

Cleopatra — Volume 07 eBook

Cleopatra — Volume 07 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XV.

Charmain went towards her own apartments. How often she had had a similar experience! In the midst of the warmest admiration for this rare woman's depth of feeling, masculine strength of intellect, tireless industry, watchful care for her native land, steadfast loyalty, and maternal devotion, she had been sobered in the most pitiable way.

She had been forced to see Cleopatra, for the sake of realizing a childish dream, and impressing her lover, squander vast sums, which diminished the prosperity of her subjects; place great and important matters below the vain, punctilious care of her own person; forget, in petty jealousy, the justice and kindness which were marked traits in her character; and, though the most kindly and womanly of sovereigns, suffer herself to be urged by angry excitement to inflict outrage on a subject whose acts had awakened her displeasure. The lofty ambition which had inspired her noblest and most praiseworthy deeds had more than once been the source of acts which she herself regretted. When a child, she could not endure to be surpassed in difficult tasks, and still deemed it a necessity to be first and peerless. Hence the unfortunate circumstance that Antony had given Barine the counterpart of an armlet which she herself wore as a gift from her lover, was perhaps the principal cause of her bitter resentment against the hapless woman.

Charmian had seen Cleopatra forgive freely and generously many a wrong, nay, many an affront, inflicted upon her; but to see herself placed by her husband on the same plane as a Barine, even in the most trivial matter, might easily seem to her an unbearable insult; and the mishap which had befallen Caesarion, in consequence of his foolish passion for the young beauty, gave her a right to punish her rival.

Deeply anxious concerning the fate of the woman in her care—greatly agitated, moreover, and exhausted physically and mentally—Charmian sought her own apartments.

Here she hoped to find solace in Barine's cheerful and equable nature; here the helpful hands of her dark-skinned maid and confidante awaited her.

The sun was low in the western horizon when she entered the anteroom. The members of the body-guard who were on duty told her that nothing unusual had occurred, and with a sigh of relief she passed into the sitting-room.

But the Ethiopian, who usually came to meet her with words of welcome, took her veil and wraps, and removed her shoes, was absent. Today no one greeted her. Not until she entered the second room, which she had assigned to her guest, did she find Barine, who was weeping bitterly.

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During Charmian's absence the latter had received a letter from Alexas, in which he informed her that he was ordered by the Queen to subject her to an examination the next morning. Her cause looked dark but, if she did not render his duty harder by the harshness which had formerly caused him much pain, he would do his utmost to protect her from imprisonment, forced labour in the mines, or even worse misfortunes. The imprudent game which she had played with King Caesarion had unfortunately roused the people against her. The depth of their indignation was shown by the fury with which they had assailed the house of her grandfather, Didymus. Nothing could save Dion, who had audaciously attacked the illustrious son of their beloved Queen, from the rage of the populace. He, Alexas, knew that in this Dion she would lose a friend and protector, but he would be disposed to take his place if her conduct did not render it impossible for him to unite mercy with justice.

This shameful letter, which promised Barine clemency in return for her favour without unmasking him in his character of judge, explained to Charmian the agitation in which she found her friend's daughter.

It was doubtless a little relief to Barine to express her loathing and abhorrence of Alexas as eagerly as her gentle nature would permit, but fear, grief, and indignation continued to struggle for the mastery in her oppressed soul.

It would have been expected that the keen-witted woman would have eagerly inquired what Charmian had accomplished with the Queen and Archibius, and what new events had happened to affect Cleopatra, the state, and the city; but she questioned her with far deeper interest concerning the welfare of her lover, desiring information in regard to many things of which her friend could give no tidings. In her brief visit to Dion's couch she had not learned how he bore his own misfortunes and Barine's, what view he took of the future, or what he expected from the woman he loved.

Charmian's ignorance and silence in regard to these very matters increased the anxiety of the endangered woman, who saw not only her own life, but those dearest to her, seriously threatened. So she entreated her hostess to relieve her from the uncertainty which was harder to endure than the most terrible reality; but the latter either could not or would not give her any further details of Cleopatra's intentions, or the fate and present abode of her grandparents and Helena. This increased her anxiety, for if Alexas's information was correct, her family must be homeless. When Charmian at last admitted that she had seen Dion only a few minutes, the tortured Barine's power of quiet endurance gave way.



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She, whose nature was so hopeful that, when the glow of the sunset faded, she already anticipated with delight the rosy dawn of the next day, now beheld in Cleopatra's hand the reed which was to sign the death-sentence of Dion and herself. Her mental vision conjured up her relatives wounded by the falling house or bleeding under the stones hurled by the raging populace. She heard Alexas command the executioner to subject her to the rack, and fancied that Anukis had not returned because she had failed to find Dion. The Queen's soldiers had probably carried him to prison, loaded with chains, if Philostratus had not already instigated the mob to drag him through the streets.

With feverish impetuosity, which alarmed Charmian the more because it was so unlike her old friend's daughter, Barine described all the spectres with which her imagination—agitated by terror, longing, love, and loathing—terrified her; but the former exerted all the power of eloquence she possessed, by turns reproving her and loading her with caresses, in order to soothe her and rouse her from her despair. But nothing availed. At last she succeeded in persuading the unhappy woman to go with her to the window, which afforded a most beautiful view. Westward, beyond the Heptastadium, the sun was sinking below the forests of masts in the harbour of the Eunostus; and Charmian, who had learned from her intercourse with the royal children how to soothe a troubled young heart, to divert Barine's thoughts, directed her attention to the crimson glow in the western sky, and told her how her father, the artist, had showed her the superb brilliancy which colours gained at this hour of the day, even when the west was less radiant than now. But Barine, who usually could never gaze her fill at such a spectacle, did not thank her, for this sunset reminded her of another which she had lately watched at Dion's side, and she again broke into convulsive sobs.

Charmian, not knowing what to do, passed her arm around her. Just at that moment the door was hurriedly thrown open, and Anukis, the Nubian, entered.

Her mistress knew that something unusual must have happened to detain her so long from her post at Barine's side, and her appearance showed that she had been attending to important matters which had severely taxed her strength. Her shining dark skin looked ashen grey, her high forehead, surrounded by tangled woolly locks, was dripping with perspiration, and her thick lips were pale. Although she must have undergone great fatigue, she did not seem in need of rest; for, after greeting the ladies, apologizing for her long absence, and telling Barine that this time Dion had seemed to her half on the way to recovery, a rapid side glance at her mistress conveyed an entreaty that she would follow her into the next room.

But the language of the Nubian's eyes had not escaped the suspicious watchfulness of the anxious Barine and, overwhelmed with fresh terror, she begged that she might hear all.



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Charmian ordered her maid to speak openly; but Anukis, ere she began, assured them that she had received the news she brought from a most trustworthy source—only it would make a heavy demand upon the resolution and courage of Barine, whom she had hoped to find in a very different mood. There was no time to lose. She was expected at the appointed place an hour after sunset.

Here Charmian interrupted the maid with the exclamation “Impossible!” and reminded her of the guards which Alexas, aided by Iras, who was thoroughly familiar with the palace, had stationed the day before in the anteroom, at all the doors—nay, even beneath the windows.

The Nubian replied that everything had been considered; but, to gain time, she must beg Barine to let her colour her skin and curl her hair while she was talking.

The surprise visible in the young beauty’s face caused her to exclaim: “Only act with entire confidence. You shall learn everything directly. There is so much to tell! On the way here I had planned how to relate the whole story in regular order, but it can’t be done now. No, no! Whoever wants to save a flock of sheep from a burning shed must lead out the bell-wether first—the main thing, I mean—so I will begin with that, though it really comes last. The explanation of how all this—”

Here, like a cry of joy, Barine’s exclamation interrupted her:

“I am to fly, and Dion knows it and will follow me! I see it in your face.”

In fact, every feature of the dusky maid-servant’s ugly face betrayed that pleasant thoughts were agitating her mind. Her black eyes flashed with fearless daring, and a smile beautified her big mouth and thick lips as she replied:

“A loving heart like yours understands the art of prophecy better than the chief priest of the great Serapis. Yes, my young mistress, he of whom you speak must disappear from this wicked city where so much evil threatens you both. He will certainly escape and, if the immortals aid us and we are wise and brave, you also. Whence the help comes can be told later. Now, the first thing is to transform you—don’t be reluctant—into the ugliest woman in the world—black Anukis. You must escape from the palace in this disguise.—Now you know the whole plan, and while I get what is necessary from my chest of clothes, I beg you, mistress, to consider how we are to obtain the black stains for that ivory skin and golden hair.”

With these words she left the room, but Barine flung herself into her friend’s arms, exclaiming, amid tears and laughter: “Though I should be forced to remain forever as black and crooked as faithful Aisopion, if he did not withdraw his love, though I were obliged to go through fire and water—I would O Charmian! what changes so quickly as

joy and sorrow? I would fain show some kindness to every one in the world, even to your Queen, who has brought all these troubles upon me.”

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The new-born hope had transformed the despairing woman into a happy one, and Charmian perceived it with grateful joy, secretly wishing that Cleopatra had listened to her appeal.

While examining the hair-dyes used by the Queen she saw, lurking in the background of what was still unexplained, and therefore confused her mind, fresh and serious perils. Barine, on the contrary, gazed across them to the anticipated meeting with her lover, and was full of the gayest expectation until the maid-servant's return.

The work of disfigurement began without delay. Anukis moved her lips as busily as her hands, and described in regular order all that had befallen her during the eventful day.

Barine listened with rising excitement, and her joy increased as she beheld the path which had been smoothed for her by the care and wisdom of her friends. Charmian, on the contrary, became graver and more quiet the more distinctly she perceived the danger her favourite must encounter. Yet she could not help admitting that it would be a sin against Barine's safety, perhaps her very life, to withhold her from this well-considered plan of escape.

That it must be tried was certain; but as the moment which was to endanger the woman she loved drew nearer, and she could not help saying to herself that she was aiding an enterprise in opposition to the express command of the Queen and helping to execute a plan which threatened to rouse the indignation, perhaps the fury, of Cleopatra, a feeling of sorrow overpowered her. She feared nothing for herself. Not for a single instant did she think of the unpleasant consequences which Barine's escape might draw upon her. The burden on her soul was due only to the consciousness of having, for the first time, opposed the will of the sovereign, to fulfil whose desires and to promote whose aims had been the beloved duty of her life. Doubtless the thought crossed her mind that, by aiding Barine's escape, she was guarding Cleopatra from future repentance; probably she felt sure that it was her duty to help rescue this beautiful young life, whose bloom had been so cruelly assailed by tempest and hoar-frost, and which now had a prospect of the purest happiness; yet, though in itself commendable, the deed brought her into sharp conflict with the loftiest aims and aspirations of her life. And how much nearer than the other was the woman—she shrank from the word—whom she was about to betray, how much greater was Cleopatra's claim to her love and gratitude! Could she have any other emotion than thankfulness if the plan of escape succeeded? Yet she was reluctant to perform the task of making Barine's beautiful, symmetrical figure resemble the hunch-backed Nubian's, or to dip her fingers into the pomade intended for Cleopatra; and it grieved her to mar the beauty of Barine's luxuriant tresses by cutting off part of her thick fair braids.

True, these things could not be avoided, if the flight was to succeed, and the further Anukis advanced in her story, the fewer became her mistress's objections to the plan.

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The conversation between Iras and Alexas, which had been overheard by the maid, already made it appear necessary to withdraw Barine and her lover from the power of such foes. The faithful man whom Anukis had found with Dion, whose name she did not mention and of whose home she said only that no safer hiding-place could be found, even by the mole which burrowed in the earth, really seemed to have been sent with Gorgias to Dion's couch by Fate itself. The control of the subterranean chambers in the Temple of Isis which had been bestowed on the architect, also appeared like a miracle.

