he, too, ought to be given up to justice, she showed so much hesitation, that Alexas stopped abruptly and turned the conversation upon Barine. Here she promised assistance with her former eager zeal, and it was settled that the arrest should be made the following morning during the hours of Charmian's attendance upon the Queen.

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Irás had valuable counsel to offer. She was familiar with one of the prisons, whose doors she had opened to many a hapless mortal whose disappearance, in her opinion, might be of service to the Queen. She had deemed it a duty, aided by the Keeper of the Seal, to anticipate her mistress in cases where her kind heart would have found it difficult to pronounce a severe sentence, and Cleopatra had permitted it, though without commendation or praise. What happened within its walls—thanks to the silence of the warder—never passed beyond the portals. If Barine cursed her life there, she would still fare better than she, Irás, who during the past few nights had been on the brink of despair whenever she thought of the man who had disdained her love and abandoned her for another.

As the Syrian held out his hand to take leave, she asked bluntly

“And Dion?”

“He cannot be set free,” was the reply, “for he loves Barine; nay, the fool was on the eve of leading her home to his beautiful palace as its mistress.”

“Is that true, really true?” asked Irás, whose cheeks and lips lost every tinge of colour, though she succeeded in maintaining her composure.

“He confessed it yesterday in a letter to his uncle, the Keeper of the Seal, in which he entreated him to do his utmost for his chosen bride, whom he would never resign. But Zeno has no liking for this niece. Do you wish to see the letter?”

“Then, of course, he cannot be set at liberty,” replied Irás, and there was additional shrillness in her voice. “He will do everything in his power for the woman he loves, and that is much—far more than you, who are half a stranger here, suspect. The Macedonian families stand by each other. He is a member of the council. The bands of the Ephebi will support him to a man. And the populace?—He lately spoiled the game of your brother, who was acting for me, in a way. He was finally dragged out of the basin of the fountain, dripping with water and overwhelmed with shame.”

“For that very reason his mouth must be closed.”

Irás nodded assent, but after a short pause she exclaimed angrily: “I will help you to silence him, but not forever. Do you hear? Theodotus’s saying about the dead dogs which do not bite brought no blessing to any one who followed it. There are other ways of getting rid of this man.”

“A bird sang that you were not unfriendly to him.”

“A bird? Then it was probably an owl, which cannot see in the daylight. His worst enemy, your brother, would probably sacrifice himself for his welfare sooner than I.”

“Then I shall begin to feel sympathy for this Dion.”

“I saw recently that your compassion surpassed mine. Death is not the hardest punishment.”

“Is that the cause of this gracious respite?”

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“Perhaps so. But there are other matters to be considered here. First, the condition of the times. Everything is tottering, even the royal power, which a short time ago was a wall which concealed many things and afforded shelter from every assault. Then Dion himself. I have already numbered those who will support him. Since the defeat at Actium, the Queen can no longer exclaim to that many-headed monster, the people, ‘You must,’ but ‘I entreat.’ The others—”

“The first considerations are enough; but may I be permitted to know what my wise friend has awarded to the hapless wight from whom she withdrew her favour?”

“First, imprisonment here at Lochias. He has stained his hands with the blood of Caesarion, the King of kings. That is high treason, even in the eyes of the people. Try to obtain the order for the arrest this very day.”

“Whenever I can disturb the Queen with such matters.”

“Not for nay sake, but to save her from injury. Away with everything which can cloud her intellect in these decisive days! First, away with Barine, who spoiled her return home; and then let us take care of the man who would be capable, for this woman’s sake, of causing an insurrection in Alexandria. The great cares associated with the state and the throne are hers; for the minor ones of the toilet and the heart I will provide.”

Here she was interrupted by one of Cleopatra’s waiting-maids. The Queen had awakened, and Iras hastened to her post.

As she passed Charmian’s apartments and saw two handsome soldiers, belonging to the Macedonian body-guard, pacing to and fro on duty before them, her face darkened. It was against her alone that Charmian was protecting Barine. She had been harshly reproved by the older woman on account of the artist’s daughter, who had been the source of so many incidents which had caused her pain, and Iras regretted that she had ever confided to her aunt her love for Dion. But, no matter what might happen, the upas-tree whence emanated all these tortures, anxieties, and vexations, must be rooted out—stricken from the ranks of the living.

Ere she entered the Queen’s anteroom she had mentally pronounced sentence of death on her enemy. Her inventive brain was now busy in devising means to induce the Syrian to undertake its execution. If this stone of offence was removed it would again be possible to live in harmony with Charmian. Dion would be free, and then, much as he had wounded her, she would defend him from the hatred of Philostratus and his brother.

She entered the Queen’s presence with a lighter heart. The death of a condemned person had long since ceased to move her deeply. While rendering the first services to her mistress, who had been much refreshed by her sleep, her face grew brighter and

brighter; for Cleopatra voluntarily told her that she was glad to have her attendance, and not be constantly annoyed by the same disagreeable matter, which must soon be settled.

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In fact, Charmian, conscious that no one else at court would have ventured to do so, had never grown weary, spite of many a rebuff, of pleading Barine's cause until, the day before, Cleopatra, in a sudden fit of anger, had commanded her not to mention the mischief-maker again.

When Charmian soon after requested permission to let Iras take her place the following day, the Queen already regretted the harsh reproof she had given her friend, and, while cordially granting the desired leave, begged her to attribute her angry impatience to the cares which burdened her. "And when you show me your kind, faithful face again," she concluded, "you will have remembered that a true friend withholds from an unhappy woman whom she loves whatever will shadow more deeply her already clouded life. This Barine's very name sounds like a jeer at the composure I maintain with so much difficulty. I do not wish to hear it again."

The words were uttered in a tone so affectionate and winning, that Charmian's vexation melted like ice in the sun. Yet she left the Queen's presence anxious and troubled; for ere she quitted the room Cleopatra remarked that she had committed the singer's affairs to Alexas. She was now doubly eager to obtain a day's freedom, for she knew the unprincipled favourite's feelings towards the young beauty, and longed to discuss with Archibius the best means of guarding her from the worst perils.

When at a late hour she went to rest, she was served by the Nubian maid, who had accompanied her to the court from her parents' home. She came from the Cataract, where she had been bought when the family of Alypius accompanied the child Cleopatra to the island of Philae. Anukis was given to Charmian, who at the time was just entering womanhood, as the first servant who was her sole property, and she had proved so clever, skilful, apt to learn, and faithful, that her mistress took her, as her personal attendant, to the palace.

Charmian's warm, unselfish love for the Queen was equalled by Anukis's devotion to the mistress who had long since made her free, and had become so strongly attached to her that the Nubian's interests were little less regarded than her own. Her sound, keen judgment and natural wit had gained a certain renown in the palace, and as Cleopatra often condescended to rouse her to an apt answer, Antony had done so, too; and since the slight crook in the back, which she had from childhood, had grown into a hump, he gave her the name of Aisopion—the female AEsop. All the Queen's attendants now used it, and though others of lower rank did the same, she permitted it, though her ready wit would have supplied her tongue with a retort sharp enough to respond to any word which displeased her.

But she knew the life and fables of AEsop, who had also once been a slave, and deemed it an honour to be compared with him.

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When Charmian had left Cleopatra and sought her chamber, she found Barine sound asleep, but Anukis was awaiting her, and her mistress told her with what deep anxiety for Barine she had quitted the presence of the Queen. She knew that the Nubian was fond of the young matron, whom in her childhood she had carried in her arms, and whose father, Leonax, had often jested with her. The maid had watched her career with much interest, and while Barine had been her mistress's guest her efforts to amuse and soothe her were unceasing.

