

Cleopatra — Volume 08 eBook

Cleopatra — Volume 08 by Georg Ebers

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CHAPTER XIX.

Night brought little sleep to Cleopatra. Memory followed memory, plan was added to plan. The resolve made the day before was the right one. To-day she would begin its execution. Whatever might happen, she was prepared for every contingency.

Ere she went to her work she granted a second audience to the Roman envoy. Timagenes exerted all his powers of eloquence, skill in persuasion, wit, and ingenuity. He again promised to Cleopatra life and liberty, and to her children the throne; but when he insisted upon the surrender or death of Mark Antony as the first condition of any further negotiations, Cleopatra remained steadfast, and the ambassador set forth on his way home without any pledge.

After he had gone, the Queen and Iras looked over the plans for the tomb brought by Gorgias, but the intense agitation of her soul distracted Cleopatra's attention, and she begged him to come again at a later hour. When she was alone, she took out the letters which Caesar and Antony had written to her. How acute, subtle, and tender were those of the former; how ardent, impassioned, yet sincere were those of the mighty and fiery orator, whose eloquence swept the listening multitudes with him, yet whom her little hand had drawn wherever she desired!

Her heart throbbed faster when she thought of the meeting with Antony, now close at hand; for Charmian had gone with the Nubian to invite him to join her again. They had started several hours ago, and she awaited their return with increasing impatience. She had summoned him for their last mutual battle. That he would come she did not doubt. But could she succeed in rekindling his courage? Two persons so closely allied should sink and perish, still firmly united, in the final battle, if victory was denied.

Archibius was now announced.

It soothed her merely to gaze into the faithful countenance, which recalled so many of her happiest memories.

She opened her whole soul to him without reserve, and he drew himself up to his full height, as if restored to youth; while when she told him that she would never sully herself by treachery to her lover and husband, and had resolved to die worthy of her name, the expression of his eyes revealed that she had chosen the right path.

Ere she had made the request that he should undertake the education and guidance of the children, he voluntarily proposed to devote his best powers to them. The plan of uniting Didymus's garden with the Lochias and giving it to the little ones also met with his approval. His sister had already told him that Cleopatra had determined to build her tomb. He hoped, he added, that its doors would not open to her for many years.

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She shook her head sorrowfully, exclaiming "Would that I could read every face as I do yours! My friend Archibius wishes me a long life, if any one does; but he is as wise as he is faithful, and therefore will consider that earthly life is by no means a boon in every case. Besides, he says to himself: 'Events are impending over this Queen and woman, my friend, which will perhaps render it advisable to make use of the great privilege which the immortals bestow on human beings when it becomes desirable for them to leave the stage of life. So let her build her tomb.' Have I read the old familiar book aright?"

"On the whole, yes," he answered gravely. "But it is inscribed upon its pages that a great princess and faithful mother can be permitted to set forth on the last journey, whence there is no return, only when—"

"When," she interrupted, "a shameful end threatens to fall upon the fair beginning and brilliant middle period, as a swarm of locusts darkens the air and devours and devastates the fields. I know it, and will act accordingly."

"And," added Archibius, "this end also (faithful to your nature) you will shape regally.—On my way here I met my sister near the Choma. You sent her to your husband. He will grasp the proffered hand. Now that it is necessary to stake everything or surrender, the grandson of Herakles will again display his former heroic power. Perhaps, stimulated and encouraged by the example of the woman he loves, he will even force hostile Fate to show him fresh favour."

"Destiny will pursue its course," interrupted Cleopatra firmly. "But Antony must help me to heap fresh obstacles in the pathway, and when he wishes to use his giant strength, what masses of rock his mighty arm can hurl!"

"And if your lofty spirit smooths the path for him, then, my royal mistress—"

"Even then the close of the tragedy will be death, and every scene a disappointment. Was not the plan of bringing the fleet across the isthmus bold and full of promise? Even the professional engineers greeted it with applause, and yet it proved impracticable. Destiny dug its grave. And the terrible omens before and after Actium, and the stars—the stars! Everything points to speedy destruction, everything! Every hour brings news of the desertion of some prince or general. As if from a watch-tower, I now overlook what is growing from the seed I sowed. Sterile ears or poisonous vegetation, wherever I turn my eyes. And yet! You, who know my life from its beginning, tell me—must I veil my head in shame when the question is asked, what powers of intellect, what talents industry, and desire for good Cleopatra displayed?"

"No, my royal mistress, a thousand times no!"

“Yet the fruit of every tree I planted degenerated and decayed. Caesarion is withering in the flower of his youth—by whose fault I know only too well. You will now take charge of the education of the other children. So it is for you to consider what brought me where I now stand, and how to guard their life-bark from wandering and shipwreck.”

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"Let me train them to be human beings," replied Archibius gravely, "and preserve them from the desire to enter the lists with the gods. From the simple Cleopatra in the garden of Epicurus, who was a delight to the good and wise, you became the new Isis, to whom the multitude raised hearts, eyes, and hands, dazzled and blinded. We will transfer the twins, Helios and Selene, the sun and the moon, from heaven to earth; they must become mortals—Greeks. I will not transplant them to the garden of Epicurus, but to another, where the air is more bracing. The inscription on its portals shall not be, 'Here pleasure is the chief good,' but 'This is an arena for character.' He who leaves this garden shall not owe to it the yearning for happiness and comfort, but an immovably steadfast moral discipline. Your children, like yourself, were born in the East, which loves what is monstrous, superhuman, exaggerated. If you entrust them to me, they must learn to govern themselves. At the helm stands moral earnestness, which, however, does not exclude the joyous cheerfulness natural to our people; the sails will be trimmed by moderation, the noblest quality of the Greek nation."

"I understand," Cleopatra interrupted, with drooping head. "Interwoven with the means of securing the children's welfare, you set before the mother's eyes the qualities she has lacked. I know that long ago you abandoned the teachings of Epicurus and the Stoa, and with an earnest aim before your eyes sought your own paths. The tempest of life swept me far away from the quiet garden where we sought the purest delight. Now I have learned to know the perils which threaten those who see the chief good in happiness. It stands too high for mortals, for in the changeful stir of life it remains unattainable, and yet it is too low an aim for their struggles, for there are worthier objects. Yet one saying of Epicurus we both believed, and it has always stood us in good stead: 'Wisdom can obtain no more precious contribution to the happiness of mortal life than the possession of friendship.'"

She held out her hand as she spoke, and while, deeply agitated, he raised it to his lips, she went on: "You know I am on the eve of the last desperate battle—if the gods will—shoulder to shoulder with Antony. Therefore I shall not be permitted to watch your work of education; yet I will aid it. When the children question you about their mother, you will be obliged to restrain yourself from saying: 'Instead of striving for the painless peace of mind, the noble pleasure of Epicurus, which once seemed to her the highest good, she constantly pursued fleeting amusements. The Oriental recklessly squandered her once noble gifts of intellect and the wealth of her people, yielded to the hasty impulses of her passionate nature.' But you shall also say to them: 'Your mother's heart was full of ardent love, she scorned what was base, strove for the highest goal, and when she fell, preferred death to treachery and disgrace.'"

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Here she paused, for she thought she heard footsteps approaching, and then exclaimed anxiously: "I am waiting—expecting. Perhaps Antony cannot escape from the paralyzing grasp of despair. To fight the last battle without him, and yet under the gaze of his wrathful, gloomy eyes, once so full of sunshine, would be the greatest sorrow of my life. Archibius, I may confess this to you, the friend who saw love for this man develop in the breast of the child—But what does this mean? An uproar! Have the people rebelled? Yesterday the representatives of the priesthood, the members of the museum, and the leaders of the army assured me of their changeless fidelity and love. Dion belonged to the Macedonian men of the Council; yet I have already declared, in accordance with the truth, that I never intended to persecute him on Caesarion's account. I do not even know—and do not desire to know the refuge of the lately wedded pair. Or has the new tax levied, the command to seize the treasures of the temple, driven them to extremities? What am I to do? We need gold to bid the foe defiance, to preserve the independence of the throne, the country, and the people. Or have tidings from Rome? It is becoming serious—and the noise is growing louder."

"Let me see what they want," Archibius anxiously interrupted, hastening to the door; but just at that moment the Introducer opened it, crying, "Mark Antony is approaching the Lochias, attended by half Alexandria!"

"The noble Imperator is returning!" fell from the bearded lips of the commander of the guard, ere the courtier's words had died away; and even while he spoke Iras pressed past him, shrieking as if half frantic: "He is coming! He is here! I knew he would come! How they are shouting and cheering! Out with you, men! If you are willing, my royal mistress, we will greet him from the balcony of Berenike. If we only had—"

"The twins—little Alexander!" interrupted Cleopatra, with blanched face and faltering voice. "Put on their festal garments."

"Quick—the children, Zoe!" cried Iras, completing the order and clapping her hands. Then she turned to the Queen with the entreaty: "Be calm, my royal mistress, be calm, I beseech you. We have ample time. Here is the vulture crown of Isis, and here the other. Antony's slave, Eros, has just come in, panting for breath. The Imperator, he says, will appear as the new Dionysus. It would certainly please his master—though he had not commissioned him to request it—if you greeted him as the new Isis. —Help me, Hathor. Nephoris, tell the usher to see that the fan-bearers and the other attendants, women and men, are in their places.—Here are the pearl and diamond necklaces for your throat and bosom. Take care of the robe. The transparent bombyx is as delicate as a cobweb, and if you tear it No, you must not refuse. We all know how it pleases him to see his goddess in divine majesty and beauty."

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Cleopatra, with glowing cheeks and throbbing heart, made no further objection to donning the superb festal robe, strewn with glimmering pearls and glittering gems. It would have been more in harmony with her feelings to meet the returning Antony in the plain, dark garb which, since her arrival at home, she had exchanged for a richer one only on festal occasions; but Antony was coming as the new Dionysus, and Eros knew what would please his master.

Eight nimble hands, which were often aided by Iras's skilful fingers, toiled busily, and soon the latter could hold up the mirror before Cleopatra, exclaiming from the very depths of her heart, "Like the foam-born Aphrodite and the golden Hathor!"

Then Iras, who, in adorning her beloved mistress, had forgotten love, hate, and envy, and amid her eager haste barely found time for a brief, fervent prayer for a happy issue of this meeting, threw the broad folding-doors as wide as if she were about to reveal to the worshippers in the temple the image of the god in the innermost sanctuary.