Upon a small tablet, which the wise Aisopion had intentionally delayed handing to her mistress until now, were the lines: "Archibius greets his sister Charmian. If I know your heart, it will be as hard for you as for me to share this plot, yet it must be done for the sake of her father, to save the life and happiness of his child. So it must fall to your lot to bring Barine to the Temple of Isis at the Corner of the Muses. She will find her lover there and, if possible, be wedded to him. As the sanctuary is so near, you need leave the palace only a short time. Do not tell Barine what we have planned. The disappointment would be too great if it should prove impracticable."

This letter and the arrangement it proposed transformed the serious scruples which shadowed Charmian's good-will into a joyous, nay, enthusiastic desire to render assistance. Barine's marriage to the man who possessed her heart was close at hand, and she was the daughter of Leonax, who had once been dear to her. Fear and doubt vanished as if scattered to the four winds, and when Aisopion's work of transformation was completed and Barine stood before her as the high-shouldered, dark-visaged, wrinkled maid, she could not help admitting that it would be easy to escape from the palace in that disguise.

She now told Barine that she intended to accompany her herself; and though the former's stained face forced her to refrain from kissing her friend, she plainly expressed to her and the faithful freedwoman the overflowing gratitude which filled her heart.

Anukis was left alone. After carefully removing all the traces of her occupation, as habit dictated, she raised her arms in prayer, beseeching the gods of her native land to protect the beautiful woman to whom she had loaned her own misshapen form, which had now been of genuine service, and who had gone forth to meet so many dangers, but also a happiness whose very hope had been denied to her.

Charmian had told her maid that if the Queen should inquire for her before Iras returned from the Choma to say that she had been obliged to leave the palace, and to supply her place. During their absence, when Charmian had been attacked by sickness, Cleopatra had often entrusted the care of her toilet to Aisopion, and had praised her skill.

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The Queen's confidential attendant was followed as usual when she went out by a dark-skinned maid. Lanterns and lamps had already been lighted in the corridors of the spacious palace, and the court-yards were ablaze with torches and pitch-pans; but, brilliantly as they burned in many places, and numerous as were the guards, officers, eunuchs, clerks, soldiers, cooks, attendants, slaves, door-keepers, and messengers whom they passed, not one gave them more than a careless glance.

So they reached the last court-yard, and then came a moment when the hearts of both women seemed to stop beating—for the man whom they had most cause to dread, Alexas the Syrian, approached.

And he did not pass the fugitives, but stopped Charmian, and courteously, even obsequiously, informed her that he wished to get rid of the troublesome affair of her favourite, which had been assigned to him against his will, and therefore had determined to bring Barine to trial early the following morning.

The Syrian's body-servant attended his master, and while the former was talking with Charmian the latter turned to the supposed Nubian, tapped her lightly on the shoulder, and whispered: "Come this evening, as you did yesterday. You haven't finished the story of Prince Setnau."

The fugitive felt as if she had grown dumb and could never more regain the power of speech. Yet she managed to nod, and directly after the favourite bowed a farewell to Charmian. The Ligurian was obliged to follow his master, while Charmian and Barine passed through the gateway between the last pylons into the open air.

Here the sea-breeze seemed to waft her a joyous greeting from the realm of liberty and happiness, and the timid woman, amid all the perils which surrounded her, regained sufficient presence of mind to tell her friend what Alexas's slave had whispered—that Aisopion might remind him of it the same evening, and thus strengthen his belief that the Nubian had accompanied the Queen's confidante.

The way to the Temple of Isis was short. The stars showed that they would reach their destination in time; but a second delay unexpectedly occurred. From the steps leading to the cella of the sanctuary a procession, whose length seemed endless, came towards them. At the head of the train marched eight pastophori, bearing the image of Isis. Then came the basket-bearers of the goddess with several other priestesses, followed by the reader with an open book-roll. Behind him appeared the quaternary number of prophets, whose head, the chief priest, moved with stately dignity beneath a canopy. The rest of the priestly train bore in their hands manuscripts, sacred vessels, standards, and wreaths. The priestesses—some of whom, with garlands on their flowing hair, were already shaking the sistrum of Isis—mingled with the line of priests, their high voices blending with the deep notes of the men. Neokori, or temple servants, and a large number of worshippers of Isis, closed the procession, all wearing wreaths and carrying



flowers. Torch and lantern bearers lighted the way, and the perfume of the incense rising from the little pan of charcoal in the hand of a bronze arm, which the pastophori waved to and fro, surrounded and floated after the procession.

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The two women waiting for the train to pass saw it turn towards Lochias, and the conversation of the bystanders informed them that its object was to convey to “the new Isis,” the Queen, the greeting of the goddess, and assure the sovereign of the divinity’s remembrance of her in the hour of peril.

Cleopatra could not help accepting this friendly homage, and it was incumbent upon her to receive it wearing on her head the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, and robed in all the ecclesiastical vestments which only her two most trusted attendants knew how to put on with the attention to details that custom required. This had never been entrusted to maids of inferior position like the Nubian; so Cleopatra would miss Charmian.

The thought filled her with fresh uneasiness and, when the steps were at last free, she asked herself anxiously how all this would end.

It seemed as if the fugitive and her companion had exposed themselves to this great peril in vain; for some of the temple servants were forcing back those who wished to enter the sanctuary, shouting that it would be closed until the return of the procession. Barine gazed timidly into Charmian’s face; but, ere she could express her opinion, the tall figure of a man appeared on the temple steps. It was Archibius, who with grave composure bade them follow him, and silently led them around the sanctuary to a side door, through which, a short time before, a litter had passed, accompanied by several attendants.

Ascending a flight of steps within the long building, they reached the dimly lighted cella.

As in the Temple of Osiris at Abydos seven corridors, here three led to the same number of apartments, the holy place of the sanctuary. The central one was dedicated to Isis, that on the left to her husband Osiris, and that on the right to Horus, the son of the great goddess. Before it, scarcely visible in the dim light, stood the altars, loaded with sacrifices by Archibius.

Beside that of Horus was the litter which had been borne into the temple before the arrival of the women. From it, supported by two friends, descended a slender young man.

A hollow sound echoed through the pillared hall. The iron door at the main entrance of the temple had been closed. The shrill rattle that followed proceeded from the metal bolts which an old servant of the sanctuary had shot into the sockets.

Barine started, but neither inquired the cause of the noise nor perceived the wealth of objects here presented to the senses; for the man who, leaning on another’s arm, approached the altar, was Dion, the lover who had perilled his life for her sake. Her eyes rested intently on his figure, her whole heart yearned towards him and, unable to control herself,—she called his name aloud.



Charmian gazed anxiously around the group, but soon uttered a sigh of relief; for the tall man whose arm supported Dion was Gorgias, the worthy architect, his best friend, and the other, still taller and stronger, her own brother Archibius. Yonder figure, emerging from the disguise of wraps, was Berenike, Barine's mother. All trustworthy confidants! The only person whom she did not know was the handsome young man standing at her brother's side.



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Barine, whose arm she still held, had struggled to escape to rush to her mother and lover; but Archibius had approached, and in a whisper warned her to be patient and to refrain from any greeting or question, "supposing," he added, "that you are willing to be married at this altar to Dion, the son of Eumenes."

Charmian felt Barine's arm tremble in hers at this suggestion, but the young beauty obeyed her friend's directions. She did not know what had befallen her, or whether, in the excess of happiness which overwhelmed her, to shout aloud in her exultant joy, or melt into silent tears of gratitude and emotion.

No one spoke. Archibius took a roll of manuscript from Dion's hand, presented himself before the assembled company as the bride's kyrios, or guardian, and asked Barine whether she so recognized him. Then he returned to Dion the marriage contract, whose contents he knew and approved, and informed those present that, in the marriage about to be solemnized, they must consider him the paranymphos, or best man, and Berenike as the bridesmaid, and they instantly lighted a torch at the fires burning on one of the altars. Archibius, as kyrios, joined the lovers' hands in the Egyptian—Barine's mother, as bridesmaid, in the Greek-manner, and Dion gave his bride a plain iron ring. It was the same one which his father had bestowed at his own wedding, and he whispered: "My mother valued it; now it is your turn to honour the ancient treasure."

After stating that the necessary sacrifices had been offered to Isis and Serapis, Zeus, Hera, and Artemis, and that the marriage between Dion, son of Eumenes, and Barine, daughter of Leonax, was concluded, Archibius shook hands with both.

Haste seemed necessary, for he permitted Berenike and his sister only time for a brief embrace, and Gorgias to clasp her hand and Dion's. Then he beckoned, and the newly made bride's mother followed him in tears, Charmian bewildered and almost stupefied. She did not fully realize the meaning of the event she had just witnessed until an old neokori had guided her and the others into the open air.

Barine felt as if every moment might rouse her from a blissful dream, and yet she gladly told herself that she was awake, for the man walking before her, leaning on the arm of a friend, was Dion. True, she saw, even in the faint light of the dim temple corridor, that he was suffering. Walking appeared to be so difficult that she rejoiced when, yielding to Gorgias's entreaties, he entered the litter.

But where were the bearers?

She was soon to learn; for, even while she looked for them, the architect and the youth, in whom she had long since recognized Philotas, her grandfather's assistant, seized the poles.



“Follow us,” said Gorgias, under his breath, and she obeyed, keeping close behind the litter, which was borne first down a broad and then a narrow staircase, and finally along a passage. Here a door stopped the fugitives; but the architect opened it and helped his friend out of the litter, which before proceeding farther he placed in a room filled with various articles discovered during his investigation of the subterranean temple chambers.



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Hitherto not a word had been spoken. Now Gorgias called to Barine: "This passage is low—you must stoop. Cover your head, and don't be afraid if you meet bats. They have long been undisturbed. We might have taken you from the temple to the sea, and waited there, but it would probably have attracted attention and been dangerous. Courage, young wife of Dion! The corridor is long, and walking through it is difficult; but compared with the road to the mines, it is as smooth and easy as the Street of the King. If you think of your destination, the bats will seem like the swallows which announce the approach of spring."

Barine nodded gratefully to him; but she kissed the hand of Dion, who was moving forward painfully, leaning on the arm of his friend. The light of the torch carried by Gorgias's faithful foreman, who led the way, had fallen on her blackened arm, and when the little party advanced she kept behind the others. She thought it might be unpleasant for her lover to see her thus disfigured, and spared him, though she would gladly have remained nearer. As soon as the passage grew lower, the wounded man's friends took him in their arms, and their task was a hard one, for they were not only obliged to move onward bending low under the heavy burden, but also to beat off the bats which, frightened by the foreman's torch, flew up in hosts.

Barine's hair was covered, it is true, but at any other time the hideous creatures, which often brushed against her head and arms, would have filled her with horror and loathing. Now she scarcely heeded them; her eyes were fixed on the recumbent figure in the bearers' arms, the man to whom she belonged, body and soul, and whose patient suffering pierced her inmost heart. His head rested on the breast of Gorgias, who walked directly in front of her; the architect's stooping posture concealed his face, but his feet were visible and, whenever they twitched, she fancied he was in pain. Then she longed to press forward to his side, wipe the perspiration from his brow in the hot, low corridor, and whisper words of love and encouragement.

This she was sometimes permitted to do when the friends put down their heavy burden. True, they allowed themselves only brief intervals of rest, but they were long enough to show her how the sufferer's strength was failing. When they at last reached their destination, Philotas was forced to exert all his strength to support the exhausted man, while Gorgias cautiously opened the door. It led to a flight of sea-washed steps close to the garden of Didymus, which as a child she had often used with her brother to float a little boat upon the water.

The architect opened the door only a short distance; he was expected, for Barine soon heard him whisper, and suddenly the door was flung wide. A tall man raised Dion and bore him into the open air. While she was still gazing after him, a second figure of equal size approached her and, hastily begging her permission, lifted her in his arms like a child, and as she inhaled the cool night air and felt the water through which her bearer waded splash up and wet her feet, her eyes sought her new-made husband—but in

vain; the night was very dark, and the lights on the shore did not reach this spot so far below the walls of the quay.



