

CHAPTER VII

OF THE SURRENDER OF THE TROOPS AND FLEET OF ANTONY BEFORE THE CANOPIC GATE; OF THE END OF ANTONY, AND OF THE BREWING OF THE DRAUGHT OF DEATH

On the morrow, at dawn, Antony came forth and gave command that his fleet should advance against the fleet of Cæsar, and that his cavalry should open the land-battle with the cavalry of Cæsar. Accordingly, the fleet advanced in a triple line, and the fleet of Cæsar came out to meet it. But when they met, the galleys of Antony lifted their oars in greeting, and passed over to the galleys of Cæsar; and they sailed away together. And the cavalry of Antony rode forth beyond the Hippodrome to charge the cavalry of Cæsar; but when they met, they lowered their swords and passed over to the camp of Cæsar, deserting Antony. Then Antony grew mad with rage and terrible to see. He shouted to his legions to stand firm and wait attack; and for a little while they stood.

One man, however--that same officer who would have slain me on the yesternight--strove to fly; but Antony seized him with his own hand, threw him to the earth, and, springing from his horse, drew his sword to slay him. He held his sword on high, while the man, covering his face, awaited death. But Antony dropped his sword and bade him rise.

"Go!" he said. "Go to Cæsar, and prosper! I did love thee once. Why, then, among so many traitors, should I single thee out for death?"

The man rose and looked upon him sorrowfully. Then, shame overwhelming

him, with a great cry he tore open his shirt of mail, plunged his sword into his own heart and fell down dead. Antony stood and gazed at him, but he said never a word. Meanwhile the ranks of Cæsar's legions drew near, and so soon as they crossed spears the legions of Antony turned and fled. Then the soldiers of Cæsar stood still mocking them; but scarce a man was slain, for they pursued not.

"Fly, Lord Antony! fly!" cried Eros, his servant, who alone with me stayed by him. "Fly ere thou art dragged a prisoner to Cæsar!"

So he turned and fled, groaning heavily. I went with him, and as we rode through the Canopic gate, where many folk stood wondering, Antony spoke to me:

"Go, thou, Olympus; go to the Queen and say: 'Antony sends greeting to Cleopatra, who hath betrayed him! To Cleopatra he sends greeting and farewell!'"

And so I went to the tomb, but Antony fled to the palace. When I came to the tomb I knocked upon the door, and Charmion looked forth from the window.

"Open," I cried, and she opened.

"What news, Harmachis?" she whispered.

"Charmion," I said, "the end is at hand. Antony is fled!"

"It is well," she answered; "I am weary."

And there on her golden bed sat Cleopatra.

"Speak, man!" she cried.

"Antony has fled, his forces are fled, Cæsar draws near. To Cleopatra the great Antony sends greeting and farewell. Greeting to Cleopatra who betrayed him, and farewell."

"It is a lie!" she screamed; "I betrayed him not! Thou, Olympus, go swiftly to Antony and answer thus: 'To Antony, Cleopatra, who hath not betrayed him, sends greeting and farewell. Cleopatra is no more.'"

And so I went, following out my purpose. In the Alabaster Hall I found Antony pacing to and fro, tossing his hands toward heaven, and with him Eros, for of all his servants Eros alone remained by this fallen man.

"Lord Antony," I said, "Egypt bids thee farewell. Egypt is dead by her own hand."

"Dead! dead!" he whispered, "and is Egypt dead? and is that form of glory now food for worms? Oh, what a woman was this! E'en now my heart goes out towards her. And shall she outdo me at the last, I who have been so great; shall I become so small that a woman can overtop my courage and pass where I fear to follow? Eros, thou hast loved me from a

boy--mindest thou how I found thee starving in the desert, and made thee rich, giving thee place and wealth? Come, now pay me back. Draw that sword thou wearest and make an end of the woes of Antony."

"Oh, Sire," cried the Greek, "I cannot! How can I take away the life of godlike Antony?"

"Answer me not, Eros; but in the last extreme of fate this I charge thee. Do thou my bidding, or begone and leave me quite alone! No more will I see thy face, thou unfaithful servant!"