A long, echoing shout of surprise and delight greeted the Queen, for the courtiers, hastily summoned, were already awaiting her without, from the grey-haired epistolograph to the youngest page. Regally attired women in her service raised the floating train of her cloak; others, in sacerdotal robes, were testing the ease of movement of the rings on the sistrum rods, men and boys were forming into lines according to the rank of each individual, and the chief fan-bearer gave the signal for departure. After a short walk through several halls and corridors, the train reached the first court-yard of the palace, and there ascended the few steps leading to the broad platform at the entrance-gate which overlooked the whole Bruchium and the Street of the King, down which the expected hero would approach.

The distant uproar of the multitude had sounded threatening, but now, amid the deafening din, they could distinguish every shout of welcome, every joyous greeting, every expression of delight, surprise, applause, admiration, and homage, known to the Greek and Egyptian tongues.

Only the centre and end of the procession were visible. The head had reached the Corner of the Muses, where, concealed by the old trees in the garden, it moved on between the Temple of Isis and the land owned by Didymus. The end still extended to the Choma, whence it had started.

All Alexandria seemed to have joined it.

Men large and small, of high and low degree, old and young, the lame and the crippled, mingled with the throng, sweeping onward among horses and carriages, carts and beasts of burden, like a mountain torrent dashing wildly down to the valley. Here a loud

shriek rang from an overturned litter, whose bearers had fallen. Yonder a child thrown to the ground screamed shrilly, there a dog trodden under the feet of the crowd howled piteously. So clear and resonant were the shouts of joy that they rose high above the flutes and tambourines, the cymbals and lutes of the musicians, who followed the man approaching in the robes of a god.

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The head of the procession now passed beyond the Corner of the Muses and came within view of the platform.

There could be no doubt to whom this ovation was given, for the returning hero was in the van, high above all the other figures. From the golden throne borne on the shoulders of twelve black slaves he waved his long thyrsus in greeting to the exulting multitude. Before the bacchanalian train which accompanied him, and behind the musicians who followed, moved two elephants bearing between them, as a light burden, some unrecognizable object covered with a purple cloth. Now the column had passed between the pylons through the lofty gateway which separated the palace from the Street of the King, and stopped opposite to the platform.

While officials, Scythians, and body-guards of all shades of complexion, on foot and on horseback, kept back the throng by force where friendly warning did not avail, Cleopatra saw her lover descend from the throne and give a signal to the Indian slave who guided the elephants. The cloth was flung aside, revealing to the astonished eyes of the spectators a bouquet of flowers such as no Alexandrian had ever beheld. It consisted entirely of blossoming rose-bushes. The red flowers formed a circle in the centre, surrounded by a broad light garland of white ones. The whole gigantic work rested like an egg in its cup in a holder of palm fronds which, as it were, framed it in graceful curving outlines. More than a thousand blossoms were united in this peerless bouquet, and the singular gigantic gift was characteristic of its giver.

He advanced on foot to the platform, his figure towering above the brown, light-hued, and black freedmen and slaves who followed as, on the monuments of the Pharaohs, the image of the sovereign dominates those of the subjects and foes.

He could look down upon the tallest men, and the width of his shoulders was as remarkable as his colossal height. A long, gold-broidered purple mantle, floating to his ankles, increased his apparent stature. Powerful arms, with the swelling muscles of an athlete, were extended from his sleeveless robe towards the beloved Queen.

The well-formed head, thick dark hair, and magnificent beard corresponded with the powerful figure. Formerly these locks had adorned the head of the youth with the blue-black hue of the raven's plumage; now the threads of grey scattered abundantly through them were concealed by the aid of dye. A thick wreath of vine leaves rested on the Emperor's brow, and leafy vine branches, to which clung several dark bunches of grapes, fell over his broad shoulders and down his back, which was covered like a cloak, not by a leopard-skin, but that of a royal Indian tiger of great size—he had slain it himself in the arena. The head and paws of the animal were gold, the eyes two magnificent sparkling sapphires. The clasp of the chain, by which the skin was suspended, as well as that of the gold belt which circled the Emperor's body above the hips, was covered with rubies and emeralds. The wide armlets above his elbows, the

ornaments on his broad breast, nay, even his red morocco boots, glittered and flashed with gems.

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Radiant magnificent as his former fortunes seemed the attire of this mighty fallen hero, who but yesterday had shrunk timidly and sadly from the eyes of his fellow-men. His features, too, were large, noble, and beautiful in outline; but, though his pale cheeks were adorned with the borrowed crimson of youth, half a century of the maddest pursuit of pleasure and the torturing excitement of the last few weeks had left traces only too visible; for the skin hung in loose bags beneath the large eyes; wrinkles furrowed his brow and radiated in slanting lines from the corners of his eyes across his temples.

Yet not one of those whom this bedizened man of fifty was approaching thought of seeing in him an aged, bedecked dandy; it was an instinct of his nature to surround himself with pomp and splendour and, moreover, his whole appearance was so instinct with power that scorn and mockery shrank abashed before it.

How frank, gracious, and kindly was this man's face, how sincere the heart-felt emotion which sparkled in his eyes, still glowing with the fire of youth, at the sight of the woman from whom he had been so long parted! Every feature beamed with the most ardent tenderness for the royal wife whom he was approaching, and the expression on the lips of the giant varied so swiftly from humble, sorrowful anguish of mind to gratitude and delight, that even the hearts of his foes were touched. But when, pressing his hand on his broad breast, he advanced towards the Queen, bending so low that it seemed as if he would fain kiss her feet, when in fact the colossal figure did sink kneeling before her, and the powerful arms were outstretched with fervent devotion like a child beseeching help, the woman who had loved him throughout her whole life with all the ardour of her passionate soul was overpowered by the feeling that everything which stood between them, all their mutual offences, had vanished. He saw the sunny smile that brightened her beloved, ever-beautiful face, and then—then his own name reached his ears from the lips to which he owed the greatest bliss love had ever offered. At last, as if intoxicated by the tones of her voice, which seemed to him more musical than the songs of the Muses; half smiling at the jest which, even in the most serious earnest, he could not abandon; half moved to the depths of his soul by the power of his newly awakening happiness after such sore sorrow, he pointed to the gigantic bouquet, which three slaves had lifted down from the elephant and were bearing to the Queen. Cleopatra, too, was overwhelmed with emotion.

This floral gift imitated, on an immense scale, the little bouquet which the famous young general had taken from her father's hand before the gate of the garden of Epicurus to present to her as his first gift. That had also been composed of red roses, surrounded by white ones. Instead of palm fronds, it had been encircled only by fern leaves. This was one of the beautiful offerings which Antony's gracious nature so well understood how to choose. The bouquet was a symbol of the unprecedented generosity natural to this large-minded man. No magic goblet had compelled him to approach her thus and with such homage. Nothing had constrained him, save his overflowing heart, his constant, fadeless love.

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As if restored to youth, transported by some magic spell to the happy days of early girlhood, she forgot her royal dignity and the hundreds of eyes which rested upon him as if spell-bound; and, obedient to an irresistible impulse of the heart, she sank upon the broad, heaving breast of the kneeling hero. Laughing joyously in the clear, silvery tones which are usually heard only in youth, he clasped her in his strong arms, raised her slender figure in its floating royal mantle from the ground, kissed her lips and eyes, held her aloft in the soaring attitude of the Goddess of Victory, as if to display his happiness to the eyes of all, and at last placed her carefully on her feet again like some treasured jewel.

Then, turning to the children, who were waiting at their mother's side, he lifted first little Alexander, then the twins, to kiss them; and, while holding Helios and Selene in his arms, as if the joy of seeing them again had banished their weight, the shouts which had arisen when the Queen sank on his breast again burst forth.

The ancient walls of the Lochias palace had never heard such acclamations. They passed from lip to lip, from hundreds to hundreds and, though those more distant did not know the cause, they joined in the shouts. Along the whole vast stretch from the Lochias to the Choma the cheers rang out like a single, heart-stirring, inseparable cry, echoing across the harbour, the ships lying at anchor, the towering masts, to the cliff amid the sea where Barine was nursing her new-made husband.

CHAPTER XX.

The property of the freedman Pyrrhus was a flat rock in the northern part of the harbour, scarcely larger than the garden of Didymus at the Corner of the Muses, a desolate spot where neither tree nor blade of grass grew. It was called the Serpent Island, though the inhabitants had long since rid it of these dangerous guests, which lived in great numbers in the neighbouring cliffs. Not even the poorest crops would grow in soil so hostile to life, and those who chose it for a home were compelled to bring even the drinking-water from the continent.

This desert, around which hovered gulls, sea-swallows, and sea-eagles, had been for several weeks the abode of the fugitives, Dion and Barine. They still occupied the two rooms which had been assigned to them on their arrival. During the day the sun beat fiercely down upon the yellow chalky rock. There was no shade save in the house and at the foot of a towering cliff in the southern part of the island, the fishermen's watch-tower.

There were no works of human hands save a little Temple of Poseidon, an altar of Isis, the large house owned by Pyrrhus, solidly constructed by Alexandrian masons, and a smaller one for the freedman's married sons and their families. A long wooden frame, on which nets were strung to dry, rose on the shore. Near it, towards the north, in the

open sea, was the anchorage of the larger sea-going ships and the various skiffs and boats of the fisher folk. Dionikos, Pyrrhus's youngest son, who was still unmarried, built new boats and repaired the old ones.

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His two strong, taciturn brothers, with their wives and children, his father Pyrrhus, his wife and their youngest child, a daughter, Dione, a few dogs, cats, and chickens, composed the population of the Serpent Island.

Such were the surroundings of the newly wedded pair, who had been reared in the capital. At first many things were strange to them, but they accommodated themselves to circumstances with a good grace, and both had admitted to each other, long before, that life had never been so equable and peaceful.

During the first week Dion's wound and fever still harassed him, but the prediction of Pyrrhus that the pure, fresh sea-air would benefit the sufferer had been fulfilled, and the monotonous days had passed swiftly enough to the young bride in caring for the invalid.

The wife of Pyrrhus—"mother," as they all called her—had proved to be a skilful nurse, and her daughters-in-law and young Dione were faithful and nimble assistants. During the time of anxiety and nursing, Barine had formed a warm friendship for them. If the taciturn men avoided using a single unnecessary word, the women were all the more ready to gossip; and it was a pleasure to talk to pretty Dione, who had grown up on the island and was eager to hear about the outside world.

