THE LAUGHING QUEEN

E. BARRINGTON



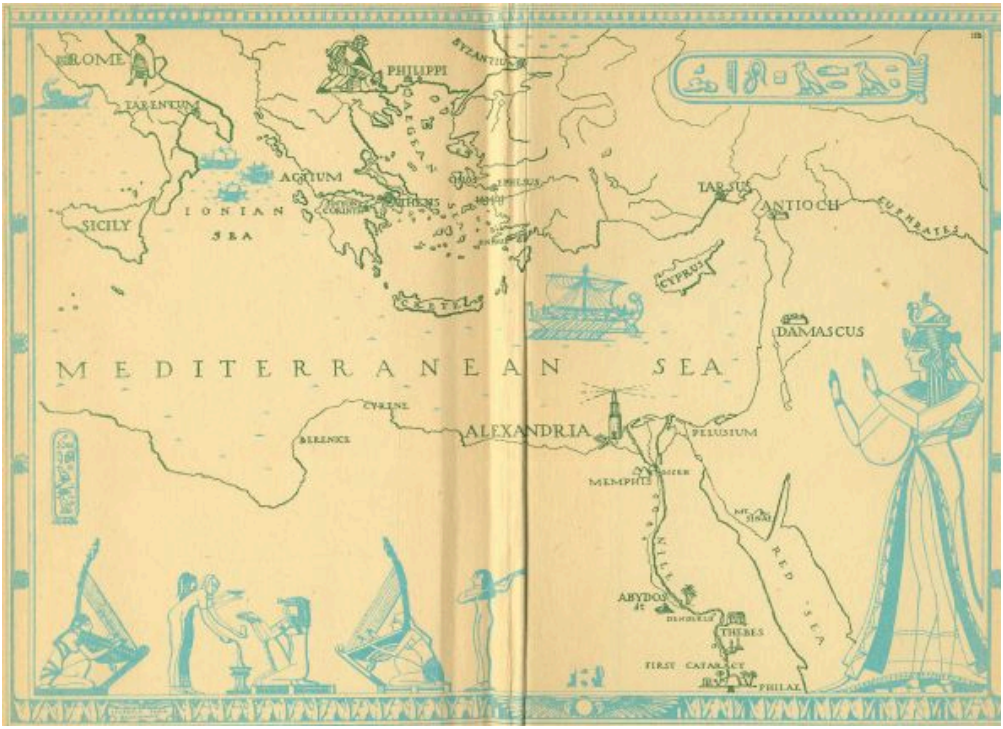
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THE LAUGHING QUEEN

BY E. BARRINGTON

Author of *The Divine Lady*, Etc.



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In writing this romance of Cleopatra I have been indebted to many historians, ancient and modern, and among moderns most to Mr. Weigall's delightful "Life of the Queen." No one can ever write of her now without gratitude to him and pleasure in his brilliant study. It takes much courage to differ with him, but I cannot agree with his estimate of her character in some important respects and of her relations with the two great Romans who were her lovers. This romance will show the manner in which I differ.

There are few stories more ironical than hers, few in which History more definitely throws aside her almost invariable character of moralist and indulges in pure cynicism. Who but History would have ventured to make the existence of the Roman Empire the result of a girl's likes and dislikes? Or have given Nero as grandson to the chaste and unadventurous Octavia, who so amply accounts for and excuses Antony's passion for Cleopatra? And these are only two of many examples. It is a story where History enforces no judgment. She notes and smiles—but not with mirth.

E. Barrington.

Canada.

THE LAUGHING QUEEN

"AND if the most glorious city in the world is mine, I am going to be proud of it!" cried the little Queen. "What do I care what Cæsar thinks? What have the Romans to show like Alexandria? Their city of dark, narrow, up-and-down streets, with fever and poverty prowling about it like Roman wolves—I despise it! Look at my Alexandria sitting on the sea, stately as a white swan! It is good Cæsar should see it and know that Rome cannot rule the world while I hold the keys of the Orient!"

The young Cleopatra stood in the window of a marble chamber in the palace of Pelusium, and for a moment forgot that she was in hiding and an exile from her capital. Her small figure dilated with joy and pride.

"And what do I care for Cæsar himself?" she repeated. "Let him stick in Alexandria until he gets tired of it and some one sticks a knife into him as they did into Pompey, the other Roman; and serve him right! But he shall never make a slave of me; no matter what he may do with my owl of a sister and fool of a brother, now he has them under his thumb!"

Beside her knelt a beautiful girl of her own age, twenty, and a middle-aged man, the dark intelligence of his face fixed on the young beauty who flung her defiance in the teeth of the haughty Mistress of the World, the omnipotent Roman Republic!

"Your Divine Majesty should consider," he said anxiously, "nor speak in haste. When our enemies quarrel we may profit. A few weeks since, who could tell whether Pompey or Julius Cæsar would be Dictator of Rome? Pompey was appointed your guardian and that of your brother, the little King, by the Roman Republic; and it was Pompey we had to consider. Today Pompey lies murdered in Alexandria, and Julius Cæsar, established in the Palace there, pretends to mourn him. If his ear could be gained, might not your Divine Royalty rule again as Queen of Egypt? Might not the Star of Egypt blaze as an equal beside that of the Roman Republic, and not as its satellite?"

She laughed aloud—the sweetest laugh in the world, low and merry as a bird's song at dawn.

"Much I can do—a fugitive here at Pelusium! If my father, the King of Egypt, left a fool of a will, as he did, marrying me, the heiress of Egypt, a girl of eighteen, to my brother, a little puling idiot of nine, and bidding us rule together, can I be answerable for all the absurdities that happen? Of *course* the brat was in the hands of his tutor and eunuchs, and a precious nest of villains they are! and of *course* they want to murder me and make room for

the child and my milk-faced sister Arsinoë—the most detestable little spy that ever sneaked about pretending to worship the Gods and really making eyes at all the officers of the Guards! And as I have no wish to become a mummy sooner than I need—what can be duller than a stuffed mummy's existence!—I fled for my life, and you were the first to advise me to do it. Charmion here, also!"

Cleopatra touched with a delicately sandalled foot the beautiful girl kneeling at her side. Charmion looked up laughing. It was very clear that in spite of royal forms the two were close friends.

"I told your Sacredness to bolt for it because if one runs away one can always run back. Whereas if one is a mummy!—but surely what the wise Apollodoros questions is whether this is the lucky moment for reappearing in Alexandria."

"That depends on many things I don't know!" said the young Queen, flinging herself into an ivory chair. "Tell me what you can, and then I and Charmion and the highly gifted Apollodoros can hold a council of State. There's no one else to hold it with us. Rise, Apollodoros, stand and be eloquent. Immortal Amen, how hot it is!"

Apollodoros, a strongly built, middle-aged Sicilian, rose and stood before the girl who, representing the Majesty of Egypt, was herself a human divinity as successor of the Divine Pharaohs. She was, if you please, the Egyptian Venus incarnate, she was also the Goddess Isis veiled in flesh, and if her faithful subjects believed this, as they honestly did, they had perhaps more excuse for the belief than in some former cases. For the girl bolt upright in the ivory chair, with large expectant eyes fixed on Apollodoros, was one who, wearing the girdle of Venus as she undoubtedly did, must anywhere have caught the hearts of men and aroused the ardent jealousy of women.

Greek of the Greeks, her quick blood spoke in every delicate swift gesture, in light lures and laughters, and the exquisite grace of her small body. The little hands and feet were a child's; the swell of her breasts, adolescent; the charms of the child still mingled with the budding beauty of girlhood like the meeting of dawn and morning. She had the Greek ardor and courage of her royal line and wore it with defiant grace and humor, quick flashes of temper and lovely relentings; teasing, sparkling, swift to love or hate, very woman of very woman. As to her face, the first impression was that of highest Greek breeding and distinction—prominent nose with delicate nostrils; clear-cut curling lips, sweet for kisses; long golden-amber eyes, somewhat narrow but beautifully lashed; and dark hair tipped on each ripple with bronze, like a wave catching sunlight. But when all is said, it is little without the play of light and shade in lovely eyes and lips, like sunshine on a

landscape. That was her girdle of Venus; that was where other women must stand by, eclipsed, while she shot her bright harmless arrows here and there, transfixing every heart she aimed at.

That was also why her secretary Apollodoros saw hope for the brilliant little Queen, fugitive and exile as she was, in the advent of the Roman Julius Cæsar to Alexandria, in spite of the existence of her foolish child-brother, King Ptolemy, with his base, plotting eunuch, Potheinos, and baser tutor, Theodotos.

He spoke in the measured fashion considered respectful in the presence of divine royalty, and Charmion listened breathless, lips apart. She would have died for her friend and mistress any day, and to see her again Queen of Egypt, the living Isis seated on the throne of Rameses the Great, she would have pawned her soul to all the hells. But Apollodoros was speaking!

"The royal Greek dynasty of your Sacredness has the misfortune to be foreign in Egypt. A Greek cannot have the backing that a Queen of the ancient Egyptian stock could command, and outside Alexandria—up the Nile —"

Cleopatra laughed with glee.

"Outside Alexandria! And who cares for the barbarians up the Nile, the moles of the tombs and sands! No, no, Apollodoros, Alexandria is Egypt and the Key of the gateway of the Orient, and what I decree in Alexandria will go as far as the Libyan and Arabian deserts and much beyond."

Here she suddenly recollected herself and the smile died in a sigh.

"But it is Potheinos, the eunuch, who rules Alexandria now, and I—I may soon be dancing on the stage in Rome to earn my bread. Well—I shall do it pretty well, and that's my consolation!"

"The immortal Gods forbid! Graciously attend to me! Potheinos and the child, your brother, not to mention his misbegotten tutor, have not only had the folly to murder your guardian Pompey when he fled here for refuge, thus drawing down the Roman vengeance, but they have walked into Cæsar's snare, and he has got them with him in the Royal Palace and what conditions he offers they must take. He wants the Roman Republic to set its eagle's claws in the flesh of Egypt. He wants the vast wealth of its Kings. He wants —guess, my Queen, and then I shall know if the Greek wit is as bright in your brain as in your eyes!"

She looked at him with her brilliant smile with a hint of melancholy behind it.

"India—diamonds, gold, myrrh and spices, wealth unutterable—and he wants to bring them back to Rome in a triumph that will smatter the dull old

Republic into flinders and make him King of Rome. Right, most wise Apollodoros?"

"Right, omniscient Isis!" Apollodoros could venture a jest with the young lady. She knew his true heart. "But there is more!" he added. "Much more. There is Cæsar!"

"Well, there is Cæsar!" she said indifferently. "A dull old Roman. Just such another as Pompey whom we never saw until he fled here from Cæsar. Guardian indeed! I never laid an eye on him. But may the Gods send that Cæsar poison Ptolemy and Arsinoë and Potheinos and Theodotos, and when the thieves fall out an honest woman may come by her own."

"An honest woman at Pelusium will never come by her own while kingdoms are changing hands at Alexandria, great Lady. Out of sight out of mind, and who will say a good word for you? The difficulty is that you can't get there. It will be a dagger between your ribs if you attempt it. Potheinos will see to that—the cursed, sexless brute! But Cæsar—Julius Cæsar—is no dull old Roman. He—"

"He is fifty-four. Serapis be good to us! Why a man of fifty-four should be allowed to go on living is a mystery to me. But I own he *was* a great man."

Apollodoros dropped on his knee and lifted supplicating hands.

"My Queen, you know nothing of the man Cæsar. You know only of the fighter, the politician. Now listen, listen, for worlds may hang on what I say. *This* is Cæsar. He is mad for women—always has been—and they are as mad for him. He is all brilliance and fire. If a man could dare imagine yourself by the will of the Gods changed into manhood, such is he. He has your very air of high breeding that makes us all earthenware by porcelain. There is no sport in which he does not excel. He can ride a galloping horse, his hands behind his back. He is God-descended, as are you. His race sprang from the Roman Venus. He is adventure itself, gay, full of splendor and extravagance. He gave a single pearl, costing sixty thousand pounds, to a woman for her embrace; and she took the embrace and gave him back the pearl, wild with love of him; and he was fifty then. And he left her! No woman can hold him, and that is why they adore him."

"O that we could see him," breathed the lovely Charmion, with a heavenly sigh as she knelt.

"Fifty-four," repeated the remorseless little Queen—but with faltering conviction. Apollodoros gauged his audience and hurried on.

"He is the terror of lovers and husbands. When he returned from Gaul to Rome his marching legions chanted to the furious Romans:

" 'Citizens, look after your wives. We are bringing the adulterer with us.' "

A pause. He added skilfully.

"He is a poet, an artist, a great romantic. Of course he isn't a *good* man. Far from it."

Another pause. The blue Mediterranean lapsed rhythmically in a dying swell against the marble of the Palace seawall; a butterfly breeze fluttered the bronze tendrils of the Queen's hair as she stared at the small hands locked in her lap, splendid with great thumb rings of royal emerald.

"But the Roman has no heart?" ventured the dark-eyed Charmion. "Why should a woman give all and get nothing?"

"She gets the honor of a conquest the like of which is not in the known world. And the Gods know if that is not dear to a woman."

"Scarcely an honor if she shares it with a regiment like herself!" retorted Charmion.

"Girl, you know nothing. You are green in such matters and trip at the alphabet. Wiser than yourself know that such a man has a heart, if the right woman come his way. He is dissolute because he seeks her in every fair face. Shall we blame him? Jupiter-Amen forbid! He is right, a thousand times right to conserve his heart for the One, the Alone. And if such a woman breathes—O happy, most happy she!"

Silence and the breath of the breeze; after a while Cleopatra sighed as softly:

"I wish I were in Alexandria!"

Apollodoros hid a smile with skill.

"That is unhappily impossible. It would be death. It was to escape death that your Sacredness fled to Syria and down the coast to Pelusium."

Another pause. The Queen continued slowly:

"After all—poor man—how can he settle the affairs of Egypt without my presence? The child Ptolemy is only king because he is my husband, and Arsinoë is a pasty-faced nonentity! Nothing is anything without me!"

"Nothing," assented Apollodoros. "But if your Majesty joins the conference as a corpse—"

"A corpse! I shall never die. I feel eternal life in my veins—and what about Isis and Venus-Hathor? Apollodoros—"

Another long pause. She sat meditating and now the gravity behind the gaiety was strong in her enchanting face. It gave one to suspect the gaiety a mask; the gravity, the woman. Yet the man who, thinking this, built on it

would be very gravely mistaken, and might find himself landed in the Gods know what ditch while the hunt swept on without him! For the girl was all things to all men, of the swiftest pliability, the perfect comedian; yet with this honesty—that she sincerely felt all she acted and could imagine no other mood at the moment. Thus she wept and smiled with equal perfection, trembled to the mystery in the temple of her divine double, Isis, and laughed until bright tears ran down her cheeks at the last wickedness. . . . "The Divagations of Decadent Deities" which the scandalous young Alexandrians were singing at their rose-garlanded symposia in company with the lightest ladies of the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Be sure she knew it all to the last line, and could nose out a jest like a pointer.

"Apollodoros," she said slowly, with a frown on bright brows, "if I say I wish I were in Alexandria, you shall not mistake me. I may want to chain Cæsar or any other man to my girdle—for reasons—and if I do it I shall do it well. But never, never will it be for the reasons that leap to men's minds when they look at a girl like me. I am more brain than body. I am seeing through them all the time and longing, *praying* to be deceived, to be made a fool of and overwhelmed in what they call love; and not a thrill of it has ever reached me, nor ever will!"

She paused on a sigh.

"Wait, omniscient Isis," said he with a male smile, "let Cæsar teach you!"

"Cæsar! The old man! He will teach me to act magnificently well—if it comes off!—to deceive him to the top of his bent. That is why women with brains like mine appear far more passionate lovers than the coarse, sensuous sort—like Rhodopis! It is because we always try to persuade ourselves, as well as the man, that we do care in that way. We strain to feel it as if for Paradise. We act our part sublimely, but we are always on the outside of the queer world where passion really matters—and though we do love them in our own way they never know how. A dog's life! All that side of love we have to put up with for the sake of what we really want and never get—a love that doesn't exist this side of the stars! No—I am cold! cold! I shiver in my own air sometimes. Charmion, I am virgin, and you are not a maid. Do I speak as a fool?"

Charmion, stooping, kissed the bare instep of the little sandalled foot.

"You speak true, my Queen, though how you know I cannot tell. And I fear men, for you will never forget yourself for one—no, not for a moment. Therefore they will bring you pain and little joy."

"And you, Apollodoros?"

He slightly shrugged his shoulders. "Life is life and fate is fate and a Queen is not as other women. Again I say, let Cæsar teach you! He is a tutor

skilled from long practice."

She was silent, a smile playing about the edges of her lips, thinking thoughts intangible as moonbeams on the depths of the sea. Neither of the two who loved her disturbed her thoughts.

After a while she lifted her head, braided smoothly with bright-touched bronze in the manner of a Greek bust of the Clytie.

"Apollodoros, could you lift me?"

She rose, and, stretching her arms above her head, stood on tiptoe as if to feel her own lightness. He stared in amazement; Charmion also.

"Yes, but could you?" she asked with impatience.

He measured her dainty smallness from braids to lovely feet in little gilded sandals. Her robe of almost transparent silk gave the very glow of the warm body beneath it, the curve of limbs light as a dryad's swaying on her tree-bough in moonlight.

"Have you ever lifted a woman?" she asked, smiling through narrowed lashes. "No, not just to clasp her, but right off her feet, and walked off with her?"

"Majesty, yes! I am a strong man!" he answered, with discreetly lowered eyes, not knowing what she would be at.

"Then give Charmion a hoist first and let me see. She is a good lump of a girl. Honey and ortolans and capons stewed in butter—Charmion loves good things and shows it, the lazy beauty! Up with you, Charmion, and into his arms!"

In great astonishment the languid-limbed young woman rose and stood dubious. Apollodoros had no masculine interest for her any more than for her mistress, and she objected to ruffling her very light tunic of rose byssus silk. But when the Queen commands! Cleopatra rested a fair chin on her hand and watched the process.

He got his arms about the girl's legs below the knees and lifted her well; but to carry a well-fed young woman is less easy and romantic than it may read in print, and as he walked across the marble floor she slipped on his shoulder and he staggered, recovering himself quickly, however, and bidding her put her arms about his neck for convenience.

This Cleopatra disallowed.

"No, carry her as if she were a log. She isn't much better—the heavy thing! She mustn't use her arms."

He did it; carried her to the window and back to the room's end—a good distance—but returned panting a little.

"Now me!" said the Queen. "And mind you—no respect! Forget the daughter of the Gods and the divine Isis and the uræus crown and all that stuff, and just toss me over your shoulder like a sack of corn. If you can, that is!"

He took a minute's breather and advanced to the step where she stood poised as if for flight, her arms out like a bird's wings.

"Arms down, your Majesty, please."

In a second he had her over his shoulder—light as a foam bell on the waves, and, starting at a steady trot, did twice to the wall and back—a mere slip of a girl and no goddess, all said and done!

"Why, I could sit on your shoulder!" she cried, and as he knelt to disembark her, did so, he rising to his feet easily. She slipped off then, however, and returned to her chair and swept him with long eyelashes.

"Good man! That settles it!" said the Queen of Egypt. "Sit down at my feet, Charmion—your tunic is all right and you only showed your thigh twice. Now listen, Apollodoros, for I shall speak to some purpose."

Charmion drew a cushion to the little Queen's feet, and looked up earnestly. Apollodoros stood in his best attitude of submission. She addressed them with a bland and brazen air of superiority, her little nose in the air.

"My children, while you have been playing I have been thinking! All is now settled. I shall return to Alexandria tonight!"

They stared at her perplexed. Whatever Apollodoros might have wished, the responsibility was a heavy one enough for him.

"And how, most royal Lady?"

She beckoned him closer, and as he knelt put one arm about his neck and the other round Charmion to pull their heads close, and so whispered in the midst. Drawing back, both stared at her, pale and alarmed.

She clapped her hands, laughing with all her starry youthfulness and singing in a voice passably tuneful for a Queen, but by no means so lovely as her spoken music:

"When the Gods will have their way,
  Stand from under!
Run to cover while you may,
  'Ware the thunder!"

"Come, Apollodoros, make your will; and, Charmion, order the spices and linen for my mummying!"

And still they stared at her with dropped jaws.

The Queen of Egypt, or rather, the laughing Queen, for that was what her faithful Alexandrians much preferred to call her! They said she came at you like a ship on a wind, all grace and swaying swiftness and gaiety, and that, passing, she left behind her, in the minds of all who saw, a dancing wake of tossing, sparkling foam. She was wine to them. The whole city glittered at her, like its blue waters; and not a man there but tasted her spirit and the headlong pleasures she delighted in.

But unfortunately the prank she was up to now was so serious that Alexandria would have halted business (of which they had plenty) and pleasure too (of which they had more) to watch and wonder breathless.

CHAPTER II

In the royal apartments of the palace on the Lochias promontory in Alexandria sat Julius Cæsar with a problem on his hands that not even his brain of ice and fire could solve at the moment.

Down the Mediterranean he had sped on the creaking oars of his great galleys in hot pursuit of his rival Pompey, the man who alone disputed with him the future rulership of the known world; and when he reached Alexandria, hoping to slay his enemy in fair fight, the grinning servile tutor of the boy-king Ptolemy had presented him with the head and signet ring of Pompey, foully done to death by wretches unworthy to lick his feet.

It was then that the supple Greek had the most terrible surprise of his base life. What could he expect but the gratitude of Cæsar, rewards, promotion, power, and a profitable sale of himself and Egypt to the Roman power?

But, incredibly to Theodotos, seeing the pitiable head of his noblest enemy, Cæsar wept. Iron tears rolled down the iron cheek of the great soldier. Yes, an enemy, but Pompey had been also a Roman, a most splendid Roman, a lion done to death by jackals. Sickening regret that the cur before him could never understand overwhelmed him, and for a moment Cæsar looked Theodotos in the eyes, and from his sternly delicate lips came one brief sentence:

"Slave and coward! While I can yet command myself—Go!" And Theodotos fled from his presence and from Egypt, to meet an awful doom in Syria.

Cæsar knew that in Pompey an obstacle had been removed from his path. What man can sentimentalise in politics? But still that moment had been a flower in a crevice of the rock, beautiful to himself and others. Rock, he told himself, he must be in the astonishing circumstance which had brought him to Egypt and put him in power there. It seemed to him that blind chance had thrust upon him the greatest opportunity of his wonderful life. But what was he to do with the little king and with his eunuch-minister Potheinos? And what with the Princess Arsinoë? And what had become of the Queen—Cleopatra they called her? Of course what he wished was to make himself uncrowned King of Egypt. Since he meant to shatter the Roman Republic and give Rome an Emperor in himself, it was easy to see how the wealth, importance, and magnificence of Egypt, the Gateway of the Orient, would smooth his way to the Roman throne. A gift of the Gods!

But, meanwhile, the Alexandrians—and Alexandria represented Egypt—were in an ugly temper enough. They did not want a Roman Dictator. They

would not be Roman slaves. They wanted their own long-established Greek dynasty and kept muttering and growling about their Queen—this Cleopatra! And where in the name of the Gods was the woman? She seemed to have disappeared altogether. It annoyed Cæsar more than a little. All round the palace of the Lochias the mob was snarling. They had even attempted to poison the drinking water of his soldiers. He wanted to get back to Rome, but certainly Egypt came first. Egypt might be the very yea and nay of his plans in the near future. With what solidity could he get in touch?

His first move was to send to the young King Ptolemy, his sister, Arsinoë, and the eunuch, Potheinos, commanding them to return and take up their residence in the palace with him; and they dared not refuse, though they knew well that their *rôle* was to be that of hostages. It had been a strange scene when they arrived.

First, leading the boy-king by the hand, walked the Princess Arsinoë, a pale girl of sixteen, with fine delicate features, not unhandsome, marred by an air of peevish assertion that took its stand on her royalty and flung it in the face of all she addressed. Ptolemy was pretty and pettish, a spoiled boy, weak and foolish. Behind them slouched Potheinos, with the slant wary eyes of a fox set in a fat face, a big loose man with hanging jowl and gross body, the flesh swaying under his purple robe clasped with jewels. Cæsar's keen glance noted the royal color on the slave-minister, but he said nothing. That could wait.

When salutations were made, and Cæsar had led the Princess to her Greek chair, ivory-inlaid, resting on gold claws, he left Potheinos standing, noting very well the dull spark of fury in the eunuch's eye; but he addressed him, for the King was too young for anything but the form of consultation:

"You are aware that by the will of the dead King of Egypt the Roman Republic is left guardian to his children and that it is also the executor of his will?"

"Great Cæsar, I am aware."

"Then may I ask why the young King Ptolemy has quarrelled with his sister, the Queen Cleopatra, whose consort he is, in accordance with Egyptian custom, and why, nothing said to the Republic, he has actually raised an army against her and compelled her to take to flight? You, as his adviser, should know that the matter in dispute should have been referred to the Roman Republic for judgment."

The boy leaped to his feel, pale-faced, and furious, the band of gold about his head fronted with the uræus snake which seemed to dart at the intruder.

"For judgment? I am King of Egypt and Egypt is no province of the Roman Empire. Why should we refer a family dispute to Rome?"

Cæsar turned a quelling glance on him, cold and stern as death.

"Sit down, young sir. This is no matter for children. Queen Cleopatra is also in fault. She should have put herself in the hands of the Republic that justice might be done between you. Where is she?"

It was beginning to be clear to him that in this cleavage in the Egyptian royal family might be the chance of Rome. The honest broker often comes by the spoils.

"Where is she?" echoed the boy impudently. "Do I know? Do I care? She is a spitfire, a torment, a beastly scratch-cat, and the farther off she is the better. I wish to all the Gods some one would murder her as they did Pompey, and then if I *must* marry a sister let it be Arsinoë. But I hate sisters. I want one of the Palace ladies."

Arsinoë shot a shaft of pale hatred at him from pale lashes. That there was no love lost in the Royal Family of Egypt was very evident. Potheinos had said nothing. Cæsar looked haughtily at him.

"Do you know where the Queen is hidden?"

"If I knew—" began Potheinos, and the look in his eye finished the sentence with a bloody period. He changed his tone and went on. "All I know is she has raised an army and intends to fight His Majesty for the kingdom,—but of course that is all rubbish. If we can get her—"

"What was the quarrel about?" But even as he asked the question Cæsar knew the answer from the hate in the eunuch's face. The Queen had affronted his pride.

"She wanted to rule her brother-king." ("You mean yourself!" thought Cæsar.) "She wanted to turn the kingdom upside down, and would hear no word of advice, so—"

"Good. I understand!" said Cæsar briefly. "Princess, there must be some sort of sympathy between you and your sister. Has she confided nothing to you?"

"To *me*?" said Arsinoë—and the question was fully answered. Cæsar surveyed the party with distaste. He supposed the other would be like her sister, and a little of that family would go a long way. Still—business was business. He turned his searching look full on Potheinos.

"I must ask you to understand that no business can be transacted without the Queen. Her absence holds everything up. What I recommend—or rather what the Republic recommends is this. The King must disband his army. The Queen must be invited to return. See to it!"

"The King refuses!" broke in the boy in a weak quaver of defiance. "I won't disband my army—why should I? I want to catch her. If you *knew* the

beast she is— If you knew!"

Cæsar, taking no heed, fixed cold eyes on Potheinos.

"See that it is done!" he said. The eunuch-minister raised protesting hands.

"Noble Cæsar, your greatness asks too much. That is impossible. And we know nothing of where Cleopatra is hidden. I wish to all the Gods we did! But—we can bring the King's army to Alexandria, and we will!"

Impossible to misunderstand the covert threat, equally impossible to resent it. Cæsar had too few soldiers behind him to take as high a stand as befitted the Roman Dictator, and though his own ships were moored under the walls of the Palace the Egyptian galleys were not to be despised.

But Potheinos quickly altered his tone. Cæsar's soldiers were toughened in war all over the known world. His own were a mongrel horde, and in the background lay Rome, armed, watchful, ill to defy. No, it would be well to temporise until he could get that dagger between Cleopatra's ribs which he had so often thirsted to use on the impudent minx; and then all would be plain sailing. Rome *must* support the little King, and he himself was master of the young Ptolemy and the narrow-eyed Arsinoë. He lavished himself in compliments to Cæsar. He gave hints of fabulous treasure deposited in places where a friendly hand could reach it. Nothing like gold for building a causeway to the steps of a throne. And Cæsar smiled and listened, and loathed the ready knave in his soul, believing exactly as much as he wished, and that was nothing. It began to be unpleasantly apparent that all his dealings would have to be with this treacherous, fawning slave; and what could he do with an Egypt in such hands? It was like attempting to build a bridge with rotten wood. A step—and the gulf beneath.

A week went by, and, loaded with flattery and costly gifts which he did not refuse, he still saw his way no clearer. And, if he could do nothing with Egypt, he should be in Rome. Rome clamored for him from all her brazen throats. He must return. Egypt must take its chance. After all, one could always have Potheinos crucified later on if he gave trouble! And still the days slipped by.

He worked one night in the small marble room looking out over the great harbor and the mighty Pharos Lighthouse, the wonder of the world. His secretary sat at a table scribbling for dear life a despatch to Rome which Cæsar dictated as he paced up and down, passing and re-passing the window, lost in thought. The situation was most delicate in Rome, where Pompey's son Sextus was gathering a powerful party against him, and he felt Egypt slipping daily from his grasp. The eunuch fawned and lied; the young King, carefully tutored, was dully polite but evidently hated and feared him;

Arsinoë was silent as a statue with dropped eyelids. Through whom was he to govern Egypt? He could get into touch with nothing tangible. He knew very well that the day his galleys' oars dipped, Egypt would have slid from his grasp.

"Write that in ten days I return, reluctant, but seeing that nothing is to be done here; for the government is a child and a scoundrel. But write also to the Senate that if anything should happen to me on the way back my last word was this: Let them distrust Potheinos. Let them remember that, with Theodotos, he was the murderer of the noble Pompey. It is my advice in that case that some Roman to be trusted be sent to Alexandria, possibly Mark Antony—"

As the words left his lips the heavy curtain hanging across the door-opening was lifted aside and a man presented himself, the curtain falling across him, half hiding his figure.

Cæsar's hand went to his dagger. A man in his position at any moment expects the assassin and the end. The secretary sprang to his feet and to his master's side.

"Call the guard!"

The man let the curtain fall behind him and advanced, a long bundle, on his shoulder, burdening him heavily.

"Halt there!" said Cæsar, scarcely raising his voice. "What's your business? What are you doing here with your bedding, my good fellow? You must explain yourself further before you make another step."

The man halted, smiling, and began to shift the burden.

Cæsar! No danger or alarm could ruffle his tranquillity, and certainly he looked a most noble Roman as he stood there, in lamplight, surveying the man with careless curiosity edged with a smile. The man stooped and set the bundle carefully on the ground. It rolled over, and he knelt above it with his knife, answering:

"A gift for your greatness, noble Cæsar. A very great gift!" with a laugh in his voice like that of a plain man used to simple ways. It was disarming, and both the secretary and his master relaxed, and watched with some interest.

He cut the knotted rope, and stood back as the bundle fell apart, and disclosed—what?

A girl who sprang light as air to her feet, and put her hands to her hair to be sure it did her justice. What could Cæsar think but that the man had brought him some impudent beauty who wanted to make her way in the world by the road of an easy passion? Possibly a woman of birth, since it was

clear the guard must not see her—another chapter in the history of his light loves, an adventure after his own heart! He advanced upon her laughing, tossing a few gold pieces to the man, who did not pick them up as they spun on the marble. He had drawn aside and stood waiting.

"Pretty one, you deserve a kiss for your courage and shall have many," he said. "But permit me first to finish a letter that must not delay. The galley waits it now. Have you any commands for Rome?"

She came forward into the arc of light the lamp threw about it, and he beheld the sweetest slip of a girl his eyes had seen for many a long day. She was in a tumbled tunic of thin silk, and one sandal had slipped off and was gone, and a white foot was bare on the marble floor. Small she was and exquisitely shaped, with budding breasts and slender flanks and arms. Her face was flushed like a rose-petal, from bundling in the bedding. But her eyes danced with demure delight and she had the walk and spring of a goddess, and whoever thought her a common thing picked up in the street might read the lie in the very arch of her foot and the haughty little mouth and delicate distinctive carriage of her head. He halted as he would have turned to the writing table and stared, but never guessed. How could he? And the man stood behind her dumb.

She extended her hands. On one shone an emerald scarab worth a city's ransom, on the other a diamond that flashed rainbows in his eyes. Between her young breasts was the Buckle of Isis, an amulet in royal diamonds.

But her eyes outsparkled them. They brimmed with glee.

"It is perfectly absurd," she said in a voice choking with laughter, "but I am Cleopatra the Queen. I don't expect you to believe it. I scarcely believe it myself."

Breathless, he believed it before the words were out of her mouth. Fool that he had been not to anticipate her! The beautiful daring creature, slender and tense as a steel sword, all grace and nerve! Who else in the world could it have been?

Beautiful? But was she? His experienced eyes flashed over her. He had known many women exceedingly beautiful—the blondes of Germania, all gold and ivory, flushed with rose; women of Hispania, dark and sumptuous as damask roses, heavy and perfumed; the bright brunettes of Gallia; the blue-eyed beauties of Britannia, white as a whale's tooth and as cold—but, though more beautiful, they lacked something this girl had. Yes, every one of them! She was indeed a sword unsheathed, an emblem of honor, glittering, dangerous, true to herself. And what more?—all that a sword is in the hand of the man who adores it! For a moment even his experience could not tell how to take her or dissociate the Lady of the Two Lands from the bundle.

Ceremony or distrust? And suddenly he saw it was only a young girl after all, laughing, nervously enough, to seem unafraid, but ready in a twinkling to stiffen into terrified pride if he should despise her.

At that he was himself instantly, and in command of the situation, the greatest gentleman of Rome, and the statesman. The magnificence of his bow! He seemed to touch the ground with one knee, but did not, because the Republic comes first and must kneel to none in her representative.

Next he led her to a chair.

"It was a terrible transit for your Majesty!" he said gravely, "and words fail me to express my undying gratitude. Your presence has rescued me from a most serious dilemma. May I reward the gallant fellow who has borne a burden more precious than the world itself upon his shoulders?"

She assumed fatigue for a moment, since it was expected, but had never felt more full of zest and energy in her life. Instantly she caught his note and responded like a struck harp, for she began to taste security. He might have handed her over to Potheinos—who could tell? He had not. Then all was probably well, and she topped the occasion. She also assumed her best manners and they could be excellently good.

"Noble Cæsar, that is my secretary Apollodoros. He would die for me. What reward could you offer that he would take? None! I came because I knew very well that without me nothing could be done. Could it?"

She spoke the loveliest Latin. Her voice slipped along the vowels like cream. And he knew, for reports of queens travel, that she had many other languages at her tongue's tip, and could hail every man in his own until he sighed for home. The royal girl! That was the queen in her! She delighted him instantly, as a brave horse or dog delights a man. No more—as yet.

"Nothing could be done without the Queen," he answered. "But I see now much that can be done with her aid."

Turning towards his secretary he flung an order at him:

"Tear up that letter and tell the galley she sails tomorrow with another. I have no more need of you tonight. Does your Majesty need the noble Apollodoros? There is much for us to discuss."

"I need Apollodoros," she faltered, looking up at him through deep lashes and for a moment most terribly afraid of making a slip. "Later, perhaps . . ."

"Then, before Apollodoros, I will say this! You have risked much for your country, and you have won. If you had not come, there is no doubt that Egypt would have sunk into a Roman province. Now—"

His look said the rest.

"But how did you do it, how—*how?*" he added.

She rose and stood by the window, leaning lightly against it, her face pale in the flooding glory of moonlight, the galaxy of lights of the harbor behind her.

"I knew I must come. What hindered me was an invitation from Potheinos to do so, for I knew he would have me stabbed or poisoned before I reached you. But still I must come. That was clear, most noble Cæsar. How could you deal with the foolish children Arsinoë and Ptolemy and the black scoundrel Potheinos? But how could I do it? If Potheinos knew, my life—well, you know! So I told Apollodoros we must take ship from Pelusium, and a long way from shore we left the ship in an open boat, he and I alone. And when we got under the palace walls I made him roll me in the bedding and tie me with a rope. The Alexandrians always toss everything over their shoulders, you know. So we came, and he said he was carrying the bedding to one of your guard. And you can imagine we knew our way about the palace pretty well! So here I am!"

But while she spoke, and while he answered, her eyes were searching the man to see what like he was and whether she could use him, could break him, could in any way get through the shell and at him. She was virgin still, not only in body but in heart. Not in knowledge—far from it! A girl could not live in that vast plotting palace of the Lochias, humming with all the secrets and intrigues of an Oriental court—for Oriental it was in all its ways, despite its Greek sovereigns—and keep her innocence. She knew the ways of men and women like a book, yet held herself aloof because of a certain disgust at the men about her. As she had said herself, she was cold of heart; and warmer manifestations moved her to curiosity lightly tinged with distaste. Their amorous looks—the touch of hot hands—affronted the coolness in her that could not melt until some unknown sun found her ice. Besides, she owned a kind of royalty that knew it must have the best—and what best was there in Alexandria? Fops and dandies!—while Rome was bestriding the world and thundering her great names down the Mediterranean. Pompey, Julius Cæsar, Mark Antony—indeed, a sonorous roll, and more to add to it.

Now, looking at the greatest of them all, she summed him up and was analytic.

And first—in his company she felt herself charming. She had believed she could be, and it was easy enough with the man-stuff she saw daily. Any woman, almost, would serve their turn! But this, be it remembered, was a very great man—the greatest in the world at that moment, rumor said the greatest since Alexander the Great (who had given his name to her capital) had been laid to dream vaster dreams, no longer bounded by the brain, in his golden coffin in the Mausoleum at hand. She knew her daring had struck him

into admiration as a boy's might. But his eyes said more. They said: "But you little sweet white wonder! If a man had dared it had been much—but for you —marvel of marvels!" He did not find her a fool either, she could see that! He treated her as a girl most adorable, but also a great queen who must be consulted, considered, obeyed! Oh, he was charming, she said in her heart. What was raw youth compared with that incapturable self-possession? The all-accomplished! And at his age he could not care for the follies of love that she despised. He would have lived through all that stuff and look out at the other side. She could see him flashing at the head of his legions, riding gallantly to war, looser of the thunder of Rome. If she could win him to her side, why, then she could dare Potheinos, and extinguish Ptolemy and Arsinoë, and reign, a free Queen, in Egypt, as the mighty Pharaohs had done long, long ago. She loved his clean-cut distinction, the cool, pale pride of his face. She thought he meant to be good to her—how otherwise? A splendid soldier, a great nobleman, knows how to talk to women. No, not love, but attraction, friendship—a touch of the paternal,—befitted the gulf between their ages. She might permit herself a manner gently caressive—if—if Apollodoros were not there!

"Noble Cæsar," she said in her exquisite Latin, patrician as dropped diamonds in the gold of a perfect voice. He leaned eagerly towards her as she faltered.

"Noble Cæsar, I think that I can now do without Apollodoros." The dark, intelligent Apollodoros, inwardly smiling, bowed and retired gravely, taking the roll of bedding with him. Outside the door-curtain he chuckled softly to think of what Potheinos would say if he could guess the conference proceeding in that little sea-chamber, white as sea-foam veined with coral. A very pretty setting for a political discussion! The laughing Queen!—and he had left her laughing with Cæsar. It appeared very probable that Potheinos would soon be laughing too, but on the wrong side of his mouth. He could see Charmion's glee when she was told of the climax.

The laughing Queen! What a girl she was! There was none like her. None.

"LET me look out at the moonlight while we speak," said the young Queen. "Is not my Harbor of The Happy Return beautiful, most noble Cæsar, and the town? The great wide ways—have you seen the Street of Canopus by the Serapeum and the glorious Museum and Lecture Halls? Surely it is a city of palaces worthy of Alexander who named it. The Gods are honored here—the immortal Serapis,—Pan also in his temple where you may stand and see all my majesty and power spread below."

She was playing for time and to marshal her child's wits against his. He knew that well, and delighted to watch the panting and turning of his royal quarry. But he assented, as if admiration of the city were his only thought, praising the noble expanses, the majestic buildings and throb of life and commerce which made her Alexandria the mart of the world.

She sat, leaning her head against the marble wall, her light feet on a footstool of ivory, and he was as near as he dared, the corner of a singular tortoise-shell table, inlaid with gold, between them. She rested a white arm on it. Suddenly she straightened herself.

"We play and we should work, great Cæsar. Tell me with frankness what Potheinos has told you, and your own desires. I am frank as the sea-wind, and if you trust me you shall not regret it."

He was unscrupulous, even for his age, and ambition was a consuming fire in him—a sacred fire to which he sacrificed all. She appealed to that consummately. He knew her vast wealth, her queendom, all that she must bring to the Roman Empire of his dream. She held the gorgeous East in fee, her ships commanded the Eastern Mediterranean. There was the wretched little Ptolemy—yes, but it did not take the eyes of a Cæsar to see that this girl would rule. She was what he had hitherto sought in vain in Egypt—the tangible something, the foundation on which he could build. Was she to be captured through heart or brain? Already capture was the word in his mind as he looked at her, weighing, wondering!

"Royal Lady, I trust you. I know by the manner of your coming that you have courage bright as steel, a brain to match my own. Here was I not knowing where to find a human being with whom I could deal, and you have alighted, a goddess from a cloud. Why should I not be frank? Interest and pleasure both constrain me to it. Here then is the position. Mark and weigh, for the future of the world hangs on your will."

He leaned his own elbow on the table and concentrated his face on her.

"Young you are, a girl in her first youth, but in you I see the future mistress of the world, if you will be guided by wise counsel and not by the foolish clamor of the Alexandrians. You stand at the gate of the Orient. Your country is one of unexampled riches. Here in the Delta of the Nile I see such grain fields, such mighty production as Rome cries out for in her markets. What of the Valley of the Nile and the cities of the ancient Pharaohs?"

She took his tone instantly, her white brows knitted in thought:

"As to the Valley of the Nile—I have never voyaged there—I have been little outside Alexandria. But I know, for all that. The Egyptians are a peaceful people, and our laws run even if we were descendants of the godlike Pharaohs. On the upper reaches they raise three crops a year in the rich Nile mud. The taxes they pay in kind—the country is a huge granary. So it has been forever, since the days of the Gods on earth."

She paused and added eagerly.

"And the temples and palaces! Oh, it is a glorious land, that ancient Egypt! I must go there before long, for I—even I—am a reigning deity! Did you know that?" She laughed aloud and added quaintly: "I don't look like it at the present moment!"

She eyed, with disparagement, her tumbled tunic and the bare foot beside the sandalled one. He enjoyed her enormously, though that did not blunt the keenness with which he drank in her political value and information.

"I had heard it. Inform me more certainly."

"Well, I am Hathor—the Venus of Egypt. I have my temple and rites of worship. Often in Alexandria they salute me as Hathor-Venus and, if even I fall short of what I should look like, think if it had been Arsinoë! Also I am an incarnate part of the divine Isis."

He saw the tail of her eyes seek his to assure herself whether ridicule lurked in it. There was none. It was a commonplace of the age that divinity not only hedged a king but took up its residence in his august person, and a belief with such obvious advantages was by no means to be discouraged. Besides—could one be certain that it was not true? The Gods had walked with men and left tangible traces in gifted and beautiful offspring. There were moments when in Cæsar's own inmost soul he believed he felt inspirations from the deity within him, and it was surely the same with the Egyptian girl.

And there were really no personal drawbacks. To be divine bound no yoke of the morality of the modern God upon the shoulders of its living temple. Naturally one would excel the mere mortal in courage, beauty, brilliance and the splendor of one's destiny; but this was all that was expected. There was scarcely even doubt in his eyes, and, feeling herself encouraged, she went on triumphantly:

"I am Daughter of the Sun, and Sister of the Moon. I am a Heavenly Being. I am worshipped as an Immortal in the temples of the Nile. And I must own it is rather bewildering to think I arrived here in a bundle of bedding and that Potheinos very likely will finish me off tomorrow. If that comes off, I really don't advise the Goddesses to incarnate in that wretched little Arsinoë. She is a born old maid!"

Cæsar laughed aloud. The Egyptian Hathor-Venus was perfectly enchanting. When she made these wild remarks her upper lip lifted over the pearls of teeth, and her under lip drew in indescribably but deliciously.

But could she ever present the dignity of a Goddess-queen? Might she not always slip tumbling down into a girl's little absurd spites and laughters? He longed to probe and assure himself. That would not be so desirable.

"And you are not a born old maid? No—no, I never thought you were," he said with reassurance. "You don't look like that most despicable thing on earth—a withered virgin."

"You see, I—I must have a child. It is required of me," she said gravely. "But to go back, O Cæsar, I feel that if I had your support I might even triumph over Ptolemy, Arsinoë and Potheinos, and reign as sole Queen in Egypt! And the return I could make! You don't realise me yet. How can you when I was tumbled at your feet like a bushel of corn? But if you saw me in majesty, in the robe of Isis— Of course it's always a pity I am so small! I could make more of it if I had the figure of an obelisk!"

Even then he was not swept away, beautiful as was her face in moonlight, wooing as were her sweet eyes. An Empire in Rome, a subservient Egypt; there was where his thoughts fixed and grew. She was as yet incidental.

He heard in silence but with a look at her that encouraged confidence. Besides, it was most interesting to see how far her own wits would carry the girl. He was trying the edge of the sword he believed she might prove to be.

"Speak, goddess!" was all he said.

Her eyes glittered in moonlight as she turned them on him.

"Cæsar! On the day I left Pelusium, I had an omen. Standing looking out over the sea I saw a dove pursued by a hawk, and lo! a royal eagle killed the hawk and the dove sheltered in the palace windows. Was not that a great omen, and I coming to you?"

"A great omen, Isis. And it shall be fulfilled."

"Now, mightiest of the Romans, you shall hear my dream! You, Dictator in Rome; I, Queen of Egypt. I will choose a Roman husband, or rather you shall choose for me. Our armies, our fleets, shall strike together, and we will conquer India, and her kings shall walk chained with gold in our triumph;

and, since you have no son by your wife Calpurnia—you have no son that I could marry, have you?—my son shall inherit the power of Rome and Egypt and be a greater Alexander. Now, what do you say to that?"

It was chilling. His son indeed! But she showed nothing. He flung his hands across the table and caught both hers, forcing her to face him.

"I say—*O dea certe!*—goddess confessed! A great dream—a grand dream, with only a few differences that I should not count. I say—I, the descendant of the Roman Venus through Æneas her son—that I ask no better than to be true partner and servant in the counsels of the Egyptian Venus. Rome and Egypt together, twin stars in an unchanging heaven! No, I have no son; not one, at least, that counts. There are some who owe their being to me, yet I cannot put them forward. But I must have one whom I can raise on my shield in the sight of the world, crying to the legions: 'This child is born of Divinity. Salute him and set him on the throne of Alexander and more.'"

His enthusiasm, partly calculated (but that was beyond her perception), kindled her.

"Magnificent!" she said in a voice low and intense with feeling. "Oh, how I understand! But *my* son—mine! Shall they stand side by side in the day of the Gods?"

He ventured no further at the moment, but skilfully deflected her thoughts:

"The first thing is to seat you alone on the throne. What a ridiculous thing is this notion of the Egyptians to wed a beautiful girl to a miserable boy, and her brother!"

"It was always done!" Cleopatra said seriously. "It concentrated interests and kept the divine blood pure. But Ptolemy is absolutely impossible, the veriest little brat, squealing for the moon and venomous as an asp. What did you think of him, Cæsar?"

"Naturally I saw that myself. But we must go slowly and consider the prejudices of the ignorant. First, you must be reconciled with him—"

She stared and pulled her hands away with grieved eyes.

"Wait, you darling lovely wisdom, you will soon see! I, as representing the Roman Republic, must reconcile you both; and you must be civil to the eunuch, giving him hope that I have rebuked you into meekness. I will give some great gift of territory to conciliate the Alexandrians. What will please them best?"

"The island of Cyprus!" she answered promptly, and with keen interest. "We have always wanted that. It was our own."

"Be it so! Lulling them into security, we will seize the city and the harbor. And then—then—"

"What?" she cried with clasped hands.

"We will not hang the eunuch and his King, but put the rope where they can hang themselves; and then—Venus-Hathor shall be sole ruler in Egypt, and may she be gracious to her poor general and worshipper!"

"You mean it, noble Cæsar? You are not luring me to ruin?"

"Divine Isis, no. The Gods protect their own. But when I have done all this, what will you give me? What is the reward?"

She looked at him doubtfully—like a very young girl feeling her way in much hesitation. What would he ask? Something beyond her riches to pay? Some derogation of power which might leave her poor indeed?

"I wish Apollodoros were here," she faltered. "I should not be alone. Your eyes, your wisdom, draw me. I may pledge away something that may make Egypt the slave of Rome. You see things I cannot. I cannot—I cannot! Are you practising on me?"

He was indeed, yet with a half-sincerity. Every moment she won him more. Indeed she and her riches and power summed up and comprised all his earthly wishes. A passion of possession increased on him, for with her the world's orb lay in the hollow of his hand. Without her, doubt and failure very possible and terrible. Was he too old? Was the rod broken in his hand, or could he rekindle his own flame at her magical youth? Again he captured the hands.

"Venus-Hathor, you are as old as the ages and have all the wisdom of your sex, but you are also most divinely young. What need have you of Apollodoros? You have an instinct compared to which his knowledge is child's play. See, with me, O Beautiful, that our stars are one! See, with me, that together we conquer, apart we fail. I ask nothing but your friendship. Nothing!"

"I see, I see!" she panted. He noted the quick rise and fall of her bosom beneath the thin veil of silk. It throbbed like a bird.

"But my son and your son! Foolish talk for a foolish girl! Do the Gods count age and youth when they take counsel together as a God and Goddess do now?"

He paused and released her hands with dignity.

"You shall be free to choose. Queen, I have possessed many women; many have loved me; but in all this world I have never had a friend of your sex, because I have not met my mate—one who can think high thoughts, act

with courage and decision, free of the tattling, petty jealousies that disfigure women. Tonight I think I have met her. Can she grant me her friendship?"

She dropped her head on crossed arms, bewildered almost to stupor. She had never thought of this. She a chit of a girl, he the greatest of the Romans! His age, his terrible reputation with women! But at his age that surely must be dead ash? His Roman interests as opposed to her Egyptian ones, the magnificence and power of the man! How could such an unequal friendship be possible? Oh, for Apollodoros! She began to fear that he would sweep her off her feet and, unaided, she might pawn away all her future of royalty. But friendship, friendship with a great man who could understand her—this was her dearest dream.

While these thoughts tossed through her mind he rose and stood by the open window, his arms folded on his breast, looking down on the harbor where moonlight played like white fire on the unruffled mirror of the sea. It was an hour of divine stillness, for man was gathered to the bosom of nature, and from the dreaming ships no sound disturbed the ecstasy of night. The moon was full on his face, and, looking unseen through her fingers, she watched it for some answer to her questions.

It had a stern beauty that her soul, quick to worship the beautiful, could comprehend. His vices had left no disfiguring imprint on the clear cold lines, and at the moment he looked austere as a priest in the service of divinity. Of his power none could doubt; the world knew that history, and trembled. His refinement, the distinction of his manner attracted her delicately balanced nerves. But truth, fidelity—what had these been in his past life to promise any disinterested friendship to which she could trust? She, who was to give such royal gifts, what could she hope in return?

She lifted her head and looked at him in desperate appeal.

"Cæsar—most noble Cæsar—I cannot tell. If you were true friend to me I could be to you, I know that. But I am not only Cleopatra, the girl; I am Egypt, the Queen; and Rome devours all and has never been our friend. Don't be angry because I am bewildered. A few days—a few! I want your friendship, but tell me to what it binds me. And if I am your friend what—oh, what gift have you for me in return for my trust? For it is said of you that you compel all men and women to do your will, and I am free Queen in Egypt!"

He replied calmly, still looking at her trouble over folded arms.

"I will be your friend, true and steadfast. We are both God-descended. Should we not trust one another? For a gift—I will give you the brain and sword of Cæsar to work for you, whether we are together or apart. And more. I will choose you a husband—the noblest Roman of them all—and he shall bring the power of Rome for his bride-gift. And more. You shall be Queen of

Asia as well as of Rome and Egypt. What is to prevent it? And yet more. Your son—"

She rose to her feet and moved from the shadow into full moonlight. He saw her eyes rapt on his in a white ecstasy.

"He shall be King of the World. I swear it. I, Cæsar!"

He stretched his hand and clasped hers as one man clasps a brother. The thought in his mind was, "I must not frighten her. She is young. I must not be too hasty."

He dropped her hand.

"We must now consider many matters. Sit there and fix your attention. Tomorrow will make or mar you for life. But I and Rome are at your back henceforth."

They talked until the sea turned gray to a gray dawn. Business and statecraft only, and beneath a moon of lovers! Nothing more.

Next day it was announced by Cæsar to the King Ptolemy and the eunuch Potheinos that the Queen had returned and was in the Palace; and, not only so, but that she had come as a suppliant, acknowledging her transgressions against the Roman Republic and her brother and co-monarch. They must all meet, said Cæsar gravely, and a public reconciliation take place, which the wisdom of Potheinos would cement and guard. Thus and thus only could the royal freedom of Egypt be ensured and the murder of Pompey forgiven.

Marvelling greatly, Potheinos assented. If indeed the wayward daredevil of a girl were tamed by dread of the Roman Republic, he might find her a more useful tool than the detestable Arsinoë or the pettish boy. For any and all of the three he cared nothing. He needed a tool and a royal one.

CHAPTER IV

On the next day, to the young Queen, seated in the smaller chamber of audience with Cæsar in a chair beside her, entered the young Ptolemy, followed by Arsinoë and Potheinos; and this was done purposely that they might be made to present themselves before her as inferiors. And they knew it.

It must be owned, and was even confessed by their own rebellious hearts, that the girl Cleopatra looked her part. For she wore the robe of the Goddess Hathor, a stuff of transparent weave, disclosing her beauty as if she swam in clear water, and, holding it about her loins, a girdle of hanging strings of emeralds from the mines of Zabarah clothing her to the knee with green fire. On her breast she carried the outspread vulture wings of the Mother-Goddess Nout, also in mighty emeralds, and she was crowned with the moon-disk held in horns above her brows.

So had she sat when Cæsar entered her presence, and the majesty of her amazed him; for where was the laughing, frightened girl of the bundle? Gone on the wings of night, and in her stead the pale young Queen of Egypt, glorious in splendor, stately and apart as the Divinity incarnate in her fair flesh.