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Barine was frightened; but a few minutes after the outlines of a large fishing boat loomed through the darkness, dimly illumined by the harbour lights, and the next instant the giant who carried her placed her on the deck, and a deep voice whispered: "All's well. I'll bring some wine at once."

Then Barine saw her husband lying motionless on a couch which had been prepared for him in the prow of the boat. Bending over him, she perceived that he had fainted, and while rubbing his forehead with the wine, raising his head on her lap, cheering him, and afterwards by the light of a small lantern carefully renewing the bandage on his shoulder, she did not notice that the vessel was moving through the water until the boatman set the triangular sail.

She had not been told where the boat was bearing her, and she did not ask. Any spot that she could share with Dion was welcome. The more lonely the place, the more she could be to him. How her heart swelled with gratitude and love! When she bent over him, kissed his forehead, and felt how feverishly it burned, she thought, "I will nurse you back to health," and raised her eyes and soul to her favourite god, to whom she owed the gift of song, and who understood everything beautiful and pure, to thank Phoebus Apollo and beseech him to pour his rays the next morning on a convalescent man. While she was still engaged in prayer the boat touched the shore. Again strong arms bore her and Dion to the land, and when her foot touched the solid earth, her rescuer, the freedman Pyrrhus, broke the silence, saying: "Welcome, wife of Dion, to our island! True, you must be satisfied to take us as we are. But if you are as content with us as we are glad to serve you and your lord, who is ours also, the hour of leave-taking will be far distant."

Then, leading the way to the house, he showed her as her future apartments two large whitewashed rooms, whose sole ornament was their exquisite neatness. On the threshold stood Pyrrhus's grey-haired wife, a young woman, and a girl scarcely beyond childhood; but the older one modestly welcomed Barine, and also begged her to accept their hospitality. Recovery was rapid in the pure air of the Serpent Isle. She herself, and—she pointed to the others—her oldest son's wife, and her own daughter, Dione, would be ready to render her any service.

CHAPTER XVI.

Brothers and sisters are rarely talkative when they are together. As Charmian went to Lochias with Archibius, it was difficult for her to find words, the events of the past few hours had agitated her so deeply. Archibius, too, could not succeed in turning his thoughts in any other direction, though important and far more momentous things claimed his attention.



They walked on silently side by side. In reply to his sister's inquiry where the newly wedded pair were to be concealed, he had answered that, spite of her trustworthiness, this must remain a secret. To her second query, how had it been possible to use the interior of the Temple of Isis without interruption, he also made a guarded reply.

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In fact, it was the control of the subterranean corridors of the sanctuary which had suggested to Gorgias the idea of carrying Dion through them to Pyrrhus's fishing-boat. To accomplish this it was only necessary to have the Temple of Isis, which usually remained open day and night, left to the fugitive's friends for a short time; and this was successfully managed.

The historian Timagenes, who had come from Rome as ambassador and claimed the hospitality of his former pupil Archibius, had been empowered to offer Cleopatra recognition of her own and her children's right to the throne, and a full pardon, if she would deliver Mark Antony into the hands of Octavianus, or have him put to death.

The Alexandrian Timagenes considered this demand both just and desirable, because it promised to deliver his native city from the man whose despotic arrogance menaced its freedom, and whose lavish generosity and boundless love of splendour diminished its wealth. To Rome, as whose representative the historian appeared, this man's mere existence meant constant turmoil and civil war. At the restoration of the flute-player by Gabinius and Mark Antony, Timagenes had been carried into slavery. Later, when, after his freedom had been purchased by the son of Sulla, he succeeded in attaining great influence in Rome, he still remained hostile to Mark Antony, and it had been a welcome charge to work against him in Alexandria. He hoped to find an ally in Archibius, whose loyal devotion to the Queen he knew. Arius, Barine's uncle and Octavianus's former tutor, would also aid him. The most powerful support of his mission, however, could be rendered by the venerable chief priest, the head of the whole Egyptian hierarchy. He had shown the latter that Antony, in any case, was a lost man, and Egypt was in the act of dropping like a ripe fruit into the lap of Octavianus. It would soon be in his power to give the country whatever degree of liberty and independence he might choose. The Caesar had the sole disposal of the Queen's fate also, and whoever desired to see her remain on the throne must strive to gain the good-will of Octavianus.

The wise Anubis had considered all these things, but he owed to Timagenes the hint that Arius was the man whom Octavianus most trusted. So the august prelate secretly entered into communication with Barine's uncle. But the dignity of his high office, and the feebleness of extreme age, forbade Anubis to seek the man who was suspected of friendship for the Romans. He had therefore sent his trusted secretary, the young Serapion, to make a compact as his representative with the friend of Octavianus, whose severe injuries prevented his leaving the house to go to the chief priest.



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During Timagenes's negotiations with the secretary and Arius, Archibius came to entreat Barine's uncle to do everything in his power to save his niece; and, as all the Queen's friends were anxious to prevent an act which, in these times of excitement, could not fail, on account of its connection with Dion, a member of the Council, to rouse a large number of the citizens against her, Serapion, as soon as he was made aware of the matter, eagerly protested his readiness to do his best to save the imperilled lovers. He cared nothing for Barine or Dion as individuals, but he doubtless would have been ready to make a still greater sacrifice to win the influential Archibius, and especially Arius, who would have great power through Octavianus, the rising sun.

The men had just begun to discuss plans for saving Barine, when the Nubian appeared and told Archibius what had been arranged beside Dion's sick-bed by the freedman and Gorgias. The escape of the fugitives depended solely upon their reaching the boat unseen, and the surest way to accomplish this was to use the subterranean passage which the architect had again opened.

Archibius, to whom the representative of the chief priest had offered his aid, now took the others into his confidence, and Arius proposed that Barine should marry Dion in the Temple of Isis, and the couple should afterwards be guided through the secret passage to the boat. This proposal was approved, and Serapion promised to reserve the sanctuary for the wedding of the fugitives for a short time after the departure of the procession, which was to take place at sunset. In return for this service another might perhaps soon be requested from the friend of Octavianus, who greeted his promise with grateful warmth.

"The priesthood," said Serapion, "takes sides with all who are unjustly persecuted, and in this case bestows aid the more willingly on account of its great anxiety to guard the Queen from an act which would be difficult to approve." As for the fugitives, so far as he could see, only two possibilities were open to them: Cleopatra would cleave to Mark Antony and go—would that the immortals might avert it!—to ruin, or she would sacrifice him and save her throne and life. In both cases the endangered lovers could soon return uninjured—the Queen had a merciful heart, and never retained anger long if no guilt existed.

The details of the plan were then settled by Archibius, Anukis, and Berenike, who was with the family of Arius, and the decision was communicated to the architect. Archibius had maintained the same silence concerning the destination of the fugitives towards the men composing the council and Barine's mother as to his sister. With regard to the mission of Timagenes and the political questions which occupied his mind, he gave Charmian only the degree of information necessary to explain the plan she so lovingly promoted; but she had no desire to know more. On the way home her mind was wholly absorbed by the fear that Cleopatra had missed her services and discovered Barine's flight. True, she mentioned the Queen's desire to place her children in Archibius's charge, but she could not give him full particulars until she reached her own apartments.



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Her absence had not been noticed. The Regent Mardion had received the procession in the Queen's name, for Cleopatra had driven into the city, no one knew where.

Charmian entered her apartments with a lighter heart. Anukis opened the door to them. She had remained undisturbed, and it was a pleasure to Archibius to give the faithful, clever freedwoman an account of the matter with his own lips. He could have bestowed no richer reward upon the modest servant, who listened to his words as if they were a revelation. When she disclaimed the thanks with which he concluded, protesting that she was the person under obligation, the expression was sincere. Her keen intellect instantly recognized the aristocrat's manner of addressing an equal or an inferior; and he who, in her eyes, was the first of men, had described the course of events as though she had stood on the same level. The Queen herself might have been satisfied with the report.

When she left Charmian's rooms to join the other servants, she told herself that she was an especially favoured mortal; and when a young cook teased her about her head being sunk between her shoulders, she answered, laughing—"My shoulders have grown so high because I shrug them so often at the fools who jeer at me and yet are not half so happy and grateful."

Charmian, sorely wearied, had flung herself into an arm-chair, and Archibius took his place opposite to her. They were happy in each other's society, even when silent; but to-day the hearts of both were so full that they fared like those who are so worn out by fatigue that they cannot sleep. How much they had to tell each other!—yet it was long ere Charmian broke the silence and returned to the subject of the Queen's wish, describing to her brother Cleopatra's visit to the house which the children had built, how kind and cordial she had been; yet, a few minutes later, incensed by the mere mention of Barine's name, she had dismissed her so ungraciously.

"I do not know what you intend," she said in conclusion, "but, notwithstanding my love for her, I must perhaps decide in favour of what is most difficult, for—when she learns that it was I who withdrew the daughter of Leonax from her and the base Alexas—what treatment can I expect, especially as Iras no longer gives me the same affection, and shows that she has forgotten my love and care? This will increase, and the worst of the matter is, that if the Queen begins to favour her, I cannot justly reproach her, for Iras is keener-witted, and has a more active brain. Statecraft was always odious to me. Iras, on the contrary, is delighted with the opportunity to speak on subjects connected with the government of the country, and especially the ceaseless, momentous game with Rome and the men who guide her destiny."

"That game is lost," Archibius broke in with so much earnestness that Charmian started, repeating in a low, timid tone:



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“Lost?”

“Forever,” said Archibius, “unless—

“The Olympians be praised—that there is still a doubt.”

“Unless Cleopatra can decide to commit an act which will force her to be faithless to herself, and destroy her noble image through all future generations.”

“How?”

“Whenever you learn it, will be too soon.”

“And suppose she should do it, Archibius? You are her most trusted confidant. She will place in your charge what she loves more than she does herself.”

“More? You mean, I suppose, the children?”

“The children! Yes, a hundred times yes. She loves them better than aught else on earth. For them, believe me, she would be ready to go to her death.”

“Let us hope so.”

“And you—were she to commit the horrible deed—I can only suspect what it is. But should she descend from the height which she has hitherto occupied—would you still be ready—”

“With me,” he interrupted quietly, “what she does or does not do matters nothing. She is unhappy and will be plunged deeper and deeper into misery. I know this, and it constrains me to exert my utmost powers in her service. I am hers as the hermit consecrated to Serapis belongs to the god. His every thought must be devoted to him. To the deity who created him he dedicates body and soul until the death to which he dooms him. The bonds which unite me to this woman—you know their origin—are not less indestructible. Whatever she desires whose fulfilment will not force me to despise myself is granted in advance.”

“She will never require such things from the friend of her childhood,” cried Charmian. Then, approaching him with both arms extended joyfully, she exclaimed: “Thus you ought to speak and feel, and therein is the answer to the question which has agitated my soul since yesterday. Barine’s flight, the favour and disfavour of Cleopatra, Iras, my poor head, which abhors politics, while at this time the Queen needs keen-sighted confidants—”

“By no means,” her brother interrupted. “It is for men alone to give counsel in these matters. Accursed be women’s gossip over their toilet tables. It has already scattered



to the four winds many a well-considered plan of the wisest heads, and an Iras could never be more fatal to statecraft than just at the present moment, had not Fate already uttered the final verdict.”

