

## CHAPTER V

### OF THE DRAWING FORTH OF ANTONY FROM THE TIMONIUM BACK TO CLEOPATRA; OF THE FEAST MADE BY CLEOPATRA; AND OF THE MANNER OF THE DEATH OF EUDOSIUS THE STEWARD

Ere it was yet dawn Charmion came again, and we walked to the private harbour of the palace. There, taking boat, we rowed to the island mount on which stands the Timonium, a vaulted tower, strong, small, and round. And, having landed, we twain came to the door and knocked, till at length a grating was thrown open in the door, and an aged eunuch, looking forth, roughly asked our business.

"Our business is with the Lord Antony," said Charmion.

"Then it is no business, for Antony, my master, sees neither man nor woman."

"Yet will he see us, for we bring tidings. Go tell him that the Lady Charmion brings tidings from the army."

The man went, and presently returned.

"The Lord Antony would know if the tidings be good or ill, for, if ill, then will he none of it, for with evil tidings he has been overfed of late."

"Why--why, it is both good and ill. Open, slave, I will make answer to thy master!" and she slipped a purse of gold through the bars.

"Well, well," he grumbled, as he took the purse, "the times are hard, and likely to be harder; for when the lion's down who will feed the jackal? Give thy news thyself, and if it do but draw the noble Antony out of this hall of Groans, I care not what it be. Now the palace door is open, and there's the road to the banqueting-chamber."

We passed on, to find ourselves in a narrow passage, and, leaving the eunuch to bar the door, advanced till we came to a curtain. Through this entrance we went, and found ourselves in a vaulted chamber, ill-lighted from the roof. On the further side of this rude chamber was a bed of rugs, and on them crouched the figure of a man, his face hidden in the folds of his toga.

"Most noble Antony," said Charmion drawing near, "unwrap thy face and hearken to me, for I bring thee tidings."

Then he lifted up his head. His face was marred by sorrow; his tangled hair, grizzled with years, hung about his hollow eyes, and white on his chin was the stubble of an unshaven beard. His robe was squalid, and his aspect more wretched than that of the poorest beggar at the temple gates. To this, then, had the love of Cleopatra brought the glorious and renowned Antony, aforetime Master of half the World!

"What will ye with me, Lady," he asked, "who would perish here alone?"

And who is this man who comes to gaze on fallen and forsaken Antony?"

"This is Olympus, noble Antony, that wise physician, the skilled in auguries, of whom thou hast heard much, and whom Cleopatra, ever mindful of thy welfare, though but little thou dost think of hers, has sent to minister to thee."

"And, can thy physician minister to a grief such as my grief? Can his drugs give me back my galleys, my honour, and my peace? Nay! Away with thy physician! What are thy tidings?--quick!--out with it! Hath Canidius, perchance, conquered Cæsar? Tell me but that, and thou shalt have a province for thy guerdon--ay! and if Octavianus be dead, twenty thousand sestertia to fill its treasury. Speak--nay--speak not! I fear the opening of thy lips as never I feared an earthly thing. Surely the wheel of fortune has gone round and Canidius has conquered? Is it not so? Nay--out with it! I can no more!"

"O noble Antony," she said, "steel thy heart to hear that which I needs must tell thee! Canidius is in Alexandria. He has fled far and fast, and this is his report. For seven whole days did the legions wait the coming of Antony, to lead them to victory, as aforetime, putting aside the offers of the envoys of Cæsar. But Antony came not. And then it was rumoured that Antony had fled to Tænarus, drawn thither by Cleopatra. The man who first brought that tale to the camp the legionaries cried shame on--ay, and beat him to the death! But ever it grew, until at length there was no more room to doubt; and then, O Antony, thy officers slipped one by one away to Cæsar, and where the officers go there

the men follow. Nor is this all the story; for thy allies--Bocchus of Africa, Tarcondimotus of Cilicia, Mithridates of Commagene, Adallas of Thrace, Philadelphus of Paphlagonia, Archelaus of Cappadocia, Herod of Judæa, Amyntas of Galatia, Polemon of Pontus, and Malchus of Arabia--all, all have fled or bid their generals fly back to whence they came; and already their ambassador's crave cold Cæsar's clemency."

"Hast done thy croakings, thou raven in a peacock's dress, or is there more to come?" asked the smitten man, lifting his white and trembling face from the shelter of his hands. "Tell me more; say that Egypt's dead in all her beauty; say that Octavianus lowers at the Canopic gate; and that, headed by dead Cicero, all the ghosts of Hell do audibly shriek out the fall of Antony! Yea, gather up every woe that can o'erwhelm those who once were great, and loose them on the hoary head of him whom--in thy gentleness--thou art still pleased to name 'the noble Antony!'"

