

## CHAPTER X

### OF THE TROUBLE OF CLEOPATRA; OF HER OATH TO HARMACHIS; AND OF THE TELLING BY HARMACHIS TO CLEOPATRA OF THE SECRET OF THE TREASURE THAT LAY BENEATH THE MASS OF "HER"

That same night Cleopatra summoned me to her private chamber. I went, and found her much troubled in mind; never before had I seen her so deeply moved. She was alone, and, like some trapped lioness, walked to and fro across the marble floor, while thought chased thought across her mind, each, as clouds scudding over the sea, for a moment casting its shadow in her deep eyes.

"So thou art come, Harmachis," she said, resting for a while, as she took my hand. "Counsel me, for never did I need counsel more. Oh, what days have the Gods measured out to me--days restless as the ocean! I have known no peace from childhood up, and it seems none shall I know. Scarce by a very little have I escaped thy dagger's point, Harmachis, when this new trouble, that, like a storm, has gathered beneath the horizon's rim, suddenly bursts over me. Didst mark that tigerish fop? Well should I love to trap him! How soft he spoke! Ay, he purred like a cat, and all the time he stretched his claws. Didst hear the letter, too? it has an ugly sound. I know this Antony. When I was but a child, budding into womanhood, I saw him; but my eyes were ever quick, and I took his measure. Half Hercules and half a fool, with a dash of genius veining his folly through. Easily led by those who enter at the gates of his voluptuous sense; but if crossed, an iron foe. True to his friends,

if, indeed, he loves them; and oftentimes false to his own interest.

Generous, hardy, and in adversity a man of virtue; in prosperity a sot and a slave to woman. That is Antony. How deal with such a man, whom fate and opportunity, despite himself, have set on the crest of fortune's wave? One day it will overwhelm him; but till that day he sweeps across the world and laughs at those who drown."

"Antony is but a man," I answered, "and a man with many foes; and, being but a man, he can be overthrown."

"Ay, he can be overthrown; but he is one of three, Harmachis. Now that Cassius hath gone where all fools go, Rome has thrown out a hydra head. Crush one, and another hisses in thy face. There's Lepidus, and with him, that young Octavianus, whose cold eyes may yet with a smile of triumph look on the murdered forms of empty, worthless Lepidus, of Antony, and of Cleopatra. If I go not to Cilicia, mark thou! Antony will knit up a peace with these Parthians, and, taking the tales they tell of me for truth--and, indeed, there is truth in them--will fall with all his force on Egypt. And how then?"

"How then? Why, then we'll drum him back to Rome."

"Ah, thou sayest so, and, perchance, Harmachis, had I not won that game we played together some twelve days gone, thou, being Pharaoh, mightest well have done this thing, for round thy throne old Egypt would have gathered. But Egypt loves not me nor my Greek blood; and I have but now scattered that great plot of thine, in which half the land was meshed.

Will these men, then, arise to succour me? Were Egypt true to me, I could, indeed, hold my own against all the force that Rome may bring; but Egypt hates me, and had as lief be ruled by the Roman as the Greek. Still I might make defence had I the gold, for with money soldiers can be bought to feed the maw of mercenary battle. But I have none; my treasuries are dry, and though there is wealth in the land, yet debts perplex me. These wars have brought me ruin, and I know not how to find a talent. Perchance, Harmachis, thou who art, by hereditary right, Priest of the Pyramids," and she drew near and looked me in the eyes, "perchance, if long descended rumour does not lie, thou canst tell me where I can touch the gold to save thy land from ruin, and thy Love from the grasp of Antony? Say, is it so?"

I thought a while, and then I answered:

"And if such a tale were true, and if I could show thee treasure stored by the mighty Pharaohs of the most far-off age against the needs of Khem, how can I know that thou wouldst indeed make use of that wealth to those good ends?"

"Is there, then, a treasure?" she asked curiously. "Nay, fret me not, Harmachis; for of a truth the very name of gold at this time of want is like the sight of water in the desert."

"I believe," I said, "that there is such a treasure, though I myself have never seen it. But I know this, that if it still lie in the place where it was set, it is because so heavy a curse will rest upon him who

shall lay hands on it wickedly and for selfish ends, that none of those Pharaohs to whom it has been shown have dared to touch it, however sore their need."

"So," she said, "they were cowardly aforetime, or else their need was not great. Wilt thou show me this treasure, then, Harmachis?"

"Perhaps," I answered, "I will show it to thee if it still be there, when thou hast sworn that thou wilt use it to defend Egypt from this Roman Antony and for the welfare of her people."

"I swear it!" she said earnestly. "Oh, I swear by every God in Khem that if thou showest me this great treasure, I will defy Antony and send Dellius back to Cilicia with sharper words than those he brought. Yes, I'll do more, Harmachis: so soon as may be, I will take thee to husband before all the world, and thou thyself shalt carry out thy plans and beat off the Roman eagles."