How could even his experience guess that in this part, as in all, she was complete, the central figure of the picture set in her own mind of the Queen of mighty Egypt receiving her rebels with mercy in one hand and justice in the other?

He might indeed have feared the golden bird escaped out of his hand but that as he entered and halted on his foot, amazed at the glory of her, she looked down at him and smiled a wicked brief smile that disclosed the tips of her teeth and no more. It was the smile of the Alexandrian street urchin—the donkey-boy, let us say—and brimming with perfect understanding. A wink had served her Goddess-ship no better. She relapsed instantly into the statuesque, and Cæsar, reassured, occupied his diligent brain in attempting to reckon the enormous value of her emeralds in talents of gold while the approaching steps were heard.

When young Ptolemy entered and beheld her Majesty seated, and the Dictator beside her, the haughtiness he had prepared fell flat as the sail of a galley taken aback. He halted in dismay, and looked irresolute over his shoulder at Potheinos. The little shrew, Arsinoë, alone preserved her courage. She had been too much behind the scenes of that Goddess-pose to offer it any

incense. Outstepping the others she walked on and planted herself before the Queen.

"So you have come back, sister, after running off with yourself! And how did you travel? Not in your state galley as becomes a Queen, but in a bundle on the back of Apollodoros. So they say in the Palace! Holy Serapis, and why?"

The venom in her pale eyes and lips matched the uræus on the brow of Ptolemy, and Cæsar watched with inward amusement to see if the crowned girl could keep her dignity in the face of such provocation. Not a bit of it! Like a spring released she was on her feet in an instant, the glittering emerald drops shaking green fire about her.

"You taunting chit, you whey-faced fright, be ashamed before Cæsar! Sit down and hold your tongue! What are you? Nothing! Come, Ptolemy, sit on your throne if you have the spirit of a mouse! He won't eat you!"

The boy leaned back upon Potheinos who propelled him forward. His face was gray with fear. To see the sister he dreaded suddenly returned and seated beside Cæsar was a portent that blew all his dreams of sovereignty away with the sands of the desert. He collapsed into his equal seat with Cleopatra, but Cæsar observed the shaking hands on its arms and was assured that he had backed the right claimant.

He rose and waved his hand for peace, and the Queen fell once more into sublimity and the statue, while the voice of the Roman Republic made itself heard.

"King of Egypt, your Majesty has driven your sister into exile and raised an army against her. What excuse can you offer for this to Rome, the executor of the will of your father, the King of Egypt? He appointed you joint rulers."

"Excuse?" the boy panted, in an ecstasy of rage and fear. "Am I not King and—"

"Is she not Queen?" asked the inexorable voice of Rome.

"She is Queen, but no man alive could rule with her. She is a vixen, a liar, —she wins all hearts away from me! When she goes out in the streets the people shout and bow and worship. She wheedles and bedevils them, and when I go nobody cares a snap of the finger for me. It is not fair—not fair!"

Cæsar smiled inwardly. Certainly the boy had very little chance of popularity compared with the exquisite girl. A child might see that with one gulp she could swallow him. The only surprise was that she had not made a mouthful of him before. His survival was due no doubt to the arts of Potheinos. But aloud Cæsar replied coolly.

"Your Majesty's wisdom will be to use the charms of the Queen as weapons in your own cause, and that can only be done by a full reconciliation. Hear now the will of your father—both King and Queen—and respect it!"

He produced from a box beside him, splendid with green mother-of-emerald, a roll of papyrus, and read aloud the part concerning the children of the late King. It was clear and definite. Wedded, they must rule together, sharing equal powers. Cleopatra, rising in token of respect while it was read, bowed a gently submissive head. Ptolemy sat pouting and fuming, Potheinos scowling behind him. What good could the Minister augur from the calm contempt of the glance she had shot at him, her evident elation and excitement? Not for nothing had he studied every changing expression of her face and longed to still it forever into the rigidity of death. He too had not realised the beauty of her; seeing it daily, and no charm of it all turned his way, he had seen nothing in her any more than in Arsinoë, except a greater intellect, pertness, and obstinacy. Now—knowing Cæsar's amorous histories, as they were told down either coast of the Mediterranean, a most terrifying possibility dawned upon the mind of the slave-minister. He clenched teeth and hands and waited.

Cæsar rolled the document and enclosed it carefully in the splendid box—the young queen resuming her seat.

"Your course is clear. There must be instant reconciliation or the wrath of Rome. You, King, must disband your army and swear in my presence honorable treatment to your co-sovereign. You," turning to the Queen, "must swear the same. In all things, as your husband, equal sovereign, and brother, you must honor the King and treat him with needful deference. Your promise?"

She rose to her feet and laid one slender hand on the box containing the will of her father.

"By the great God Serapis, honored in this city, and by the Goddesses Isis and Hathor whose incarnation I am—I swear to rule in equal love and confidence with my brother, the King of Egypt."

"It is well," said Cæsar gravely. In his white toga, bordered with a stripe of purple, he had a royal air according well with his high distinguished features and the cool disdain of his expression. Secretly this enchanted the girl, accustomed from the cradle to crawling flatterers, diversified only by the spites of her brother and sister and the virulent hatred of Potheinos. But she stared rigid at the marble wall, though her pulse fluttered like a bird's as the fold of his toga swept her foot. He turned to the King.

"Your oath. Swear to disband your army on the instant, and to rule in love and confidence with the Queen, obedient to the will of your father and the guardianship of the Republic."

The wretched boy, his dream dispersed, sprang to his feet in one of his hysterical furies.

"I am lost—I am lost!" he screamed like a girl. "The witch has got you as she always gets all men. I am no more King of Egypt. Swear? I will die sooner than swear. Here—take this and give it to her as you would give my head if she asked it!"

Wild tears raining down his cheeks, he tore the uræus crown violently from his head by the fillets and, flinging it on the marble, rushed sobbing from the room, to cry his wrongs aloud in the crowd of sycophants and soldiers who filled the outer audience chamber. A hoarse roar arose outside, and Potheinos, running as if for his life, followed the boy without a look behind him.

"You have done it this time, sister!" said Arsinoë through white and tightened lips, and rising, not without dignity, walked slowly after the two. Presently she turned, lifting the golden curtain with one thin hand.

"You have got your way as you always do. See how you like it when the fruit ripens! And to your face I tell you, Cæsar, that the man who trusts Cleopatra is a fool, though he call himself a King and wise!"

The curtain fell, and Cleopatra brought her eyes from the sculptured marble and fixed them timidly and tenderly on Cæsar.

"I did what you told me!"

"Loveliest, you did!" he answered but without enthusiasm. The sullen roar outside alarmed him. A loud violent voice could be heard haranguing from one of the windows. There was a hurrying tramp of feet in the street. He should be with his soldiers or himself haranguing that Alexandrian mob proverbially so fierce and fickle! What time had he for a girl's arts? Instantly, as ever, she caught his mood, and was cool and queenly—a true daughter of the Gods.

"Go, noble Cæsar, and persuade these fools of their folly. I will stay here. Who dare touch Cleopatra the Queen?"

But how dared he leave her among enemies? The people who loved her did not know of her return; they would side with the King who was in view, unless they beheld their own liege lady. In the same flash both saw the necessity. She thrust her hand into his.

"Quick! I'll go with you. I'll speak to them from the window. Come! Come! Run!"

She ran for it now, dragging his older and more laggard steps after her until her young fire winged him to speed. Together they tore into the great audience chamber, now empty except for a few slaves crowding the windows; for all Ptolemy's friends had stormed down into the streets with him and the eunuch to inflame the inflammable populace with tales of Rome's tyrannies and the King's wrongs.

Without an instant's hesitation Cleopatra flung aside a slave from the nearest window and thrust her head and half her body into the blazing sunshine, with a crowd thick below. She hailed them, her clear voice ringing like a clarion through the hoarse orator's shout in the street.

"Men of Alexandria! I am here. I, Cleopatra the Queen. Rejoice in my return!"

All heads turned upward to the glittering vision in the opening. Her strings of emeralds fell over the white wall, burning in sunshine, and blazed, but no brighter than her face—all rose and light and dancing beauty. There was a sudden dead silence below, Ptolemy and Potheinos huddling back against the palace. Were she to incite her lovers—for the crowd was little less—to tear them to pieces, who could tell the end? The Alexandrians could be wolves, then and later. Again the silver cry:

"Men of Alexandria, the noble Cæsar stands beside me, laden with gifts from the Republic for my happy people. He brings in his hand the Isle of Cyprus, our heart's desire. He brings the remission of my father's debts to Rome. Oh, happy day! Oh, happy people!"

A thundering roar of applause went up, startling clouds of doves into flight. It echoed over the harbor and from the mighty Pharos.

The boons she promised were the two first objects of Egyptian policy—they removed the great causes of hostility to Rome. The quick girl knew it; swept on a billow of passion she thrust her hand behind her and dragged Cæsar forward.

"Here is the mighty Cæsar who has done this great thing. And more, men of Alexandria, more! He has reconciled the King my brother to me, and together we shall reign in love and confidence. Come up, my brother, beside me, where all can see you, and let our faithful subjects know that war is over and a golden peace and prosperity begun."

Flushed and glowing, she stooped above them, arms out, almost seeming as though she could fly through the air to the embrace of her beloved citizens. It was simply magnificent—no other word matched the case—and Cæsar knew it and glowed also as he stood saluting beside her. The sea breeze blew her light garment about him, the perfume of her presence enwrapped him, stimulating to a blaze emotions he had thought chilled with years. He would

not speak aloud—the honors should all be the young beauty's as she deserved. But his eyes thanked and praised and loved her as he saluted and waved his hands to the populace.

"*Ave*, Cæsar! *Ave*, Cæsar!" they roared and shouted to the face serene as a cut gem above them. And the thundered applauses and cries for the divine Cleopatra-Isis followed and would not cease.

What could the wretched Ptolemy, the miserable Potheinos do? Not an eye turned on them—all were fixed on the vision above them, dazzled, entranced. A cry was stimulated for Ptolemy, King of Egypt, and, by the advice of his friends, the boy was taken inside and pushed up the marble stair, that he might show himself with his triumphing sister. Potheinos followed, gnashing his teeth. The witch—the devil! What had she not done? Who could stand up against her? Cyprus? The remission of the King's debts? O Jupiter-Amen, O Serapis! What gifts to such as she! The Roman was in her snare and the legions of Rome at her service.

But there was nothing to be said. If the Gods play a man false he must knock under, and today they had visibly taken side with beauty. Up the stairs they stumbled, and Ptolemy was thrust into the window with his sister—Cæsar making room for him. It was not an impressive appearance. Pale and sullen, the tear-marks still on his pinched features, "King of North and South, Lord of Two Lands," he did not look the part and had no inspiration with which to play it.

"The little owl!" said a voice audible from below, and was then drowned in some half-hearted applause as the Queen took him by the hand and presented him. But the drama was over then, and she turned away, dropping it, to face the viciously pale Arsinoë trembling with jealous passion.

"You have your way again, sister! Take it and see where it leads you, into the den of the Roman wolf!"

The beauty eyed her with good-humored disdain. She could afford to!

"Foolish Arsinoë! You don't know that it is you who shall be ruler of Cyprus! I have Cæsar's promise. And you spit at me like a wild cat! Silly girl! Why can't you grow up!"

The patronage was inimitable and again Cæsar laughed in his heart. The Queen was absolutely enchanting. She glowed like a jewel. She rayed light like a star, and for courage and readiness, and golden passion in speaking—Gods, how she had moved the crowd and with what simple urgent words! The right—the absolutely right ones! The other two and their followers gathered in knots talking. She led the way into the small audience chamber and Cæsar followed, more stirred in soul and body than friend or enemy could have believed. She had given him Egypt in that moment at the window.

He knew it. But whom should he leave there to keep his fires alight while he went hunting down the trail of his ambitions to Rome? Whom—when this bright young thing had forgotten him? The heavy curtains fell behind them. They were alone, and she turned and faced him radiant.

"Did I do it well, most noble Cæsar?"

For answer he caught her jewelled hands and pressed them first to his heart and then most passionately to his lips, there holding them and feeling the blood beat in blue veins. She stood dismayed, delighted, trembling. Her soft voice broke almost in a whimper.

"You are satisfied?"

"Satisfied?" And still he could not speak for kissing her hands. Would it move her? Had his old power deserted him? Would she draw them away presently and eye him from a cold distance?

She came a step nearer.

"Noble Cæsar—" the words faltered on her lips, and still he said nothing, but kissed her hands and the slim wrists above them where the throb of the pulse told him she felt—but what?

"Cæsar—if you go—I shall be killed. Potheinos will never forgive."

A pause. He looked up, and at last—"Would I leave you?" The words were little. The look said all. Policy and passion met and clasped each other in his heart, but for the moment passion so much the stronger that her voice was the only one heard by Cleopatra.

Very softly the little Queen said:

"I am only a girl. If I had you to guide me—" And again, "*Must* you leave me? Oh, Gods, if you could stay!"

It was the melting mood now, and he snatched at it.

"Does the Queen desire it?" His eyes on hers.

"She desires it."

There was a pause. He raised her hands, holding them against his heart.

"Loveliest, does the woman desire it also?"

The woman! and she who knew herself but a callow girl. The woman!—and this from the greatest man in the living world to a girl as cold as snow! No worship of any abstract chastity stood in her way. She had no moralities; but his warmth chilled her as warmth inevitably did. She had played her part well just now at the window. Surely she could play this of modesty shot through with unconscious invitation. For what else was she a woman—with an empire to gain?

She raised eyes of a most lovely timidity to him, drowned in dark lashes. He could only see a gleam like sun-amber between them.

"Noble Cæsar, I— Stay, oh, stay!"

It was a cry. He flung his arms about her and caught her to his breast, snatching her lips to his as a man long famished for the ambrosia of Olympus.

She drew herself almost primly away, looking on the ground. "Mighty Cæsar. My brother has not yet sworn his oath. Must he not? And he and I are wedded. And you— Is there not Calpurnia?"

Old men are quick to flame and cool. It chilled him. He drew apart with an angry flush.

Within ten minutes the King had sworn with bitterly compressed lips and a darted glance of hate at Cleopatra. But to her last question Cæsar had made no answer. It offered difficulties serious enough to freeze the warmest kiss.

THAT night Cleopatra lay in the curious room especially sacred to her moods.

It was not very large, but lined with richest rose-porphyry marble against which the beauty of the Queen shone like a white star. The roof was supported on porphyry pillars with Hathor-headed capitals of intricate carving in honor of the human Hathor-Venus whom the room enshrined, and about the walls ran a broad frieze of decoration painted on white plaster, smooth as pearl, the figures in colored outline. Here were departed Pharaohs with their slim queens behind them making offerings to rigid deities, naked save for the outline indication of a stiffly projecting garment, bearing lotuses in their hands, themselves adored in turn by lines of worshipping slaves and conquered enemies. Here stood the father of Cleopatra with hands uplifted to the Gods, and beside him his inscription in hieroglyphics:

"Ptolemy living for ever, beloved of Isis and Ptah."

Here also was herself, a slim nude outline in Egyptian red, making offering to her Mother-Goddess, a lotus in one hand, the sistrum of Isis in the other, attended by a band of girl-musicians. Beside her was her own inscription:

"*Neb taui. Qlapetrat tchettu-nes Trapenet*."

"Lady of Two Lands. Cleopatra. Called is she Tryphena." A girl might well feel herself a goddess in the midst of it all. But, except for purposes of state and, as it were, a full-dress decoration, Cleopatra loved neither Egyptian art nor what it signified. All her tastes were light, graceful, Greek, tempered by the luxury of the Orient.

This mingling of tastes appeared in her surroundings. Costly rugs from Persia strewed the marble floor. Golden hangings from India, with alien Gods staring almond-eyed, closed the spaces between the pillars, and, most incongruous of all, broad low Oriental divans heaped with gorgeous cushions stood everywhere in case the whim might urge her to lie (unlike the stiff figures on the walls) and rest with the most abandoned grace and enjoyment. A mongrel room in spite of all its exotic charm.

A chamber wherein, like Alexandria itself, the civilizations had met but never blended. Indeed they jostled. Here on the night of the reconciliation Cleopatra lay on a divan of rose-purple and gold, with Charmion kneeling beside her combing out the long beautiful hair, so closely braided in the daytime about the Queen's small head. Charmion loved that hair as she loved its owner. It was delight to her to feel the silken waves slip smoothly through

her fingers, to perfume, to braid it. She combed mechanically now, however, listening enthralled to the day's adventures.

"And when Ptolemy swore, I saw the flash of hate in his eye meet that of Potheinos. They will murder me when Cæsar sails to Rome."

"But, my Queen, you must keep him. Surely—surely—"

"And that brings us to the point!" said Cleopatra. "Stop combing, Charmion. I want to put my arms under my head. And listen to what I have to say."

She folded her arms beneath her head and stretched herself to the full length of her toes. That made her feel taller. A cool night wind blew off the sea, therefore she lay like naked pearl on a great fur of black leopards from the Northland, and so closed her eyes luxuriously under the veil of black lashes.

"Charmion," she said slowly, "you are wise in love. You have had many lovers. Tell me now this: Can a young woman really love a man older—*much* older than herself?"

The kneeling girl suppressed a smile, knowing very well the nice point involved. She kissed the arm that lay on the fur beside her and answered with caution.

"My Queen, I have never done it. The young men were always too engrossing. Yet it can certainly be done. Even were an old man fat, bald, amorous—there might still be his purse. One might fall in love with his money."

"I have too much of my own. Try again."

"Otherwise—quite certainly it might be possible! Look at the Roman scandals we feed on—and even here they tell me that before we came back the young and beautiful in Alexandria have sighed for Cæsar."

Silence. Charmion continued:

"If the old man were a great warrior, lean still—that is necessary—beautiful as a stern God might be, wearied and saddened with overseeing the world— If the touch of his hand were favor, his glance honor, then certainly —"

"In short, if he were Cæsar! Then what would the wise Charmion say?"

Her eyes were still closed. The God-Greek flowed softly from her lips, indeed one might think she did not care the toss of a copper coin for the answer. Yet beneath lowered lashes she had an eye on Charmion, bright as an arrow's point. Charmion waxed enthusiastic.

"To my eye he sets all youths in the shade. Oh, his air of command! I have come acquainted with a young captain of his legionaries, certainly a

most beautiful young man, with close-curled golden hair and blue eyes (however he came by them!) and, O Gods! to hear him talk of his Commander-in-Chief—his 'imperator' as the Romans call him. Oh, it was fine—fine! This afternoon, instead of praising my ankles, which are not to be despised, and my bosom, which is better, he held me with wild romances of Gallia and Britannia and other barbarian countries, and Cæsar's genius in them all—a God more than a man—until at last I said 'Hold! or you will make me love him!'"

The Queen laughed. She knew her Charmion.

"Naturally he would stop!"

"Lady of Two Lands, he went on—praising Cæsar—until I said: 'Would that my Queen could hear! She loves a brave tale like a brave man.' And he said: 'Then let her hear them from Cæsar!' I own I thought the advice excellent."

There was a pause. One of the lovely-voiced slave girls in an adjoining chamber was singing low, shaking the sistrum softly in accompaniment, with the aim of driving away evil influences. It filled the pauses with wooing delight.

"And my Captain spoke of the future also!" said Charmion. "He told me there is no question in Rome but that Cæsar will rule the world. People are sick of the Republic and its fusty catch-words. A Republic is as dull as ditch water and as corrupt—every myriad hand extended for a bribe. An empire is all grace and beauty and dignity—a place for great men and lovely women—and all the arts come to pay their court. In a Republic every low-born publican has his ambition to be Dictator—Gods, the corruption! In a monarchy there is a settled Dynasty. We know that here!"

Cleopatra still listened with apparently closed lashes, peeping however all the time at Charmion's eager face from their ambush.

"Send Iras to call Apollodoros!" she said languidly. "Let him come in haste."

In a few moments he came, bowing low, and kneeling beside the black leopards and his white liege lady upon them.

"Goddess, I am here." He knew right well the title pleased her. Besides it was hers.

"Apollodoros, I wish to talk of Cæsar. Charmion fills my ear with his praises. What is your word now you have seen him—and listened no doubt with those wise silent ears of yours?"

"My word is this— But first,—shall Charmion go? These things are secret."

"Charmion is true as my heart's inmost fibre. She shall stay."

She laid warm lips to her Queen's hand. No wonder she loved her.

"Then, Lady of Egypt, in seeing Cæsar I have seen Power. She has always perched on his standards, an eagle tamed. For all the Gods' sakes, capture the man, seize him, make him yours; for he is to make the title of imperator from that of a general to that of the World's Ruler."

She opened her eyes and sat bolt upright now with arms about her knees and no pretences, and looked him hard in the face.

"Cold truth, Apollodoros! Am I beautiful? Since you know I cannot do without you—no, not for one day!—you need not spare either my frowns or blushes. Don't beat about the bush."

He looked her over exactly as a merchant values rich jewels displayed for purchase. Such was the wish of her Majesty.

"Divine Hathor, counting feature by feature I have seen women more beautiful. Yes, it is true. Certainly more sensually seductive, for sometimes your coldness is like ice in your eyes, and, for awhile, passion is the first lure with men, but also the most swiftly wearied. It is so common that every woman not repulsive has her little grain of that potion to administer. But you have not only beauty in more than fair allowance, considering your Queenship, but charm! Oh, praise the Gods—and more especially the Goddesses—for this divine gift! You are all things to all men, and in each perfect. I have seen you wise as age, gay as childhood, frank, impudent, modest, wooing, shy, imperious—I have seen nothing that you are not and cannot be, and all with such charm that a man cannot take his eyes off you and is eternally eager to know what you will be at next. You have an infinite variety! If a man left you he could not match you. Queen, among milky chains of pearls in your treasury, there is one great rose-pearl from India. If we lost a white pearl there are others, but if *that* were stolen—the Gods themselves might take millions of years to tint another. Exquisite lady I—there is none like you!"

This dithyramb might have melted snow, and the more so as she devoutly believed it true, and that it was as natural to her to act her part beautifully, grave or gay, or majestic, as to any boy on the Athenian stage. What she was behind it all she had never herself been able to make out, and certainly it was an interesting question. But now she was bent on cold business, of which her beauty was but the preliminary.

"Allowing this—let us now speak frankly, Apollodoros. Cæsar wants me, as I do not want him. I shrink and my fingertips curl from it. But I need him. I cannot see how to do without him. Am I to give myself to him? Is this your counsel? I see the advantages. But tell me this with candor. What will my

people of Egypt say if their Queen is the mistress of the husband of Calpurnia?"

That indeed was a facer, and the dark brows of Apollodoros knitted in a hard knot over it. True, divorce was a fashionable diversion in Rome, and Cæsar had already divorced Pompeia on the highly convenient ground that Cesar's wife must be above suspicion. And, though Calpurnia was chaste, suspicion may attach itself to the chastest. But divorce must mean the return of Cæsar to Rome, and in Rome are many beauties and—Cæsar was still Cæsar! It would not be possible for the Queen of Egypt to be merely the amusement of Cæsar's holiday hours; nor could it serve the political turn that Apollodoros, Cleopatra, and Cæsar himself had in view. Yet if the political necessity did not suffice the amatory bond must be added. The difficulty was great and urgent.

He answered very seriously.

"Great Lady, it is a poser. Would, oh, would that her guardian Gods would take Calpurnia to themselves now! Her life is a misfortune. But since she lives—all I can suggest is that a man so great as to break up the Roman constitution (which he will certainly do) may well be allowed a wife in his Roman Empire and one in the free Kingdom of Egypt! For his you must be, look at it how we will! Why not a wife in Egypt?"

"But not exactly its Queen!" she fired at him with one of her lightning flashes. "There are moments when you are a fool. And at present I am one also. Cæsar wants me, even passionately, but don't I know that once he is off to Rome I shall lose my influence? All men are like that. Charmion says so and she knows love like a book. How are we to bind the man? No—I see the question in your eye. I am not in love with him. I don't even know the meaning of it. But perhaps I am slightly intoxicated with his greatness and power, for I don't feel quite the same indifference as with the rest of them. I think that even if he were thirty years younger he still would not move me. He is too cold, too far apart, thinks too much of himself. Too like his own bust in fine marble. Very flattering, of course, to be able like Pygmalion to make the marble breathe and kiss—but other people seem to have been beforehand with me there. Still—I am proud to attract him. When he kissed my hands today I felt two inches taller, though I hadn't a thrill of the yearning that prompted him to do it. And then—an old man's love is like dead leaves alight—quick flame, and—pouf! out again. They can't keep it up. I may give myself for nothing. Can I hold him? You should know."

Too true. Apollodoros looked at her thoughtfully. Then his eye brightened.

"There is in a little street off the Street of Canopus a most extraordinary man just arrived, a priest from up the Nile. He is journeying from near the Libyan desert to visit those wise men of India whom we call Gymnosophists, and he goes tomorrow to Berenice to sail with the galley known as *Meri-ra*. He is said to be over a hundred and fifty years of age, though that I do not believe, and to have wisdom unspeakable. Will your Divinity take counsel with him? He is said to behold past, present, and future as if it were a picture —which is really more than can be said for the royal astrologers, who let us in most terribly about Potheinos the other day."

"An Egyptian?" asked the Queen of Egypt.

"A wise Egyptian."

That persuaded her. The wisdom of the Egyptians was no phrase forty years before Christ. The people and their rulers *knew*, and what they knew they respected.

"A priest, of course," she said seriously.

"A priest of the ancient temple of Osiris at Abydos, and now, seeing the end of his life approaching, his will is to die where in India the wise men have perceived a most clarifying vision of truth. He would join his wisdom with theirs. He is known as the Light on the Horizon."

"Call him, and with haste!"

Apollodoros rose and departed.

During the hour that elapsed Cleopatra, aided by Charmion, performed certain purifying ceremonies enjoined upon the divine rulers of Egypt when they should desire to touch hands with the mysteries. She bathed her body in Nile water, kept apart for that purpose. Perfumed incense was burned before her in a receptacle shaped like the canopic jars which hold the viscera of departed royalties in the close age-old heat of their tombs.

Offering flowers before the domestic shrine in her small and beautiful oratory, she recited, standing, a most ancient Egyptian prayer for truth and purity of purpose:

"Hail, ye Four Gods who convey truth to the God of the Universe, who will sit in judgment on my wickedness and virtue, who feed on truth of heart. Do away my evil deeds, and remove all barriers between you and me. Let me pass through the secret doors of the other world in peace and return in wisdom."

Deep silence followed. It was the first time she had performed the ceremony and what to expect she knew not. Could her straining heart hear any response in that enormous silence? She waited, now prostrate on the

marble, hands stopping her ears from all worldly sounds. None was audible, but, purified, she rose and awaited the Light on the Horizon.

When the old man appeared before the Queen, marshalled with reverence by Apollodoros, his head was covered with drapery and his face invisible. He halted by the pillars of the Hathor and saluting with outstretched, upraised hands addressed the standing Queen.

"To the Four Gods you have prayed, and in my heart they answered: 'If the heart is pure, come! for we have done away all wickedness and put away all sin that clung to the Queen.' If the soul is clean, through the secret doors shall you pass and return with wisdom, having touched on Union with The One."

Thrilling to the strange response, she took her seat on a chair of ivory and ebony and he stood before her.

Her talk with Charmion and Apollodoros had been worldly if no more. With this man came another influence that flowed from his presence like the rising of a tide unhurried but unlet, and filled the chamber with silence. Outside her windows lay the great sea in a great moonlight and the noises of the city were as remote and harmless as the murmur of bees in a distant hive. Apollodoros and Charmion knelt, as was their custom, and bowed their heads, as the old man drew the drapery from his head with delicate veined hands. He disclosed a remarkable face of true Egyptian type, fine, firm features and eyes of aged and serene beauty fixed on the Queen.

"Royal Daughter, royal Mother, favored of Amen, what would you know of his servant?"

She turned aside and shot a question.

"You have told him nothing, Apollodoros?"

"Nothing, Divine Lady. It was not permitted."

"Then I too will tell nothing!" said the girl, with a flash of her own audacity. "If the Gods know, let them declare the truth. If they cannot, what are they to me?"

The old man stood before her, leaning on a staff of ebony, smiling a little as at a child's pets and whims.

"It is not the right approach, Royal Daughter, yet be sure the Gods you challenge can answer, and I am instructed. I have heard your voice call in the vast—'Shall I give my body to Cæsar that he may beget a son who shall rule the world with his power and mine? Shall my kingdom increase and be mighty if I do this thing and shall I, ruling Cæsar, sit upon the throne of the world?'"

He spoke with such quiet, such a lack of assumption that she, used to the gorgeous involved ceremonies and haughty priests of the strange concourse of Gods worshipped in Alexandria, was not impressed. Simplicity was beyond her and, like most ignorant people, she mistook it for poverty of wisdom, not knowing that Truth goes naked and beautiful through the Earth. Insensibly to herself her tone was touched with a queen's pride.

"That is what I wish to know, but I can scarcely think—"

"In these matters one does not think. Thought is no avenue of approach for the one to the One. It is a bridge broken in the Abysses. Union is needed, Royal Daughter, and if there is not union there is great and terrible danger, for the eyes may see falsely and in a distorting mirror. And a man may be terribly misled even to his death and ruin because he sees what is not."

"If the Gods cheat," she said, a strange bewilderment numbing her senses, "if they juggle like men, I will not see. I want the truth."

"A man or woman can have only as much truth as they can take, and lies if they can take none. The Gods do not cheat, and any man who knows the merest approach to the unseen can loose you as I do. *But* it may be he would not warn you. Once more and solemnly I warn you that when you are loosed you will see only through the window of your own truth and purity. If those are flawed the sight is flawed also, and that is why it is a peril of perils to meddle with these inner and secret matters."

His eyes had a compelling power. She looked helplessly about her, but her two attendants knelt like statues, rigid, with hidden faces. She pushed Charmion angrily with her sandalled foot, but the girl never stirred. She was marble-still. She struck Apollodoros lightly with her hand. No breath—no movement. There was a dead silence while she revolved the matter in her mind. Could she dare the ordeal? Was she pure to present herself in the presence of the Pure Gods who bestow vision? Literally, she did not know. She had no means of testing herself, but every day and all day round her people bought soothsayers and had their fortunes read and horoscopes cast, and tampered lightly with the inscrutable. And why not she? After all, whatever it was, she need not be guided by it unless she wished. There was nothing to be afraid of, and fear was not her besetting sin.

"Shall I go or stay?" the old man asked patiently.

"Stay, I will see."

"Royal Daughter, I have warned you. There is danger. The air whispers with it now. Permit my departure."

"I tell you, I will see!"

"We are alone," said the Light on the Horizon, "for in this man and woman the gateways of perception are closed. Fix your eyes on mine while I speak the word of Release."

She heard a whispered and mysterious word and knew no more of the room in the Palace of the Lochias. It had fluttered away like a gossamer on the wind. In a great sunlight she saw the Capitoline Hill in Rome. The Capitol loomed up before her. She stood within the stately place and before her were the seven venerated statues of the ancient Kings of Rome. She knew them from many a picture and tale. But now an Eighth was added. She beheld the statue of Cæsar among them—King of Rome, crowned and throned. It passed.

She stood in the Senate, a ghostly figure unseen, unheeded by all those urgent busy politicians, and, in a spectral world of her own, looked and listened. On a throne of gold in the midst sat Cæsar, in his hand a sceptre of ivory, his head embraced by a crown of golden laurel leaves. But more and greater,—voices worlds apart from her, but audible, hailed him in ghostly clamor as "Jupiter-Julius," and she beheld his deified statue set up with the inscription—"To Jupiter-Julius, the immortal God," while his priests worshipped before it, and the Romans invoked him, still living, as a guardian genius. The blood rushed to her heart. The intoxication of power beat along her veins like strong wine,—The God-King of Rome, and she the Goddess-Queen of Egypt! In the sleep of vision her hands moved, struggled and clenched, as though to grasp the splendors seen by her eyes.

It drifted and passed, and fresh sight took its place. She beheld a glorious temple dedicated to the Roman Venus, the ancestress of Cæsar—the Venus Genetrix—and there—there in the awe of its inmost marble heart, there in the midst of the Romans, she beheld her own statue exalted as the Goddess of Love and Beauty. She herself, hailed by the worship of Rome as loveliest and most divine, deified as Cæsar himself was deified: his immortal consort, with him, recognised by the will of the people as native to the stars, their God-begotten rulers!

An awful pride swelled the bosom of the young goddess as she saw. In Egypt such was her title and she had gloried in their belief, but now for the first time trust in her own divinity possessed her. It is a strong draught for humanity to drink, an intoxicating cup for any woman to handle. In that wild vision the earth diminished to a little globe like a child's plaything. She caught it in her hand and looking down upon it laughed, herself crowned with the moon and stars, and beside her stood Cæsar laughing also, on his head the sun's disk as, in the temple of Amen-Ra, the God sits crowned. There came a

roar of thunder, a rushing together as of heaven and earth and darkness—black impalpable darkness, and she knew no more.

Her eyelids were leaden. Chill and weight like death oppressed her limbs. It seemed that she struggled back to life through black and bitter waters, and climbing a steep shore sank exhausted. Again she knew no more. Rest and quiet followed and after a time, whether long or short she could not tell, she opened her eyes and saw Charmion and Apollodoros kneeling beside her, themselves newly awaked from the sleep of personality. They had seen, had heard nothing. She radiant, rejoicing, strong, sprang to her feet, poured out her tale of glory to the two she knew she could trust, all warnings forgotten, headlong as a torrent rushing to the sea.

"But where is the man?" she asked halting suddenly in her triumph. "I will give him great rewards and he shall be near me always to be my guide. The Light on the Horizon?—No, but the Sun at his Zenith!"

The palace was searched for him, the city also, but in vain. Only in an hour a writing was brought to the Queen in the Demotic characters used in common life.

"To the Lady of the Two Lands greeting and obedience. When in the day of her need she desires light on a dark horizon let her remember and recall Thothmes the Egyptian."

She clapped her hands with a cry of delight.

"I would not have lost that man forever for all the emeralds in my treasure-house. Be very sure that I shall recall him. And now, Apollodoros, go quickly and bid Cæsar to sup with me in the lesser chamber of Kings—he and I—that we may talk of great things. If he can fill my hands with what I want it would be miser's work to refuse him what he wants in turn. Especially as I have little enough value for it myself."

Never in her life had she felt harder, firmer, more self-certain than in that glorious moment. Her way lay clear before her.

So the great Roman came with a pride that out-matched her own, and rare wines and splendid meats were set before them, served in gold, and all about he saw such splendors as were not known in Rome, the outpouring of the boundless wealth and power of the most ancient monarchy in the world. It was not lost on him. It was oil on the fire of ambition which was the altar-light in the temple of his great heart. For men worship gods many and strange, and the God of Cæsar was Power, cast in his own image.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the tables were removed the two were alone, and Cæsar knew well, as did the girl, that the great and inevitable moment of life was upon them. As they sat together in the window commanding the starry sea—the water-way to Rome—she told him her vision with a pride and exultation not to be concealed, and the blood crept up his pale cheek and another fire was lit in him that warmed his chilling blood and rekindled the more ethereal fire of youth until his eyes shone like her own.

"The man was a great prophet," he said, "and worthy of riches. Alexander the Great travelled always with his soothsayers and was guided by them in his decisions. And it is very certain that the Gods are good to those who resemble them in power and majesty, and, dying, we shall leave great names and our divine kindred receive us in starry homes."

"Great talk!" thought the young Queen, "and if I could love him—! Yet after all, what is love? A flash in springtime and gray ashes after. That is how it always seems to me. There are things far more interesting—pride, ambition, power, majesty and the life that flows from them, a life as fascinating as a tale told by a great story-teller. And, because he can give these, this great man who shall fulfil my destiny is more to me than any young lover and most truly better for me than any other, though he is old."

So with sweet eyes she wooed him, and the fluttering of white hands and all the glow of her desirable youth, and laughing she told him gay tales of the doings of her Alexandrians, both men and women, and he laughed and applauded, never having met a woman so seductive as this and she a young Goddess and a Queen!

"And you give yourself to me?" he asked later, in the voice of the Master who knows the inevitable answer.

"I give!" she answered with her honey-sweet low laughter having in it the very song of running streams and fresh bird-music at dawn. She looked down, then in his eyes and added:

"But for your sake and mine, most royal Cæsar, the gift must have no spot upon it."

Another pause and she descended from the queenly manner to the colloquial with the odd and sudden change that was not the least of her enchantments.

"You see it doesn't do at all for girls to be talked about wantonly. It ruins Queens, and as for goddesses—I know a good many stories are told about them, but only after they are safely pedestalled in heaven, and then it really

doesn't matter. Besides a goddess has generally two personalities, and what she does in one doesn't affect the other, which is convenient. There is the Heavenly Venus, and the Venus of the stews. The Chaste Diana and the Diana who kissed Endymion, and others, and you can worship which you please. But, as for me, I have only one self, and if that gets soiled I have nothing else to wear. Besides I have to rule in Alexandria where, if you make a slip, the place rings with laughter and pasquinades. They pierce even the immortal Gods with ridicule. So what I ask is this—tell me what canopy can you raise between me and the rain of scandal in Rome and Alexandria if I do what you wish—and what *I* wish!" she added with the glance provocative in which she excelled when she chose.

His brow was furrowed in a moment. It was really a question of terrible importance for his own sake, which affected him far more than hers. Not that the most enthusiastic Roman could have protested that Cæsar had a rag of reputation to lose in such matters—but there was Calpurnia. And to deal with Calpurnia he must return to Rome before matters had gone too far with Cleopatra; for, if she should bear him a child, that child's birth must have no spot upon it—no, not even the suspicion of any degrading circumstance. There his own very tarnished record must never stand in the way. And if he went to Rome now, the golden, the immortal chance might not wait patiently for him. Who could guarantee a fitful girl's fidelity against the attack of an ardent lover?

Cleopatra's anxiety was quite in another strain, but each with his own they sat and looked at each other in silence tinged with dismay and with a quite insufficient force of driving passion on either side to force them to take obstacles in a flying leap.

"I know little about Rome but it would be impossible in Egypt," said Cleopatra with irony. "One may be a goddess, but I have never found it help when things go really wrong. When the ortolans are a cinder or one has a cold in one's head one may crucify the cook and curse the sea-wind but the unpleasantness sticks. Indeed I sometimes think one's godship makes one even more furious with Fate. And *now* what are we to do?"

"I incline to defy Fate, to trust divine Fortuna, the most fascinating divinity of them all. She has stood by me hitherto. Let us throw our dice! The Gods love a cheerful gambler."

"But prefer a cheerful winner, I have noticed," said Cleopatra, grievously disturbed in mind. "It is all such a tangle that but for the vision I would—"

But she snapped that sentence in two. She must display no pets and whims to the Great Lover, the man with whose fortunes her own were so inextricably enwound. If only visions would be a little more indicative,

measurable! She had seen just enough to whet her appetite, but not a ray as to the cooking of the dish. She permitted Cæsar to caress her little hand and rewarded him with glances from down-dropped amber eyes which effectually concealed the thought resurgent every few minutes: "If only he were not so old, perhaps it would be easier. Even if I do embark on the adventure he may easily die before we get through! And that nuisance of a Calpurnia!"

Suddenly with the flash of an inspiration she said aloud:

"Let us consult Apollodoros. I never yet knew him fail in a difficulty. He could and would untie the Gordian knot if I asked him."

She clapped her hands and in ten minutes Apollodoros stood before them in the deep humility which he thought proper to assume before Cæsar. No observer of men like the mighty Roman could fail to see and enjoy the subtle power that shone in those deep-set Sicilian eyes of the Queen's secretary. Hand in hand with his evident devotion to the girl he had served from a child, it was a weapon of war to be cherished and honored, and Cæsar was one who knew the worth of such weapons alike in war and peace. None better!

The Dictator drew a nobly cut gem from his hand and placed it on the hand of Apollodoros with a few words yet more precious.

The case was stated, Cleopatra twisting a string of great pearls about her fingers in nervous irritation while she spoke, not thinking it needful to mention that the subject was not entirely new to Apollodoros. Cæsar supported her with a few grave questions, and the secretary listened in abysmal silence. When all was ended he took a moment for reflection—his face like a brown mask of meditation. Then, at last, and with extreme modesty, he spoke.

"Divine Lady and most august Cæsar, great is the difficulty, yet rightly considered, in the light of the customs of Egypt, it disappears, and becomes indeed a source of strength to the mighty triumph of your joint fortunes. I speak, subject to the approval of your great wisdoms. In the ancient City of Thebes on the banks of royal Nile stands the House of Amen in the Southern Apt, and in it the magnificent Court of Amenophis the Third, and from this through a doorway is attained a chamber pictured after the same manner as in the chamber of Cleopatra, but with the Birth Story of Amenophis the Third. And thus it is. In the first series is a conference of Gods and Goddesses, concerning the birth of the child who shall rule Egypt. In the next the Queen-wife holds converse with the great God Amen, and, in the script beneath, the Divinity declares that he himself is father of the child to be born of the Queen. He, and not the King. In the next the Queen is informed of the God's gracious intention. In the next the Goddesses breathe the breath of life into the Queen and she conceives. In the next the birth of the royal child and his

reception on the knees of his Divine Father the God. In the last, the child, now King, seated on his throne while the Gods make recognition before him. August Cæsar, you are God-descended. The people of Egypt would most easily recognise in you the divine consort of the Queen were that announced on the expectation of an auspicious birth. She is herself a goddess, which makes it easier, since like seeks like."

He folded his hands meekly and was silent. Hope flashed from Cleopatra to Cæsar and back.

"Wonderful, wonderful, most astute Apollodoros!" she cried, clapping her hands until the great rings clashed. But the light faded presently for Rome had been forgotten.

"And in Rome?" asked Cæsar with doubt reflecting itself on the face of Cleopatra.

"In Rome also the idea of divine descent is familiar," returned Apollodoros, "and if the Queen's vision is fulfilled, and a temple erected in Rome to Jupiter-Cæsar and to the Queen as Venus Genetrix, I think the difficulty disperses. The child of such a union must be divine. Cannot be otherwise! Romans will allow for our customs."

There was perhaps a little sober triumph in his glance responsive to Cæsar's smile of stern approval. To that swift mind the words opened up vistas of gorgeous and immortal triumph. With every phrase Cleopatra became dearer and more indispensable. Yes—reigning in Rome and Alexandria as God-King and Goddess-Queen the world was theirs and their son's. There must be no concealment. The union must be surrounded with a kind of grave glory. He saw, he saw it all!

"To the wise Apollodoros I tender a gratitude which does not forget its friends," he said slowly. "To Cleopatra, the Queen, my devotion. For the present this must remain a profound secret between us three. Not a whisper, not a breath must escape while the Queen's consort Ptolemy still lives."

But when Apollodoros departed, exalted so that his feet scarcely seemed to touch earth, the lover was still preoccupied. It was no slight to the girl whose gaiety, grace and audacity enchanted him, but simply that schemes crowded upon him with every turn of events, and she had come too late into his life to make any ineffaceable impression. She saw it and was not displeased—life was too interesting in the larger issues to victimise her by feminine spites and jealousies for long,—and the more Cæsar reflected the greater would be her future. He interested her far more deeply from that point of view than from the erotic.

Again she caught his mood, and sat beside him, her two young hands fresh as rosebuds, clasping his veined and aging hand most tenderly. She

leaned her head against his shoulder in a quiet as deep as his own. His mind was on her brother, Arsinoë, and Potheinos. Between this day and his return to Rome that group must be dispersed and extinguished. For his purposes the consort of Cleopatra must be removed from his path and she reign alone. But all this must be done with extreme caution, and for how long could he delay in Egypt? His lieutenant, Mark Antony, was writing that he was needed—needed urgently in Rome. "An absent man, even though great as Cæsar, is soon forgotten," he wrote. "Return, most honored, most fortunate!"

Fortunate indeed, and his chief glory of fortune centered in the slight girl, whose sweetness would have turned his head dizzy in earlier years, who stirred him even now to delight.

He put his arm about her and drew her closer. Their lips met in a kiss that was a pledge.

Then he rose slowly and reluctantly.

"There is one thing, beloved and beautiful. Because Apollodoros is right you must, when the time comes, go up the Nile and visit your cities and make offerings in the most ancient temples. And I must go with you."

"It is true," said Cleopatra thoughtfully, "and I must build a temple to Isis at the ancient Hermonthis. I had thought of this, but it really seemed rather absurd that I, who am Isis, should build a temple to my own divinity. It is all rather odd, I think. But as she is the Mother-Goddess I see it will have to be done, especially now we have settled to have a child. The temple will be expected of me."

"Isis is much worshipped in Rome too," said Cæsar, and was silent. He could not make up his mind whether he quite approved the extremely business-like and capable way in which the girl was handling their romance. It was his mistaken belief (one common to his sex) that women are more developed on the romantic side than men, and he felt her to be startlingly clear-headed. It had its conveniences, especially to a man who had long sailed out of the Torrid Zone, but yet— Never mind! He would teach her, and if he could reach the mischief in her long eyes she would prove an apt scholar.

"And now may the Gods bless the day that brought me to Alexandria. Sleep well, beloved, and dream of the mighty future. And now I go."

She looked at him with golden-amber eyes under midnight lashes. They lit her small face with subtle meanings.

"And *must* you go, most noble Cæsar?"

Caught in the dash of her audacity his face flamed into youth. For a moment she beheld the young Cæsar, beautiful, triumphant, the delight and

despair of the loveliest whom he chose or rejected. His arms clasped her, the innocent brave girl who had dared so much for him! That night he did not leave her. She woke in his arms, conquered or victorious as the mysterious future would disclose.

In two or three weeks a whisper started on its journey through Alexandria to travel up the Nile, to permeate the ancient kingdom of the Pharaohs. It was to the effect that, in the person of Julius Cæsar, Jupiter-Amen the great God, worshipped under differing names in Rome and Alexandria, yet the same, eternally the same, had come to visit the young Goddess of Egypt, even as in ancient days the Gods had walked with men and fathered them for their own divine designs. The wits of Alexandria might laugh, and they laughed unmercifully and with a gay impropriety extremely characteristic of the times and life of the swarming city of the Delta; but the simple and pious people of the Nile country and beyond heard with awe as the rumor travelled farther and farther, gaining glory as it left Alexandria and realities behind. Oh, that they could behold their divine young ruler! Oh, that if there were to be a heavenly child it could be born in their midst! Would she not come, that offering might be laid before her feet and those of the God-incarnate consort?

And Cleopatra, closeted with Charmion and Apollodoros, was equally accessible to the wit of the one and the pathetic faith of the other.

"They are a horrible people these Alexandrians, but it really is very amusing!" she said, wiping tears of laughter from her eyes as she laid a paper on her knee. "They have got Cæsar to the life. Just that immaculate air of 'I came. I saw. I conquered!' which I am sure he retains even in the bath. Still, the one thing you never can conquer is wit! If he could laugh at them as I do! but he never could. Never in this world! He takes himself so dreadfully seriously as a divinity. There, Charmion, burn that writing, and you, Apollodoros, take care that none reach him. Yet, for the Gods' sake, let me read it once more. Just that middle bit.

> "Poor little Goddess! When the amorous God
> Descended to her from his blest abode,
> She might have hoped for some less withered bliss,
> A little mild excitement in a kiss!
> O Hercules, Apollo, where were you?
> Is this the best Olympus now can do?
> Sure, here and there a shining golden curl
> Would have impressed our Alexandrian girl.
> But bald! And nose in air!—alas, poor lass!
> 'Tis *Time* has come to town with scythe and glass."

She laughed till the room rang and then said more seriously:

"Have a hint given them to shut up, Apollodoros. If Cæsar were to see that, they would learn that when wasps sting they die, and I couldn't save them, though I never mind what they say of me. Heigh ho! I often wish he were younger. It gives the whole thing a touch of the ridiculous. Or even if he were older! A great silver beard like Homer's gives a godlike majesty and hides a lot of absurdity. It is elderly middle age that is so absolutely impossible. What on earth will the people up the Nile say when they see the divine Jupiter-Amen beside me? They are such simple religious people. I hate to think what a shock it will be."

"They will say he is the omnipotent Cæsar on earth and a God on Olympus, and I am sure your Sacredness will remember what is due to him—for your own sake!"

"Certainly the Gods must hang together;" Cleopatra retorted incorrigibly, "they will get precious little incense if they don't; and I mean that up the Nile Cæsar and I shall win all hearts. Was I born yesterday, Apollodoros?"

He smiled and was silent. No one knew better that her impulses could be dangerous.

With all his own heart he wished that Cæsar were younger, less impenetrably mailed in self-belief and dominance. He yielded nothing to the Queen now he had won her, did not allow her for one moment to suppose herself the light and lodestar of his life, talked of blended interests but never of blended hearts. Always a gentleman—but one more than a little chilled with age, warming his hands at the fire of ambition now that love's was dying out into ash. Also his doubts were returning. He needed a steel-true comrade, and for how long would he please a brilliant young woman who took worship as her right? Already he found declarations fatiguing. Suppose, most horrible suppose, that some day she fell in love with love instead of ambition! What then would happen? He thrust the thought fiercely from him and believed himself still the perfect lover—with a difference!

The same fear had occurred more than once to Apollodoros—to whom the Queen could allow herself the luxury of candor. He groaned aloud as he pictured her driven on a wind, a gale, a hurricane of passion. Where would Cæsar and his ambition be then? And Egypt? And as yet no hope of a child. Were that to be it might forge a bond unbreakable. If not— Alas for Cæsar's gray hairs and touch-me-not manner!

BUT love between two greatnesses such as Cæsar and the young Queen could not be all thornless roses and raptures such as lesser folk may hope for an hour.

There was Potheinos ceaselessly exciting the Alexandrians against Rome, and therefore covertly against Cleopatra; there was the young Ptolemy, sulking, and Arsinoë watching her sister with eyes of smouldering hate. And, lastly, the Egyptian forces raised by Potheinos were still under arms and clamoring for their royal Ptolemy. Tangled threads to weave into the robe of sovereignty desired by the lovers!

And one fine morning when they waked to a new day of perplexities their bird had flown. Arsinoë, with something of the audacity of her lovelier sister, had escaped to the army and would very likely be proclaimed Queen and all the rest of it, on the ground that Cleopatra and Ptolemy were prisoners of the Roman!

"A pretty kettle of fish!" ejaculated Cæsar with a face as long as his arm, when Apollodoros gravely presented the news. "Who would have thought the withered little virgin had it in her!"

"If they do proclaim her Queen at least they cannot make her Venus-Hathor!" said Cleopatra sourly. "That would pass even their folly and invoke the sure anger of the Goddess! No one likes to be caricatured. I told you, Cæsar—and you, Apollodoros, that there will be no peace while Arsinoë lives. Ptolemy is a donkey, but she has something of the spirit of our race in her mean little herring of a body. Suppose she marries Achillas—their commander!"

"The Princess has already plotted the murder of the noble Cæsar," submitted Apollodoros, "and the freeing of her brother and the eunuch. It appears to me that in any case a seat in Paradise is preparing for the young King."

"And how have these secrets reached you, wise man?"

"Through the palace barber—a person of excessive timidity and with ears as long, and collective, as a donkey's. He is here, there and everywhere like a fly. My best and most trustworthy scout, great Cæsar! There is no question but that the rumor of the divine consort has stirred them all to a desperate throw. Now, what shall be done, most Magnificent?"

Cæsar reflected but a moment.

"Potheinos was the murderer of the noble Pompey. Why have I borne with him so long? I might well deserve the just indignation of the Republic if

I let him go further. Send me the officer of the guard."

Cleopatra did not pale when the stern young man stood before his imperator, stiff and one-purposed as duty herself.

"Surround the chambers of the eunuch with a guard, and let the head of the murderer of Pompey be at my feet within the hour."

She had never heard that voice before—and it struck the certitude of success in her. When had Cæsar failed? How was it possible that he should ever fail?

Very much within the hour, the plottings of Potheinos were done forever, and a vast hoard of ill-gotten treasure was added to her own. That matter dismissed, Cæsar addressed her, again with the fixed purpose and rigid lips which awed her. Apollodoros, standing behind her, brightened as he spoke.

"Your brother. We cannot murder him. He cannot live. I have considered, and, if you doubt, remember, my Queen, that all kingdoms wither and die beneath a divided rule. What I say is for the good of Egypt—which is yours! I shall send Ptolemy from the Palace to join the Egyptian army."

"Gods!—and why?" breathed Cleopatra. "Surely he will be their inspiration! Let us keep him prisoner!"

Apollodoros shaped "Silence!" with mute lips. He saw. He understood.

"I must fight the Egyptian army, Queen of Egypt—and surely their King should be with them? The Thirty-seventh Legion joins me in a few days with men and supplies—and then—and then, if Ptolemy is with his army . . ."

He said no more, as indeed what need was there? The wretched Ptolemy, heart-stricken by the death of Potheinos, his one support, perceived the deadly purpose of Cæsar and pleaded and struggled to be retained as prisoner in the Palace. The slaying of Potheinos was just—he knew it. If he himself were thrust out of the Roman protection, forced to face Cæsar in battle. . . .

He would have thrown himself at his sister's knees, but Cleopatra was ill—invisible. So they told him. And Cæsar's steadfastly reiterated reply was only:

"It shall never be said I kept your Majesty a prisoner. I restore you to your army. Go."

What the Gods will is done, no doubt, on earth as in heaven!

In a few brief days the Egyptian army, routed, was fleeing before the Roman legions. Many of the fugitives fled across the Nile, young Ptolemy among them; and when the overweighted boat which carried the King of Egypt sank, and buried him and his pitiably brief story in Nile mud, it ended a life matched against too heavy odds to hope even for one ray of happiness or glory.

The triumph of Cæsar! The joy of Cleopatra! She reigned sole sovereign of Egypt. Arsinoë was a prisoner, helpless and hopeless, and there was none to say her nay. Surely the Gods had guided her into her alliance with Cæsar! There might—there *must* be more than political value in the belief that deific inspiration dwelt in his breast and hers.

Crowned with roses, beautiful with triumph, she waited in her Palace chamber as he came riding into Alexandria at the head of his legions, splendid in steel, the Roman helmet disclosing the keen intelligence and beauty of his aspect. "A terrible fighting face!" the cowed populace whispered as the rows of soldiers tramped through them onward to the Palace. Perhaps it was not all so ill, the Alexandrians thought. At least the Queen would have a *man* if not a god for her consort, and the power of Rome harnessed to that of Egypt.

So too thought Cleopatra.

He had never seen her more lovely than when, still wearing his helmet, he entered that beautiful and silent chamber sacred to their love and to the moment they could speak together before the great banquet claimed them—the triumph for their friends and those they hoped to conciliate.

He noted with surprise that she wore the robe of Isis, the wings of the Mother-Goddess outspread on her bosom.