Dion had long since left his couch and the house, and each day looked happier, more content with himself and his surroundings. At first his feverish visions had shown him his dead mother, pointing anxiously at his new-made wife, as if to warn him against her. During his convalescence he remembered them and they conjured up the doubt whether Barine could endure the solitude of this desolate cliff, whether she would not lose the bright serenity of soul whose charm constantly increased. Would it be any marvel if she should pine with longing in this solitude, and even suffer physically from their severe privations?

The perception that love now supplied the place of all which she had lost pleased him, but he forbade himself to expect that this condition of affairs could be lasting. Nothing save exaggerated self-conceit would induce the hope. But he must have undervalued his own power of attraction—or Barine's love—for with each passing week the cheerful serenity of her disposition gained fresh steadfastness and charm. He, too, had the same experience; it was long since he had felt so vigorous, untrammelled, and free from care. His sole regret was the impossibility of sharing the political life of the city at this critical period; and at times he felt some little anxiety concerning the fate and management of his property, though, even if his estates were confiscated, he would still retain a competence which he had left in the hands of a trustworthy money-changer. Barine shared everything that concerned him, even these moods, and this led him to tell her about the affairs of the city and the state, in which she had formerly taken little interest, his property in Alexandria and the provinces. With what glad appreciation she listened, when she went out with him from the northern anchorage on the open sea, or sat during long winter evenings making nets, an art which she had learned from Dione!

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Her lute had been sent to her from the city, and what pleasure her singing afforded her husband and herself; how joyously their hosts, old and young, listened to the melody!

A few book-rolls had also come, and Dion enjoyed discussing their contents with Barine. He himself read very little, for he was rarely indoors during the day. The fourth week after his arrival he was able to aid, with arms whose muscles had been steeled in the pakestra, the men in their fishing, and Dionikos in his boat-building.

The close, constant, uninterrupted companionship of the married pair revealed to each unexpected treasures in the other, which, perhaps, might have remained forever concealed in city life. Here each was everything to the other, and this undisturbed mutual life soon inspired that blissful consciousness of inseparable union which usually appears only after years, as the fairest fruit of a marriage founded on love.

Doubtless there were hours when Barine longed to see her mother and others who were dear to her, but the letters which arrived from time to time prevented this yearning from becoming a source of actual pain.

Prudence required them to restrict their intercourse with the city. But, whenever Pyrrhus went to market, letters reached the island delivered at the fish auction in the harbour by Anukis, Charmian's Nubian maid, to the old freedman, who had become her close friend.

So the time came when Dion could say without self-deception that Barine was content in this solitude, and that his love and companionship supplied the place of the exciting, changeful life of the capital. Though letters came from her mother, sister, or Charmian, her grandfather, Gorgias, or Archibius, not one transformed the wish to leave her desolate hiding-place into actual homesickness, but each brought fresh subjects for conversation, and among them many which, by arousing the interest of both, united them more firmly.

The second month of their flight a letter arrived from Archibius, in which he informed them that they might soon form plans for their return, for Alexas, the Syrian, had proved a malicious traitor. He had not performed the commission entrusted to him of winning Herod to Antony's cause, but treacherously deserted his patron and remained with the King of the Jews. When, with unprecedented shamelessness, he sought Octavianus to sell the secrets of his Egyptian benefactor, he was arrested and executed in his own home, Laodicea.

Now, their friend continued, Cleopatra's eyes as well as her husband's were opened to the true character of Barine's most virulent accuser. The influence of Philostratus, too, was of course destroyed by his brother's infamous deed. Yet they must wait a little longer; for Caesarion had joined the Ephebi, and Antyllus had been invested with the

toga virilis. They could now undertake many things independently, and Caesarion often made remarks which showed that he would not cease to lay plots for Barine.

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Dion feared nothing from the royal boy on his own account, but for his wife's sake he dared not disregard his friend's warning. This was hard; for though he still felt happy on the island, he longed to install the woman he loved in his own house, and every impulse of his nature urged him to be present at the meetings of the Council in these fateful times. Therefore he was more than ready to risk returning to the city, but Barine entreated him so earnestly not to exchange the secure happiness they enjoyed here for a greater one, behind which might lurk the heaviest misfortune, that he yielded. Another letter from Charmian soon proved the absolute necessity of continuing to exercise caution.

Even from the island they could perceive that everything known as festal pleasure was rife in Alexandria, and bore along in its mad revelry the court and the citizens. When the wind blew from the south, it brought single notes of inspiring music or indistinct sounds of the wildest popular rejoicing.

The fisherman's daughter, Dione, often called them to the strand to admire the galleys adorned with fabulous splendour, garlanded with flowers, and echoing with the music of lutes and the melody of songs. Sails of purple embroidered silk bore the vessels over the smooth tide. Once the watchers even distinguished, upon a barge richly adorned with gilded carving, young female slaves who, with floating hair and transparent sea-green robes, handled, in the guise of Nereids, light sandal-wood oars with golden blades. Often the breeze bore to the island the perfumes which surrounded the galleys, and on calm nights the magnificent ships, surrounded by the magical illumination of many-hued lamps, swept across the mirror-like surface of the waves. Among the voyagers were gods, goddesses, and heroes who, standing or reclining in beautiful groups, represented scenes from the myths and history. On the deck of the Queen's superb vessel guests crowned with wreaths lay on purple couches, under garlands of flowers, eating choice viands and draining golden wine-cups.

On other nights the illumination of the shore of the Bruchium rendered it as bright as day. The huge dome of the Serapeum on the Rhakotis, covered with lamps, towered above the flat roofs of the city like the starry firmament of a smaller world which had descended to earth. Every temple and palace was transformed into a giant candelabrum, and the rows of lamps on the quay stretched like tendrils of light from the dazzlingly illuminated marble Temple of Poseidon to the palace at Lochias, steeped in radiance.

When Pyrrhus or one of his sons returned from market they described the festivals and shows, banquets, races, and endless pleasure excursions arranged by the court, which made the citizens fairly hold their breath. It was a prosperous time for the fishermen; the Queen's cooks took all their wares and paid a liberal price.

January had come, when another letter arrived from Charmian. Dion and Barine had watched in vain for any unusual events on Cleopatra's birth day, but on Antony's, a few

days later, there was plenty of music and shouting, and in the evening an unusually magnificent illumination.

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Two days after, this letter was delivered to Pyrrhus by his dusky friend Anukis.

Her inquiry whether he thought it prudent to convey visitors to his guests was answered in the negative, for since Octavianus had been in Asia, the harbour swarmed with the boats of spies, and a single act of imprudence might bring ruin.

Charmian's letter, too, was even better calculated to curb Dion's increasing desire to return home than the fisherman's warning.

True, the beginning contained good news of Barine's relatives, and then informed Dion that his uncle, the Keeper of the Seal, was fairly revelling in bliss. His inventive gifts were taxed more than ever. Every day brought a festival, every night magnificent banquets. One spectacle, excursion, or hunting party followed another. In the theatres, the Odeum, the Hippodrome, no more brilliant performances, races, naval battles, gladiatorial struggles, and combats between beasts had been given, even before Actium. Dion himself had formerly attended the entertainments of those who belonged to the court circle, the society of "Inimitable Livers." It had been revived again, but Antony called them the "Comrades of Death." This was significant. Every one knows that the end is drawing near, and imitates the Pharaoh to whom the oracle promised six years of life, and who convicted it of falsehood and made them twelve by carousing during the night also.

The Queen's meeting with her husband, which she had previously reported, had been magnificent. "At that time," she wrote, "we hoped that a more noble life would begin, and Mark Antony, awakened and elevated by his rekindled love, would regain his former heroic power; but we were mistaken; Cleopatra, it is true, toiled unceasingly, but her lover with his enormous bunch of roses gave the signal for the maddest revelry which the imagination of the wildest devotee of pleasure could conceive. The performances of the Inimitable Livers were far surpassed by those of the "Comrades of Death."

"Antony is at their head, and he, whose giant frame resists even the most unprecedented demands, succeeds in stupefying himself and forgetting the impending ruin. When he comes to us after a night of revelry his eyes sparkle as brightly, his deep voice has as clear a ring, as at the beginning of the banquet. The Queen is his goddess; and who could remain unmoved when the giant bows obediently to the nod of his delicate sovereign, and devises and offers the most unprecedented things to win a smile from her lips? The changeful, impetuous wooing of youth lies far behind him, but his homage, which the Ephebi of today would perhaps term antiquated, has always seemed to me as if a mountain were bending before a star. The stranger who sees her in his company believes her a happy woman. Amid the fabulous radiance of the festal array, when all who surround her admire, worship, and strew flowers in her path, one might believe that the old sunny days had returned; but when we are alone, how rarely I see her smile! Then she plans for the tomb which, under Gorgias's direction, is rapidly

rising, and considers with him the best method of rendering it an inaccessible place of retreat.

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“She decided everything, down to the carving on the stone sarcophagi. In addition, there are to be rooms and chambers in the lower story for the reception of her treasures. Beneath them she has had corridors made for the pitch and straw which, if the worst should come, are to be lighted. She will then give to the flames the gold and silver, gems and jewels, ebony and ivory, the costly spices—in short, all her valuables. The pearls alone are worth many kingdoms. Who can blame her if she prefers to destroy them rather than leave them for the foe”

“The garden in which you grew up, Barine, is now the scene of the happy, busy life led by Alexander and the twins. There, under my brother’s guidance, they frolic, build, and dig. Cleopatra goes to it whenever she longs for repose after the pursuit of pleasures which have lost their zest.

“When, the day before yesterday, Antony, crowned with ivy as the new Dionysus, drove up the Street of the King in the golden chariot drawn by tamed lions, to bring her, the new Isis, from the Lochias in a lotus flower made of silver and white paste, drawn by four snow-white steeds, she pointed to the glittering train and said: ‘Between the quiet of the philosopher’s garden, where I began my life and still feel most at ease, and the grave, where nothing disturbs my last repose, stretches the Street of the King, with this deafening tumult, this empty splendour. It is mine.’