She had gone every morning to Berenike to ask tidings of Dion's health, and always brought favourable news. Anukis knew Philostratus and his brother, too, and as she liked Antony, who jested with her so kindly, she grieved to see an unprincipled fellow like Alexas his chief confidant. She knew the plots with which the Syrian had persecuted Barine, and when Charmian told her that the Queen had committed the young beauty's fate to this man's keeping her dark face grew fairly livid; but she forced herself to conceal the terror which the news inspired. Her mistress was also aware what this choice meant to Barine. But Anukis would have thought it wrong to disturb Charmian's sleep by revealing her own distress. It was fortunate that she was going early the next morning to seek the aid of Archibius, whom Anukis believed to be the wisest of men; but this by no means soothed her. She knew the fable of the lion and the mouse, which had been told in her home long before the time of the author for whom she was nicknamed, and already more than once she had been in a position to render far greater and more powerful persons an important service. To soothe Charmian to sleep and turn her thoughts in another direction, she told her about Dion, whom she had found much better that day, how tenderly he seemed to love Barine, and how touchingly patient and worthy of her father the daughter of Leonax had been.

After her mistress had fallen asleep she went to the hall where, spite of the late hour, she expected to meet some of the servants—sure of being greeted as a welcome guest. When, a short time later, Alexas's body-slave appeared, she filled his wire cup, sat down by his side, and tried with all the powers at her command to win his confidence. And so well did the elderly Nubian succeed that Marsyas, a handsome young Ligurian, after she had gone, declared that Aisopion's jokes and stories were enough to bring the dead to life, and it was as pleasant to talk seriously with the brown-skinned monster as to dally with a fair-haired sweetheart.

After Charmian had left the palace the following morning, Anukis again sought Marsyas and learned from him for what purpose and at what hour Iras had summoned Alexas. His master was continually whispering with the languishing Macedonian.

When Anukis returned, Barine seemed troubled because she brought no tidings from her mother and Dion; but the Nubian entreated her to have patience, and gave her some books and a spindle, that she might have occupation in her solitude. She, Anukis, must go to the kitchen, because she had heard yesterday that the cook had bought

some mushrooms, which might be poisonous; she knew the fungi and wanted to see them.

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Then, passing into Charmian's chamber, she glided through the corridor which connected the apartments of Cleopatra's confidential attendants, and slipped into Iras's room. When Alexas entered she was concealed behind one of the hangings which covered the walls of the reception-room.

After the Syrian had retired and Iras had been called away, Anukis returned to Barine and said that the mushrooms had really been poisonous, and of the deadliest species. They had been cooked, and she must go out to seek an antidote. Since a precious human life might be at stake, Barine would not wish to keep her.

"Go," said the latter, kindly. "But if you are the old obliging Aisopion, you won't object to going a little farther."

"And inquiring at the house near the Paneum garden," added Anukis. "That was already settled. Longing is also a poison for a loving heart, and its antidote is good news."

With these laughing words she left her favourite; but as soon as she was out of doors her black brow became lined with earnest thought, and she stood pondering a long time. At last she went to the Bruchium to hire a donkey to ride to Kanopus, where she hoped to find Archibius. It was difficult to reach the nearest stand; for a great crowd had assembled on the quay between the Lochias and the Corner of the Muses, and groups of the common people, sailors, and slaves were constantly flocking hither. But she at last forced her way to the spot and, while the driver was helping her to mount the animal she had chosen, she asked what had attracted the throng, and he answered:

"They are tearing down the house of the old Museum fungus, Didymus."

"How can that be?" cried the startled woman. "The good old man!"

"Good?" repeated the driver, scornfully. "He's a traitor, who has caused all the trouble. Philostratus, the brother of the great Alexas, a friend of Mark Antony, told us so. He wanted to prove it, so it must be true. Hear the shouts, and how the stones are flying! Yes, yes. His granddaughter and her lover set an ambush for the King Caesarion. They would have killed him, but the watch interfered, and now he lies wounded on his couch. If mighty Isis does not lend her aid, the young prince's life will soon be over."

Then, turning to the donkey, he dealt him two severe blows on the right and left haunches, shouting: "Hi, Grey! It does one good to hear that royal backs have room for the cudgel too."

Meanwhile, the Nubian was hesitating whether she should not first turn the donkey to the right and seek Didymus; but Barine was threatened by greater peril, and her life was of more value than the welfare of the aged pair. This decided the question, and she rode forward.

The donkey and his driver did their best, but they came too late; for in the little palace at Kanopus, Anukis learned from the porter that Archibius had gone to the city with his old friend Timagenes, the historian, who lived in Rome, and seemed to have come to Alexandria as an envoy.

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Charmian, too, had been here, but also failed to find the master of the house, and followed him. Evil tidings—which, owing to the loss of time involved, might prove fatal. If the donkey had only been swifter! True, Archibius's stable was full of fine animals, but who was she that she should presume to use them? Yet she had gained something which rendered her the equal of many who were born free and occupied a higher station — the reputation for trustworthiness and wisdom; and relying upon this, she told the faithful old steward, as far as possible, what was at stake, and soon after he himself took her, both mounted on swift mules, to the city and the Paneum garden.

He chose the nearest road thither through the Gate of the Sun and the Kanopic Way. Usually at this hour it was crowded with people, but to-day few persons were astir. All the idlers had thronged to the Bruchium and the harbour to see the returning ships of the vanquished fleet, hear something new, witness the demonstrations of joy, the sacrifices and processions, and—if Fortune favoured—meet the Queen and relieve their overflowing hearts by acclamations.

When the carriage turned towards the left and approached the Paneum, progress for the first time became difficult. A dense crowd had gathered around the hill on whose summit the sanctuary of Pan dominated the spacious garden. Anukis's eye perceived the tall figure of Philostratus. Was the mischief-maker everywhere? This time he seemed to encounter opposition, for loud shouts interrupted his words. Just as the carriage passed he pointed to the row of houses in which the widow of Leonax lived, but violent resistance followed the gesture.

Anukis perceived what restrained the crowd; for, as the equipage approached its destination, a body of armed youths stopped it. Their finely-formed limbs, steeled by the training of the Palaestra, and the raven, chestnut, and golden locks floating around their well-shaped heads, were indeed beautiful. They were a band of the Ephebi, formerly commanded by Archibius, and to whose leadership more recently Dion had been elected. The youths had heard what had occurred—that imprisonment, perhaps even worse disaster, threatened him. At any other time it would scarcely have been possible to oppose the decree of the Government and guard their imperilled friend, but in these dark days the rulers must deal with them. Though they were loyal to the Queen, and had resolved, spite of her defeat, to support her cause, as soon as she needed them, they would not suffer Dion to be punished for a crime which, in their eyes, was an honour. Their determination to protect him grew more eager with every vexatious delay on the part of the city council to deal with a matter which concerned one of their own body. They had not yet decided whether to demand a full pardon or only a mild sentence for the man who had wounded the “King of kings,” the son of the sovereign. Moreover, the quiet Caesarion,

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still subject to his tutor, had not understood how to win the favour of the Ephebi. The weakling never appeared in the Palaestra, which even the great Mark Antony did not disdain to visit. The latter had more than once given the youths assembled there proofs of his giant strength, and his son Antyllus also frequently shared their exercises. Dion had merely dealt Caesarion with his clenched fist one of the blows which every one must encounter in the arena.

Philotas of Amphissa, the pupil of Didymus, had been the first to inform them of the attack and, with fiery zeal, had used his utmost power to atone for the wrong done to his master's granddaughter. His appeal had roused the most eager sympathy. The Ephebi believed themselves strong enough to defend their friend against any one and, if the worst should come, they knew they would be sustained by the council, the Exegetus, the captain of the guard—a brave Macedonian, who had once been an ornament of their own band—and the numerous clients of Dion and his family. There was not a single weakling among them. They had already found an opportunity to prove this; for, though they had arrived too late to protect Didymus's property from injury, they had checked the fury of the mob whose passions Philostratus had aroused, and forced back the crowd whom the Syrian led to Barine's dwelling to devote it to the same fate.