Then Eros drew his sword and Antony knelt before him and bared his breast, turning his eyes to heaven. But Eros, crying "I cannot! oh, I cannot!" plunged the sword to his own heart, and fell dead.

Antony rose and gazed upon him. "Why, Eros, that was nobly done," he said. "Thou art greater than I, yet I have learned thy lesson!" and he knelt down and kissed him.

Then, rising of a sudden, he drew the sword from the heart of Eros, plunged it into his bowels, and fell, groaning, on the couch.

"O thou, Olympus," he cried, "this pain is more than I can bear! Make an end of me, Olympus!"

But pity stirred me, and I could not do this thing.

Therefore I drew the sword from his vitals, staunched the flow of blood, and, calling to those who came crowding in to see Antony die, I bade them summon Atoua from my house at the palace gates. Presently she came, bringing with her simples and life-giving draughts. These I gave to Antony, and bade Atoua go with such speed as her old limbs might to Cleopatra, in the tomb, and tell her of the state of Antony.

So she went, and after a while returned, saying that the Queen yet lived and summoned Antony to die in her arms. And with her came Diomedes. When Antony heard, his ebbing strength came back, for he was fain to look upon Cleopatra's face again. So I called to the slaves--who peeped and peered through curtains and from behind pillars to see this great man die--and together, with much toil, we bore him thence till we came to the foot of the Mausoleum.

But Cleopatra, being afraid of treachery, would no more throw wide the door; so she let down a rope from the window and we made it fast beneath the arms of Antony. Then did Cleopatra, who the while wept most bitterly, together with Charmion and Iras the Greek, pull on the rope with all their strength, while we lifted from below till the dying Antony swung in the air, groaning heavily, and the blood dropped from his gaping wound. Twice he nearly fell to earth: but Cleopatra, striving with the strength of love and of despair, held him till at length she drew him through the windowplace, while all who saw the dreadful sight wept bitterly, and beat their breasts--all save myself and Charmion.

When he was in, once more the rope was let down, and, with some aid from

Charmion, I climbed into the tomb, drawing up the rope after me. There I found Antony, laid upon the golden bed of Cleopatra; and she, her breast bare, her face stained with tears, and her hair streaming wildly about him, knelt at his side and kissed him, wiping the blood from his wounds with her robes and hair. And let all my shame be written: as I stood and watched her the old love awoke once more within me, and mad jealousy raged in my heart because--though I could destroy these twain--I could not destroy their love.

"O Antony! my Sweet, my Husband, and my God!" she moaned. "Cruel Antony, hast thou the heart to die and leave me to my lonely shame? I will follow thee swiftly to the grave. Antony, awake! awake!"

He lifted up his head and called for wine, which I gave him, mixing therein a draught that might allay his pain, for it was great. And when he had drunk he bade Cleopatra lie down on the bed beside him, and put her arms about him; and this she did. Then was Antony once more a man; for, forgetting his own misery and pain, he counselled her as to her own safety: but to this talk she would not listen.

"The hour is short," she said; "let us speak of this great love of ours that hath been so long and may yet endure beyond the coasts of Death. Mindest thou that night when first thou didst put thine arms about me and call me 'Love'? Oh! happy, happy night! Having known that night it is well to have lived--even to this bitter end!"

"Ay, Egypt, I mind it well and dwell upon its memory, though from that

hour fortune has fled from me--lost in my depth of love for thee, thou Beautiful. I mind it!" he gasped; "then didst thou drink the pearl in wanton play, and then did that astrologer of thine call out his hour--'The hour of the coming of the curse of Menkau-ra.' Through all the after-days those words have haunted me, and now at the last they ring in my ears."

"He is long dead, my love," she whispered.

"If he be dead, then I am near him. What meant he?"

"He is dead, the accursed man!--no more of him! Oh! turn and kiss me, for thy face grows white. The end is near!"

He kissed her on the lips, and for a little while so they stayed, to the moment of death, babbling their passion in each other's ears, like lovers newly wed. Even to my jealous heart, it was a strange and awful thing to see.

