

## BOOK II--THE FALL OF HARMACHIS

### CHAPTER I

OF THE FAREWELL OF AMENEMHAT TO HARMACHIS; OF THE COMING OF HARMACHIS TO ALEXANDRIA; OF THE EXHORTATION OF SEPA; OF THE PASSING OF CLEOPATRA ROBED AS ISIS; AND OF THE OVERTHROW OF THE GLADIATOR BY HARMACHIS

Now the long days of preparation had passed, and the time was at hand. I was initiated, and I was crowned; so that although the common folk knew me not, or knew me only as Priest of Isis, there were in Egypt thousands who at heart bowed down to me as Pharaoh. The hour was at hand, and my soul went forth to meet it. For I longed to overthrow the foreigner, to set Egypt free, to mount the throne that was my heritage, and cleanse the temples of my Gods. I was fain for the struggle, and I never doubted of its end. I looked into the mirror, and saw triumph written on my brows. The future stretched a path of glory from my feet--ay, glittering with glory like Sihor in the sun. I communed with my Mother Isis; I sat within my chamber and took counsel with my heart; I planned new temples; I revolved great laws that I would put forth for my people's weal; and in my ears rang the shouts of exultation which should greet victorious Pharaoh on his throne.

But still I tarried a little while at Abouthis, and, having been commanded to do so, let my hair, that had been shorn, grow again long

and black as the raven's wing, instructing myself meanwhile in all manly exercises and feats of arms. Also, for a purpose which shall be seen, I perfected myself in the magic art of the Egyptians, and in the reading of the stars, in which things, indeed, I already have great skill.

Now, this was the plan that had been built up. My uncle Sepa had, for a while, left the Temple of Annu, giving out that his health had failed him. Thence he had moved down to a house in Alexandria, to gather strength, as he said, from the breath of the sea, and also to learn for himself the wonders of the great Museum and the glory of Cleopatra's Court. There it was planned that I should join him, for there, at Alexandria, the egg of the plot was hatching. Accordingly, when at last the summons came, all things being prepared, I made ready for the journey, and passed into my father's chamber to receive his blessing before I went. There sat the old man, as once before he sat when he had rebuked me because I went out to slay the lion, his long white beard resting on the table of stone and sacred writings in his hand. When I came in he rose from his seat and would have knelt before me, crying "Hail, Pharaoh!" but I caught him by the hand.

"It is not meet, my father," I said.

"It is meet," he answered, "it is meet that I should bow before my King; but be it as thou wilt. And so thou goest, Harmachis; my blessings go with thee, O my son! And may Those whom I serve grant to me that my old eyes may, indeed, behold thee on the throne! I have searched long, striving, Harmachis, to read the future that shall be; but I can learn

naught by all my wisdom. It is hid from me, and at times my heart fails. But hear this, there is danger in thy path, and it comes in the form of Woman. I have known it long, and therefore thou hast been called to the worship of the heavenly Isis, who bids her votaries put away the thought of woman till such time as she shall think well to slacken the rule.

Oh, my son, I would that thou wert not so strong and fair--stronger and fairer, indeed, than any man in Egypt, as a King should be--for in that strength and beauty may lie a cause of stumbling. Beware, then, of those witches of Alexandria, lest, like a worm, some one of them creep into my heart and eat its secret out."

"Have no fear, my father," I answered, frowning, "my thought is set on other things than red lips and smiling eyes."

"It is good," he answered; "so may it befall. And now farewell. When next we meet, may it be in that happy hour when, with all the priests of the Upper Land, I move down from Abouthis to do my homage to Pharaoh on his throne."

So I embraced him, and went. Alas! I little thought how we should meet again.

Thus it came about that once more I passed down the Nile travelling as a man of no estate. And to such as were curious about me it was given out that I was the adopted son of the High Priest of Abouthis, having been

brought up to the priesthood, and that I had at the last refused the service of the Gods, and chosen to go to Alexandria, to seek my fortune. For, be it remembered, I was still held to be the grandson of the old wife, Atoua, by all those who did not know the truth.