Another equipage was already standing before the door of Berenike's house—one of the carriages which were always at the disposal of the Queen's officials—when Anukis left Archibius's vehicle. Had some of Alexas's myrmidons arrived, or was he himself on the way to examine Dion, or even arrest him? The driver, like all the palace servants, knew Anukis, and she learned from him that he had brought Gorgias, the architect.

Anukis had never met the latter, though, during the rebuilding of Caesarion's apartments, she had often seen him, and heard much of him; among other things, that Dion's beautiful palace was his work. He was a friend of the wounded man, so she need not fear him.

When she entered the atrium she heard that Berenike had gone out to drive with Archibius and his Roman friend. The leech had forbidden his patient to see many visitors. No one had been admitted except Gorgias and one of Dion's freedmen.

But time pressed; people of the same rank and disposition understand one another; the old porter and the Nubian were both loyal to their employers, and, moreover, were natives of the same country; so it required only a few words to persuade the door-keeper to conduct her without delay to the bedside of the wounded man.

The freedman, a tall, weather-beaten greybeard, simply clad, who looked like a pilot, was waiting outside the sick-room. He had not yet been admitted to Dion's presence, but this did not appear to vex him, for he stood leaning quietly against the wall beside

the door, gazing at the broad-brimmed sailor's hat which he was slowly turning in his hands.

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Scarcely had Dion heard Anukis's name, when an eager "Let her come in" reached her ears through the half-open door.

The Nubian waited to be summoned, but her dark face must have showed distinctly that something important and urgent had brought her here, for the wounded man added to his first words of greeting the expression of a fear that she had no good news.

Her reply was an eager nod of assent, accompanied by a doubtful glance at Gorgias; and Dion now curtly told the architect the name of the newcomer, and assured her that his friend might hear everything, even the greatest secret.

Anukis uttered a sigh of relief and then, in a tone of the most earnest warning, poured forth the story of the impending danger. She would not be satisfied when he spoke of the Ephebi, who were ready to defend him, and the council, which would make the cause of one of its members its own, but entreated him to seek some safe place of refuge, no matter where; for powers against whom no resistance would avail were stretching their hands towards him. Even this statement, however, proved useless, for Dion was convinced that the influence of his uncle, the Keeper of the Seal, would guard him from any serious danger. Then Anukis resolved to confess what she had overheard; but she told the story without mentioning Barine, and the peril threatening her also. Finally, with all the warmth of a really anxious heart, she entreated him to heed her warning.

Even while she was still speaking, the friends exchanged significant glances; but scarcely had the last words fallen from her lips when the giant figure of the freedman passed through the door, which had remained open.

"You here, Pyrrhus?" cried the wounded man kindly.

"Yes, master, it is I," replied the stalwart fellow, twirling his sailor hat still faster.

"Listening isn't exactly my trade, and I don't usually enter your presence uninvited; but I couldn't help hearing what came through the door, and the croaking of the old raven drew me in."

"I wish you had heard more cheerful things," replied Dion; "but the brown-skinned bird of ill omen usually sings pleasant songs, and they all come from a faithful heart. But when my silent Pyrrhus opens his mouth so far, something important must surely follow, and you can speak freely in her presence."

The sailor cleared his throat, gripped his coarse felt hat in his sinewy hands, and said, in such a tremulous, embarrassed tone that his heavy chin quivered and his voice sometimes faltered: "If the woman is to be trusted, you must leave here, master, and seek some safe hiding-place. I came to offer one. On my way I heard your name. It was said that you had wounded the Queen's son, and it might cost you your life. Then I

thought: 'No, no, not that, so long as Pyrrhus lives, who taught his young master Dion to use the oars and to set his first sail—Pyrrhus and his family.'

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Why repeat what we both know well enough? From my first boat and the land on our island to the liberty you bestowed upon us, we owe everything to your father and to you, and a blessing has rested upon your gift and our labour, and what is mine is yours. No more words are needed. You know our cliff beyond the Alveus Steganus, north of the great harbour—the Isle of Serpents. It is quickly gained by any one who knows the course through the water, but is as inaccessible to others as the moon and stars. People are afraid of the mere name, though we rid the island of the vermin long ago. My boys Dionysus, Dionichus, and Dionikus—they all have ‘Dion’ in their name—are waiting in the fish market, and when it grows dusk—” Here the wounded man interrupted the speaker by holding out his hand and thanking him warmly for his fidelity and kindness, though he refused the well-meant invitation. He admitted that he knew no safer hiding-place than the cliff surrounded by fluttering sea-gulls, where Pyrrhus lived with his family and earned abundant support by fishing and serving as pilot. But anxiety concerning his future wife prevented his leaving the city.

The freedman however gave him no rest. He represented how quickly the harbour could be reached from his island, that fish were brought thence from it daily, and he would therefore always have news of what was passing. His sons were like him, and never used any unnecessary words; talking did not suit them. The women of the household rarely left the island. So long as it sheltered their beloved guest, they should not set foot away from it. If occasion should require, the master could be in Alexandria again quickly enough to put anything right.

This suggestion pleased the architect, who joined in the conversation to urge the freedman’s request. But Dion, for Barine’s sake, obstinately refused, until Anukis, who had long been anxious to go in pursuit of Archibius, thought it time to give her opinion.

“Go with the man, my lord!” she cried. “I know what I know. I will tell our Barine of your faithful resolution; but how can she show her gratitude for it if you are a dead man?”

This question and the information which followed it turned the scale; and, as soon as Dion had consented to accompany the freedman, the Nubian prepared to continue her errands, but the wounded man detained her to give many messages for Barine, and then she was stopped by the architect, who thought he had found in her the right assistant for numerous plans he had in his mind.

He had returned early that morning from Heroonpolis, where, with other members of his profession, he had inspected the newly constructed waterway. The result of the first investigation had been unfavourable to the verge of discouragement; and, in behalf of the others, he had gone to the Queen to persuade her to give up the enterprise which, though so full of promise, was impracticable in the short time at their disposal.

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He had travelled all night, and was received as soon as Cleopatra rose from her couch. He had driven from the Lochias in the carriage placed at his disposal because he had business at the arsenal and various points where building was going on, in order to inspect the wall erected for Antony on the Choma, and the Temple of Isis at the Corner of the Muses, to which Cleopatra desired to add a new building. But scarcely had he quitted the Bruchium when he was detained by the crowd assailing the house of Didymus with beams and rams, and at the same time keeping off the Ephebi who had attacked them.

He had forced his way through the raging mob to aid the old couple and their granddaughter. The slave Phryx had been busily preparing the boats which lay moored in the harbour of the seawashed estate, but Gorgias had found it difficult to persuade the grey-haired philosopher to go with him and his family to the shore. He was ready to face the enraged rioters and—though it should cost his life—cry out that they were shamefully deceived and were staining themselves with a disgraceful crime. Not until the architect represented that it was unworthy of a Didymus to expose to bestial violence a life on which helpless women and the whole world—to whom his writings were guide-posts to the realms of truth—possessed a claim, could he be induced to yield. Nevertheless, the sage and his relatives almost fell into the hands of the furious rabble, for Didymus would not depart until he had saved this, that, and the other precious book, till the number reached twenty or thirty. Besides, his old deaf wife, who usually submitted quietly when her defective hearing prevented her comprehension of many things, insisted upon knowing what was occurring. She ordered everybody who came near her to explain what had happened, thus detaining her granddaughter Helena, who was trying to save the most valuable articles in the dwelling. So the departure was delayed, and only the brave defence of young Philotas, Didymus's assistant, and some of the Ephebi, who joined him, enabled them to escape unharmed.