“Then hence with these scruples,” cried Charmian eagerly; “my doubts are at an end! As usual, you point out the right path. I had thought of returning to the country estate we call Irenia—the abode of peace—or to our beloved little palace at Kanopus, to spend the years which may still be allotted to me, and return to everything that made my childhood beautiful. The philosophers, the flowers in the garden, the poets— even the new Roman ones, of whose works Timagenes sent us such charming specimens— would enliven



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the solitude. The child, the daughter of the man whose love I renounced, and afterwards perhaps her sons and daughters, would fill the place of my own. As they would have been dear to Leonax, I, too, would have loved them! This is the guise in which the future has appeared to me in many a quiet hour. But shall Charmian—who, when her heart throbbed still more warmly and life lay fair before her, laid her first love upon the altar of sacrifice for her royal playfellow—abandon Cleopatra in misfortune from mere selfish scruples? No, no!—Like you, I too belong—come what may—to the Queen.”

She gazed into her brother’s face, sure of his approval but, waving his uplifted hand, he answered gravely: “No, Charmian! What I, a man, can assume, might be fatal to you, a woman. The present is not sweet enough for me to embitter it with wormwood from the future. And yet you must cast one glance into its gloomy domain, in order to understand me. You can be silent, and what you now learn will be a secret between us. Only one thing”—here he lowered the loud tones of his deep voice—“only one thing can save her: the murder of Antony, or an act of shameless treachery which would deliver him into Octavianus’s power. This is the proposal Timagenes brought.”

“This?” she asked in a hollow tone, her grey head drooping.

“This,” he repeated firmly. “And if she succumbs to the temptation, she will be faithless to the love which has coursed through her whole life as the Nile flows through the land of her ancestors. Then, Charmian, stay, stay under any circumstances, cling to her more firmly than ever, for then, then, my sister, she will be more wretched—ten, a hundred fold more wretched than if Octavianus deprives her of everything, perhaps even life itself.”

“Nor will I leave her, come what may. I will remain at her side until the end,” cried Charmian eagerly. But Archibius, without noticing the enthusiastic ardor, so unusual to his sister’s quiet nature, calmly continued: “She won your heart also, and it seems impossible for you to desert her. Many have shared our feelings; and it is no disgrace to any one. Misfortune is a weapon which cleaves base natures like a sword, yet like a hammer welds noble ones more closely. To you, therefore, it now seems doubly difficult to leave her, but you need love. The right to live and guard yourself from the most pitiable retrogression is your due, as much as that of the rare woman on the throne. So long as you are sure of her love, remain with her, and show your devotion in every situation until the end. But the motives which were drawing you away to books, flowers, and children, weigh heavily in the balance, and if you lack the anchor of her favour and love, I shall see you perish miserably. The frost emanating from Cleopatra, if her heart grew cold to you, the pin-pricks with which Iras would assail you, were you defenceless, would kill you. This must not be, sister; we will guard against it. Do not interrupt me. The counsel I advise you to follow has been duly weighed. If you see that the Queen



still loves you as in former days, cling to her; but should you learn the contrary, bid her farewell to-morrow. My Irenia is yours—”



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“But she does love me, and even should she no longer—”

“The test is at hand. We will leave the decision to her. You shall confess that you were the culprit who aided Barine to escape her power to punish.”

“Archibius!”

“If you did not, a series of falsehoods must ensue. Try whether the petty qualities in her nature, which urged her to commit the fate of Leonax’s daughter to unworthy hands, are more powerful than the nobler ones. Try whether she is worthy of the self-sacrificing fidelity which you have given her all your life. If she remains the same as before, spite of this admission—”

Here he was interrupted by Anukis, who asked if her mistress would see Iras at this late hour. “Admit her,” replied Archibius, after hastily exchanging glances with his sister, whose face had paled at his demand. He perceived it and, as the servant withdrew, he clasped her hand, saying with earnest affection: “I gave you my opinion, but at our age we must take counsel with ourselves, and you will find the right path.”

“I have already found it,” she answered softly with downcast eyes. “This visitor brought a speedy decision. I must not feel ashamed in Iras’s presence.”

She had scarcely finished speaking when the Queen’s younger confidante entered. She was excited and, after casting a searching glance around the familiar room, she asked, after a curt greeting:

“No one knows where the Queen has gone. Mardion received the procession in her place. Did she take you into her confidence?”

Charmian answered in the negative, and inquired whether Antony had arrived, and how she had found him.

“In a pitiable state,” was the reply. “I hastened hither to prevent the Queen from visiting him, if possible. She would have received a rebuff. It is horrible.”

“The disappointment of Paraetonium is added to the other burdens,” observed Archibius.

“A feather compared with the rest,” cried Iras indignantly. “What a spectacle! A shrivelled soul, never too large, in the body of a powerful giant. Disaster crushes the courage of the descendant of Herakles. The weakling will drag the Queen’s splendid courage with him into the dust.”



“We will do our best to prevent it,” replied Archibius firmly. “The immortals have placed you and Charmian at her side to sustain her, if her own strength fails. The time to test your powers has arrived.”

“I know my duty,” replied Iras austerely.

“Prove it!” said Archibius earnestly. “You think you have cause for anger against Charmian.”

“Whoever treats my foes so tenderly can doubtless dispense with my affection. Where is your ward?”



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“That you shall learn later,” replied Charmian advancing. “But when you do know, you will have still better reason to doubt my love; yet it was only to save one dear to me from misery, certainly not to grieve you, that I stepped between you and Barine. And now let me say—had you wounded me to the quick, and everything dear to the Greek heart called to me for vengeance—I should impose upon myself whatever constraint might be necessary to deny the impulse, because this breast contains a love stronger, more powerful, than the fiercest hate. And this love we both share. Hate me, strive to wound and injure one at whose side you have hitherto stood like a daughter, but beware of robbing me of the strength and freedom which I need, to be and to offer to my royal mistress all the assistance in my power. I have just been consulting my brother about leaving Cleopatra’s service.”

“Now?” Iras broke in vehemently. “No, no! Not that! It must not be! She cannot spare you now.”

“More easily, perhaps, than you,” replied Charmian; “yet in many things my services might be hard to replace.”

“Nothing under the sun could do it,” cried Iras eagerly. “If, in these days of trouble, she should lose you too—”

“Still darker ones are approaching,” interrupted Archibius positively. “Perhaps you will learn all to-morrow. Whether Charmian yields to her desire for rest, or continues in the service of the Queen, depends on you. If you wish her to remain you must not render it too hard for her to do so. We three, my child, are perhaps the only persons at this court to whom the Queen’s happiness is more than their own, and therefore we should permit no incident, whatever name it may bear, to cloud our harmony.”

Iras threw back her head with angry pride, exclaiming passionately: “Was it I who injured you? I do not know in what respect. But you and Charmian—though you have so long been aware that this heart was closed against every love save one—stepped between me and the man for whom I have yearned since childhood, and built the bridge which united Dion and Barine. I held the woman I hated in my grasp, and thanked the immortals for the boon; but you two—it is not difficult to guess the secret you are still trying to keep from me—you aided her to escape. You have robbed me of my revenge; you have again placed the singer in the path where she must find the man to whom I have a better and older claim, and who perhaps may still be considering which of us two will be the better mistress of his house, if Alexas and his worthy brother do not arrange matters so that we must both content ourselves with thinking tenderly of a dead man. That is why I believe that I am no longer indebted to you, that Charmian has more than repaid herself for all the kindness she has ever showed me.”

With these words she hurried to the door, but paused on the threshold, exclaiming: “This is the state of affairs; yet I am ready to serve the Queen hand in hand with you as

before; for you two—as I have said—are necessary to her. In other respects—I shall follow my own path.”



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CHAPTER XVII.

Cleopatra had sought the venerable Anubis, who now, as the priest of Alexander, at the age of eighty, ruled the whole hierarchy of the country. It was difficult for him to leave his arm-chair, but he had been carried to the observatory to examine the adverse result of the observation made by the Queen herself. The position of the stars, however, had been so unfavourable that the more deeply Cleopatra entered into these matters, the less easy he found it to urge the mitigating influences of distant planets, which he had at first pointed out.

In his reception-hall, however, the chief priest had assured her that the independence of Egypt and the safety of her own person lay in her hands; only—the planets showed this—a terrible sacrifice was required—a sacrifice of which his dignity, his eighty years, and his love for her alike forbade him to speak. Cleopatra was accustomed to hear these mysterious sayings from his lips, and interpreted them in her own way. Many motives had induced her to seek the venerable prelate at this late hour. In difficult situations he had often aided her with good counsel; but this time she was not led to him by the magic cup of Nektanebus, which the eight pastophori who accompanied it had that day restored to the temple, for since the battle of Actium the superb vessel had been a source of constant anxiety to her.

Cleopatra had now asked the teacher of her childhood the direct question whether the cup—a wide, shallow vessel, with a flat, polished bottom could really have induced Antony to leave the battle and follow her ere the victory was decided. She had used it just before the conflict between the galleys, and this circumstance led Anubis to answer positively in the affirmative.

Long ago the marvellous chalice had been exhibited to her among the temple treasures, and she was told that every one who induced another person to be reflected from its shining surface obtained the mastery over his will. Her wish to possess it, however, was not gratified, and she did not ask for it again until the limitless devotion and ardent love of Antony had seemed less fervent than of yore. From that time she had never ceased to urge her aged friend to place the wondrous cup in her keeping. At first he had absolutely refused, predicting that its use would bring misfortune upon her; but when her request was followed by an imperative command, and the goblet was entrusted to her, Anubis himself believed that this one vessel did possess the magic power attributed to it. He deemed that the drinking-cup afforded the strongest proof of the magic art, far transcending human ability, of the great goddess by whose aid King Nektanebus—who, according to tradition, was the father of Alexander the Great—was said to have made the vessel in the Isis island of Philoe.



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Anubis had intended to remind Cleopatra of his refusal, and show her the great danger incurred by mortals who strove to use powers beyond their sphere. It had been his purpose to bid her remember Phaeton, who had almost kindled a conflagration in the world, when he attempted, in the chariot of his father, Phoebus Apollo, to guide the horses of the sun. But this was unnecessary, for he had scarcely assented to the question ere, with passionate vehemence, she ordered him to destroy before her eyes the cup which had brought so much misfortune.

The priest feigned that her desire harmonized with a resolution which he had himself formed. In fact, before her arrival, he had feared that the goblet might be used in some fatal manner if Octavianus should take possession of the city and country, and the wonder-working vessel should fall into his hands. Nektanebus had made the cup for Egypt. To wrest it from the foreign ruler was acting in the spirit of the last king in whose veins had flowed the blood of the Pharaohs, and who had toiled with enthusiastic devotion for the independence and liberty of his people. To destroy this man's marvellous work rather than deliver it to the Roman conqueror seemed to the chief priest, after the Queen's command, a sacred duty, and as such he represented it to be when he commanded the smelting furnace to be fired and the cup transformed into a shapeless mass before the eyes of Cleopatra.

While the metal was melting he eagerly told the Queen how easily she could dispense with the vessel which owed its magic power to the mighty Isis.

The spell of woman's charms was also a gift of the goddess. It would suffice to render Antony's heart soft and yielding as the fire melted the gold. Perhaps the Emperor had forfeited, with the Queen's respect, her love—the most priceless of blessings. He, Anubis, would regard this as a great boon of the Deity; “for,” he concluded, “Mark Antony is the cliff which will shatter every effort to secure to my royal mistress undiminished the heritage which has come to her and her children from their ancestors, and preserve the independence and prosperity of this beloved land. This cup was a costly treasure. The throne and prosperity of Egypt are worthy of greater sacrifices. But I know that there is none harder for a woman to make than her love.”

The meaning of the old man's words Cleopatra learned the following morning, when she granted the first interview to Timagenes, Octavianus's envoy.

The keen-witted, brilliant man, who had been one of her best teachers and with whom, when a pupil, she had had many an argument, was kindly received, and fulfilled his commission with consummate skill.

The Queen listened attentively to his representations, showed him that her own intellect had not lost in flexibility, though it had gained power; and when she dismissed him, with rich gifts and gracious words, she knew that she could preserve the independence of her beloved native land and retain the throne for herself and her children if she would



surrender Antony to the conqueror or to him, as “the person acting,” or—these were Timagenes’s own words—“remove him forever from the play whose end she had the power to render either brilliant or fateful.”