On the tenth night, sailing with the wind, we reached the mighty city of Alexandria, the city of a thousand lights. Above them all towered the white Pharos, that wonder of the world, from the crown of which a light like the light of the sun blazed out across the waters of the harbour to guide mariners on their way across the sea. The vessel having been cautiously made fast to the quay, for it was night, I disembarked and stood wondering at the vast mass of houses, and confused by the clamour of many tongues. For here all peoples seemed to be gathered together, each speaking after the fashion of his own land. And as I stood a young man came and touched me on the shoulder, asking me if I was from Abouthis and named Harmachis. I said "Yea." Then, bending over me, he whispered the secret pass-word into my ear, and, beckoning to two slaves, bade them bring my baggage from the ship. This they did, fighting their way through the crowd of porters who were clamouring for hire. Then I followed him down the quay, which was bordered with drinking-places, where all sorts of men were gathered, tipping wine and watching the dancing of women, some of whom were but scantily arrayed, and some not arrayed at all.

And so we went through the lamp-lit houses till at last we reached the shore of the great harbour, and turned to the right along a wide way paved with granite and bordered by strong houses, having cloisters in

front of them, the like of which I had never seen. Turning once more to the right we came to a quieter portion of the city, where, except for parties of strolling revellers, the streets were still. Presently my guide halted at a house built of white stone. We passed in, and, crossing a small courtyard, entered a chamber where there was a light. And here, at last, I found my uncle Sepa, most glad to see me safe.

When I had washed and eaten, he told me that all things went well, and that as yet there was no thought of evil at the Court. Further, he said, it having come to the ears of the Queen that the Priest of Annu was sojourning at Alexandria, she sent for him and closely questioned him--not as to any plot, for of that she never thought, but as to the rumour which had reached her, that there was treasure hid in the Great Pyramid which is by Annu. For, being ever wasteful, she was ever in want of money, and had bethought her of opening the Pyramid. But he laughed at her, telling her the Pyramid was the burying-place of the divine Khufu, and that he knew nothing of its secrets. Then she was angered, and swore that so surely as she ruled in Egypt she would tear it down, stone by stone, and discover the secret at its heart. Again he laughed, and, in the words of the proverb which they have at Alexandria, told her that "Mountains live longer than Kings." Thereon she smiled at his ready answer, and let him go. Also my uncle Sepa told me that on the morrow I should see this Cleopatra. For it was her birthday (as, indeed, it was also mine), and, dressed in the robes of the Holy Isis, she would pass in state from her palace on the Lochias to the Serapeum to offer a sacrifice at the Shrine of the false God who sits in the Temple. And he said that thereafter the fashion by which I should gain entrance to the

household of the Queen should be contrived.

Then, being very weary, I went to rest, but could sleep little for the strangeness of the place, the noises in the streets, and the thought of the morrow. While it was yet dark, I rose, climbed the stair to the roof of the house, and waited. Presently, the sun's rays shot out like arrows, and lit upon the white wonder of the marble Pharos, whose light instantly sank and died, as though, indeed, the sun had killed it. Now the rays fell upon the palaces of the Lochias where Cleopatra lay, and lit them up till they flamed like a jewel set on the dark, cool bosom of the sea. Away the light flew, kissing the Soma's sacred dome, beneath which Alexander sleeps, touching the high tops of a thousand palaces and temples; past the porticoes of the great museum that loomed near at hand, striking the lofty Shrine, where, carved of ivory, is the image of the false God Serapis, and at last seeming to lose itself in the vast and gloomy Necropolis. Then, as the dawn gathered into day, the flood of brightness, overbrimming the bowl of night, flowed into the lower lands and streets, and showed Alexandria red in the sunrise as the mantle of a king, and shaped as a mantle. The Etesian wind came up from the north, and swept away the vapour from the harbours, so that I saw their blue waters rocking a thousand ships. I saw, too, that mighty mole the Heptastadium; I saw the hundreds of streets, the countless houses, the innumerable wealth and splendour of Alexandria set like a queen between lake Mareotis and the ocean, and dominating both, and I was filled with wonder. This, then, was one city in my heritage of lands and cities! Well, it was worth the grasping. And having looked my full and fed my heart, as it were, with the sight of splendour, I communed with the Holy

Isis and came down from the roof.