"The way is clear!" he said, standing to make his announcement, as if in the presence of the Roman Senate. "The Queen's enemies are scattered. She reigns alone."

She fled to his arms like a dove to her refuge.

"Did I not see the omen, my King of Kings, as I came down from Pelusium?—the dove rescued by a mighty eagle? O heart of my heart, the gratitude—the love! What shall I do for you—how reward you? Yet I can—I can! Yourself will own it. The son of all our hopes,—the King of the World, shall be! The Gods have heard my prayer. Come up with me into the true Egypt and thank them."

Even in Cæsar's great life that was one of the mighty moments. His stay in Egypt with its ancient beliefs and royalties had rooted and watered in his powerful mind the belief that he was not as are other men. And small wonder! He had come all but unattended to Alexandria, and on a very different errand—the destruction of his rival Pompey. He had thought to leave it in a few brief days. But the spell of the Nile had caught him. In the lovely Macedonian Queen he had found his tool and siren, and lo!—that world also was at his feet, and in his hand the key of the vast and mysterious East. Could he return to Rome with this to lay before the wondering Romans surely the Roman Kingship would be his. What could they deny to their

invincible Cæsar? But for himself— Vanity! ashes in the mouth!—having no son to leave it to, no dynasty to found. But now—but now—the Queen of Egypt promised him that greatest of all the gifts of Fortune, a divine child to sit on the Roman throne, to rule in Egypt, to be Emperor of Asia, and, with all this, most truly of the World also. He clasped her in a silence more eloquent than any speech, so tense that it startled her, and looking up she saw tears in his eyes and a quiver like a prayer upon his lips. It was too much—too great a gift from the clenched hand of Fate. There was no obstacle. Her foolish little consort was dead. She was free to hail the greatest of the Gods as her child's father.

She flung her arms up in a rapture that all but excelled his own.

"The vision, the vision!" she cried. "O Light on the Horizon, O Sun that nears its zenith! Clasp me, mighty Cæsar, restrain me, or I shall go mad with joy."

YEARS later that voyage up the Nile hung the gallery of the little Queen's memory with many pictures, most wonderful and beautiful.

The royal boat was made ready and even Cæsar's reticence was amazed by its splendors. Luxury supreme reigned on board—shaded chambers for the Queen and her ladies, rooms of audience, stately colonnades, a roofed garden of delicate exotic flowers and plants, shrines for the worship of Venus-Hathor and the Roman Bacchus. No preparation for magnificent leisure was absent, and no lack of wind could halt the Queen's progress, for the vessel was propelled by many banks of oars. And the luxury of ornament! The rooms were panelled with rare aromatic woods of Asia, sweet-smelling cedar and almug trees, and upon the polish of these were laid friezes of gold-leaf, and on these were depicted the triumphs of the greatest of the deified Egyptian Kings.

With the Queen and her now openly announced consort went a fleet of four hundred ships filled with Cæsar's legionaries and the soldiers of the Queen. Not only was the royalest pomp desirable, but he would take no chances for the precious lives now in the hollow of his hand for safe keeping. He surrounded her with tenderest observance. Both knew that longer than the birth of the child he dared not linger from Rome. He must go there to build their mighty future. But meanwhile he would give her memories so sweet, so binding, that they would safeguard her love for him until he could call her to Rome to set the seal on his achievement.

He succeeded. He half won her heart and her gratitude wholly. Those were happy days. Her condition, if it lowered the brilliance of her sparkle and audacity, made her more gentle, more submissive, gave new sweetness to her eyes—the tenderness of a wife, the tremor of a girl about to face the terrifying issue of motherhood and depending wholly upon the devotion of the man who had brought her to the danger and would be her support in agony.

"If she should die—if I should lose her!" he thought, and often not selfishly, but with a kind of terror of the black midnight that must engulf his age if that brightness were withdrawn.

She lay one day on her couch, covered with great tapestries, gold-embroidered and splendid, looking incredibly small and pale, filled with the forebodings natural to her condition, and overweighted with awe of the greatness of the Egypt she had never known till now. Against the still but powerful current they were oaring upwards slowly to the city of Abydos, the

city of Osiris, consecrated by the passionate devotion of ages to the God of Light who was also God of the dark underworld and the shadowy armies of the dead—the most awful place in Egypt, for there Osiris himself lay buried.

"I will not land. I dare not!" said Cleopatra, shuddering as the shore loomed in sight. Cæsar sat beside her, watching with profound interest, for to him she had rehearsed the stories that clung like bats in the darkness about the mysteries. He withdrew his eyes from the shore and looked at her with a smile.

"My little Queen shall land where and how she will, and not otherwise. Talk no more of these evil things. Talk of our great future and I will tell you how Rome shall resound and ring like smitten brass when you come to shine and glitter there, bringing my son to me."

But still her face was pale and her lip trembled.

"Who escapes sorrow—and under what sky? And Calpurnia? Will she also rejoice when I come with my son to Rome?"

"Calpurnia? You need not fear her, you little fool. You who never really fear anything! The Gods have done too much for you to deserve distrust."

"But Calpurnia?" she persisted with a kind of languid melancholy. "Often I tell myself she has the first right to my beloved. And the Roman people—will they bear to see her slighted?"

"They will bear what I please," he said austerely. "But Calpurnia is a Roman—she will never flinch from a duty—she is of the greatly enduring type. I know her. When I consider difficulties she is not among them."

"Difficulties? And what are they now?" She raised herself on one arm and looked in his face anxiously.

"Not women. Men! There are men in Rome who grudge to see me rise, and I am not perfectly certain that in Mark Antony, my right hand, I have the man I should. He is as brave as Achilles, and yet—"

"I have often wondered about him and thought you must trust him deeply that you leave so much in his hands. Describe him to me, beloved. I love to hear of men." She lay back again with a long sigh of content, her arms beneath her head, black lashes laid on cheeks a little paled but no less lovely.

He thought with a thrill of pride that even his glory would not suffer when he presented this young Queen captive of his bow and spear to the critical world of Rome. How they would talk—how discuss her in the great villas by the Tiber and elsewhere, where ladies, many of them intimately well known to him, congregated to prepare the daily dish of highly flavored scandal! Her name would be tossed like a ball above the crowded streets, in

the baths, in the hall where the gladiators gathered and laughed over every item of their masters' loves and hates.

Yes, there would be scandal and gossip; but when she came in all her glory, loaded with riches, radiating charm, what could there be but envy of him and of her, and wonder—wonder all the time! He knew well that apart from beauty she had her air of unrivalled distinction, unmatched in Rome, the Greek grace of bearing and lissom elegance in which the stately Roman women were less proficient than they wished. It was not without bearing on the case that Rome owed nearly all her arts but that of architecture to Greece, and the Queen would be as eminently the fashion as the last drama or the group of Apollo in pursuit of Daphne which had set the town ablaze last year.

He looked at her, studying the impression she would make. Her expression was not deliberately haughty—never! That was quite unnecessary and she knew it. It was an atmosphere about her which proclaimed the highest descent, the careless habit of command, the absence of any self-assertion, more clearly than if a band of trumpeters had shouted it before her. It said, but with the utmost finesse, to other women:

"Yes, you are all very well. You are even, let us say—more beautiful than I. But are you not rather— Is there not a little too *much* of you in every way? I have no rights to assert. All stand aside for me, for I am I."

What she represented was subtle and final. One could get no nearer than that. But he rejoiced in it, and not only in that but in all the circumstance that surrounded the Queen. Every day he realised more fully the dramatic importance of this, and how it must aid a climbing man who meant to rule the world and stave off assassination until he could attain it.

"But Mark Antony?" she questioned, yawning a little. "Charmion, fan me! Isis, how hot it is! He is young?"

Cæsar winced a little. So that was what she thought of most importance! Like to like! It acidulated his description of his General-in-charge.

"He is mature," he said with slightly tightened lips, "and of fine stature and appearance. In my own mind I call him the Gladiator. He has their faults and virtues. Brave to an extreme, with the courage of a charging bull. Good-natured, genial, a little stupid—as genial people mostly are! Entirely unable to resist any temptation whether in the form of wine or women. Let us say an overgrown boy. Judge whether I can leave our affairs in such hands a day longer than I must!"

"Faithful, I suppose?" she asked with some interest.

"That depends. If the beautiful courtesan Cytheris set herself to extract a secret from him between two draughts of Falernian I should be sorry for the secret! . . . But who is this venerable man approaching on that strange boat?"

Cleopatra raised herself upright and stared over the side in alarm. She caught at Cæsar's hand in an access of nervous terror.

"Oh, tell the slaves to row fast, fast! I dare not—I will not land here."

The order was given, but the rowing ceased, as though a spell had fallen. The overseers of the benches of oars themselves stood motionless, whip in hand, issuing no orders. All faces were fixed on the approaching boat.

A strange boat indeed, platformed and decorated to represent the sacred boat of the Solar Disk. In it, surrounded by young priests with professionally serious faces, stood an old man in the magnificent ceremonial robes of the high priest of Abydos, already bowing toward the royal vessel in honor of the presence of the living Gods, Cleopatra and Cæsar.

"Halt!" she said in a terrified whisper. "No, I dare not pass him by. It is the High Priest of Osiris—the greatest in the eyes of the people. What he says is law for me as for others."

He helped her to rise, himself too ignorant of the ways of the land to interfere, and in a moment more the visitor was received on deck with profound reverence by every Egyptian, profound curiosity by every Roman. For in every Roman mind the great priests of Egypt were gifted with supernatural powers. What mighty marvels might not now be done to delight the Queen?

A curtain was lowered to exclude the majesties of the interview from lesser spectators, and within that enclosure the High Priest stood after salutation, leaning on his great staff ciphered with hieroglyphs and speaking his mind as the great with the great. He was himself descended from a King of the Fifth Dynasty and bore his name.

"It is fitting that the Divine Cleopatra should make offering in the mighty Temple of Osiris built by her great predecessors on the throne, and that the Divine Consort should accompany her. Tonight when the eternal stars keep watch, come, Lady of Egypt, and make offering for yourself and the unborn God."

The occasion struck a new string in the high-strung nature of Cleopatra, responsive to every note of terror or beauty. Her vessel lay for the first time between banks awful with the glorious and silent temples of the mightiest period of Egyptian wisdom. There was heaviness in the air, a dead and oppressive destiny heaped on the present by the actions and faiths of peoples unknown and vanished, yet still potent for good and ill. Alexandria—how different! There she had often jested with her intimates, Charmion and Apollodoros (but he refuses to recognise that comedy), at the cowheaded Hathor, the jackal-headed Anubis. Who could expect any modern person to take such manifestations quite seriously—and amid the irreverent brilliancies

of the town of a comparatively latter-day person like Alexander the Great? Three hundred years since he died, and what was that compared with the immense and terror-striking antiquity represented by Abydos? She could hardly breathe the air for the weight of ages upon it; its dead dreams brooded upon the sands and the temples already beginning to feel the touch of decay, the ruining of time. She had heard that the spirits of the dead are powerful and from them nothing is hidden, and the belief became credible here in their all but visible and tangible presence.

"I will come, most noble Sahu-Ra," she said, faltering. "I had no other thought, but my condition pleads for your pardon if I am weak. And by him who sleeps at Abydos I entreat your intercession for me and for the King unborn."

He made a gesture with his hand, turning away.

"You shall not go. I swear it!" Cæsar said sternly as the boat made for the shore.

"What, and face misfortunes I dare not name, if I disobey? No, my hero shall come with me, and all be well. I am no coward."

But yet she was pale as the Nile lilies.

When the orange sunset had died over the sands of the Arabian desert the stars came out lamping low and brilliant, the more so because no moon lit the world.

"The Egyptian serving girls say that on this night she shines in the Under World, and, because the dead fear light, they troop to our night!" said Charmion fearfully as she bound her Queen's head with the fillets worn by the ancient rulers of Egypt when they visited the Sanctuary of Sanctuaries. "Is it well my Queen should leave the brightness and safety of the royal boat for those dark temples?"

"Is it well that the Queen of Egypt should pay her duty in the holy places? And should you hinder me, Charmion? Give me courage, if I shrink. And I do shrink. Abydos is a place of awful memories."

Poor Charmion cast about for reassurance, trembling for her beloved. Presently her face brightened.

"Royal Isis—the Goddess Isis incarnate in you has nothing to fear from her brother and husband, the mighty Osiris. Oh, this is a place of good omen for you—of happiest omen! All the gifts of the God will be laid in your hands. And more—was not the Light on the Horizon, who foretold all good for my dear Lady, a priest of the Temple at Abydos? What but good can come from that happy place?"

Joy dawned on the little pale face. Woman-like, queen-like, she had forgotten the warning, and remembered only the good.

"My own Charmion, how right you are! It is true. For this good thought, kiss me!"

She moved slowly to the curtain and Charmion held it aside, following her to where Cæsar waited. He looked at her in astonishment. She wore the ritual dress and insignia of the Goddess Isis, copied faithfully from the most ancient pictures,—a dress stiff, archaic, not in itself so much beautiful as strange with a strangeness that set her apart in divinity.

A white robe was loosely girded about the waist and flowing to the feet from the girdle, gemmed with amulets of Isis. On her head were golden horns supporting the disk of the sun and springing from the throne of Osiris, all wrought in gold. This rested on the close-fitting vulture cap, the bird-head pointing greedily forward, the blue wings covering her ears as though to shut out all earthly sounds. In one hand she bore the feather of truth, with its lotus capital. In the other, the ringed cross of life, symbolising immortality. It was no dress to set off womanhood or beauty, nor had it been chosen for that purpose. Every detail represented a vast cosmic symbolism to the minds of those who saw, a terrible solitude of dignity, leading the thoughts to the innermost of the mysteries.

In this strange dress, claiming eternal majesty, her small pale humanity, the delicate features a little sharpened by approaching maternity, touched Cæsar as never before. It was the first instant of their connection which had awakened any emotion of pity. She had run him through the gamut of every other emotion but not that of tender simplicity. The little creature—bearing the solar disk on wearied brows, the cross of immortality in a hand so slender!—what could she do when he had left her alone to deal with her divinity and her unruly kingdom, and her child? If he could stay! If she could come with him! He longed for it—that he might shield her in his arms.

It passed as quickly as it came, but that moment had been all that his brilliant life had ever given him to know of the heavenly Eros. Of the earthly he knew more than enough. Yet it left natural tenderness behind it. He held his arm about her as they sat in the boat, and supported her as, preceded by torches, her litter marched to the Temple of Seti the First, the crowd on either side making reverence and murmuring in an unceasing monotone of adoration:

"The Goddess comes to worship the God. O earth, be silent!"

At the entrance all fell back, and only Cleopatra and Cæsar entered the vast hall, supported by pillars, where the High Priest and two others standing behind him waited rigid as images.

And as they stood, the High Priest, leaning on his staff, pronounced a greeting:

"Hail to the living Isis, justified before earth and heaven! Let her approach the altar of her lord Osiris, and be received by him as a wife by her husband, making the declaration of purity."

The priests turned, and, conscious of a strange upbearing power, the Queen followed them, Cæsar walking behind her, kindling to the indescribable emotions roused by the vastness and silence. Awe floated in the air like an inaudible but thrilling vibration and catching the imagination of the man tuned him into the key of the occasion. He felt and bore himself as should the consort of the Queen.

But at the entrance of the next hall, the priest's raised hand halted him.

"Here none may enter but the priests and the holy Isis. Holy is it and most holy! Here stand, Great One, and see, but set no foot over the threshold lest the thunder of the God break loose."

Cæsar looked anxiously in the face of Cleopatra but she made no sign. Her eyes were fixed on the altar of black marble seen small in the immense length of the hall. A flame of fire, pure white and pointed, burned steadily and unwaveringly upon it and was the only light in the great and shadowy place. Darkness itself would have been less awe-striking.

"If harm come to the Queen—!" he said, his attitude a menace.

"What should hurt the Queen in the halls of her own divinity? Stand back, Roman, back!" the old man answered sternly. She was already moving forward as though drawn to the flame. Cæsar stood before the threshold in deep dread, fearing to invoke some mysterious danger if he followed, every nerve trembling with dread of the unknown.

Thus, followed by the priests, she approached the great altar of black marble supporting the silent image of Osiris, in black marble also, crowned, but bandaged and stiff, a mummy, the dead but living God, holding the symbol of life immortal—and beside him a high-raised empty throne of black marble, as though for an equal God.

The High Priest now preceded her, turned, and standing before the image faced the Queen.

"Osiris hears. Let the Royal Wife, the Goddess, make declaration."

With courage, she raised her hands in salutation and began:

"I have come before thee. May I not be turned back! May my members be renewed by the sight of thy beauty. Because I have worshipped may I reach the land of Eternity!

"I come before thee pure, bearing thy son Horus in my body.
Give peace and protection to thy sister, thy wife.
Set thy Child Horus upon the throne of the Two Lands.
Hail, Osiris, Lord of the dead and living.
Homage!"

She prostrated herself before the Osiris, then rising, guided by the priest's hand, ascended the empty throne of black marble beside him, and, as she did so, sitting motionless as the marble image, a rattling of sistra was heard, and from all the chapels poured in hundreds of priests filling the sanctuary, while mysterious lights in the roof and great columns sprang into life, flooding the scene with radiance.

A strong-voiced male chant broke from the men, drowning all else in waves of deep sound:

"O Lady of the Beginning, Lady of the Emerald, shine before our faces!
Come in peace, thou who art Hathor the Lovely!
Come in peace, thou who art Isis the Hidden!
Hathor is the Lady of the turquoise, great in the Land of Egypt!
Isis is the Lady of the Emerald, great throughout the world.
Hail, thou hidden God born in the flesh of her body!"

There was a sudden and dead silence, and then, terrifying and magnificent, broke out the thundering shout:

"Shine, O Golden One! Hail! Hail! Hail!"

The lights were suddenly extinguished—only the radiance from the altar flame fell on the tense pale face of the human Goddess adored by her priests. They could be seen—dim shadows like a darkness on the ground. She rose with outstretched hands to pronounce the ritual words, and even as she did so the light on the altar fell and was not, and a great thunder overhead rolled like the denunciation of the Gods.

In the blinding darkness a moaning wail broke from all the prostrate figures, and through it pierced the cry of the High Priest:

"Not in ten thousand years has the light died. Not since the hand of the holy Isis lit it in Abydos. O Queen, go forth! The God rejects your child and you! Go, go, go!"

There was a frightful silence. Cæsar in an agony of fear for the Queen, helpless in the darkness, pushed forward with the instinct to reach and guard her, and so set his foot over the holy threshold.

As he did so frightful thunderings broke out again, with darting flashing lights among the columns. A hedge of priests invisibly opposed him, steadily

ranked.

"Here it is death to enter. Behold the lightnings of the God!" they shouted. "Do not dare to enter!"

Amid thunderings and lightnings terrible to hear and see, the mass of men parted, and four bearing the Queen as if dead in their arms came slowly down the pathway. The High Priest followed, his face white with fear. He made a wild gesture of abhorrence.

"It is doom; it is doom! Never has such a thing been! She is not of our blood. The God rejects her. Flee from the Holy Place, O unhappy!—taking her also. For the face of the God is set against you as a hedge of spears!"

The priests broke into a run, carrying her as though to have done with the accursed thing, Cæsar perforce running with them, himself wild with mingled fear and anger, conscious that it was a flight most ignominious and dangerous to the Queen's honor.

The litter was reached, and they laid her in it, then turning fled to the temple entrance where the High Priest waited towering above the tossing groups of his priests.

Marvellous to tell, the night was still and starlit as when they entered. The thunder had ceased. Only the people prostrate and face-hidden along the way testified to the past terror. Furious and shamed, Cæsar shouted aloud:

"If this matter is told abroad not a man of you shall live. I will smoke out this hive of wild hornets until not one stone is left on another to tell the tale of the trickery and sedition of priests!"

And still the High Priest cried above the throng:

"Go! Go!"

And the people lay in dead silence like ghosts in the night.

WHEN, on board the royal vessel, Cleopatra returned to life, she pushed her disordered hair aside, and, pale as death, wild-eyed, sent for Apollodoros.

"Go instantly. See the High Priest Sahu-Ra. Ask him in what I have sinned. Take with you my emerald crown and the armlets of fine emerald and offer them. Entreat him that he come and give his blessing to me and my child. Oh, Cæsar, do not delay him!"

For Cæsar would have drawn him aside to consult on the possibility of the whole episode being trickery with some dark and terrible priest-plot behind it. Yet even if it were, so mighty was the power of the priests over the Egyptian people that none could dare affront them, and her method of conciliation might be the safest. Cæsar stood back, perplexed. Again she cried to Apollodoros:

"Most faithful, say to him that the Light on the Horizon, a venerable priest of his temple, foretold me all good. Why then is the face of Osiris set against me and my child?"

Apollodoros, himself utterly confounded, fully realising the danger, delayed not one moment. Cleopatra, leaning through the curtains, saw his boat rowing swiftly to shore, and sank back sighing on her cushions. She kept a troubled silence. Cæsar was a great man, none greater, but what could he know of the dealings of the Gods of Egypt with those of their own people?

In a very short time Apollodoros knelt before her again, himself quaking at the news he had to bring.

"Lady of Egypt, the doors of the temple were barred as if in the day of battle, and from a pylon a priest looked down and bade me begone. I showed the great emeralds. I cried aloud to him, but none answered."

At that extreme of insult her spirit kindled to fierce anger. She sprang to her feet like a raging goddess.

"Then, if it be so, and the God of Abydos rejects me, I appeal to the ever living Gods of whom I myself am one. And in Hermonthis I will build myself a temple to Isis. And if the Egyptian Gods reject me I will honor those of Rome and they shall protect me!"

They calmed her as best they could, fearing the consequences, and at last, with the amazing elasticity of her strange nature, the impression dimmed on her mind; it became a dream of the past night and the very next day the joyful images of the sunny future and the triumph to be had effaced it. She could even jest with Cæsar on the trickery of the priests and the vast and hidden chambers where great engines for contriving the stage thunders might so

easily be hidden. But they left Abydos with the utmost speed and continued their journey up the Nile with pomp and music and feasting to the rulers of the various nomes through which they passed.

"Yet, it is observable," said Apollodoros in great anxiety to Charmion, "that in all the holy places the priests hold aloof and there is no question but that the people shrink from us at their order. The priests do what is needed. They acknowledge the divine union and the divinity of the child to be; but nothing more than is ritually required of them. In Alexandria it matters little, for there no man believes in anything but gain, but in this ancient and mighty Egypt it is another affair and of my two eyes I would give one to know the meaning. I fear very greatly that in their hidden knowledge they have foreseen harm from the alliance with Rome through Cæsar. Oh, that I could know, but the priests are secret as death. Eventually this may ruin the Queen."

To Cæsar, Cleopatra said little or nothing about the episode at Abydos when it was past. For her plans it was of the utmost importance that the magnitude of her riches, power, and the devotion of her people should be stamped on his mind, and it was bitter to her that he should have seen her rejection for in all things she desired that he should realise her consequence as an ally. They little knew how unblinded were those clear Roman eyes, that acute brain.

So the days and months went on to the great day which should bring to life the divine child who for earthly reasons also might be expected to possess more than a ray of piercing intelligence. Apart from all pretensions to deity, the child of Cæsar and Cleopatra should accomplish much on the royal stage where the throne awaited him.

And when it dawned the frantic rejoicings of the city showed that the Gods had been great in giving. On the breast of the Queen lay a man-child fair and beautiful, strong-limbed and bright, true heir to his father and mother, wielder of the sceptre of the world.

Lifting him in weak arms with joy and pride unbounded, she presented him to his father:

"I have called him Cæsarion and he shall live to make your name greater even than it is now. I say that he shall carry the name like a banner over Europe and Asia. Receive him as the noblest of gifts, and thank me also, for —I have suffered!"

She had all but died in the battle of life-giving, but pride rushed to her white cheek in scarlet as she spoke.

As Cæsar took the child in his arms a strange tenderness suffused his heart, the more so because the very next day he must leave these two, to fight

their battle and his own in Rome. Already the galleys waited in the Harbor of the Happy Return, straining like hounds at the leash.

"I swear that there shall be no deed undone, no thought unthought to place him where he should be. And of all that I have, the best is his. And for this gift which has changed the face of the world to me, I thank my lady and wife." He could scarcely say less, but the last word was precious to her for it constituted the acknowledgment of his position as Divine Consort, and the assurance that that was the attitude to be observed in Rome. Surely every word and event bore out the flashing pictures of glory which she had beheld with the sight given by the wise Egyptian—the Light on the Horizon.

In parting he clasped her to his breast, saying:

"Guard this great charge I have given you. Be wise in Egypt for his sake and mine. Take counsel always with the wise Apollodoros. Amass great riches that they may always be at our disposal. They are the sinews of war. And when I send for my Queen to Rome come with glory that they may say the Sun indeed has risen in the East. And now may all the Gods be good to you and Fortune blow my sails full for Rome."

Weak and craving at the moment for some more personal word she clung to him, shedding a few tears.

"And Calpurnia, Cæsar beloved?"

"Calpurnia is *my* affair, and you shall not suffer!" he said in a cooler tone, and disengaging himself. "And now, is there more to say?"

"No more!" she answered, piqued that the obvious vows and protestations which really were a matter of common courtesy, if no more, should be forgotten.

"You will follow my counsel?"

"Faithfully. Have I not my child to think of?"

"Then farewell, happiest and most beautiful; and when I send, come quickly."

It was over. Lying by the great window looking out upon the harbor and the Pharos, in a short while she saw the oars of the fleet, loaded, by the way, with Egyptian treasure, dip at the given signal, and the sails run up and expand their wings to the fair breeze. Like oaring swans they followed their leader, leaving the strange solitude on empty waters that the passing of a ship bequeaths to a deserted harbor. All Alexandria was on the quay, applauding and waving. There were few who did not realise the magnitude of Cæsar's errand to Rome. But Cleopatra did not watch for the figure of Cæsar and her last glimpse of one beloved. In silence she lay with the small Cæsar in her arms thinking strange thoughts—clearly shaped and resolute for a girl so

young. The immediate impression of Cæsar's personality had passed from her with the last sight of his face, and she felt power within to shape life and bend it to her will for herself and the child.

When it was permitted she sent for Apollodoros and showed him the face of the prince like a rose on the pillow beside her.

"Here is the fruit of our policy, most faithful, and now we are alone to deal with it, you and I. Cæsar is gone, and the Gods only know whether to death or life, to glory or defeat. Even now I hesitate whether to dare all with Rome or to fall back into Egypt and make myself one with my own people. It is a great decision whether to win the priests back and stand by the Gods of Egypt, or to trust the Roman deities and go forward."

Kneeling he fixed brooding eyes upon her, eyes full of doubt and foreboding.

"There is now no turning, divine Cleopatra. We are as surely bound to Cæsar as he to us and all is staked on his fidelity. The Gods are good to us in giving this child. It is a strength here and in Rome. But, O beloved Lady, do not speak lightly of the Gods of Rome any more than of the Gods of Egypt. It is in my mind that all gods are one, and the names we give them, but disguises they use to steal nearer to the hearts of men. Certainly they protect the truth-teller and justice-dealer, and the name of a righteous king is dear to them."

"It is true. But, alas, the disguise they wear is so thick that we never see them, never know them till too late; and there is nothing easier to forget than a god, if it were not a lover! I have half forgotten Cæsar already, should have wholly forgotten him, if it were not for ambition. For the child is mine, mine, and I will make him great. What is a father to a child? For my part I wonder the Gods should have troubled to create such an irrelevance! It is the mother—it is the long nine months that count, the jewel shaping into color and fire in the dark. But I will affront no god, though I wish that Isis and all the rest of them had not made me so cold and lonely in my heart that I can never give myself wholly to any one—no, not even to Charmion and to you. I long to love, I die to love, and I can see nothing in it! Life is my lover—of that I never weary; and to use men, to set them alight is a part of life, but no more."

She laughed, throwing herself back on the pillows. He thought she had never looked so human, or showed so little of the cold elf-like strangeness which came like bright cold glass between her and any approach from outside. However well she feigned love and submission, he, at least, could always decipher her; but now, for awhile, her struggle for life and young motherhood had given her an exquisite delicacy of coloring, and her manner a soft languor more attractive than the boyish frankness of the past. She

clasped the child, her bright intricate eyes softened with a haze like tears as she studied the little face of the Ruler of the World.

That mood too was thrown aside when she gave him to the nurses, and talk passed into the best means of conciliating the priests. She gave orders for the building of the temple at Hermonthis, and especially that she herself should be depicted on its sacred walls in company with the God Amen, and that a splendid constellation of gods should appear, assisting at the birth of her child. All the time she was vehemently wishing that the Goddess's tastes were not so extravagant, and what, she asked, could there be to please any one with a ray of womanhood about her in a dull old temple and the eternal chanting of tedious priests? "Of course there may be something in it I don't grasp, and if so it may be a good investment. There are times when I believe in my own divinity, but many more when I don't. It may be easy enough to give oneself airs when the people shout 'Hail to the Goddess,' though I often think them fools for their pains; but just now I nearly died in childbirth and there was very little of the goddess about me then. And look at Arsinoë—I suppose she must have a divine particle in her if I have, but none the less she will have to walk in Cæsar's Triumph in Rome, loaded with golden chains and loathing her life. It's rather a poor show being a human divinity."

She laughed aloud. The humor of that thought was never far from her.

"A divinity—I! Well, I hope my fellow gods will remember this poor immortal in Rome, for otherwise I shall never see Egypt again. Gods! the nest of enemies waiting for me! Calpurnia! Octavian, Cæsar's nephew, whom the birth of this child has ruined! All Cæsar's light and heavy loves! Think in how many paths I am a stumbling block."

She laughed again; then sighed.

"Well, good-bye to Cæsar for the present. I never loved him—he was too cantankerous and took himself too seriously. But, all the same, it was a good time and I lived every hour of it. I have downed Ptolemy and Potheinos. Arsinoë is a prisoner. Did Cæsar use me or I him? And which will it be in Rome? For now the Roman adventure opens."

CHAPTER X

THE affairs of Cleopatra and his son fell into the background of Cæsar's mind soon after he left Alexandria, for along the Mediterranean were several little wars which needed the hand of the All-Conqueror, and even on reaching Rome he was compelled to leave it almost immediately to exterminate the remaining friends of Pompey in North Africa. But, on the whole, this suited his plans, for, go where he would, Victory followed him like a figure chained with gold in the Triumphs of Rome; and he returned, haloed with glory, more than a year after he had left Egypt, exalted in the eyes of the Romans to a position almost more than mortal.

The delay had given time also for splendid rumors to precede him of the Egyptian amour. They exaggerated the magnificence of the Queen, her beauty and political importance, his own unique and miraculous position as her Divine Consort and father of the succeeding Pharaoh. Egypt was far enough away to make any marvels credible, combined as the stories must be with the acknowledged mystery and antiquity of that strange country. From time immemorial the Greeks and Romans had looked to it as a sacred wonder, and Cæsar's adventures there added more brilliant rays to the glory that now encircled him. To be sure these rumors lost nothing in the hands of Mark Antony, his general, whose own interests required that Cæsar's should flame resplendent in the sky.

Behold him in the gardens of Cæsar's magnificent villa across the Tiber paying a visit of ceremony to the forsaken Calpurnia, a visit which her warm dislike of Antony could have dispensed with, and only endured as obedience to Cæsar's commands.

She sat in an arbor of trees by the lapping of the river, shaded by interwoven branches of leaf and blossom from the ardent sun, enjoying the coolness rising from the wandering water. No longer a very young woman, she still possessed the marble stateliness of beauty which Cæsar could not dispense with in his wife. She had also the air of having lived in the midst of great events and being equal to them—a close-lipped and reticent dignity necessary to a woman who must take her place in an utterly dissolute society and hold herself above the muddy path with sufficient skill to avoid giving offence.

Cæsar must have a wife above suspicion, but she must also strengthen his party, increase his popularity, help to dispense his vast hospitalities and carry an air of sober and benign grandeur through it all. Women must not feel she censured their debaucheries, though she did not share them. They must be able to say:

"The kind Calpurnia. The dear Calpurnia. A pity she is so strait-laced for herself when she is so sympathetic and lenient for others!"

They did not know that she held the daily promiscuous drunkenness and gluttony in abhorrence, apart and austere as a cloistered nun, a born mystic and worshipper in the new faith of the Egyptian Isis, which was taking steady root in Rome. There before the Mother-Image of the Divine Mother, the childless wife of Cæsar found a mystic peace through which his infidelities and ambitions sounded far off as the murmur of distant waters. He had never intruded them on her in Rome. So, as women will, having lost what she valued most, she replaced it with what she could best gather to her desolate heart. She looked with wincing distaste at Mark Antony as he came through a long pergola of roses forming a vista which concentrated light and shade on his remarkable person. To her he represented all the vices of Rome, all that had made a desert of her life and left her lonely. Each and every one of them found their apotheosis in Antony.

His very swagger bruised her. Two slaves attended him, one fawning with his purple cloak in case of need; the other strutting insolently behind him with the air of the spoiled favorite.

He was a big man shaped for heavy strength and power, of great height even among the tall Romans, a man who would be corpulent in later life and was massive now. He had a thick throat based on broad shoulders, powerful jaws belied by the curve of beautiful sensuous lips, low forehead and aquiline nose, the beak of the bird of prey, with a spring of plentiful hair from the brows lying in curling masses heavy as marble over his finely moulded head. A splendid personality, brimming with over-abundant life, a very creditable representative of the mighty Hercules; for that, and no less, was the descent he claimed.

The living Hercules, his flatterers called him, and it was in acknowledgment that he wore his purple tunic girt close to his huge thigh, and a heavy sword swinging beside it. Altogether he presented a highly impressive appearance, which did not in the least attract the lady of the villa. Her lip curled with dislike as he drew near, relaxing only into the smallest pinched smile demanded by civility.

Seeing her, he performed a carelessly good-natured salutation for, having no influence with Cæsar or others, she counted little with him. The two slave-girls behind her watched with interest. He was invariably interesting to women.

A seat was placed for him in the shade at a respectful distance from the great lady and he proceeded to make himself comfortable with considerable care.

"It is a hot day, most noble Calpurnia, and this garden is like the tepidarium in the baths. It makes a man sweat horribly and I have a thirst which—"

She gave the order for wine cooled with snow, in a voice which might have chilled it sufficiently, and when it stood beside him eyed it with an air of aloofness which forbade any suggestion that she should share it.

"I have this day a letter from Julius Cæsar, noble Calpurnia, and he charges me to tell you that he returns to Rome within a few days of my receiving it. I offer my felicitations."

"And I accept them."

There was a pause. Then very coldly and distinctly she asked:

"Is there news also of the Egyptian?"

There could be no concealment on that point. Rome had rung with it since the beginning of the amour, and it really required no delicacy of treatment even with Cæsar's wife. As to the slaves, who cared what they heard or thought? Besides, were not he and Calpurnia talking Greek, just as elegant people later were to glide into a foreign tongue when they wished to baffle the vulgar? She had really asked as coolly as she might have done about her husband's health.

"As a matter of fact she is no Egyptian, noble Calpurnia. She is a Greek—Macedonian, for choice. I think it is only out of their pretty little spite that our ladies call her the Egyptian."

"I have no spite, either pretty or ugly," Calpurnia replied. "Is the child living?"

"So they say. A boy."

"And Cæsar, who will run a mile if he hears a child squeak!" said Cæsar's childless wife, smiling frostily.

"He has run farther than a mile," Antony reminded her. "It is a good bit farther from Alexandria to Rome. But it is said—"

The "but" arrested her as she pulled a white rose to bits. She stopped and looked at him with cold Roman eyes under level brows.

"He returns to her?"

"By no means. His plans require his presence here. But they say"—he cast a side-long glance—"that she is following him to Rome." In his own mind he said: "Amusing to see how Lady Decorum takes that!" It was a thing he himself had hardly thought possible. Calpurnia was one of a great family, and such an affront actually under her classic nose—no chance intrigue, but a woman of rank far exceeding her own, with the position of a wife, and a son to flaunt in the face of Rome—Gods! what a set-out! He would never have

dared it with his own extremely capable Fulvia, though he had left nothing else undared. But then Fulvia had a masterly way with her which Calpurnia lacked. She might even have flown at him, claws out like a Fury. Whereas Lady Decorum took it as the gladiators take a sword in the heart, unflinching and silent.

"Do you hear what the woman is like? The heavy Oriental style, I suppose."

Antony laughed, one of his jolly ha-ha shouts!

"Hercules, no! A Greek, noble Calpurnia. Slight, beautifully made, straight little nose, golden eyes, brown hair dashed with gold, a scapegrace madcap as ever lived. A daring, racy girl. Uncommonly amusing, they say."

"You seem," said the lady, tapping with her foot, "to have gone to some trouble to find out all you can and acquaint yourself with her general effect. Why?"

He laughed with the careless good temper which made him the idol of the soldiers and of friends as reckless as himself.

"Pretty women are pretty women all the world over. Can't think of anything else when they are about. Nothing so interesting as an amour. And especially a divine one."

"Divine?" Her large gray eyes opened on him in surprise.

"Why, yes. Cleopatra is Isis-Venus, or Venus-Isis, according to which mood is topmost at the moment—the respectable or the disreputable. I fancy Venus comes first generally with her. But an Egyptian queen is always more or less divine."

A thrill had run through her body at the beloved name of the Goddess—a shudder at the mockery. But the subject held her.

"And do people believe it?"

"Naturally—in Egypt. And who can disprove it? Every charming girl is an incarnation of Venus, if you come to that. And she is also a queen and beautiful, with temples built in her honor and rows of priests to hymn her. The Divine Cleopatra is a lady to reckon with, and that is why Cæsar has mixed himself up with her."

Some inward compulsion drove her on, even with this coarse gladiator. "But is she beautiful, noble Antony? The centurion who brought the last news from Egypt saw her pass in her chariot. The sight was magnificent; her tunic, as it were, of emeralds, but her face pale and she was very slender. No Goddess. She sat very gravely."

He laughed uproariously. "Goddesses only smile in a solitude of two. But we shall see when she comes, and that will be soon."

"I believe she will never come," Calpurnia said haughtily. "You differ from me? Graciously explain why?"

"Because it is a part of Cæsar's ambition that she should come. She sits at the gate of the Orient that Alexander the Great once forced open though it shut with a clang when he died. And this woman is Queen not only of Egypt but of armies, ships, a bottomless purse. Did Cæsar kill young Ptolemy and make the Princess Arsinoë prisoner to amuse the Queen? No, but for some deep gain of his own. Her beauty is only the sauce to the dish."

She was dead silent; new fears and ideas rushing upon her brain. Antony rose massively.

"No need to fear the Macedonian. Cæsar uses us all as he will. She will play his game like the rest. I bid you farewell and go to make my preparations with his friends."

When he left her the iron had entered her heart. She had never dared to believe the woman would follow him to Rome or that he would permit it. She could not believe it even now—her brain tossed like meeting seas when she tried to force herself to face the thought, and all it would entail upon her of a misery wholly new and untried. For awhile she succeeded in convincing herself.

But in two days' time another visitor arrived at the villa—Antony's wife, the redoubtable Fulvia, borne in her litter of ebony and gold along the garden ways with two richly dressed slave girls before and two behind. Calpurnia knew her before the curtains were undrawn, by the large foot, sandalled and bound with golden thongs, which first made its appearance.

Next came the strong, well-modelled face surmounted with a labyrinth of stiff curls dispersed with the utmost and most laborious art above a forehead which should have been that of a ruler of men, and quite certainly held Antony as a subject. Calpurnia took her by the hand as she descended and they performed an embrace and greeting more political than sisterly.

"Noble Fulvia, how the dressing of your hair becomes you! That Armenian slave is worth her weight in gold. I wish I had her like!"

"Noble Calpurnia, your beauty is beyond improvement by any hairdressing."

So like Fulvia! A clumsy compliment that you could take either way and never be sure which she meant. Was ever woman so maladroit? But the hostess smiled kindly and sent for the most fashionable sherbet of fruit juice and wine, and little delicate cakes sprinkled with poppy-seed, and the talk ranged fast and free over society, Fulvia's dagger (as her intimates called her tongue) striking right and left with devastating candor while Calpurnia followed with the healing balms. It infuriated the younger woman at last:

"If it were not for your well-known chastity one would say you were far too lenient to debauchery. One has to endure the laxity of morals that the wars have brought about, and indeed all the old Roman manners are gone and the younger generation of women are simply harlots in word and deed. Have you heard of the behavior of Caia—and what Lucilla's husband said in public?"

"I hear so little in these quiet gardens. The birds' songs deafen me to scandal. Poor Lucilla—poor Caia! They are both to be pitied."

"I wonder, noble Calpurnia, whether you will extend the same charity to the Queen of Egypt when she comes. It will be a lesson to every wife in Rome if you do."

"I can imagine nothing more unlikely than her coming," the other replied, a little pale about the lips. In those two days she had reasoned herself into perfect security. Cleopatra would never have the hardihood to follow her lover to Rome, nor the patience to forgive his open amour in Africa with the beautiful Eunoë, wife of the Mauretanian king. Why should a royal woman bear such an insult? No—that patience was only to be expected from wives. Besides she had the son she needed, and why should a beautiful girl trouble herself further with a wearied old debauchee? Calpurnia had slept well with these thoughts for company and the divine Isis had moreover vouchsafed her a dream of peace. No, Cleopatra would not come!

Fulvia gave a laugh as irritating as salt on a wound.

"Would that you were right! We have enough scandals here of the home-grown variety. My very heart compassionates you. But Antony had news last night from a centurion of the Seventh Legion that her ships have been seen off the Italian coast. He describes the woman as possessing the very girdle of Venus. No man can resist her."

"I had not heard she was so beautiful," said Cæsar's wife, with quivering lips, still clinging desperately to composure.

"Beautiful, yes. In the best Greek type. But yet quite a new style, and will set all the fashionable fools mad to copy her. She sticks at nothing. Will disguise herself in a hundred ways and ramble through the city with her lover, whoever he may be at the moment, like a perfect daredevil, seeking adventures. She has the courage of a man and a wit that stings like gadflies!"

"Coarse, common, then," said the sad Calpurnia.

Fulvia heard a gleam of hope in her voice and pounced on it like a hawk. "Coarse, common? Venus, no! Not a bit like Antony's beloved Cytheris, the actress. *There's* commonness, if you want it! No. She can say the sharpest things in the most innocent way and freeze you with her royalty next second, and it is always a queen amusing herself with the ways of the vulgar. They

say her palace is the most enchanting place in the world and perfectly scandalous, and since no one has ever known a great lady behave like a harlot and still retain the most *perfect* distinction every one is mad to see her. Our Roman vices are vulgar in comparison."

"I have no doubt the noble Antony is interested," said Calpurnia gravely. Fulvia laughed harshly:

"You are vexed. I have distressed you, best Calpurnia, I who am your friend! Naturally *you* would not be amused with her vagaries. Let us talk of the new show. They say there is a gladiator from Germania—Vespasia and Julia are mad about him already—a big golden-haired brute of a man—"

A woman slave came rushing through the pergolas, her long hair flying behind her. She dropped on one knee before the ladies, gasping for breath. "Domina, great Cæsar landed two days since, and he will enter Rome this afternoon. It is said the Senate will meet him without and attend him to his house in the city."

Fulvia rose instantly: "I will leave you to your preparations. The Gods grant you a happy meeting with Cæsar."

She was gone, the litter scurrying off through the roses as though the bearers were hurrying to see the show. Calpurnia was alone, but for the women behind her, exchanging significant glances above her braided hair. They both knew more Greek than was supposed.

"Leave me. I wish to be alone; and tell the slaves to make ready to take me to the city. Let them be ready in twenty minutes by the water-clock."

So this was to be the end of it. In spite of all her religion she had been conscious of a very human thrill of pleasure when the story of his amour with the lovely Eunoë reached her, because this often repeated infidelity to herself would at least be a new experience for the Queen of Egypt. For all her divinity and magnificence she would have to learn Calpurnia's lesson. People said how perfectly she herself had taken this new escapade, but that was the real reason—Cleopatra! And now—when she had thought that the anger of the Queen would keep her in Egypt, she was coming and bringing her son!

That was the agony—oh, her barrenness, her barrenness! She sank on the turf, weeping, raging, digging her fingers into it as if to cling to something to secure herself from being swept utterly away on the rushing tide of passion, a pitiable sight for gods and men.

But the storm was brief. Twenty minutes she had allowed herself by the water-clock. In fourteen she rose and, kneeling by the fountain, bathed her face and eyes. She gathered three peerless red roses and fastened one in her bosom with the brooch which commemorated Cæsar's victories in Gaul. The other two she carried in her hand, burying her face in them as if to enjoy their

rich perfume, and so paced beneath the blossoms with the serenity which she considered became a Roman lady equally in the presence of joy or ruin.

"I have seen her make more fuss over the misfit of a peplum," said Galfreda, the slave from Germania, to Porcia the Latin.

CHAPTER XI

YET after the first moment of meeting and strained attention to what the great man might condescend to tell her of his adventures, divinity was not the impression left on the mind of Calpurnia. It was age. His features would be imposing to the end, but they had grown harsh, aquiline, haggard, nose projecting sternly over a hard mouth, lips thinned to a locked line of secrecy enclosed in the sharply cut brackets of time. The furrows between his eyebrows were dug into trenches giving a look of perpetual anger like a pouncing hawk, the cheeks so hollow that the bones jutted beyond the full-face line. He had by no means the air of the thriving lover of a queen—rather it was the old man who by instinct and habit holds his attention fiercely fixed upon his business, because it is an obsession but no longer a pleasure.

Of his year in Egypt and the following battle in North Africa he gave only the political side, mentioning Cleopatra from that angle alone as a factor in the harnessing of Egypt to the Roman power. His wife felt leagues of distance between them in his measured coolness. So, thinking with intense bitterness, she listened for what seemed to her hours and still the quiet voice continued, she hardening her resolve to snatch at the inevitable moment when it came and force him to realise that she too counted and must be reckoned with at his peril. Sometimes she lost herself in such thoughts but caught him up again later with fixed eyes on his masking face.

"You will no doubt have heard," he was saying austerely, "that I am to hold a magnificent triumph here. Every curiosity which can tickle the palates of the Romans will march in the procession. It will last four days and will surpass anything seen as yet. The Princess Arsinoë, in golden fetters, will walk in the procession also. And the Queen Cleopatra will be here to behold it!"

Calpurnia stared at him bewildered. Then it was upon her! But yet—it was impossible surely! A protest was wrung out of her.

"What?" she said, locking her hands until the bones hurt. "Will the Queen see the humiliation of her country in her sister, see Egypt represented as dragged in triumph at your chariot wheels? Surely she will never be witness of such a frightful humiliation!"

Cæsar turned his pale eyes coldly on her. The color had bleached from them in the years of his absence.

"You don't understand. You are mistaken. Arsinoë and the others were rebels against the Queen. Helped by the Roman power she struck them down.

She comes, rejoicing in her restored dignity, to triumph with us over the traitors."

"And will the young Arsinoë be executed at the end of the Triumph? And will her sister see it?"

An execution of prisoners was a common finis to a Triumph and Cæsar took the question as a natural one, ignoring the implication.

"Possibly, but not probably. The Queen may express some wish for mercy. She and Arsinoë travel in the same fleet. She is compelled to be here because her presence will show the Romans that Egyptian sentiment is with us. And this is very vital to the plans which I come prepared to discuss with Mark Antony."

The confusion in her mind almost overwhelmed her with terror. She who had been so calm seemed now to be driven by the torrent of events into a madness like their own. She had climbed painfully from her griefs into a difficult serenity and yet the beginnings of her struggle were upon her again. For at least it was something left to be the wife of Cæsar, the greatest lady in Rome. None of his open and cruel infidelities could strip her of that honor, and she knew she had borne it worthily. And now that too was crumbling. In all things she must be eclipsed by the brilliant Queen, the mother of his child. In all the wide Roman world there would be nothing left for the childless wife but almost certain divorce and obscurity, and if she had dreamed that her religious faith would bear her above her disgrace she was the more deceived. It burned, it stung, as it might have tortured the veriest worldling.

Urged by great terror, her lips dry with fear, she said hurriedly, stupidly—she who had meant to choose her words with such careful dignity:

"There is a child. Whose is it?"

"You refer to the child of the Queen? His name is Cæsarion. He is my son."

There was dead silence in the beautiful chamber. The floor was paved in a rich mosaic with the story of Medea, the cruelly forsaken wife of Jason. In a chariot drawn by winged dragons she was blown on a gale across a wrathful sky to her vengeance on the two who had betrayed her. She leaned forward, her face a mask of hate.

Calpurnia's eyes rested on it and the omen rang hollow in her heart.

He looked at her indifferently.

"Is the bath prepared?" Knowing what she suffered, he knew that mastership must come first. Afterwards, if she could learn her lesson, would come the rewards of submission. He rose as if to go.

But for long habit of self-control the torrent would have broken from her raging. She must speak, would have died if she had not, but she kept the outward quiet of the great lady though her voice was dry and hard as a loose wire.

"Then what is to be her position when she comes? Your wife? And mine?"

She had risen and stood leaning one hand on a sculptured marble table as if to support herself. He looked at her coolly.

"I am very glad you ask these questions. They clear the air, and I am entering on a very difficult and confused stage of my career. You can give me little help, but such as it is I want it."

A pause. She could not have spoken to save her life. What would he ask? His coolness gave her the sense that she was a foolish unreasonable woman —an obstacle in the way of events which mattered supremely. But she would hold her own. The life of society in Rome had become so atrocious in debauchery that whatever the vices of the plebeians they would snatch at the chance of expressing their snarling hatred for their masters, and Cæsar's insult to his wife might be made to arm his enemies to the point where if she could not be honored she might be feared. But nothing could be read in her down-dropped eyes and he went on:

"The help you can give me is that of behaving reasonably and with courtesy to Cleopatra. And my reason is this: I have projects too great to be mentioned, which Egypt opened to me. All my doings there were conditioned by that necessity. The Queen comes here with the same ends in view. Surely it would be unworthy in you to spoil great purposes which will lift yourself to the highest honor, for the sake of an imbecile's jealousy. Do I look like a lover?"

He too had risen and faced her across the table. The light fell on his face and showed it ravaged and weary and old, but it did not touch her in the least. Men were men, and the past too full of bitter memories for her to take any word of his at its face-value. She stood sullenly silent. She had always been sacrificed to his pleasure or ambitions. Unless she resisted now the last humiliation was upon her. She gathered herself together at last, trying to master her fear of him, while he waited with perfect nonchalance, drumming his fingers absently on the table.

"What do you mean to do with me? And with yourself?"

Poison, or the knife, was not very far from a recalcitrant wife, she knew, but the Roman ladies were also beginning to recognise the force of such arguments with recalcitrant husbands. He knew what her question and

unspoken threat meant as well as she, and brushing it aside came straight to the point.

"We should not be enemies. Why have you never complained in the past and why now? Let us understand each other."

It flashed out of her like lightning.

"Because I could despise the other women. Who were they that they should touch the pride of Calpurnia, daughter of Piso the Consul? I thought of them little more than of your former wives. But this woman is a queen. She is adored as a goddess, young, beautiful, the greatest woman in the world. And she has borne you a son. She must have loved you."

"I think, never," he said seriously. "I think I can scarcely flatter myself on that conquest. She was not even in love with love. She is the most singular young woman, sexually cold, inordinately proud, humorous, ironic, and of a most burning ambition. She did not think, nor did her very clever secretary Apollodoros, that I saw through it, but I did. It was represented as a flaming passion. But experience with women is a useful commodity, and women have loved me and I know. She needed a son, too, after her brother's death, that she might have what they call in Egypt a consort on the throne. Therefore, she gave me her body exactly as she heaped my galleys with treasure, and to the same end."

"And what is the end?" his wife asked breathlessly, her throat dry as husks. It was the first time she had had a look beneath the surface in any one of his amours and it caught her with a more than dramatic interest. Her face was like a white flame before him. He saw the effect, noted it, and went on.

"The end is that I should be Emperor of Rome and of the world, that I should marry her and she be Empress of the World and our son Pharaoh in Egypt and Roman Emperor with all that the title will mean when I have done with it."

"And you tell *me* this? And I?"

"The thought in my mind is that you should be my wife in Rome and Cleopatra in Egypt. That is quite possible, and Antony, who entered the city with me, tells me that that idea has flown round Rome and met with much approval. There is no question but that the Senate would pass a law making it possible. The Senate! In a few weeks each word *I* say will be law! But as to Cleopatra, my aim will be in every way to raise the notion of her power, wealth, and divinity here. Every action of mine shall build up her pedestal, because it will be my own also. Now do you understand? I do you the honor of addressing you as a reasonable being, instead of a fool full of malice. Am I to be rewarded?"

She did not hear the question—she had always lived among great policies and burning party questions in which men's and women's lives were as worthless pawns in a game they themselves could not understand. After her husband's triumph over Pompey in Egypt, and in Northern Africa on his way back to Rome, such great enemies as Scipio and Cato had committed suicide, owning themselves vanquished, and fifty thousand of their supporters had perished in the battle that ruined them. Certainly he had cleared the stage for his own appearance as supreme ruler. But what tortured her was the doubt as to her own position. Had he any regard for her—any tenderness at all in his heart for his wife? Was it in truth only an alliance of policy with the brilliant Queen of Egypt? If she could see! If she could know!

"Have you no love for her?"

She got out the question at last with dry lips, salt-tasting with a few bitter tears which had distilled without her knowledge from eyes fixed on him as if to light up some truth in his own.

"What is she like?" she added. She would judge by his answer.

"I have told you. Ironic for so young a woman. All nerves and quick replies and changing moods of wild merriment and desponding sadness. A shadow, an omen, sends her highest hopes to Tartarus. A sunbeam revives them. I think her dangerous to work with, because of this instability. I should much prefer your calm. But she has the position which makes her indispensable. Love her? Again I say, look at me! And I have the world on my shoulders. Call me Atlas rather than Cæsar."

It was true. His weariness was heavy upon him. What could she think?

"But she is a woman!" she said, faltering.

"Yes—a woman. But more a goddess. She is Isis in Egypt. Her thoughts are not those of other women. I was conscious of it often."

Was he deceiving her deliberately, or himself partly deceived? Had the spells of Egypt seized their noblest prey as age and sickness pulled him down? Who could know? But she thrilled to the beloved name.

"Isis! You cannot think it true. A mere woman!"

He turned from her impatiently.

"She is not a mere woman. She is a young goddess. There are things you cannot understand. Egypt is Egypt."