"Nay, my Lord, I have done."

"Ay, and so have I done--done, quite done! It is altogether finished, and thus I seal the end," and snatching a sword from the couch, he would, indeed, have slain himself had I not sprung forward and grasped his hand. For it was not my purpose that he should die as yet; since had he died at that hour Cleopatra had made her peace with Cæsar, who rather wished the death of Antony than the ruin of Egypt.

"Art mad, Antony? Art, indeed, a coward?" cried Charmion, "that thou

wouldst thus escape thy woes, and leave thy partner to face the sorrow out alone?"

"Why not, woman? Why not? She would not be long alone. There's Cæsar to keep her company. Octavianus loves a fair woman in his cold way, and still is Cleopatra fair. Come now, thou Olympus! thou hast held my hand from dealing death upon myself, advise me of thy wisdom. Shall I, then, submit myself to Cæsar, and I, Triumvir, twice Consul, and aforetime absolute Monarch of all the East, endure to follow in his triumph along those Roman ways where I myself have passed in triumph?"

"Nay, Sire," I answered. "If thou dost yield, then art thou doomed. All last night I questioned of the Fates concerning thee, and I saw this: when thy star draws near to Cæsar's it pales and is swallowed up; but when it passes from his radiance, then bright and big it shines, equal in glory to his own. All is not lost, and while some part remains, everything may be regained. Egypt can yet be held, armies can still be raised. Cæsar has withdrawn himself; he is not yet at the gates of Alexandria, and perchance may be appeased. Thy mind in its fever has fired thy body; thou art sick and canst not judge aright. See, here, I have a potion that shall make thee whole, for I am well skilled in the art of medicine," and I held out the phial.

"A potion, thou sayest man!" he cried. "More like it is a poison, and thou a murderer, sent by false Egypt, who would fain be rid of me now that I may no more be of service to her. The head of Antony is the peace offering she would send to Cæsar--she for whom I have lost all! Give me

thy draught. By Bacchus! I will drink it, though it be the very elixir of Death!"

"Nay, noble Antony; it is no poison, and I am no murderer. See, I will taste it, if thou wilt," and I held forth the subtle drink that has the power to fire the veins of men.

"Give it me, Physician. Desperate men are brave men. There!----Why, what is this? Yours is a magic draught! My sorrows seem to roll away like thunder-clouds before the southern gale, and the spring of Hope blooms fresh upon the desert of my heart. Once more I am Antony, and once again I see my legions' spears asparkle in the sun, and hear the thunderous shout of welcome as Antony--beloved Antony--rides in pomp of war along his deep-formed lines! There's hope! there's hope! I may yet see the cold brows of Cæsar--that Cæsar who never errs except from policy--robbed of their victor bays and crowned with shameful dust!"

"Ay," cried Charmion, "there still is hope, if thou wilt but play the man! O my Lord! come back with us; come back to the loving arms of Cleopatra! All night she lies upon her golden bed, and fills the hollow darkness with her groans for 'Antony!' who, enamoured now of Grief, forgets his duty and his love!"

"I come! I come! Shame upon me, that I dared to doubt her! Slave, bring water, and a purple robe: not thus can I be seen of Cleopatra. Even now I come."

In this fashion, then, did we draw Antony back to Cleopatra, that the ruin of the twain might be made sure.

We led him up the Alabaster Hall and into Cleopatra's chamber, where she lay, her cloudy hair about her face and breast, and tears flowing from her deep eyes.

"O Egypt!" he cried, "behold me at thy feet!"

She sprang from the couch. "And art thou here, my love?" she murmured; "then once again are all things well. Come near, and in these arms forget thy sorrows and turn my grief to joy. Oh, Antony, while love is left to us, still have we all!"

And she fell upon his breast and kissed him wildly.

That same day, Charmion came to me and bade me prepare a poison of the most deadly power. And this at first I would not do, fearing that Cleopatra would therewith make an end of Antony before his time. But Charmion showed me that this was not so, and told me also for what purpose was the poison. Therefore I summoned Atoua, the skilled in

simples, and all that afternoon we laboured at the deadly work. And when it was done, Charmion came once more, bearing with her a chaplet of fresh roses, that she bade me steep in the poison.

This then I did.