In the chamber beneath was my uncle Sepa. I told him that I had been watching the sun rise over the city of Alexandria.

"So!" he said, looking at me from beneath his shaggy eyebrows; "and what thinkest thou of Alexandria?"

"I think it is like some city of the Gods," I answered.

"Ay!" he replied fiercely, "a city of the infernal Gods--a sink of corruption, a bubbling well of iniquity, a home of false faith springing from false hearts. I would that not one stone of it was left upon another stone, and that its wealth lay deep beneath yonder waters! I would that the gulls were screaming across its site, and that the wind, untainted by a Grecian breath, swept through its ruins from the ocean to Mareotis! O royal Harmachis, let not the luxury and beauty of Alexandria poison thy sense; for in their deadly air, Faith perishes, and Religion cannot spread her heavenly wings. When the hour comes for thee to rule, Harmachis, cast down this accursed city and, as thy fathers did, set up thy throne in the white walls of Memphis. For I tell thee that, for Egypt, Alexandria is but a splendid gate of ruin, and, while it endures, all nations of the earth shall march through it, to the plunder of the land, and all false Faiths shall nestle in it and breed the overthrow of Egypt's Gods."

I made no answer, for there was truth in his words. And yet to me the

city seemed very fair to look on. After we had eaten, my uncle told me it was now time to set out to view the march of Cleopatra, as she went in triumph to the Shrine of Serapis. For although she would not pass till within two hours of the midday, yet these people of Alexandria have so great a love of shows and idling that had we not presently set forth, by no means could we have come through the press of the multitudes who were already gathering along the highways where the Queen must ride. So we went out to take our places upon a stand, built of timber, that had been set up at the side of the great road which pierces through the city, to the Canopic Gate. For my uncle had already purchased a right to enter there, and that dearly.

We won our way with much struggle through the great crowds that were already gathered in the streets till we reached the scaffolding of timber, which was roofed in with an awning and gaily hung with scarlet cloths. Here we seated ourselves upon a bench and waited for some hours, watching the multitude press past shouting, singing, and talking loudly in many tongues. At length soldiers came to clear the road, clad, after the Roman fashion, in breast-plates of chain-armor. After them marched heralds enjoining silence (at which the population sung and shouted all the more loudly), and crying that Cleopatra, the Queen, was coming. Then followed a thousand Cilician skirmishers, a thousand Thracians, a thousand Macedonians, and a thousand Gauls, each armed after the fashion of their country. Then passed five hundred men of those who are called the Fenced Horsemen, for both men and horses were altogether covered with mail. Next came youths and maidens sumptuously draped and wearing golden crowns, and with them images symbolising Day and Night, Morning



and Noon, the Heavens and the Earth. After these walked many fair women, pouring perfumes on the road, and others scattering blooming flowers. Now there rose a great shout of "Cleopatra! Cleopatra!" and I held my breath and bent forward to see her who dared to put on the robes of Isis.

But at that moment the multitude so gathered and thickened in front of where I was that I could no longer clearly see. So in my eagerness I leapt over the barrier of the scaffolding, and, being very strong, pushed my way through the crowd till I reached the foremost rank. And as I did so, Nubian slaves armed with thick staves and crowned with ivy-leaves ran up, striking the people. One man I noted more especially, for he was a giant, and, being strong, was insolent beyond measure, smiting the people without cause, as, indeed, is the wont of low persons set in authority. For a woman stood near to me, an Egyptian by her face, bearing a child in her arms, whom the man, seeing that she was weak, struck on the head with his rod so that she fell prone, and the people murmured. But at the sight my blood rushed of a sudden through my veins and drowned my reason. I held in my hand a staff of olive-wood from Cyprus, and as the black brute laughed at the sight of the stricken woman and her babe rolling on the ground, I swung the staff aloft and smote. So shrewdly did I strike, that the tough rod split upon the giant's shoulders and the blood spurted forth, staining his trailing leaves of ivy.