Could it be possible, she thought, that the stories of gods assuming human shape could be true? At the shrines one heard such things filtering in from the Orient through Persia—and—yet—Egypt? Could it be possible that even a portion of the Goddess for her own divine ends had condescended—Impossible! But—such things had been known. They were a part of the

Roman faith as well as of the Egyptian. Some laughed at them, but others believed heart and soul. Isis, the mysterious! Her resolution was loosening already under the spell of his calm reasonableness and the almost equality with which for the first time he treated her. His very voice was a spell, clear, low, with a deep resonance and magic that might break forth in power to subdue all humanity to his will. When had he failed? And what he said harmonised with her own beliefs! He saw, noted, and added:

"It is for you to choose whether you will be the partner of my counsels and hers and rise with us to magnificence, or pose as the wife betrayed, scorned and despised. I know which I would choose, but women are women. For you I will say you have always hitherto acted as a Roman wife should do. If you refuse your part I shall respect the past though I disown the present."

His calm was conquering. She collapsed into defeat with the last word. There was relief even in defeat and yielding.

Who would have known Calpurnia, the serene, the dignified, in the pale woman with tempestuous tears raining down her face, stretching out her hands blindly to her husband. Again he might have said—"I came, I saw, I conquered, in a victory not less difficult than that of Zela," but there was no trace of exultation in the calm with which the conqueror took the shaking hands into his and held them as if for reassurance.

"You will not regret it. You shall share my plans. And first, it will be necessary that Cleopatra shall occupy my villa by Tiber. She must be surrounded with every magnificence. We will remain here and visit her when necessary. Laugh aloud when the foolish women call her Egyptian. She is pure Macedonian Greek and must not be thought of as Asiatic. Express your satisfaction in her coming and the glorious gifts she brings for you. Act as though you respected her and my alliance with her. She has the wit to repay you in kind. Thwart the waspish domineering Fulvia who holds Antony up to public ridicule by her behavior. Cause them to believe her the goddess she most truly is. On her rests the fate of the world."

"I will do it. I will do it!" she sobbed, clenching his hands as if broken in the soul-strain. "You are my master. I will obey."

He leaned forward as if to kiss her on the cheek when a noise crashed in the atrium, Antony bouncing in from the street, burly, gay, half-drunk with the excitement of Cæsar's return and the great game beginning.

"Where is the Divine Cæsar? Where?" they heard him shouting to the laughing slaves. "Make way for the first of his subjects!"

His great voice rang through the rooms. They could hear the answering laughter of the slaves. No one feared Antony unless the battle-lust was on him.

"And when the lovely Egyptian Queen comes loaded with gifts—splendor, wealth, for every fortunate slave in great Cæsar's household, you will all be plutocrats, every man Jack and woman Jill of you! Pearls for these pretty ears—"

They heard the squeak and scuffle of an escaping slave-girl from Antony's boisterous embrace.

Calpurnia dashed her eyes dry, shuddering at the coarseness intruded on her deep intense feeling. It jarred her every nerve. Cæsar laughed aloud,—

"The great overgrown boy!—a true descendant of the rollicking amorous Hercules! Go, wife, all is well between us. Send Serapion the Alexandrian to tell me when the bath is ready."

She glided away like a shadow as Antony leaped in almost breathless with excitement. With a vine-garland about his knotted curls, flushed and handsome, he would have been the Roman Bacchus to the life. As it was, he was Antony, the darling of the legions, and none on earth like him. His familiarity with Cæsar was in itself a miracle to petrify the beholder. Cæsar! Who else than Antony would have flung his fingers in that august face with a frenzied gesture of inquiry.

"How does the old girl—I mean the noble Calpurnia—take it?"

The Dictator's face relaxed into a smile that made the wrinkles about his mouth deeper.

"Like a sensible wife and an ambitious woman. She will play her part."

Antony sat himself on the marble table and swung his legs to and fro.

"Good. Excellent! All the Gods grant that I learn your secret with women some day, and master Fulvia! She's as sour as a choke-cherry and as obstinate as an Iberian mule with forelegs stuck out before it. They always master me, the darlings—and if they were worth it— But what I came to say is this: That devil Cicero must be flattered and overwhelmed with gifts by the Queen, or his pen will be a sword against us. He is stirring already like a snake in the grass. Write him a letter, most noble Dictator, about his fame having reached Egypt and outshining the Pharos—now, now! before the other side gets him! Take the bath first and then—at him! And I am to meet the Queen and escort her to Rome. Venus Aphrodite send that I don't fall in love with her, since she is meat for my master."

Master! That was the title with which Antony had paid his homage and affection to the man now bestriding the narrow globe, who was to make him a king also, wallowing in gold and jewels, as though any wealth would stretch to his vast expenses, his terrific lavishness and generosity, his wild amours! But without that prospect it was certain his career would have the

rapid end of a meteor. He had worn out even Roman patience with his debaucheries and waste. His only asset was their liking—no more popular man in Rome—and that was his surety with Cæsar; that and his personal courage and gift of brilliant flamboyant oratory, so useful at a pinch to stir up the soldiers and color the world with rainbows until the phantom beauty passed in rain and storm.

Yes, there was only one Antony, and Cæsar must have him!

"Go, meet the Queen!" he said, smiling. "Go in splendor—your best Hercules manner! Take a great guard with you. Treat her as the greatest of sovereigns visiting the greatest of cities. She has gifts for you also, and Cicero has been considered. Announce to the young goddess—for such she is—that my trans-Tiberine villa is at her disposal with all its slaves. Lay the homage of Rome at her feet. And meanwhile have the plebeians excited to frenzy with stories of her beauty and magnificence, and also of my Triumph to come. She has her own instructions."

"I go," said Antony, yet lingered. "Great Master, is she so beautiful?"

"She has the beauty," said Cæsar with austerity, "which requires a high taste to appreciate it to the full. It is not the sort that has mastered you in Cytheris and a hundred others. It is beauty with a something of the unearthly in it and requires an answering divinity to capture it. Now go. And remember the Queen is a goddess."

"Hercules!—I never had a taste for ghosts and lamias! Well—I am off to my job. Take your bath, Divine One, and rest. You look uncommonly tired. There is a fine show of gladiators tomorrow—one a Numidian—a marvel with the net. That would refresh you. No tonic like blood to an old soldier!"

"Old"—the word he loathed. Cæsar did not smile as he turned away and Antony made his noisy way to the street.

CHAPTER XII

CLEOPATRA entered Rome with a magnificence hitherto unbeheld even at those glorified circuses, the Roman Triumphs. The setting had been a problem to which she had given her keenest wits, for the display was by no means to convey the notion of uncivilized Asiatic profusion to the Roman mind. It was to symbolise the utmost that Europe could do; the truest Greek elegance based on the subject and limitless resources of Asia. Cæsar's agents had not been backward in spreading the knowledge, and it was well known in Rome, that the Alexandrian merchants were princes among their kind and that this was chiefly because from the Red Sea they had opened a broad trade route to India, not by the old march of Alexander the Great across deserts, mountains, and through dangerous peoples, but by the straight sure way of the sea.

The sea! Cæsar divined from his own experience in war and from what Cleopatra and Apollodoros had told him in secret that on the sea lay the future of the World Empire which he beheld with visionary eyes as the cloudy towers and battlements of a new sovereignty hitherto undreamed.

And now the Romans should have ocular proof of the millions of money poured into the lap of the young goddess by the trading of her merchants with the mysterious golden East. They were not to behold a supple and subservient ruler coming to lay her tribute before their feet in the seat of their own power. Far from it. They were to realise that for Cæsar's purposes of Roman glory here was a great independent monarch prepared to act with them if so the Republic should choose, and that in their possible alliance with her lay the future prosperity of Rome. But they were also to know that the hard won and slowly built civilisation of Greece and Rome was not to be menaced by a grossness of Orientalism flooding the relics of republican simplicity. They talked of republicanism still, though the idea was dead.

In this programme Cleopatra herself was leader. Her own instincts would invariably guide her rightly in matters of taste, unless she were deliberately playing to a gallery which must be conciliated on very different lines. Here, the part suited her pride as well as her sense of fitness. Rome still labored under a sense of inferiority to Greece in matters of taste. All distinction in the lighter forms of art came from Athens. The most skilled actors, dancers, artists in dress, in all the minor and some of the greater beauties which embellish life, were Greek. They had reached a technique to which the blunter Romans could never aspire. That was allowed.

Therefore, she would come as a Greek queen ruling in Egypt—the advance-guard, as it were, of the irresistible march of European conquest upon the jewelled lords of Asia.

The Senate had decreed a public reception of welcome to the Egyptian Queen. They would greet her with Cæsar at their head. If there were some who grumbled at homage paid to Cæsar's mistress—a woman who would so inevitably swell his dangerous power—none could grumble at the enlarged avenues of commerce which she would open to them. And Rome needed commerce. The process of consolidating Europe into an empire by force of arms had been as costly as glorious.

Therefore when her *cortège* approached the city all Rome lined her way both within and without. Her ships had debarked their cargoes of magnificent possessions. Rumor had flown before her to Rome trumpeting the glories of thrones, beds, tables, of rare Eastern woods and ivories set with jewels which lesser sovereigns might wear as adornments. Piled and guarded on the beach by Egyptian soldiers, chests innumerable of glorious Eastern stuffs and garments hitherto unknown had been seen by envious eyes, chests also of spices, of confections and preserves of fruits and foods the very names of which made strange music in Roman ears. Metal-bound cases were said to be loaded with such gems as the western world had never glimpsed, and all these treasures were conveyed across Rome through the glorious gardens of Cæsar's pleasure villa on Tiber and placed in strong-houses especially built and guarded. The waiting, staring crowd never wearied of their pleasure in seeing the torrent of riches pour into Rome. It made the poorest itch with a sense of coming ease. What a lady and queen! What could be too good for such a benefactress? Lucky Cæsar—wicked old dog! but all the same more power to him if he had captured the liking of a woman who could pay for all the Roman wars and not know she had done it! The spirit of morality slumbered to the lullaby of tinkling gold.

And now the litter, following the procession of Indians and Egyptians magnificently dressed and armed, was advancing. A litter of gold and ivory set with rosy jewels, curtained with rosy silk woven with threads of pure gold like a splendid sunset, it approached the open space on the Capitoline Hill where the Senate awaited it. No eye might see the Queen until that moment. But in the litter of equal splendor which followed hers was a sight on which all Rome might glut its eyes and speculations, for there, displayed to all beholders, sat two nurses, one a fair Greek, the other a swarthy Egyptian, and in the arms of the Greek sat, looking about him in baby astonishment, the little Cæsarion. Shouts of delight and interest rose from the crowd.

"Gods, he is like his father! Do but look at the bold chin, the alertness of the eyes. We shall have another Cæsar to fight for us when this sits among the stars. Look at the little fellow! He holds Asia like a toy in the clutching of his hands."

So it ran along the lines, densely packed with eager sightseers, the women shrill in the baby's praise. The health of him! The little strong arms and legs! Many times the nurses held him aloft that all might see, and Cleopatra's cheek brightened in her litter as she heard. Yes—her weapons were strong. Cæsar had done well in choosing her for his ally.

By the place where the Senate would receive her, was set a stand where the most noble Roman women might see and greet the foremost lady of the world. They sat in ranks, the stately Julias, Claudias, Pompeias and many more, and among them Fulvia in purple tunic caught with gold fibulæ on the shoulders, her sharp eyes fixed on every movement of her Antony who, having dismounted, marched now by the royal litter at the head of a glittering guard of soldiers nearly as warrior-like in appearance as himself. "Had he seen Cleopatra? What had he thought of her?" Already a faint spasm of jealousy stirred in her domineering heart lest the newcomer should be yet more beautiful than report made her. For if so—Antony! Oil to fire! Had he ever resisted beauty—or even mere womanhood, short of the absolutely repulsive, in his life? She turned her eyes on Calpurnia leaning forward pale and dignified in her white himation as it was now the fashion to call the draped tunic. She smiled kindly, bending her head here and there to the lesser ladies who sat about her, but, so thought the shrewd Fulvia, scarcely conscious of what she said, so steadfastly were her eyes fixed on the swaying approaching litter, curtained and mysteriously guarding its secret like the unbudded petals of a rose.

The soldiers fell back into groups surrounding standards blazing in gold, displaying Egyptian devices mysterious with gods and goddesses in stiff hieratic attitudes of guardianship and benediction about the Queen, and against the background of these magnificent soldiers advanced the Queen's women, Charmion at their head. Then indeed a murmur of admiration rose from the stand and from all who could see.

They were all clothed in Greek robes but of such stuff as the eyes of the Roman women had never beheld. Perish the thought of their stiff silks and dull woollens for ever after! These happy creatures wore woven silver light as air, lifting on a breath and as transparent, shot through with sunset blues and green and rose, faint miracles of color, evanescent as the changing hues surrounding the sinking sun, and mingling into the same nameless perfections. Every woman had been chosen for her midnight beauty, dark locks, breaking into curls or satin-smooth, all bound with the threefold Greek fillet—green, blue and rose jewels set in filigreed silver. One wore her black tresses falling below the knee braided with pearls and pearl tassels which swept the ankles; others with the noble Greek knot emphasising the

loveliness of deerlike heads. The stiff-tiered curls of the Roman women were heavy and bewigged beside this new sculpturesque beauty before them.

They waited, graceful as the Graces, long dark eyes looking from drooping lashes in amazement at the huge concourse gathered to greet their Queen. Only the eyes moved. Otherwise they were fair statues wrought in silver.

The Queen. Her eunuchs, splendid in the gorgeousness of parrot dyes which became their degradation, stepped forward and slid back the rosy curtains, as the women fell into two groups. The head of the litter, a novelty in Rome, was raised, and Antony came forward in purple cloak and bare head with a purple fillet about his curls, to aid the Queen.

She rose, with a great semi-transparent veil of gold that drifted about her hiding her from head to foot. Even in the calm of the summer day it lifted light as thistledown to each movement. And so at last the long-desired stood before the assembly, but as yet unseen.

"She is not tall!" cried Fulvia's eager whisper in Calpurnia's ear. "She lacks majesty. A woman so slight should never be a queen. She has not the presence to carry off her royalty!"

But not a word did Calpurnia hear. What vanquishing charm did that veil conceal? It folded round lines of slenderest grace. A sculptor would have worshipped its lovely folds, sheathing the lily-bud of a woman. But her face, her face!

A deep breath of suspense ran through the crowd as Charmion and Iras lifted each one side of the veil and drew it backward, holding it behind her and exposing the Queen unveiled to all eyes.

The golden Queen! The Orient had clothed her in gold, supple and flowing as water, that swept away from her slender shoulders in lines of the most exquisite period of Greek art. What need a queen care for fashion! She made her own, reverting to the days of Phidias and Praxiteles. None so beautiful has ever been imagined or can be, concealing and disclosing the flower-form within. Her bronze hair, broadly rippled like the sea in a calm, was parted over perfect brows and knotted behind, a fillet of pearls binding it and supporting the weight; and on the calm of her white bosom lay one matchless pearl, no less ivory white than her face and bare arms and bosom. Golden and white, like a lily unsheathed, she confronted them untroubled by all the amphitheatre of gazing eyes fixed on her and her only.

Again Greece triumphed. There were women present of more opulent and obvious beauty, but who had that white and slender distinction, the chiselled nostrils, the delicate lift of the haughty upper lip in the faint smile with which she looked about her, the perfect and careless ease with which she stood

alone and lovely? Lovely, yes, but with a something beyond loveliness, regal —or could it be divine?—which set her apart from the Roman women, as though she were lifted on an altar with lights and incense burning before her.

Even as the thought flashed into many minds two men of Egypt stepped forward and placed at her feet two mighty golden censers resting on lions' claws, the thin blue spirals of incense rising about the hem of her golden robe. Two more, standing behind her, suddenly swung out and up enormous peacock screens, spread outward like wings of glory, forming a background of jeweled bronze and green and ruby and blue and gold, barbarically magnificent. She stood, a slender winged Psyche, against it. So indeed a goddess might stand reflecting back the sun-rays, unafraid and equal.

An intaken hissing breath of wonder and admiration rose about her, all marvelling alike at the grace and royalty of the girl. It deepened and became vocal and a great cry arose of "Cleopatra! Cleopatra! Hail to Isis, to the Egyptian Venus! Hail! Hail! Hail!"

With infinite grace and dignity she looked about her, gravely but graciously, saluting with slightly raised hands—a moment that never would be forgotten in Rome; then fixed her eyes on the Senate.

They advanced majestic, Cæsar leading them, strange thoughts hidden within. All there knew his relation to Cleopatra. Not one present but hoped to see his or her own personal account in it. And she? Would she have forgotten? Would she care at all to see him again outside the climbing path of ambition? And the child? His son. As yet he dared not look that way, nor dared he lift his eyes above the folds of her robe, but the blood rose in his cheek like a youth's as he approached the veiled figure, saluting, with the bowing Senate behind him.

Then in the stately phrases suitable to the occasion, he began his oration.

As the first word fell from his lips she raised her head and looked him in the face with young and smiling eyes—eyes of friendly and happy memory that all might see—the girl irrepressible in the queen, and sent her smile raying over the grave Senate. An inimitable touch, for the instant after she composed herself again into the gold and ivory statue half veiled in incense, her peacock wings unfurled behind her.

But all had seen her human and liked her the better. All but Calpurnia, swift-eyed to detect charm and fear it. By her very look Cleopatra's secret bright glance placed her in a moment and detected Cæsar's wife.

The welcome ended. Would she command the secretary who stood behind her women to make her reply? No, not she! Then would their ears be greeted with barbarous inflexions of Greek-Egyptian Latin from herself, offensive to patrician ears? Again, not so. She waved a slender hand with the

orator's gesture, poising on the ball of her right foot like a goddess alighting for an instant, and spoke. Which was the sweeter and purer, the silver voice or the words it uttered, the audience could not tell. It was too brief—the smile that winged it was too swiftly resumed into the Queen's calm. She spoke of her joy in visiting the greatest city of the world. ("Yet I would that all the noble persons here present could see the royalty of my own Alexandria! Let them come as guests most welcome!") She spoke of the great future in the joined forces of Rome and Egypt for the uplifting of the barbarians into civilisation. Not a word—not a word which could implicate Cæsar or express too binding a hope. All was grace and majesty, but, with the unexpressed air of a woman conscious of her worth yet leaning on a mightier power than her own, most infinitely flattering to the hard and arrogant Roman pride.

Perfection! The pride of Cæsar swelled within his breast as she ended amid thunders of applause. He was justified—justified here in the sacred places of Rome. This indeed was the weapon placed in his hand by kindred gods!

But it was over. She made a sign and her women folded the veil about the shining figure. It was as though rare music had ceased and left the air poor and empty. As she re-entered the litter and the rose folded its petals once more about her, great cries and shouts rang like the brazen beating of a gong, the plaudits of the people.

"Hail to the divine Cleopatra. Hail to the young goddess. Hail to Venus-Hathor. Hail to Isis the Divine Mystery."

And amid such shouts and rejoicing she was borne in triumph to the palace gardens of Cæsar by rolling Tiber, an embodied victory, radiant and supreme.

That evening after dusk he came to her, alone. That was due to the past, to his own wish and to hers, but it would have to be very carefully considered what form their further meetings should take. He had told his intention frankly to Calpurnia and she had received it with strained acquiescence, knowing well that her only hope lay there.

To his amazement, arriving at the villa, ushered with all state due to the Roman Dictator into Cleopatra's presence, he found the grave Apollodoros obsequious at the door to meet him. Behind him Cleopatra in her white tunic, again the Greek girl he had known in Egypt, with arms outstretched running gaily to meet him.

"Glad—oh, but my heart is glad to see you, my friend, my friend!" she cried flute-voiced as she ran. "Was the year long to you as to me? But tell me first of all—you who know all—did I do well today? Oh, what did they say—what did they say? Don't lose a word. I die for praise!"

Nothing to complain of in cordiality warm and heartwarming. Then all was well; she had not slipped from his grasp. Yet one would have supposed she would have wished to meet him alone, that she might curve her crescent-moon slenderness against his breast, her lips on his as long ago in Egypt. Some cold regret stirred in him for a moment.

"Go, Apollodoros, and return, bringing the women with the divine Pharaoh."

The child was that indeed—the consort of the Queen his mother on the throne of Egypt.

As Apollodoros disappeared she flung her arms about Cæsar and straining upward laid her cheek against his. She diffused the fragrance of youth and health about her in every gesture, and never had age seemed to him so pitiful, so helpless, as reflected in the clear brightness of her brown eyes, translucent as forest pools in sunshine.

"He is as like you as like can be! How should it be otherwise? Did I not tell you it must be? And strong and beautiful as a bright bird! But you are wearied, noble Cæsar. I see it in your eyes and your pallor, and even in your beloved voice I heard it. Oh, preserve your strength for our victory and our child!"

This irritated him, and less than ever could he control his temper. It leaped out in little spurts and flames harmful enough to his plans, for even the good-natured Antony found it difficult at times to accept these jars with patience. He drew back, and she realised instantly that she had said the wrong word and hurriedly repaired it.

"But your divine strength can never fail. The Gods are behind and in us. But look—who comes!"

Bearing between them what was shaped like a huge seashell of thinnest plates of mother-of-pearl two women slowly approached and set it on the marble table between them. In it, amongst draperies hued like the heart of a shell—faintest pearl-pink—was the year-old Cæsarion, sleeping angelically, one baby fist curled like a rose-leaf at his rosy lips, strong and fair and beautiful, dreaming the little unshaped vaporous dreams of babyhood, different indeed from those of the father and mother who stood with clasped hands above him seeing less his childhood than the crowns of the world on the soft unwrinkled brows.

"May I touch him?" said Cæsar, hushing his breath before the innocent sleep. She motioned "Yes" with her lips and he stooped and kissed the warm cheek with strange shame and joy upon him—shame that any should see him moved from his stately reserve, joy that there was this to fight for. He had never imagined the Queen so lovely as, bending toward her child, she

gathered him with one arm into that fragrant nest of her bosom, he sleeping still.

"I love him. I love him!" she said, looking up into Cæsar's face with beaming eyes—the glow of young motherhood haloing her every look and gesture. "For him I played my part today. For him I have come across the seas."

"For me also, most beautiful?"

"Doubtless, and for our great dream. I love splendor and power and to be a great queen. Even for *this* (she touched the child's face with a feather-light finger) I could not forget *that*! Well—take him away. You have seen my treasure and yours."

It was characteristic that the mood maternal passed with the passing of the pearly shell. Her quick brows were concentrated next minute on the tale that she and Apollodoros must lay before Cæsar of events in Egypt, the treasures amassed, the concentration of public opinion on the Egyptian-Roman alliance.

With Apollodoros at her elbow, and the keen face before her, her clear brain spoke and composed all he must know into the smallest compass, for she saw the fatigue in his eyes.

"And the priests—we judge that they too are favorable to the interests of Rome, noble Cæsar. From Abydos—you recall the trouble at Abydos?—they have sent offerings and gifts and blessings to the Divine Child, and I cannot now understand, nor can they, why the omens were dark and terrible when we lay there. It is in my mind and theirs that possibly the God resented the intrusion of the Divine Consort into his sanctuary, for I am Isis and Isis is his. And from the Temple of Osiris built by Mer-en-Ra in the ancient days came a most glorious oracle declaring that you should shine like the sun alone in the sky with two stars beside you—doubtless myself and Calpurnia. She should not hate me. But tell me of her. I saw her today—a calm face and beautiful, like the bust of a noble lady crowned with olive leaves—and no more expression in her eyes!"

"Did you hate her?" Cæsar asked in jest.

"Hate her—no! Why should I? Does she hate me? She should not, if she cares for the only things that matter. *Does* she hate me?"

"So little that she has made you welcome in her beloved villa and gardens. But be kind to her when she comes to see you. I will tell her of that oracle. I too—" he checked himself suddenly.

"I will be kind. But certainly she has no reason for jealousy. I do not steal your heart, your great heart is set on higher things than women. But we fight

together like Castor and Pollux, arm by arm in a great battle. She should love me. But women don't love me—except my waiting-women. Well, you shall see. I will win all Roman hearts, and for my part I am willing indeed for the plan you wrote of that she should be your wife in Rome and I in Egypt."

Should he not rejoice that she was so ready for an equal division? It was true political wisdom and yet—had he been Antony, glowing in the very prime of his summer, strong and glorying in his strength, would a girl of twenty-two have been so willing to share him with another? Even Fulvia required consolation when he was rambling the olive groves with Cytheris, the beautiful courtesan, in his train!

He winced before the thought. Too poignantly it recalled Antony in his glitter of armor and manly beauty, marble if it were not for the gay glances and significant smiles to the fair women bending from the tribune to laugh into his eyes. "Hercules!—the very Hercules! He would have been a royal husband for the Egyptian girl! What a pair!" Had Cleopatra heard or guessed? He would test her.

"And Antony? Did you talk with him as he brought you up to Rome? And what did you think of him? You often asked me of him in Egypt!"

She frowned slightly over that problem.

"I wished to like and trust him. Like him I do, as one likes an overgrown oaf of a handsome man. Trust him I never could. He is a babbler, a boaster. He trumpeted Hercules in one of my ears and Bacchus in the other until I wished—the Gods forgive me!—that the one had choked him with his wine, the other brained him with his club. Be very cautious, noble Cæsar, that you tell him nothing that can spoil us if he chatters."

"Trust me to know what is right!" said the great man, irritable, yet vanity salved by her verdict. After all, she had the wit to prefer brains to brawn!

But when he was gone, and Cleopatra sat alone with Apollodoros her verdict would not have pleased him so well:

"How he is aged! How fearfully aged! Oh, Apollodoros, the Gods send that he lives six more years! I ask no more, but that I ask with prayer and sacrifice. For if he die my dream of a world empire dies with him. I can rule it if I get it—with you behind me—but without him I cannot get it. We must conserve his strength. It terrifies me to look at him!"

"I too fear greatly!" said Apollodoros, "though these lean haggard men are often wiry and enduring. But can he rule his temper—wear the smiling mask among his enemies and friends? Would that it were Antony we had to deal with. That big handsome talker could be ruled by you and me, my Queen, like a slave—a sword in the hands of the skilful. The old man is suspicious and angry now, doubting of his own powers—a most dangerous

ally for us. Again, would that it were Antony, and we in Rome as we are! I find the soldiers worship the ground he walks on."

"Antony!" she echoed, and fell to musing—her fair face propped on her hand. Then, with an ebbing voice—"Impossible! And yet—"

As the days passed the anxiety of Cleopatra and Apollodoros strengthened, and with reason. True, Rome was full of rumors, which her coming had kindled, that the time drew near when Cæsar must shine, sole sun in the firmament, as Royal Ruler of the Roman world. The title was hard to choose, for something in the Roman spirit revolted at the name of King. That had been tried long since and carried painful memories. There was however the loud-resounding style of *Imperator* or Emperor, applied to the Commanders-in-Chief of the Roman Armies. How would it be, suggested the friends of Cæsar, to confine the title of *Imperator* to one, to make it hereditary, and to offer it to Cæsar's acceptance, thus making him perpetual Commander-in-Chief of the world which Rome must rule? That suggestion found favor in the eyes of the masses and classes alike, but even this did not overtake Cæsar's rapidly towering pride. Was not his own name good enough to be both imperial and hereditary, he asked aloud and in public places—Cæsar! He had covered it with dazzling glory, what better style could there be for any world ruler who should succeed him? The word itself should signify empire. The Cæsar, Kaiseros, Kiseres, later, Tsar, they tried it in all the subject languages of Rome, and found it good. It would wear well. Future ages would acknowledge it royal, and it had the merit of conveying the military spirit on which Rome was founded. The thought of his little Cæsarion swayed his mind in considering it, and Cleopatra approved it with glee, for the touch of fine arrogance delighted her. Thus Gods and Rulers proclaim themselves to an attentive world.

The Triumph of Cæsar had also given immense satisfaction to the Roman world, and much popularity to Cleopatra. During four gorgeous days it drew breathless crowds to the streets to see the Victor hailed in his own city. As conqueror of Gaul, followed and surrounded by great elephants, he ascended to the Capitol. As conqueror of the Egyptian rebels he appeared on the second day, with the wretched Arsinoë loaded with gold fetters and followed by an image of the dead Potheinos led along the streets to swell his triumph, Cleopatra looking down upon her from a tribune with strangely mingled feelings of triumph and shame to see a princess of Egypt trailed through the jeers of a Roman mob. She won much applause by her intercession for her sister later with Cæsar. African animals swelled the triumph, giraffes nodding their slender heads high over the shouting populace.

On the third day was celebrated the conquest of Pontus, with a huge tablet borne before Cæsar, carrying his famous boast—"I came, I saw, I conquered." And on the fourth, his victories in North Africa. And each day

Cleopatra, quivering with joy and pride, saw the swelling of his party and her own. He filled the eyes, the ears, the thoughts of Rome until it seemed that nothing but shouts of "Cæsar,—Cæsar!" filled the air, seconded here and there by shouts of "Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra!"

Of Calpurnia little was heard. She made no hostile party nor any gesture of defiance, which was all to the good. But Apollodoros, who permeated Rome like the very spirit of inquiry, brought news that in spite of the dazzling reception and Calpurnia's acquiescence many leaders of opinion in the Senate and among the great ladies thought her cruelly used by Cleopatra's presence.

"And I that have done everything to please her!" cried Cleopatra in frank amazement, to Apollodoros and Charmion kneeling beside her. She spoke with all the want of comprehension which very clever people often exhibit to the stupid. "The woman must be a fool! Does she think I am in love with a man as old as Rameses the Great? The Gods preserve me from such bad taste! Go and tell her, Apollodoros, that I want no man. I want empire and to spread the bounds of Egypt. Why doesn't she come and see me that I may open her eyes? And yet—I suppose Cæsar's vanity would be up in arms if I did. He is as full of vanity as I when I was sixteen. Oh, men, men! How much easier it would be if there were no such thing as sex!"

"It would be dull," said Apollodoros. "Your Majesty would have re-invented it. But I wish indeed that Calpurnia would visit you. There are things she could tell us that we must know. It is vital that we should be able to gauge the life of Cæsar, for, depending on him only, we are lost if he dies. From a priest of the Roman Temple of Isis I have heard in the deepest secrecy that Calpurnia has said he has strange seizures, reputed to be divine possessions, and that he has sworn her to dismiss all others when this happens so that he and she only may know the revelation of the Deity. There may be much behind that! The priest overheard it in her prayers to Isis. If my Queen could but win her it would be worth a mine of jewels! See now! She is a devotee of Isis. Send her a message in your character of the goddess!"

His eager eyes searched her face. She laughed carelessly; shrugging her shoulders. Calpurnia failed to interest her.

"Does omnipotence cover a woman's jealousy? I think not! No, tell her I am in love with Antony—whom I have seen twice and never alone—and she may come. Not otherwise. However, bring her with any story you choose, and I will do my best."

She turned away, then turned again in another mood, eyes limpid and kind.

"You are right, my true Apollodoros. It is of consequence and I will do my best indeed. Tell her I have heard of her devotion to the Great Goddess and earnestly desire to see her. And I will win her!"

It was by invoking Cæsar that he gained an audience of the greatest of Roman ladies, for it had become important to Cæsar that Calpurnia should make some decided sign of amity. He reflected ironically that if the Senate were to pass the law permitting him two wives they should at least present a united threefold front or become supremely absurd. Therefore to Calpurnia he expressed his wish. She yielded instantly, and received Apollodoros, a deep insatiable curiosity mingled with her obedience. To her amazement he assumed the tone of one who bears a message from an Immortal.

"Lady, the Divine Queen, she who in Egypt is Isis, desires your presence that she may talk with you on matters of high moment. Not as a woman talks with a woman, but far otherwise."

He stood silent before her, adding nothing. Such was the message. She agreed at once. The next day was appointed.

She came with her slaves about her, nobly attended, full in the eyes of Rome, knowing that all faces turned, every tongue wagged when the wife of Cæsar set forth to visit the Queen of Egypt. But two considerations upbore her; her devotion to the goddess with whom the other might have some mysterious unity, and the will of Cæsar to which she had pledged her obedience. Therefore she went with more than common dignity, with visionary eyes fixed on her inward dream, wondering what strange gates would open now in her strange life and whither they would lead her.

The Queen received her with Apollodoros only in attendance. She wore a simple himation of white with a girdle of silver. No Venus-Hathor for that occasion, but Isis, calm, apart, and pure.

"It is very odd," she said to Apollodoros, "that though I am a queen and a great one I am also, and more, an actress. I feel every part I undertake to the tips of my fingers and can't imagine anything else for the moment. It makes things very interesting and yet—can one be entirely truthful either with oneself or others? And how much or little does it matter if one is not? This is the very queerest world that mad Gods ever imagined! Probably it is the Divine in me which laughs at its absurdities!"

Thus it happened that Calpurnia, with heart beating like a bird's under her girdle, saw a slender young woman advancing down that long chamber (how changed since she had known it!) clothed in vestal white, without shimmer of jewels, viewing her with eyes as calm and direct as her own. Devoid of all pretension, grave, reserved, so observation declared her,—full of serene

intelligence. She saluted the visitor as an equal with exquisitely deferential courtesy, causing Apollodoros to set her chair beside her own.

"Noble Calpurnia, I have desired very greatly to meet you," said the silver voice. "I know the circumstances are strange and few of the coarse hearts about us would believe that I could seek a friend in you. Yet I do—I must. I am young, in a strange land, many enemies around me, and yet all Cæsar's vast plans are bound up in my person. Oh, that I might have your counsel!"

Strangely different indeed from her expectation was the grace with which the girl put herself at her feet. She had looked for ill-hidden pride and arrogance. Stories were flying round of Cleopatra's contemptuous comments on the city and scornful comparisons of it with the glories of Alexandria and Egypt. She had been much too wary for any folly of the kind but the impression existed and had influenced Calpurnia. The sweet melancholy of the young Queen's voice and soft entreating eyes were potent against it and the rigidity of Calpurnia's attitude relaxed a little though her eyes still watched.

"If you would treat me," the girl pleaded, "as a woman who, though divine, has a difficult part to play here on earth! Consider, noble Calpurnia! —my brother and sister did their best to murder me, and yet I have entreated for the life of Arsinoë. They drove me from Alexandria. But for Cæsar I should have been dead two years ago, and what could I be but grateful? And how could any woman fail to realise the grandeur of his ambition? He saw Egypt in me, and the Orient. I saw Asia in him and more. Was it wonderful that we should join hands? In the ancient Temple of Isis built by Mer-en-Ra, the Great Goddess declared in an oracle none may question, that hand in hand we should mount the throne of the world and Cæsar shine like the sun with twin stars beside him, yourself and Cleopatra the Queen."

"This I have heard from Cæsar," the wife answered, hesitating. "But the child?"

She had thought it would be impossible to speak with the Queen, and behold! it was so easy that her new fear was of saying too much. Cleopatra looked at her with gravely shadowed eyes:

"You do not understand Egypt, most noble lady. The Queen must have a consort. My brother was dead. It was also needful that I should have a son God-descended as were the Pharaohs. And I too am a goddess. I am Hathor-Venus. I am Isis."

Calpurnia trembled. It was bewildering to hear this beautiful girl announce herself as the Holy, the Unapproachable. Could it be true? Did she herself believe it? Calpurnia had never been able to persuade her brain that

Cæsar believed even in his own divine descent until his entanglement with the Egyptian Queen. Then, at once, the notion of divinity took root in him. It budded, it blossomed and the older and more wearied he grew the more he was assured that Godhead was his. It was almost incomprehensible to her, yet might be, for who knew the strange ways of the Gods? But the Queen recaptured her brooding thoughts. Certainly her people accepted her as divine, and Egypt was the land of wonder and mystery—all the world knew that! Who on earth could tell what was true or false?

"Who else could I choose than Cæsar?" Cleopatra asked with gentle insistence. "And my hope being accomplished what else is he to me than a friend in a great and terrible enterprise? Why should his wife not be my friend also and aid us?"

Even Apollodoros who knew better than most what might be expected of his Queen was astounded at her consummate mastery of the part she had allotted herself. And there was truth in it also. It had the right ring!

"If I could trust you!" hesitated the Roman. "If I could believe!"

"You can trust me indeed. What have I to gain?"

If Calpurnia had had her wits about her she might have made a fairly long list of objects Cleopatra might have to gain, but none occurred to her at the moment. She made a faint affirmative gesture and Cleopatra leaning forward touched her hand with delicate cool fingers.

"Lady, our oracles have declared for certain victory. You cannot doubt when I tell you that the holy image of Isis in Hermonthis inspired the Chief Priest with a divine dream in which he saw Cæsar enthroned, and afterwards a god among the Immortals. That future nothing can change, but what I would know is this. Has he himself had any inspirations and possessions of divinity which you have seen? What have you known to fasten your own belief to ours?"

She fixed compelling eyes upon Cæsar's wife, holding her hand. Calpurnia answered trembling, looking upward with something of a child's belief in her eyes, wearied and half extinguished with pain.

"It is true. I have seen things so strange that I could never believe them if told. I will tell you. You have the heart of a queen and goddess. Why should I not trust you? He has seizures of which he will scarcely speak even to me. They come suddenly like the influx of a God. He is struck to the earth and struggles, fighting with his arms and feet as though against an unseen foe, the veins in his temples swell so thick that you might think they would burst, and all his face is dark with the rush of blood. He utters cries like a dying man—terrifying, most terrifying to hear! And then suddenly the possession departs and he lies unconscious, still and exhausted. It is Isis, the great Goddess, who

desires to see her worship spread throughout the world. I know it! I know it! For he declares that in these possessions bright lights shine and great visions are revealed to him of splendors and majesties divine and unspeakable to which he will attain, and that in the end he will sit enthroned, a very God."

"Marvelous!" said the soft voice beside her. "Indeed, noble Calpurnia, you are privileged as one divine yourself in seeing such inspirations. Then is it revealed to you also that he shall rule the world?"

"I believe no less!" said Calpurnia solemnly. "And it is because I believe this that I have put aside all jealousies and distrusts and have come when you desired to see me."

Cleopatra clasped her hand again.

"You have done well; and let it be the token of our union that you wear this—my sister!"

There lay a box on the table beside her, enriched with gold wrought into filigree like lace. She opened it, drawing out a chain of rubies glowing with the very spirit of all roses that have ever bloomed or shall bloom in the gardens of earth—or of Paradise. Indeed it gave forth their perfume also, having one ruby hollowed and containing a drop of the magical oil or essence of roses in its glowing heart. Perfume and color exhaled from it most royally as it swung in the hand of the Queen.

"Bend your proud head, my sister," she said with her smile of sweetness, "and wear what I was given as a token of the utmost happiness and good fortune that life can offer. My merchants brought it from India, a worthy jewel for a great queen. Take it, and my friendship. Tell Cæsar we have met, yet, since he trusts you above me, do not tell him that I have heard the story of his inspirations. I have no jealousies and I shall go the more proudly and securely because of this great news. When you have more, send; or come and tell me that I also may rejoice."

The other promised, startled at the richness of the jewels, yet soothed and comforted by the mysterious calm of the young Queen. She rejoiced that she had spurned the pettiness of a woman's jealousy, and so risen into aërial heights where the approval of the Great Goddess would meet her face to face. She would have kissed the hand of Cleopatra who, drawing it away, kissed her instead on the cheek.

When Calpurnia had left the villa by the river she remembered too late how little she had learned from the Queen of the inner heart of the Isis worship of which she wished to learn so much. But now—she fingered the glowing rubies about her neck—they knew each other. There would be great opportunities. She caused her slaves to stop by the famous Isis temple, daily more crowded with worshippers, and knelt a long time before the image of

the Mother of Mystery brooding over her child. The air with which Cleopatra had met her seemed an earthly reflection of that soft abstraction. And she had once hated—had feared her! Love based on the divine is immortal, she thought; hate passes like a dream.

The reflections of Cleopatra and Apollodoros when left together were very different.

"That was easy," she said, "and I know it was necessary, yet I hated to use her. I think she is a good woman. But no one should be so nakedly innocent. It is positively indecent. It is only her dignity which protects her from contempt. What do you think, Apollodoros, of her news?"

"My Queen, I did not think—I *knew*. What Calpurnia described was a well-known sickness—a dangerous and terrible disease which fills me with dread. It is known as the falling sickness. The Greeks call it *epilepsia*, and though it does not kill immediately it works havoc in the brain—"

Cleopatra interrupted, pale with fear.

"Gods, will he go mad?"

"Not in a crashing moment. But there will be a hiatus here—or there, gradually, like the fretting of moths in a rich garment. It explains much—his fits of temper; his overweening belief in his divinity. It was told me in the temple yesterday that when he was lately contradicted in some trifle he cried aloud with oaths: 'Men should look upon what I say as the word of a God!' This is not reasonable—it is the disease that speaks."

Again she interrupted with passion.

"Then he must marry me instantly. For if he died—what of Cæsarion? His nephew, Octavian, a gawk of nineteen, is his natural heir if he leaves no lawful son. Apollodoros, this is frightful news! We must act instantly."

"Would it be possible for you to win Octavian?"

"His first act would be—will be, sooner or later—to murder Cæsarion," she said hopelessly. "And besides he is cold, cruel, dull and vicious as a beast, though so young. He is nothing to Cæsar except that his blood counts for him. No, Apollodoros—pray to all the Gods that he live for six—no, even four years, and I can achieve my will. If he dies now—But he must marry me here, now! Help me, I beseech you!"

He reflected a moment, she watching him with eyes of frantic strain and eagerness. Before her swam her ruining dream, drowned in darkness and weeping rain.

"I see two things as instantly needful: First, that we should have a way of escape if Cæsar dies in one of these fits of *epilepsia*, for it is more than possible that if this happened the treacherous Romans would seize and

imprison you, sending Octavian or another to rule in Egypt—and the child's life they would value no more than a fly's. The ships must be ever ready for flight. But meanwhile you must make this house a Paradise for Cæsar. Give him rest here from all his cares. Laugh, jest, feed him with faith in his own divinity as lamps are fed with oil, for tranquillity and self-confidence avert this disease. Do not draw him to you again as a lover—he is too old—yet never tell him your reason. Feign illness if needful. And above all, thrust, thrust forward with all your strength the moment of his accepting the crown which the Senate must offer. We must use gold like water, smiles and the favors of a Queen like oil and balsam, to smooth and urge and help matters on, for time is our enemy."

While he spoke she had listened but with an undercurrent of her own thoughts also. When he ended she sprang up, glittering, kindling to the emergency as she had always done.

"Right, my true Apollodoros. I will do it all. But there is more—there is Antony!"

Without a word more he understood. Antony, Cæsar's sword, the idol of the armies and of Rome. The gallant General, the enemy of Octavian—the man with every qualification to carry her through to triumph if Cæsar fell. Antony, the slave of women—and yet their ruler by virtue of his gross masculinity which they could never understand but adored. The Bacchus, the Hercules of their delight.

"But *could* you, my Queen?" said Apollodoros, and a whole history of doubts and fears charged the question. Could her delicate beauty and clear cold intelligence charm the man who had found his mates among the coarser sort of Roman women—patricians who were frequenters of gladiators and actors, themselves gamblers, lewd, loud, matching his tastes in word and deed. These and the shameless Cytheris and her like had been to his taste. There were no delicacies of apprehension in his mind any more than in his big florid person. For a moment in spite of all policies, something in the man shuddered and revolted. His little laughing Queen!—must she stoop so low to conquer a throne so high? And could they wholly trust this Antony? Apollodoros had heard much in Rome of his ill-timed drunkenness, the part of Bacchus played with a realism which did not always forward his ambitions, spending the days in sleep or wandering about with crazed and aching head, lowering himself to attend the feasts of actors and jesters. Oh, for a man to match the little Queen, with her abstemiousness—indeed there was a touch of austerity in the girl, absurd as it might seem—her dogged devotion to her purpose, her wit and charm! Given a man in health to second her, or merely a brave man of decent life, and she herself might create and

rule an Empire for Rome. If only she were not Greek! The Romans would never endure the rule of a Greek. Therefore, a man must be found; and who but Antony?

Before his thought had reached its goal, she had decided. She laughed aloud at the doubt.

"Long ago I told you, Apollodoros, that if my brother and Potheinos drove me out of Egypt I could dance for my living on the Roman stage. And so I could! I am a born actress. I can be all things with all men—and women. You have seen me clear, swift and cool with Cæsar. You shall see me coarse, luxurious, sensuous with Antony. But so far—and no further, until we know whether Cæsar lives or dies. I will be a bird flitting just out of reach until the Fates answer the Sphinx's riddle of life or death. Charmion!"

She called loudly, clapping her hands, and the girl came with a quick gliding step along the mosaic floor to throw herself at her Queen's feet.

"Oh, it was great, great, my own beloved Lady. You played the Roman woman as an angler plays a fish. Who can stand against you? And now, what orders?"

"Tomorrow fill the small banqueting room with roses, roses. See that the feast, though not too long, is such as the Gods might wish to linger over. Order the wines—and among them the Syrian wines we brought from Egypt. They will be new here. Set out my Indian cups of gold and emeralds. Send slaves to bid Antony to sup with me, and send also to Cicero the writer at his house on the Palatine Hill and bid him come and feast with the Queen of Egypt."

"And gifts—gifts!" Apollodoros eagerly interrupted.

"Great gifts—each suited to the man—and jewels for their wives, Fulvia and Publilia. For Cicero also my ivory Sphinx with eyes of beryl—green as the Cat-Goddess's of Bubastis. And for my dress, Charmion—oh, gold and glory and splendors. Make me a radiant shining goddess. But not out of reach—near as Diana when she curved to kiss Endymion. Forget Isis. Remember only the melting Diana."

Charmion nodded importantly. She saw in her mind's eye a girl all white and silver and crystal glitter, the moon's slim crescent half hidden in the vapor of her hair, little hands, unjewelled, moving delicately but irresistibly, as if pleading for freedom while they surrendered. Cleopatra read her thought in her eyes, clear as dark sea-water, and shook her head, laughing. She patted Charmion on the shoulder:

"No, not yet. And Antony would never see or understand. Wealth, emeralds, lures, smiles. Queenliness with possibilities of mischief in the background, and above all—youth—youth."

Suddenly she sighed.

"This Rome—this Rome, is so great, so stubborn, so male, that it forces even a great queen to play the courtesan for its favors! I hate the Romans—But who can stand against them?"

She dropped her chin upon her hand and fell into melancholy thought.

SHE had her way, how could it be otherwise? The learned Cicero would never have chosen the Bacchic Antony as a fellow-guest—he had a personal hatred for him and his excesses. But how refuse the flattering invitation of the loveliest queen in the world? How refuse the prospect of a distinguished invitation to Alexandria there to shine supreme among crowding intellectuals? How refuse the inevitable gift of jewels to adorn the lovely young Publilia his wife? He affected to jest at the invitation with some of the leading men who visited at his house next day.

"I am to meet Antony, the butcher, the prize-fighter, at the Queen's banquet! She is innocent indeed of Roman politics to invite us together, but I am told she is a very royal young woman, and her young innocence is refreshing. Besides I have no wish to offend Cæsar at the moment."

Therefore he went—eager to see for himself the inside of that very singular establishment—but with every hair bristling in case the detested Antony should be aggressive.

It was, however, an evening of enchantments. Cæsar himself was not present, but the Queen, with Apollodoros behind her chair, though young and fresh as the Roman spring, with cold dawn-roses in her cheeks, was also glorious as a galaxy of winter stars. Above her transparent robe, through which white limbs gleamed half-hidden as in running water, she wore the famous dropping girdle of great emeralds clothing her in green fire from waist to knee, and round the white column of her throat and lovely curves of her young bosom chains of emeralds yet more magnificent, surely the alembic of all the green that spring lets loose in torrents upon the happy world. Emeralds held the weight of her hair, they shone on her little hands. Over the couch on which she reclined at the banquet were thrown draperies of silk sewn with pearls and emeralds, and those for Cicero and Antony were not less splendid.

This had its effect, yet might not have very greatly moved the sardonic orator but for two other considerations. One was the quelling of Antony—which could not but be gratifying to an enemy. The big man was on his best behavior, uncertain how to adapt himself to the unaccustomed company, and it was evident that the girl puzzled him and that like the fly in amber he was wondering how on earth he found himself in such society. The foods and drinks were exquisite—entirely to his taste—but the talk marched on altitudes where he found the rarity of the air a little difficult to breathe. For there came the second pleasure for Cicero, bald and bland in the sunshine of royalty.

The Queen of Egypt, in homage to his gifts and her own tastes, spoke chiefly of the marvels of architecture in her own country, of the glorious rolls of papyrus in the Museum Library containing the wisdom of ages, the history of Egypt for centuries, and of the learning of the philosophers and scholars of Alexandria.

"But there is not one," she said with enthusiasm, "who would not thank the gracious Gods of Egypt if the illustrious Cicero condescended to visit us, and shed the light of his learning and oratory on the happy citizens of my city!"

Her cheek flushed delicately through its lovely pallor, so great was her eagerness on this head, and Cicero smiled and bowed while Antony glowered in silence. Such a fuss about a dull old orator who lapped up flattery as a cat swallows cream! If *that* was the sort of woman Cæsar chose for a sweetheart, he himself was very sure she would bore him blind in a week. She was pretty though, certainly pretty, and looked almost alarmingly high-bred—a true patrician. And, Hercules!—what emeralds! They would pay all his debts and leave something over for the expenses of Cæsar's popularity-campaign. Her voice was pretty too—low, clear, with shadows in it that one listened for. But none of your clever women for him!

She was detailing a plan to Cicero for inviting orators and writers of renown to fill temporary lecture-chairs at the Museum, for the instruction of the Alexandrian pundits. There was a fund, it appeared, from which large emoluments could be drawn for such gracious visitors. It had been set aside by her grandfather.

"My Alexandrians are so quick-witted that it is a delight to lecture to them, I am told. And myself—my tastes lie that way, most noble Cicero, though care of my kingdom draws me in another. But you do not eat generously. Is the food not to your taste?"

"My stomach is not strong," replied the much-caressed author, "and though the gracious condescension of the Queen warms it, I must be vigilant. I am liable to attacks of nausea."

She leaned forward with grace and placed her own untasted cup before him. It was of gold embossed with a design of a Pharaoh loosing his arrows against his enemies, towering in his chariot above the pigmies he destroyed.

"This Syrian wine is a cordial recommended by the greatest of Egyptian doctors. It cured my father, the King, of a malignant dyspepsia which tortured him. And if the flavor pleases you, noble Cicero, your slaves shall carry back a case of the wine to your house. I ask but one grace in exchange—your promise to visit me in Alexandria."

"Great Queen, it is given," answered the happy orator, sipping the generous wine all rosy in the cup. "And I thank you for your solicitude. The wine is comforting and has no acidity. It is mellow as sunshine."

It was another sort of sunshine to his enjoyment to behold the popular Antony lying unnoticed on his couch, eating and drinking as best he could without special honors. Not that the Queen ignored her guest. He received the honors due and would have been welcomed into the talk if he could have taken his share in it. That museums and lectures and antiquities were not his interests was no fault of the Queen's. She had done her best.

"She and her orator!" said Antony in the sulky deeps of his heart. "I would have the Egyptian know that here sits a man who can stir the people with oratory while Cicero sets them all yawning. When *I* talk the legions march. When *he* talks the lily-livered patricians applaud and go home and forget him. And a girl of that age to chatter about fusty old pyramids and mummied Kings! She might as well be a mummy herself, for all she's so pretty—the little pale pedant—and drinking water tinged with wine! Give me a good hearty girl, with plenty of color in her cheeks, that likes a joke and her fill of drink. The unlucky Cæsar! No wonder if he goes a little daft with *that* stuff always clacking in his ear!"

He drank the more to console himself and with the deepest appreciation of the Syrian vintage.

It was earlier than usual when Cicero rose to depart, satiate with food and flattery of the most delicate and artistic, bearing in his hand the cup from which he had drunk—a queen's gift indeed. She had told him in words sweet as the honey of Hymettus that no lips—not even her own—must henceforth touch the cup honored by his illustrious use, and when he would have refused looked in his face with eyes of such melting beauty, so winning in their frank young admiration of greatness, that he could but accept, tingling to his very finger tips with pleasure. He had promised that somehow or other she should hear him when next he delivered an oration. She had also despatched Charmion to bring a strange foreign box of silk brocaded with silver peacocks displaying their fanned tails, and opening it revealed a many rowed necklace of golden flowers interspersed with rubies set in golden flies and shells—a treasure of great value, having been, as she explained, the property of the ancient Queen Ta-usert. The earrings lay with them, the hoops and flies glowing with rubies. No modern jewel could match its price, for it had been rescued from the age-old tomb.

"Take these to the lovely Publilia with the hope of the Queen of Egypt that they may adorn ears and a bosom as much more lovely than the Queen Ta-usert's as report speaks them. Would that I might see such beauties for

myself! And for the noble Cicero, this—the only thing on earth wiser than himself!"

Unwrapping many folds of silk within a silver box she disclosed an exquisite model in ivory of the Sphinx, gazing right on with calm eternal eyes—eyes of green beryl which gave an air of sinister wisdom to the fixed gaze. It was a gift after his own heart, and he flushed with pleasure in taking it from those fair and royal hands.

"A banquet to be remembered, great Queen, whose generosity and intellect outshine even your beauty that is a world's marvel!" he said, his cold blood hurried and alert. "And if you will permit the visit of the grateful Publilia—" with much more to the same effect. She knew and was right in knowing that the golden tongue of Cicero would be raised in her praise next day in and out of season. Another success to her score!

But when the purple curtain fell behind him she turned to Antony stretching her arms widely as a yawn, as if to relax a wearying strain. She sighed like a tired child.

"A great man indeed! And if I were not so young! but queens must be every age to match their guests. Noble Antony, permit the slaves to fill your cup and me to shed fifty years of age and grow young in your company. And, oh, fill mine also. My throat is dry with learning. Taste these dates and apricots from Egypt. They have a flavor of their own. Will you too come to Alexandria? Ah, we have dancing girls there—in all Rome you have not the like. There are Nubians, black-haired and eyed, with skins of dusky softness, who dance the lascivious dances of the dead peoples, strange and seductive to see. But such things do not interest great generals."

"They do—they do!" he cried, eagerly holding up his cup. He forgot that what brimmed Cleopatra's was water tinged with wine. He forgot everything but that he was alone with a lovely girl who talked of the very things that stirred his blood. Yes, down the Mediterranean he had heard of those desert dances. Men breathed quicker in speaking of them. "I have heard," he continued, "that the dancers of Egypt would stir the blood of Stoics, but I never dreamed that such could be seen in queens' palaces."

"Not they!" she said with her little secret smile. "But I will tell you a secret of secrets—that is— Yes, if you will swear on your cup never to reveal it!"

He swore, loud and eager. She looked down; the curves of her lashes lovely.