That night at the great feast of Cleopatra, I sat near Antony, who was at her side, and wore the poisoned wreath. Now as the feast went on, the wine flowed fast, till Antony and the Queen grew merry. And she told him of her plans, and of how even now her galleys were being drawn by the canal that leads from Bubastis on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, to Clysma at the head of the Bay of Heroopolis. For it was her design, should Cæsar prove stubborn, to fly with Antony and her treasure down the Arabian Gulf, where Cæsar had no fleet, and seek some new home in India, whither her foes might not follow. But, indeed, this plan came to nothing, for the Arabs of Petra burnt the galleys, incited thereto by a message sent by the Jews of Alexandria, who hated Cleopatra and were hated of her. For I caused the Jews to be warned of what was being done.

Now, when she had made an end of telling him, the Queen called on him to drink a cup with her, to the success of this new scheme, bidding him, as she did so, steep his wreath of roses in the wine, and make the draught more sweet. This, then, he did, and it being done, she pledged him.

But when he was about to pledge her back, she caught his hand, crying "Hold!" whereat he paused, wondering.

Now, among the servants of Cleopatra was one Eudosius, a steward; and



this Eudosius, seeing that the fortunes of Cleopatra were at an end, had laid a plan to fly that very night to Cæsar, as many of his betters had done, taking with him all the treasure in the palace that he could steal. But this design being discovered to Cleopatra, she determined to be avenged upon Eudosius.

"Eudosius," she cried, for the man stood near; "come hither, thou faithful servant! Seest thou this man, most noble Antony; through all our troubles he has clung to us and been of comfort to us. Now, therefore, he shall be rewarded according to his deserts and the measure of his faithfulness, and that from thine own hand. Give him thy golden cup of wine, and let him drink a pledge to our success; the cup shall be his guerdon."

And still wondering, Antony gave it to the man, who, stricken in his guilty mind, took it, and stood trembling. But he drank not.

"Drink! thou slave; drink!" cried Cleopatra, half rising from her seat and flashing a fierce look on his white face. "By Serapis! so surely as I yet shall sit in the Capitol at Rome, if thou dost thus flout the Lord Antony, I'll have thee scourged to the bones, and the red wine poured upon thy open wounds to heal them! Ah! at length thou drinkest! Why, what is it, good Eudosius? art sick? Surely, then, this wine must be as the water of jealousy of those Jews, that has power to slay the false and strengthen the honest only. Go, some of you, search this man's room; methinks he is a traitor!"

Meanwhile the man stood, his hands to his head. Presently he began to tremble, and then fell, clutching at his bosom, as though to tear out the fire in his heart. He staggered, with livid, twisted face and foaming lips, to where Cleopatra lay watching him with a slow and cruel smile.

"Ah, traitor! thou hast it now!" she said. "Prithee, is death sweet?"

"Thou wanton!" yelled the dying man, "thou hast poisoned me! Thus mayst thou also perish!" and with one shriek he flung himself upon her. She saw his purpose, and swift and supple as a tiger sprang to one side, so that he did but grasp her royal cloak, tearing it from its emerald clasp. Down he fell upon the ground, rolling over and over in the purple chiton, till presently he lay still and dead, his tormented face and frozen eyes peering ghastly from its folds.

"Ah!" said the Queen, with a hard laugh, "the slave died wondrous hard, and fain would have drawn me with him. See, he has borrowed my garment for a pall! Take him away and bury him in his livery."

"What means Cleopatra?" said Antony, as the guards dragged the corpse away; "the man drank of my cup. What is the purpose of this most sorry jest?"

"It serves a double end, noble Antony! This very night that man would have fled to Octavianus, bearing of our treasure with him. Well, I have lent him wings, for the dead fly fast! Also this: thou didst fear that

I should poison thee, my Lord; nay, I know it. See now, Antony, how easy it were that I should slay thee if I had the will. That wreath of roses which thou didst steep within the cup is dewed with deadly bane. Had I, then, a mind to make an end of thee, I had not stayed thy hand. O Antony, henceforth trust me! Sooner would I slay myself than harm one hair of thy beloved head! See, here come my messengers! Speak, what did ye find?"

"Royal Egypt, we found this. All things in the chamber of Eudosius are made ready for flight, and in his baggage is much treasure."

"Thou hearest?" she said, smiling darkly. "Think ye, my loyal servants all, that Cleopatra is one with whom it is well to play the traitor? Be warned by this Roman's fate!"

Then a great silence of fear fell upon the company, and Antony sat also silent.