“O child, it was very different in former days! She loved Mark Antony with passionate ardour. He was the first man in the world, and yet he bowed before the supremacy of her will. The longing of the awakening heart, the burning ambition which already kindled the soul of the child, had alike found satisfaction, and the world beheld how the mortal woman, Cleopatra, for her lover and herself, could steep this meagre life with the joys of the immortals. He was grateful for them, and the most generous of men laid at the feet of the ‘Great Queen of the East’ the might of Rome and the kings of two quarters of the globe.

“These years were spent by both in one long revel. His marriage with Octavia brought the first awakening. It was hard and painful. He had not deserted Cleopatra for a woman’s sake, but on account of his endangered power and sovereignty. But the unloved Octavia constrained him to look up to her with respectful admiration—nay, she became dear to him.

“A fierce battle for him and his heart arose between the two. It was fought with very different weapons, and Cleopatra conquered. The revel, the dream began again. Then came Actium, the disenchantment, the awakening, the fall, the flight from the world. Our object was not to let him relapse into intoxication, to rouse the hero’s strength and courage from their slumber, render him for love’s sake a fellow-combatant in the common cause.



“But he had become accustomed to see in her the giver of ecstasy. The only thing that he still desired was to drain the cup of pleasure in her society till all was over. She sees this, grieves over it, and leaves no means of rousing him to fresh energy untried; yet how rarely he rallies his powers to earnest labour!

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“While she is fortifying the mouths of the Nile and the frontiers of the country, building ship after ship, arming and negotiating, she can not resist him when he summons her to new pleasures.

“Though so many of the traits which rendered him great and noble have vanished, she can not give up the old love and clings steadfastly to him because, because—I know not why. A woman’s loving heart does not question motives and laws. Besides, he is the father of her children and, in playing with them, he regains the old joyousness of mood so enthralling to the heart.

“Since Archibius has taken charge of them, they can dispense with Euphronion, their tutor. The clever man knows Rome, Octavianus, and those who surround him, so he was chosen as an envoy. His object was to induce the conqueror to transfer the sovereignty of Egypt to the boys Antonius Helios, and Alexander, but Caesar vouchsafed no answer to the mediator in Antony’s affairs—nay, did not even grant him an audience.

“To Cleopatra Octavianus promised friendly treatment, and the fulfilment of her wish concerning the boys if—and now came the repetition of the old demand—she would put Antony out of the world or deliver him into his hands.

“This demand, which contains base treachery, was impossible for her noble soul. Since she had resolved to build the tomb, granting it became impossible, yet Octavianus made every effort to tempt her to the base deed. True, the death of this one man would have spared much bloodshed. The Caesar knows how to choose his tools. He sent here as negotiator a clever young man, who possessed great charms of mind and person. No plan to prejudice the Queen against her husband and persuade her to commit the treachery was left untried. He went so far as to assure Cleopatra that in former years she had won the Caesar’s heart, and that he still loved her. She accepted these assurances at their true value and remained steadfast.

“Antony at first paid no heed to the intriguer. But when he learned what means he employed, and especially how he made use of the surrender of one of Caesar’s murderers, which he himself had long regretted, to brand him as an ungrateful traitor, he would not have been Mark Antony if he had accepted it quietly. He was completely his old self when he ordered the smooth fellow—who, however, had come as the ambassador of the mighty victor—to be scourged, sent him back to Rome, and wrote a letter to Octavianus, in which he complained of the man’s arrogance and presumption, adding—spite of my heavy heart I can not help smiling when I think of it—that misfortune had rendered him unusually irritable; yet if his action perhaps displeased Caesar, he might treat his freedman Hipparchus, who was in his power, as he had served Thyrsus!



“You see that his gay arrogance has not deserted him. Trouble slips away from him as rain is shaken from the coarse military cloak which he wore in the Parthian war, and therefore it cannot exert its purifying power.

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“When we consider that, a few years ago, this man, as it were, doubled himself when peril was most threatening, his conduct now, on the eve of the decisive struggle, is intelligible only to those who know him as we do. If he fights, he will no longer do so to save himself, or even to conquer, but to die an honourable death. If he still enjoys the pleasures offered, he believes that he can thus mitigate for himself the burden of defeat, and diminish the grandeur of the conqueror’s victory. In the eyes of the world, at least, a man who can still revel like Antony is only half vanquished. Yet the lofty tone of his mind was lowered. The surrender of the murderer of Caesar—his name was Turullius—proves it.

“And this, Barine—tell your husband so—this is what fills me with anxiety and compels me to entreat you not to think of returning home yet.

“Antony is now the jovial companion of his son, and permits Antyllus to share all his own pleasures. Of course, he heard of Caesarion’s passion, and is disposed to help the poor fellow. He has often said that nothing would better serve to rouse the dreamer from torpor than your charming vivacity. As the earth could scarcely have swallowed you up, you would be found; he, too, should be glad to hear you sing again. I know that search will be made for you.

“How imperiously this state of affairs requires you to exercise caution needs no explanation. On the other hand, you may find comfort in the tidings that Cleopatra intends to send Caesarion with his tutor Rhodon to Ethiopia, by way of the island of Philae. Archibius heard through Timagenes that Octavianus considers the son of Caesar, whose face so wonderfully resembles his father’s, a dangerous person, and this opinion is the boy’s death-warrant. Antyllus, too, is going on a journey. His destination is Asia, where he is to seek to propitiate Octavianus and make him new offers. As you know, he was betrothed to his daughter Julia. The Queen ceased long ago to believe in the possibility of victory, yet, spite of all the demands of the “Comrades of Death” and her own cares, she toils unweariedly in preparing for the defence of the country. She is doubtless the only member of that society who thinks seriously of the approaching end.

“Now that the tomb is rising, she ponders constantly upon death. She, who was taught by Epicurus to strive for freedom from pain and is so sensitive to the slightest bodily suffering, is still seeking a path which, with the least agony, will lead to the eternal rest for which she longs. Iras and the younger pupils of Olympus are aiding her. The old man furnishes all sorts of poisons, which she tries upon various animals—nay, recently even on criminals sentenced to death. All these experiments seem to prove that the bite of the uraeus serpent, whose image on the Egyptian crown symbolizes the sovereign’s instant power over life and death, stills the heart most swiftly and with the least suffering.

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“How terrible these things are! What pain it causes to see the being one loves most, the mother of the fairest children, so cruelly heighten the anguish of parting, choose death, as it were, for a constant companion, amid the whirl of the gayest amusements! She daily looks all his terrors in the face, yet with proud contempt turns her back upon the bridge which might perhaps enable her for a time to escape the monster. This is grand, worthy of her, and never have I loved her more tenderly.

“You, too, must think of her kindly. She deserves it. A noble heart which sees itself forced to pity a foe, easily forgives; and was she ever your enemy?

“I have written a long, long letter to solace your seclusion from the world and relieve my own heart. Have patience a little while longer. The time is not far distant when Fate itself will release you from exile. How often your relatives, Archibius and Gorgias, whom I now see frequently in the presence of the Queen, long to visit you!—but they, too, believe that it might prove a source of danger.”

The warnings in this letter were confirmed by another from Archibius, and soon after they heard that Caesarion had really sailed up the Nile for Ethiopia with his tutor Rhodon, and Antyllus had been sent to Asia to visit Octavianus. The latter had received him, it is true; but sent him home without making any pledges.

These tidings were not brought by letter, but by Gorgias himself, whose visit surprised them one evening late in March.

Rarely had a guest received a more joyous welcome. When he entered the bare room, Barine was making a net and telling the fisherman's daughter Dione the story of the wanderings of Ulysses. Dion, too, listened attentively, now and then correcting or explaining her descriptions, while carving a head of Poseidon for the prow of a newly built boat.

As Gorgias unexpectedly crossed the threshold, the dim light of the lamp fed by kiki-oil seemed transformed into sunshine. How brightly their eyes sparkled, how joyous were their exclamations of welcome and surprise! Then came questions, answers, news! Gorgias was obliged to share the family supper, which had only waited the return of the father who had brought the guest.

The fresh oysters, langustae, and other dishes served tasted more delicious to the denizen of the city than the most delicious banquets of the “Comrades of Death” to which he was now frequently invited by the Queen.

All that Pyrrhus said voluntarily and told his sons in reply to their questions was so sensible and related to matters which, because they were new to Gorgias, seemed so fascinating that, when Dion's good wine was served, he declared that if Pyrrhus would receive him he, too, would search for pursuers and be banished here.

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When the three again sat alone before the plain clay mixing vessel it seemed to the lonely young couple as if the best part of the city life which they had left behind had found its way to them, and what did they not have to say to one another! Dion and Barine talked of their hermit life, Gorgias of the Queen and the tomb, which was at the same time a treasure chamber. The slanting walls were built as firmly as if they were intended to last for centuries and defy a violent assault. The centre of the lower story was formed by a lofty hall of vast dimensions, in whose midst were the large marble sarcophagi. Men were working busily upon the figures in relief intended for the decoration of the sides and lids. This hall, whose low arched ceiling was supported by three pairs of heavy columns, was furnished like a reception-room. The couches, candelabra, and altars were already being made. Charmian had kept the fugitives well informed. In the subterranean chambers at the side of the hall, and in the second story, which could not be commenced until the ceiling was completed, store-rooms were to be made, and below and beside them were passages for ventilation and the storage of combustible materials.

Gorgias regretted that he could not show his friend the hall, which was perhaps the handsomest and most costly he had ever created. The noblest material—brown porphyry, emerald-green serpentine, and the dark varieties of marble—had been used, and the mosaic and brass doors, which were nearing completion, were masterpieces of Alexandrian art. To have all this destroyed was a terrible thought, but even more unbearable was that of its object—to receive the body of the Queen.

Again rapturous admiration of this greatest and noblest of women led Gorgias to enthusiastic rhapsodies, until Dion exercised his office of soberer, and Barine asked tidings of her mother, her grandparents, and her sister. There was nothing but good news to be told. True, the architect had to wage a daily battle with the old philosopher, who termed it an abuse of hospitality to remain so long at his friend's with his whole family; but thus far Gorgias had won the victory, even against Berenike, who wished to take her father and his household to her own home.

Cleopatra had purchased the house and garden of Didymus at thrice their value, the architect added. He was now a wealthy man, and had commissioned him to build a new mansion. The land facing the sea and near the museum had been found, but the handsome residence would not be completed until summer. The dry Egyptian air would have permitted him to roof it sooner, but there were many of Helena's wishes—most of them very sensible ones—to be executed.