Then, with a shriek of pain and fury--for those who smite love not that they be smitten--he turned and sprang at me! And all the people round

gave back, save only the woman who could not rise, leaving us two in a ring as it were. On he came with a rush, and, as he came, being now mad, I smote him with my clenched fist between the eyes, having nothing else with which to smite, and he staggered like an ox beneath the first blow of the priest's axe. Then the people shouted, for they love to see a fight, and the man was known to them as a gladiator victorious in the games. Gathering up his strength, the knave came on with an oath, and, whirling his heavy staff on high, struck me in such a fashion that, had I not avoided the blow by nimbleness, I had surely been slain. But, as it chanced, the staff hit upon the ground, and so heavily that it flew in fragments. Thereon the multitude shouted again, and the great man, blind with fury, rushed at me to smite me down. But with a cry I sprang straight at his throat--for he was so heavy a man that I knew I could not hope to throw him by strength--ay, and gripped it. There I clung, though his fists battered me like bludgeons, driving my thumbs into his throat. Round and round we turned, till at length he flung himself to the earth, trusting thus to shake me off. But I held on fast as we rolled over and over on the ground, till at last he grew faint for want of breath. Then I, being uppermost, drove my knee down upon his chest, and, as I believe, should thus have slain him in my rage had not my uncle, and others there gathered, fallen upon me and dragged me from him.

And meanwhile, though I know it not, the chariot in which the Queen sat, with elephants going before and lions led after it, had reached the spot, and had been halted because of the tumult. I looked up, and thus torn, panting, my white garments stained with the blood that had rushed

from the mouth and nostrils of the mighty Nubian, I for the first time saw Cleopatra face to face. Her chariot was all of gold, and drawn by milk-white steeds. She sat in it with two fair girls, clad in Greek attire, standing one on either side, fanning her with glittering fans. On her head was the covering of Isis, the golden horns between which rested the moon's round disk and the emblem of Osiris' throne, with the uræus twined around. Beneath this covering was the vulture cap of gold, the blue enamelled wings and the vulture head with gemmy eyes, under which her long dark tresses flowed towards her feet. About her rounded neck was a broad collar of gold studded with emeralds and coral. Round her arms and wrists were bracelets of gold studded with emeralds and coral, and in one hand she held the holy cross of Life fashioned of crystal, and in the other the golden rod of royalty. Her breast was bare, but under it was a garment that glistened like the scaly covering of a snake, everywhere sewn with gems. Beneath this robe was a skirt of golden cloth, half hidden by a scarf of the brodered silk of Cos, falling in folds to the sandals that, fastened with great pearls, adorned her white and tiny feet.

All this I discerned at a glance, as it were. Then I looked upon the face--that face which seduced Cæsar, ruined Egypt, and was doomed to give Octavian the sceptre of the world. I looked upon the flawless Grecian features, the rounded chin, the full, rich lips, the chiselled nostrils, and the ears fashioned like delicate shells. I saw the forehead, low, broad, and lovely, the crisped, dark hair falling in heavy waves that sparkled in the sun, the arched eyebrows, and the long, bent lashes. There before me was the grandeur of her Imperial shape.