Thus she spoke, gazing at me with truthful, earnest eyes. I believed her, and for the first time since my fall was for a moment happy, thinking that all was not lost to me, and that with Cleopatra, whom I loved thus madly, I might yet win my place and power back.

"Swear it, Cleopatra!" I said.

"I swear, beloved! and thus I seal my oath!" and she kissed me on the forehead. And I, too, kissed her; and we talked of what we would do when

we were wed, and how we should overcome the Roman.

And thus I was again beguiled; though I believe that, had it not been for the jealous anger of Charmion--which, as shall be seen, was ever urging her forward to fresh deeds of shame--Cleopatra would have wedded me and broken with the Roman. And, indeed, in the issue, it had been better for her and Egypt.

We sat far into the night, and I revealed to her somewhat of that ancient secret of the mighty treasure hid beneath the mass of Her. Thither, it was agreed, we should go on the morrow, and the second night from now attempt its search. So, early on the next day, a boat was secretly made ready, and Cleopatra entered it, veiled as an Egyptian lady about to make a pilgrimage to the Temple of Horemkhu. And I also entered, cloaked as a pilgrim, and with us ten of her most trusted servants disguised as sailors. But Charmion went not with us. We sailed with a fair wind from the Canopic mouth of the Nile; and that night, pushing on with the moon, we reached Sais at midnight, and here rested for a while. At dawn we once more loosed our craft, and all that day sailed swiftly, till, at last, at the third hour from the sunset, we came in sight of the lights of that fortress which is called Babylon. Here, on the opposite bank of the river, we moored our ship safely in a bed of reeds.

Then, on foot and secretly, we set out for the pyramids, which were at a distance of two leagues, Cleopatra, I and one trusted eunuch, for we left the other servants with the boat. Only I caught an ass for

Cleopatra to ride that was wandering in a tilled field, and threw a cloak upon it. She sat on it and I led the ass by paths I knew, the eunuch following us on foot. And, within little more than an hour, having gained the great causeway, we saw the mighty pyramids towering up through the moonlit air and aweing us to silence. We passed on in utter silence, through the haunted city of the dead, for all around us stood the solemn tombs, till at length we climbed the rocky hill, and stood in the deep shadow of Khufu Khut, the splendid Throne of Khufu.

"Of a truth," whispered Cleopatra, as she gazed up the dazzling marble slope above her, everywhere blazoned over with a million mystic characters--"of a truth, there were Gods ruling in Khem in those days, and not men. This place is sad as Death--ay, and as mighty and far from man. Is it here that we must enter?"

"Nay," I answered, "it is not here. Pass on."

I led the way through a thousand ancient tombs, till we stood in the shadow of Ur the Great, and gazed at his red heaven-piercing mass.

"Is it here that we must enter?" she whispered once again.

"Nay," I answered, "it is not here. Pass on."

We passed on through many more tombs, till we stood in the shadow of Her,[\*] and Cleopatra gazed astonished at its polished beauty, which for thousands of years, night by night, had mirrored back the moon, and

at the black girdle of Ethiopian stone that circled its base about. For this is the most beautiful of all pyramids.

[\*] The "Upper," now known as the Third Pyramid.--Editor.

"Is it that we must enter?" she said.

I answered, "It is here."

We passed round between the Temple of the Worship of his Divine Majesty, Menkau-ra, the Osirian, and in the base of the pyramid till we came to the north side. Here in the centre is graved the name of Pharaoh Menkau-ra, who built the pyramid to be his tomb, and stored his treasure in it against the need of Khem.

"If the treasure still remains," I said to Cleopatra, "as it remained in the days of my great-great-grandfather, who was Priest of this Pyramid before me, it is hid deep in the womb of the mass before thee, Cleopatra; nor can it be come by without toil, danger, and terror of mind. Art thou prepared to enter--for thou thyself must enter and must judge?"

"Canst thou not go in with the eunuch, Harmachis, and bring the treasure forth?" she said, for a little her courage began to fail her.

"Nay, Cleopatra," I answered, "not even for thee and for the weal of Egypt can I do this thing, for of all sins it would be the greatest

sin. But it is lawful for me to do this. I, as hereditary holder of the secret, may, upon demand, show to the ruling monarch of Khem the place where the treasure lies, and show also the warning that is written. And if on seeing and reading, the Pharaoh deems that the need of Khem is so sore and strait that it is lawful for him to brave the curse of the Dead and draw forth the treasure, it is well, for on his head must rest the weight of this dread deed. Three monarchs--so say the records that I have read--have thus dared to enter in the time of need. They were the Divine Queen Hatshepsu, that wonder known to the Gods alone; her Divine brother Tahutimes Men-Kheper-ra; and the Divine Rameses Mi-amen. But of these three Majesties, not one when they saw dared to touch; for, though sharp their need, it was not great enough to consecrate the act. So, fearing lest the curse should fall upon them, they went hence sorrowing."