The Scythian guards, which at last put a stop to the frantic rage of the deluded populace, arrived too late to prevent the destruction of the house, but they saved Philotas and the other youths from the fists and stones of the rabble. When the boats had gone farther out into the harbour the question of finding a home for the philosopher and his family was discussed. Berenike's house was also threatened, and the rules of the museum prevented the reception of women. Five servants had accompanied the family, and none of Didymus's learned friends had room for so many guests. When the old man and Helena began to enumerate the lodgings of which they could think, Gorgias interposed with an entreaty that they would come to his house.

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He had inherited the dwelling from his father. It was very large and spacious, almost empty, and they could reach it speedily, as it stood on the seashore, north of the Forum. The fugitives would be entirely at liberty there, since he had work on hand which would permit him to spend no time under his own roof except at night. He soon overcame the trivial objections made by the philosopher and, fifteen minutes after they had left the Corner of the Muses, he was permitted to open the door of his house to his guests, and he did so with genuine pleasure. The old housekeeper and the grey-haired steward, who had been in his father's service, looked surprised, but worked zealously after Gorgias had confided the visitors to their charge. The pressure of business forbade his fulfilling the duties of host in his own person.

Didymus and his family had reason to be grateful; and when the old sage found in the large library which the architect placed at his disposal many excellent books and among them some of his own, he ceased his restless pacing to and fro and forced himself to settle down. Then he remembered that, by the advice of a friend, he had placed his property in the keeping of a reliable banker and, though life still seemed dark grey, it no longer looked as black as before.

Gorgias briefly related all this to the Nubian, and Dion added that she would find Archibius with his Roman friend at the house of Berenike's brother, the philosopher Arius. Like himself, the latter was suffering from an injury inflicted by a reckless trick of Antyllus. Barine's mother was there also, so Anukis could inform them of the fate of Didymus and his brother, and tell them that he, Dion, intended to leave her house and the city an hour after sunset.

"But," interrupted Gorgias, "no one, not even your hostess Berenike and her brother, must know your destination.—You look as if you could keep a secret, woman."

"Though she owes her nickname Aisopion to her nimble tongue," replied Dion.

"But this tongue is like the little silver fish with scarlet spots in the palace garden," said Anukis. "They dart to and fro nimbly enough; but as soon as danger threatens they keep as quiet in the water as though they were nailed fast. And—by mighty Isis!—we have no lack of peril in these trying times. Would you like to see the lady Berenike and the others before your departure?"

"Berenike, yes; but the sons of Arius—they are fine fellows—would be wise to keep aloof from this house to-day."

"Yes indeed!" the architect chimed in. "It will be prudent for their father, too, to seek some hiding-place. He is too closely connected with Octavianus. It may indeed happen that the Queen will desire to make use of him. In that case he may be able to aid Barine, who is his sister's child. Timagenes, too, who comes from Rome as a mediator, may have some influence."



“The same thoughts entered my poor brain also,” said Anukis. “I am now going to show the gentlemen the danger which threatens her, and if I succeed—Yet what could a serving-woman of my appearance accomplish? Still—my house is nearer to the brink of the stream than the dwelling of most others, and if I fling in a loaf, perhaps the current will bear it to the majestic sea.”

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"Wise Aisopion!" cried Dion; but the worthy maid-servant shrugged her crooked shoulders, saying: "We needn't be free-born to find pleasure in what is right; and if being wise means using one's brains to think, with the intention of promoting right and justice, you can always call me so. Then you will start after sundown?"

With these words she was about to leave the room, but the architect, who had watched her every movement, had formed a plan and begged her to follow him.

When they reached the next room he asked for a faithful account of Barine and the dangers threatening her. After consulting her as if she were an equal, he held out his hand in farewell, saying: "If it is possible to bring her to the Temple of Isis unseen, these clouds may scatter. I shall be in the sanctuary of the goddess from the first hour after sunset. I have some measurements to take there. When you say you know that the immortals will have pity on the innocent woman whom they have led to the verge of the abyss, perhaps you may be right. It seems as if matters here were combining in a way which would be apt to rob the story-teller of his listener's faith."

After Aisopion had gone, Gorgias returned to Dion's room and asked the freedman to be ready with his boat at a place on the shore which he carefully described.

The friends were again alone. Gorgias had his hands full of work, but he could not help expressing his surprise at the calm bearing which Dion maintained. "You behave as if you were going to an oyster supper at Kanopus," he said, shaking his head as though perplexed by some incomprehensible problem.

"What else would you have me do?" asked the Macedonian. "The vivid imagination of you artists shows you the future according to your own varying moods. If you hope, you transform a pleasant garden into the Elysian fields; if you fear anything you behold in a burning roof the conflagration of a world. We, from whose cradle the Muse was absent, who use only sober reason to provide for the welfare of the household and the state, as well as for our own, see facts as they are and treat them like figures in a sum. I know that Barine is in danger. That might drive me frantic; but beyond her I see Archibius and Charmian spreading their protecting wings over her head; I perceive the fear of my faction, including the museum, of the council of which I am a member, of my clients and the conditions of the times, which precludes arousing the wrath of the citizens. The product which results from the correct addition of all these known quantities—"

"Will be correct," interrupted his friend, "so long as the most incalculable of all factors, passion, does not blend with them—the passion of a woman—and the Queen belongs to the sex which is certainly more powerful in that domain."

"Granted! But as soon as Mark Antony returns it will be proved that her jealousy was needless."

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"We will hope so. It is only the misled, deceived, abused Cleopatra whom I fear; for she herself is matchless in divine goodness. The charm by which she ensnares hearts is indescribable, and the iron power of her intellect! I tell you, Dion—"

"Friend, friend," was the laughing interruption. "How high your wishes soar! For three years I have kept an account of the conflagrations in your heart. I believe we had reached seventeen; but this last one is equal to two."

"Folly!" cried Gorgias in an irritated tone: "May not a man admire what is magnificent, wonderful, unique? She is all these things! Just now— how long ago is it?—she appeared before me in a radiance of beauty—"

"Which should have made you shade both eyes. Yet you have been speaking so warmly of your young guest, her loving caution, her gentle calmness in the midst of peril —"

"Do you suppose I wish to recall a single syllable?" the architect indignantly broke in. "Helena has no peer among the maidens of Alexandria—but the other—Cleopatra—is elevated in her divine majesty above all ordinary mortals. You might spare me and yourself that scornful curl of the lip. Had she gazed into your face with those tearful, sorrowful eyes, as she did into mine, and spoken of her misery, you would have gone through fire and water, hand in hand with me, for her sake. I am not a man who is easily moved, and since my father's death the only tears I have seen have been shed by others; but when she talked of the mausoleum I was to build for her because Fate, she knew not how soon, might force her to seek refuge in the arms of death, my calmness vanished. Then, when she cumbered me among the friends on whom she could rely and held out her hand—a matchless hand—oh! laugh if you choose— I felt I know not how, and kneeling at her feet I kissed it; it was wet with my tears. I am not ashamed of this emotion, and my lips seem consecrated since they touched the little white hand which spoke a language of its own and stands before my eyes wherever I gaze."