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When she was again alone her heart throbbed so passionately and her soul was in such a tumult of agitation that she felt unable to attend the appointed meeting of the Council of the crown. She deferred the session until the following day, and resolved to go out upon the sea, to endeavour to regain her composure.

Antony had refused to see her. This wounded her. The thought of the goblet and its evil influences had by no means passed from her memory with the destruction of the vessel caused by one of those outbursts of passion to which, in these days of disaster, she yielded more frequently than usual. On the contrary, she felt the necessity of being alone, to collect her thoughts and strive to dispel the clouds from her troubled soul.

The beaker had been one of the treasures of Isis, and the memory of it recalled hours during which, in former days, she had often found composure in the temple of the goddess. She wished to seek the sanctuary unnoticed and, accompanied only by Iras and the chief Introducer, went, closely veiled, to the neighbouring temple at the Corner of the Muses.

But she failed to find the object of her pilgrimage. The throng which filled it to pray and offer sacrifices, and the fear of being recognized, destroyed her calmness.

She was in the act of retiring, when Gorgias, the architect, followed by an assistant carrying surveying instruments, advanced towards her. She instantly called him to her side, and he informed her how wonderfully Fate itself seemed to favour her plan of building. The mob had destroyed the house of the old philosopher Didymus, and the grey-haired sage, to whom he had offered the shelter of his home, was now ready to transfer the property inherited from his ancestors, if her Majesty would assure him and his family of her protection.

Then she asked to see the architect's plan for joining the museum to the sanctuary, and became absorbed in the first sketch, to which he had devoted part of the night and morning. He showed it, and with eager urgency Cleopatra commanded him to begin the building as soon as possible and pursue the work night and day. What usually required months must be completed in weeks.

Iras and the "Introducer," clad in plain garments, had waited for her in the temple court and, joined by the architect, accompanied her to the unpretending litter standing at one of the side gates but, instead of entering it, she ordered Gorgias to attend her to the garden.

The inspection proved that the architect was right and, even if the mausoleum occupied a portion of it, and the street which separated it from the Temple of Isis were continued along the shore of the sea, the remainder would still be twice as large as the one belonging to the palace at Lochias.



Cleopatra's thorough examination showed Gorgias that she had some definite purpose in view. Her inquiry whether it would be possible to connect it with the promontory of Lochias indicated what she had in mind, and the architect answered in the affirmative. It was only necessary to tear down some small buildings belonging to the Crown and a little temple of Berenike at the southern part of the royal harbour. The arm of the Agathodaemon Canal which entered here had been bridged long ago.



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The new scene which would result from this change had been conjured before the Queen's mental vision with marvellous celerity, and she described it in brief, vivid language to the architect. The garden should remain, but must be enlarged from the Lochias to the bridge. Thence a covered colonnade would lead to the palace. After Gorgias had assured her that all this could easily be arranged, she gazed thoughtfully at the ground for a time, and then gave orders that the work should be commenced at once, and requested him to spare neither means nor men.

Gorgias foresaw a period of feverish toil, but it did not daunt him. With such a master builder he was ready to roof the whole city. Besides, the commission delighted him because it proved that the woman whose mausoleum was to rise from the earth so swiftly still thought of enhancing the pleasures of existence; for, though she wished the garden to remain unchanged, she desired to see the colonnade and the remainder of the work constructed of costly materials and in beautiful forms. When she bade him farewell, Gorgias kissed her robe with ardent enthusiasm.

What a woman! True, she had not even raised her veil, and was attired in plain dark clothing, but every gesture revealed the most perfect grace.

The arm and hand with which she pointed now here, now there, again seemed to him fairly instinct with life; and he, who deemed perfection of form of so much value, found it difficult to avert his eyes from her marvellous symmetry. And her whole figure! What lines, what genuine aristocratic elegance, and warm, throbbing life!

That morning when Helena, now an inmate of his own home, greeted him, he had essayed to compare her, mentally, with Cleopatra, but speedily desisted. The man to whom Hebe proffers nectar does not ask for even the best wine of Byblus. A feeling of grateful, cheerful satisfaction, difficult to describe, stole over him when the reserved, quiet Helena addressed him so warmly and cordially; but the image of Cleopatra constantly thrust itself between them, and it was difficult for him to understand himself. He had loved many women in succession, and now his heart throbbed for two at once, and the Queen was the brighter of the two stars whose light entranced him. Therefore his honest soul would have considered it a crime to woo Helena now.

Cleopatra knew what an ardent admirer she had won in the able architect, and the knowledge pleased her. She had used no goblet to gain him. Doubtless he would begin to build the mausoleum the next morning. The vault must have space for several coffins. Antony had more than once expressed the desire to be buried beside her, wherever he might die, and this had occurred ere she possessed the beaker. She must in any case grant him the same favour, no matter in what place or by whose hand he met death, and the bedimmed light of his existence was but too evidently nearing extinction. If she spared him, Octavianus



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would strike him from the ranks of the living, and she——Again she was overpowered by the terrible, feverish restlessness which had induced her to command the destruction of the goblet, and had brought her to the temple. She could not return in this mood to meet her councillors, receive visitors, greet her children. This was the birthday of the twins; Charmian had reminded her of it and undertaken to provide the gifts. How could she have found time and thought for such affairs? She had returned from the chief priest late in the evening, yet had asked for a minute description of the condition in which they found Mark Antony. The report made by Iras harmonized with the state in which she had herself seen him during and after the battle. Ay, his brooding gloom seemed to have deepened. Charmian had helped her dress in the morning, and had been on the point of making her difficult confession, and owning that she had aided Barine to escape the punishment of her royal mistress; but ere she could begin, Timagenes was announced, for Cleopatra had not risen from her couch until a late hour.

The object for which the Queen had sought the temple had not been gained; but the consultation with Gorgias had diverted her mind, and the emotions which the thought of her last resting-place had evoked now drowned everything else, as the roar of the surf dominates the twittering of the swallows on the rocky shore.

Ay, she needed calmness! She must weigh and ponder over many things in absolute quietude, and this she could not obtain at Lochias. Then her glance rested upon the little sanctuary of Berenike, which she had ordered removed to make room for a garden near at hand, where the children could indulge their love of creative work. It was empty. She need fear no interruption there. The interior contained only a single, quiet, pleasant chamber, with the image of Berenike. The "Introducer" commanded the guard to admit no other visitors, and soon the little white marble, circular room with its vaulted roof received the Queen. She sank down on one of the bronze benches opposite to the statue. All was still; in this cool silence her mind, trained to thought, could find that for which it longed—clearness of vision, a plain understanding of her own feelings and position in the presence of the impending decision.

At first her thoughts wandered to and fro like a dove ere it chooses the direction of its flight; but after the question why she was having a tomb built so hurriedly, when she would be permitted to live, her mind found the right track. Among the Scythian guards, the Mauritians, and Blemmyes in the army there were plenty of savage fellows whom a word from her lips and a handful of gold would have set upon the vanquished Antony, as the huntsman's "Seize him!" urges the hounds. A hint, and among the wretched magicians and Magians in the Rhakotis, the Egyptian quarter of the city, twenty men would have assassinated him by poison or wily snares; one command to the Macedonians in the guard of the Mellakes or youths, and he would be a captive that very day, and to-morrow, if she so ordered, on the way to Asia, whither Octavianus, as Timagenes told her, had gone.



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What prevented her from grasping the gold, giving the hint, issuing the command?

Doubtless she thought of the magic goblet, now melted, which had constrained him to cast aside honour, fame, and power, as worthless rubbish, in order to obey her behest not to leave her; but though this remembrance burdened her soul, it had no decisive influence. It was no one thing which prisoned her hand and lips, but every fibre of her being, every pulsation of her heart, every glance back into the past to the confines of childhood.

Yet she listened to other thoughts also. They reminded her of her children, the elation of power, love for the land of her ancestors, and the peril which menaced it without her, the bliss of seeing the light, and the darkness, the silence, the dull rigidity of death, the destruction of the body and the mind cherished and developed with so much care and toil, the horrible torture which might be associated with the transition from life to death—the act of dying. And what lay before her in the existence which lasted an eternity? When she no longer breathed beneath the sun, even if the death hour was deferred, and she found that not Epicurus, who believed that with death all things ended, had been right, but the ancient teachings of the Egyptians, what would await her in that world beyond the grave if she purchased a few more years of life by the murder or betrayal of her lover, her husband?

Yet perhaps the punishments inflicted upon the condemned were but bugbears invented by the priesthood, which guarded the regulation of the state in order to curb the unruly conduct of the populace and terrify the turbulent transgressors of the law. And, whispered the daring Greek spirit, in the abode of the condemned, not in the Garden of Aalu, the Elysian Fields of the Egyptians, she would meet her father and mother and all her wicked ancestors down to Euergetes I., who was succeeded by the infamous Philopater. Thus the thought of the other world became an antecedent so uncertain as to permit no definite inference, and might therefore be left out of the account. How would—this must be the form of the question—the years purchased by the murder or betrayal of one whom she loved shape themselves for her?

During the night the image of the murdered man would drive sleep from her couch, and the Furies, the Dirx, as the Roman Antony called them, who pursue murderers with the serpent scourge, were no idle creations of poetic fancy, but fully symbolized the restlessness of the criminal, driven to and fro by the pangs of conscience. The chief good, the painless happiness of the Epicureans, was forever lost to those burdened by such guilt.



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And during the hours of the day and evening? Ay, then she would be free to heap pleasure on pleasure. But for whom were the festivals to be celebrated; with whom could she share them? For many a long year no banquet, no entertainment had given her enjoyment without Mark Antony. For whom did she adorn herself or strive to stay the vanishing charm? And how soon would anguish of soul utterly destroy the spell, which was slowly, slowly, yet steadily diminishing, and, when the mirror revealed wrinkles which the skill of no Olympus could efface, when she—No, she was not created to grow old! Did the few years of life which must contain so much misery really possess a value great enough to surrender the right of being called by present and future generations the bewitching Cleopatra, the most irresistible of women?

And the children?

Yes, it would have been delightful to see them grow up and occupy the throne, but serious, decisive doubts soon blended even with an idea so rich in joy.

How glorious to greet Caesarion as sovereign of the world in Octavianus's place! But how could the dreamer, whose first love affair had caused the total sacrifice of dignity and violation of the law, and who now seemed to have once more relapsed into the old state of torpor, attain the position?

The other children inspired fair hopes, and how beautiful it appeared to the mother's heart to see Antonius Helios as King of Egypt; Cleopatra Selene with her first child in her arms; and little Alexander a noble statesman and hero, rich in virtue and talents! Yet, what would they, Antony's children, whose education she hoped Archibius would direct, feel for the mother who had been their father's murderess?

She shuddered at the thought, remembering the hours when her childish heart had shed tears of blood over the infamous mother whom her father had execrated. And Queen Tryphoena, whom history recorded as a monster, had not killed her husband, but merely thrust him from the throne.

Arsinoe's execrations of her mother and sister came back to her memory, and the thought that the rosy lips of the twins and her darling Alexander could ever open to curse her,—the idea that the children would ever raise their beloved hands to point at her, the wicked murderess of their father, with horror and scorn—No, no, and again no! She would not purchase a few more years of valueless life at the cost of this humiliation and shame.

Purchase of whom?

Of that Octavianus who had robbed her son of the heritage of his father, Caesar, and whose mention in the will was like an imputation on her fidelity—the cold-hearted, calculating upstart, whose nature from their first meeting in Rome had repelled,



rebuffed, chilled her; of the man by whose cajolery and power her husband—for in her own eyes and those of the Egyptians Antony held this position—had been induced to wed his sister, Octavia, and thereby stamp her, Cleopatra, as merely his love, cast a doubt upon the legitimate birth of her children; of the false friend of the trusting Antony who, before the battle of Actium, had most deeply humiliated and insulted both!