She thought a little, till at last her spirit overcame her fear.

"At the least I will see with mine own eyes," she said.

"It is well," I answered. Then, stones having been piled up by me and the eunuch who was with us on a certain spot at the base of the pyramid, to somewhat more than the height of a man, I climbed on them and searched for the secret mark, no larger than a leaf. I found it with some trouble, for the weather and the rubbing of the wind-stirred sand had worn even the Ethiopian stone. Having found it, I pressed on it with all my strength in a certain fashion. Even after the lapse of many years the stone swung round, showing a little opening, through which a man



might scarcely creep. As it swung, a mighty bat, white in colour as though with unreckoned age, and such as I had never seen before for bigness, for his measure was the measure of a hawk, flew forth and for a moment hovered over Cleopatra, then sailed slowly up and up in circles, till at last he was lost in the bright light of the moon.

But Cleopatra uttered a cry of terror, and the eunuch, who was watching, fell down in fear, believing it to be the guardian Spirit of the pyramid. And I, too, feared, though I said nothing. For even now I believe that it was the Spirit of Menkau-ra, the Osirian, who, taking the form of a bat, flew forth from his holy House in warning.

I waited a while, till the foul air should clear from the passage. Then I drew out the lamps, kindled them, and passed them, to the number of three, into the entrance of the passage. This done, I went to the eunuch, and, taking him aside, I swore him by the living spirit of Him who sleeps at Abouthis that he should not reveal those things which he was about to see.

This he swore, trembling sorely, for he was very much afraid. Nor, indeed, did he reveal them.

This done, I clambered through the opening, taking with me a coil of rope, which I wound around my middle, and beckoned to Cleopatra to come. Making fast the skirt of her robe, she came, and I drew her through the opening, so that at length she stood behind me in the passage which is lined with slabs of granite. After her came the eunuch, and he also

stood in the passage. Then, having taken counsel of the plan of the passage that I had brought with me, and which, in signs that none but the initiated can read, was copied from those ancient writings that had come down to me through one-and-forty generations of my predecessors, the Priests of this Pyramid of Her, and of the worship of the Temple of the Divine Menkau-ra, the Osirian, I led the way through that darksome place towards the utter silence of the tomb. Guided by the feeble light of our lamps, we passed down the steep incline, gasping in the heat and the thick, stagnated air. Presently we had left the region of the masonry and were slipping down a gallery hewn in the living rock. For twenty paces or more it ran steeply. Then its slope lessened and shortly we found ourselves in a chamber painted white, so low that I, being tall, had scarcely room to stand; but in length four paces, and in breadth three, and cased throughout with sculptured panels. Here Cleopatra sank upon the floor and rested awhile, overcome by the heat and the utter darkness.

"Rise!" I said. "We must not linger here, or we faint."

So she rose, and passing hand in hand through that chamber, we found ourselves face to face with a mighty door of granite, let down from the roof in grooves. Once more I took counsel of the plan, pressed with my foot upon a certain stone, and waited. Then, suddenly and softly, I know not by what means, the mass heaved itself from its bed of living rock. We passed beneath, and found ourselves face to face with a second door of granite. Again I pressed on a certain spot, and this door swung wide of itself, and we went through, to find ourselves face to face with a

third door, yet more mighty than the two through which we had won our way. Following the secret plan, I struck this door with my foot upon a certain spot, and it sank slowly as though at a word of magic till its head was level with the floor of rock. We crossed and gained another passage which, descending gently for a length of fourteen paces, led us into a great chamber, paved with black marble, more than nine cubits high, by nine cubits broad, and thirty cubits long. In this marble floor was sunk a great sarcophagus of granite, and on its lid were graved the name and titles of the Queen of Menkau-ra. In this chamber, too, the air was purer, though I know not by what means it came thither.

"Is the treasure here?" gasped Cleopatra.

"Nay," I answered; "follow me," and I led the way to a gallery, which we entered through an opening in the floor of the great chamber. It had been closed by a trap-door of stone, but the door was open. Creeping along this shaft, or passage, for some ten paces, we came at length to a well, seven cubits in depth. Making fast one end of the rope that I had brought about my body and the other to a ring in the rock, I was lowered, holding the lamp in my hand, till I stood in the last resting-place of the Divine Menkau-ra. Then the rope was drawn up, and Cleopatra, being made fast to it, was let down by the eunuch, and I received her in my arms. But I bade the eunuch, sorely against his will, since he feared to be left alone, await our return at the mouth of the shaft. For it was not lawful that he should enter whither we went.