Pushing back his thick locks from his brow as he spoke, he shook his head as though dissatisfied with himself and, in an altered tone, hurriedly continued: "But this is a time ill-suited for such ebullitions of feeling. I mentioned the mausoleum, whose erection the Queen desires. She will see the first hasty sketch to-morrow. It is already before my mind's eye. She wished to have it adjoin the Temple of Isis, her goddess—I proposed the great sanctuary in the Rhakotis quarter, but she objected—she wished to have it close to the palace at Lochias. She had thought of the temple at the Corner of the Muses, but the house occupied by Didymus stood in the way of a larger structure. If this were removed it would be possible to carry the street through the old man's garden, perhaps even to the sea-shore, and we should have had space for a gigantic edifice and still left room for a fine

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garden. But we had learned how the philosopher loved his family estate. The Queen is unwilling to use violence towards the old man. She is just, and perhaps other reasons, of which I am ignorant, influence her. So I promised to look for another site, though I saw how much she desired to have her tomb connected with the sanctuary of her favourite goddess Then—I have already told the clever brown witch—then the immortals, Divinity, Fate, or whatever we call the power which guides the world and our lives according to eternal laws and its own mysterious, omnipotent will, permitted a rascally deed, from which I think may come deliverance for you and a source of pleasure to the Queen in these days of trial.”

“Man, man! Where will this new passion lead you? The horses are stamping impatiently outside; duty summons the most faithful of men, and he stands like a prophet, indulging in mysterious sayings!”

“Whose meaning and purport, spite of your calm calculations of existing circumstances, will soon seem no less wonderful to you than to me, whose unruly artist nature, according to your opinion, is playing me a trick,” retorted the architect. “Now listen to this explanation: Didymus’s house will be occupied at once by my workmen, but I shall examine the lower rooms of the Temple of Isis. I have with me a document requiring obedience to my orders. Cleopatra herself laid the plans before me, even the secret portion showing the course of the subterranean chambers. It will cast some light upon my mysterious sayings if I bear you away from the enemy through one of the secret corridors. They were right in concealing from you by how slender a thread, spite of the power of your example in mathematics, the sword hangs above your head. Now that I see a possibility of removing it, I can show it to you. Tomorrow you would have fallen, without hope of rescue, into the hands of cruel foes and been shamefully abandoned by your own weak uncle, had not the most implacable of all your enemies permitted himself the infamous pleasure of laying hands on an old man’s house, and the Queen, in consequence of an agitating message, had the idea suggested of building her own mausoleum. The corridor”—here he lowered his voice—“of which I spoke leads to the sea at a spot close beside Didymus’s garden, and through it I will guide you, and, if possible, Barine also, to the shore. This could be accomplished in the usual way only by the greatest risk. If we use the passage we can reach a dark place on the strand unseen, and unless some special misfortune pursues us our flight will be unnoticed. The litters and your tottering gait would betray everything if we were to enter the boat anywhere else in the great harbour.”

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"And we, sensible folk, refuse to believe in miracles!" cried Dion, holding out his wan hand to the architect. "How shall I thank you, you dear, clever, most loyal of friends to your male friends, though your heart is so faithless to fair ones? Add that malicious speech to the former ones, for which I now crave your pardon. What you intend to accomplish for Barine and me gives you a right to do and say to me whatever ill you choose all the rest of my life. Anxiety for her would surely have bound me to this house and the city when the time came to make the escape, for without her my life would now be valueless. But when I think that she might follow me to Pyrrhus's cliff—"

"Don't flatter yourself with this hope," pleaded Gorgias. "Serious obstacles may interpose. I am to have another talk with the Nubian later. With no offence to others, I believe her advice will be the best. She knows how matters stand with the lofty, and yet herself belongs to the lowly. Besides, through Charmian the way to the Queen lies open, and nothing which happens at court escapes her notice. She showed me that we must consider Barine's delivery to Alexas a piece of good fortune. How easily jealousy might have led to a fatal crime one whose wish promptly becomes action, unless she curbs the undue zeal of her living tools! Those on whom Fate inflicts so many blows rarely are in haste to spare others. Would the anxieties which weigh upon her like mountains interpose between the Queen and the jealous rancour which is too petty for her great soul?"

"What is great or petty to the heart of a loving woman?" asked Dion. "In any case you will do what you can to remove Barine from the power of the enraged princess—I know."

Gorgias pressed his friend's hand closely, then, yielding to a sudden impulse, kissed him on the forehead and hurried to the door.

On the threshold a faint moan from the wounded man stopped him. Would he be strong enough to follow the long passage leading to the sea?

Dion protested that he confidently expected to do so, but his deeply flushed face betrayed that the fever which had once been conquered had returned.

Gorgias's eyes sought the floor in deep thought. Many sick persons were borne to the temple in the hope of cure; so Dion's appearance would cause no special surprise. On the other hand, to have strangers carry him through the passage seemed perilous. He himself was strong, but even the strongest person would have found it impossible to support the heavy burden of a grown man to the sea, for the gallery was low and of considerable length. Still, if necessary, he would try. With the comforting exclamation, "If your strength does not suffice, another way will be found," he took his leave, gave Barine's maid and the wounded man's body-slave the necessary directions, commanded the door-keeper to admit no one save the physician, and stepped into the open air.

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A little band of Ephebi were pacing to and fro before the house. Others had flung themselves down in an open space surrounded by shrubbery in the Paneum garden, and were drinking the choice wine which Dion's cellarer, by his orders, had brought and was pouring out for the crowd.

It was an animated scene, for the clients of the sufferer, who, after expressing their sympathy, had been dismissed by the porter, and bedizened girls had joined the youths. There was no lack of jests and laughter, and when some pretty young mother or female slave passed by leading children, with whom the garden was a favourite playground, many a merry word was exchanged.

Gorgias waved his hands gaily to the youths, pleased with the cheerfulness with which the brave fellows transformed duty into a festival, and many raised their wine-cups, shouting a joyous "Io" and "Evoe," to drink the health of the famous artist who not long ago had been one of themselves.

The others were led by a slender youth, the student Philotas, from Amphissa, Didymus's assistant, whom the architect, a few days before, had helped to liberate from the demons of wine. Even while Gorgias was beckoning to him from the two-wheeled chariot, the thought entered his mind that yonder handsome youth, who had so deeply wronged Barine and Dion, would be the very person to help carry his friend through the low-roofed passage to the sea. If Philotas was the person Gorgias believed him to be, he would deem it a special favour to make amends for his crime to those whom he had injured, and he was not mistaken; for, after the youth had taken a solemn oath not to betray the secret to any one, the architect asked him to aid in Dion's rescue. Philotas, overflowing with joyful gratitude, protested his willingness to do so, and promised to wait at the appointed spot in the Temple of Isis at the time mentioned.

CHAPTER XIV.

While Gorgias was examining the subterranean chambers in the Temple of Isis, Charmian returned to Lochias earlier than she herself had expected. She had met her brother, whom she did not find at Kanopus, at Berenike's, and after greeting Dion on his couch of pain, she told Archibius of her anxiety. She confided to him alone that the Queen had committed Barine's fate to Alexas, for the news might easily have led the mother of the endangered woman to some desperate venture; but even Archibius's composure, so difficult to disturb, was not proof against it. He would have sought the Queen's presence at once—if necessary, forced his way to it; but the historian Timagenes, who had just come from Rome, was expecting him, and he had not returned to his birthplace as a private citizen, but commissioned by Octavianus to act as mediator in putting an end to the struggle which had really been decided in his favour at the battle of Actium. The choice of this mediator was a happy one; for he had taught Cleopatra

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in her childhood, and was the self-same quick-witted man who had so often roused her to argument. His share in a popular insurrection against the Roman rule had led to his being carried as a slave to the Tiber. There he soon purchased his freedom, and attained such distinction that Octavianus entrusted this important mission to the man who was so well known in Alexandria. Archibius was to meet him at the house of Arius, who was still suffering from the wounds inflicted by the chariot-wheels of Antyllus, and Berenike had accompanied Timagenes to her brother.