"Well—this for truth! The Queen of Egypt does not always remain shut in her palace like a mummy in a golden coffin. No. When night puts on her jewels, and the light of the Pharos streams out over the harbor, I have known

the Queen to slip into a room wherein are locked up disguises many and skilful. There are the all-concealing robes of the Syrian women. There are coverings for the face which only allow the eyes to be seen— And are not all women's eyes exactly alike, most noble Antony?"

He protested eagerly that none equalled those eyes of golden amber veiled in a gloom of black curled lashes. She cut him short, laughing, and clapped her hands. Apollodoros entered, and stood behind her couch.

"Mine? Oh, mine, though known all over Egypt with the crown above them, are unknown when the rest of my face is hidden. You shall see some day! But my waiting woman Charmion puts a disguise upon me; it may be a woman's—we have known it even to be a youth's, for, stripped, I am as light as Hermes poised on a cloud—and, having done this, she disguises herself, and the wise Apollodoros becomes a mime or juggler or what not, and we run out into the streets of Alexandria gay as children let loose. The sights we see! No—but I dare not tell you!"

Leaning forward, he entreated. She drew back looking down and smiling as if at memories, Apollodoros grave as death behind her.

"No. There are things a woman may not tell except to—not to guests, however honored. But indeed some of our sights are wonderful. There is the Nubian dancer whom we call the Pearl, because she is dark as night. Her dancing—Apollodoros, it is for you to tell the noble Antony."

"Is exceedingly provocative. More cannot be said before the Queen," answered Apollodoros, with a seriousness that covered vast reserves.

"And yet she has seen it!" roared Antony. "Ha, ha! I like these sweet prudes who will see and never tell. And hear? What has she heard, wise man?"

She looked back at her watch-dog, finger on lip, and replied herself:

"Love tales most wonderful—that set the blood dancing as to the song of a mighty music-maker. Oh, the adventures, the passion, the beauty! The story-tellers sit at the street corner or in chambers where the people crowd to hear them. What have you like this in Rome? You are a stern, heavy people—with exceptions! But there is no city like Alexandria. There life flies on butterfly wings and roses have no thorns. Come and see us, and Charmion and I will disguise you and we will take you between us to hear the stories and see the juggling which outdoes the miracles of the Gods, and—"

"And the dancer—the dancer!" shouted Antony, now extremely warm with wine.

"There *I* cannot take you," replied the Queen primly. "It would not be a royal entertainment. But if you asked Apollodoros—"

Her eyes laughed at him distractingly under the black lashes, though her mouth was grave. Reading those shooting eyes he gulped his wine and stretched his great hand for hers.

"Loveliest—"

She rose instantly, veiling them into candor limpid as a child's.

"Noble Antony, I have drunk more wine than I should and my poor head swims. Otherwise you had never heard the story of the Queen's rambles, which I trust to your sworn secrecy. But if I find you trustworthy, there is more— No, Apollodoros must drink with you—not I!"

When he left the villa a new Cleopatra had dawned on Antony's astounded vision. The little vixen—he had not thought it of her! But how infinitely seductive and significant had become her small face, welling out golden light from those great eyes. What meaning in the infinite variety of expression! She had suddenly revealed herself as of the most absorbing interest—as good to watch as the best Greek drama imported and paid for by Cæsar's bottomless purse to win the hearts of the people. Not an actress like Cytheris—but a child of grace and innocence whose face reflected every emotion of her heart. Of course she was curious—of course she wanted to know things they would withhold from her if they could. Girls were like that even if they *were* queens! They had their natural emotions like everybody else. She must have learned a good deal from Cæsar, unless he kept his knowledge to himself. Apparently he had; her naughtiness was innocence incarnate.

So he sat in his litter, swaying back to Rome, charged with a whole new set of speculations. Hercules! She was clever! She had made Cicero—that old plebeian reared in a fuller's shop and bearing the contemptible name of Cicero—Chickpea!—Here the wine entangled the order of his reflections—Well, that plebeian Cicero, into thinking her a wiseacre like himself, when all the time—

But he was nodding asleep in the litter long before he reached his angrily anxious Fulvia and put about her sunburnt throat the Queen's gift, a chain of milky pearls, which did not set it off to advantage.

"We have done well!" said the Queen to Apollodoros and Charmion. "But for the Gods' sake let me rest now! For Cæsar comes tomorrow."

Events went swiftly after that banquet, for Cleopatra and Apollodoros held the threads in their own capable hands and where Cæsar wearied they did not. But he never guessed he was guided. He believed himself to be only seconded—a very different matter—and daily he leaned more and more on the girl who had awaked the passion of divinity in him and returned it in rays of inspiration. Her talk took on a new tone. She dwelt on high mysteries, the

vast intentions of kindred gods for the spread of his power in a world-monarchy.

How could a republic please the Gods, who desired to set an earthly god, partaking their nature, to be their vice-regent on earth? And look at the hideous corruptions of the Republic, the bribery, the base lust for money! He knew better than most how purchaseable were the Senators, how low and sordid the aspirations of the people. They needed a ruler, wise and stern. So she spoke daily—not long and tediously, but with a skilful touch here and there. And the relief was untold of escaping from Calpurnia's grave and melancholy company to the brightness and gaiety of Cleopatra's talk—gold embroidered on a background of earnest purpose. She felt with him—she understood as Calpurnia never could! It must be the royal, the divine blood in her! The courage, the gallantry of her appealed to him more every day—a fit mother of kings!

At her instigation, propping his own purpose, he became more of an autocrat daily. He took upon himself royal prerogatives, he assumed the character of a ruler both royal and divine. He became the hereditary Commander of the Romans. And to whom would the title descend? To the cold Octavian, with his unnameable vices? No. Of that he never had a thought. To the child sleeping like a pearl in his rainbow shell—the little Cæsarion, child of god-protected and inspired parents. So the intoxication of divinity strengthened on him, and the lust for a crown.

Even in his own home Calpurnia aided the cause by her deep and constant belief in the will of Isis—a portion of whose infinite being was incarnate in the intellect and power of the Queen.

Thus he was driven on every side, and the hopes of his party in Rome grew under these inspirations like gourds in a night. Their ambitions were boundless, and fear and even caution were left behind.

There was only an angry suppressed muttering among a few of the Senators and in obscure corners of the city when Cæsar placed a statue of himself in the Capitol—the heart's heart of Rome. That might have passed, so great was his power now, but that he set it beside the seven royal figures of the ancient kings of Rome—himself the eighth in that august company. And what had been the motive power? Cleopatra's vision in Egypt!

"It must be done!" she said, embracing his knees with her arms as she knelt before him. "When the Light on the Horizon gave me sight, did I not see your image among the Kings? And can the Gods err? And you, being one of them, *Imperator* and divine, can you err? Set it there, most royal Cæsar. Be fearless. Assume the King's dress. Sit on your throne in the face of all

men. I have seen with my eyes, and I am Isis, and I am Venus, and what I say is truth!"

So beautiful, so inspired was she at the moment that any man might be excused for succumbing to her radiant influence. Yet Apollodoros knew well and Cleopatra knew also that in the days of Egypt he would scarcely have gone so fast and far. Like the rich garment fretted by a moth, to which Apollodoros had compared it, the magnificent intelligence of Cæsar was yielding slowly to the inroads of disease. He became very difficult to deal with, and caused many anxieties at the villa—anxieties that threw Cleopatra more and more into the company of Antony—as indeed she desired. Sometimes the great man halted obstinately before some step which all his friends saw to be vital—such a step as his marriage to Cleopatra, which indeed Calpurnia would never have opposed, and which Cleopatra struggled for daily with every weapon of courtship and seduction and reason. But as yet she failed, though backed by Antony and the men deepest in Cæsar's counsels. It would affront the Roman people, he said, and nothing would budge him from that position. As yet.

Hers strengthened daily. All but the most conservative of the great Roman ladies were enchanted to visit her and carry away the beautiful and inexhaustible gifts she lavished on them. The banquets and wines and the Queen's charm drew not only the women but the great men of the Senate, the rich men of great descent who stood aloof from politics—each and all she caught in her glittering golden net of smiles and pleasures. But for Cæsar, she could have enjoyed her life supremely at that time. Success tingled like warm wine in her blood—delicious hopes spread rainbow wings about her. But he was a heavy anxiety and all depended upon him.

His temper was ungovernable—and just when the most perfect control and suavity were needed. Could she ever forget the dreadful day when at the banquet he started up and flung his wine in the face of Cicero because the orator had ventured to disagree with him over what had appeared to Cleopatra to be some nonsense concerning the proper manner of declaiming a peroration. And Cicero, whom she had won, who frequented the villa now like a tame sparrow, sprang up in a fury and rushed from the house, mortally wounded in his inordinate self-esteem, while Cæsar remained behind pale and raging at "the vain old fool—the insensate ass," as he called him, "who can do nothing but praise and magnify himself to all eternity. He who should worship at my feet!"

"He should, he should, divine Cæsar," cried Cleopatra, almost distracted with despair at seeing her work so wrecked and for a nothing. "But, oh, throw a little oil on the troubled waters! The man has a pen, a tongue—"

"I also!" growled Cæsar. "What can he do to me? You have not heard the news? Today it was decreed that a temple should be erected to me—as Jupiter Julius—and in the temple of Quirinus my statue will stand with the inscription: "To the immortal God." A college of priests is to be established in my honor, and that swine Cicero knows this in every detail and yet dares—*dares* to dispute with me on a matter of oratory!"

He was so furious, so human, bristling with such rage and scorn that for a moment she was on the verge of wild unpardonable laughter. The God-idea had so often wrestled in her own brain with the knocks of everyday life, and come off badly worsted, that she saw the humor of it and was mostly content to wear her deity like a decoration nowadays and put it off and on with her Isis or Hathor headdress simply as a political weapon. Abroad Cæsar must take it seriously, for political reasons, but it was almost terrifying to see with what ghastly gravity he began to take it in private.

Would that he with equal good sense would use his deity only for a weapon until the proper time came to assume it among the stars with his equals! Could all this be the sign of incipient madness? The brooding fear in the eyes of Apollodoros was ever before her.

She was on her knees in a moment beside him in terror.

"Cæsar, beloved, divine—you know best—you know all! Yet with great pains I had won Cicero and all through Rome his voice was loud in my praise. It has come to this, that everywhere the Romans are expecting our marriage and saying that only so the greatness of Rome can be accomplished and her Empire spread through the world. Let me win him back—let me! Not putting you in the wrong but saying that a momentary illness—"

"Illness? And I Julius-Jupiter! Woman, you talk folly. This house he never enters again. Do the Gods need old Chickpea to accomplish their purpose? But listen—you have often spoken of our marriage, and the time is near—near! What then, Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt!"

Cicero forgotten, she sprang to her feet rejoicing, hands clasped in delight beyond all speech, radiant, transfigured, Beauty herself at the moment, raying joy upon him in dazzling beams.

"Yes," he continued, "I have given orders for a temple in honor of Venus Genetrix, the goddess beloved of Romans from whom I am descended. And whose statue do you think shall stand in the inmost heart of her shrine as the Goddess of Love and Fertility?—whose but Cleopatra's—the Hathor-Venus of Egypt, the mother of Cæsarion!"

She put her hands before her face almost overwhelmed by the glories that broke upon her. So the Light on the Horizon had seen it, she also with the eyes of her spirit, and now it was to be made actual before the world.

"And that being done, the Senate shall issue the decree for our marriage!" said Cæsar. "You have thought me delaying. I, inspired by the divine wisdom, have chosen my time with perfect certainty. Calpurnia has accepted my decision."

Yes, Calpurnia would make no difficulty. Drunk with the God-idea, she worshipped daily at the temple of Isis, and saw in each step taken along the road to glory the manifestation of her will.

When Cleopatra, wild and laughing with triumph, flew to give the news to Apollodoros he received it with gladness not unmingled with fear.

"It is good, Majesty most beloved, good. Yet walk warily. The brain swims on the heights, yet never is there so much need for care and patience. Forget not these my words spoken with deep solemnity. We draw near the goal, yet there is Cicero—and more, infinitely more—there is Brutus!"

She stared at him in complete bewilderment.

CHAPTER XV

THERE was Marcus Brutus. To Cleopatra, walking on the heights, the existence of a young man whose austere Republicanism made him unpopular in a Senate much fallen from the grace of the early Conscript Fathers, could not seem of much importance. She knew his name because, under the influence and researches of Apollodoros, she knew the name of every man of importance in Rome; but that he should shadow her royal sunlight would have seemed as impossible to her as that the Great Pyramid of Chephren should fall and overwhelm her in its ruins. She thought of him, when she thought at all, as a promising young friend of Cæsar's who might be developed into a useful understudy of important parts in their plans.

Six months later Apollodoros entered and, dismissing even Charmion, repeated his warning.

"There is Brutus!" he said again, "and clouds gather heavy in a sky of storm. It is Cæsar against the Republic."

"Brutus! And why Brutus!" she exclaimed. "Let us ask him to a banquet and give him great gifts. Is not Portia his wife—the daughter of Cato? She has come—after your first warning I invited her with Calpurnia and the two came and to Portia I gave earrings and bracelets of amber set in gold. Charmion remembers—a thing all sunlight and honey. Surely that won her?"

"Marcus Brutus has been bidden, but he has never come. That caused me to inquire at a source where all is known, for there Calpurnia is in the hands of the priest of Isis and what she knows she tells!"

Cleopatra laughed gaily.

"You cannot frighten me, Apollodoros, now that our hands are all but closing on victory. The temple in my honor stands completed, and you yourself know how all Rome shared in the noble festivities and worshipped before my statue. There is certainly no divinity more popular than Venus in Rome! And I am a good second."

"It could not escape popularity," he answered with quiet irony, "seeing that Cæsar banqueted twenty-two thousand Romans at his own cost. To me it has always appeared that by such lavishness empires are destroyed, not built. But true candor is the obedience due to beloved kings, and my royal Mistress shall have it from her secretary."

She thanked him with eyes and smile, always at their best and truest when they fell on the man who would have served her with his life—whose life indeed was service.

"Speak!" she said. "Did you ever speak, Truest, and I not profit? Tell me of Brutus."

"In a moment—for first—have you not noticed, royal Lady, that the Roman women of the great families come here no more?"

She meditated a moment.

"It is true. Ungrateful cats! And I who have given with both hands. But why? And does it matter?"

"It matters as an index of storm. The women themselves are nothing. There is much talk in the great houses. I have spies in all the most important. They say your condescension ill disguises the haughtiest arrogance, and that if Cæsar were ever absolute King you would treat them all as slaves. They say that you have subjugated Calpurnia and Cæsar alike by magic arts of Egypt, and that you are a witch—a night-sorceress. These men, Brutus and his friends, are staunch Republicans, and they call Cæsar the murderer of the State. His life is in great danger."

Her clear eyes laughed untroubled. She gave no thought to Cæsar.

"I always was a witch—from the time I knew my right hand from my left. Remember I was born to wear the girdle of Venus. But these heavy Roman women—what have they to grumble at? I have spared their lovers!"

"Queen, you have not. They say you have gone like a love-philtre to the head of every man who frequents this villa."

"It is the Syrian wines," said Cleopatra with sparkling eyes. The stories highly amused her. They were evidences of helpless irritation—no more. But Apollodoros did not laugh.

"And there is much pity for the Princess Arsinoë. The Romans say she should have been set free and treated as a royal lady. Not understanding, they condemn you for cruelty. And there is also Cicero. He comes no more since Cæsar's insult."

Her eyes darkened like a sunshiny sea under sudden cloud.

"I know. I did what I could. We wrote him a letter, you and I, Apollodoros, that should have softened the heart of a Minotaur; I sent gifts—What does the brute say now?"

"I have seen a letter from Cicero to Atticus. He wrote: 'I detest the Queen; and the voucher for her promises, Apollodoros, knows I have good reason for saying so. What she promised were all things of the learned sort, and suitable enough to my character, such as I could avow in public. But she is untrustworthy as a quicksand, and her insolence is what I cannot recall without a pang!'"

"Holy Serapis!" ejaculated Cleopatra, and too stunned for more she collapsed into silence. Shock, however, was only a temporary dam to speech, for presently the torrent flowed free.

"That wicked old man was as near in love with me as man could be. A touch—one touch, if I had willed it, and he would have forgotten his Publilia in my arms. But I have had enough old men to last me for a myriad incarnations. Ungrateful old villain! The least he could do would be to return the gifts I threw before a vulgarian who did not know how to receive the condescension of a queen."

Apollodoros waited with respectful patience until she had raged herself to a finish, then resumed:

"But Brutus. My Queen, I have made great researches there. He is the son of Cæsar by Servilia. He knows it and loathes his father at heart, for were he his true son— Think for yourself the glories we have allotted to the baby Pharaoh Cæsarion. All these would be the possession of Brutus had Servilia his mother been an honest woman and Cæsar's wife."

She stared at him aghast. Here indeed was a motive that might well sharpen a man into a sword. And Brutus was no fool. He spoke and wrote well, she knew, and posed as a high and austere Republican. Here then was the key to that high Roman virtue.

"Men make me sick!" she muttered viciously. "Is there any truth anywhere? But what is he to gain by injuring Cæsar? Surely he knows, with all the world, that he has his favor securely and may hope for the highest offices when Cæsar rules the world?"

"There is Cæsarion," Apollodoros reminded her, "and can two suns shine in the one sky? He means to enlighten Rome himself with his pure radiance. He denounces Cæsar as debauched with Asiatic luxury, unfit to rule, drunk with Egyptian spells. And he is listened to!"

"I don't care. I believe him to be powerless. I believe—"

"Cicero is at his back," Apollodoros reminded her again. "I had rather have that grave young man on our side than Antony, for all his popularity. There is a great plot afoot of which as yet I do not hold all the threads. But I go now to see the great sport of the Lupercalia Festival, and the offering of the crown by Antony to Cæsar who, as you know, presides in the Forum. If that goes off as it should, I shall fear Brutus the less."

"Take me with you!" she cried, starting up eagerly. "I will paint my eyebrows and stain my face brown and wear black Roman curls as I have done so often in Alexandria. Who can tell then what woman laughs under my hood? But, Apollodoros, I hate this offering of the crown. This festival of the Lupercalia is a time of buffooning and obscene jokes, and Antony is the last

man to offer the crown. He is a buffoon always—a handsome fool. Cæsar is too great, too dignified, to take a crown so offered. It is the Senate—the Senate should come with humility to beseech his acceptance."

The face of Apollodoros gloomed.

"So I think. And had Cæsar's brain been clear as in Egypt, he would have scorned the notion! He to sit in the Forum with a crowd of unwashed plebeians, and take an actor's mock crown from the hands of Antony! Folly, folly! It is playing into the hands of the plotters. But we spoke in vain, you and I. Stay at home, great Lady, and do not see what will grieve you!"

But she would not hear. A sense of urgency was on her that winged her feet and thrilled in her blood like wine. After all, the Gods knew— It might prosper. The Alexandrians would have laughed themselves hoarse at such an offer. But the Romans—who could tell!

When she stood with Apollodoros in the stateliness of the Forum, jostled by the eager crowd, no human eye could have recognised the one or the other. He wore a wig of gray flowing hair, after the manner of the affected philosophers; gray hair hid his mouth and chin. His face had the sallow yellowness of the Levantine peoples. He had used the art known in Egypt of thickening the nostrils with adhesive wool inside, entirely changing the character of the most prominent feature. It coarsened the face indescribably.

For the little Queen, the mass of black hair dressed in stiff Roman curls was almost a sufficient disguise, overweighting her delicate beauty—but the lips were brightly painted with cerise and a deep sunburnt tan hardened with crimson on the cheek-bones desecrated the pearly oval of her face. Lines at the corners of the eyes, etched in by Charmion's skilful hand, added ten years to her age; and bosom and hips padded under her drapery finished the disguise. A stout, not uncomely matron, very much to the Roman taste, addicted to the prevailing fashion of paint and with a flamboyant taste in hair decoration was all that remained of beauty that moved the world as the moon cold above them draws the swelling tides.

So they stood, huddled in the crowd, as inconspicuous as any other two in the vast assemblage.

The Lupercalia was the feast of fertility, of the human, animal and vegetable rage of reproduction which yearly sweeps the world in the Spring. In Rome it had become to a certain extent civilised into comparative decency from its grosser beginning, though strange crude ceremonies survived of which it was difficult to explain the meaning—so old, so lost were they in the dim past of the building of the Roman world. Nominally, they were in honor of a god—Lupercus—whom no one now adored, whom no one valued to the worth of a penny, but who in ancient days was celebrated by savage

shepherds with lusty rites in fields and woods. He appeared to be a remote foreshadowing of Pan in his grosser aspects, and that was all one could say. But his feast was popular enough, for it gave room for a good deal of fun of the rough and ready sort, dropping easily into obscenity not very severely rebuked on the great day.

And the manner of the celebration was this:

A goat and dog were sacrificed, and the blood dashed over two strong young men, who cut the skins into thongs. Armed with these thongs they went tearing through the streets, striking every woman who put herself in their way with the fertilising thongs of Lupercus that she might bear strong children to the State, and so making their way to the Forum they were received with joyful pomp by the great man who presided, being honored themselves as instruments of the God's fruitful power.

Now Antony, a consul this year, had put himself forward as wielder of one of the strange implements, with a purpose behind the fun and buffoonery which had not been made public—the offering of the crown to Cæsar when the people were flushed with drink and merriment. His method was always to meet the people halfway in their rude tastes. "Feed with them, drink with them, laugh with them, and you can take them where you will. Stoop to conquer. Embrute yourself that you may lead the brutes!" He had forced the plan upon Cæsar, half unwilling, wholly unfit now for argument. He had beaten down the opposition of Cleopatra supported by Apollodoros, and now his foresight was to be put to the touchstone.

Coarse merriment filled the air of Rome, but it was with hearts very far removed from the tempestuous joking about them that Cleopatra and her secretary set themselves to watch the event, posing as foreigners common enough in the great and wicked city, the melting pot of the nations.

Apollodoros asked a few questions from a puny Roman citizen whose elbow was inextricably wedged in his ribs.

"And what are these rods called, noble Roman, with which the young men strike the women who desire offspring?"

"They are called februa, good Greek, and hence this month receives its name of February. It is a charm never known to fail—if proper conditions are observed afterwards! And certainly, considering the history of the noble Antony, it is to be supposed he could administer as much active virtue to the februa as most!"

"So I have gathered!" Apollodoros said seriously. "That may be well. The Gods favor devout servitors. And is this great figure seated on the throne the Divine Cæsar? I understand you worthy Romans have hailed him as a God."

"No less!" said the little Roman, "but for all his Godship and magnificence I would not take a year's lease of his life. Jupiter-Julius he is, but his face to me appears like death; and only see the lines about his mouth! Ah, we shall miss him when he is translated to the stars. A great man, a very great man! Would he might live and rule us!"

"Would you have him marry the Egyptian queen?" asked Apollodoros humoring his bent.

"That would I. Ay! A handsome young woman that has already proved she has no need of the thong. And loaded with gold and jewels and a fine kingdom at her back. Let him have two wives, say I, or twenty or a hundred, so it brings good to the State. More power to him! Why, we have had nothing but good from Egypt. This Egyptian Queen's astronomers have even regulated our calendar so that we no longer have the months and festivals tumbling head over heels over each other as before. I praise Cæsar for this,—and the woman also!"

Cleopatra smiled with painted lips red as cherries. A man after her own heart! But looking upward to where Cæsar sat, stiff as a golden idol on a golden throne, that heart misgave her. He was death-white, a parchment white that looked as though no blood circulated under the stiff and wrinkled skin. Evidently making a strong effort, he kept his eyes open and a fixed smile on his lips, but more than once amidst the noise of the impatient multitude gathered in the Forum she saw his eyelids drop heavily and he sat there in robes of burnished gold, rigid as a lifeless image, eyes closed as in pain too deep to be borne. It sent red shoots of terror darting along her veins. The Gods avert her sickening dread and send that all might go well in the great test to come.

A roar, a swelling roar drawing nearer and nearer, the shouting of the multitude, yells of laughter, great cheers that echoed along the narrow streets. The runners were coming—Antony and the young Flavius. Louder, louder it drew near, and Cæsar, opening his eyes, steadied his hands on the arms of the throne and prepared to play his part. Deafening tumults of applause and yells of laughter as the crowd parted, pushing a shrinking or bold-faced woman forward here or there to receive the fertilising stroke, and the two runners were in sight, puffed and blown with their race, striking furiously here and there with the februa.

Antony led the race, almost naked, his powerful limbs dripping with sweat, his eyes almost starting out from a face flushed scarlet with running and yelling. Thrusting the crowd right and left he flung himself before the throne of Cæsar.

"Hail, great Lupercus. Hail, God of plenty and joy, of fruitfulness in the house, the fields and the wild woods! Hail and be gracious to your worshipping subjects."

His breath sobbing in his throat, he could scarcely articulate the words. Turning, he beckoned to his associate. Flavius, a boy of twenty, fleet-foot as a faun, stepped forward and handed to Antony a royal diadem of golden leaves woven with laurels, and Antony raised it above his head crying in a great voice:

"Crowns for Kings! And what crown that the Roman Imperator does not honor by acceptance? Take this, Divine Cæsar, the sovereignty of the Roman World, and on this great day crown yourself, to the joy of all your faithful Romans."

He turned to the crowd, still holding the diadem above his head.

"Shouts and praises for the Roman Imperator!"

Strained, fixed, in a panic of fear and hope, Cleopatra almost wavered as she stood, and Apollodoros passed his arm about her in a momentary terror lest she should fall. She pushed it aside and stood rapt, ecstatic. It was coming—it was coming! Monarch in the face of Rome!

The crown trembled in Antony's strained and brawny hands. Where were the shouts?

Shouts, yes,—applauses, yes. But not the thunder of universal acclaim—far from it I Bands of men stationed here and there made what noise they could, others were silent; some made uncouth sounds expressing disapproval.

"Unanimous! Unanimous!" Antony shouted, almost drowning the dissenting voices in his own roar.

"Take it, great Cæsar, and with it the homage of myriad Romans and barbarians!"

Cæsar had risen, paler, if possible, than before. His fingers itched for the diadem—it was as though his life trembled in each laurel leaf. But he dared not. Not in the face of those half-hearted shouts—that undercurrent of doubt and dismay! Not possible—not possible. His hands flickered towards it and fell back weakly on his bright robe. Then with a mighty effort he collected himself.

His haughty features were haughtier than ever with inward anger and shame that must pass for disdain. His voice rang shrilly above the silent crowd—all upturned and eyes.

"Have I asked for a crown, young man? Do Cæsars demand honors in return for services? I am Imperator of Rome, I have served the Roman people. That is enough for me!"

Now indeed thunders of applause broke out and beat in great waves of sound all round the Forum. That was their Cæsar, the great, the Republican, the Roman! Half bewildered Antony tendered the diadem again, pretending to regard the approval as given to the crowning. Instantly it dropped to sporadic shouts raised here and there, belated in a wilderness of silence. The people would not have it. Ominous cries were raised far and near. Furiously Cæsar pushed the thing away and the episode was over. The chance was lost.

"Carry the diadem to the Capitol," his voice rang out over the assemblage, "and inscribe upon the calendar that this day the people offered me the crown and that I twice refused it. What will have I but the will of the Roman people?"

Thunders of applause again stormed the Forum. Their God, their ruler, their Cæsar, was true to himself and to them. What more was there to say!

Half sobbing for shame and furious anger, Cleopatra clung to the arm of Apollodoros, as Antony, gathering his wits together, caught up his thong and resumed his character of the God's forerunner.

"Come, young Flavius, come! Let us do our office. Let us fill the cradles of Rome with laughing boys and lovely girls!"

As they struck on either side the crowd opened again, leaving Cleopatra and her secretary for a second in the open space. They shrank back, but in that moment the thong of Antony had fallen lightly on her shoulder. She looked up in anger and disgust, and he shouted all unconscious:

"Go home, good woman, and rejoice in the sons and daughters I give you for the greatness of Rome. Oh, the sad face! She weeps because noble Cæsar has refused the diadem. But the day will come—will come! Now, Flavius!"

They sprang like hounds unleashed from the Forum and so into the streets of Rome scattering jests of the broadest about them as they went.

As Apollodoros guided the Queen through the press he whispered in her ear: "Brutus has been at work here—he and Cassius. They are the brain and hand of the plot against our hope. The fool Antony to give him the chance! Come, let us get out of this license!"

"Loathsome!" she said, shuddering. "Loathsome, to see the royal dignity buffooned away. Come, let us go!"

That night Cæsar spent at the villa—a night to be remembered.

Almost exhausted by the events of the day it was yet necessary that he should see Cleopatra and explain to her the new complexion put upon their affairs by this rejection. It was wormwood to him—bitter as death to announce his plans so far defeated that he must postpone their fulfillment, and, seeing his failing face, a look from Apollodoros over his shoulder

warned her that feel what she would, suffer as she might, she must play her game now with the utmost tact and courage if she were not to be discarded as a tool broken in the instant of trial.

Antony followed him, sobered and refreshed after his violent day. He too must be present to hear the words of the Imperator. But his gaze was on the face of Cleopatra. He regretted the failure, but he had done his best and it might have immense and unforeseen effect on his own interests.

With the paint washed from her face, whiter than any lily, and shadowed eyes, there was still courage in her, the young determination to make her way to the goal cost what it might. If the marriage, the Empire, must be postponed for a month or two she would bear it, but no more. It had become as clear to her as to Apollodoros that the race they were running was with death, and the stake the life of Cæsar. She sat on a lower seat beside him, watching intently.

His head had fallen upon his breast as if with weariness unspeakable, and there was dead silence in the lamp-lit room until he raised it and spoke in a voice thick with exhaustion.

"You all know that my heart was not in the exhibition of today, but tests are useful and the test has shown that the time is not yet. Has any one of you a word to say against this?"

Silence. Cleopatra opened her lips, but what was she against Cæsar and Antony! They knew the Roman people. She dared not speak. He continued, his stern features white as a cameo against the purple curtain that fell beside him:

"For many years I have laid stone upon stone to build the fortress of my royalty. With public shows, feastings, bribes, war and glories, I have bought the people, who have always been for sale and always will be. I have bound my friends to me. I have conciliated my enemies. And it appeared that the time was ripe for my royalty. But today has proved it is not. False stories have been spread that I desire to make Alexandria my capital instead of Rome." Cleopatra drew a deep breath. "It has been said that because Egyptian astronomers have reformed the Roman calendar that I desire to make Italy Egyptian. I must prove that this is false. I must give Rome some gift greater than any hitherto to bind her to me. She is a hard mistress and the price of buying Republicans is high."

Dead silence. What was there left to give? Gallia, Iberia, Germania, Britannia, Egypt—his gifts had been royal!

"I will give them now the kingdom of Parthia, with all its riches and all its splendors, and having given this there is nothing left in the world for them to desire but the kingdoms of the Orient, and to that Parthia is the road."

Antony sprang to his feet.

"Parthia? But that is a three years' campaign! A three years' absence from Rome!"

Three years! Cleopatra, pale as ashes, lifted her eyes in mute despair to Apollodoros where he stood beside the curtain—a servant, yet high in the counsels of his lords. His face was indecipherable, his eyes fixed on the mosaic at his feet.

"Three years!" Cæsar repeated inexorably. "With Parthia and its loot in my hand they shall take all my will for the Gods' will and they shall know what I know, that Parthia is the gate of India and of the whole world."

"If they had even the brains of swine," said Antony violently, "they would know now that the true key of India is Alexandria and the great sea. What is Parthia beside it?"

Cæsar smiled bitterly.

"Very true, but they are possessed by the dead ghosts of Alexander the Great's over-land conquests, and Rome does not understand the sea. There is no way but this. Being so, we must all face the hardness of necessity. I go to Parthia. I leave Antony in Rome to tend my interests and I will put my friends in all the high places of government that they may keep watch and ward for me. And for you—"

He turned to Cleopatra and the words faltered on his lips. Apollodoros looked up suddenly, keenly. She put out her hands, speechless, to fence herself as if from a blow.

"The Queen must return instantly to Egypt and guard my son and our interests there. For three years."

She rose to her feet stumbling over the hem of her long white robe, veiling her agony, with an arm across her face like a victim who sees the torture before him and will not see. She would have spoken, but could not, and they watched her in dead silence. Not even Apollodoros could fathom that ruin of hope and pride.

"The Gods are too great for men!" she said at last, in a stifled voice, that scarcely reached them from beneath her arm. "I should have known. The Light on the Horizon—the Light on the Horizon!"

She went out alone, her face hidden, her robe trailing behind her.

None stirred.

CHAPTER XVI

DAY followed day in dull succession while the young Queen made ready to return to Egypt. Great were the preparations for her stately departure, for there must be no hint of defeat or even of disappointment. All must be taken as some high decree of Cæsar's for the Roman good, in which she acquiesced as absolutely at one with his inspired hopes and ambitions. That was the view spread through Rome, and there were many whom it deceived and some whom it did not; among them Brutus, Casca and Cicero, who knew very much better what to think. For Brutus was in Cæsar's confidence and though, even to Brutus, he would not speak of the Queen's despair, it was easy for the younger man to read the sense of failure and bitter disappointment weighing upon the mighty soul of Cæsar. But he had no pity; it only hastened the plans of the conspirators. If in addition to the services he had rendered the Republic he should lay Parthia at her feet no earthly power would hinder his attainment of royalty. It had taken all their cunning, all their plotting even to delay it, and it was clear to them now that they must act swiftly or never. Deep subterranean currents were bubbling and flowing beneath the fair surface of events in Rome at this time.

But who can tell the despair of Cleopatra, cast down from her hope, ambition itself ruining beneath her feet? The very sight of her child was an unbearable bitterness. She had given her youth, beauty, and reputation—all the royalty and splendor of her glorious kingdom—to Cæsar, and what had it brought her? Nothing. She had kindled the fire of her bright charm to warm an old man into passion—and he left her as easily as though she had been an Alexandrian courtesan worth an hour's amusement and no more. There she was unjust to him, but who could see clear in that hour of immense failure? His pride, thwarted in its most sensitive point, forbade him to discuss feelings and motives with her or with any one. He wrapped himself in reserve as in a mantle and went coldly forward with his own preparations for the Parthian campaign, avoiding her as much as possible. It was even made plain to her that her stay at the villa was mischievous at the moment, and a great urban house was found for her—no longer must the roof of Cæsar shelter the mother of his son.

There Calpurnia came one day, veiled and secret with an urgent word to say. The Queen received her, as always in the presence of Apollodoros, and the meeting between the two was strange indeed.

"I will not see the woman!" she had said to Apollodoros. "She is his wife. Here, in Rome, I am his deserted mistress. She shall not triumph over me. I am still Queen of Egypt."

"See her, beloved Lady," he answered eagerly. "She knows things we do not, and when is not knowledge power?"

So they met, Calpurnia huddled in a black veil, Cleopatra with a mask of cool indifference to hide her shame.

Calpurnia saluted her at a distance, and, being invited to sit, stood clutching the back of a chair.

"I would not have come, Cleopatra, knowing the pride and anger that must burn in your royal soul, were it not that things terrible and urgent must be said between us. Forgive me before I speak."

Anger was impossible. Her face was livid; great rings of darkness surrounded heavy eyes and her lips were pinched and dry. In the weeks since they had met she had thinned to a shadow, quivering with nerves, her hands trembling; a pitiable sight.

Cleopatra, no less pale, swept her with a haughty glance, herself burned to the soul with insult from the horrible difficulties of her position. Not by a word, a sign, would she show this to the Roman woman. She spoke in a measured voice, slightly satirical, veiling misery under hard crystal indifference.

"I cannot tell why you have come, and to the Queen of Egypt. Rome is not the world, and it concerns me nothing now. I go to my own country. Let Rome go its own way; I, mine."

The other put out beseeching hands: "Queen, when I heard of the Parthian campaign my heart failed me for you, for myself and Rome. Look at Cæsar! Can he live to face it? None but myself knows how he is broken under the inspiration of the Goddess. It is too much for flesh and blood. No—we are denying the Mighty One. We have not faith. I have had supernatural warnings and dreams, and the omens are terrible. Do not fly from Rome. Have patience and in obedience to the holy Isis all will be well."

She did not move Cleopatra who, in spite of early training and the personal connection, could not see what Isis had to do with Cæsar's breach of trust. It might seem strange to accuse the conqueror of the world of want of courage, but that was her estimate of him. Audacity, a dazzle of daring, would have done all and at least kept her respect for him.

"For my part, the sooner I am out of Rome the better," she answered with chilly precision. "There is no direction in which I have not been cheated and betrayed. I have cheapened my country, fed every day with false promises, and now he takes his own way without a thought of me and my son and I am fleeing in disgrace, my reputation ruined. As to the campaign in Parthia, I believe not one word of his intention. It is a ruse to get rid of me until Egyptian treasure and ships and men are available again."

Calpurnia beat at the air with her hands in despair.

"No—no, you are a great queen. His hopes are in you. But that is not it. The omens! Something dreadful is at hand, and it may be you can avert it—you and the wise Apollodoros. Last night after he had eaten his meal,—not having spoken, and dark with brooding, the seizure came upon him. He fell at my feet as if fighting for life, the blood running from his bitten lips and tongue, staining the foam upon them. And he cried aloud—'O Isis, Goddess of the Egyptians, have pity on me. Grant me my life, grant me my crown, and I will fill your temples with sacrifices and you shall be mighty in Rome and throughout the world as on the Nile. Hear me—O hear!' And I looked for an answer, and, as I looked, the image of Isis with the child Horus in her arms fell, without hand touching it, from the shelf where it stands; and it was broken before my eyes."

Silence. What could Cleopatra say? Her own wrongs burned in her heart, consuming all else, and what were the pale dreams of a devotee to her flaming wrath and shame?

Wringing her hands, Calpurnia spoke, sobbing like a spent runner.

"And in the night I heard a crash that should have awakened Rome, but no one stirred. And I sat up, wet and cold with the sweat of terror—and again it came, and again! Three fearful times! And this morning Cæsar went to do sacrifice and a goat was slaughtered, and when the priests inspected the entrails they recoiled with terror, for the beast had no heart—none, and yet had lived! These are fearful omens. And a slave-woman woke screaming in the night, saying she had seen multitudes of men burning in a great flame."

Even Cleopatra shuddered. These were fearful omens indeed. They betokened the direst misfortune, but to whom? At the moment she felt that she could bear mishaps to the Parthian campaign with the utmost equanimity. They might indeed throw him back on her and resolve him to strike the one bold blow which she was convinced was all that was needed.

Apollodoros interposed.

"Great Lady, what would you have my royal mistress do?"

That plain question reduced emotion to reason. Calpurnia turned to him haggardly and with more calm.

"Wise Sicilian, I would have her do this: Throw all her weight and influence against the Parthian campaign, and take Cæsar with her to Alexandria until this dreadful imminent danger is past. There in Alexandria wealth may be collected—there he is the Royal Consort—there, in peace, he can propitiate the Holy Isis in the land of her love. There his friends can join him, and, if the Parthian campaign must be, let it begin from there and not from here, where some deep plot against him is stirring. Do this, great

Cleopatra, and your name will ring down the ages as the savior of Cæsar and his glory."

At the moment Cæsar's glory was troubling Cleopatra much less than the question of how she herself could escape from her dilemma without ruinous dishonor. She looked coldly into Calpurnia's sunk and reddened eyes.

"You are a strange woman! Have you no jealousies? But you are right. I do not want your husband. I want strength, and he has none. Nor wisdom. Did he ever listen to me except in the matter of winning over Egypt? Never. In a few days I shall have seen the last of Rome, and may the Gods of Egypt grant that I never see it again!"

As the words left her lips the purple curtain was lifted and Cæsar stood before them, worn, old, a most pathetic figure, but with unconquerable fire burning in his eyes. Dream,—folly, it might be, but there was more than a touch of the God-like about the man in the withered body and the clear flame of the spirit bright above its ruin.

"I have heard the last words of Cleopatra and Calpurnia, and I say this: Let the omens be what they will I go forward, and as for flight to Alexandria —*I* to sink into an Egyptian Pharaoh, *I*, who will be King of the World! Keep to your spinning, women, and leave me to my sword!"

Calpurnia covered her face. Cleopatra stared at him hardily. She had learned by this time that Cæsar could fail like others, and words meant nothing to her now. Apollodoros stood forward to voice her thought.

"Great Cæsar, Roman Imperator, hear my words. My Queen has put in your hands her most precious self, her son, and Egypt, with all that is in that glorious and ancient land. What has she had in return? Dangerous absence from her kingdom, scorn from the Romans, plundering of her treasures, failure, failure, in you who were once so great. She returns the poorer by a dream, the richer by experience. There is no place for you in Egypt. You have been tried and found wanting. But because you were once our friend I give you this warning: Beware of Marcus Brutus. The danger foretold by the omens centres in him. Beware—and again beware!"

A flame of fury swept over Cæsar's face at this plain speaking, but he controlled it and laughed aloud.

"Brutus? Choose your man better, Apollodoros, the Sicilian! He has his ambitions, and I know them; but he loves me—he will have the grace to wait until the breath is out of this withered body. As for the Queen—she is young and impetuous. If she had patience to wait until the Parthian war glutted Rome with gold and riches, she would see my every promise fulfilled. As it is —she must take her way—I mine. For the child's sake I regret it."

"For more than the child's sake, I regret it," she answered, her light figure dilating with scorn and anger. "I believed in you and have been deceived. The Gods grant I am in time to retrieve my mistakes and yours. Go, Calpurnia, I bear you no ill will. You did what you could. Go, Cæsar, and remember when the last day is upon you that if you had struck like a man, instead of doubting like a coward, you and I had sat side by side, rulers of the world. But I will rule it still. When you are dead and forgotten I will live and triumph. I swear it by the Holy Isis of whom I am part. Go, Roman—I have done with you!"

She flung her hand out with a gesture of cruel rejection and pride, and so stood fixed like a Pythoness in the act of prophecy. He would have answered, but Calpurnia clung weeping to his arm and dragged him to the door, and the Sicilian stood behind his queen with scorn and repulsion in every line of his face. Something seemed to choke in the throat of Cæsar; it was as though youth and hope, and the phantom of Divinity itself, bade him farewell with Cleopatra. He went slowly out with bowed shoulders, and the curtain fell behind him.

That day Calpurnia spent prostrate before the image of the Mystery, but no answer was vouchsafed.

She rose as the sun sank in a wan March sky washed in with silver rifts revealing immeasurable depths in inky clouds. As she entered her house a faithful old slave-woman met her with a word to say:

"Great Lady, the Master sups at the house of Marcus Lepidus—who came here to take him. And before he went I heard the man say to him: 'Dolabella has disputed with me today as to what sort of death is the best. What is your thought?' And Cæsar replied smiling: 'That which is unexpected.' Lady, it is a fearful omen. Wise men do not speak of the dark God. He is too great. And Zosime, the Greek slave, has let fall from her hand the treasured glass cup of the Master which he brought from Egypt with his own image upon it and it is broken into diamond dust. The Gods pity us!"

That was the cry in the heart of Calpurnia also. She was weak with fasting; all day she had not eaten, and she wavered as she walked; but she put the woman aside and would hear nothing. She said simply:

"The Gods know best. We know nothing," and so went on.

She was asleep from exhaustion when Cæsar returned, her mind, even in dreams, a confusion of unspeakable fears and doubts; and he did not wake her as he lay down beside her, nor, warmed with wine, excited with the great events of the past days, could he himself sleep, but lay staring out into the dark, seeing bright passing pictures of the past and future form upon it in a bewildering haze of colors and disappear to rekindle in confusion. The house

was deadly still—quiet as the inside of a grave—the mind of each man and woman away on its own mad ghost-hunt in the wild land of dreams; and the streets also at last were silent—the heart of Rome stilled in the vast darkness.

Suddenly a thundering crash—like that of an earthquake roaring upon its prey—and every door, every window, in the secluded chamber sprang wide, breaking up the silence into horror, the darkness into the pale staring of the moon, cold and remote but full in his face. Shuddering, he dragged at the arm of Calpurnia and could not wake her. She lay tossing, contorted in the coils of some dream of horror, sobbing, groaning, her hands clenched in each other, beyond his reach.

Then, rising, standing in bleaching moonlight, Cæsar, unshaken by fear, invoked the immortal Gods with hands extended upward:

"For what I have done amiss, pardon. For what is to come, courage." And so, returning to his bed, slept.

But in the morning Calpurnia all pale and aghast, revealed her dream:

"Let me be brief, for words will not bear the horror. I held you in my arms a murdered man, blood running from every wound in your body. For the holy Gods' sake, for the sake of the love and submission I have always shown you, do not leave the house today!"

He struggled for a laugh.

"The Senate meets today, and at the home of Lepidus I heard that the debate turns on matters of the utmost consequence to the Parthian campaign. I cannot be absent. Let me go, woman. I never knew you a coward. You shall not make me one."

"In the temple of Isis yesterday evening the most aged of the priests, one who lives in the sight of the Gods, took me apart: 'Wife of Cæsar,' he said, 'take this for truth and tell it to him as you value your life and his. Let him beware of the Ides of March.' This is the day. Hear me—by your mother's life, I entreat, if I myself am nothing!"

Her anguish was more than her words. It was dreadful to see. It moved him a little. Perhaps his own great weariness may have helped, and the gloom as of a blinding mist, in which men walked spectral coming and vanishing silently along the streets, may also have moved him.

"If it will satisfy you, cause a sacrifice to be offered, and, if the omens are then unfavorable, I will stay within—for this day only."

On the wings of terror she flew to give orders. Let the beast bleed that Cæsar might know his fate!

Terrible and most terrible was the report when it came. Warning, woe, and destruction were foretold in the body before the priests. Let Cæsar accept

it or take the ruin!

Worn out, he agreed and was about to deny all audience to visitors when Albinus, a man of importance and a friend whom Cæsar trusted, pushing aside those slaves who would have withstood him, hurried into the atrium hot with haste and excitement. The traitor, the liar!

"Come, Cæsar, delay no longer; the Senate sits and great honors are preparing themselves for you! While you supposed that all was going wrong, because of the folly of Antony on the Lupercalia, your friends were at work, and it is going better than right. The Gods are good to you. You are to be decreed King of all the Provinces outside Italy and may there wear the Imperial diadem! Only in Italy must the Republican farce be kept up a little longer, until the asses of plebeians weary of it. Come, mighty Cæsar, come!"

But again Calpurnia threw herself between them.

"Cæsar, my dream, my dream! I see his hands dripping with blood. He is luring you into the snare. Cæsar, Cæsar!"

With the name bursting in a cry from her lips she fell like one dead before him, and, the women surrounding her in terror, she was carried away into the inner room.

"Her dream?" said Albinus with a smile of scorn on thin lips. "So she dreamed some misfortune, I suppose, as women will! And you listen, and a crown in the balance! Well—have your way!"

He paused a moment, and looked about him.

"A rich house, yet not worthy of Cæsar, King of the World. But I will tell the Senate that they must wait until the dreams of Calpurnia are more fortunate. Bid her fast tonight instead of feasting, and she may do better. Or come at least and postpone the business until a more fortunate day. Why insult the Senate and your friends?"

And still Cæsar hesitated. The omens weighed upon him more than the dream of his wife.

"I will go," said Albinus. "The man who does not seize opportunity is scarcely a King for the Romans. Farewell, Cæsar, and may Calpurnia dream pleasantly this night."

He went toward the door opening on the street, and without a word Cæsar, gathering up his mantle, followed; without a word the other led the way, knowing that resolution trembled on a balance which a touch either way might send flying upward.

So they walked through the narrow streets, Cæsar a little behind, advancing toward those buildings where the Government of Rome had its sittings.

And as they did so the aged priest of whom Calpurnia had spoken stood on the edge of the people drawing aside to let the great man pass, and, seeing him approaching through the heavy mist that rose from Tiber and overhung the city like a pall, he leaned forth and looked at him very earnestly, and Cæsar, willing to relieve his own soul by a jest, said to him:

"Hail, friend! What have you to say? The Ides of March are here and no harm done. Go, tell it to Calpurnia."

And the priest said low and trembling:

"The time is come but not gone," and slipped back among the people like one terrified, and the crowd drew in its breath hissing like a great snake for fear. So he went on, and two men who knew of the plot tried to get near and alarm him, but could not, because the people thronged about him, to kiss his hands or to shake their own in his face, according as they loved him or hated.

In that hall which contained the statue of Pompey which Cæsar himself had set up, willing to have old feuds forgotten, sat the assembly, and as he entered the whole Senate rose and saluted the Dictator, standing to honor him as though he were already a king. And there was a great silence, of awe and expectation.

He looked about him for Antony, but he was not there, Albinus having fastened on him outside to keep him in talk while the murder was done inside. For his was a ready dagger; and he, Cæsar's right hand.

Afterwards, when people who were present tried to record the facts, they could give no clear description, least of all the butchers! Some of the plotters gathered round the back of his chair; some approached as if they would second the petition which Tillius Cimber presented to the Dictator on behalf of his exiled brother, following him to the chair where he took his seat, the Senate reseating itself as he sat.

He drew up haughtily as they importuned him, rejecting the petition, waving them angrily away at last. Then, in a flash, Tillius Cimber seized him by the toga, dragging it from his neck. The signal—the signal! Instantly, Casca leaped upon him with his dagger, wounding him in the throat, and Cæsar, writhing aside, caught the knife and gripped it, shrieking "Casca!" his cry more a beast's despair than a man's, drowned in the yell of Casca to his brother for help in his devil's work.

Dagger points flashed about him wherever he turned, and fierce eyes above them. Hemmed in on all sides he met blows at his face, at his eyes. Driven here and there, a wolf at bay, he was trapped in the hands of all, for all must share the guilt. A sight of horror! This way and that he turned and doubled, defending himself desperately and in vain, flung back upon the daggers, dripping blood from ghastly wounds; and none came to his help, no,

not one! The very Senate slunk away, sick and crawling with fear and shame. Brutus held back, eyes in a narrow glare, hands trembling, toppling on the edge of the precipice of crime, daring, not daring—Yes, daring at last! For the others urged him on! Then in a rush, seeing all in the blaze of hell's lightning, he struck at Cæsar's breast and murdered gratitude itself in the blow.

Now peace came to Cæsar and remembrance of high things. Flung against the base of Pompey's statue, he dropped his dagger, and looked the traitor in the face:

"Brutus—And *You*!"

And with that dying cry, he covered his face after the manner of the great Romans, that none should see him pass, and so fell dead.

They rushed in upon him, stabbing blindly, cutting one another in a mad fury of fear, until at last the quivering of the massacred body ceased and all was still.

They fled to their lairs for safety.

Now when the news was carried to Calpurnia she threw her hands above her head and fell on the floor, and for two nights and days she spoke no word, going down as it were into the dark of death with Cæsar. And when it reached Cleopatra she stood stock still, the red blood flushing up into her pale cheeks; and she said:

"The Gods,—the dreadful Gods!" and again: "Who shall stand before them?"

And Apollodoros said nothing, watching her; and at last she said:

"Send for Antony in hot haste, and until he comes leave me to myself that I may pray to all the Gods of Egypt, for this is the hour of victory or defeat."

So she turned trembling away.

CHAPTER XVII

BUT neither on that day nor for a week could Antony come to the Queen, for Rome was tossing like a raging ocean, and the murderers had fled, fearing the wrath of the Senate and the vengeance of Cæsar's friends. It was Antony, Antony everywhere, consolidating his power, gathering up the reins dropped from the dead hand, hailed, by all but the assassins and their party, as the rising sun, heir to the power of Cæsar. Calpurnia sent for him and confided to him the possessions of Cæsar, to hold in trust until his will should be opened. Word came that Octavian, the nephew of Cæsar, was riding like the wind on his way to Rome. But none as yet knew the mind of the people, and still the body of Cæsar lay unburied in the quiet of the Forum, and men and women went and came silently about it and over Rome fell a great awe.

Apollodoros passed in and out through all the crowds and suspense, hastily continuing the preparations for Cleopatra's flight, for so it must be called. He went in fear for her life those days, for who could tell that the murderers might not turn upon her next, declaring that it was she who had destroyed the republican in Cæsar. Also the Senate might hold her as a hostage for the obedience of Egypt. Many dangers hovered about them in those dark days of March. Once he gained an interview with Antony—an interview of a moment, which left him trembling:

"Tell your Queen this—that her life hangs on a thread unless I can win the Romans. Bid her keep to the house, hide herself, despatch what treasures she can secretly to the ships, for within the next day the world may crash together in ruins and destroy us all; but when I can—if I live, I will come to her."

At long last he came, graver and more manly than she had seen him, but with an air of exultation like that of the winner at the games; and so he was brought into her presence and taking her hand kissed it, and seated himself at her command.

"The Queen may go in and out at her pleasure now. Rome is won!"

She clapped her hands like a girl.

"And how?"

"By eloquence, great Lady—eloquence, though I should leave my praises to others! When the time of the funeral was set, I went to the Forum, and there was the crowd waiting about Cæsar, and I carried in my head the provisions of his will, for I knew they would go hard with Brutus and his cut-throats. And so, seeing the moment had come, I flung up my hand and spoke. Not ill, as I think!"

"No, divinely well, great Antony!" cried Apollodoros, "for I was there. Gods, how you touched them!"

She turned eager eyes from one to the other, questioning:

"No modesty! Tell me, noble Antony. Hush, Apollodoros!"

The big man sprawled in his chair, thrusting out his legs as if weary, his head lolling on the cushions of purple silk.

"I would you had heard it, Cleopatra, for you are all fire and light; you too could speak if you would. Well—I hailed them as friends and Romans—*they* Romans, the scum! And I told them how Cæsar loved them,—Cæsar—that saw in each one of them a necessary evil! And that praise moved them so much that they stood blubbering round like the fools they are. And then I told them how Cæsar had left to each Roman citizen three hundred sesterces in money, and to the Roman people the great gardens and estates of the villa on Tiber and—"

"Good Gods," ejaculated Cleopatra, "that Paradise to those swine! Well might Apollodoros say his brain was touched!"

"I have known that for some time. But the will was a stroke of policy in case it should be read in his lifetime, and it all served our turn very well. They blubbered like children as each thought of walking with his fat wife and squint-eyed children in the gardens of the great! And then I reminded them of how modestly Cæsar had refused the crown when I offered it twice on the Lupercalia. Thanks be to Mars he did, for it gave me a noble text to discourse from! And then I held up his bloody garment stabbed through and through, and then I gave them my best oratory."

"And marvellous it was!" cried Apollodoros with enthusiasm. "I wish beyond wishing that my queen had heard it, for never was such eloquence. The people wept and sobbed—O glorious, most glorious!"

Antony smiled modestly.