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On the contrary, her royal pride rebelled against obeying the command of such a man to commit the most atrocious deed; and from childhood this pride had been as much a part of her nature as her breath and the pulsation of her heart. And yet, for her children's sake, she might perhaps have incurred this disgrace, had it not been at the same time the grave of the best and noblest things which she desired to implant in the young souls of the twins and Alexander.

While thinking of the children's curses she had risen from her seat. Why should she reflect and consider longer? She had found the clear perception she sought. Let Gorgias hasten the building of the tomb. Should Fate demand her life, she would not resist if she were permitted to preserve it only at the cost of murder or base treachery. Her lover's was already forfeited. At his side she had enjoyed a radiant, glowing, peerless bliss, of which the world still talked with envious amazement. At his side, when all was over, she would rest in the grave, and compel the world to remember with respectful sympathy the royal lovers, Antony and Cleopatra. Her children should be able to think of her with untroubled hearts, and not even the shadow of a bitter feeling, a warning thought, should deter them from adorning their parents' grave with flowers, weeping at its foot, invoking and offering sacrifices to their spirits.

Then she glanced at the statue of Berenike, who had also once worn on her brow the double crown of Egypt. She, too, had early died a violent death; she, too, had known how to love. The vow to sacrifice her beautiful hair to Aphrodite if her husband returned uninjured from the Syrian war had rendered her name illustrious. "Berenike's Hair" was still to be seen as a constellation in the night heavens.

Though this woman had sinned often and heavily, one act of loyal love had made her an honoured, worshipped princess. She—Cleopatra would do something still greater. The sacrifice which she intended to impose upon herself would weigh far more heavily in the balance than a handful of beautiful tresses, and would comprise sovereignty and life.

With head erect and a sense of proud self-reliance she gazed at the noble marble countenance of the Cyrenian queen. Ere entering the sanctuary she had imagined that she knew how the criminals whom she had sentenced to death must feel. Now that she herself had done with life, she felt as if she were relieved from a heavy burden, and yet her heart ached, and— especially when she thought of her children—she was overwhelmed with the emotion which is the most painful of all forms of compassion—pity for herself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Cleopatra left the temple, Iras marvelled at the change in her appearance. The severe tension which had given her beautiful face a shade of harshness had yielded to an expression of gentle sadness that enhanced its charm, yet her features quickly

brightened as her attendant pointed to the procession which was just entering the forecourt of the palace.



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In Alexandria and throughout Egypt birthdays were celebrated as far as possible. Therefore, to do honour to the twins, the children of the city had been sent to offer their congratulations, and at the same time to assure their royal mother of the love and devotion of the citizens.

The return to the palace occupied only a few minutes, and as Cleopatra, hastily donning festal garments, gazed down at the bands of children, it seemed as if Fate by this fair spectacle had given her a sign of approval of her design.

She was soon standing hand in hand with the twins upon the balcony before which the procession had halted. Hundreds of boys and girls of the same age as the prince and princess had flocked thither, the former bearing bouquets, the latter small baskets filled with lilies and roses. Every head was crowned with a wreath, and many of the girls wore garlands of flowers. A chorus of youths and maidens sang a festal hymn, beseeching the gods to grant the royal mother and children every happiness; the leader of the chorus of girls made a short address in the name of the city, and during this speech the children formed in ranks, the tallest in the rear, the smallest in the front, and the others between according to their height. The scene resembled a living garden, in which rosy faces were the beautiful flowers.

Cleopatra thanked the citizens for the charming greeting sent to her by those whom they held dearest, and assured them that she returned their love. Her eyes grew dim with tears as she went with her three children to the throng who offered their congratulations, and an unusually pretty little girl whom she kissed threw her arms around her as tenderly as if she were her own mother. And how beautiful was the scene when the girls strewed the contents of their little baskets on the ground before her, and the boys, with many a ringing shout and loving wish, offered the bouquets to her and the twins!

Charmian had not forgotten to provide the gifts; and when the chamberlains and waiting-women led the children into a large hall to offer them refreshments, the Queen's eyes sparkled so brightly that the companion of her childhood ventured to make her difficult confession.

And, as so often happens, the event we most dread shows, when it actually occurs, a friendly or indifferent aspect; this was the case now. Nothing in life is either great or small—the one may be transformed to the other, according to the things with which it is compared. The tallest man becomes a dwarf beside a rocky giant of the mountain chain, the smallest is a Titan to the swarming ants in the forest. The beggar seizes as a treasure what the rich man scornfully casts aside. That which the day before yesterday seemed to Cleopatra unendurable, roused her keenest anxiety, robbed her of part of her night's repose, and induced her to adopt strenuous measures, now appeared trivial and scarcely worthy of consideration.



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Yesterday and to-day had brought events and called up questions which forced Barine's disappearance into the realm of unimportant matters.

Charmian's confession was preceded by the statement that she longed for rest yet, nevertheless, was ready to remain with her royal friend, in every situation, until she no longer desired her services and sent her away. But she feared that this moment had come.

Cleopatra interrupted her with the assurance that she was speaking of something utterly impossible; and when Charmian disclosed Barine's escape, and admitted that it was she who had aided the flight of the innocent and sorely threatened granddaughter of Didymus, the Queen started up angrily and frowned, but it was only for a moment. Then, with a smile, she shook her finger at her friend, embraced her, and gravely but kindly assured her that, of all vices, ingratitude was most alien to her nature. The companion of her childhood had bestowed so many proofs of faithfulness, love, self-sacrifice, and laborious service in her behalf that they could not be long outweighed by a single act of wilful disobedience. An abundant supply would still remain, by virtue of which she might continue to sin without fearing that Cleopatra would ever part from her Charmian.

The latter again perceived that nothing on earth could be hostile or sharp enough to sever the bond which united her to this woman. When her lips overflowed with the gratitude which filled her heart, Cleopatra admitted that it seemed as if, in aiding Barine's escape, she had rendered her a service. The caution with which Charmian had concealed Barine's refuge had not escaped her notice, and she did not ask to learn it. It was enough for her that the dangerous beauty was out of Caesarion's reach. As for Antony, a wall now separated him from the world, and consequently from the woman who, spite of Alexas's accusations, had probably never stood closer to his heart.

Charmian now eagerly strove to show the Queen what had induced the Syrian to pursue Barine so vindictively. It was evident—and scarcely needed proof—that Mark Antony's whole acquaintanceship with the old scholar's granddaughter had been far from leading to any tender relation. But Cleopatra gave only partial attention. The man whom she had loved with every pulsation of her heart already seemed to her only a dear memory. She did not forget the happiness enjoyed with and through him, or the wrong she had done by the use of the magic goblet; yet with the wall on the Choma, which divided him from her and the rest of the world, and her command to have the mausoleum built, she imagined that the season of love was over. Any new additions to this chapter of the life of her heart were but the close. Even the jealousy which had clouded the happiness of her love like a fleeting, rapidly changing shadow, she believed she had now renounced forever.



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While Charmian protested that no one save Dion had ever been heard with favour by Barine, and related many incidents of her former life, Cleopatra's thoughts were with Antony. Like the image of the beloved dead, the towering figure of the Roman hero rose before her mind, but she recalled him only as he was prior to the battle of Actium. She desired and expected nothing more from the broken-spirited man, whose condition was perhaps her own fault. But she had resolved to atone for her guilt, and would do so at the cost of throne and life. This settled the account. Whatever her remaining span of existence might add or subtract, was part of the bargain.

The entrance of Alexas interrupted her. With fiery passion he expressed his regret that he had been defrauded by base intrigues of the right bestowed upon him to pass sentence upon a guilty woman. This was the more difficult to bear because he was deprived of the possibility of providing for the pursuit of the fugitive. Antony had honoured him with the commission to win Herod back to his cause. He was to leave Alexandria that very night. As nothing could be expected in this matter from the misanthropic Emperor, he hoped that the Queen would avenge such an offence to her dignity, and adopt severe measures towards the singer and her last lover, Dion, who with sacrilegious hands had wounded the son of Caesar.

But Cleopatra, with royal dignity, kept him within the limits of his position, commanded him not to mention the affair to her again, and then, with a sorrowful smile, wished him success with Herod, in whose return to the lost cause of Antony, however, much as she prized the skill of the mediator, she did not believe.

When he had retired, she exclaimed to Charmian: "Was I blind? This man is a traitor! We shall discover it. Wherever Dion has taken his young wife, let her be carefully concealed, not from me, but from this Syrian. It is easier to defend one's self against the lion than the scorpion. You, my friend, will see that Archibius seeks me this very day. I must talk with him, and—you no longer have any thought of a parting? Another will come soon enough, which will forever forbid these lips from kissing your dear face."

As she spoke, she again clasped the companion of her childhood in her arms, and when Iras entered to request an audience for Lucilius, Antony's most faithful friend, Cleopatra, who had noticed the younger woman's envious glance at the embrace, said: "Was I mistaken in fancying that you imagined yourself slighted for Charmian, who is an older friend? That would be wrong; for I love and need you both. You are her niece, and indebted to her for much kindness from your earliest childhood. So, even though you will lose the joy of revenge upon a hated enemy, forget what has happened, as I did, and maintain your former affectionate companionship. I will reward you for it with the only thing that the daughter of the wealthy Krates cannot purchase, yet which she probably rates at no low value—the love of her royal friend."



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With these words she clasped Iras also in a close embrace, and when the latter left the room to summon Lucilius, she thought: "No woman has ever won so much love; perhaps that is why she possesses so great a treasure of it, and can afford such unspeakable happiness by its bestowal. Or is she so much beloved because she entered the world full of its wealth, and dispenses it as the sun diffuses light? Surely that must be the case. I have reason to believe it, for whom did I ever love save the Queen? No one, not even myself, and I know no one in whose love for me I can believe. But why did Dion, whom I loved so fervently, disdain me? Fool! Why did Mark Antony prefer Cleopatra to Octavia, who was not less fair, whose heart was his, and whose hand held the sovereignty of half the world?"

Passing on as she spoke, she soon returned, ushering the Roman Lucilius into the presence of the Queen. A gallant deed had bound this man to Antony. After the battle of Philippi, when the army of the republicans fled, Brutus had been on the point of being seized by the enemy's horsemen; but Lucilius, at the risk of being cut down, had personated him, and thereby, though but for a short time, rescued him. This had seemed to Antony unusual and noble and, in his generous manner, he had not only forgiven him, but bestowed his favour upon him. Lucilius was grateful, and gave him the same fidelity he had showed to Brutus. At Actium he had risked Antony's favour to prevent his deserting Cleopatra after the battle, and then accompanied him in his flight. Now he was bearing him company in his seclusion on the Choma.

The grey-haired man who, but a short time before, had retained all the vigour of youth, approached the Queen with bowed head and saddened heart. His face, so regular in its contours, had undergone a marked change within the past few weeks. The cheeks were sunken, the features had grown sharper, and there was a sorrowful expression in the eyes, which, when informing Cleopatra of his friend's condition, glittered with tears.

Before the hapless battle he was one of Cleopatra's most enthusiastic admirers; but since he had been forced to see his friend and benefactor risk fame, happiness, and honour to follow the Queen, he had cherished a feeling of bitter resentment towards her. He would certainly have spared himself this mission, had he not been sure that she who had brought her lover to ruin was the only person who could rouse him from spiritless languor to fresh energy and interest in life.

From motives of friendship, urged by no one, he came unbidden to the woman whom he had formerly so sincerely admired, to entreat her to cheer the unfortunate man, rouse him, and remind him of his duty. He had little news to impart; for on the voyage she had herself witnessed long enough the pitiable condition of her husband. Now Antony was beginning to be content in it, and this was what most sorely troubled the faithful friend.