Charmian did not venture to go there; a visit to Octavianus's former teacher would have been misinterpreted, and it was repugnant to her own delicacy of feeling to hold intercourse at this time with the foe and conqueror of her royal mistress. She therefore let her brother drive with Berenike to the injured man's; but before his departure Archibius had promised, if the worst came, to dare everything to open the eyes of the Queen, who had forbidden her, Charmian, to speak in behalf of Barine and thwart the plans of Alexas.

From the Paneum garden she was carried to the Kanopic Way and the Jewish quarter, where she had many important purchases to make for Cleopatra. It was long after noon when the litter was again borne to Lochias.

On the way she had severely felt her own powerlessness. Without having accomplished anything herself, she was forced to wait for the success of others; and she had scarcely crossed the threshold of the palace ere fresh cares were added to those which already burdened her soul.

She understood how to read the faces of courtiers, and the door-keeper's had taught her that since her departure something momentous had occurred. She disliked to question the slaves and lower officials, so she refrained, though the interior of the palace was crowded with guards, officials of every grade, attendants, and slaves. Many who saw her gazed at her with the timidity inspired by those over whom some disaster is impending. Others, whose relations were more intimate, pressed forward to enjoy the mournful satisfaction of being the first messengers of evil tidings. But she passed swiftly on, keeping them back with grave words and gestures, until, before the door of the great anteroom thronged with Greek and Egyptian petitioners, she met Zeno, the Keeper of the Seal. Charmian stopped him and inquired what had happened.

"Since when?" asked the old courtier. "Every moment has brought some fresh tidings and all are mournful. What terrible times, Charmian, what disasters!"

"No messenger had arrived when I left the Lochias," replied Charmian. "Now it seems as though the old monster of a palace, accustomed to so many horrors, is holding its breath in dread. Tell me the main thing, at least, before I meet the Queen."

The main thing? Pestilence or famine—which shall we call the worse?”

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“Quick, Zeno! I am expected.”

“I, too, am in haste, and really there is nothing to relate over which the tongue would care to dwell. Candidus arrived first. Came himself straight from Actium. The fellow is bold enough.”

“Is the army defeated also?”

“Defeated, dispersed, deserted to the foe—King Herod with his legions in the van.”

Charmian covered her face with her hands and groaned aloud, but Zeno continued:

“You were with her in the flight. When Mark Antony left you, he sailed with the ships which joined him for Paraetionum. A large body of troops on which the Queen and Mardion had fixed their hopes was encamped there. Reinforcements could easily be gained and we should once more have a fine army at our disposal.”

“Pinarius Scarpus, a cautious soldier, was in command; and I, too, believed—”

“The more you trusted him, the greater would be your error. The shameless rascal—he owes everything to Antony—had received tidings of Actium ere the ships arrived, and had already made overtures to Octavianus when the Emperor came. The veterans who opposed the treachery were hewn down by the wretch’s orders, but the brave garrison of the city could not be won over to the monstrous crime. It is due to these men that Mark Antony still lives and did not come to a miserable end at the hands of his own troops. The twice-defeated general— a courier brought the news—will arrive to-night. Strangely enough, he will not come to Lochias, but to the little palace on the Choma.”

“Poor, poor Queen!” cried Charmian; “how did she bear all this?”

“In the presence of the defeated Candidus and Antony’s messenger like a heroine. But afterwards—Her raving did not last long; but the mute, despairing silence! Ere she had fully recovered her self-command she sent us all away, and I have not seen her since. But all the thoughts and feelings which dwell here”—he pointed to his brow and breast—“have left their abode and linger with her. I totter from place to place like a soulless body. O Charmian! what has befallen us? Where are the days when care and trouble lay buried with the other dead—the days and nights when my brain united with that of the Queen to transform this desolate earth into the beautiful Elysian Fields, every-day life to a festival, festivals to the very air of Olympus? What unprecedented scenes of splendour had I not devised for the celebration of the victory, the triumph—nay, even the entry into Rome! Whole chests are filled with the sketches, programmes, drawings, and verses. All who handle brush and chisel, compose and execute music, would have lent their aid, and—you may believe me—the result would have been

something which future generations would have discussed, lauded, and extolled in song. And now—now?”

“Now we will double our efforts to save what is yet to be rescued!”

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“Rescued?” repeated the courtier in a hollow tone. “The Queen, too, still clings to this fine word. When I saw her at work yesterday, it seemed as if I beheld her drawing water with the bottomless vessel of the Danaides. True, today, when I left her, her arms had fallen—and in this attitude she now stands before me with her tearful eyes. And besides, I can’t get my nephew Dion out of my mind. Cares—nothing but cares concerning him! And my intentions towards him were so kind! My will gives him my entire fortune; but now he actually wants to marry the singer, the daughter of the artist Leonax. You have taken her under your protection, but surely your own niece, Iras, is dearer to you, so you will approve of my destroying the will if Dion insists upon his own way. He shall not have a solidus of my property if he does not give up the woman who is a thorn in the Queen’s flesh. And his choice does not suit our ancient race. Iras, on the contrary, was Dion’s playfellow, and I have long destined her for his wife. No better match, nor one more acceptable to the Queen, could be found for him. He cared for her until the singer bewitched him. Bring them together, and they shall be like my own children. If the fool resists his uncle, whose sole desire is to benefit him, I will withdraw my aid. Whatever intrigues his foes may weave, I shall fold my arms and not interfere. I stand in the place of his father, my dead brother, and demand obedience. The Queen is my universe, and her favour is of more value than twenty refractory nephews.”

“You will retain her Majesty’s favour, even if you intercede for your brother’s son.”

“And Iras? When she finds herself deceived—and she will soon discover it—she will not rest—”

“Until she has brought ruin upon him,” interrupted Charmian, in a tone of sorrow rather than reproach as though she already beheld the impending disaster. “But Iras has no greater influence with the Queen than I, and if you and I unite to protect the brave young fellow, who is of your own blood—”

“Then, of course—no doubt, on account of your longer period of service, you have more influence with her Majesty than Iras—however—such matters must be considered—and I have already said—my mind leaves its abode to follow the Queen like her shadow. It heeds only what concerns her. Let everything else go as it will. The fleet the same as destroyed, Candidus defeated, Herod a deserter, treason on treason—the African legions lost! What in the name of the god who tried to roll back the wheel dashing down the mountain-side!—And yet! Let us offer sacrifices, my friend, and hope for better days!”

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Zeno retired as he spoke, but Charmian moved forward with a drooping head to find Barine and her faithful Anukis, and weep her fill ere she went to perform the duty of consoling and sustaining her beloved mistress. Yet she herself so sorely needed comfort. Wherever she turned her eyes she beheld disaster, peril, treachery, and base intrigues. She felt as if she had lived long enough, and that her day was over. Hitherto her gentle nature, her intellect, which yearned to expand, gather new riches, and exchange what it had gained with others, had possessed much to offer to the Queen. She had not only been Cleopatra's confidante, but necessary to her to discuss questions far in advance of the demands of the times, which occupied her restless mind. Now the Queen's attention was wholly absorbed by events—hard, cruel facts—which she must resist or turn to her own advantage. Her life had become a conflict, and Charmian felt that she was by no means combative. The hard, supple, keenly polished intellect of Iras now asserted its value, and the elderly woman told herself that she was in danger of being held in less regard than her younger companion. To resign her office would have given her peace of mind, but she repelled the thought. For the very reason that these days were so full of misery and perhaps drawing nearer to the end, she must remain, first for the sake of the Queen, but also to watch over Barine.