Barine and Dion glanced significantly at each other; but the architect, perceiving it, exclaimed: "Your mute language is intelligible enough, and I confess that for five months Helena has seemed to me the most attractive of maidens. I see, too, that she has some regard for me. But as soon as I stand before her—the Queen, I mean—and hear her voice, it seems as if a tempest swept away every thought of Helena, and it is

not in my nature to deceive any one. How can I woo a girl whom I so deeply honour—your sister, Barine—when the image of another rules my soul?”

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Dion reminded him of his own words that the Queen was loved only as a goddess and, without waiting for his reply, turned the conversation to other topics.

It was three hours after midnight when Pyrrhus warned Gorgias that it was time for departure. When the fisherman's fleetest boat was at last bearing him back to the city he wondered whether girls who, before marriage, lived like Helena in undisturbed seclusion, would really be better wives and more content with every lot than the much-courted Barine, whom Dion had led from the gayest whirl of life in the capital to the most desolate solitude.

This delightful evening was followed by a day of excitement and grave anxiety. It had been necessary to conceal the young couple from the collector's officials, who took from Pyrrhus part of his last year's savings, and the large new boat which he used to go out on the open sea. The preparations for war required large sums; all vessels suitable for the purpose were seized for the fleet, and all residents of the city and country shared the same fate as Pyrrhus.

Even the temple treasures were confiscated, and yet no one could help saying to himself that the vast sums which, through these pitiless extortions, flowed into the treasury, were used for the pleasures of the court as well as for the equipment of the fleet and the army.

Yet so great was the people's love for the Queen, so high their regard for the independence of Egypt, so bitter their hate of Rome, that there was no rebellion.

How earnestly Cleopatra, amid all the extravagant revels, from which she could not too frequently absent herself, toiled to advance the military preparations, could be seen even by the exiles from their cliff; for work in two dock-yards was continued day and night, and the harbour was filled with vessels. Ships of war were continually moving to and fro, and from the Serpent Island they witnessed constantly, often by starlight, the drilling of the oarsmen and of whole squadrons upon the open sea. Sometimes a magnificent state galley appeared, on whose deck was Antony, who inspected the hastily equipped fleet to make the newly recruited sailors one of those kindling speeches in which he was a master hard to surpass. Two sons of Pyrrhus were now numbered in the crews of the recently built war ships. They had been impressed into the service in April, and though Dion had placed a large sum at their father's disposal to secure their release, the attempt was unsuccessful.

So there had been sorrow and tears in the contented little colony of human beings on the lonely cliff, and when Dionysus and Dionichos had a day's leave of absence to visit their relatives, they complained of the cruel haste with which the young men were drilled and wearied to exhaustion, and spoke of the sons of citizens and peasants who had been dragged from their villages, their parents, and their business to be trained for seamen. There was great indignation among them, and they listened only too readily to

the agitators who whispered how much better they would have fared on the galleys of Octavianus.

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Pyrrhus entreated his sons not to join any attempt at mutiny; the women, on the contrary, would have approved anything which promised to release the youths from their severe service, and their bright cheerfulness was transformed into anxious depression. Barine, too, was no longer the same. She had lost her joyous activity, her eyes were often wet with tears, and she moved with drooping head as if some heavy care oppressed her.

Was it the heat of April, with its desert winds, which had brought the transformation? Had longing for the changeful, exciting life of former days at last overpowered her? Was solitude becoming unendurable? Was her husband's love no longer sufficient to replace the many pleasures she had sacrificed?—No! It could not be that; never had she gazed with more devoted tenderness into Dion's face than when entirely alone with him in shady nooks. She who in such hours looked the very embodiment of happiness and contentment, certainly was neither ill nor sorrowful.

Dion, on the contrary, held his head high early and late, and appeared as proud and self-conscious as though life was showing him its fairest face. Yet he had heard that his estates had been sequestered, and that he owed it solely to the influence of Archibius and his uncle, that his property, like that of so many others, had not been added to the royal treasures. But what disaster could he not have speedily vanquished in these days?

A great joy—the greatest which the immortals can bestow upon human beings—was dawning for him and his young wife, and in May the women on the island shared her blissful hope.

Pyrrhus brought from the city an altar and a marble statue of Ilythia, the Goddess of Birth, called by the Romans Lucina, which his friend Anukis had given him, in Charmian's name, for the young wife. She had again spoken of the serpents which lived in such numbers in the neighbouring islands, and her question whether it would be difficult to capture one alive was answered by the freedman in the negative.

The image of the goddess and the altar were erected beside the other sanctuaries, and how often the stone was anointed by Barine and the women of the fisherman's family!

Dion vowed to the goddess a beautiful temple on the cliff and in the city if she would be gracious to his beloved young wife.

When, in June, the noonday sun blazed most fiercely, the fisherman brought to the cliff Helena, Barine's sister, and Chloris, Dion's nurse, who had been a faithful assistant of his mother, and afterwards managed the female slaves of the household.

How joyously and gratefully Barine held out her arms to her sister! Her mother had been prevented from coming only by the warning that her disappearance would surely

attract the attention of the spies. And the latter were very alert; for Mark Antony had not yet given up the pursuit of the singer, nor had the attorney Philostratus recalled the proclamation offering two talents for the capture of Dion, and both the latter's palace and Berenike's house were constantly watched.

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It seemed more difficult for the quiet Helena to accommodate herself to this solitude than for her gayer-natured sister. Plainly as she showed her love for Barine, she often lapsed into reverie, and every evening she went to the southern side of the cliff and gazed towards the city, where her grandparents doubtless sorely missed her, spite of the careful attention bestowed upon them in Gorgias's house.

Eight days had passed since her arrival, and life in this wilderness seemed more distasteful than on the first and the second; the longing for her grandparents, too, appeared to increase; for that day she had gone to the shore, even under the burning rays of the noonday sun, to gaze towards the city.

How dearly she loved the old people!

But Dion's conjecture that the tears sparkling in Helena's eyes when she entered their room at dusk were connected with another resident of the capital, spite of his wife's indignant denial, appeared to be correct; for, a short time after, clear voices were heard in front of the house, and when a deep, hearty laugh rang out, Dion started up, exclaiming, "Gorgias never laughs in that way, except when he has had some unusual piece of good fortune!"

He hurried out as he spoke, and gazed around; but, notwithstanding the bright moonlight, he could see nothing except Father Pyrrhus on his way back to the anchorage.

But Dion's ears were keen, and he fancied he heard subdued voices on the other side of the dwelling. He followed the sound without delay and, when he turned the corner of the building, stopped short in astonishment, exclaiming as a low cry rose close before him:

"Good-evening, Gorgias! I'll see you later. I won't interrupt you."

A few rapid steps took him back to Barine, and as he whispered, "I saw Helena out in the moonlight, soothing her longing for her grandparents in Gorgias's arms," she clapped her hands and said, smiling:

"That's the way one loses good manners in this solitude. To disturb the first meeting of a pair of lovers! But Gorgias treated us in the same way in Alexandria, so he is now paid in his own coin."

The architect soon entered the room, with Helena leaning on his arm. Hour by hour he had missed her more and more painfully, and on the eighth day found it impossible to endure life's burden longer without her. He now protested that he could approach her mother and grandparents as a suitor with a clear conscience; for on the third day after Helena's departure the relation between him and the Queen had changed. In



Cleopatra's presence the image of the granddaughter of Didymus became even more vivid than that of the peerless sovereign had formerly been in Helena's. Outside of the pages of poetry he had never experienced longing like that which had tortured him during the past few days.

CHAPTER XXI.

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This time the architect could spend only a few hours on the Serpent Island, for affairs in the city were beginning to wear a very serious aspect, and the building of the monument was pushed forward even during the night. The interior of the first story was nearly completed and the rough portion of the second was progressing. The mosaic workers, who were making the floor of the great hall, had surpassed themselves. It was impossible to wait longer for the sculptures which were to adorn the walls. At present slabs of polished black marble were to occupy the places intended for bronze reliefs; the utmost haste was necessary.

Octavianus had already reached Pelusium; even if Seleukus, the commander of the garrison, held the strong fortress a long time, a part of the hostile army might appear before Alexandria the following week.

A considerable force, however, was ready to meet him. The fleet seemed equal to that of the enemy; the horsemen whom Antony had led before the Queen would delight the eye of any one versed in military affairs; and the Emperor hoped much from the veterans who had served under him in former times, learned to know his generosity and open hand in the hour of prosperity, and probably had scarcely forgotten the eventful days when he had cheerfully and gaily shared their perils and privations.

Helena remained on the cliff, and her longing for the old couple had materially diminished. Her hands moved nimbly, and her cheerful glance showed that the lonely life on the island was beginning to unfold its charms to her.

The young husband, however, had grown very uneasy. He concealed it before the women, but old Pyrrhus often had much difficulty in preventing his making a trip to the city which might imperil, on the eve of the final decision, the result of their long endurance and privation. Dion had often wished to set sail with his wife for a great city in Syria or Greece, but fresh and mighty obstacles had deterred him. A special danger lay in the fact that every large vessel was thoroughly searched before it left the harbour, and it was impossible to escape from it without passing through the narrow straits east of the Pharos or the opening in the Heptastadium, both of which were easily guarded. The calm moderation that usually distinguished the young counsellor had been transformed into feverish restlessness, and the heart of his faithful old monitor had also lost its poise; for an encounter between the fleet in which his sons served and that of Octavianus was speedily expected.

One day he returned from the city greatly excited. Pelusium was said to have fallen.

When he ascended the cliff he found everything quiet. No one, not even Dione, came to meet him.

What had happened here?

Had the fugitives been discovered and dragged with his family to the city to be thrown into prison, perhaps sent to the stone quarries?

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Deadly pale, but erect and composed, he walked towards the house. He owed to Dion and his father the greatest blessing in life, liberty, and the foundation of everything else he possessed. But if his fears were verified, if he was bereft of friends and property, even as a lonely beggar he might continue to enjoy his freedom. If, for the sake of those to whom he owed his best possession, he must surrender the rest, it was his duty to bear fate patiently.

It was still light.

Even when he had approached very near the house he heard no sound save the joyous barking of his wolf-hound, Argus, which leaped upon him.