"It was really not so bad. Let Cicero mock at my 'Asiatic style of oratory' as he was pleased to call it. It certainly served my turn and cooked his goose on that occasion! *He* could not do the like! They simply whooped with emotion. If the murderers had been in Rome we could have despatched them one and all to keep Cæsar company in the land of Shades. I own I should like to see that good young Republican Brutus with a dagger in his throat! However—to make a long story short, the people tore up the benches, railings, everything they could lay their hands on, and made a glorious pyre, and they spread a purple cloak and laid Cæsar upon it, and poured oil, and lit it, and the blaze went up in a roar—and so, an end of Cæsar. It was an immense relief to their feelings. Oh, the people—the people! How I despise them, yet knowing they must be courted for awhile. Not but what I get on

well enough with them when they know their place. Hercules!—when I called Brutus an honorable man, and my eyes cast up to heaven, they were great! They would have lit the pyre with him for a penny. They tasted the irony!"

"They don't trouble us much in Alexandria as yet. That pleasure is reserved for republics," she said, with a lift of her lip, "and the more I see of the Republic the more poisonous I think it. Well, there is an end of Cæsar, and what next?"

Her whole heart was still burning from what she considered the betrayal of her hopes. If she felt any pity she would not show it. Pride and policy alike forbade it, and moreover she knew her man. Beauty in tears would please Antony only when the tears were shed in his own honor. The laughing Queen for him. She had proved it already.

"What next?" he said with his jolly laugh. "It would puzzle a woman of any less than your wit to understand that! Why, to make friends with Brutus and his murderers until the day of vengeance comes along! The Senate is all for peace and politeness now. They say we have all been wrangling too long. But you may guess what the peace will be worth! One thing more—" He hesitated, looking at the girl under his handsome eyelids to see how she would take it. "In Cæsar's will, made recently—"

She took it with all her subtlety, anticipating him:

"I know. No mention of me and my son. Am I right?"

"Right, Queen of Queens!" said Antony, immensely relieved. Cleopatra was much too pretty and powerful a person to be wounded. "And I blush to tell you he leaves nearly all to that beast Octavian, as vicious a young brute as lives, and makes him his official heir also. The rest between two other nephews. Calpurnia is rich otherwise."

Apollodoros ground his teeth in silent rage. The money was nothing. Cleopatra's wealth could have bought Cæsar's and half Rome. But no mention of her or of Cæsarion!—no acknowledgment! One might well call it treachery, were it not that the reason was so plain. With that belief in his own divinity which Cleopatra had fostered, he had counted certainly on coming through the Parthian campaign in triumph, and had thought it better not to tie his hands. Until then it would be no harm to hold a rod and a promise over Cleopatra. All must depend upon her good behavior in his absence. Well, he was past caring now that he had ruined her.

But, whatever wrath and scorn they might feel, the whirlwind must not be let loose before Antony. The eloquent eyes of the Sicilian warned Cleopatra, and hers responded. Who could tell that the one Roman was more trustworthy than the other? He was the less bound to them.

"I see!" she said composedly, "and though I regret it as you do, noble Antony, I know Cæsar's difficulties, and who would accuse the dead? Alas, he was old and his health breaking, and he had not the heart to face the difficulties. So he chose Parthia as the least difficult, for he was ever a soldier!"

"True, wisest and loveliest of women. We will not blame Cæsar. But tell me now and frankly: Is treasure needed? For with what is in my hands of Cæsar's I can give what I will to the wife and son of Cæsar—for wife and son you two are to me. Have I not heard Cæsar say it times out of mind?"

She laughed her lovely laugh, low, sweet as the dove's note in the warm swaying of green leaves.

"Money, most noble Antony? I have not touched the fringe of my treasures for Cæsar. I keep them for a better than he—the man who shall rule the world with me. For—Cæsar's dream was not murdered with him. It lives and moves here!"

She struck her hand lightly on her breast, smiling into his eyes, knowing she had dazzled him. She had indeed. That a person could be offered money, could refuse it, could possess so much that the offer was beneath contempt, raised her high in the eyes of Antony, the incorrigible spendthrift. He looked at her with a new respect.

"I have money for my friends also!" she said proudly. "Have the golden streams of Egypt run dry, Apollodoros?"

He shook his head, laughing aloud.

"I think not! And now, what has the noble Antony to offer? It is certain that since the little Pharaoh is a baby the man who will put forward his rights and act as his regent and supporter will—deserve well of the Queen his mother."

Antony raised his hand, his eyes fixed and shining. He had thought—for so she had willed he and all the world should think—that she had given a girl's passion to Cæsar. He had anticipated a mourning widow that day—a girl with every hope crushed, every joy scattered, terrified, doubting where to turn for help. A man might make his own terms there! True, it had seemed that a girl might not remain eternally inconsolable, but here and now she would be helpless. Having found her very far otherwise, his heavy handsome face brightened with complete understanding; not understanding of the woman's heart, but of the Queen's position.

"Why then," he said eagerly, "you will see my difficulties. If I do not conciliate the murderers they will throw themselves into Octavian's arms, and he will forgive them his uncle's death—apparently for the peace of the State—and I shall be blotted out—crushed!" He made a final gesture with his

big hand. “But if I join with them I can dare Master Octavian to his face, and I will proclaim in the Senate that Cæsarion was the lawful son of Cæsar. Never a better stick to beat Octavian than that! If indeed the Queen will work with me—will have patience and understanding, why then indeed!”

His laughter said the rest. He was in earnest. One could read his good-humored genial expression as one never could read Cæsar’s close-lipped reserve. The happy Hercules! That was what she had called him to Apollodoros. That was how she saw him still.

She sprang to her light feet and caught his hand.

“Together we will work, O most noble—most brave—most wise Antony, and if you need money, I am no beggar! Oh, the delight of youth! I am myself again. Cæsar’s age lay like ice upon me. How could I laugh or be myself with that deathly cold ever upon me? The old to death! The world to the young!”

And now the amazed Antony beheld the Queen of Egypt in another of her myriad-minded moods. She flung her hands above her head, she whirled on tiptoe about the room in attitudes of the wildest grace and abandonment tossing her arms as though they shook the sistrum. White feet twinkled through the folds of her robe, a lovely bosom panted beneath the cestus that crossed it. Then suddenly she halted, rigid, a perfect pose of flying beauty, and laughing collapsed into a chair.

“Gods!” cried Antony, “if any Greek dancer could match that—!”

“They couldn’t! How should they?” said the laughing Queen. “You forget, most noble general, that I am Venus and Hathor and Isis, and a few other importances in one small body. And just now I am like the earth released from winter and blossoming in spring. And what can you say that I don’t understand? The Gods, my relatives, fashioned the inside of my head as well as the outside. Do you think me blind? If Octavian takes possession of Cæsar’s power, you are nothing. But if you support Cæsarion, with me behind you, Cæsar’s dream may come true, with a better man than Cæsar in the seat of the mighty. And now let us drink to our success and offer a libation to the spirit of the dead, and forget him!”

Wines were brought in in goblets of glass banded with gold and gems, and they splashed their libations in wine like blood upon the white pavement of mosaic. Then raising their cups the two drank to wealth, to glory, to success, to all they needed to realise their dream. And at the last Antony filled a brimmer and tossed it off “To Beauty.”

“That I must not drink, for I am Beauty—I alone!” said Cleopatra demurely.

He began to think that this was true.

When he departed lit up with new enterprise and courage, Cleopatra still in a blaze of excitement struck her hands together triumphing.

"I have won him. Not as a lover yet, but that will come. He shall be besotted on me, as Cæsar never was. But even now he will do what we need."

"Do not be too sure—too hasty," Apollodoros said in a deep note of warning. "We must not trust him too far. He is in the hands of women, and until you are the one woman go with caution. But you said and did wisely in every look, in every gesture. I watched you with pride. The Gods indeed guide their royal daughter. Now let us keep our heads cool and judge him as we prove him."

He stopped a moment, then looked at her with eyes keen as stars.

"My Queen, is there anything in the man that touches your heart?"

She replied with careless candor:

"Nothing. He is a great big hulking good-humored gladiator. No more. I have never seen the man for whom I would sacrifice a lock of my hair if it were not to gain my end."

"Then that is well!" he said with relief. "For this is not a man to love. He is one to watch with clear eyes, to use, to discard when he drags one into danger. But love!"

His tone said much. She looked at him with bright-eyed curiosity.

"Love—what is love, Apollodoros? Have you known it? Tell me, you who are instructed!"

He answered evasively, looking upon the ground.

"Once long ago, great Qlapetrat!" (using her Egyptian style). "A bitter God, salt as the sea, sweet as life, dark as death. Winged and his eyes are stars."

"Winged?—all love is winged to flutter from one flower to another!" she said carelessly.

"Winged for the heights and abysses. Wings wide as the sky. The greatest of the Gods!" answered Apollodoros, still looking downward.

She put it aside, returning smiling and full of hope to the uses they must make of Antony.

"But we began on the wrong note here!" she said seriously. "I was clouded, damped, eclipsed by Cæsar. He shall come to me down the Mediterranean and I will outshine Cytheris on her own ground. That is the only way with a man like Antony. And now let us be off, back, back to Egypt

—but before we go let us tie Antony to the cause! Rome chokes me with its blood and sullen furies. To Egypt!"

"To Egypt, Qlapetrat!" he answered.

And before she sailed, her will was done, and Antony was Autocrat of Rome. The cold Octavian, loathing and distrusting him, was still compelled to seek his friendship for a time and smother his resentment until it might burst safely into flame. And Antony, avoiding the mention of Cleopatra, declared in the Senate that Cæsarion was true son to Cæsar; and, though the eyes of Cleopatra haunted him and came between him and other women, he dared neither see her nor bind himself to her interests, for his Fulvia watched him, lynx-eyed. But Apollodoros knew his mind and Cleopatra waited smiling. And she left Rome like a great Queen, and with her ships and her child sailed back to Alexandria, hating Rome and the Romans but having left her mark upon it and struck at the very root of republicanism in her use of Cæsar.

So, uniting with Octavian, Antony at the battle of Philippi defeated the murderers of Cæsar, who one after another received the reward of their wickedness; and first of all Cicero followed Cæsar to the Dark Land, and after him came Cassius, and Brutus the traitor, who killed himself, fearing to face Antony.

And as time went by the face of Cleopatra faded in Antony's mind and other women renewed their temptations, and it might have seemed that she was forgotten; but she and Apollodoros waited with patience until Antony had made himself not only the greatest of the Romans but the greatest man in Asia Minor, having the highest military reputation in the world, now that Cæsar's sword was dust. Kings sued at his doors, and the wives of Kings used their beauty as a price to buy his favor. And Antony now in times of peace and leisure, happily settled out of reach of Fulvia's tongue, became the very slave of luxury, surrounded always with a rabble of actors and dancers and all the harlotry of Asia, becoming daily less of a Roman and more of an Asiatic. And still Cleopatra waited. And again and again she refused to send a message.

"But the time is nearly ripe, Qlapetrat!" said Apollodoros. "And from my spies about him I read his character and see in him our very weapon, provided always that you have no love for him; for if love comes and blinds you to his follies, then Egypt is lost and ruined, and Rome the world's mistress. He has the grace of good-humor, of easy forgiveness to others and repentance when he himself does amiss. But he is too easy, too wanton in merriment to hold his dignity, and he permits familiarities that degrade him and is the very prey of flatterers—"

"And that is how I have won and shall win him!" said she, laughing. "If he were a Stoic—"

"No, but it is a great danger also!" Apollodoros said gravely. "Still, we have no one else to serve our turn, for he is the greatest of the Romans and his word runs through Asia Minor. It is true that Octavian divides the world with him and is mighty in Rome, but with your heart and brain of tempered steel we may do well and trample Octavian down, for he and he only is rival to Cæsarion the son of Cæsar. But if the fire of the heart melt the steel of the brain—"

He stopped. She laughed aloud.

"I love the friend of Octavian? You dream, Apollodoros. If I had loved the man should I have waited? As for Antony, he may say, 'I have had an affair with the Moon, in which there was neither sin nor shame.' I am not sure that he shall ever have another."

CHAPTER XVIII

So at last it was late summer and the mighty Antony, in his headquarters in the great and ancient city of Tarsus, cast his memory back to Cleopatra. Across the sea to Alexandria like a winging sea-mew his thoughts went flying to the little Queen. Sweet and gay he saw her, a frail boat dragged in the wake of Cæsar's mighty galley, and yet capable of reasserting herself very strangely in her spring to freedom the moment he lay dead in the Forum. To what new and enchanting aspects of her character had that opened the eyes of Antony! And yet he had been obliged to let her slip just at the moment when there might have been the very developments he most appreciated. There had been several reasons for that. The press of great events had been too strong for any love-preoccupation, and in Rome the legend of Cæsar and Cleopatra had grown and assumed luxuriant proportions. She was the Eastern Siren, the woman who embodied all the luxury, the voluptuousness, and shameless licence and charm of the Orient. They never remembered her as a Greek. No, she was the enervating spirit of Oriental luxury who would, if she could, break down the austerity of the Republic into slavish obedience as she had broken Cæsar himself down into slavish obedience to her spells. Indeed her reputation in Rome was very evil. It paid the great writers and orators, it had even paid Antony, to represent her as a siren seated at the doors of the Orient weaving her spells and charms in gold to ensnare the austere integrity of the West. It was therefore very much safer to avoid such dangerously delightful society. So she had slipped out of Antony's mind. Egypt was quiet and the Queen made no sign; perhaps she had forgotten him, though women did not readily forget the Roman Hercules! Well, if so, no need to trouble about her. There were plenty of other women to amuse his abundant leisure.

But one day he was compelled to remember her, for a rumor reached him to the effect that the Queen of Egypt had been giving some assistance in money to the party of Brutus. Nothing could be more unlikely, but still where there is smoke there may be fire, and he had reason to know that money was plentiful with her. If not in the past, she might in the future be lavishing her gold just where she should not; and when one came to think of it the woman might have resented his desertion of her cause and his friendship with Octavian, the supplanter of the little Cæsarion. Affairs in Asia Minor were always ticklish, and Egypt, wisely treated, might have a useful word to say in the matter; and as to her reputation, the affair of Cæsar had more or less blown over, and he himself was now so great a man and so far out of reach of Octavian's claw that he might afford to choose his own company. Besides, and this was the finishing stroke to his resolution, he wanted money as much

as any one of earth could want it. That was Antony's chronic condition, and it was acute at the moment. It decided him to command her presence, through an emissary.

Cleopatra and her strange secretary! It would be interesting to see them again. But the lady must learn that the Autocrat of Asia Minor was no longer the Antony whose fate had quivered in the balance with Cæsar's. She must acknowledge herself honored by his notice. She must come submissive, and with no mistake about their relative positions. Dellius, his chosen ambassador, had imagined a large-limbed beauty, darkly and richly shadowed with dusky veiled eyes above lips with the damask and perfume of the rose. Her bosom must be imperially orbed, her languid gestures bespeaking indolent command, every glance a sensuous invitation, in a word the Circe of story, the ruin of men. He knew, he had seen many such in the court of Antony. He went resignedly, prepared for a new sultana dangerous to Antony's renown as a man of war.

As it chanced, his galley made the Pharos much earlier than had been expected,—early in the morning of a bright-blowing spring day, flying in from a wide-tossing plain of blue edged with crisp lines of foam. Landing and looking about him in surprise and delight at the glorious city unfolding before him in brilliant sunshine, splendid in marble and wide and royal vistas, Dellius made his way toward the Palace of the Lochias, attended by his officers, one bearing the customary gifts sent by a sovereign to another.

"But we shall not see the woman so early," observed Dellius, magnificent in Roman helmet and breastplate, to his second in command. "They say that in Rome she never rose until after the midday meal, being drunk with her Syrian wines and the smoke or juice, I don't know which, of some poisonous Indian plant which induces lascivious dreams. But Apollodoros the Sicilian is said to rule her and be her paramour, and him we may see."

"For my part," said the other, "I hope she will refuse to cross the water, for if she is handsome as they say she may have influence with Antony, and the Gods know he is drunken enough as it is. It would be more to the point to get Fulvia to Tarsus and have some sensible cold women about him to stop his unbuttoned gaiety."

"True enough! Queer to look about us and think that here great Pompey met his end and greater Cæsar fell a victim to Cleopatra! And all looks so fair and open in the morning gold. Really one would say a man could make out a healthy life enough in that wind-swept palace with the sea tossing before him. But who is this?"

It was Apollodoros advancing along the way to meet them with a few brilliantly dressed slaves in attendance, his own dress simple in the extreme.

He saluted and his "Hail, great Romans!" had nothing either assertive or cringing about it. He met them as equals and turning led them toward the white magnificence of the palace, with a few graceful words on the beauty of the day and the welcome he rejoiced that it had given them. The impression he made must always be favorable, owing to the calm intelligence of his face and the reserved dignity which strengthened upon him daily.

"But we cannot hope the Queen will see us at this hour. She will be still abed," said Dellius. "All Rome knows of her Majesty's habits."

Apollodoros smile subtly:

"These things are said in Rome, I know. But—the Queen had her own ways there and here, and, being a queen, has no need to alter them to suit others."

"Very true," said Dellius disagreeably, "and yet—"

Apollodoros looked him straight in the eyes.

"My Queen is not only queen but goddess in Egypt. Goddess in Rome also, where the people worship in the temple Julius-Jupiter raised in her honor. Probably the noble Dellius has himself worshipped at that altar."

"All men worship Venus, great Apollodoros, but deities go in and out of fashion in Rome. I cannot say whether the temple is still frequented or no."

After that light clash of swords the party went slowly on their way, discoursing of Antony and the subject Asiatic kings who did homage at his court in Tarsus.

"And my errand is to bid the mighty Cleopatra to come also and do homage to Antony and hold counsel with him over the affairs of Asia Minor in which she is concerned."

Apollodoros turned eyes of calm surprise upon the haughty Roman.

"Great queens do not cross the seas to visit, much less to do homage to, generals, even when as successful as Antony. Curb your presumption, Roman. Such is not language for the divine Cleopatra's ears."

Dull anger blazed up in the Roman's eyes. The Roman soldiers had so acquired the habit of command that they regarded all other races as slaves.

"You dare!" he cried aloud to Apollodoros, halting and turning on him. "Then know that the Princess Arsinoë, who has taken refuge in the temple of Diana at Ephesus, may yet be set upon the Egyptian throne by Antony, as a more obedient slave of Rome than Cæsar's harlot!"

A group of men were working near by at the great blocks of stone which built the sea-way to the palace. Apollodoros shouted aloud in the Egyptian tongue and with their mallets uplifted they sprang like wild beasts on the

Roman and his companions, and in a second held them pinioned and at Apollodoros' mercy.

"I might bid them heave you all into the deep blue water beside us!" he said sternly, pointing to where the fish swam below in pellucid deeps, "and it would be bare justice. What guest insults a host in his own house? But the host has a duty also. Ask my pardon and you shall go on and see the face you are not worthy to look upon."

Pride struggled with a sense of shame, but at last decency conquered, and Dellius, flushed purple, made his brief apology, briefly received. His arms were loosed and, crestfallen, he followed to the palace.

Enfolded in vast courts they came upon a garden—surely the very garden of enchantment, with blossoming groves and shaded walks and green spaces where fountains scattered tossing lights amongst trellised roses. To men fresh from the salt and barren beating of the sea it appeared the very haunt of nymphs, most beautiful, palms touching frondage with acacias, unknown flowers starring the grass at their feet, gray doves cooing warm notes in sunny boughs. They halted almost in fear of the silent loveliness, so poignant and strange was its spell, with blossomed branches above them, and clear running of streams into a winding lake of white marble where the sacred nenuphar swayed in the shade over its sleeping leaves, the golden fish darting among piped stems.

And, as they halted, arose shrill-sweet cries and laughters, and a group of girls came running down a green alley tossing a ball as they ran fleet-foot, white robes girt up to the knees like those nymphs who run hunting in moonlight woods with the Goddess Diana. So lovely was the sight, so swiftly their white feet glimmered in green grass, that for a moment the Romans feared, thinking they were caught indeed in a spell of Egypt and beheld those dangerous maids whom no man but he who is virgin as themselves may see unharmed—the companions of that goddess who shines alone in unclimbed skies.

"Gods, what is this?" said Dellius in a quick underbreath, halting to see the bright ball flung from hand to hand and the swift interchange and play of white limbs as the girls leaped at it. One flung it far, another missed, and it ran bounding along the turf to where the men stood half-hidden in leaves. The nymphs froze into loveliest groups of startled wonder, gazing like deer on the turn to fly. One only stood forward.

"It is the Queen and her maidens. Advance!" said Apollodoros, and lost in amazement the Romans went forward, steps muted on velvet turf. What could Dellius think, what believe, as he bent his knee and beheld "the harlot of Egypt" in the cool girl who watched his approach gravely. At first he

scarcely thought her beautiful, so did she differ from his image of a lascivious, dark-browed woman who disgraced the Egyptian throne. In troubled surprise he stared, thinking the handsome dark girl who stood at her shoulder must be the true Cleopatra.

But when she spoke he knew and needed no assurance. The marvellous voice famed through the world, sweet as the morning lilt of birds, fresh as a May-breeze—that was the laughing Queen and no other! The lips, curled pink rose-petals in the warm ivory of her face—the golden-amber eyes, sad and a little ironic, hair framing white brows with goddess-wings of bright-touched bronze. Cleopatra, the one, the only! How sweet, how sweet among flowers, with blossomed trees behind her, her fair breast heaving softly, thoughts of wonder and disdain flitting across her eyes like birds in golden skies! You will perceive the man rhapsodised already! But that was the manner of men lesser and greater than the Roman soldier, for all the world knows she had the trick of awaking longings she would neither understand nor quench. It was far more her manner of ruling than her sceptre.

As he stood dumb before her Apollodoros came forward:

"Great Queen, this man, sent by Antony the Roman with a message from Tarsus, has permitted himself to speak foul words of you, words vented from the very cess-pits of Roman filth, here in your own happy kingdom. Your orders?"

There was no flush upon her smooth cheek, but she stiffened in a moment, and the girls fell back from her as if the sunshine had chilled suddenly. Her eyes still held him but now with power and hard as steel. They gripped his fear like claws.

"And what were the words?" said the young Queen slowly.

"He has called the divine Isis-Hathor of Egypt the harlot of Cæsar."

Silence.

To what would she doom him? He began to stumble in his speech.

"If you can dare to answer my murder to Antony. Ambassadors—"

She laughed aloud.

"If you can dare to answer your insult to Antony when it is told him—Take the man, Apollodoros, bind him hand and foot and cast him to the crocodiles in Mareotis. What is such an ambassador to me?"

He stood stunned, ash-pale in the sunshine, hearing the beating of death's wings about his head. The girls stared open-mouthed, but unconcerned save with cruel curiosity. The guard of Egyptian soldiers closed about the man. She raised her hand and spoke to his fellows in a voice clear as the clash of steel.

"Return to Antony and tell him that if he sends such ambassadors again I will indeed come to Tarsus but with my bronze-beaked ships, and my men to guard me. And tell him this also: I would have been his friend; he knows it, but if he chooses me for an enemy, so be it!"

Dellius trembled, not indeed from the fear of death, but because he had betrayed the purpose of his general. He fell on one knee, his hands raised as to a goddess.

"I do not pray for life. Let me die—it is just—but send no such message to the Imperator Antony, for what I did was my own and not his. I am not fit to live."

As she turned from him a child's clear cry rang out and a boy of four trotted out of the thick boughs, followed by his nurse and running through thick grass to his mother. Reaching her he clung to her knee and she stooped and swung him up, pressing him against her slender bosom and laying the velvet cheek to hers. A lovely sight.

"It is the child of Cæsar. It is Cæsarion," muttered the Romans. "Gods! How like! It is the Dictator."

"The man—what has he done?" asked the boy seriously. She pressed his little face into the curve of her throat.

"Don't look, my treasure. Such men hurt the eyes. He is vile. He has thrown mud at the Pharaoh, my little one!"

"Mud?" said the child, amazed, looking down at the white garment, that scarcely hid his little golden body. "It has not soiled me. He shall not be thrown to the dreadful beasts. I say it and I am Pharaoh."

A great silence. Dellius crawled along the ground on his knees and catching the small hand kissed it.

"Hail, son of Cæsar, true son of a mighty father! Hail, Queen, mother of Cæsar's child! And now—I am ready for death."

She looked down at him with the eyes of a goddess remote and unpitying but just.

"My consort-king has forgiven. I forgive also. Take your life and know that though Cæsar is forgotten in Rome he is still a God in Egypt, and his wife and son divine also. Go, make offering in the temple of Jupiter-Amen and ask forgiveness of the God for your blasphemy."

He stumbled away, head bowed and tears on his cheek. She had won the Roman utterly and knew it as she always knew the hearts of men. Afterwards, alone with Apollodoros and Charmion, she clapped her hands, laughing:

"That man at all events will believe no more in the witch of Egypt. It was better than well that the Pharaoh ran to my knees. And he will carry my praises to Antony; and I will go, and in such magnificence as the world has never seen, for the time has come!"

He would have dissuaded her at first but she would not listen.

"No, Arsinoë is a danger. Neither I nor the child is safe while she lives with her venom hidden behind shut lips. *She* a priestess of Diana!—the bitter withered little virgin! No—but the lurking shrinking Queen of Egypt as she hopes and believes! I will go and ask her death of Antony. And there is more, much more! He has forgotten but I have not."

"Nor I—nor I!" said Apollodoros, throwing himself on his knees at her feet. "Antony is not Cæsar. He is a man swept away on the river of his lusts. He is passion's slave."

"Then mine!" said Cleopatra. "He is at least a man. Cæsar was a selfish old dotard. Antony shall play my game, not I his. Cæsar used me for his own ends. Antony shall not."

But still Apollodoros pleaded.

"Even in Rome I doubted, but now, power and licence and drink and women have eaten into the very fibre of his resolution. See how he has treated us already! Let us not commit our priceless things to his care—and least of all yourself! For you are Egypt—what strength has the child?—and if you are lost—O Queen, have pity upon yourself and the child!"

She pushed him from her with her little foot, laughing, and he stooped and clasped and kissed it.

"Have pity! Have pity! You to be the half-wife of this man as you were of Cæsar! Fulvia will thrust a dagger into your throat, and all the Romans mock. Have done with them, my Queen."

So it went on. At last she rose, still keeping to her purpose, but conceding a little to his fidelity.

"We will go, as I said, in splendor; and if among the men assembled I see a better than Antony, he shall be my man, for a man I must have to guard Cæsarion and me; and you shall judge Antony and tell me your mind. And I will listen, I promise that. Never fear that my brain will stumble over my heart. My affections—if you can compliment them with the name—are like the women employed by Cicero to worm out his enemies' secrets. Oh, I am a monster like the Sphinx—half woman and half beast! God? How can I tell? But have no fear. His hulking beauty is nothing to me. I will charm him first by my sex, and hold him after by my mind."

"A woman once given—" began Apollodoros.

"Given? I have never given myself, and since the birth of Cæsarion, this has been inviolate." She tore aside her robe, unveiling breasts white and cold as marble. "My womanhood is a weapon, and I desire the man's desire, but nothing else. I have lain in a man's arms and borne his child, but I am a virgin. When will men learn that the gift of the body is nothing—the soul all. Go, you are wise, but I am wiser."

So Dellius, his life spared, haunting the palace and the Queen like a dog, when permitted, saw with stunned amazement the preparations for her voyage. What was any splendor he had seen compared with the wealth so lavished? The inmost secrets were kept from him. None but those in her inmost confidence saw her own ship or heard a word concerning it. Over that hung a mystery.

But the Queen herself he saw often, though mostly at a distance, and he grew to think her the most beautiful and divinest of women. For that was her power, of which none other had the secret. She grew upon men as dawn broadening into day until she dazzled them body and soul; she was the true elixir of enchantment, and there was not one who could either describe her magic or disown it, indecipherable as a sound or a perfume, and her own.

But Dellius and his companions were sent to prepare Antony for her coming, and that they might not see the final sights of the pageant. And when he reached the presence of the Imperator and saluted, standing before him, Antony lying on a silken couch, crowned with roses, hot with wine, asked him first:

"Will she come?"

"She will come."

And second:

"What is she like now? I remember her in Rome, white and—was she beautiful? I forget. But there was a something. One had to look at her."

"There is a something. One must look at her."

There was a pause.

"Well?" said Antony. "What more?"

"Nothing. What more should there be? You will see."

Already the ships of Cleopatra, sails filled with a southern breeze, oars dipping in tune, cut the blue marble of the sea, running swiftly to Tarsus. And Destiny sat on her prow like a sea-mew and watched.

CHAPTER XIX

THE great and ancient city of Tarsus lay beneath the Taurus Mountains beside her river Cydnus. A beautiful city, rich and learned, for there was the most famous school of oratory in the world, one to which the most brilliant men of the time journeyed to learn the profitable trade of swaying an audience by the arts of speech where a clever sophism or quick retort might be worth a fortune. But fortunes of quite another sort could also be made at Tarsus, for it was a mighty mart, second only to Alexandria. Ships plied from there up and down the Mediterranean unloading costly goods, all the magnificence of the Orient brought in by ocean fliers from Alexandria. It had also a great land traffic. Damascus, said to be the oldest inhabited city on earth, with Antioch, contributed raiment of gold flowered with silk, the delight of the luxurious Roman women, garlands of golden leaves set with gems, huge jars and beakers and cups rough with carvings. Thus it had its sailors' quarters down by the docks and its great gardens and palaces where the rich merchants and the wealthy of all sorts lived in the enjoyment of almost Asiatic luxury.

A wonderful town overflowing with riches and the sights and sounds of far lands, and behind the bustle of the markets the quiet groves surrounding the Halls of Learning, fountains splashing, gray doves cooing in peaceful shades. Before her the river Cydnus broadening into a lake, a blue dream of peace.

Tarsus, for all she was a seaport, had the air of an island city, for the five-mile-long river was her highway to the sea.

To luxurious Antony the city of Tarsus summed up all delight. He was the mightiest of the three men who now ruled the Roman world as a Triumvirate. Octavian was remarkable, Lepidus negligible, but the fame of Antony rang over the Mediterranean like a brass gong and other men crept about like ants beneath his feet.

Everything about his personality was on the great scale which attracts the notice of the world, including his vices and follies. But he was lovable with it all, in his lavish spontaneous outbursts of generosity, even with his foes, though that was as capricious as all else. Who but he would have draped his own purple cloak for a pall over the hated Brutus when his body lay unfriended? Who but he would have run himself into low water that he might heap his friends with gifts or remit the conqueror's levy for his soldiers on a vanquished people? The earth and the kingdoms thereof laid themselves at the feet of the great good-humored giant, propitiating, flattering and getting very much their own way with him when he was too lazy to object. Roused,

he could be terrific, but that happened seldom when wine and women abounded.

And Tarsus, as the home of oratory, had much opportunity of flattering that distinguished orator, Antony, and of offering its pleasure with both hands for his acceptance.

There drifting through languid golden sunshine went groups of beautiful women garlanded with flowers, the light breeze blowing about their feet transparent folds and garments woven in strange looms; lovely faces mingling the beauties of the Orient and Mediterranean. All day the sound of flute and cymbal stirred the perfumed air. All night the rosy lamps lighted an ecstasy of revelry until the sun harnessed his golden chariot in the east and the mountains glowed with incredible fires in the dawn.

There Antony held his Court and had no will to leave it, and of all places in the world it was probably the worst for such a man as he. Better the stern Roman camp, the terrible discipline of the legions, hard food, careworn nights and days, than that soft enervating luxury, his only care to vary his pleasures lest they should become nauseating. And indeed there were times when the eternal sweetness cloyed; the soft submissive women, watching his eyes like slaves, irritated him to rage, and the eternal sunshine weighed like lead. What can we find worth doing when the worst we can do is done? The question of the ages, the riddle that not even the sad Sphinx can answer, was beginning to loom before him in beautiful Tarsus, old in wickedness and the skilled mysteries of enervating delight.

Now on a certain day, breathlessly hot, with skies of flawless blue, the watchers by the docks far down the river signalled that a great fleet was making the harbor—ships of Egyptian type gloriously painted and decorated as though some noble person were aboard. One sailed hidden among the rest, and the watchers imagined that women must be on board, so carefully was it guarded. They were evidently for the river and the city of Tarsus.

Dellius sped with the news to Antony and it was hastily resolved that when the fleet cast anchor in the lagoon before the City the Triumvir should enthrone himself in the great market place, surrounded by his retinue, that the Queen landing from the ships might thus be made to approach him in the manner of a supplicant.

"The peoples of Asia Minor shall know that Egypt also is subject to the Roman Power!" said Antony, and Dellius agreed, reserving in his own mind the thought that there is another Power to which the gods themselves are subject, and that it might be at this moment incarnate in the fair Egyptian. But who could tell? The Triumvir was satiated with the beauty of women—

satiated with all the pleasures the Earth had to offer. It was possible that not even Cleopatra might tickle his jaded palate.

So the ships with oar and sail made their stately way up the river, and the people crowded down from terraced vine and wheat fields to see the sight, gallant and bright as a picture on the blue crystal of the river. Magnificent indeed it would be when the Queen of Egypt landed with her retinue to do homage to Rome! Would she be carried in a splendid litter? Or stand in a flying chariot like the Pharaohs of old? Or walk beneath a golden canopy? What was the manner of the woman Pharaoh of Egypt?

And Antony sat in the market place beneath his canopy, a magnificent table of black wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl from Damascus at his elbow, spread with fruits and wine cooled in ice, and at his feet the Greek mime Charmides to pass the time with tales of love until the Queen should come in sight. With vanity that was as open and natural as a child's, he had done honor to his guest by the most cunningly devised apparel to set off what he considered his type of manly beauty. He represented the Roman Bacchus, clothed in a short tunic of white, golden sandals on his feet with thongs wound about and up the legs and on his head a garland of ivy and vine-leaves. He had somewhat outgrown the part since Cleopatra and he had met in Roman days and was now more heavily built, massive, the great jaw fleshy, the muscles on his bare breast no longer rippling free, but clothed in fat. Yet the eyes were bright and genial still, the lips smiled and the cleft in the broad chin was the very signature of Venus. He felt a gently warm curiosity as to how Cleopatra would bear herself toward His Magnificence now—the little Queen, as he used to call her. What had she done with her liberty since she escaped with it from under the cold shadow of Cæsar, as a man flees from the shadow of a mountain into sunshine? Lovers, lovers, without end, no doubt! That piqued his curiosity a little. But Dellius either had observed nothing or would not say.

"Why the immortal Gods doesn't she come?" he asked pettishly at length, for the shades were deepening in the market place. "You said they had cast anchor an hour ago. Is there no sign of landing?"

A boy fled to a point of vantage, and reported: "None," but that many boats had put off from the shore with fruits and vegetables for sale.

Antony considered. A crowd had crammed the market place hoping there to secure the most perfect view of the royal beauty whose fame rang round the world, but wearying of the long delay they had melted off and were scurrying down to the piers to see what they could. The picture was spoiled.

"May the Gods spur her!" said Antony resignedly. "One might think time was of no value! Well, it isn't of much. I suppose the woman is painting her

face. Is there anything to see down there?"

"Noble Triumvir, may I not go?" asked the impertinent Charmides. "You aren't listening to the story and folks say the Queen's ship is worth a day's journey to see—all gold and purple sails and silver oars. Why can't I go?"

"Take your worthless carcass off for all I care! You grow duller every day," yawned Antony. "I shall go to sleep. Fan me, somebody! And waken me when the woman lands. Cheeky jilt!"

Fans began their rhythmic waving. He leaned his head back and slept with wide open mouth, the ivy wreath lolling on one side and the shadows lengthening as the sun sloped westward. In an hour he woke and looked drowsily about him, then suddenly sat bolt upright.

His immediate retinue stood or sat about him in a state of appalling boredom, and the market place was empty. Not a mouse stirred.

"Gods! What's gone with the Queen?" he cried in blank astonishment and slipshod Latin.

"Apparently she does not choose to come ashore," Dellius answered nervously. "Not a soul has landed and we are evidently expected to make the first move. Your orders, great Triumvir?"

They were not forthcoming. Antony sat, twisting his fingers through his tightly curled hair, considering.

Certainly Rome must require her due in obedience, but yet a woman was a woman, and with Antony very much a woman. Perhaps the Queen might be wearied with the voyage.

Reflecting, he dispatched Dellius to invite her to dinner with him in the cool of the evening, and took himself off to his quarters a little huffed.

But Dellius returning, not having been vouchsafed a glimpse of the Queen, reported that her Sacredness would prefer that Antony and such grandees of Tarsus as he might consider eligible should dine with her on board her ship.

"And now, shall I go or not?" said Antony. "It may be a plot to get me at a disadvantage. That young woman learned in Cæsar's school, and there was precious little he didn't know."

Dellius stood in unhelpful silence. He was wondering whether her eyes were still as like amber with sunshine swimming in golden depths, and whether there was still that little dimple among the blue veins of her wrist.

"The question is," said Antony as gravely as an owl, "what would Octavian do in my place? Yet after all Octavian is an ass. Why should I think of him? I believe I shall go. Why not? Let her know." He lounged away laughing.

When the sun set behind the western slopes of the mountains a violet dusk dropped like dew from skies fading into night. The citizens strolled along the water's edge admiring the smart outlines of the ships grouped and screening the ship of the Queen so that it was hidden as behind a curtain. They stood and sat, listening to the strange speech and songs borne across still water, for that was all they could know of the strangers, none of whom had landed.

And now the first stars glimmered and the moon floating upward showered unveiled glory upon the water. It was an hour of enchantment. Music broke forth—the sound of Phrygian flutes and lutes with women's and boys' voices angel-clear among them. And, as if at a signal, the ships sprang into blossom and fruitage of many colored lamps, glorious to behold, reflected in quivering lines of light in deep water. The oars dipped silently as a swan's webbed feet and, to the sound of music, the Queen's ship, disengaging itself from the rest, began to move slowly toward the quays.

The whole city lined the water-way to see that wonder moving dream-like through the dusk—a wonder stamped upon the world's imagination once and for ever. There was no sound among the watchers, for every sense was concentrated in sight, breathless and absorbed as the moonlight strengthened and she drew nearer—nearer.

A golden ship—glittering with gold from stem to stern. Gold embossed into a garland encircled it like the girdle of a woman. The sails of purple silk hung motionless in calm, but silver oars dipping rhythmically to the sound of music urged it slowly onward to the meeting. It glittered and glimmered with constellations of lights. Some hung in great branches of clustered grapes, jade-green and purple; some upborne in chalices of lilies; some shone from the hearts of roses. They swung from the masts, they gleamed through the sails, they wreathed the ship; she moved with unearthly pride and beauty, a fairy ship between sky and water. There is nothing more aërial in all the dreams of earth than a slowly gliding ship, and this came onward divine. But chiefly the splendor of light concentrated upon the high-raised golden poop where shone a golden canopy starred with lights like galaxies of planets converging upon a sight so exquisite that never a man or woman who saw could forget it in the poorer years to come.

For, beneath it upon a couch—no, rather an altar of beauty—lay the Queen, bare-bosomed, girt about the waist with a girdle of great rubies breathing fire as she breathed. A garment of gauze, transparent as fine air, swathed and disclosed her lovely limbs from waist to little rosy feet. Embracing her head was the trellised golden crown of Venus, and in one languid hand the goddess's own sceptre, a thornless bough of roses. Yet all

the magnificence was as nothing compared with the living beauty and grace it enshrined as she lay amid her roses with smiles and shining eyes and motions of her little hand, waving a salutation to the spellbound crowds upon the quay. The goddess herself revealed at last, most beautiful and gracious to her worshippers!

No men were visible. The fairest of her women, disrobed as sea-nymphs and graces, were stationed at the ropes and rudder, and about the Queen grouped little naked cupids waving curling white feather screens to diffuse the sleepy perfumes of incense, dimming the lights into mystery which made her beauty unearthly as the apparition of a divine being.

Suddenly the crowds broke out into a thundering cry:

"Hail to the heavenly Venus who comes to visit Antony the Roman Bacchus for the good of Asia! May their revels be fortunate!"

And as Antony, followed by Dellius and his officers, stepped aboard, great veils splendid with silver peacocks and peonies fell from the masts, hiding the meeting and feasting from the ravished eyes that lined the shore. Only the lights shone through the rifts and a celestial harmony of lutes and flutes and silver voices was left to enchant the night. All else was memory.

But Antony, led with due honor to the poop, could scarcely steady his senses amid the besieging glamour. The strong perfumes assailed them, the witchery of the music, and even before he reached the Queen's presence she had conquered. He could no more have uttered a rebuke to her face than he could have thwarted an immortal nymph in her pleasure.

The old spell that had assailed Cæsar's mightier mind was on him now. Could it be possible that in himself and in this incomparable beauty there was indeed something far removed from grosser humanity and allied with Godhead? And if it were so, what might not be possible? It seemed he trod on air and might have scaled the clouds.

Outside the crowds still shouted their greetings to Venus and Bacchus, and the sight within strengthened its powerful enchantment with every step he took. And he, the man least of all qualified to resist it!

The breathing music ceased as he reached her mysterious golden couch, and she raised herself slightly on one elbow and extended a swan-white hand.

"At last!" she said with a little sigh like the pleasure of a child, and sank back on rosy pillows, smiling.

As Antony kissed that hand he was aware in the very marrow of his bones that this was a new Cleopatra, one he had never seen in Rome, one entirely unknown to Cæsar. It was a woman hitherto checked in the blossoming of love and beauty but now breaking loose from all restraint in the very

kingdom of Eros. If she had spoken thus, it could have been no more plainly revealed than in the thrill of her hand in his large grasp and under the fire of his lips. Her eyes, languid in long lashes, betrayed it in swimming moisture, the throb of her bosom above its rubies uttered it in every visible heartbeat. Before him lay adorable loveliness and grace, the prize of the conqueror.

Why had he not known in Rome? Why had he left her for the worthless support of Octavian? Could she ever forgive him? That banquet—in his long record of indulgence and waste, Antony had never seen its equal. With his help she descended from her couch and led the way, hand in hand with him, to the floating palace where all was prepared and the tables set for happy guests. There stood golden dishes fretted with jewels, the walls hung with royal embroideries from Damascus, the floor strewn with roses, netted with silk to form a perfumed carpet into which the foot sank as into velvet.

"And all these things are yours—yours," she said, smiling to the Triumvir whose couch was next to hers. "When we have feasted I give it all to you. Everything is to be a memory of the visit of Venus. Accept a thing little worth for the sake of the—the friendship which gives it; for long, long ago we were friends in Rome."

"If I had only known then what I know now!" he said with eyes fixed on her. "Why did you hold yourself away then, most beautiful?"

"Because I was Cæsar's. What is a woman worth who has no fidelity? But thoughts fly free, and even then— Do I not remember it even now that you have forsaken my wisdom—and I am wise indeed!—and have forsaken my cause also for the friendship of the treacherous Octavian."

"But not to your loss, loveliest!" he said eagerly. "Have I ever done anything to hurt your cause? Nothing. Octavian—"

"Let us not talk of Octavian. His very name sours the wine," she said with the gay laugh he remembered. "I should not have spoken of him. Let us eat and drink and forget the mummy at the feast. That as you know is a custom of Egypt. Tomorrow my ships hoist sail for home and we may never meet again. Be happy while we may."

"Tomorrow? Not tomorrow!" he cried. But she shook her fair head and pressed him to eat strange dainties he had never known. The wines of Egypt brimmed her golden cups. They too were strange to him. A sense of vaporous unreality dimmed all his senses as though the exquisite Queen, the golden ship, the lovely servitors who surrounded them, might melt like the smoke of colored mist dissolving into the darkness of night, leaving only a memory that would be a pang forever. From what mysterious wonder-world did she come? To what would she return? That ancient Egypt! He knew what spells it had woven about Cæsar. For Cæsar, like the man in the fairy tale, who

discovered the underworld, had also undergone some mystic change, had eaten strange foods and drunk sweet poisons and returned never again to live as a man among men, his very blood changed, his very heart beating to another measure.

The other guests talked quietly among themselves. They knew their place too well to intrude. It was as though he were alone with the Egyptian Queen.

Afterwards on the shining deck they were truly alone, for the others begged that they might see the wonders of the ship, and the attendants crouched out of hearing in groups that might have inspired a sculptor. Then the Queen on her golden couch beneath the shaded lights talked more openly with Antony, who sat beside her, eyes glowing on her beauty.

"But you have been cruel!" she said, resting a light hand on his. "When I was alone in Rome with Cæsar dead and in terrible fear and danger I turned to you. I said, 'Antony loved Cæsar; he is brave, wise and noble, a man of men. He will see that in union with me, mother of Cæsar's son, Queen of Egypt, lies his own glorious future!' You came, you saw it then, O greatest of Romans. You announced in the Senate that Cæsarion was Cæsar's true heir. You conquered the murderer Brutus at Philippi, and then—when all my hopes were blossoming, you made friends with the vile Octavian and forgot me."

"Who could forget you, most lovely?" stuttered Antony, clasping the little slender hand. "It was you who forgot me. You fled to Egypt. How could you let me go? You sent no message. What can a man do?"

She sighed.

"It is weary, weary work speaking of such things, and yet life compels. But ask yourself this: Will not Octavian betray you and make himself the tyrant of Rome the very instant he dares?"

"As certainly as I sit here. But a brave man takes the chances. Life is a gamble. I gamble on victory; he also. The Gods only know the winner."

"But I who am a goddess know the winner also, if Egypt and gold are on your side," she said, with a little laugh like the dropping of diamonds. "And it was to tell you this that I came to Tarsus. A long voyage for a Queen!"

"Was it worth it—was it worth it?"

She understood his tone very well, and smiled with mischief.

"Did you think, mighty Triumvir, that I came because you commanded me—a little too roughly for such a Queen as I? No, indeed! I had but to stay in Egypt and what could you do? You have enough on your hands here in Asia Minor, and the Egyptian Sphinx is strong. I came for two reasons. One you shall hear and not the other."

The wine was mounting to his brain. He tried to steady himself. His voice sounded thick and unreal in his ears—like that of another—a man who had struggled once to escape her strong toil of grace, but now entangled felt the bonds winding slowly and surely about him.

"I will hear both, both," he stuttered. "For what am I a man and Triumvir if I am not obeyed? For what are you a woman if I may not crush resistance out of you in my arms?"

She breathed with her lips against his ear:

"Bend your high head this way. That too may come when you have seen the worth of my first reason, as Cæsar saw it. He knew that with my Egypt and his military genius he and I could rule the world. And you who are a greater soldier than ever was Cæsar do not see it. Oh, foolish, foolish Antony!"

"That is true. That is true," he said thickly. "I will learn. Shall I come to Alexandria to see the treasures of the Queen? You are right. What was Cæsar to me? He scourged the legions with fear of him, but me they love."

He covered her wrists and hands with kisses, burying his hot face against them.

"Shall I come to Alexandria?"

She flung her light feet over the side of the couch and stood straight and slight as a lance before him, looking him in the face. The languor of the goddess had vanished—she was quick and keen as a brave boy on a war-horse. Oh, the changing moods of her! She laughed aloud as she had often laughed upon danger.

"Yes. Come to Alexandria and see me as a great queen inspired by the Gods who are my kin. Did you think it was to charm your eyes that I came as Venus? No, indeed. Far from me be such folly! It was because in Egypt I *am* Venus, and where I come power follows and Fortune is my slave. I am no woman; the puddle of mortal blood does not stagnate in my clean veins. I am fire and air! I am divine!"

She threw one light hand into the air laughing into his eyes. He stared at her dazzled, believing in her belief, and it is not too much to say that for the moment she was in truth divine. There was a silence. Suddenly she relaxed, covering her face with her hands.

"Go," she said in a whisper, "lest I tell you the second reason. Go. Cleopatra is a queen but not always queen of herself. That reason you shall not hear."

He shook off the fumes of the wine and rose to his feet, a splendid Hercules in height and strength and the sensuous beauty of his face. Her

crowned head did not reach his shoulder as they stood together, but in spite of his look the mastery was in her eyes, not in his.

"I will hear that reason if I die to hear it, either now or in Alexandria."

He flung a great arm about her, and though she writhed herself free her face did not forbid him. Leaning downward he kissed the warm pearl of her shoulder so passionately and roughly that the red blood flushed it to answer his lips.

"You shall hear it in Alexandria."

ALEXANDRIA. WHEN the golden argosy of Cleopatra returned from Tarsus it carried what she believed to be the talisman of power, the heart of Antony. His last words were that he would follow and that their great alliance of interests must lead to one nearer and dearer. The time seemed short, even to her fiery ambition, before the swift prows of his ships cut the blue water, flying southward, white-winged after the delicious Queen. In Alexandria, in her city of palaces, he found her, sweeter even than his memory, wooing and wooed.

And then began a time of enchantment; such delight as in all his sensuous life he had never tasted. The gaiety and grace of life in Alexandria, with the little Queen to rule the revels, were such as none of the heavy extravagance and dull profusion of Rome had prepared him to understand. The Romans must spur themselves brutally along the pathway of pleasure where the Alexandrians danced light-footed, with the gusto of happy children added to the wit and subtlety of practised Epicureans. Of the two cities Alexandria was probably the more wicked—but how infinitely more lovely! It had the full grace of simplicity, except where a whim took the Queen to dazzle Antony's senses with a magnificence which left Rome gasping behind. She could do that also beautifully as she could do all else, and if she thought it "Roman"—in other words, tasteless and vulgar—that fact was not disclosed to her lover.

But the crown, the cream of Alexandrian achievement, was the famous Society of Inimitable Livers which she had formed, a society where all that was most patrician, elegant and witty in the great city was banded under her own leadership to solve the problem of enjoyment. It was the most exclusive club in the world and accordingly the world rang with its eccentricities and successes, its daring and shameless grace. The winged rumor of it had blown as far as Rome where immediately all the fashionable and dissipated men and women of the patricians, flavored with a strong mixture of actors, dancers and the like, formed a semi-secret society of enjoyment to match, to which they gave the name of The Happy Spendthrifts. They met at each other's houses, they drank and diced and revived the orgies of a more brutal time with a conscientious fidelity which should have been very amusing, and was not.

For what were the clumsy pleasures of the heavy Romans compared with the gaiety and grace of the Alexandrian Inimitable Livers headed by the brilliant little Queen? She had everything to back her, climate, the most splendid city in the world, a gay people, capricious and intellectual, boundless wealth and her own quick-witted delicacy of perception and

distinction to shape it all. The Greek in her could beat the Roman at the game of enjoyment any day.

Dressed as peasants, the Inimitable Livers would disperse after a feast through the city seeking adventures—men and women alike—bound by oath to assemble at the palace at a given hour—each with an adventure to record, a terrible forfeit awaiting the Inimitable who could not amuse the assembled club; and the stories told were such as fled round civilisation on wings of mirth and protest, until half the Happy Spendthrifts of Rome, not to mention the literary men, were prepared to set out for Alexandria and Paradise, if they had not been afraid to face the Queen whom they had abused when she graced their own duller city. And moreover there was no room for them among the Inimitable Livers. It was a very small society, very chosen; and wit and beauty, not rank and wealth, were the qualifications. What could wealth matter with the Queen's bottomless treasury to back it all?

Hand in hand she and Antony would scamper through Alexandria, he a burly farmer, she a wisp of a Greek dancer; and one of the most successful of the nights was when, on the pavement of a moonlit street, the Queen of Egypt danced to an open-mouthed and fascinated circle of her loyal subjects who thought none the worse of her and very much the better for the exquisite grace of her dance, though they had far too much sense to reveal the fact that they knew it was the divine Hathor who honored them with an exhibition of her skill in the most prized of their arts.

"They never guessed you were not some Myrrha or Lais," panted Antony, racing down a side street beside her as she sped toward the palace, running like a deer and springing over the shadows.

"Didn't they though! There was not a man or woman there but knew me! Ah, they are patricians, my Alexandrians—even the plebeians! It would not have been manners to applaud the Queen, but they shouted for the dancer!"

"Hercules! It is an astonishing and delicious city. A man can enjoy life here!"

Life! It could hardly be called life out of Alexandria. There was not an Inimitable Liver but understood the noble art of enjoyment and shared his or her triumphs with the rest. They rode and hunted furiously on the verge of the desert, the Queen riding astride like a boy—fearless, reckless, until Antony quaked for the light flying figure and all it meant for him. There were picnic parties on sleeping seas drifting between blue sky and bluer ocean, to the sound of lutes and flutes so sweet that it seemed the Nereids of the deep sea must float upward to match their beauty against the lovelier women laughing beneath the glittering canopy of the Queen's barge. There were delightful fishing scenes, her vessel swaying indolently in the harbor, when all plied

their green rods and all had luck but Antony, who did not shine as an angler. There was the famous day when, piqued by the laughter and skill of the rest, he caused a brown Egyptian boy to dive and swim snake-like under the water to impale a prosperous fish upon his hook. Could anything escape her quick eyes? She saw, but said nothing and silenced the Inimitable Livers with a quick finger on her lip. Next day when Antony drew up a heavy hook in triumph two ponderous dried and salted fish appeared above the surface. The roars of laughter! The applause! In a few weeks the Happy Spendthrifts were cudgelling their thick Roman brains to catch the secret of eternal merriment, and could not. And the Banquet of the Pearl! There indeed the Happy Spendthrifts owned themselves worsted. A dispute had arisen among the Inimitable Livers as to how much could be spent upon a single feast if one concentrated one's wits upon it. Antony, with memories of Rome and a purse emptied in such pursuits, gave it as his considered opinion that one might spend twenty-five thousand pounds sterling on a dinner for twelve that would include oysters from Britain, nightingales' tongues from Sicily, and so on through a ponderous bill of fare, and would also allow for the cost of golden cups and dishes. Gods, how the Queen and the Inimitable Livers applauded. Twenty-five thousand pounds!—but that was nothing! nothing! Cleopatra laughed until bright tears of mirth stood in her eyes.

"But, great Triumvir, this feast before us cost fifty thousand, and I will undertake it shall cost a hundred and fifty thousand before we leave the tables!"

Antony roared with laughter. Impossible! He would wager—what would he not wager that such a thing could not be! How could it?

Again how she laughed! How the Inimitable Livers to a man and woman backed their royal lady! What she said she could do, she could! Rome? What was Rome and its feeble efforts to Alexandria, the abode of Gods and Pharaohs and every fashionable folly that made the world blush and wonder? Rome was a *parvenu*; Alexandria a patrician.

With distended eyes he watched as a cup was set before her, containing a little vinegar. Was it to be a charm, a magic? Would she turn the cup into a solid ruby? Was that where her riches came from? It had come to that pass that he could believe anything of Qlapetrat, as her Egyptians called her. The company reclining upon their couches sat up to see the triumph.