Now she longed to go to Cleopatra. Her mere presence, she knew, would do her sore heart good. The silvery laugh of a child reached her ears through the open gate of the garden which she was rapidly approaching. Little six-year-old Alexander ran towards her with open arms, hugged her closely, pressed his curly head against her, and gazed into her face with his large clear eyes.

Charmian's heart swelled; and as she raised the child in her arms and kissed him, she thought of the sad fate impending, and the composure maintained with so much difficulty gave way; tears streamed from her eyes and, sobbing violently, she pressed the boy closer to her breast.

The prince, accustomed to bright faces and tender caresses, broke away from her in terror to run back to his brother and sisters. But he had a kind little heart, and, knowing that no one weeps and sobs unless in pain, Alexander pitied Charmian, whom he loved, and hurried to her again.

What he meant to show her had pleased his mother, too, and dried the tears in her eyes. So he took Charmian by the hand and drew her along, saying that he wanted her to see the prettiest thing. She willingly allowed herself to be led over the paths, strewn with red sand, of the little garden which Antony had had laid out for his children in the magnificent style which pleased his love of splendour, and filled with rare and beautiful things.

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There was a pond with tiny gold and silver fish, where the rare lotus flowers with pink blossoms arose from amid their smooth green leaves, and another where dwarf ducks of every colour, which seemed as if they had been created for children, swam to and fro. A bit of the sea which washed its shore had been enclosed by a gilded latticework, and on its surface floated a number of snow-white swans and black ones with scarlet bills. Native and Indian flowers of every hue adorned the beds, and the narrow paths were shaded by arbours made of gold wire, over which ran climbing vines filled with bright blossoms.

A grotto of stalactites behind the dense foliage of an Indian tree offered a resting-place, and beside it was a little house where the children could stay. The interior lacked none of the requisites of living, not even the cooking utensils in the kitchen, and the family portraits in the tablinum, delicately painted by an artist on small ivory slabs. Everything was made to suit the size of children, but of the most costly material and careful workmanship.

Behind the house was a little stable where four tiny horses with spotted skins, the rarest and prettiest creatures imaginable—a gift from the King of Media—were stamping the ground.

In another place was an enclosure containing gazelles, ostriches, young giraffes, and other grass-eating animals. Bright-plumaged birds and monkeys filled the tops of the trees, gay balls rose and fell on the jets of the fountains, and child genii and images of the gods in bronze and marble peered from the foliage. This whole enchanted world was comprised within a narrow space, and, with its radiance of colour and wealth of form, its perfume, songs, and warbling, exerted a bewildering influence upon the excited imaginations of grown people as well as children.

Little Alexander, without even casting a glance at all this, drew Charmian forward. He did not pause until he reached the shore of the lotus pond; then, putting his fingers on his lips, he said: "There, now, I'll show you. Look here!"

Rising cautiously upon tip-toe as he spoke, he pointed to the hollow in the trunk of a tree. A pair of finches had built their nest in it, and five young ones with big yellow beaks stretched their ugly little heads hungrily upward.

"That's so pretty!" cried the prince. "And you must see the old ones come to feed them." The beautiful boy's sweet face fairly beamed with delight, and Charmian kissed him tenderly. Yet, even as she did so, she thought of the young swallows hacked to death in his mother's galley, and a chill ran through her veins.

Just at that moment voices were heard calling Alexander from a neglected spot behind the dainty little house built for the children, and the boy exclaimed peevishly:

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"There, now, I showed you the little nest, so I forgot. Agatha fell asleep and Smerdis went away, so we were alone. Then they sent me to Horus, the gate-keeper, to get some of his spelt bread. He never says no to anything, and it does taste so good. We're peasants, and have been using the axe and the hoe, so we want something to eat. Have you seen our house? We built it ourselves. Selene, Helios, Jotape, my future wife, and I—yes, I! They let me help, and we finished it alone, all alone! Everything is here. We shall build the shed for the cow to-morrow. The others mustn't see it, but I may show it to you."

While speaking, he drew her forward again, and Charmian obediently followed. The twins and little Jotape, who had been chosen for the future bride of the six-year-old Prince Alexander a pretty, delicate, fair-haired child of his own age, the daughter of the Median king, who had been betrothed to the boy after the Parthian war, and now remained as a hostage at Cleopatra's court—welcomed her with joyous shouts. With the exception of the little Median princess, Charmian had witnessed their birth, and they all loved her dearly.

The little royal labourers showed their work with proud delight, and it really was well done.

They had toiled at it for weeks, paying no heed to the garden and all its costly rarities. They pointed with special pride to the two planks which Helios, aided by Alexander, had fished out of the sea after the last storm, when they were left alone, and to the lock on the door which they had secretly managed to wrench from an old gate. Selene herself had woven the curtain in front of the door. Now they were going to build a hearth too.

Charmian praised their skill, while they—all talking merrily together—told her how they had conquered the greatest difficulties. Their bright eyes sparkled with pleasure while describing the work of their own hands, and they were so absorbed in eager delight that they did not notice the approach of a man until startled by his words: "Enough of this idle sport now, your Highnesses. Too much time has already been wasted on it."

Then, turning to the Queen, who had accompanied him, he continued in a tone of apology: "This amusement might seem somewhat hazardous, yet there is much to be said in its favour. Besides, it appeared to afford the royal children so much pleasure that I permitted it for a short time. But if your Majesty commands:

"Let them have their pleasure," the Queen interrupted kindly; and as soon as the children saw their mother they rushed forward, crowded around her with fearless love, thanked her, and eagerly assured her that nothing in the whole garden was half so dear to them as their little house. They meant to build a stable too.

“That might be too much,” said the tutor Euphronion, a grey-haired man with a shrewd, kindly face. “We must remember how many things are yet to be learned, that we may reach the goal fixed for your Majesty’s birthday and pass the examination.”

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But all the children now joined in the entreaty to be allowed to build the stable too, and it was granted.

When the tutor at last began to lead them away, the royal mother stopped them, asking “Suppose, instead of this garden, I should give you a bit of bare land, such as the peasants till, where, after your lessons, you might dig and build as much as you please?”

Loud shouts of joy from the children answered the question; but the little Median girl, Jotape, said hesitatingly:

“Could I take my doll too—only the oldest, Atossa? She has lost one arm, yet I love her the best.”

“Deprive us of anything you choose!” cried Helios, drawing little Alexander towards him, to show that they, the men, were of the same mind, “only give us some ground and let us build.”

“We will consider whether it can be done,” replied Cleopatra. “Perhaps, Euphronion, you would be the right person—But we will discuss the matter at a more quiet hour.”

The tutor withdrew and the children, who followed, looked back, waving their hands and calling to their mother for a long time.

When they had disappeared behind the shrubbery in the garden Charmian exclaimed, “However dark the sky may be, so long as you possess these little ones you can never lack sunshine.”

“If,” replied Cleopatra, gazing pensively at the ground, “with a thought of them another did not blend which makes the gloom become deeper still. You know the tidings this terrible day has brought?”

“All,” replied Charmian, sighing heavily.

“Then you know the abyss on whose verge we are walking; and to see them— them also dragged into the yawning gulf by their unhappy mother— Oh, Charmian, Charmian!”

She sobbed aloud, threw her arms around the neck of her friend and playfellow, and laid her head upon her bosom like a child seeking consolation. Cleopatra wept for several minutes, and when she again raised her tear-stained face she said softly:

“That did me good! O, Charmian! no one needs love as I do. On your warm heart my own has already grown calmer.”

“Use it, nestle there whenever you need it, to the end,” cried Charmian, deeply moved.