He now laid his hand upon the lock of the door—but it was flung open from the inside.

Dion had seen him coming and, enraptured by the new happiness with which this day had blessed him, he flung himself impetuously on the breast of his faithful friend, exclaiming: “A boy, a splendid boy! We will call him Pyrrhus.”

Bright tears of joy streamed down the freedman’s face and fell on his grey beard; and when his wife came towards him with her finger on her lips, he whispered in a tremulous voice: “When I brought them here you were afraid that the city people would drag us into ruin, but nevertheless you received them as they deserved to be, and—he’s going to name him Pyrrhus—and now!—What has a poor fellow like me done to have such great and beautiful blessings fall to my lot?”

“And I—I?” sobbed his wife. “And the child, the darling little creature!”

This day of sunny happiness was followed by others of quiet joy, of the purest pleasure, yet mingled with the deepest anxiety. They also brought many an hour in which Helena found an opportunity to show her prudence, while old Chloris and the fisherman’s wife aided her by their experience.

Every one, down to the greybeard whose name the little one bore, declared that there had never been a lovelier young mother than Barine or a handsomer child than the infant Pyrrhus; but Dion could no longer endure to remain on the cliff.

A thousand things which he had hitherto deemed insignificant and allowed to pass unheeded now seemed important and imperatively in need of his personal attention. He was a father, and any negligence might be harmful to his son.

With his bronzed complexion and long hair and beard he required little aid to disguise him from his friends. In the garments shabby by long use, and with his delicate hands calloused by work in the dock-yard, any one would have taken him for a real fisherman.

Perhaps it was foolish, but the desire to show himself in the character of a father to Barine's mother and grandparents and to Gorgias seemed worth risking a slight danger; so, without informing Barine, who was now able to walk about her room, he set out for the city after sunset on the last day of July.

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He knew that Octavianus was encamped in the Hippodrome east of Alexandria. The white mounds which had risen there had been recognized as tents, even from the Serpent Island. Pyrrhus had returned in the afternoon with tidings that Antony's mounted troops had defeated those of Octavianus. This time the news of victory could be trusted, for the palace at Lochias was illuminated for a festival and when Dion landed there was a great bustle on the quay. One shouted to another that all would be well. Mark Antony was his old self again. He had fought like a hero.

Many who yesterday had cursed him, to-day mingled their voices in the shouts of "Evoe!" which rang out for the new Dionysus, who had again proved his claim to godship.

The late visitor found the grandparents alone in the house of Gorgias. They had been informed of Barine's new happiness long before. Now they rejoiced with Dion, and wanted to send at once for their host and future son-in-law, who was in the city attending a meeting of the Ephebi, although he had ceased some time ago to be a member of their company. But Dion wished to greet him among the youths who had invited the architect to give them his aid in deciding the question of the course they were to pursue in the impending battle.

Yet he did not leave the old couple immediately; he was expecting two visitors—Barine's mother and Charmian's Nubian maid who, since the birth of little Pyrrhus, had come to the philosopher's every evening. The former's errand was to ask whether any news of the mother and child had been received during the day; the latter, to get the letters which she delivered the next morning at the fish-market to her friend Pyrrhus or his sons.

Anukis was the first to appear. She relieved her sympathizing heart by a brief expression of congratulations; but, gladly as she would have listened to the most minute details concerning the beloved young mother from the lips of Dion himself, she repressed her own wishes for her mistress's sake, and returned to Charmian as quickly as possible to inform her of the arrival of the unexpected guest.

Berenike bore her new dignity of grandmother with grateful joy, yet to-night she came oppressed by a grave anxiety, which was not solely due to her power of imagining gloomy events. Her brother Arius and his sons were concealed in the house of a friend, for they seemed threatened by a serious peril. Hitherto Antony had generously borne the philosopher no ill-will on the score of his intimate relations with Octavianus; but now that Octavianus was encamped outside the city, the house of the man who, during the latter's years of education, had been his mentor and counsellor, and later a greatly valued friend, was watched, by Mardion's orders, by the Scythian guard. He and his family were forbidden to enter the city, and his escape to his friend had been effected under cover of the darkness and with great danger.

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The anxious woman feared the worst for her brother if Mark Antony should conquer, and yet, with her whole heart, she wished the Queen to gain the victory. She, who always feared the worst, saw in imagination the fortunes of war change—and there was reason for the belief. The bold general who had gained so many victories, and whom the defeat of Actium had only humbled, was said to have regained his former elasticity. He had dashed forward at the head of his men with the heroic courage of former days—nay, with reckless impetuosity. Rumour reported that, with the huge sword he wielded, he had dealt from his powerful charger blows as terrible as those inflicted five-and-twenty years before when, not far from the same spot, he struck Archelaus on the head. The statement that, in his golden armour, with the gold helmet framing his bearded face, he resembled his ancestor Herakles, was confirmed by Charmian, who had been borne quickly hither by a pair of the Queen's swift horses. Cleopatra might need her soon, yet she had left the Lochias to question the father about many things concerning the young mother and her boy, who was already dear to her as the first grandson of the man whose suit, it is true, she had rejected, but to whom she owed the delicious consciousness of having loved and been loved in the springtime of life.

Dion found her changed. The trying months which she had described in her letters to Barine had completely blanched her grey hair, her cheeks were sunken, and a deep line between her mouth and nose gave her pleasant face a sorrowful expression. Besides, she seemed to have been weeping and, in fact, heart-rending events had just occurred.

She had stolen away from Lochias in the midst of a revel.

Antony's victory was being celebrated. He himself presided at the banquet. Again his head and breast were wreathed with a wealth of fresh leaves and superb flowers. At his side reclined Cleopatra, robed in light-blue garments adorned with lotus-flowers which, like the little coronet on her head, glittered with sapphires and pearls. Charmian said she had rarely looked more beautiful. But she did not add that the Queen had been obliged to have rouge applied to her pale, bloodless cheeks.

It was touching to see Antony after his return from the battle, still in his suit of mail, clasp her in his arms as joyously as if he had won her back, a prize of victory, and with his vanished heroic power regained her and their mutual love. Her eyes, too, had been radiant with joy and, in the elation of her heart, she had given the horseman who, for a deed of special daring, was presented to her, a helmet and coat of mail of solid gold.

Yet, even before the revel began, she had been forced to acknowledge to herself that the commencement of the end was approaching; for, a few hours after she had so generously rewarded the man, he had deserted to the foe. Then Antony had challenged Octavianus to a duel, and received the unfeeling reply that he would find many roads to death open.

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This was the language of the cold-hearted foe, secure of superior power. How sadly, too, she had been disappointed in the hope—that the veterans who had served under Antony would desert their new commander at the first summons and flock to his standard!—for all her husband's efforts in this direction, spite of the bewitching power of his eloquence, failed, while every hour brought tidings of the treacherous desertion from his army of individual warriors and whole maniples. His foe deemed his cause so weak that he did not even resist Mark Antony's attempts to win the soldiers by promises.

From all these signs Cleopatra now saw plainly, in her lover's victory, only the last flicker of a dying fire; but so long as it burned he should see her follow its light.

Therefore she had entered the festal hall with the victor of the day. She had witnessed a strange festival. It began with tears and reminded Cleopatra of the saying that she herself resembled a banquet served to celebrate a victory before the battle was won. The cup-bearers had scarcely advanced to the guests with their golden vessels when Antony turned to them, exclaiming: "Pour generously, men; perhaps to-morrow you will serve another master!"

Then, unlike his usual self, he grew thoughtful and murmured under his breath, "And I shall probably be lying outside a corpse, a miserable nothing."

Loud sobs from the cup-bearers and servants followed these words; but he addressed them calmly, assuring them that he would not take them into a battle from which he expected an honourable death rather than rescue and victory.

At this Cleopatra's tears flowed also. If this reckless man of pleasure, this notorious spendthrift and disturber of the public peace, with his insatiate desires, had inspired bitter hostility, few had gained the warm love of so many hearts. One glance at his heroic figure; one memory of the days when even his foes conceded that he was never greater than in the presence of the most imminent peril, never more capable of awakening in others the hope of brighter times than amid the sorest privations; one tone of the orator's deep, resonant voice, which so often came from the heart and therefore gained hearts with such resistless power; the recollection of numberless instances of the bright cheerfulness of his nature and his boundless generosity sufficiently explained the lamentations which burst forth at that banquet, the tears which flowed —tears of genuine feeling. They were also shed for the beautiful Queen who, unmindful of the spectators, rested her noble brow, with its coronal of pearls, upon his mighty shoulder.

But the grief did not last long, for Mark Antony, shouted: "Hence with melancholy! We do not need the larva!"

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[At the banquets of the Egyptians a small figure in the shape of a mummy was passed around to remind the guests that they, too, would soon be in the same condition, and have no more time to enjoy life and its pleasures. The Romans imitated this custom by sending the larva, a statuette in the form of a skeleton, to make the round of the revellers. The Greek love of beauty converted this ugly scarecrow into a winged genius.]

We know, without its aid, that pleasure will soon be over!—Xuthus, a joyous festal song!—And you, Metrodor, lead the dancers! The first beaker to the fairest, the best, the wisest, the most cherished, the most fervently beloved of women!” As he spoke he waved his goblet aloft, the flute-player, Xuthus, beckoned to the chorus, and the dancer Metrodor, in the guise of a butterfly, led forth a bevy of beautiful girls, who, in the cloud of ample robes of transparent coloured bombyx which floated around them, executed the most graceful figures and now hovered like mists, now flitted to and fro as if borne on wings, affording the most charming variety to the delighted spectators.

The “Comrades of Death” had again become companions in pleasure; and when Charmian, who did not lose sight of her mistress, noticed the sorrowful quiver of her lips and glided out of the circle of guests, the faithful Nubian had approached to inform her of Dion’s arrival.

Then—but this she concealed from her friends—she hastened to her own apartments to prepare to go out, and when Iras opened the door to enter her rooms she went to speak to her about the night attendance upon the Queen. But her niece had not perceived her; shaken by convulsive sobs, she had pressed her face among the cushions of a couch, and there suffered the fierce anguish which had stirred the inmost depths of her being to rave itself out with the full vehemence of her passionate nature. Charmian called her name and, weeping herself, ripened her arms to her, and for the first time since her return from Actium her sister’s daughter again sank upon her breast, and they held each other in a close embrace until Charmian’s exclamation, “With her, for her unto death!” was answered by Iras’s “To the tomb!”