From her little ears swung two enormous pearls, globed wonders of the deep, with shell-pink lights playing about their milky beauty. One of these she laid in the vinegar, a smile playing about the corners of her lips, while Antony stared spellbound. A long pause while she stirred it slowly with the stem of a rose which lay beside her. Suddenly—

"Look, noble Antony, look! It is dissolved! Is not this a Queen's drink? Already I have almost touched the cost I wagered, and when I dissolve the other—"

She showed him the cup, holding the liquid pearl. "To your good health I drink it!"—and tossed it off with a wry face at the vinegar. What could he do but snatch her hand with the second pearl, forbidding such wicked luxury, and own himself a conquered and humiliated Roman, while the Inimitable Livers applauded frantically? It was a joke and a costly one, but, apart from the magnificence of the surroundings, it was no aim of Cleopatra's to set the fashion of coarse and ostentatious luxury except in so far as it humored Antony. She had the Greek taste which knew what must be omitted instead of added, to achieve perfection. And Antony, satiate with gold and gems, was compelled to own the beauty of her banquets after the Greek manner, with services of porcelain and cups of ivory, and the festooned garlands of Athens rather than the massed profusion of trodden and trampled flowers which were the Roman and Persian fashion, their glory bruised and martyred under the feet of the feasters. Such a time of enchantment seemed to him like a dream of immortal bliss. Surely thus and thus only the Gods must dwell on Olympus, glad and forgetful in a heaven of beauty. She had even awakened his interest in things of the intellect. Drama, the theatre, had always moved him. She developed this into pleasure in the sources of tragedy and comedy. Carefully chosen debates and orations by philosophers from the Museum, who could be trusted to blend instruction with amusement so cleverly that instruction disappeared in brilliance, became one of the amusements of the Inimitable Livers, who had their fashionable philosophers in attendance and considered them as necessary as their favourite hairdressers and jewelers. Nor was religion neglected. The mysteries of Isis were exceedingly the mode, and the more so with Cleopatra as her living representative. It would be discourteous to the Queen to leave the worship of the Goddess uncultivated, since devotion to her implied a compliment to royalty.

Exquisite days to Antony, with the certainty that the Queen's love would make this Paradise his own for ever.

And yet— In that cup also was one bitter drop, hardly to be comprehended by himself. There had begun for him the strangest new experience. She possessed him utterly. For the first time he tasted the bitter draught of passion not only sensuous but involving the deeper sources of life. All his days it had been easy to love and ride away, secure that wherever fate took him there would be soft embracing arms, lips sweet for kisses, all the allures of the flesh. That seemed as necessary and natural a part of life as breathing and if in song or story another love was hinted, terrible, tyrannical, lord of life and death, he would laugh, thinking its existence a sickly dream

of poets and women, one that could never concern a man whose business was the mastership of the world.

And now he was its slave. How should he explain or endure the strange thing that had befallen?

She terrified and enchanted him. Terrified, because, though he possessed her body, believing that that meant complete surrender, she never surrendered. Held in an embrace that should have made her one with him, she was always herself—not his, not him, out of reach, unwon and unsubdued. Surely she loved him, he thought, but not in the way he craved, not his way but her own, a torturing sweetness that burned him with unquenched thirst and left his lips parched. She gave all physically and withheld everything else.

Once he would not have cared. What did one ask of a woman but beauty? In that night of stars when she surrendered once and forever, as he thought, he felt himself the conqueror. He flaunted his conquest to her. She was his slave, sharing intoxication and doubling it. Now she would watch his eyes with sweet obedience, putting forth anxious lures to bewitch him and hold a wavering fidelity. Half amused, half pitying, he would see her quiver at the thought of a rival, beseeching his grace with pleading hands and lips. He knew as well as most men how women will cringe and submit to any indignity and cruelty if only they may keep a slipping hold on the lover to whom they have given all. They were always subject—weakly rebellious sometimes, but subject,—that was his creed—and that this white large-eyed slip of a woman should differ from the rest was unimaginable. Why hide his triumph? The Queen was unqueened and he was king.

But the very next day after that supreme surrender she was still unconquered, cool, inscrutable, laughing, equal; the perfect comrade but a bad lover, half driving him to guess that her passion was a concession to him rather than to any necessity of her own. There was a stinging virginity in her that he longed to abase and could not. Maddening! Certainly she protested in phrases of intellectual beauty like all songs and stories that she loved him, but he was inclined to suspect that was drama in which the brain took more part than the centres of passion. He must console himself with the belief that love mixed with brains is as much improved by the blend as anything else, and meanwhile her vows were a delicious music.

What charm of words, what art of love was unknown to her? She strained his senses almost to breaking point of rapture when she chose. But always next day she had recaptured virginity and was as quick-witted and eager in any political matter or discussion of literature with some intolerable old pedant of a philosopher as in his own arms. She took love, wore it

charmingly, then immediately laid it aside as she might her diadem, and turned with equal or surpassing interest to something else.

In a word, she was self-sufficing where he wished her to be merged and submerged in a passion for him.

The garden of Circe indeed, but no languid lady of enchantments such as he had hoped for and would have wearied of in a day. A busy and intellectual little Queen, full of interests as a hive of bees, quickly sensitive, fluid as water flowing into any channel open to her, magnificent when that suited her part, careless of dress as a boy when she had better things to think of. She sometimes infuriated him so that he longed to crush the very life out of her in his mighty arms if only he could crush her into his being and incorporate her maddening remote sweetness with the throbbing blood beating in his own veins.

As they walked hand in hand in cool gardens musical with sea breezes, glimpsing the innumerable laughter of blue water through airy rifts of leafage, he tried one day to express some of that thwarted longing. If he could make her tranquillity understand his unrest she might soften. He would try!

He had spoken, and, absorbed in some keen thought, she had not even heard.

"You don't know what love is. You have never felt it!" he said sharply and suddenly, dragging his hand away.

"Gods!" she said in blank astonishment. "Love? What about it?"

The beginning was not promising. A dark flush swelled into his face. He spoke cruelly, violently.

"When I saw you in Tarsus you were Venus, drowned in love, shedding it about you like fragrance. You were love itself. And I thought that when we were lovers you would set yourself to me, cling to me, live and die for me, kiss my feet, and now you are cold as the snows of the Apennines." She looked up at him laughing impertinently, provocatively.

"Was I cold last night in the garden pavilion?"

"No—you yielded yourself as one gives toys to a child that one half despises—to keep it quiet. You have the arts of love but not the soul of it. You do that well as you do everything else, but your heart—where is it? I have never known. You are not my slave. It is indecent in a woman."

It was masterfully unreasonable, but she was neither perturbed nor angry. Her lips twitched with laughter.

"Indeed I am your slave. What more can I do? Think, my beloved! Rumor is shouting through Rome and down the Mediterranean that I am your

mistress as I was Cæsar's. They call me the Egyptian sorceress. Oh, the liars! Cæsar captured me. He took me by force. And you also captured me. I hadn't a word to say for myself. Egypt and I are at your feet."

He kicked the grass before him moodily, avoiding her bright unconquered eyes.

"Little they know! I also thought that about Cæsar, but I can tell you I changed my mind when I saw how little you cared for his death. Calpurnia cried her eyes blind. *You* made eyes at me."

"Calpurnia was his wife," she reminded him. "I wonder what has become of her, poor thing! As to making eyes at you—doesn't that prove I had fallen in love with you even then? That was why I went to Tarsus. That was the second reason I would not tell you. Unreasonable Antony! I run after you in a golden ship with all the world watching; I accept what Rome calls the position of your mistress and have them all calling me—I won't say what, but very bad names. And both you and they call me indecent. With a difference!"

"I can't explain it," he said with passion. "You always get the best of it in words. I know you live in some secret cold corner of your own heart and if there is any god on that altar it is not I."

She wound herself softly against him.

"Poor Bacchus, poor Roman Bacchus! But indeed you would be on my altar if I had one. I know too much about the Gods, being one myself, to be perpetually on my knees. But you know I love you, passionately, tenderly, devotedly. Do you ever see me spend a look upon another man? Even goddesses have been known to. But not I."

He thrust her away.

"You respect Apollodoros more than me. You trust him, but never me. Sometimes I would rather all the rest should go and you would treat me like a man and not a child—stuffing me with sweets!"

She dragged him to a seat and curving upward from his knee kissed his mouth exquisitely, forcing his head back that she might smile into his eyes. Apollodoros indeed! One does not compare a mere lover with the friend of a lifetime. But the lover was not to know the real estimate of his value, and had his uses. Therefore, she dealt out sweets to him, kisses under which he closed his eyes, shuddering for rapture.

"That, and that, and *that*! Now don't you believe? And see this little warm place under your chin—such a strong chin, with the cleft in the middle—the very place for a kiss. Yes—you are a god indeed, strong and beautiful and my own. See, behind your ear where that beloved curl lies and must be

lifted for the kiss. No, I will kiss it too. The strong clean scent of you goes to my brain like wine. Do I not love you? Oh, you blaspheme against me—and I a goddess!"

It was perfect while it lasted. He sat, accepting adoration, bathed in bliss, but already her eyes were careless even while she shed her kisses here and there like flower-petals. She was trying to solve the problem of charming the man and yet not charming him too much, for she had found his weakness and knew that whatever he loved he could not leave until he had crushed out and extracted the last drop of sweetness. He must not unlove her but he must certainly leave her if her goal was to be reached. She felt the atmosphere cloying and not a little tedious sometimes. And while storms were brewing in Rome and Asia Minor, when swords were rattling in their scabbards and the thunder of trampling legions began to be heard in dim distance, to be condemned to talk of love and kisses filled her with nervous impatience that it could not seem worth while to disguise but for the fact that Antony was the sole weapon to her hand and must be led through his senses, as one tickles a donkey with carrots under his nose. Men! They filled her with alternate amusement and disgust. They let such stupid follies stand in the way of things which really matter! Even Cæsar—his temper and vanity had cost him his life, and her her heart's desire. And as for Antony! Words failed her.

So, sitting upon his knee, she kissed him, almost finding it in her heart to wish that he had the brutal callousness of Octavian if that would send him to his right place in the forefront of the battle.

"I am doomed to work through men who never see what I see!" she said despairingly to Apollodoros when she returned to the palace, having seen Antony catered for, the wine-cup by his elbow, and the famous Nubian dancer to show off her paces until he should dispose himself to sleep.

"One could forgive them if it only concerned the glory of Egypt, but it is for their own world-wide dominion. It is Rome. Cæsar saw it but had not the strength to strike. Oh, those frightful days in Rome!"

"He was a dying man, my Queen. He saw but could struggle no more. This man will fail us. I saw it—I warned you. Your very self will strangle your hope, for he is besotted on you—but not on your true self who would drive him like the cry of a trumpet if he could but know. No, but on a low sensuality, and if he leaves you another woman will take him until drink kills him body and soul."

"Yet he had his uses," she said with darkening eyes. "I am rid of Arsinoë at long last. Today I hear he has had her slaughtered in the Temple of Diana at Ephesus. If I have gained no more, that is a great danger averted. The Romans could always have used her against me."

"Thanks be to the holy Isis and all the Gods of Egypt! There was more venom and determination in the little body of the Princess than in ten ordinary women. A burning sore is healed."

She sighed, looking at him with melancholy.

"True. But, oh, the toil to be faced if I am to sit on the world's throne with Cæsar's son for heir. If I lose, Egypt will be a province of Rome. Either Octavian or I must rule the world, and it is life and death; for if he wins he must murder Cæsarion, and if I, I must slaughter Octavian. Oh, gods, the weariness—the weariness!"

"It is true," Apollodoros said eagerly. "And oh, for a stronger than Antony! Yet he is all we have. Defer to him, win him, for the kings of Asia Minor are rising against Rome, and if Antony leads them we have Octavian yet! Do not be too hard upon him, my Queen. I know well that there is nothing so relentless as a woman with her end in view, but hide it—hide it!"

She sat tracing patterns on the marble with a foot worthy to lie in the breast of a god, but did not look up.

"I must hold him, but he must go, and away from me he is at the mercy of any woman who takes the trouble to woo him. Oh, I have never been proud of my victory there—not I! You know that. The slothful fool! Why were *you* not twenty years younger and a prince, and together you and I would have fought side by side with no fool's talk of love, but trust and courage and brave bright things that do not sicken in the after-taste. That—that would have been the life for me, for you are as cold as I and care only for adventure and daring and to shape the world's way. Well—at all events, thank the Gods for a good friend. They have no gift as good—no, not one. So say I!"

Not looking up she did not see the blood flush the dark fine face of the man standing before her, nor, if she had, could she have understood. Of the two he was very much the stronger. He remained silent and she went on passionately:

"I ask you, what is the love of such a man worth? A handsome beast, purring to petting. Will he forget me when he goes, or throw all up to return to me? On which do you wager?"

"Great Queen—Qlapetrat,—the man is false, weak, treacherous on a point of policy, yet he is yours. As to fidelity you know as well as I that a man may share love with a hundred women and yet love one. But I cannot foresee the future. Events are too mighty for us. What the Gods send we must take."

And in two weeks the Gods had sent to such purpose that even to Antony it became apparent that to linger in Alexandria was to make a gift of the world to Octavian, for all Asia Minor was astir and Parthia was breaking

loose on the Roman possessions in Greece. The thought of leaving sickened him into a dull anger which vented itself on Cleopatra, and she met that gaily, gallantly, keeping up his spirits to the last, an Inimitable Liver in word and deed.

On the evening of his sailing they stood together by the window from which she had looked with Cæsar on their first meeting. His arm was about her, her head on his breast. She listened with patience to his protestations of eternal fidelity and swift return. They were the speeches due to such an occasion and must be said and heard. Events only would show what they were worth.

But this she did not reveal. She clung to him in an attitude of exquisite and loving submission, her eyes heavy with unshed tears.

"Life without you! What unpardonable sin have I committed that life should use me so hardly? If I could come with you, heart of my heart! You have thought me cold—The Gods know the burning agony of love in my soul at this moment!"

"I leave my heart here!" he said, lifting her in great arms and straining her to him. "The Gods know how I love you and the faithfulness I swear. I will not look in a woman's eyes, not have one within a mile of me. And if Fulvia dies—and they say she is sick—I will come back and you shall be my wife in Rome as here. I swear it."

"That is true? You swear it?" she whispered, holding herself away that she might look into his eyes.

"I swear it and may the Furies pursue me and the Dog of Hell devour me if I am not true man and faithful to my love."

"Then I will tell you this, which otherwise I would not tell. You go, but our love blossoms. The Divine Mother, the Holy Isis will grant us a child."

He stared at her, his face flushing violently. This was a note beyond range of the Inimitable Livers—a higher note than had as yet been struck in Egypt. For a moment he could not speak. Huge possibilities tossed like billows in his brain—unspeakable hopes and ambitions. Her voice, sweet as bird-music, pierced them.

"It is a new bond where no greater was needed. You are my royal consort here in Egypt as was Cæsar. But swear one thing to me: Swear that this child shall not injure Cæsarion. The world is wide enough for the two, and we shall have crowns for the giving. Swear to me, heart's dearest!"

He swore. The boy Cæsarion had been his playfellow and comrade. It was not in Antony to hurt him. And wild liver as he had been, wild boaster about a strong man's powers and rights in perpetuating his species, this

staggered him. For he loved the woman to the limit of his power and moreover he perceived that this was a matter to shake thrones and bring Octavian to the dust.

He covered her face with kisses protesting his grief, his shame, in leaving her to face the anguish uncomforted.

"But I will come. May the Gods hurl me down to the lowest pit of hell if in anything I fail you, my heart's delight."

She looked him solemnly in the face.

"And if you come back true to me I will love you as never man was loved yet. I will be yours to the gates of death and out beyond, and all that is mine shall be yours, my life and my king."

Later, Cleopatra stood by the window, watching the sailing of the Roman fleet. The great light of the Pharos illumined it as if it were day, breaking the ripples into confused glory, most beautiful to see. The ships lay silent as in a picture of light and darkness.

A sudden trumpet called from the ship of the Triumvir and instantly shouting broke loose, with the rattling of ropes and oars, a great tumult of sound. She believed that on the poop she could distinguish a solitary figure with folded arms, his face turned shoreward. A shooting star glanced through the sky and plunged into the deep outside as though a god hurled his javelin away, having no more use for it.

She turned away herself with a bitter little smile.

Gods and men. Life seemed to be resolving itself into a fight against both.

NEWS poured into Alexandria true, distorted, utterly impossible; and Cleopatra must make what she could of it for after two letters, the last from Athens, Antony wrote no more. It was said that his wife, the waspish Fulvia, had made some weak attempt at rebellion against Octavian in Rome, and having failed had fled to Greece to join the enraged Antony, who strongly objected to having his hand forced in such a manner. For the present, therefore, Italy and Rome were vanished dreams, and the state of affairs in Asia Minor was almost as discouraging, for the Parthians, rising like men from sleep, were gathering to their standards the kings conquered by Antony and overrunning the country from Euphrates to Greece.

"But at least," Cleopatra said feverishly to her one counsellor, "this will deepen the hate between him and Octavian. Now that Fulvia has mortally offended Octavian, Antony cannot betray me as he did before by joining forces with him. This must bind Antony to me for ever."

"These Romans—who can tell?" Apollodoros said with concentrated bitterness. "There is no enmity, no insult they will not swallow for gain. Pray for the life of Fulvia, adored Isis, for she is the gulf between the two men. While she lives Octavian cannot forgive Antony."

But Cleopatra, not so far-sighted, hampered by her condition, could not see it. She had tasted the difficulties of the birth of Cæsarion with Cæsar's living wife in Rome, and had no desire to repeat the experience with Antony. Her cry was for the death of Fulvia.

"For then he would marry me, and together we would face Octavian. Would not one think that Octavian would make her repent her rebellion in blood? The Gods send he may!"

And the Gods heard her prayer, but with a difference. A ship flying into the Harbor of the Happy Return, sails strained, men dropping at their oars (for the captain guessed the importance of the news to the Queen), brought tidings of Fulvia's death at Sicyon, worn out with grief and fear and jealousy of the Egyptian Queen.

Pale and huddled together when the man was brought into her presence, she sprang to her feet vivid and beautiful as the great news reached her senses. It could not be true—and yet it was, it was! And now he would return, and from Alexandria with all his ships and men they would face the Parthians and scourge the kings into submission and confine Octavian in Italy until the great day came for the march on Rome. From her arm she snatched a bracelet set with great jewels and thrust it into the captain's hand. It was riches for life

and he stared at it and the Queen, dazzled by her beauty—for she was one whom a thought divinely inspired, as a thought also felled her in the dust—so quick was she to blossom or wither.

And now Apollodoros dared to hope that this wonderful event might be in her favor. She wrote to Antony a letter most glad, most loving, calling to mind his promises—a letter a true man might brighten like flame to read, and then sat down to await the answer and the day of her agony.

The one came, and not the other—the Gods giving her a prince and a princess, Alexander the Sun and Cleopatra the Moon, at the end of a travail in which Apollodoros and Charmion thought to see her go down to death. To the gates of death she went in agony but returned, faint as Persephone floating up from the darkness of the Underworld. And still no letter came down the Mediterranean, though she watched the inward sails of every ship with a beating heart. Was it death, or treachery, or mere forgetfulness?

One day, when she had regained health and strength (and indeed health was her element, for she was most lightly and beautifully made), Apollodoros came into the gardens where she sat, Cæsarion, fair as a flower at her feet, reading a book written in the hieroglyphics of the Egyptians, being lightning-quick to learn as became the child of Cæsar and Cleopatra. But Apollodoros motioned him away to play with the swans in the great lake, and knelt before the Queen in silence.

"You have news and it is bad," she said, catching at her breath. "Is he dead?"

"It would be better a thousand times if he were dead. That at least would leave us free to make our terms with Octavian. Think the worst you can, my Queen, and it is still worse."

"Tell me," she said from white lips.

"The death of Fulvia having removed the obstacle, Antony has journeyed to Rome to clear himself of the guilt of her rebellion against the Triumvir Octavian, and he has struck hands with him again."

She looked at him for a moment with utter disbelief. Such treachery could not be, for mere shame's sake! Good opinion of men she had very little, and of Antony none; and yet how could this base thing be? Then suddenly she knew she had expected it always.

"The liar! The fool! The coward!" Her hands dropped upon her knees as if with an immense weight upon them.

"And we trusted him!" she said. And again, after a silence, "When I think what I gave him!" And again, while it worked in her heart! "But my love I never gave him. From that the Gods saved me."

And still Apollodoros knelt with eyes averted.

"My Queen, there is more."

"What more then? Has he sold us to Octavian?"

He made a gesture repudiating that, but went on.

"The Triumvirate has divided the Roman world into three parts—Antony taking the East for his portion—Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, and—"

"Then he will come back—he will be near and together we may strike Octavian again, and now Fulvia is dead—"

"Octavian foresaw that also, and as a bond of his fidelity he has stipulated that Antony should marry his sister Octavia—and it is done."

He dared not lift his eyes to Cleopatra's well-beloved face. He who knew her could guess something of the rage of shame and agony that swept through her like a hurricane—yet even he not all. To the humiliation of the woman who had twice trusted a Roman in vain was added the shame of the Queen who sees her utmost grace flung back in her face with spitting.

Her position was in truth frightful; every ambition broken, her love betrayed, displaced for a young and beautiful woman who was exalted in her stead. She had seen her in Rome and could measure very well the depth of Antony's self-sacrifice in accepting that condition of the treaty with Octavian.

For a moment the steel spring of hope and youth which had carried her laughing through so many dangers broke. She cowered into half her size, hiding her face in her hands, and for a long time there was silence and the sighing of the wind in the boughs, while in a great darkness she sent her heart through the bitter past and found no comfort.

And first she saw Octavia as she had seen her in Rome, standing among roses in the gardens of Cæsar's villa on Tiber. She had a garland of roses a little too large and blowsy on her head, her white tunic ungracefully looped to a golden chain about her waist, not a vestige of the distinction of a great lady. But none the less a goddess's figure, though carried stiffly; fine eyes also, moon-browed, dark hair rippling into a Greek knot that became her. Her face had the dull majesty of a profile on a coin, fair of feature but with no sparkle or play of expression, a noble landscape without sunshine—a true Roman beauty. The Queen saw herself smiling upon her, offering a peacock fan set with garnets and turquoises from Damascus,—the other taking it kindly and with an awkward sincerity very unlike the giver's gay grace.

Who could have thought then that time would make them rivals? For she was the wife of Caius Marcellus, and Cleopatra the consort of Cæsar. And now—oh, bitter gods who stand aside, laughing at the ignorance, the groping

folly of mortals!—now, for this woman's sake to whom as to herself Antony had been but a name—so great was her anguish that she could not even take the relief of tears for the burning of shame within her. These Romans, how they had used and felled and trampled her beauty and pride in the vilest of abasement and dust!

For the first time in her proud young life she tasted the bitterness of despair and most deadly humiliation. For how long Apollodoros knelt by her motionless as the image of the Faun in the thicket, neither knew, both sounding the deeps of a timeless grief. At last, dropping her hand from her face, but still crouching, she looked him in the eyes.

"And to this all our plotting and skill have led us! Better for me if I lay dead like Arsinoë—a virgin still, than the sport of those two cursed Romans. Oh, the laughter in Rome! I can hear it. The men at their feasts will say: 'Let any man go to Alexandria and amuse her with tales of empire—or less—and she is his for the taking. And easily to be left too when a man has had enough of her! A good pliable girl! How many children of how many fathers in the palace by the sea?' And Antony himself will laugh with them—the cur, the coward! Oh, if I had him here, my dagger in his throat—the drunken beast!"

Apollodoros knew her self-torturing torment that wrung his own heart, and had no word of comfort. Together they must endure until the Gods relaxed their cruel sport. She sat now, her hands drooped on her knees looking out with lost eyes over the sea. At last:

"Is there a gleam of hope anywhere? Can I strike at him—and how?"

And still Apollodoros was silent, and forgetting her own question she stared out over the sea lost in a maze of misery.

When at last he spoke she started:

"Queen—there is hope, immense as is the ruin. Let us not strike at him—he is not worth it. Let us still use the man until it is time to drop him and reach the goal alone. This we can do. He will still be within reach in Asia Minor and Octavia, the meek, the womanly, will stay and spin in Rome, tending her children and Fulvia's. And here we will use him. We will drive him to our ends!" His face was cruel as he said it—the face of a man to whom lives count as nothing in his purpose. She answered as if from a great distance:

"And if it could be—I begin to learn that we are nothing and the high gods use us for their purposes and drop us and go on with the game we can never understand. What good is it if I use Antony when they are using me? They have neither repentance nor pity. How should they when they themselves are driven by Destiny?"

"That is no doctrine for the Lady of the World. For my part I say: Let us do all we can while the day lasts, even if at the end we drop in the jaws of darkness and know no more. At least we leave a name; and you, the memory of a beauty that is the World's Rose."

"And am I so beautiful, Apollodoros? If I am, it has done little enough for me. I will trust my beauty no more."

"You are beauty itself, O Isis-Hathor, and the Cross of Life is in your hand. You were the little laughing Queen—a thing of dawn and dewdrops—now you are pale with knowledge, and your eyes are homes of mystery. I feel at what I would say, and words fail me. Oh, Goddess and Divine, have courage, for you touch upon things that endure, and you shall be a name, a song to move the hearts of men when Antony is remembered only because once he kissed your feet."

"A goddess! No. A woman deserted and debased. But still a Queen—and there is hope for Egypt still if I have none for myself. Well—let us consider the use of Antony. Coward! He dares not write!"

They talked long while the little Cæsarion waded among the lilies in the pool, and in the end, choosing a crescent diadem of pearls from her great stores of jewels, she sent it to Antony with this letter:

"I send these pearls to grace the white brows of Octavia the beautiful. She will remember me. I, her. Autocrat of the East, I would have you know that queens have no rancors like lesser women for they are not their own but must walk in the way marked out for them by the Gods. Therefore do not think I wish you anything but what is most good. I have forgotten. Here in Alexandria life is joyful and my days are winged with delight. May it be so also with you and the bride. Your children, Alexander the Sun and Cleopatra the Moon, are well and beautiful and full of felicity. Therefore, in joy I bid you joy, desiring you to remember that should the Fates decree that the help of Egypt is needed for the good of Asia then my ships and men shall strike with you as friends with friends."

She listened with interest as Apollodoros, having written, read it aloud, her slight body almost collapsing in weariness.

"Will he believe it? Is it too good to be true? He will have expected whirlwinds of reproach, and he gets—this!"

Apollodoros smiled a small cruel smile:

"He will believe it, for he was never sure of you. And not only so—but to speak of the delights of Alexandria is to hold out honey to the bear. Never in the wide world such a palace of delights as the Lochias, never such a comrade as my Queen! Give him rope—give him the dull beauty of Octavia—and this letter. And we shall see!"

So that letter was sent to Athens, and keen-eyed watchers were instructed to send from there daily report of what the Autocrat might choose to do, and, lest the same watch should be set on her, Cleopatra led in Alexandria the life of a great queen, full of wholesome delights and rejoicings, a careful mother to her children, considering the welfare of her people; and her name was great in the world, though the Romans, taught by Octavian, hated and distrusted her beyond all the monsters of legend.

They said she sat like a siren, singing behind her Pharos, and that her mysterious charm drew great men irresistibly to her net, and that the floors of her palace, like a witch's cave, were strewn with white bones of men. They told stories in Rome of her debaucheries, which were read to her by Apollodoros, she sitting laughing to hear the frolics of the Inimitable Livers magnified to bestiality, laughing the more because she knew from her watchers in Rome of the vices of Octavian—"plebeian vices" as she called them—jesting at his grandfather the money-lender.

"Octavia has that air also!" she said. "Her virtues are as heavy as his vices. The household drudge who has not blood enough to sin. She will drive Antony mad. Will she make his clothes as she made Octavian's—and as badly? Will she throw up her hands in horror when he comes reeling to her as Bacchus, or capers on the altar of Mars in Athens? Does she talk through her nose like her brother? I forget, for she had no breeding or courage to speak in a queen's presence in Rome. And now—see! she has sent no word of thanks for my pearls. Great ladies know how to keep manners with their enemies. She does not."

A year went by and news came that Octavia had borne a daughter to Antony and that little love was lost between him and Octavian. Also that in Athens he ruled with a good-humored and drunken rule, very popular among the commoner sort of Athenians. He had attempted to revive Inimitable Livers of his own, under the shadow of the Acropolis, but they could not thrive without the laughing guidance of the Queen, and their meetings were drinking bouts and no more. And when she heard of the massive God of Wine and Mirth in Athens, Cleopatra smiled. Even from Apollodoros were now hidden whatever dangerous thoughts lurked in the cold interlunar cave of her royal heart. She always smiled when Antony was mentioned, and said little or nothing.

And two more years went by and she strengthened herself in Egypt and won the hearts of the priests, visiting Abydos with great gifts and worshipping the Gods and amassing huge wealth, living greatly and wisely as the greatest of the Pharaohs, and was patiently watchful of all things.

"It was well," she said to Charmion, "that we did away with the Inimitable Livers now that Antony has brought them into such disrepute in Athens. They were too good to last, and now I am too wise."

"Yes, those were brave days," Charmion said, sighing. "They seem to have taken something of youth with them. How the Triumvir loved them!"

Cleopatra smiled. "Who cares? Life passes and changes and what matter? Where now is the Light on the Horizon? He told me of great glories in Rome, and they came, and ruin with them. Yet I can say this—if I have fought for my own hand I have fought for Egypt more, and therefore the Gods might have given me better than Cæsar and Antony. Last night I dreamed of him that I saw Octavia holding his hand and bidding him farewell as quietly as a wife in a picture, and I thought he laughed and I woke."

"May we never hear him laugh again!" said Charmion, who distrusted Antony with all her heart. "Thanks be to Isis that we are rid of him!"

"You will hear him laugh again or I am much mistaken. His mind will turn to the pleasures of Alexandria after a long diet of Octavia. He will come."

And within the next few months news came thick and fast.

First, that Antony could no longer endure the virtuous dulness of Octavia, and did not so much as trouble to hide his distaste, saying openly to those about him that there was no place worth a man's endurance but Alexandria, adding, however, that he had so deeply offended the Queen that he could never hope to see it again. And then tidings that he had sailed for Tarentum in Italy with Octavia, there to meet Octavian, and later that he had given her over to her brother and that, after a friendly farewell with Octavian, he had returned alone to Asia Minor.

"It is coming, coming!" said Cleopatra to Apollodoros.

He, kneeling before her, made his last protest: "My Queen, consider! Three years ago the man was sinking into debauchery. He is three years deeper in now. Is he worth the scandal, the danger, and the failure? I say, no, for the chance of Egypt may yet come without him. He is a mighty man now in Asia Minor, I own it; but what chance had he ever that he did not throw away? If he writes, send no reply. That is my counsel."

She shook her head, laughing coldly:

"Wrong, wrong, Apollodoros. He is absolute ruler of the East, and I will make my market of him, for he owes me much. Have no fear. I know him now, and when he has made Egypt what I desire, and provided thrones for my children, let him go back to Octavia and lick the feet of Octavian."

As for Antony, after so much of Octavia's company, his very soul longed for the brilliance of the laughing Queen. She was the only woman whom he had never won, who had never wearied him. And she had told him with a man's candor that she had forgotten him and was happy. That letter stuck in him like a barbed arrow. Happy and without him, she who had known his worship! Happy, and in Alexandria, the one place where he longed to be, where the art of pleasure was inimitably understood. Night and day he had the Egyptian slave Setep beside him, that he might talk of the Queen, that he might hear of the love of the people for their royal beauty and laugh over the frolics of Alexandria.

At last, summoning his resolution, he wrote a letter to her and sent it in a six-banked galley, swift and dangerous. And on board went one of his officers, a man he trusted, with orders to invite Cleopatra to return with him to Syria, if her reception of the letter should be friendly. And a parching thirst raged in him to see her again and hear her laughter once more. For her laughter was of all things the nearest to his heart. And he gave the letter to Setep.

And Setep gave the letter to Apollodoros and he to the Queen, and when she heard it she struck her hands together and laughed aloud, saying: "At last we have him. Read it again."

"Most beautiful of Queens, I am alone in Antioch. My wife Octavia I shall not see again. Are you so happy that the past is utterly forgotten? Yet there remains the good of Asia and since you promised in your letter, which has since been enshrined in a casket of gold, to aid me with men and ships when I had need of the help of Egypt, come now and meet me in Antioch that we may talk of high things. Antony the Autocrator."

"Write thus," she said slowly to Apollodoros:

"To Antony the Autocrator. Cleopatra has forgotten the past, but the Queen of Egypt remembers the good of Asia. She will come to Antioch, not in the Roman ship but with her own fleet and in her own time. So, committing you to the care of favorable gods, she ends. Cleopatra the Queen."

When it was despatched she turned to her counsellor.

"He is now the greatest man in the world, and Octavian hated in Italy and ruler only there. If you and I behind Antony cannot, with a touch, worst Octavian, then we are fit only to be slaves. Do you lose your old daring, Apollodoros? Then I have enough for both!"

Therefore, in spite of the sorrow of Apollodoros, that letter crossed the Mediterranean to Antioch, and in a short while Cleopatra followed it. But not with the lavish magnificence of a courtesan, as she had done at Tarsus. Not as

an abandoned Venus, but with stately and noble simplicity, as became the royal Isis, whose robes she wore. Yet most beautiful, for it seemed each year that passed shaped her from the reckless fantastic brilliance of the girl into the nobler beauty of the woman. Her eyes were deeper, more shadowed, and none could fathom the thoughts that hid in their sun-amber. Her mouth concealed its scorn in a great serenity, her hair was braided in a crown of bronze above brows serenely royal. Never was a queen more great.

And so Antony saw her when he came on board and stooped to kiss her hand.

SHE met him kindly but unconcerned, her quick eye noting the work of time upon him. A handsome man still, and would be so until death, so proud and high his features and the strong moulding of lips and chin. His great figure towered above her with a massive strength which would have touched the ordinary woman into awe-struck submission to male grandeur of mind and body. Her cooler judgment set a good deal of it down to inordinate feasting and there left it. She knew very well now that she was immune from illusions of that especial sort and that it was no part of her nature to be moved by the maleness of a man or to dwell on it with passion. Life itself was her lover, and its sweetness, dash and brilliance swept her along on too high an aërial current for any mere male to reach. As a girl she had thought her coldness unripeness; now she knew it for the very keynote of her being and blessed it, believing that it must save her from the subjection which is Nature's usual way of a man with a maid. Otherwise, where Cæsar had failed, Antony might have been expected to succeed, for the difference is often all with a woman, but she had sounded her own deeps and thought herself safe. Certainly, because she was a woman, her sense of power amused her. It was pleasure as well as policy to excite and enrage, to take them as far as their limits, though she herself poised winged on the edge of the precipice when she had driven them over. This had been the case with lesser men not worth mention in this true history; she had used their passions as slaves—much as a prince may toy with a peasant maid and forget her for nobler game.

Yet these women, all nerve and brain, artists to their fingertips, act love and its emotions better than those really subjugated, and with the artist's delight in the drama stand superior all along the line of attack and defence. Therefore, history (written by man) sets them down for headlong voluptuaries when in reality they are as cool and detached in self-criticism as the rest of their tribe. And Cleopatra, inaccessible to all men but the two she used as means to her end, stands pilloried to eternity as a sensualist who threw the world away for kisses, counting it well lost. One must remember how she would have laughed at the portrait.

On this memorable occasion Antony, being all sex, was excited, nervous, overstrained, she perfectly cool, ready to melt or freeze as became the moment.

He took his seat before her on the divan which, Oriental fashion, adorned her great cabin, inwardly ravaged by the sensations of a penitent arraigned before his judge as he looked at the cold beauty he last remembered dissolving in his arms. It was unreasonable to expect that she would melt

after more than three years' infidelity, yet the man in him, still swaggering and a filibuster with women, was not without expectation that a storm of tears and kisses might end the affair.

Instead she began the interview with placid courtesy.

"And how is the noble Octavia? I was sorry to hear that the Athenian air did not suit her health."

Irritation burst out of him in a growl:

"The noble Octavia is with the devil her brother, and long may he hold her! She is with Octavian in Rome."

She listened with admirable repression.

"Her native air will restore her to the beauty which all the world admires. I had wished I might behold it making beautiful the diadem I sent on her marriage. Did it please her?"

His face grew venomous.

"She never received it. Was it likely that I would see another woman in your jewels?"

Her face was gently concerned.

"I certainly intended no offence. One does not buy new jewels for every occasion and my stores are vast. But if you prefer it a new diadem shall be made for your wife's honor. The last ships from India brought pearls of a barbaric magnificence. I might walk dripping with them like a Nereid."

Irritation boiled over. With Octavia's expenses, Octavia's close fist, and his own reckless spending he felt the pinch of a narrow purse. One might certainly wring gold out of the miserable people of the lands his soldiers occupied, but after all—poor devils—that was not his way! It was not in his nature to be cruel unless he forgot, or people stood very much in the way. Now the longing to shatter and batter the Queen unless she would yield almost overcame him. He turned upon her vehemently.

"You sit there as cold as a goddess boasting of your wealth and pearls—the only person I know in the world who has no need to sell her soul for money! You know well that was not the reason. I would have pitched your diadem into the sea sooner than see it adorning Octavia's sheep's head. It was because I loved you. And this is my reward!"

"Talk of the unreason of women!" thought Cleopatra, as she waved her fan rhythmically with a little smile upon her lovely lips.

"It must gratify any woman to be honored by the love of Antony the Autocrator. But it is a long way from Alexandria to Antioch and I did not come to discuss the politics of Eros and Venus, but rather those of Asia Minor. May I know why you desired to meet me?"

Stuttering and stumbling he conveyed the axiom that nothing really could be done without the aid of Egypt. She smiled serenely.

"I knew that a good deal more than three years ago, but imagined that from the union of two such giants as Antony and Octavian another line of policy had been fixed and Egypt brushed from consideration. Are we really of any consequence still in matters of policy?"

She had him as completely at a disadvantage as she intended. He sat in sullen, and she in tranquil silence, as it were reviewing the position. Suddenly he leaped to his feet.

"If you think I shall sit here and be mocked! You were as good as my wife—"

"Not *quite* as good!" she interjected, but he ran on unheeding.

"And the mother of my children. How dare you sit there with your pale face and great eyes jeering at me and play-acting like a Greek pantomime! Come here and kiss me and submit like a sensible woman and I will tell you what I want—and take it too!"

He blustered in vain. She hinted softly that a long course of Octavia's submission had distorted his views of herself. That the Queen of Egypt was not his wife, and therefore a free woman could be scarcely expected to be as servile as she, granddaughter of a Roman money-lender. That also infuriated him and he plunged like a bull in a net, she undulating her fan in an untroubled rhythm.

He raged; she yawned. At last, and inevitably, calm conquered.

"I don't in the least want to be disagreeable," she said, "and I really have no rancors—they only get in the way—but the facts are there and too big to be ignored. How could I ever trust you again? You left me to face my confinement alone, with a damaged reputation into the bargain, and went straight off to Octavian—breaking your word of honor into bits, among other unconsidered trifles, by marrying a plebeian whom I would not have admitted to my palace as a waiting woman. Some women really would have reproached you. Have I done that? I sent instead a very handsome gift to the bride."

He admitted sullenly that she had made no reproaches but added that her silence and indifference had been infinitely more wounding.

"Did you expect thanks? Silence after my congratulations seemed to me more dignified, especially as my gift passed unnoticed. And besides, my position obliges me to be a politician, and really I can hardly take you seriously. You spin like a top! After Cæsar's death you were ready to fly at Octavian's throat. I trusted to that and spent a good deal of money on the

assurance. Round you spun again into friendship with him and a share in the Triumvirate, and I and my money and my Cæsarion were chucked away like garbage! Again, at Tarsus, you swerved round to me and your promises in Alexandria towered as high as the Great Pyramid. Like a fool—or a woman—I believed you. I made you my consort. I trusted Cæsarion's future to you and—I wonder how much it has cost me!"

She made a guttural note of disgust and fixed him with cool bright eyes as he sat scowling on the divan, his arm on his knee, chin propped on his hand.

"Do you yourself know what you want, mean, or intend?" she asked coldly, and sat looking at him as if his answer mattered little enough.

At the moment he wanted nothing but sympathy and consolation and thought her horribly hard and unjust. But it seemed useless to propound that point of view, and evidently some sort of propitiation was necessary. Besides, she hurt him. He wanted her, soft, yielding, in his arms again; to be able to look down upon her with fondling tenderness, and be the great man, Autocrat of the Queen of Egypt once more.

He tried to pose infallible, especially irresistible in big men who have little large-eyed women to deal with—women who must inevitably be yielding if taken in the right way.

"I have made grievous mistakes. None knows it better than I; and how dear I have paid for them only the Gods know. I was very ill in Athens and in the midst of dreadful sufferings my heart longed for my home in Alexandria and—for the only woman who ever understood me."

That she understood him she knew very well, but the phrase had hardly the same meaning for them both. A flash darted into her eye but was instantly suppressed. She sat observing his struggles gravely. He continued:

"And—Gods, the dullness of Octavia! A woman like that should be a Vestal Virgin instead of having tortured two husbands. Everything I did turned her blue. She thinks Octavian a paragon of virtue, and when I took the trouble to open her eyes (and the Gods know no one could do it better, for I am up to all his tricks!) she cried and snuffled and— Oh, Cleopatra, I have suffered! I thought of you and of the Inimitable Livers, and there was Octavia always posted before me. Give me a death's head for choice!"

His eyes pleaded. There at least he was truthful. He had known the very depths of boredom and the rack was preferable. She was conscious of a seasonable relenting. A mingled sense of gratification and power took the extremest chill off her coldness and melted the icy edge of her hurt pride. So that was the end of that fine marriage! She had known it. Triumph lifted its head in her like a touch of spring in winter.

But still she was silent. He flung himself on his knees before her, burying his head in her lap like a great boy.

"Take me back, heart's dearest, and I'll never stray again. I have learned my lesson—there's no woman like you, never was and never will be. Let Octavia go to Hades with her vile brother. I told her before she went that I would never set eyes on her again, and she snuffled—actually snuffled—and kissed me! If you knew what I have gone through! And my children—I want to see them."

"You have a daughter by Octavia," she reminded him, austerely keeping her fingers with some difficulty from the curls whose crisp resistance to caresses she knew so well. After all—after all, can a man be wiser than the Gods made him? But still she held her fingers stiffly away.

"So have I by lots of other women, and you never minded. And that child is as like Octavia as two peas. Let me forget them one and all!" he said pathetically. "I want to be in Alexandria. The very sight of you—my heart was always yours! All this was policy. To win Octavian."

Her manner softened but was still quiet and controlled. He also felt a breath of spring in wintry air and put out a groping hand for hers but did not find it.

"Speak to me, heart's dearest!" he said imploringly from the refuge of her knees.

"Yes, I will speak," she said with quiet sadness, "but you have wrecked my hopes so often that it is very difficult. Supposing I could forgive you—and a slave could scarcely be expected to—what would you do?"

"Anything—everything."

"That means nothing. Would you marry me if I wished it? I am by no means certain that I do. But would you?"

She felt the start that ran through him. He muttered:

"Octavia."

"Calpurnia did not stand in Cæsar's way. Why should Octavia in yours?"

"Yes, I would do that," he said desperately. "Of course, it would drive her brother mad. You know that?"

"Let it!" she said with contempt. "If you are true to me you can be free of Roman law. You need never see Rome again until you enter it as a conqueror."

Her very voice inspired him. All things seemed possible when she spoke in those clear ringing tones with dauntless eyes behind them. And the man himself was compact of courage when shown his prey and unleashed. It was

only when alone and tangled in doubts and the contrariety of things that he blundered and slumbered. She had the initiative he wanted.

"You inspire me," he said. "I can do everything with you. Oh, the fool I have been!"

She gradually permitted him to hold her hand, to draw a seat beside her, to lean his head against her shoulder, but still holding herself a little aloof from encroachments—and so they talked until the low sun turned the sea to glory and twilight closed about the ships in a great peace.

When the talk was ended the Queen, playing for Egypt and Cæsarion, had won her game, and Antony had conceded all. He had given her great slices of territory under his rule in Asia. Her frontiers spread far and wide. She had done well for Egypt, she thought; her name would be remembered among the greatest sovereigns of the ancient land. A proud flush rose in her little pale face as she heard him. There was to be a marriage in Egypt and coins struck with their heads and inscriptions conjoined. He stipulated that he should be King of Egypt, but she put that sternly aside. Cæsarion was her consort on the throne. No other was possible. Let Antony be Autocrator of the East. Gods—what a title to stir a man's imagination, she said. And he was subdued and promised. He must swear also to serve the right of Cæsarion in all things. The son of Cæsar and the Queen must come first. For the twins, lesser kingdoms to be carved out in Asia. He swore.

"And in return I give you the help of Egypt in all your undertakings. Money, men, and ships, and myself to back it. Myself, with all my heart and will."

"Your heart?" he said, and looked at her doubtfully. She seemed wiser, more self-sufficing, further removed from him than ever. Her long robes fell about her in shadowy folds hiding the little feet he had kissed so often—so little that both could lie into the hollow of his great hand. Yes, he had found the lost Cleopatra again but with a difference. He might be Autocrator of the East, but never, never again of the Egyptian Queen, as he had once believed himself.

"And you will love me as long, long ago?" he asked piteously. For answer she drew a great arm about her and hid her soft lightness against him with kisses intolerably sweet after long hunger.

Later in detailing her victory to Apollodoros she half excused herself for that tenderness.

"He is really a very difficult person to keep up anger with. In my soul I believe he is younger than Cæsarion. He needs to be mastered, asks, craves for subjugation, and that fool of a woman would persist in putting him on a pedestal and kneeling before him! Serapis, what folly!"

She added with a sigh: "At all events he will never betray us again."

"Possibly not," said Apollodoros. "But—"

"But what; owl, raven?" she asked, laughing nervously.

"What my Queen has said herself. He has no self-guidance."

"Unless he is mastered, and I have him to heel like a dog. There is only one doubt. Can I hold him? I am twenty-nine and I think the years have not spared me. Sometimes my eyes are wearied and I guess at two faint brackets that will come round my mouth. Is it not true?"

He repelled this with scorn. To him she grew more beautiful daily. But even he must own that the gaiety of the girl-Queen was dimming. That faint gray dust of time was settling a little on it.

He sighed, for of all men he most distrusted Antony, but turned resolutely toward her.

"Royal Isis, if on my knees I implore you to let the man go, to strengthen ourselves in Asia Minor with the territories he gives us, to make an alliance with Herod of Judea and defy Antony and so hold our line until Cæsarion is of age to rule—would you hear me?"

She shook her head. He knelt before her with hands joined, imploring:

"Let Antony and Octavian break each other, and let us profit by their ruin. The looker-on may laugh and win. The Romans hate both. They will accept the son of Cæsar, and the boy shows his father. Oh, my Queen have pity on Egypt and yourself. Let this drunkard go. Part friends with him, but part. Patience will give us all."

When his voice ceased his working features entreated. The promises of Antony weighed nothing with him. He thought the Queen mad. Never had she seen Apollodoros thus moved and it moved her also. She hesitated, wavered, commanded him to give his reasons in full, and for an hour they debated while the sailors of the Fleet waited in doubt whether to hoist sail for Alexandria or drop anchor for good in the harbor of Antioch. Apollodoros viewed her with the despair a man often feels face to face with the intricacies of a woman's nature. She allowed her reasons could hardly face the facts of Antony's behavior. Then were they to be called reasons? asked Apollodoros. She did not know, could not see what else was to be done, had an instinct—and so forth, until at last he began to doubt whether some swing of the fiery wing of passion had not brushed her immaculate coolness and left it smouldering. That she denied hotly, and fell back on the instinct.

"I have presentiments sometimes and feelings like ominous figures moving in twilight. May not the Gods send inspirations after that fashion? Besides, who else is there than Antony?"

“Ourselves, our wealth and our courage,” he answered stoutly. “What have we gained from the Romans? Give me the order to hoist sail this instant.”

He was at the door when she recalled him:

“It may be, best Apollodoros, that the Gods may visit me in a dream or some omen warn me. Let Antony be told that my head aches to weariness and I cannot see him tonight.”

For the first time in his life he looked at her with anger.

“He left you!” he said, with an edge of contempt.

“But he returned! The one reason is as good as the other,” said Cleopatra, “and both are worthless. It is Fate drives me as it does all! Let Fate choose this night.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE night came quietly down over the harbor of Antioch without sound of feasting or revels, jewelled with stars and wearing the moon on her brow like the Hathor of Egypt, and the Queen, leaning her head against the window, looked out at the star-strewn ocean and pondered the counsel of Apollodoros. And as she sat Charmion entered.

"Royal Isis, there is an Indian merchant who has come here from the city of Balkh, having a rare gift to offer. He was on his way to Alexandria but hearing the Queen's ships were at Antioch he has come to lay it at your feet."

She wavered on a refusal, so anxious were her thoughts, but the girl entreated:

"The man is set upon it—a great gift, royal Isis. He says it has magic in it."

That word decided her. Oh, for any magic light to throw a ray upon that dark path of the future! One believed in magic, for all the wisest of the world trembled before its powers. All, men and women, went cautiously protected by amulets and rings and seals from the malice of enemies or the threat of evil fortune. She herself wore in her bosom the tokens of Isis carved in amethysts and emeralds.

The man entered, a supple Indian, black-browed and turbaned, a man of fifty and more, age gray in his beard and the hair on his upper lip. He prostrated himself before the Queen, touching the carpet three times with his forehead, then rose to his knees and from his breast drew a little packet wrapped in yellow silk, speaking Syrian fluently from long trading in the eastern Mediterranean.

"For the living Goddess, the Queen whose greatness dims all others into darkness, this—from her servant Gomukh."

He peeled off the lengths of silk with delicate dark fingers, adding:

"And had I been known to carry this splendor, my life had not been worth a pinch of dust. For it came from the temple of the Great God in the terrible mountains of India and it holds the power of the Immortals."

As the last wrapping fell beside him it disclosed a small chain of gold, and attached to it a mighty black opal, midnight dark and shot with ominous flames of color darting and interchanging their unnameable hues in greens and blues and fiery reds, such as may be seen in the skies at sunset and reflections of fire in black waters, but man has no name in any speech for them for when a name is given, instantly the color is another. And she looked at its beauty and size in amazement for it was a square, more than an inch

every way and thick as the first joint of the little finger, smooth as the skin of an apple and pierced at one end for a ring and chain. And she said eagerly:

"This is a great jewel. There can be no other like it. I have never even heard of such a thing. And its virtues?"

Abasing his eyes reverently on the floor the dark man answered in Syrian:

"Living Goddess, it has two virtues, for this is the jewel of life and death, the black being night and death, and the flames light and life. Passed over the face every night it keeps youth fresh as a rose at dawn, and no woman's beauty can wither who does this and drinks the water in which the stone is steeped. For this reason it was given to the temple, because men's jealousy would not allow their women to survive them young and beautiful when they went down to death. Also a law was made in India that when a man died his wife should burn with him, and this was because when this stone is steeped in wine, not water, it gives out deadly poison, and he who drinks it dies, but it leaves no mark or harm on his body, so that the murderer cannot be traced, and it causes death in an instant and without pain. So the stone was a very great danger, being handed about among women to preserve their loveliness and to end their husbands when they wearied of them, and for safety men took it and gave it to the God. But mark this—it must be kept from sunlight, for its mother and home is the dark."

She raised her hands in astonishment and Charmion leaning over her shoulder examined the stone with awe, the merchant kneeling like a bronze statue. And Cleopatra said:

"I am wise in amulets, for that is a part of the Egyptian wisdom, and no ruler on earth has a greater store of them than I. But none has such powers as this. How can I test these virtues?"

And he replied:

"Send for a mirror and a cup of water and one of wine. And if in Antioch there is a criminal condemned to death, send for him."

So Iras, standing by the door, ran, and while she was gone Cleopatra sat with the black opal in her hand watching its weird and angry beauty with delight, and, thinking it a living being with a dangerous spirit inhabiting it, she turned to Charmion:

"I asked for an omen this night having a great choice to make, and unless this merchant lies this jewel is the magic lord of love and slave of death. Could there be a better omen for a Queen?"

"If what he says is true—no!" answered Charmion doubtfully. "But can it be?"

And in a short time Iras returned with Apollodoros and, between two of the Queen's soldiers, a prisoner bound and condemned to death for the brutal murder of the overseer of the bank of oars in which he rowed. He stood there hangdog and sullen, saying no word nor raising his eyes when Cleopatra asked his sentence.

"Crucifixion."

"And no escape?"

"None."

"We do no injustice then but are merciful, if this merchant tells the truth. Dismiss the soldiers and give me the wine."

She took the cup and sat steeping the stone in it watching it with eager curiosity.

"For how long, fortunate merchant?"

"Until it turns rose-red. The poison remains active for eight days and a very little suffices."

The wine was an Egyptian vintage yellow as topaz, and as she bent to see, it passed into a deep and noble rose color, brimming most beautifully in the Queen's cup. And when this was so, she held it out to the prisoner.

"Unbind his hand that he may take. And now, man, drink, and thank the justice of the Queen. I give you the mercy you have not shewn, and since you serve my turn I wish you a quick passage. Drink!"

He took it in a firm hand, his face sullen and defiant, and drank without a word, and instantly relaxed as if in a sleep, smiling, and so slid to the ground at her feet, lying at her feet in the very image of happy repose; and all seeing it said:

"Wonderful! Most wonderful!" as indeed it was, and the merchant raised a dark triumphant eye to the Queen's face.

"Can it be death?" she said, breathing quickly. "Surely it is the gentlest sleep. Feel his heart, Apollodoros."

He knelt and drew back the poor garment covering the breast.

"Death, royal Isis. The man has solved the mystery."

"Then remove his body. There will be moments when I shall envy him. The Gods are less merciful to men than I to him. And now for life."

And, first having cleansed the stone, she held it in a cup of water, looking steadily in the eyes of the merchant Gomukh.

"If you have lied, and this stone poisons the water as it did the wine, then my men will tear you limb from limb and toss the bloody fragments into the sea to feed the fishes. For my men love me."

He smiled gravely:

"When the water glows like wine give me the cup and I will drink."

She held the cup a moment more and with her own hand offered him what seemed a cup of golden wine, and moreover it quivered and broke at the brim into a lightly hissing foam. And then a great wonder was done before their eyes. He drank and set the cup aside and raised his face to the Queen, the light from the perfumed lamps falling on it. Before the watchers a miracle was done. They saw youth dawn in his face, as when night turns gray for morning. The nerves twitched and rippled; the olive skin smoothed as if a skilled hand had erased the lines with rare oils and unguents; the gray faded in his beard like melting snow in spring. But most of all the change was in his eyes. No longer half sunk in a network of wrinkles, they sparkled like jewels, elate and audacious, and in ten minutes he stood before them a splendid young man, his clear-skinned hands clasped in each other, nor a joint, not a vein showing, an Indian Dionysos, light and beautiful as a Faun.