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The Emperor had called the little palace which he occupied on the Choma his Timonium, because he compared himself with the famous Athenian misanthrope who, after fortune abandoned him, had also been betrayed by many of his former friends. Even at Taenarum he had thought of returning to the Choma, and by means of a wall, which would separate it from the mainland, rendering it as inaccessible as—according to rumour—the grave of Timon at Halae near Athens. Gorgias had erected it, and whoever wished to visit the hermit was forced to go by sea and request admittance, which was granted to few.

Cleopatra listened to Lucilius with sympathy, and then asked whether there was no way of cheering or comforting the wretched man.

“No, your Majesty,” he replied. “His favourite occupation is to recall what he once possessed, but only to show the uselessness of these memories. ‘What joys has life not offered me?’ he asks, and then adds: ‘But they were repeated again and again, and after being enjoyed for the tenth time they became monotonous and lost their charm. Then they caused satiety to the verge of loathing.’ Only necessary things, such as bread and water, he says, possess real value; but he desires neither, because he has even less taste for them than for the dainties which spoil a man’s morrow. Yesterday in a specially gloomy hour, he spoke of gold. This was perhaps most worthy of desire. The mere sight of it awakened pleasant hopes, because it might afford so many gratifications. Then he laughed bitterly, exclaiming that those joys were the very ones which produced the most disagreeable satiety. Even gold was not worth the trouble of stretching out one’s hand.

“He is fond of enlarging upon such fancies, and finds images to make his meaning clear.

“‘In the snow upon the highest mountain-peak the feet grow cold,’ he said. ‘In the mire they are warm, but the dark mud is ugly and clings to them.’

“Then I remarked that between the morass and the mountain-snows lie sunny valleys where life would be pleasant; but he flew into a rage, vehemently protesting that he would never be content with the pitiable middle course of Horace. Then he exclaimed: ‘Ay, I am vanquished. Octavianus and his Agrippa are the conquerors; but if a rock mutilates or an elephant’s clumsy foot crushes me, I am nevertheless of a higher quality than either.’”

“There spoke the old Mark Antony!” cried Cleopatra; but again Lucilius’s loyal heart throbbed with resentment against the woman who had fostered the recklessness which had brought his powerful friend to ruin, and he continued:

“But he often sees himself in a different light. ‘No writer could invent a more unworthy life than mine,’ he exclaimed recently. ‘A farce ending in a tragedy.’”

Lucilius might have added still harsher sayings, but the sorrowful expression in the tearful eyes of the afflicted Queen silenced them upon his lips.

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Yet Cleopatra's name blended with most of the words uttered by the broken-spirited man. Sometimes it was associated with the most furious reproaches, but more frequently with expressions of boundless delight and wild outbursts of fervent longing, and this was what inspired Lucilius with the hope that the Queen's influence would be effectual with his friend. Therefore he repeated some especially ardent words, to which Cleopatra listened with grateful joy.

Yet, when Lucilius paused, she remarked that doubtless the misanthropist had spoken of her, and probably of Octavia also, in quite a different way. She was prepared for the worst, for she was one of the rocks against which his greatness had been shattered.

This reminded Lucilius of the comment Antony had made upon the three women whom he had wedded, and he answered reluctantly: "Fulvia, the wife of his youth—I knew the bold, hot-blooded woman, the former wife of Clodius—he called the tempest which swelled his sails."

"Yes, Yes!" cried Cleopatra. "So she did. He owes her much; but I, too, am indebted to the dead Fulvia. She taught him to recognize and yield to woman's power."

"Not always to his advantage," retorted Lucilius, whose resentment was revived by the last sentence and, without heeding the faint flush on the Queen's cheek, he added: "Of Octavia he said that she was the straight path which leads to happiness, and those who are content to walk in it are acceptable to gods and men."

"Then why did he not suffer it to content him?" cried Cleopatra wrathfully.

"Fulvia's school," replied the Roman, "was probably the last where he would learn the moderation which—as you know—is so alien to his nature. His opinion of the quiet valleys and middle course you have just heard."

"But I, what have I been to him?" urged the Queen.

Lucilius bent his gaze for a short time on the floor, then answered hesitatingly:

"You asked to hear, and the Queen's command must be obeyed. He compared your Majesty to a delicious banquet given to celebrate a victory, at which the guests, crowned with garlands, revel before the battle—"

"Which is lost," said the Queen hurriedly, in a muffled voice. "The comparison is apt. Now, after the defeat, it would be absurd to prepare another feast. The tragedy is closing, so the play (doubtless he said so) which preceded it would be but a wearisome repetition if performed a second time. One thing, it is true, seems desirable—a closing act of reconciliation. If you think it is in my power to recall my husband to active life, rely upon me. The banquet of which he spoke occupied long years. The dessert will

consume little time, but I am ready to serve it. When I asked permission to visit him he refused. What plan of meeting have you arranged?"



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“That I will leave to your feminine delicacy of feeling,” replied Lucilius. “Yet I have come with a request whose fulfilment will perhaps contain the answer. Eros, Mark Antony’s faithful body-slave, humbly petitions your Majesty to grant him a few minutes’ audience. You know the worthy fellow. He would die for you and his master, and he—I once heard from your lips the remark of King Antiochus, that no man was great to his body-slave—thus Eros sees his master’s weaknesses and lofty qualities from a nearer point of view than we, and he is shrewd. Antony gave him his freedom long ago, and if your Majesty does not object to receiving a man so low in station—”

“Let him come,” replied Cleopatra. “Your demand upon me is just. Unhappily, I am but too well aware of the atonement due your friend. Before you came, I was engaged in making preparations for the fulfilment of one of his warmest wishes.”

With these words she dismissed the Roman. Her feelings as she watched his departure were of very mingled character. The yearning for the happiness of which she had been so long deprived had again awakened, while the unkind words which he had applied to her still rankled in her heart. But the door had scarcely closed behind Lucilius when the usher announced a deputation of the members of the museum.

The learned gentlemen came to complain of the wrong which had been done to their colleague, Didymus, and also to express their loyalty during these trying times. Cleopatra assured them of her favour, and said that she had already offered ample compensation to the old philosopher. In a certain sense she was one of themselves. They all knew that, from early youth, she had honoured and shared their labours. In proof of this, she would present to the library of the museum the two hundred thousand volumes from Pergamus, one of the most valuable gifts Mark Antony had ever bestowed upon her, and which she had hitherto regarded merely as a loan. This she hoped would repay Didymus for the injury which, to her deep regret, had been inflicted upon him, and at least partially repair the loss sustained by the former library of the museum during the conflagration in the Bruchium.

The sages, eagerly assuring her of their gratitude and devotion, retired. Most of them were personally known to Cleopatra who, to their mutual pleasure and advantage, had measured her intellectual powers with the most brilliant minds of their body.

The sun had already set, when a procession of the priests of Serapis, the chief god of the city, whose coming had been announced the day before, appeared at Lochias. Accompanied by torch and lantern bearers, it moved forward with slow and solemn majesty. In harmony with the nature of Serapis, there were many reminders of death.



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The meaning of every image, every standard, every shrine, every peculiarity of the music and singing, was familiar to the Queen. Even the changing colours of the lights referred to the course of growth and decay in the universe and in human life, and the magnificent close of the chant of homage which represented the reception of the royal soul into the essence of the deity, the apotheosis of the sovereign, was well suited to stir the heart; for a sea of light unexpectedly flooded the whole procession and, while its glow irradiated the huge pile of the palace, the sea with its forest of ships and masts, and the shore with its temples, pylons, obelisks, and superb buildings, all the choruses, accompanied by the music of sackbuts, cymbals, and lutes, blended in a mighty hymn, whose waves of sound rose to the star-strewn sky and reached the open sea beyond the Pharos.

Many a symbolical image suggested death and the resurrection, defeat and a victory following it by the aid of great Serapis; and when the torches retired, vanishing in the darkness, with the last, notes of the chanting of the priests, Cleopatra, raised her head, feeling as if the vow she had made during the gloomy singing of the aged men and the extinguishing of the torches had received the approval of the deity brought by her forefathers to Alexandria and enthroned there to unite in his own person the nature of the Greek and the Egyptian gods.

Her tomb was to be built and, if destiny was fulfilled, to receive her lover and herself. She had perceived from Antony's bitter words, as well as the looks and tones of Lucilius, that he, as well as the man to whom her heart still clung with indissoluble bonds, held her responsible for Actium and the fall of his greatness.

The world, she knew, would imitate them, but it should learn that if love had robbed the greatest man of his day of fame and sovereignty, that love had been worthy of the highest price.

The belief which had just been symbolically represented to her—that it was allotted to the vanishing light to rise again in new and radiant splendour—she would maintain for the present, though the best success could scarcely lead to anything more than merely fanning the glimmering spark and deferring its extinction.

For herself there was no longer any great victory to win which would be worth the conflict. Yet the weapons must not rest until the end. Antony must not perish, growling, like a second Timon, or a wild beast caught in a snare. She would rekindle, though but for the last blaze, the fire of his hero-nature, which blind love for her and the magic spell that had enabled her to bind his will had covered for a time with ashes.



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While listening to the resurrection hymn of the priests of Serapis, she had asked herself if it might not be possible to give Antony, when he had been roused to fresh energy, the son of Caesar as a companion in arms. True, she had found the boy in a mood far different from the one for which she had hoped. If he had once been carried on to a bold deed, it seemed to have exhausted his energy; for he remained absorbed in the most pitiable love-sickness. Yet he had not recovered from his illness. When he was better he would surely wake to active interest in the events which threatened to exert so great an influence on his own existence and, like the humblest slave, lament the defeat of Actium. Hitherto he had listened to the tidings of battle which had reached his ears with an indifference that seemed intelligible and pardonable only when attributed to his wound.

His tutor Rhodon had just requested a leave of absence, remarking that Caesarion would not lack companions, since he was expecting Antyllus and other youths of his own age. A flood of light streamed from the windows of the reception hall of the "King of kings." There was still time to seek him and make him understand what was at stake. Ah! if she could but succeed in awaking his father's spirit! If that culpable attack should prove the harbinger of future deeds of manly daring!

No interview with him as yet had encouraged this expectation, but a mother's heart easily sees, even in disappointment, a step which leads to a new hope. When Charmian entered to announce Antony's body-slave, she sent word to him to wait, and requested her friend to accompany her to her son.

As they approached the apartments occupied by Caesarion, Antyllus's loud voice reached them through the open door, whose curtain was only half drawn. The first word which the Queen distinguished was her own name; so, motioning to her companion, she stood still. Barine was again the subject of conversation.

Antony's son was relating what Alexas had told him. Cleopatra, the Syrian had asserted, intended to send the young beauty to the mines or into exile, and severely punish Dion; but both had made their escape. The Ephebi had behaved treacherously by taking sides with their foe. But this was because they were not yet invested with their robes. He hoped to induce his father to do this as soon as he shook off his pitiable misanthropy. And he must also be persuaded to direct the pursuit of the fugitives. "This will not be difficult," he cried insolently, "for the old man appreciates beauty, and has himself cast an eye on the singer. If they capture her, I'll guarantee nothing, you 'King of kings!' for, spite of his grey beard, he can cut us all out with the women, and Barine—as we have heard—doesn't think a man of much importance until his locks begin to grow thin. I gave Derketaeus orders to send all his men in pursuit. He's as cunning as a fox, and the police are compelled to obey him."