Presently, I saw the Change of Death gather on his face. His head fell back.

"Farewell, Egypt; farewell!--I die!"

Cleopatra lifted herself upon her hands, gazed wildly on his ashen face,

and then, with a great cry, she sank back swooning.

But Antony yet lived, though the power of speech had left him. Then I drew near and, kneeling, made pretence to minister to him. And as I ministered I whispered in his ear:

"Antony," I whispered, "Cleopatra was my love before she passed from me to thee. I am Harmachis, that astrologer who stood behind thy couch at Tarsus; and I have been the chief minister of thy ruin.

"Die, Antony!--the curse of Menkau-ra hath fallen!"

He raised himself, and stared upon my face. He could not speak, but, gibbering, he pointed at me. Then with a groan his spirit fled.

Thus did I accomplish my revenge upon Roman Antony, the World-loser.

Thereafter, we recovered Cleopatra from her swoon, for not yet was I minded that she should die. And taking the body of Antony, Cæsar permitting, I and Atoua caused it to be most skilfully embalmed after our Egyptian fashion, covering the face with a mask of gold fashioned like to the features of Antony. Also I wrote upon his breast his name and titles, and painted his name and the name of his father within his

inner coffin, and drew the form of the Holy Nout folding her wings about him.

Then with great pomp Cleopatra laid him in that sepulchre which had been made ready, and in a sarcophagus of alabaster. Now, this sarcophagus was fashioned so large that place was left in it for a second coffin, for Cleopatra would lie by Antony at the last.

These things then happened. And but a little while after I learned tidings from one Cornelius Dolabella, a noble Roman who waited upon Cæsar, and, moved by the beauty that swayed the souls of all who looked upon her, had pity for the woes of Cleopatra. He bade me warn her--for, as her physician, it was allowed me to pass in and out of the tomb where she dwelt--that in three days she would be sent away to Rome, together with her children, save Cæsarion, whom Octavian had already slain, that she might walk in the triumph of Cæsar. Accordingly I went in, and found her sitting, as now she always sat, plunged in a half stupor, and before her that blood-stained robe with which she had staunched the wounds of Antony. For on this she would continually feast her eyes.

"See how faint they grow, Olympus," she said, lifting her sad face and pointing to the rusty stains, "and he so lately dead! Why, Gratitude could not fade more fast. What is now thy news? Evil tidings is writ large in those dark eyes of thine, which ever bring back to me something that still slips my mind."

"The news is ill, O Queen," I answered. "I have this from the lips of

Dolabella, who has it straight from Cæsar's secretary. On the third day from now Cæsar will send thee and the Princes Ptolemy and Alexander and the Princess Cleopatra to Rome, there to feast the eyes of the Roman mob, and be led in triumph to that Capitol where thou didst swear to set thy throne!"

"Never, never!" she cried, springing to her feet. "Never will I walk in chains in Cæsar's triumph! What must I do? Charmion, tell me what I can do!"

And Charmion, rising, stood before her, looking at her through the long lashes of her downcast eyes.

"Lady, thou canst die," she said quietly.

"Ay, of a truth I had forgotten; I can die. Olympus, hast thou the drug?"

"Nay; but if the Queen wills it, by to-morrow morn it shall be brewed--a drug so swift and strong that not the Gods themselves can hold him who drinks it back from sleep."

"Let it be made ready, thou Master of Death!"

I bowed, and withdrew myself; and all that night I and old Atoua laboured at the distilling of the deadly draught. At length it was done, and Atoua poured it into a crystal phial, and held it to the light of

the fire; for it was white as the purest water.

"La! la!" she sang, in her shrill voice; "a drink for a Queen! When fifty drops of that water of my brewing have passed those red lips of hers, thou wilt indeed be avenged of Cleopatra, O Harmachis! Ah, that I could be there to see thy Ruin ruined! La! la! it would be sweet to see!"

"Vengeance is an arrow that oft-times falls upon the archer's head," I answered, bethinking me of Charmion's saying.