This was a word which, in many an hour of the silent night, had stirred the soul of the woman who had been the youthful playmate of the Queen who, with bleeding heart, sat below among the revellers at the noisy banquet and forced her to ask the question: “Is not your fate bound to hers? What can life offer you without her?”

Now, this word was spoken by other lips, and, like an echo of Iras’s exclamation, came the answer: “Unto death, like you, if she precedes us to the other world. Whatever may follow dying, nowhere shall she lack Charmian’s hand and heart.”

“Nor the love and service of Iras,” was the answering assurance.

So they had parted, and the agitation of this fateful moment was still visible in the features of the woman who had formerly sacrificed to her royal playfellow her love, and now offered her life.

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When, ere leaving Gorgias's house, she bade her friend farewell, she pressed Dion's hand with affectionate warmth and, as he accompanied her to the carriage, she informed him that, before the first encounter of the troops, Archibius had taken the royal children to his estate of Irenia, where they were at present.

"Rarely has it been my fate to experience a more sorrowful hour than when I beheld the Queen, her heart torn with anguish, bid them fare well. What fate is impending over the dear ones, who are so worthy of the greatest happiness? To see the twins and little Alexander recognized and saved from death and insult, and your boy in Barine's arms, is the last wish which I still cherish."

On returning to Lochias, Charmian had a long time to wait ere the Queen retired. She dreaded the mood in which she would leave the banquet. For months past Cleopatra had returned from the revels of the "Comrades of Death" saddened to tears, or in a blaze of indignation. How must this last banquet, which began so mournfully and continued with such reckless mirth, affect her?

At last, the second hour after midnight, Cleopatra appeared.

Charmian believed that she must be the sport of some delusion, for the Queen's eyes which, when she had left her, were full of tears, now sparkled with the radiant light of joy and, as her friend took the crown from her head, she exclaimed:

"Why did you depart from the banquet so early? Perhaps it was the last, but I remember no festival more brilliant. It was like the springtime of my love. Mark Antony would have touched the heart of a stone statue by that blending of manly daring and humble devotion which no woman can resist. As in former days, hours shrivelled into moments. We were again young, once more united. We were together here at Lochias to-night, and yet in distant years and other places. The notes of the singers, the melodies of the musicians, the figures executed by the dancers, were lost upon us. We soared back, hand in hand, to a magic world, and the fairy drama in the realms of the blessed, which passed before us in dazzling splendour and blissful joy, was the dream which I loved best when a child, and at the same time the happiest portion of the life of the Queen of Egypt.

"It began before the gate of the garden of Epicurus, and continued on the river Cydnus. I again beheld myself on the golden barge, garlanded with wreaths of flowers, reclining on the purple couch with roses strewn around me and beneath my jewelled sandals. A gentle breeze swelled the silken sails; my female companions raised their clear voices in song to the accompaniment of lutes; the perfumes floating around us were borne by the wind to the shore, conveying the tidings that the bliss believed by mortals to be reserved for the gods alone was drawing near. And even as his heart and his enraptured senses yielded to my sway, his mind, as he himself confessed, was

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under the thrall of mine. We both felt happy, united by ties which nothing, not even misfortune, could sever. He, the ruler of the world, was conquered, and delighted to obey the behests of the victor, because he felt that she before whom he bowed was his own obedient slave. And no magic goblet effected all this. I breathed more freely, as if relieved from the oppressive delusion—the fire had consumed it also—which had burdened my soul until a few hours ago. No magic spell, only the gifts of mind and soul which the vanquished victor, the woman Cleopatra, owed to the favour of the immortals, had compelled his lofty manhood to yield.

“From the Cydnus he brought me hither to the blissful days which we were permitted to pass in my city of Alexandria. A thousand sunny hours, musical, echoing surges which long since dashed down the stream of Time, he recalled to life, and I—I did the same, and our memories blended into one. What never-to-be-forgotten moments we experienced when, with reckless mirth, we mingled unrecognized among the joyous throng! What Olympic delight elated our hearts when the plaudits of thousands greeted us! What joys satiated our minds and senses in our own apartments! What pure, unalloyed nectar of the soul was bestowed upon us by our children— bliss which we shared with and imparted to each other until neither knew which was the giver and which the receiver! Everything sad and painful seemed to be effaced from the book of memory; and the child’s dream, the fairy-tale woven by the power of imagination, stood before my soul as a reality—the same reality, I repeat, which I call my past life.

“And, Charmian, if death comes to-morrow, should I say that he appeared too early—summoned me ere he permitted life to bestow all its best gifts upon me? No, no, and again no! Whoever, in the last hour of existence, can say that the fairest dreams of childhood were surpassed by a long portion of actual life, may consider himself happy, even in the deepest need and on the verge of the grave.

“The aspiration to be first and highest among the women of her own time, which had already thrilled the young girl’s heart, was fulfilled. The ardent longing for love which, even at that period, pervaded my whole being, was satisfied when I became a loving wife, mother, and Queen, and friendship, through the favour of Destiny, also bestowed upon me its greatest blessings by the hands of Archibius, Charmian, and Iras.

“Now I care not what may happen. This evening taught me that life had fulfilled its pledges. But others, too, must be enabled to remember the most brilliant of queens, who was also the most fervently beloved of women. For this I will provide: the mausoleum which Gorgias is erecting for me will stand like an indestructible wall between the Cleopatra who to-day still proudly wears the crown and her approaching humiliation and disgrace.

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“Now I will go to sleep. If my awakening brings defeat, sorrow, and death, I have no reason to accuse my fate. It denied me one thing only the painless peace which the child and the young girl recognized as the chief good; yet Cleopatra will possess that also. The domain of death, which, as the Egyptians say, loves silence, is opening its doors to me. The most absolute peace begins upon its threshold—who knows where it ends? The vision of the intellect does not extend far enough to discover the boundary where, at the end of eternity—which in truth is endless—it is replaced by something else.”

While speaking, the Queen had motioned to her friend to accompany her into her chamber, from which a door led into the children’s room. An irresistible impulse constrained her to open it and gaze into the dark, empty apartment.

She felt an icy chill run through her veins. Taking a light from the hand of one of the maids who attended her, she went to little Alexander’s couch. Like the others, it was empty, deserted. Her head sank on her breast, the courageous calmness with which she had surveyed her whole past life failed and, like the luxuriant riot in the sky of the most brilliant hues, ere the glow of sunset suddenly yields to darkness, Cleopatra’s soul, after the lofty elation of the last few hours, underwent a sudden transition and, overwhelmed by deep, sorrowful depression, she threw herself down before the twins’ bed, where she lay weeping softly until Charmian, as day began to dawn, urged her to retire to rest. Cleopatra slowly rose, dried her eyes, and said: “My past life seemed to me just now like a magnificent garden, but how many serpents suddenly stretched out their flat heads with glittering eyes and forked tongues! Who tore away the flowers beneath which they lay concealed? I think, Charmian, it was a mysterious power which here, in the children’s apartment, rules so strongly the most trivial as well as the strongest emotions, it was—when did I last hear that ominous word?—it was conscience. Here, in this abode of innocence and purity, whatever resembles a spot stands forth distinctly before the eyes. Here, O Charmian!—if the children were but here! If I could only—yet, no, no! It is fortunate, very fortunate that they have gone. I must be strong; and their sweet grace would rob me of my energy. But the light grows brighter and brighter. Dress me for the day. It would be easier for me to sleep in a falling house than with such a tumult in my heart.”

While she was being attired in the dark robes she had ordered, loud shouts arose from the royal harbour below, blended with the blasts of the tuba and other signals directing the movements of the fleet and the army, a large body of troops having been marched during the night to the neighbouring hills overlooking the sea.

The notes sounded bold and warlike. The well-armed galleys presented a stately appearance. How often Cleopatra had seen unexpected events occur, apparent impossibilities become possible! Had not the victory of Octavianus at Actium been a miracle? What if Fate, like a capricious ruler, now changed from frowns to smiles?

What if Antony proved himself the hero of yesterday, the general he had been in days of yore?

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She had refused to see him again before the battle, that she might not divert his thoughts from the great task approaching. But now, as she beheld him, clad in glittering armour like the god of war himself, ride before the troops on his fiery Barbary charger, greeting them with the gay salutation whose warmth sprung from the heart and which had so often kindled the warriors to glowing enthusiasm, she was forced to do violence to her own feelings to avoid calling him and saying that her thoughts would follow his course. But she refrained, and when his purple cloak vanished from her sight her head drooped again. How different in former days were the cheers of the troops when he showed himself to them! This lukewarm response to his gay, glad greeting was no omen of victory.

CHAPTER XXII.

Dion, too, witnessed the departure of the troops. Gorgias, whom he had found among the Ephebi, accompanied him and, like the Queen, they saw, in the cautious manner with which the army greeted the general, a bad omen for the result of the battle. The architect had presented Dion to the youths as the ghost of a dead man, who, as soon as he was asked whence he came or whither he was going, would be compelled to vanish in the form of a fly. He could venture to do this; he knew the Ephebi— there was no traitor in their ranks.

Dion, the former head of the society, had been welcomed like a beloved brother risen from the dead, and he had the gratification, after so long a time, of turning the scale as speaker in a debate. True, he had encountered very little opposition, for the resolve to hold aloof from the battle against the Romans had been urged upon the Ephebi by the Queen herself through Antyllus, who, however, had already left the meeting when Dion joined it. It had seemed to Cleopatra a crime to claim the blood of the noblest sons of the city for a cause which she herself deemed lost. She knew the parents of many, and feared that Octavianus would inflict a terrible punishment upon them if, not being enrolled in the army, they fell into his power with arms in their hands.

The stars were already setting when the Ephebi accompanied their friend, singing in chorus the Hymenaeus, which they had been unable to chant on his wedding day. The melody of lutes accompanied the voices, and this nocturnal music was the source of the rumour that the god Dionysus, to whom Mark Antony felt specially akin, and in whose form he had so often appeared to the people, had abandoned him amid songs and music.