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“If I were not forced to lie here like a dead donkey, I would soon find her,” sighed Caesarion. “Night or day, she is never out of my mind. I have already spent everything I possessed in the search. Yesterday I sent for the steward Seleukus. What is the use of being my mother’s son, and the fat little fellow isn’t specially scrupulous! He will do nothing, yet there must be gold enough. The Queen has sunk millions in the sand on the Syrian frontier of the Delta. There is to be a square hole or something of the sort dug there to hide the fleet. I only half understand the absurd plan. The money might have paid hundreds of spies. So talents are thrown away, and the strong-box is locked against the son. But I’ll find one that will open to me. I must have her, though I risk the crown. It always sounds like a jeer when they call me the King of kings. I am not fit for sovereignty. Besides, the throne will be seized ere I really ascend it. We are conquered, and if we succeed in concluding a peace, which will secure us life and a little more, we must be content. For my part, I shall be satisfied with a country estate on the water, a sufficient supply of money and, above all, Barine. What do I care for Egypt? As Caesar’s son I ought to have ruled Rome; but the immortals knew what they were doing when they prompted my father to disinherit me. To govern the world one must have less need of sleep. Really—you know it—I always feel tired, even when I am well. People must let me alone! Your father, too, Antyllus, is laying down his arms and letting things go as they will.”

“Ah, so he is!” cried Antony’s son indignantly. “But just wait! The sleeping lion will wake again, and, when he uses his teeth and paws—”

“My mother will run away, and your father will follow her,” replied Caesarion with a melancholy smile, wholly untinged by scorn. “All is lost. But conquered kings and queens are permitted to live. Caesar’s son will not be exhibited to the Quirites in the triumphal procession. Rhodon says that there would be an insurrection if I appeared in the Forum. If I go there again, it certainly will not be in Octavianus’s train. I am not suited for that kind of ignominy. It would stifle me and, ere I would grant any man the pleasure of dragging the son of Caesar behind him to increase his own renown, I would put an end—ten, nay, a hundred times over, in the good old Roman fashion, to my life, which is by no means especially attractive. What is sweeter than sound sleep, and who will disturb and rouse me when Death has lowered his torch before me? But now I think I shall be spared this extreme. Whatever else they may inflict upon me will scarcely exceed my powers of endurance. If any one has learned contentment it is I. The King of kings and Co-Regent of the Great Queen has been trained persistently, and with excellent success, to be content. What should I be, and what am I? Yet I do not complain,



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and wish to accuse no one. We need not summon Octavianus, and when he is here let him take what he will if he only spares the lives of my mother, the twins, and little Alexander, whom I love, and bestows on me the estate—the main thing is that it must be full of fishponds—of which I spoke. The private citizen Caesarion, who devotes his time to fishing and the books he likes to read, will gladly be allowed to choose a wife to suit his own taste. The more humble her origin, the more easily I shall win the consent of the Roman guardian.”

“Do you know, Caesarion,” interrupted Antony’s unruly son, leaning back on the cushions and stretching his feet farther in front of him, “if you were not the King of kings I should be inclined to call you a base, mean-natured fellow! One who has the good fortune to be the son of Julius Caesar ought not to forget it so disgracefully. My gall overflows at your whimpering. By the dog! It was one of my most senseless pranks to take you to the singer. I should think there would be other things to occupy the mind of the King of kings. Besides, Barine cares no more for you than the last fish you caught. She showed that plainly enough. I say once more, if Derketaeus’s men succeed in capturing the beauty who has robbed you of your senses, she won’t go with you to your miserable estate to cook the fish you catch, for if we have her again, and my father holds out his hand to her, all your labour will be in vain. He saw the fair enchantress only twice, and had no time to become better acquainted, but she captured his fancy and, if I remind him of her, who knows what will happen?”

Here Cleopatra beckoned to her companion and returned to her apartments with drooping head. On reaching them, she broke the silence, saying: “Listening, Charmian, is unworthy of a Queen; but if all listeners heard things so painful, one need no longer guard keyholes and chinks of doors. I must recover my calmness ere I receive Eros. One thing more. Is Barine’s hiding-place secure?”

“I don’t know—Archibius says so.”

“Very well. They are searching for her zealously enough, as you heard, and she must not be found. I am glad that she did not set a snare for the boy. How a jealous heart leads us astray! Were she here, I would grant her anything to make amends for my unjust suspicion of her and Antony. And to think that Alexas—but for your interposition he would have succeeded—meant to send her to the mines! It is a terrible warning to be on my guard. Against whom? First of all, my own weakness. This is a day of recognition. A noble aim, but on the way the feet bleed, and the heart—ah! Charmian, the poor, weak, disappointed heart!”

She sighed heavily, and supported her head on the arm resting upon the table at her side. The polished, exquisitely grained surface of thya-wood was worth a large estate; the gems in the rings and bracelets which glittered on her hand and arm would have

purchased a principality. This thought entered her mind and, overpowered by a feeling of angry disgust, she would fain have cast all the costly rubbish into the sea or the destroying flames.



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She would gladly have been a beggar, content with the barley bread of Epicurus, she said to herself, if in return she could but have inspired her son even with the views of the reckless blusterer Antyllus. Her worst fears had not pictured Caesarion so weak, so insignificant. She could no longer rest upon her cushions; and while, with drooping head, she gazed backward over the past, the accusing voice in her own breast cried out that she was reaping what she had sowed. She had repressed, curbed the boy's awakening will to secure his obedience; understood how to prevent any exercise of his ability or efforts in wider circles.

True, it had been done on many a pretext. Why should not her son taste the quiet happiness which she had enjoyed in the garden of Epicurus? And was not the requirement that whoever is to command must first learn to obey, based upon old experiences?

But this was a day of reckoning and insight, and for the first time she found courage to confess that her own burning ambition had marked out the course of Caesarion's education. She had not repressed his talents from cool calculation, but it had been pleasant to her to see him grow up free from aspirations. She had granted the dreamer repose without arousing him. How often she had rejoiced over the certainty that this son, on whom Antony, after his victory over the Parthians, had bestowed the title of Co-Regent, would never rebel against his mother's guardianship! The welfare of the state had doubtless been better secured in her trained hands than in those of an inexperienced boy. And the proud consciousness of power! Her heart swelled. So long as she lived she would remain Queen. To transfer the sovereignty to another, whatever name he might bear, had seemed to her impossible. Now she knew how little her son yearned for lofty things. Her heart contracted. The saying "You reap what you sowed" gave her no peace, and wherever she turned in her past life she perceived the fruit of the seeds which she had buried in the ground. The field was sinking under the burden of the ears of misfortune. The harvest was ripe for the reaper; but, ere he raised the sickle, the owner's claim must be preserved. Gorgias must hasten the building of the tomb; the end could not be long deferred. How to shape this worthily, if the victor left her no other choice, had just been pointed out by the son of whom she was ashamed. His father's noble blood forbade him to bear the deepest ignominy with the patience his mother had inculcated.

It had grown late ere she admitted Antony's body-slave, but for her the business of the night was just commencing. After he had gone she would be engaged for hours with the commanders of the army, the fleet, the fortifications. The soliciting of allies, too, must be carried on by means of letters containing the most stirring appeals to the heart.

Eros, Antony's body-slave, appeared. His kind eyes filled with tears at the sight of the Queen. Grief had not lessened the roundness of his handsome face, but the expression of mischievous, often insolent, gaiety had given place to a sorrowful droop of the lips, and his fair hair had begun to turn grey.



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Lucilius's information that Cleopatra had consented to make advances to Antony had seemed like the rising of the sun after a long period of darkness. In his eyes, not only his master, but everything else, must yield to the power of the Queen. He had heard Antony at Tarsus inveigh against "the Egyptian serpent," protesting that he would make her pay so dearly for her questionable conduct towards himself and the cause of Caesar that the treasure-houses on the Nile should be like an empty wine-skin; yet, a few hours after, body and soul had been in her toils. So it had continued till the battle of Actium. Now there was nothing more to lose; but what might not Cleopatra bestow upon his master? He thought of the delightful years during which his face had grown so round, and every day fresh pleasures and spectacles, such as the world would never again witness, had satiated eye and ear, palate and nostril,—nay, even curiosity. If they could be repeated, even in a simpler form, so much the better. His main—nay, almost his sole-desire was to release his lord from this wretched solitude, this horrible misanthropy, so ill suited to his nature.

Cleopatra had kept him waiting two hours, but he would willingly have loitered in the anteroom thrice as long if she only determined to follow his counsel. It was worth considering, and Eros did not hesitate to give it. No one could foresee how Antony would greet Cleopatra herself, so he proposed that she should send Charmian—not alone, but with her clever hunch-backed maid, to whom the Emperor himself had given the name "Aisopion." He liked Charmian, and could never see the dusky maid without jesting with her. If his master could once be induced to show a cheerful face to others besides himself, Eros, and perceived how much better it was to laugh than to lapse into sullen reverie and anger, much would be gained, and Charmian would do the rest, if she brought a loving message from her royal mistress.

Hitherto Cleopatra had not interrupted him; but when she expressed the opinion that a slave's nimble tongue would have little power to change the deep despondency of a man overwhelmed by the most terrible disaster, Eros waved his short, broad hand, saying:

"I trust your Majesty will pardon the frankness of a man so humble in degree, but those in high station often permit us to see what they hide from one another. Only the loftiest and the lowliest, the gods and the slaves, behold the great without disguise. May my ears be cropped if the Emperor's melancholy and misanthropy are so intense! All this is a disguise which pleases him. You know how, in better days, he enjoyed appearing as Dionysus, and with what wanton gaiety he played the part of the god. Now he is hiding his real, cheerful face behind the mask of unsocial melancholy, because he thinks the former does not suit this time of misfortune. True, he often says things which make your skin creep,



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and frequently broods mournfully over his own thoughts. But this never lasts long when we are alone. If I come in with a very funny story, and he doesn't silence me at once, you can rely on his surpassing it with a still more comical one. A short time ago I reminded him of the fishing party when your Majesty had a diver fasten a salted herring on his hook. You ought to have heard him laugh, and exclaim what happy days those were. The lady Charmian need only remind him of them, and Aisopion spice the allusion with a jest. I'll give my nose—true, it's only a small one, but everybody values that feature most—if they don't persuade him to leave that horrible crow's nest in the middle of the sea. They must remind him of the twins and little Alexander; for when he permits me to talk about them his brow smooths most speedily. He still speaks very often to Lucilius and his other friends of his great plans of forming a powerful empire in the East, with Alexandria as its principal city. His warrior blood is not yet calm. A short time ago I was even ordered to sharpen the curved Persian scimitar he likes to wield. One could not know what service it might be, he said. Then he swung his mighty arm. By the dog! The grey-haired giant still has the strength of three youths. When he is once more with you, among warriors and battle chargers, all will be well."

"Let us hope so." replied Cleopatra kindly, and promised to follow his advice.

When Iras, who had taken Charmian's place, accompanied the Queen to her chamber after several hours of toil, she found her silent and sad. Lost in thought, she accepted her attendant's aid, breaking her silence only after she had gone to her couch. "This has been a hard day, Iras," she said; "it brought nothing save the confirmation of an old saying, perhaps the most ancient in the world: 'Every one wilt reap only what he sows. The plant which grows from the seed you place in the earth may be crushed, but no power in the world will compel the seed to develop differently or produce fruit unlike what Nature has assigned to it.' My seed was evil. This now appears in the time of harvest. But we will yet bring a handful of good wheat to the storehouses. We will provide for that while there is time. I will talk with Gorgias early to-morrow morning. While we were building, you showed good taste and often suggested new ideas. When Gorgias brings the plans for the mausoleum you shall examine them with me. You have a right to do so, for, if I am not mistaken, few will visit the finished structure more frequently than my Iras."

The girl started up and, raising her hand as if taking a vow, exclaimed: "Your tomb will vainly wait my visit; your end will be mine also."

"May the gods preserve your youth from it!" replied the Queen in a tone of grave remonstrance. "We still live and will do battle."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:



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Epicurus, who believed that with death all things ended
No, she was not created to grow old
Nothing in life is either great or small
Priests: in order to curb the unruly conduct of the populace
She would not purchase a few more years of valueless life
To govern the world one must have less need of sleep
What changes so quickly as joy and sorrow

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