“To the end,” repeated Cleopatra, wiping her eyes. “It began to-day, I think. I have just spent an hour alone. I meant to commit a crime, and you know how impatiently passion sweeps me along. But what misfortunes have assailed me! The army destroyed; the desertion of Herod and Pinarius; Antony’s generous, trusting heart torn by base treachery, his soul darkened; the reconstruction of the canal, the last hope—Gorgias brought the news—the same as destroyed. Just then little Alexander came to show me his bird’s nest. Everything else in the garden seemed to him worthless by comparison. This awakened new thoughts, and now here is the little house which the children have built with their own hands. All

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these things forced me by some mysterious power to look back along the course of my life to the distant days in your father's house—I—These children! Upon what different foundations our lives have been built! I made them begin at the point I had gained when youth lay behind me. My childhood commenced among the disorders of the government, clouded by my father's exile and my mother's death, on the brink of ruin. That of the twins—they are ten years old—will soon be over—and now, after enjoying pleasures not one of which was bestowed on me, they must endure the same sorrow. But did not we have better ones? What they daily possessed we only dreamed of in our simple garden. How often I let you share the radiant visions which my soul revealed to me! You willingly accompanied me into the splendid fairy world of my dreams. All that my imagination conjured up during the years of quiet and repose accompanied me into my after-life. Again and again I have beheld them, rich and powerful, upon the throne. The means of rendering the vision a varity were at hand; and when I met the man whose own life resembled the realization of a dream, I recalled those childish fancies and made them facts. The marvels with which I adorned my lover's existence were childish dreams to which I gave tangible form. This garden is an image of the life to which I intended to rise; in reality, fell. We collected within the limits of this bit of earth everything which can delight the senses; not a single one is omitted in this narrow space, whose crowded maze of pleasures fairly impede freedom of movement. Yet in your home, and guided by your wise father, I had learned to be content with so little, and commenced the struggle to attain peace. That painless peace —our chief good—whence came it? Through me it was lost to you both But the children—I made them begin their lives in an arena of every disturbing influence; and now I see how their own healthy natures yearn to escape from the dazzling wealth of colour, the stupefying fragrance, the bewildering songs and twittering. They long to return to the untilled earth, where the life of struggling mortals began.

“The boy casts away the baubles, to test his own creative powers. The girl follows his example, and clings fast only to the doll in which she sees the living child, in order to do justice to the maternal instinct, the token of her sex. But what they so eagerly desire is right, and shall be granted. When I was ten years old, like the twins, my life and efforts were already directed towards one fixed goal. They are still blindly following the objects set before them. Let them return to the place whence their mother started, where she received everything good which is still hers. They shall go to the garden of Epicurus, no matter whether it is the old one in Kanopus or elsewhere. All that their mother beheld in vivid dreams, which she often strove with wanton extravagance to realize, has surrounded them from their birth and early satiated them. When they enter life, they will scorn what merely stirs and dazzles the senses, and cling to the aspiration for painless peace of mind, if a wise guide directs them and protects them from the dangers which the teachings of Epicurus contain for youth. I have found this guide, and you, too, will trust him—I mean your brother Archibius.”

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“Archibius?” asked Charmian in surprise. “Yes, he who grew up in the garden of Epicurus, and in life and philosophy found the support which has preserved his peace of mind during all the conflicts of existence— he who loves the mother, and to whom the children are also dear— he to whom the boys and girls cling with affectionate confidence. I wish to place the children under his protection and, if he will consent to grant this desire of the most hapless of women, I shall look forward calmly to the end. It is approaching! I feel, I know it! Gorgias is already at work upon the plan for my tomb.”

“O my Queen!” cried Charmian sorrowfully. Whatever may happen, your illustrious life cannot be in danger! The generous heart of Mark Antony does not throb in Octavianus’s breast, but he is not cruel, and for the very reason that cool calculation curbs ambition he will spare you. He knows that you are the idol of the city, the whole country; and if he really succeeds in adding fresh victories to this first conquest, if the immortals permit your throne and—may they avert it!—your sacred person, too, to fall into his power—”

“Then,” cried Cleopatra, her clear eyes flashing, “then he shall learn which of us two is the greater—then I shall know how to maintain the right to despise him, though blind Fate should make the whole power of the world subject to him who robbed my son and Caesar’s of his heritage!”

Her eyes had blazed with anger as she uttered the words; then, letting her little clenched hand fall, she went on in an altered tone:

“Months may pass before he is strong enough to risk the attack, and the immortals themselves approved the erection of the monument. The only obstacle in the way, the house of the old philosopher Didymus, was destroyed. A messenger from Gorgias brought the news. It is to be the second monument in Alexandria worthy of notice. The other contains the body of the great Alexander, to whom the city owes its origin and name. He who subjected half the world to his power and the genius of the Greeks, was younger than I when he died. Whence do I, by whose miserable weakness the battle of Actium was lost, derive the right to walk longer beneath the sun? Perhaps Mark Antony will arrive in a few hours.”

“And will you meet the disheartened hero in this mood?” interrupted Charmian.

“He does not wish to be received,” answered Cleopatra bitterly. “He even refused to let me greet him, and I understand the denial. But what must have overwhelmed this joyous nature, so friendly to all mankind, that he longs for solitude and avoids meeting those who are nearest and dearest? Iras is now at the Choma—whither he wishes to retire—to see that everything is in order. She will also provide a supply of the flowers he loves. It is hard, cruelly hard, not to welcome him as usual. Oh, Charmian, what joy it was when, with open arms and overflowing heart,

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he swung his mighty figure ashore like a youth, while his handsome, heroic face beamed with ardent love for me! And then—you do not forget it either—when he raised his deep voice to shout the first greeting, why, it seemed as if the very fish in the water must join in, and the palm-trees on the shore wave their feathery tops in joyous sympathy. And here! The dreams of my childhood, which I made reality for him, received us, and our existence, wreathed with love and roses, became a fairy tale. Since the day he rode towards us at Kanopus and offered me the first bouquet, with his sunny glance wooing my love, his image has stood before my soul as the embodiment of the virile strength which conquers everything, and the bright, undimmed joy which renders the whole world happy. And now—now? Do you remember the dull dreamer whom we left ere he set forth for Paraetionum? But no, no, a thousand times no, he must not remain so! Not with bowed head, but erect as in the days of happiness, must he cross the threshold of Hades, hand in hand with her whom he loved. And he does love me still. Else would he have followed me hither, though no magic goblet drew him after me? And I? The heart which, in the breast of the child, gave him its first young love, is still his, and will be forever. Might I not go to the harbour and await him there? Look me in the face, Charmian, and answer me as fearlessly as a mirror: did Olympus really succeed in effacing the wrinkles?”

“They were scarcely visible before,” was the reply, “and even the keenest eye could no longer discover them. I have brought the pomade, too, and the prescription Olympus gave me for—”

“Hush, hush!” interrupted Cleopatra softly. “There are many living creatures in this garden, and they say that even the birds are good listeners.”

A roguish smile deepened the dimples in her cheeks as she spoke, and delight in her bewitching grace forced from Charmian’s lips the exclamation:

“If Mark Antony could only see you now!”

“Flatterer!” replied the Queen with a grateful smile. But Charmian felt that the time had now come to plead once more for Barine, and she began eagerly:

“No, I certainly do not flatter. No one in Alexandria, no matter what name she bears, could venture to vie even remotely with your charms. So cease the persecution of the unfortunate woman whom you confided to my care. It is an insult to Cleopatra—”

But here an indignant “Again!” interrupted her.

Cleopatra’s face, which during the conversation had mirrored every emotion of a woman’s soul, from the deepest sorrow to the most mischievous mirth, assumed an

expression of repellent harshness, and, with the curt remark, "You are forgetting what I had good reason to forbid—I must go to my work," she turned her back upon the companion of her youth.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

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See facts as they are and treat them like figures in a sum

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