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The youths left Dion in front of the Temple of Isis. Gorgias alone remained with him. The architect led his friend to the Queen's mausoleum near the sanctuary, where men were toiling busily by torchlight. Alight scaffolding still surrounded it, but the lofty first story, containing the real tomb, was completed, and Dion admired the art with which the exterior of the edifice suggested its purpose. Huge blocks of dark-grey granite formed the walls. The broad front-solemn, almost gloomy in aspect-rose, sloping slightly, above the massive lofty door, surmounted by a moulding bearing the winged disk of the sun. On either side were niches containing statues of Antony and Cleopatra cast in dark bronze, and above the cornice were brazen figures of Love and Death, Fame and Silence, ennobling the Egyptian forms with exquisite works of Hellenic art.

The massive door, adorned with brass figures in relief, would have resisted a battering-ram. On the side of the steps leading to it lay Sphinxes of dark-green diorite. Everything connected with this building, dedicated to death, was grave and massive, suggesting by its indestructibility the idea of eternity.

The second story was not yet finished; masons and stone-cutters were engaged in covering the strong walls with dark serpentine and black marble. The huge windlass stood ready to raise a masterpiece of Alexandrian art. This was intended for the pediment, and represented Venus Victrix with helmet, shield, and lance, leading a band of winged gods of love, little archers at whose head Eros himself was discharging arrows, and victoriously fighting against the three-headed Cerberus, death, already bleeding from many wounds.

There was no time to see the interior of the building, for Pyrrhus expected his guest to join him at the harbour at sunrise, and the eastern sky was already brightening with the approach of dawn.

As the friends reached the landing-place the brass dome of the Serapeum, which towered above everything, was glittering with dazzling splendour.

The pennons and masts of the fleet which was about to set sail from the harbour seemed steeped in a sea of golden light. Tremulous reflections of the brazen and gilded figures on the prows of the vessels were mirrored in the undulating surface of the sea, and the long shadows of the banks of oars united galley after galley on the surface of the water like the meshes of a net.

Here the friends parted, and Dion walked down the quay alone to meet the freedman, who must have found it difficult to guide his boat out of this labyrinth of vessels. The inspection of the mausoleum had detained the young father too long and, though disguised beyond recognition, he reproached himself for having recklessly incurred a danger whose consequences—he felt this to-day for the first time—would not injure himself alone. The whole fleet was awaiting the signal for departure. The vessels

which did not belong to it had been obliged to moor in front of the Temple of Poseidon, and all were strictly forbidden to leave the anchorage.

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Pyrrhus's fishing-boat was in the midst, and return to the Serpent Island was impossible at present.

How vexatious! Barine was ignorant of his trip to the city, and to be compelled to leave her alone while a naval battle was in progress directly before her eyes distressed him as much as it could not fail to alarm her.

In fact, the young mother had waited from early dawn with increasing anxiety for her husband. As the sun rose higher, and the strokes of the oars propelling two hundred galleys, the shrill whistle of the flutes marking the time, the deep voices of the captains shouting orders, and the blasts of the trumpets filling the air, were heard far and near around the island, she became so overwhelmed with uneasiness that she insisted upon going to the shore, though hitherto she had not been permitted to take the air except under the awning stretched for the purpose on the shady side of the house.

In vain the women urged her not to let her fears gain the mastery and to have patience. But she would have resisted even force in order to look for him who, with her child, now comprised her world.

When, leaning on Helena's arm, she reached the shore, no boat was in sight. The sea was covered with ships of war, floating fortresses, moving onward like dragons with a thousand legs whose feet were the countless rowers arranged in three or five sets. Each of the larger galleys was surrounded by smaller ones, from most of which darted dazzling flashes of light, for they were crowded with armed men, and from the prows of the strong boarding vessels the sunbeams glittered on the large shining metal points whose office was to pierce the wooden sides of the foe. The gilded statues in the prows of the large galleys shone and sparkled in the broad radiance of the day-star, and flashes of light also came from the low hills on the shore. Here Mark Antony's soldiers were stationed, and the sunbeams reflected from the helmets, coats of mail, and lance-heads of the infantry, and the armour of the horsemen quivered with dazzling brilliancy in the hot air of the first day of an Egyptian August.

Amid this blazing, flashing, and sparkling in the morning air, so steeped in warmth and radiance, the sounds of warlike preparations from the land and fleet constantly grew louder. Barine, exhausted, had just sunk into a chair which Dione, the fisherman's daughter, had placed in the shade of the highest rock on the northwestern shore of the flat island, when a crashing blast of the tuba suddenly echoed from all the galleys in the Egyptian fleet, and the whole array of vessels filed past the Pharos at the opening of the harbour into the open sea.

There the narrow ranks of the wooden giants separated and moved onward in broader lines. This was done quietly and in the same faultless order as a few days before, when a similar manoeuvre had been executed under the eyes of Mark Antony.

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The longing for combat seemed to urge them steadily forward.

The hostile fleet, lying motionless, awaited the attack. But the Egyptian assailants had advanced majestically only a few ships lengths towards the Roman foe when another signal rent the air. The women whose ears caught the waves of sound said afterwards that it seemed like a cry of agony—it had given the signal for a deed of unequalled treachery. The slaves, criminals, and the basest of the mercenaries on the rowers' benches in the hold had doubtless long listened intently for it, and, when it finally came, the men on the upper benches raised their long oars and held them aloft, which stopped the work of those below, and every galley paused, pointing at the next with the wooden oars outstretched like fingers, as if seized with horror. The celerity and faultless order with which the raising of the oars was executed and vessel after vessel brought to a stand would have been a credit to an honourable captain, but the manoeuvre introduced one of the basest acts ever recorded in history; and the women, who had witnessed many a naumachza and understood its meaning, exclaimed as if with a single voice: "Treachery! They are going over to the enemy!"

Mark Antony's fleet, created for him by Cleopatra, surrendered, down to the last galley, to Caesar's heir, the victor of Actium; and the man to whom the sailors had vowed allegiance, who had drilled them, and only yesterday had urged them to offer a gallant resistance, saw from one of the downs on the shore the strong weapons on which he had based the fairest hopes, not shattered, but delivered into the hands of the enemy!

The surrender of the fleet to the foe—he knew it—sealed his destruction; and the women on the shore of the Serpent Island, who were so closely connected with those on whom this misfortune fell, suspected the same thing. The hearts of both were stirred, and their eyes grew dim with tears of indignation and sorrow. They were Alexandrians, and did not desire to be ruled by Rome. Cleopatra, daughter of the Macedonian house of the Ptolemies, had the sole right to govern the city of her ancestors, founded by the great Macedonian. The sorrow they had themselves endured through her sank into insignificance beside the tremendous blow of Fate which in this hour reached the Queen.

The Roman and Egyptian fleet returned to the harbour as one vast squadron under the same commander, and anchored in the roadstead of the city, which was now its precious booty.

Barine had seen enough, and returned to the house with drooping head. Her heart was heavy, and her anxiety for the man she loved hourly increased.

It seemed as if the very day-star shrank from illuminating so infamous a deed with friendly light; for the dazzling, searching sun of the first of August veiled its radiant face with a greyish-white mist, and the desecrated sea wrinkled its brow, changed its pure

azure robe to yellowish grey and blackish green, while the white foam hissed on the crests of the angry waves.

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As twilight began to approach, the anxiety of the deserted wife became unendurable. Not only Helena's wise words of caution, but the sight of her child, failed to exert their usual influence; and Barine had already summoned the son of Pyrrhus to persuade him to take her in his boat to the city, when Dione saw a boat approaching the Serpent Island from the direction of the sea.

A short time after, Dion sprang on shore and kissed from his young wife's lips the reproaches with which she greeted him.

He had heard of the treachery of the fleet while entering a hired boat with the freedman in the harbour of Eunostus, Pyrrhus's having been detained with the other craft before the Temple of Poseidon.

The experienced pilot had been obliged to steer the boat in a wider curve against the wind through the open sea, and was delayed a long time by a number of the war vessels of the fleet.

Danger and separation were now passed, and they rejoiced in the happiness of meeting, yet could not feel genuine joy. Their souls were oppressed by anxiety concerning the fate of the Queen and their native city.

As night closed in the dogs barked violently, and they heard loud voices on the shore. Dion, with a presentiment that misfortune was threatening himself and his dear ones, obeyed the summons.

No star illumined the darkness. Only the wavering light of a lantern on the strand and another on the nearest island illumined the immediate vicinity, while southward the lights in the city shone as brightly as ever.

Pyrrhus and his youngest son were just pushing a boat into the water to release from the sands another which had run aground in a shallow near the neighbouring island.

Dion sprang in with them, and soon recognized in the hail the voice of the architect Gorgias.

The young father shouted a joyous greeting to his friend, but there was no reply.

Soon after, Pyrrhus landed his belated guest on the shore. He had escaped—as the fisherman explained—a great danger; for had he gone to the other island, which swarmed with venomous serpents, he might easily have fallen a victim to the bite of one of the reptiles.

Gorgias grasped Dion's hand but, in reply to his gay invitation to accompany him to the house at once, he begged him to listen to his story before joining the ladies.

Dion was startled. He knew his friend. When his deep voice had such a tone of gloomy discouragement, and his head drooped so mournfully, some terrible event had befallen him.

His foreboding had been correct. The first tidings pierced his own soul deeply.

He was not surprised to learn that the Romans ruled Alexandria; but a small band of the conquerors, who had been ordered to conduct themselves as if they were in a friendly country, had forced their way into the architect's large house to occupy the quarters assigned to them. The deaf grandmother of Helena and Barine, who had but half comprehended what threatened the citizens, terrified by the noisy entrance of the soldiers, had had another attack of apoplexy, and closed her eyes in death before Gorgias set out for the island.

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But it was not only this sad event, which must grieve the hearts of the two sisters, that had brought the architect in a stranger's boat to the Serpent Island at so late an hour. His soul was so agitated by the horrible incidents of the day that he needed to seek consolation among those from whom he was sure to find sympathy.

Nor was it wholly the terrible things Fate had compelled him to witness which induced him to venture out upon the sea so recklessly, but still more the desire to bring to the fugitives the happy news that they might return with safety to their native city.

Deeply agitated—nay, confused and overpowered by all he had seen and experienced—the architect, usually so clear and, with all his mental vivacity, so circumspect, began his story. A remonstrance from Dion induced him to collect his thoughts and describe events in the order in which they had befallen him.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Fairest dreams of childhood were surpassed
Golden chariot drawn by tamed lions
Life had fulfilled its pledges
Until neither knew which was the giver and which the receiver

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