"May the Queen live for ever!" he said, laughing. "Does she think I would sell this treasure if I did not know the mountain valley where its like are found? It is worth all the riches of all the Kings; therefore, keep it for royalty only and use the stone nightly as I have instructed you. Also keep it in the dark of your bosom. Now drink!"

She could have thought the Greek Apollo, a trifle sunburned, stood before her, so beautiful was his face, such music the harmony of his voice.

"Drink, Venus of the Egyptians!" he said, and himself took another cup of water and with slender fingers held the stone submerged. And, as he did this, again it grew golden and again the light hissing of the bubbles sounded through the air.

She drank, and the taste of unknown fruits in the golden juice brought strange glad thoughts into her mind, at first like dreams of childhood, bright and changing as a butterfly's wings, and, as she drank deeper, like the gladness of a girl such as she remembered herself in the Lochias Palace, running and tossing her ball with others, the daughters of great nobles; and joy bounded along her pulses like a dancer, and she drank to the last drop and set the cup down laughing aloud for gladness and daring.

"The mirror, the mirror!" she cried. Iras and Charmion kneeling supported between them a great surface of polished glass set in silver and clear as the sea at dawn, looking eagerly themselves in the mirror to see what would happen. But Apollodoros fixed his gaze steadfastly upon the face he loved, for to him all change was loss.

Oh, beautiful! The strong elixir sent brilliant color to cheeks and lips, a glory of sunshine to amber eyes, kindling more gold in the threads of her

hair. The ineffable softness and innocent beauty of first youth erased the passage of the years between eighteen and twenty-nine and strewed the bloom of fresh flowers upon the petal-smoothness of her fair face. No feature was changed, but all raised to the power—the highest power, of its own beauty, as when the sun strikes leaping water and suffuses it with rainbows, shimmering with light and color.

Charmion and Iras looked up at her awe-stricken, but the young merchant cried out:

"Hail to the Goddess of Beauty who in India is Shri, in Rome Venus, and in Egypt I know not what, but in all the world One. And now I depart."

"Give him all the gold he will take!" cried the girl Cleopatra eagerly. "Load camels for him with precious things. Take him to the treasure vault of my ship and let him choose, and none hinder him. And take my thanks, Merchant Gomukh, and this!"

She drew a great table emerald from her hand, splendid with green as deep ocean water, and herself put it upon his. And as he crept from her presence, bowing and prostrating himself, it seemed that all the young beauty of manhood went with him and left the palace darker.

But light and shedding light, triumphant and adorable, she cried, flinging out her arms as if to embrace the world:

"Oh, youth! Oh, joy! Could I ask a better omen? Now I can hold Antony for ever, and how can he or any other man resist me? The ghost of old age is exorcised and I have strength and courage to face all Fates. Bright Gods, I worship you! Tell Antony I have a word to say to him, and bring wine. We stay in Antioch."

Happy madness possessed her; she heeded neither Apollodoros nor any other, and when Antony saw her he believed he had recovered the lost Cleopatra and rejoiced. For her beauty is a woman's soul, and in its life she lives. So she breathed empire and was drunk with power.

But when that story reached Rome, distorted as all was distorted that had to do with her, it confirmed the tale of her witchcrafts and dyed her reputation black as ink. And every Roman shuddered at her name, remembering the fate of Cæsar and foretelling the ruin of Antony and any miserable man who trusted her.

THEREFORE, when the news flew through the Roman Empire that Antony was in Alexandria once more, scorn and derision, fanned with the utmost skill by Octavian and his agents, winged after it.

Octavia returned to Rome meek, uncomplaining, gathering under her wing the son of Antony by Fulvia, together with her own daughter, and devoting herself to all the duties of a model Roman lady. And Rome broke into flame at the sight of so much virtue set against the black background of Cleopatra's vice. The witch! The sorceress! One would have thought that the beauty and nobility of Octavia would have saved her husband from those Alexandrian snares. The Roman anger added legions to the cause of Octavian who had such a sister to avenge!

What scorn and reprobation could be too great for the outcasts of the Lochias Palace?

And Antony had had the insolence to hold a Triumph in his own honor in Alexandria—a thing never before done by a Roman out of Rome—a gorgeous procession of legions, and elephants, and the captive royal family of Armenia shrinking along the streets, pale, dumb with misery, laden with golden chains, while he himself, quite in the Cæsarian manner, was the focus of all eyes in a glorious chariot drawn by four white horses.

Rome growled like a furious wolf when the story reached her with the descriptions of Cleopatra sitting on a golden throne to receive him, and her children about her on thrones of silver—all raised on a platform to command the worship of the crowd. She sat there brilliant in beauty and triumph.

Whether it was the mysterious jewel of the Indian or rekindled hope which had made her a flame of enchantment remained her own secret, but she shone supreme, the very memory of her a light to shine down the ages and extinguish lesser glories. It only inflamed the hatred of Rome where every tongue cried that she was the most abandoned of women and Antony her abject slave. The truth was she was a peril to Roman power, and, being a woman, vilification must be added to the usual means of conquest; though when the news was cried on the Capitol that at the great banquet following the Triumph, Antony, rising, had proclaimed the young Cæsarion King of Kings, and had allotted kingdoms like toys to his own children by the Queen, no more was needed. Octavian smiled like a man who sees his goal.

The tumult roared along the Mediterranean. Antony, they said, was now a besotted fool whom Cleopatra kept drugged and drunken while she pursued her plans for the ruin of the Roman power. As the price of her love, she had

demanded the Roman Empire, and in his drunken bouts he had promised it to the witch as he might have given the ring on his finger. Up and at them, for the sake of the Republic!

And the cold and crafty Octavian, watchful and patient as a spider sitting in the heart of her web observing the gilded dance of the flies, heard and resolved and acted.

And first he spread through Rome, and amongst the soldiers of the legions, reports of the magnificence of the riches of Alexandria and of Egypt.

What a palace for looting would be the Lochias! There were beams of pure gold across the mighty ceilings, fretted and inlaid with jewels. The very flooring of the halls was onyx or alabaster. The chairs and divans glittered with jewels of price brought by laden ships from India up the Red Sea. The beauty of the slaves and their skill in all the arts of luxury made the possession of each one a fortune. As for the luxury of Antony and Cleopatra, it beggared all description. Of Cleopatra they wrote that she almost sank beneath the weight of jewels, her white breasts more displayed than hidden by the woven webs of the Orient, embroidered in gold and jewels by the skill of Alexandrian handicrafts men. Little else was talked of in Rome, and that was as Octavian must have it. So, having kindled this flame, he proceeded to pour oil upon it, and took his next step. He despatched the meek Octavia, pale and lily-like in submissive beauty, to Athens, whence she called upon her husband Antony to meet her and receive gifts from Octavian. And having done this Octavian waited events.

When the letter reached Alexandria Cleopatra sat with Apollodoros in close council. So foolish and drunken a braggart was Antony now that those two read all letters and transacted all business before referring to him.

"Dare we keep it from him?" she asked anxiously. "He is weak as water —he might go to her again and Octavian murder him. The Roman woman has probably been sent for that very purpose."

Apollodoros, his brows heavy with anxiety, shook his head:

"I think rather that she is sent to Athens so that Antony in refusing to join her may be accused of an open insult to a most virtuous wife. Royal Isis, you cannot keep it from him. If he insults his wife that insult must not come from you."

So Cleopatra took her way to the chamber overlooking the blue waters of the harbor which had seen such changes in her destiny. There she found Antony in conference with a leading actor, a man named Metrodoros, planning a masque of Bacchus for the delight of the Alexandrians and his own. For, to her terror and wrath, all the pests of Italy, the dancers and actors,

had come down the Mediterranean after Antony, and the palace was besieged by these impudent parasites night and day.

"And I myself will drive through the streets in a car drawn by tigers, teeth drawn and claws clipped, and I will appear garlanded with ivy and with a chorus of Fauns and Bacchantes, and the whole city shall celebrate the rites of the God, and work shall cease and all be given over to pleasure for three days and nights. And there shall be a great banquet, where Plancus shall take the part of the Sea-God come to visit me, and—"

"Splendid, most divine Autocrator, splendid!" cried Metrodoros eagerly. "And we will have a chorus of unclothed sea-nymphs with him, and he shall dance at the banquet naked, with a garland of sea-weed, and a great fish-tail flapping behind. He is a handsome fellow, and the Alexandrians love a joke, especially if a little indecent!"

With what difficulty she hid her rage and contempt, she only knew, but knew also that hidden it must be for the moment. She sat down.

"Beautiful indeed, and what part is allotted to Metrodoros who is King of taste and fancy?"

"He will be Mercury the herald, announcing the different pageants. But sit and see the exquisite groups he has drawn for me to consider. They are in the truest classic feeling."

She put them aside on the onyx table. No—she must have a few words with the Autocrator, and then Metrodoros should return.

"But it is the hour when the children expect us in the gardens for their games. You would not surely disappoint Cæsarion and the little ones?" urged the good-humored Bacchus.

"The children will wait. They are fishing with Charmion and their attendants from the seawall."

She could hardly get rid of Metrodoros, but at last it was achieved, and Antony put an amorous arm about her and composed himself to listen in comfort.

"A man named Niger—has arrived here, sent from Athens, and—"

"Niger? An excellent good fellow! Then we must have a banquet in his honor. Those wild boars roasted—"

"That too shall be done. No friend of my beloved's shall miss due honor from me. But he brings a message from Octavia."

Then indeed Antony sat bolt upright in uttermost amazement. Having dismissed Octavia he had never expected to hear from her again, and her virtuous pertinacity was astounding and unwelcome.

"Octavia? Holy Serapis!"

Cleopatra laid the letter upon the magnificent table.

"She greets you as a wife and says she brings much clothing for your soldiers, many beasts of burden and money and gifts in abundance, and besides this two thousand picked soldiers in splendid armor, a gift from Octavian, to help in your campaign against Parthia."

"Gods, from Octavian? And is she in Athens?"

He sat a moment digesting the news. His arm fell from her waist. Cleopatra waited in hidden impatience, her bright brows frowning over the letter. Presently he spoke:

"It there more than that?"

"Dutiful messages. Hopes. Expectations. No more."

A pause. He sighed gently.

"A royal gift. The poor Octavia—she was always madly in love with me."

"I should have thought the word 'madly' scarcely applied to any action of Octavia's."

He did not even hear her, so deeply was he interested in this new development.

"And Octavian. I will say that was a handsome notion of his—the soldiers. They will be a splendid nucleus for my army. These tried men, hardened and sharpened by war, are worth their weight in gold!"

Then and not till then, she turned tragic eyes upon him:

"You would accept them?"

"Gods, why not? I tell you they are worth—"

She cut across it.

"You would go to Athens to receive them?"

"Well—I had not thought—but after all, why not? The Athenians have always been devotees of mine. I have an immense popularity there. It might be politic."

Her face was a mask of horror.

"You would return to Octavia? You do not see that this is a trap of Octavian's? O Gods of Egypt, what have I done to deserve this?"

"Hercules!—If I went, what could it matter? I should probably never clap eyes on Octavia,—and it would be proper to receive Octavian's gift with respect. I only wish he would double it. But let me see Niger—and you stay and hear for yourself."

"I will not stay," she cried, lightnings darting from her eyes. "Do what you will, go where you will. You have been a fool and coward always. I was

your wife before Octavia. But be true either to her or me. To both you cannot."

He would have kissed her, but she fled weeping. For the first time he had seen the tears of Cleopatra.

Of course he did not go, and his refusal blazed through Rome—oil on fire, as Octavian had foreseen. For Octavia returned meekly weeping to Rome, and a vote was passed in the Senate for war against the hated Queen and the renegade Antony. And Octavian proclaimed that Antony was drugged and no longer master of himself and therefore to make war on Egypt was to rescue a Roman once worthy but now imprisoned in shameful bonds. And Rome gathered her might for the struggle.

When the news of this purpose reached her, Cleopatra said to Apollodoros:

"This is the end. The failure of Antony's war in Parthia leaves both him and Parthia open to Octavian. He will strike now, and he is right. I have done my best for Egypt and Cæsarion, but the Gods are too great for me. And in what have I sinned against them? If they would but tell us mortals and give us a chance to amend! But they sit in the dark and smile. Life is strange. Plot how you will, suddenly comes the Unforeseen, the Terrible, and strikes all one's wisdom into the dust."

She sat with darkened eyes fixed on the ground, and added presently:

"It is as if some mad god wandered the world in idleness, striking all hopes into nothing. What is Octavian better than Antony? And I—I am cleaner than other women. I am temperate, wise, and chaste. I might have embruted myself with men, as they accuse me. Whatever I am, the Gods made me and the blame is theirs. They lie foully of me in Rome, but—you know it, Apollodoros—I have given my body to two men only and that from no passion but because I believed they could make me a great Queen of a most glorious empire. That and no less was what I owed to Egypt. If I brushed people out of my way I did right—a Queen's right. And what is my reward? Ruin comes on me as if I had been the vilest of women, and my hopes break into colored dust in my hand."

He said some reassuring words. Not now was the time to reproach her, though there were things he might have said. But what mortal could have seen clearer than she? Surely she might have hoped that alliance with the two most splendid Romans—the greatest men of the time—would not only strengthen her country but also make Egypt the ruler and Rome the appendage; and, hoping this, could she do less than she had done? And now the sword was shattered in her hand. She looked a broken girl—no more than

a girl—as she sat huddled in her chair, and pity choked his words. He turned away sighing.

She recalled him:

"I have a thought. It has long been floating in my mind. Send through the city to know whether that wise priest known as The Light on the Horizon has ever returned from India. He held the secret of the future and if I could have even one glimspe of light on my horizon I might have courage to think and act. For the truth is—Antony is our ruin. If he were a man he should kill himself, for the life is gone out of him and he is now nothing. Oh, if I could say to him: 'You have wantoned enough with me; you have eaten enough of my substance; you have drunk enough of my wine—it is time for you to go.' I will do it if I live. I should do it this instant, I know."

He went out, leaving her with head dropped on her arms, alone.

In an hour it might have seemed that time had shifted back and the years between were a dream, for she sat as before in the room of rose-porphyry among the Hathor-headed pillows and beneath the broad frieze painted with the worshipping Pharaohs. There she herself, a slim nude outline in red, made offering before her Mother-Goddess. And as she sat there beneath the images of her glories, the Light on the Horizon stood again before her, his eyes calm as a midnight sky reflecting the image of the Unseen in stars. Again she felt a cold breath about her like the chill rising from deep water, stilling and freezing the quick pulses in wrists and temples. He spoke in a voice often remembered in her dreams:

"Royal Daughter, the day is come that I foretold. Because your heart was not pure you saw only in a distorted mirror —true, yet false. Now you desire light on a dark horizon. What I can I will, and indeed as I sat in a valley in India, with wild white peaks above me, a voice said in my soul: 'Cleopatra the Queen has need of you. Go quickly.' And I came."

"See for me. I am afraid," she said, putting out her hand to grasp at some support. Was it her own voice that spoke or a stranger's? Already his words had penetrated to the unknown self that crouched within her, and it raised its head obedient. A kind of terror of that self awoke within her. What was it? What did it do or know? It lived in her life, yet apart. Was it that which had betrayed her in every crisis of her fate, foiling all her will? Was what she called "the Gods" only that lurking invisible life?

"See for me. It darkens," she said below her breath.

"I read your thought, royal Daughter. That inner self is a spark of the Divine and must be resumed into the Flame after much pilgrimage. You have many lives to live and much to learn. In your busyness of mind you forgot or did not know the Essential, and lost your way. Therefore, you have been a

wanderer in the world of illusion. You know not the Real from the unreal and where you think you have failed you have conquered, and what you have thought victory is defeat."

She sighed, with closing eyelids, passive like one sinking into sleep. She murmured faintly:

"I see defeat and nothing else."

He answered gently as a mother to a child drowsing on her bosom:

"See!"

Her eyes closed and the inner self floated free from the trammels of the body and was at large.

She saw the camps of Antony at Ephesus where from her great Temple Diana looks down upon the world. She heard the clash of the subject kings of Asia gathering to the standard of Antony, to do battle with Octavian for the rights of the son of Cæsar. She saw her own fleet riding at the mouth of the river, loaded with treasure, food, and all the munitions of war. And pride kindled to flame as she saw, for Antony's seemed a power the world could not match, much less conquer. Her soul exulted within her. The picture floated away as a dream at dawn, and she beheld the sea, a wild breeze herding the waves, an ocean of peacock-blue, rough, metallic, crisped with white. Upon it a mighty fleet, her own, the bronze-beaked galleys terrible in weight and stately in height and strength of sails and banks of oars. And before them the little ships of Octavian, many but weak, ill-fitted, small sea-birds, crouching before the eagles riding the great winds. And again her heart cried out for pride and triumph as though it shouted "Victory!" As a dream the battle floated away in confused cries and winds and was gone.

Quiet and darkness as in the black heart of a prison. The moon travelling on her immortal voyage cast at last a faint gleam through narrow windows. The pyramid built for her own tomb by the holy temple of Isis. The faint beam moved onward resting upon a golden couch and upon it a crowned woman sleeping with folded hands and feet. So divine was the quiet as she looked upon her own face, so lovely the dream lying upon it like moonlight on deep ocean that all the lures of life withered, leaving only longing for that ineffable tranquillity. What was the shout of victory to the sight transfiguring the closed eyes? What the prizes of power and dominion, for which she had suffered and struggled, to the passionless smile of knowledge? Life passed before her, a night's fever shot with fierce colors of illusion, nightmares of desire dispersing in a cool dawn. And at last she knelt beside the lovely Death, knowing it herself, released from torment, feeling life flow above, about, within, the rising of a full tide from the unfathomed heart of a surrounding sea.

The yearning broke in tears, soft and healing as sweet rain in spring. They fell on the beautiful dreaming face and she laid her head on the cold bosom craving to be drawn to its repose, sobbing against the shut door of Quiet. And, so lying, peace enfolded her, more desirable than any words can shape, and the Mysteries swept her with floating wings and sight drifted from her to be lost in abysses of light.

Again the palace room was about her and to the silence she cried aloud:

"Death is better than life. Better than all victory. Oh, give me death!"

And from a great distance a voice answered:

"It is more life. It is victory. Royal Daughter, you have seen. On a dark horizon the only light is honor, for its path is the orbit of stars and its return in great glory."

All was gone, light and voice and peace, and time became nothing or eternity.

She awoke with an immense weariness upon her, weighting her limbs like lead, covering her hopes and fears with a gray pall which made them alike and worthless. The dark night of the soul.

Then outside she heard the voice of Antony shouting for her to come and take counsel with him on the transport of a legion to Ephesus.

She rose slowly and went to meet him, her hands before her eyes, walking heavily, stumbling as if dazed with vision.

As must happen when mortal and immortal touch lips, the beauty of the vision faded into reason and speculation. What did it mean? Was it not the favor of the Gods guiding their daughter to victory? So far as she could analyse, and hers was an analytic mind, it left her two beliefs by which to shape her course. The one was victory at sea, a great battle of the ships, which would see the destruction of Rome. The other—death. Whether sooner or later she could not tell, but, her work accomplished, she would be gathered in great glory to the sleeping Pharaohs. Well—she would rejoice to have done with it! Even for the prospect of victory for Egypt she knew she had paid dear, with her own self-respect and happiness. Life had broken all its promises—a lover, but like other lovers, how faithless! Let it go—henceforth she would be no woman but a mighty queen.

But there was much to endure. She must reap the bitter harvest her own hands had sown so eagerly. It was now her Nemesis that, having taken possession of Antony with all the dominance of a strong will over a weak one, he was helpless without her and openly, in the world's face, justified the saying of Octavian that he was her besotted slave. Yet a weakly rebellious one, with tigerish furies and fawning reconciliations; a man wrecked and ruined by life until purpose and will had become memories, a flawed sword, breaking in the hand of the user. When she joined the camp at Ephesus she saw at once the dangers and terrors of her position. She must rule and guide him. No hope was left outside, and yet the four hundred Roman senators who had met them there—enemies of Octavian's as they were—cried out against her, would have none of her, so hated was she in Rome. They were ready to support Antony and were glad enough of Cleopatra's resources, but raised a hue and cry against her presence on the ground that the Roman hate destroyed all sympathy for his cause. She must return to Egypt, leaving her men and ships behind her, or no help from them for any of his designs. In her pride and indignation she would have thrown up her share in the campaign but for the sure knowledge that a deadly lethargy of sloth and drunkenness would fall upon him when she abandoned him.

She had triumphed—how often—to Apollodoros in her power over the man, and now it was her curse. It was torment to blush and pale under those hard Roman eyes, in shame that they should see the ruin which had been Antony, and call it her work. And not a Roman there but reproached him with Octavia, her dignity and submission, the contempt that his conduct to her had set alight in Rome. To them she was the great Roman lady, sister of Octavian,

and Cleopatra an alien with her own axe to grind. A money-bag to be used and despised. Nothing more.

These things they said with side-glance at the little pale fierce Egyptian Queen, and she knew that if she left him it would be their interest to take charge of him and swing him round to Octavian and ruin him and herself in some catastrophe of treachery. And they could do it so easily. He might be her besotted slave but neither she nor any one could control his madness of drink and the gradual decay of his powers.

One day, to her horror, he shouted aloud in her very presence, while haranguing the army with all his old floridity of oratory, that when he had done with Octavian he would establish an immaculate republic in Rome. A republic! And Antony who was pledged to her to achieve the monarchy of the world and of Rome! That he was half drunk did not mend matters, for the Romans at his elbow shouted deep-throated applause.

He turned on her savagely:

"After all, part of the fleet is mine. I wish to all the Gods that you would get back to Egypt and leave me here to manage the campaign. What business have women in camp? You make me the world's laughing stock,"—and so on, in weak passions of self-assertion.

"Should I go?" she asked Apollodoros distractedly. "If you counsel it I will. Life is horrible to me here. I sicken under every eye that falls upon that miserable drunkard."

He looked at her and for a moment was silent. So much that might have been, the lost, the irrecoverable, passed through his mind. He saw in a glimpse of illumination that the weapons they had trusted, her beauty, charm, wealth, power, had been the very means of her ruin. What use has a woman for the beauty that makes her a prize for kings? It had given her a fatal confidence which compelled her to take men at their worst and weakest instead of at their best, and they had repaid her in kind. Of their worst and weakest they had given her. Her spell had changed the man to the beast. Cæsar had never cared for any but his own ends, and what was Antony! Not her fault only, the little lovely laughing Queen! He, Apollodoros,—he had had skill, but never vision. He had seen men always as they are, never as they might be. Some high call had been dumb. He was too intellectual a man to have been entirely deaf to the high moralities and philosophies discussed in Alexandria and if he had dismissed them from his mind his excuse was extreme preoccupation with affairs, not distaste. But suppose they were right? Suppose there was some high way, infallibly right, which he had ignored. He shuddered slightly, as thinking that a man more unworldly wise might have saved her. At the moment they were on the lovely island of

Samos, where Antony had collected not only his own dancers and actors but had commanded his subject-kings to bring their *troupes* also; and in consequence Samos had become a centre of the maddest dissipation, resounding with music, buzzing with over-filled theatres and feastings and riotings which threatened to absorb the greater part of the treasure she had poured out for war.

"Dare I leave him? This island with its lewd debaucheries turns me sick —and the Roman shadow drawing nearer and nearer." So she appealed to Apollodoros, and still he shook his head.

"He will go down to ruin if you leave him. We must get him away from this sink of vice to Athens. Go to him now, this moment, and shame him."

She went, too careworn and wearied to assume the arts of love which she had begun to loathe while using them to sway him.

He lay on a couch covered with jewelled tapestries, a chaplet of vine-leaves about his head, large, loose, dishevelled, his tunic fallen open to the waist, disclosing his naked body. His eyes were reddened with wine and he had the drunkard's vacuous good-natured smile fixed on his lips. About him a rabble of men of the lowest type of the Greek pantomime actor, and women scarcely less vile. Beautiful, dangerous, graceful as panthers, they crowded about his couch, fondling his hands and face, snatching his jewels from his neck, dancing, singing, reciting love-verses and scenes from the obscene plays to which the mighty Athenian drama had fallen. A rabble rout indeed, as drunk with wickedness as wine.

She flung the door curtains aside and stood there, pale with shame and anger, her eyes darting fire, her very hair crisping like wire upon her head in the fierce wrath that possessed her—Fate itself advancing upon them could hardly have been more dreadful to behold. For an instant she could not speak. This, this was what she had brought upon herself! Gods, that she could be done with it and him!

All turned and stared with loose lips upon the stiff white figure. One laughed aloud—a vacant laugh that loosed her fury.

"Out, out with you all, dogs and swine who feed upon the ruin of your masters. Out, lest I call my soldiers to scourge your white skins and wash your crimes away in blood. Out and away, parasites and slaves, or when the sun sets there shall not be one of you living to see it."

All beauty deserted her. Her glare was frightful, a white Fury invoking doom. She flung up a clenched hand and it seemed that lightnings shot from it to blast them. Her eyes were daggers.

The women whimpered; the naked, gathering up their robes about them. She stood fixed while, crowding together, they slunk out, edging by her with

side-long eyes upon her every movement. At last the place was emptied of its filth, and they had left her alone with Antony, risen on his elbow, staring about him with empty surprise.

"What's wrong? They were reciting a scene from 'The Parasites' and singing like sirens. I want my beloved with me to hear. The poor beauties! The poor players! What had they done, my Queen?" Then, standing before him, her grief and horror broke from her like blood pouring from a wound.

"Out with you also, who are the ruin of our cause and me! To what have you fallen who were once so great? What man is there that does not despise you, sunk to the companionship of such as these parasites and harlots, creatures of your own kind, scorned by all others? Go! Or I will have you also scourged through the fleet by my sailors, for a wretch who is neither Roman nor Egyptian, but a slave of slaves!"

He stared at her in maudlin self-pity as she stood there, her light figure dilated with denunciation, her eyes raining scorn. He hesitated and trembled:

"If I had known you did not wish it, my beloved—"

"Wish it? *Wish* to see your ruin and the gold I wrung from my people wasted on lice like these! Wish it! Oh, Gods of Egypt! I tell you, go, or I will drive my dagger through your foul heart. What woman can fight the world with such a burden tied upon her back?" She sprang forward, clenching her dagger. He flung his feet over the side of the couch, roused at last, too unsteady to stand, but still goaded into returning her attack, raging weakly like a woman:

"And if I am vile who made me so? Who taught me to lavish gold? Who melted pearls for a fool's drink? It is you that ruined me as you ruined Cæsar. Every Roman here dins it in my ears. They say: 'She is a witch that kills men from her pleasure.' They say: 'Look at the noble Octavia and then at *this*!' And it is true. Out with you and get to Egypt, and leave me here with the Romans, and take yourself and your Asiatics out of my sight."

What could she say? There was enough truth to wing the darts to her very soul. She was a pitiable sight, quivering from head to heel, the tears frozen in her eyes. He saw his advantage and gathered strength.

"What do I care for your Cæsarion and you? Take your ships and leave me with my own people."

"And take my money also?" she asked with bitter lips. That halted him, but only for a moment.

"It is against you the Romans have declared war, not me. The Gods curse the evil day when I left Octavia for you. I tell you the army will not march;

the Romans will desert me unless you leave me. You are the enemy of Rome. They wish me to join with Octavian to crush you."

She felt he was breaking her. She was failing. She had not said the right things—the things that must be said, that would win him, if she could make him understand. Quiet, quiet!—she must not rage; she could not beat him there and the case was desperate. She must control herself somehow and be wise.

She pressed her hands against her burning temples and forced down the clambering passion in her throat.

"I do wrong—very wrong to reproach you. Together we must stand or fall. You know, and I, that if you veer round again to Octavian your life is not worth a copper coin. It is he and we now, and the world the stake. Listen—listen to me. I spoke in anger, but you see—you know. We cannot, we dare not waste time and money. Come to Athens. Divorce Octavia. Then he will know the die is cast. And I will prepare the fleet and we will fight him at sea!"

She did not come near him but still stood apart, her hands extended like prayers. He stared sullenly on the ground, and with passion she continued, launching winged words at a blind mark.

"The sea. Cæsar believed in it. He knew that the people who hold the sea hold the world. And what are the Roman ships to mine and yours? We learnt of the Phœnicians long, long ago. We are great on the sea. And there is your fleet, too. Oh, meet him there, and we shall conquer. I saw it in my vision—I told you, I told you! Ask Setep the astrologer; he knows. The Gods know. The sea for us—the sea!"

Moved to agony by her own pleading she came nearer, hands stretched out, and fell on her knees, clasping her arms about him.

"Beloved, forgive the words of a tortured woman, but see the truth. These Roman senators, they are in Octavian's pay. I have proof. They are here to hand you over to him. Come down to Actium and see my ships, and when we have beaten him at sea it is only to march on Rome. Oh, beloved, put aside your toys for a little, a very little, and when it is done you shall be served like a God with all your heart's delight. You shall have women, wealth, plays, feasting—"

Her voice choked hoarsely in her throat. If men were children one must bribe them—she had always found that must be done. What more could she find to promise him? Yes—

"And you shall be regent for Cæsarion and rule him and me. All shall be your own and we your slaves."

The fever of wine was wearing off and there was more concentration in the look he fixed on her. He was not the man to be angry for long with the female of his own species, and laid his great hand on hers, relenting a little more at its damp cold.

"Poor little woman! She should trust her man to know best. I forgive you —kiss me! Another, full on the lips. But your little head sees things when you don't blind yourself with love or anger, and I know the Romans are Octavian's friends, not mine. You are right there."

She curled herself shuddering against him, dumb with suspense. That was the way. One said things and drove them home, and then they worked in him and came forth as his own. Sometimes, that is, when he was not too drunk or amorous. He hugged her against him, proud of victory, half maudlin with the sweetness of reconciliation.

"Yes, they would hand me over to Octavian. The only way to keep them is success. The fleet. You have said that again and again, and the senators say it is folly."

"They know the danger to Octavian!" she threw in, stifling her voice against his breast. "They want to prevent your using the weapon he fears."

"Very likely. They are finished traitors. Some day I will flay them all alive. Now—I tell you what! If you will go back to Egypt like a good little woman and obedient wife, I will take the fleet and strike at the right moment. Is it a bargain?"

He pulled her up to him until her cheek rested on his, her mouth on the corner of his lips. With a supreme effort she wreathed her arms about him, embracing him with every inch of her supple body.

"And could I leave you—I who die in your absence? Oh, heart's beloved, do you not understand my passion and shame? It is because I have feared you might leave me for these Greek women. It was jealousy—jealousy that bites like a wolf! Since we landed in this accursed island I have not slept in your arms. Tonight—let me come gliding in as long, long ago, and then—the world may go to ruin while you are mine—mine only, mouth to mouth."

She flung herself along his body, covering his face with hers, and he clasped her with strength that bruised her like a flower. Thus in many ways she wooed him, moulding him like wax, herself in such a torture of hidden grief and shame acting the torture of love despised, that at last when it was over and she returned to Apollodoros she reeled as she went, putting out her hands for support like a dying woman.

"It is done. He will fight at sea. And I—what am I?"

So the Gods, leading the Queen to greater ends through the gates of loss and ruin, made her victorious over Antony; and though there were moods of distrust in him, in which he accused her of desiring his death that she might find some better man to fight her battles, preparation was made steadily for that battle which should decide the fate of Europe and Asia.

It was the night before, and many men sat at the feast, for whom it would be the last their living eyes should see. And Cleopatra entered, supported by Iras and Charmion because of the splendid weight of her golden robe and panoply of jewels, and so, glimmering like the night with stars, she ascended the couch by Antony's, and so great was the majesty of her entry that even her enemies were moved as they rose to greet her. But Antony, still in fear of her, cowered from her eyes and she knew distrust was lurking in his heart.

Now beside her stood a jar of Indian porcelain and she filled her cup from it and his also, for it was the rarest wine, and she drank the half of hers, then raised her clear voice.

"Most noble Antony, I drink to your health and victory and to the unbroken trust between husband and wife. Pledge me from this cup of mine, of which I have drunk the half, that all men may know we are one. See—I dip my roses in it, for the greater grace."

She dipped the red roses in her cup and withdrew them and set them in her bosom. Eager for her favor, he stretched his hand and lifted the cup to his mouth, but swiftly leaning forward she struck cup and wine to the ground.

"You have not trusted me. You have said I plot your death! See now, and let all see, how easily I might have ridded myself of you had such wickedness been in my mind—I, who cannot live without you! These roses are poisoned and had a drop passed your lips it would have been death. Though you distrust me, know it is truth itself you distrust; for with my own life I would shield you."

He fawned upon her, kissing her hands, but in great weariness she rose and left the feast, saying to Apollodoros who went beside her:

"When the victory is won—and certainly my vision cannot deceive me—I will have done with him. I will give him riches and kingdoms, but not myself. There is no trusting the fool—no, not for a day."

And in the morning, burning with wrath and shame, she would not see him, sending word only that he could count on victory because the Gods had shown it to her, and then, so pale, so slender that the very air might have upborne her feet, she went on board her great ship to watch the triumph and reap the fruit of all her sorrows.

Now there was a rising wind and all the green plain of the sea was flecked with flying crests of foam, and the strengthening breeze blew hard for

Egypt; and she said:

"How quietly the palace looks down now upon the Harbor of the Happy Return! How sweet is home, and, oh, for the gardens and the great peace! Would that I were there!"

And looking up at the furled sails she said again:

"Oh, that we could spread these wings like the gray gulls over the waste meadows of the sea! For even with victory wheeling in the air I am weary—most weary!" And two large tears formed in her eyes and rolled down her white cheeks.

But now the ships gathered to the battle, the little swift ships of Octavian and the great and terrible ships of Egypt and the ships of Antony, and she said no more but stood watching; not doubting at all but thinking thoughts which not even Apollodoros could read—silent and dark.

And so began the greatest battle men had yet fought on sea, and mighty things hung on it, together with the fate of Europe, but the Gods took part with Octavian, for he was the better man now Antony was wine-sodden, and he out-manœuvred Antony, surrounding his floating fortresses as hornets cloud together about a horse, and after awhile the Egyptian ships fell into a terrible confusion, being boarded and sacked and taken like towers on land, the Romans crowding aboard them in floods of men let loose—a frightful sight to see.

Then suddenly Cleopatra flung up her arms and shrieked through the noises of battle and the roaring of the wind:

"The Gods—the Gods! They betray me always! And why should we go down to ruin with these traitors? Home—to Egypt! Spread sails! Egypt!"

And the captain heard and his heart went with her words, and so thought all the Egyptians, and the great wind took their sails and they plunged through the ships of Antony and Octavian and made for home, breaking through the banks of oars and hurling the rowers to death and mutilation; and all stared upon them aghast so that the very battle seemed to pause as the Queen led the flight, her cloak driving about her and wild hair whipping in the gale, staring on with blind eyes to Egypt, the salt brine dropping from them like tears.

Apollodoros struck his hands together for joy, crying:

"Now, if Octavian does but make an end of him we are free, and Egypt shall yet be mistress."

And Cleopatra said nothing, watching like a statue staring into a black sky, but suddenly she put out her hand and clenched the man by the wrist, pointing backward, for, from the ships and shouting, a small boat made out,

sail bellying and oars pulling madly like one who races for his life, and three men were in her and one stood with his arm about the little mast, and he did not look back to the battle nor yet forward to the Queen's flying ships, but laid his head upon his arm like a ruined soul, and his boat made after the Queen.

And she said only this, in a great bursting cry:

"Who can fight against the high Gods? Death itself will not rid me of Antony." And so falling on the deck lay like a dead woman. Oh, shame—for, leaving his men and hers to die, he abandoned the battle and fled after her, lost souls, chained together forever in torment; a thing accursed, a fallen life not worth the taking. And he clung to her still like a beggar and with his boat hanging to her galley would not be shaken off, though the Egyptians bared their knives at him, and so at last was received on board, for she said, "Not even he can make my ruin greater now." And their disgrace was complete.

And when he asked if he might approach her she said:

"Why not? I am as vile as he and as God-forsaken. We are well matched," and in the end received him passively as might a woman near death to whom life has nothing to give any more.

When they sighted the coast of Libya he went away, to wander alone awhile, not as yet having courage to face the Alexandrians whom he had ruined; and the Queen went on alone.

But a shout of triumph and derision loud as thunder arose in Rome and echoed down the Mediterranean and over the world, and all men watched breathless to see what would be the end of Antony and Cleopatra who had lost all—rule and honor and life—at Actium, for death was hidden in that defeat.

YET, being rid of Antony for awhile, even from that abyss of ruin her thoughts plucked some salvage; and every day they hovered over the vision of the Light on the Horizon, and she said in her heart:

"I misread it, but the words of the man were this: 'Death is victory,' and death the Gods themselves cannot withhold from us, and I will go very gladly, having finished such work as is possible."

For, having fled in the face of the enemy, though not indeed from fear of them, it appeared to her that she must so retrieve herself that even the Romans should not boast they had conquered her soul. So she took counsel with Apollodoros and determined to thrust her ships across from the Mediterranean into the Red Sea, through the canal made by Darius the Great when he had conquered Egypt half a thousand years before. True, it was silted up in part with sand, and here the ships must be dragged through it, but she did not shrink from that labor, remembering the mighty Pharaohs who had built the wonders of the Pyramids by the unstinted toil of men beyond numeration. And she resolved to build ships at Suez too, that with them she might show the Romans the splendor of her courage and wisdom; for she would go down the Red Sea with her ships, now that Egypt must be the prey of Rome, and in India, the vast, the hidden, she would make a new empire for herself and Cæsarion, free at last of the miserable Antony and the tyrannous Romans; and they should know that Cleopatra was still a Queen and no slave. But there, too, the Gods saw far otherwise, and the prowling Arabs burned her ships; and so ended that high-hearted and marvelous enterprise, bringing her a step nearer to the end.

Then, seeing her desperate strait, she sent Cæsarion and the others of her children into Media, beyond the Roman power. While he lived, her dream could not die; therefore, she sent him to sail with a great escort for India, that he might there lay the foundation of the Empire she had promised Cæsar. That done, she set her face toward the Mysteries, and it seemed to her that Victory has two faces, one for the conquered as for the conqueror. For she began to know that it is not the circumstance by which a man is judged but the man meeting it, who determines the end, though it is not as he would have had it. Thus she became the spectator of her destiny and saw it in part tragedy in part comedy, conscious that she herself would soon rise up from the theatre and depart to a new spectacle. Further, it was revealed to her that her moods and thoughts and the parts she had acted of love and hate and laughter and luxury were never herself (but this she had suspected) being rather a play of sunlight upon the deeps of a great ocean as yet unsounded;

and she beat, as it were, at the gates of death, believing that their opening would admit her to knowledge of that self as a thing wonderful and eternal rejecting the joys and sorrows of earth as none of its own. And she yearned to know this self with more than any lover's passion, counting those years as wasted in which this great thing had consorted with her forgotten as a captive queen enslaved but royal. Of these things she spoke much with Apollodoros for he had in secret read and studied much of the Indian wisdom, which regards death as a little thing or rather the gateway to enlightenment and a new birth of adventure and experience. Thus she received comfort not to be told in words but desirable beyond all things which she had coveted formerly. Seeing that Antony, who had returned and secluded himself, ashamed that she or any should see his face, was now a broken sword and so little master of himself that in some drunken madness he might murder her and fling his life upon the Roman spears, she withdrew into the pyramid which she had built as her mausoleum, after the fashion of the Pharaohs, a tomb-palace with certain halls and a great storage place for treasure, for there she might have safety until she could make terms with Octavian for Egypt and her children. With her she took Iras, Charmion and Apollodoros and, as she entered that dark house of death, she said to them: "This is the end. I am now done with Antony, with the world, and only not with hope, but it is winged hope and walks no more on earth."

In the later days of July, the Roman armies advancing on the city, Antony made a wild and hopeless sally, and drove the Roman cavalry back upon their camp; but this could do nothing in the face of their inevitable triumph, though he boasted like a braggart blown up with pride, and sent his news to Cleopatra. She smiled a little but silently.

Now that night a strange thing happened, for, leaning from the high window of the pyramid, she looked out into the star-sown night, undeceived by this flicker of fate. And suddenly these arose the sound of wild revelry and shouting of men and women and melody of flutes and pipes and dancing feet and mighty rejoicing, and it came nearer and nearer until it was beneath the pyramid, and she saw nothing though the drunken delight deafened her ears.

Pale in the moonlight she turned to Apollodoros and the women: "Count this rejoicing of Antony's my last shame. Who but he would come blaring and drunken through the dying city to celebrate tomorrow's Roman victory? Gods of Egypt, where is your thunder?"

But the women shrank back from the window and Apollodoros caught her arm, saying hoarsely:

"Oh, Queen, live for ever! The Gods, the Gods justify your rejection of the base Antony, for they reject him also. These are no earthly sounds. The

rejoicings deafen us; the revellers are below us; but we see nothing, for we are mortal and they spirits."

And indeed the thing was fearful, for the space below rang and swarmed with crowds and awful shoutings and mild music and leapings, and yet there was nothing but moonlight and shadows that did not stir. So that she cried aloud: "What is it?" and could scarcely be heard in the din; and Charmion the brave shrieked like a woman mad with fear, crying out:

"It was foretold. It is the divine Bacchus, whom Antony has always served and honored, leaving the city and deserting to the Romans with all his following, and Antony is no better than a dead man and we with him."

But the Queen stood like a marble image staring out upon the emptiness that rang with dreadful noise and inhuman gladness, and though she saw nothing her eyes peopled it with figures lovely and terrible in rejoicing, glad at her destruction and passing on with glee to the camp of the Romans; and she said one word and no more:

"The pitiless Gods!" And so the noise died away toward the camp, and that night none slept of those in the mausoleum, for the dark was full of presences and powers and all the air thrilled with the oncoming of death. In the morning Apollodoros gave her a letter flung up to the narrow window by a man from below, and it was from Octavian to the Queen. For awhile she held it in her hand, lost in a dream which it could not reach, and it was Apollodoros who took it from her and read:

"Great Cleopatra, and never greater than in misfortune, consider these words. It is Antony only, the degenerate, the worthless, who stands between us, and would you lose Egypt and the Roman friendship for such as he? You are too full of wisdom and the inspiration of the Gods. Send me his head tomorrow and there is no wish the Queen can express which Octavian, the nephew of Cæsar, will not think himself glad in fulfilling. And for such beauty and royalty great days open in the power and heart of the conqueror who is also the conquered."

He read it aloud to the last word and looked at her in the darkness of the tomb, using her Egyptian name that he loved:

"It is easily done, Qlapetrat. A signal from this window to my watchers, and Antony's head is at the feet of Octavian. And this pyramid is charged with treasures beyond reckoning for the propitiation of the Roman. Also, I, who see, declare that you are beautiful as never yet—more beautiful than when you bent Cæsar to your will. What then is your answer to Octavian?"

She stood leaning against the window and laughed, but not in mirth.

"What? Shall I die as traitors die? You also laugh, for you know the answer. Shall I trust another Roman? Shall I walk like Arsinoë in a Roman

Triumph? Shall I break faith with Antony who has never once kept faith with me? We do none of these things in Egypt. Write!"

And he wrote this with his stylus while she spoke:

"To the Conqueror. There is one thing only not to be conquered, and what that is you know, knowing Cleopatra. If you want the head of Antony take the city and find it in the ruins. There is no other answer."

And he dropped this letter to the man who waited below.

Let those who will tell of the defeat of Antony and how after it he set sword to his own breast and wounded himself to death, and, not yet dead, was carried to the barred door of the pyramid, that he might die on the bosom of Cleopatra. For such a horror of shame came upon the man, thinking of the enormous ruin that he had brought upon her and Egypt, that he could not face the great Dark without her pity and pardon. And again Apollodoros cried out to her:

"Do not let him in. It is a most frightful danger, for men are posted to rush the door when it is opened. Oh, Antony, selfish and worthless to the last, to drag a Queen and your wife to captivity!" She turned to him laughing as she had laughed upon the letter of Octavian:

"And why not, Apollodoros? But, no—we will be discreet. I will let down cords for him. I taught him that he could not so much as breathe without me, and shall I send the child out into the night without a word to speed him? You and I are old and wise—as old as the Sphinx—but Antony is a boy. We must strengthen him."

So they let down strong cords, and they were fastened about the dying man, and those in the pyramid drew him up to the window, a dreadful sight and he in the agonies of death, and he was laid at her feet struggling to clasp her and to speak words choked with blood, imploring her forgiveness.

And then, of her many-faced moods, the Queen presented yet another to the watching Apollodoros, for sitting beside Antony she gathered him to her bosom as a mother a child, and his blood dripped upon her and she laid her cheek to his, speaking low and sweet and comforting him with words most beautiful and tranquil and tender, and touches of her hands and lips as if he had never done her a wrong, acting her part with such pity as made it real in his eyes if not in hers.

"All is done, beloved, and if you were my ruin I also was partly yours. But surely when men speak of us in the unborn years they will say: 'They were great lovers, and what is death in the face of such love?' And indeed you have been a very great man and Roman. We shall be a song and a memory and no oblivion overtake us."

He lifted his eyes to her dimly, saying:

"Love, I never knew you loved me, but now I know. The Gods know I loved you—I, unworthy. Yet I was a great man once."

And he could say no more, but lay in her arms foredone, and she held him tenderly and weeping:

"Sleep therefore, beloved, knowing all is well."

He murmured some words not to be heard, and at last raised himself so strongly that it seemed he might live, saying this:

"At least I have lived, and greatly, and have tasted all the joy and power of life, and I have loved the most wonderful of women. Also I die, not ignobly, but a Roman, conquered only by a Roman."

And she bent her face over him and clasped him to her bosom and her long hair fell over him, veiling him; and so he died, she sitting bewildered, like one awaking from a dream.

An hour later she said:

"He has shown me the way and it was not difficult. I know now that no hatreds or scorns can pass that threshold. I have forgiven."

Two hours later she called Apollodoros from the little room where he waited, and she sat on the golden couch which served her as a bed, and again and most strangely she smiled as if some thought pleased her, her hands lying idly on her knee, and the sight of this thing brought the hard tears to his eyes, though he hid them.

"Truest friend, in a very short time Octavian will be here to take possession of me and my treasures. Already the Romans enter the city, and it cannot last. A watch will be set and none can go out. Go now while you may —"

He broke into a great and bitter cry, falling on his knees at her feet:

"May the Gods do so to me and more also if—"

But stooping she took his hand and held it lovingly:

"Hush, wise man! Am I not a goddess, and do I not know the Divine Mind? You also. Have no fear for me, for we shall meet beneath the Wings of the Eternal Justice, for in life there was truth between us. And depart in peace knowing I am safe. I have the stone of the wise Indian, and Charmion and Iras go with me. But for you I have work, and you who know the nobleness of fidelity know there is no rest with work undone. Take this casket of jewels of great price to Cæsarion in Berenice. Tell him I loved and love him. His tutor is a hypocrite and coward; therefore, have pity on the lad. To you I commit him. Tell him also where you and I have hidden the great treasure."

How could he refuse? Of all his obedience, of all his long fidelity, this was the most bitter, for he had hoped to die with her, continuing his service. And be sure, no prisoner condemned to death knows such a pang as this man condemned to life.

But the strength of his long patience upbore him and rising to his feet he stood like a soldier, taking the casket from her hand and hiding it in the breast of his tunic, and, for the last time using the name he loved, he said:

"It shall be done, Qlapetrat, Lady of the Two Lands. And now to the Gods I commit you, saying this only: Through the worlds and the hells and the heavens I will seek until I find you."

She also rose to her feet:

"I will wait. I will watch for you. And now, O true, O wise, go, taking the love of your Queen with you, and this for its token." So she kissed him upon the lips, still smiling, but with such a smile that, seeing, he hid his face and falling at her feet embraced them in a passion of silence. And those were their last words.

Below the window he looked up, hoping, but it was empty, nor did he know that the Queen lay on her face within, thanking the Gods that she had known him and his love, exceeding the love of lovers, since in that she still discerned their purpose and worshipped their power who had given her this one truth in which she also had been true.

What she had foreseen came quickly, for the Roman took her with cunning, and the conqueror Octavian faced her in the gloom of the mausoleum, lit with a faint lamplight falling upon her broken fortunes. Very smooth things he promised, safety for her children, and Egypt for herself, if she would surrender her treasures and trust to his word in everything.

"And do not fear, noblest Cleopatra, that I have even the least desire to inflict any humiliation upon so great a Queen. Now that Antony is dead Rome smiles upon you and all is well. Under her shield you shall rule in Egypt."

But she saw the fox's gleam in his eye, the furtive spark that would not lie with his will, and therefore she gathered up her strength to play the last part allotted to her on earth, as a consummate player who must win the applause of his audience:

"Noble Octavian, or rather Cæsar—for so I should call his nephew, inheritor of his great gifts and his name—I thank you for your great mercy and I accept your promises. I am very sick and weary and in bitter fear of death. You will not kill me? Oh, rather a thousand times let me walk in your Triumph, if that must be, but spare my life and let me live in Rome under the shadow of your protection. I have no more now to hope from the Egyptians,

for they know I was led aside by Antony. But set my Cæsarion on the throne, and he shall be obedient to you in all things."

Her eyes were humble as a slave's; they followed and found his with meekness most pitiable to behold in so great a Queen. Even his hard heart pitied her for a moment, but he rejoiced greatly, for he needed her to swell his Triumph and, of all things, he desired the last ounce of her treasure, and had feared that no arts could keep such a woman from death by her own hand. She continued with little sobs:

"I would have asked for the villa of Cæsar, where I have known happy days, but that in his liberality he left it to the citizens. Then put me where your august will decrees; but only spare my life, for dear is life to all."

He redoubled his promises, assured at last that he had got her. With shaking hand she drew a paper from her breast and tendered it:

"The list of my treasures, now yours."

He snatched that greedily; and one of her slaves, Seleucus, who had followed Octavian, thrust in his word:

"Great Cæsar, the Queen cheats you. This list is a lie. She and Apollodoros have hidden ten times the treasure she reveals, but I do not know where."

For the last time her living wrath blazed out, and she flew at the wretch and struck him so that he fell, and spurned him with her foot until Octavian dragged her back, she crying:

"But is it not a vile thing that because I have set aside some few trifles for gifts with which to gain the pity of your wife and Octavia that this filthy scoundrel should betray me? I am fallen indeed. Yes, good Cæsar, since it is so you shall know where to find these little, little things—poor remnants of my glory—which I saved to propitiate Octavia and your Livia."

A sob choked her, and Octavian, bidding the wretch begone, yet wait for him outside, spoke most gently and falsely, and so left her, well satisfied that she was in great fear and that the threat of death would quickly bring the treasure to light, and that meanwhile he had secured her for his triumph and the delight of Rome, and then her death.

But when she was left with her women she threw up her arms and breathed a deep breath as though to relieve an intolerable strain:

"It is done; it is done! He trusts me. Now to our work. For awhile none will disturb us, and all is well."

Then Charmion and Iras the beautiful took out her royal robes and the crown of her forefathers and the jewels suitable to be worn when she appeared before her subjects in her mightiest splendor, and they did all

swiftly and without words, knowing her mind. Also they brought a great golden cup and brimmed it with wine and when she was fully attired she sat and stooped over it and steeped in it the black jewel that she wore always in her bosom, and as she did this the wine turned rose-red beneath their eyes, and she withdrew the jewel laughing.

"Oh, the good gift! If even they entered now they could not hinder the Queen from pledging her women nor them from drinking to her. And who can guess the virtues of this great stone when we are dumb? But stay—they shall not have it!"

She ran to the window and flung the stone below and, because opals are very brittle, they saw it fly into black sparkles and vanish—a lost and baleful star.

Then Cleopatra turned again to her women, nobly robed and sceptred, and asked them smiling:

"Am I beautiful?" And indeed she shone like a thing divine, her eyes and cheeks burning as though their lamps were lit for a great festival, and all the glory of her body like a flame of fire. And Iras, kneeling, answered:

"Most beautiful, royal Isis."

And Charmion:

"The Gods shall rejoice in their daughter when she ascends the throne beside them."

And now she seated herself on the golden couch, and the vision of the Light on the Horizon rose before her, a dream of peace; and Charmion, setting a table before her, put upon it the cup of wine and a small basket of figs covered with green leaves, and she tasted a fig, lingering on the sweetness, saying:

"Among these figs there is an asp hidden, and I desired this because they shall not know how we ended."

And she put the fig aside and drew the little frightened deadly thing from among the figs and laid it in her bosom, covering it there with her hand as if to warm its cold, laughing:

"Lucky we did not trust the little cold poison-bearer! He loves the summer of my bosom. He will not bite. But the time goes."

Then Iras came forward and knelt:

"Majesty, have I your leave to depart?" and Cleopatra, stooping, kissed her on the brow, holding the cup to her lips; and she drank a little, looking up at the Queen, and instantly relaxing she slipped down softly as if into a deep sleep, and so died.

And Charmion, coming before the Queen, knelt also, and embraced her knees, looking up into her face with wordless love, and they kissed and clung together like sisters; and from her true hand Cleopatra took the cup, and, pausing for a moment, she said this, still smiling:

"Even now in the ruin of life I perceive the pledge of immortality. I testify that the Gods have done justice, and coming again I shall praise them, but with understanding." And drank, and, drinking, swayed aside upon the couch and lay.

And Charmion straightened her limbs and composed her into beauty like that of a goddess who, sleeping, dreams peace to all the worlds, lying in the mystery of Isis and the loveliness of Hathor and the power of Nout; and, kneeling, Charmion worshipped the Divine in her, remembering many things, and glad because the queen had triumphed and had passed beyond the utmost shaft of fate. Nor did the time seem long until she heard the steps of the Romans and rose to answer for Cleopatra.

She drank and poured what was left on the stone and as she stood she swayed, with overwhelming sleep, and instantly the men saw and cried to her: "Charmion, was this well done?" And she answered:

"It was well done and fitting a Queen descended from so many glorious kings." And she fell across the Queen's feet and died.

The end of Apollodoros none knows, nor the secret of the treasure which hides its cold glories in earth. Cæsarion, betrayed by his traitor tutor, was murdered by order of Octavian, and Egypt became the kingdom of the Cæsars, Emperors of Rome. Yet Egypt, still lost in the dream of her tombs and her ancient glories, sleeping in the sands of her deserts, foresees the coming of her peace and the life of her world to come. And of all that loss and defeat and triumph and despair, none knows the secret until the work is ended and the eyes of Omniscience behold the woven pattern complete and beautiful.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Laughing Queen*, by Elizabeth Louisa Moresby (as E. Barrington).]