There burnt the wonderful eyes, hued like the Cyprian violet--eyes that seemed to sleep and brood on secret things as night broods upon the desert, and yet as the night to shift, change, and be illumined by gleams of sudden splendour born within their starry depths. All those wonders I saw, though I have small skill in telling them. But even then I knew that it was not in these charms alone that the might of Cleopatra's beauty lay. It was rather in a glory and a radiance cast through the fleshly covering from the fierce soul within. For she was a Thing of Flame like unto which no woman has ever been or ever will be. Even when she brooded, the fire of her quick heart shone through her. But when she woke, and the lightning leapt suddenly from her eyes, and the passion-laden music of her speech chimed upon her lips, ah! then, who can tell how Cleopatra seemed? For in her met all the splendours that have been given to woman for her glory, and all the genius which man has won from heaven. And with them dwelt every evil of that greater sort, which fearing nothing, and making a mock of laws, has taken empires for its place of play, and, smiling, watered the growth of its desires with the rich blood of men. In her breast they gathered, together fashioning that Cleopatra whom no man may draw, and yet whom no man, having seen, ever can forget. They fashioned her grand as the Spirit of Storm, lovely as Lightning, cruel as Pestilence, yet with a heart; and what she did is known. Woe to the world when such another comes to curse it!

For a moment I met Cleopatra's eyes as she idly bent herself to find the tumult's cause. At first they were sombre and dark, as though they saw indeed, but the brain read nothing. Then they awoke, and their very

colour seemed to change as the colour of the sea changes when the water is shaken. First, there was anger written in them; next an idle noting; then, when she looked upon the huge bulk of the man whom I had overcome, and knew him for the gladiator, something, perchance, that was not far from wonder. At the least they softened, though, indeed, her face changed no whit. But he who would read Cleopatra's mind had need to watch her eyes, for her countenance varied but a little. Turning, she said some word to her guards. They came forward and led me to her, while all the multitude waited silently to see me slain.

I stood before her, my arms folded on my breast. Overcome though I was by the wonder of her loveliness I hated her in my heart, this woman who dared to clothe herself in the dress of Isis, this usurper who sat upon my throne, this wanton squandering the wealth of Egypt in chariots and perfumes. When she had looked me over from head to the feet, she spake in a low full voice and in the tongue of Khemi which she alone had learned of all the Lagidæ:

"And who and what art thou, Egyptian--for Egyptian I see thou art--who darest to smite my slave when I make progress through my city?"

"I am Harmachis," I answered boldly. "Harmachis, the astrologer, adopted son of the High Priest and Governor of Abouthis, who am come hither to seek my fortune. I smote thy slave, O Queen, because for no fault he struck down the woman yonder. Ask of those who saw, royal Egypt."

"Harmachis," she said, "the name has a high sound--and thou hast a high

look;" and then, speaking to a soldier who had seen all, she bade him tell her what had come to pass. This he did truthfully, being friendly disposed towards me because I had overcome the Nubian. Thereon she turned and spoke to the girl bearing the fan who stood beside her--a woman with curling hair and shy dark eyes, very beautiful to see. The girl answered somewhat. Then Cleopatra bade them bring the slave to her. So they led forward the giant, who had found his breath again, and with him the woman whom he had smitten down.

"Thou dog!" she said, in the same low voice; "thou coward! who, being strong, didst smite down this woman, and, being a coward, wast overthrown of this young man. See, thou, I will teach thee manners. Henceforth, when thou smitest women it shall be with thy left arm. Ho, guards, seize this black slave and strike off his right hand."

Her command given, she sank back in her golden chariot, and again the cloud gathered in her eyes. But the guards seized the giant, and, notwithstanding his cries and prayers for mercy, struck off his hand with a sword upon the wood of the scaffolding and he was carried away groaning. Then the procession moved on again. As it went the fair woman with the fan turned her head, caught my eye, and smiled and nodded as though she rejoiced, at which I wondered somewhat.

The people cheered also and made jests, saying that I should soon practice astrology in the palace. But, as soon as we might, I and my uncle escaped, and made our way back to the house. All the while he rated me for my rashness; but when we came to the chamber of the house

he embraced me and rejoiced greatly, because I had overthrown the giant with so little hurt to myself.