

Antony and Cleopatra

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

Antony and Cleopatra

By William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this work may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, audio or video recording, or other, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Contact: paul@wsrightnow.com

Note: Spoken lines from Shakespeare's drama are in the public domain, as is the Globe (1864) edition of his plays, which provided the basic text of the speeches in this new version of *Antony and Cleopatra*. But *Antony and Cleopatra, by William Shakespeare: Presented by Paul W. Collins*, is a copyrighted work, and is made available *for your personal use only*, in reading and study.

Student, beware: This is a *presentation*, not a scholarly work, so you should be sure your teacher, instructor or professor considers it acceptable as a reference before quoting characters' comments or thoughts from it in your report or term paper.

Chapter One Uneasy in Egypt

Wisps of lively conversation—much of it gossip and scandal—float in the tall throne room this afternoon among the crowd of lords and ladies, courtiers and officials, attendants and messengers awaiting the Queen of Egypt.

Off to one side, two Roman soldiers speak quietly and privately. Part of a visiting contingent, they serve in the legions with which the powerful republic keeps control of lands around the Mediterranean basin.

“Nay, but this *dotage* of our general’s o’erflows the measure!” the experienced officer tells the younger, newly arrived from the Italian peninsula. “Those his goodly eyes, that o’er the files and musters of the *war* have glowed like plated *Mars*, now bend, now turn the office and devotion of their view upon a *tawny front!* His *captain’s* heart, which in the struggle of great fights hath burst the buckles on his breast, reneges from all tempering, and he’s become the bellows of a *gypsy’s lust*—and the fan to cool it!”

Even standing still, the soldiers sweat. The sun of a long summer day has broiled Alexandria, the capital founded three hundred years ago by Alexander the Great just west of the wide, fertile delta where the world’s longest river, the Nile, finally dissipates into the sea.

A regal flourish of cornets heralds the queen’s arrival, and the huge doors swing wide to welcome her and her train.

“Look where they come,” says Philo, the older Roman, his voice hushed. “Take but good note, and you shall see in him a *triple pillar of the world* transformed into a *strumpet’s fool!* Behold—and *see...*”

Queen Cleopatra, strikingly attractive at twenty-nine, sweeps imperiously into the marble hall, fanned as she goes by two eunuchs. Her ladies-in-waiting follow, then a cluster of Greek noblemen serving as Egyptian officials, or retained as courtiers, all accompanied by soldiers of her guard.

And striding in beside the queen is Marcus Antonius, rugged and handsome at forty-two, a triumvir—one of three men who, after their victory over the rebel Romans who conspired to kill Julius Caesar, govern Rome and all of its conquests. Mark Antony controls the vast and prosperous eastern territories: Greece and Macedonia; Asia Minor from Lydia to Paphlagonia; Cilicia, Syria and Phoenicia, Cyprus and Judea.

He came to Alexandria a year ago to question Cleopatra about Egyptian support for the defeated forces; but, wholly entranced by the queen’s vivacity, he has remained here as her guest—and lover.

This evening she continues to challenge him playfully: “If it be love *indeed*, tell me *how much!*”

Watching her, he smiles. “There’s *beggary* in the love that can be *counted.*”

“I’ll set a bourn how *far* to be beloved,” she proposes.

“Then thou must needs find out *new heaven*, a *new earth!*”

An attendant approaches him. “News, my good lord, from Rome.”

“*Grates* me,” mutters Antony, irritated; listening to emissaries will take time. “The sum,” he demands impatiently.

“Nay, *hear* them, Antony,” says Cleopatra. She taunts, mentioning his wife, “Fulvia perchance is *angry*. Or, who knows if the scarce-bearded *Caesar*”—Octavius, also a triumvir, is a younger man—“have not sent his powerful *mandate* to you: ‘*Do this*, or *this*; take in that kingdom, and enfranchise *that!*—*perform’t*, or else we *damn* thee!’”

Antony, who finds political duties—and his wife—tedious, wants to change topics. “Now, my love—”

“Perchance,” she persists, “nay, most *likely!*”

“You must not stay here longer,” she concludes abruptly. “Your *dismission* is come from Caesar; therefore hear it, Antony.” She looks peeved. “This is *Fulvia*’s process—Caesar’s, I *should* say. *Both!*”

“Call in the messengers,” she urges.

She enjoys his discomfiture. “As I am Egypt’s queen thou *blushest*, Antony! In *that* blood of thine is Caesar’s *homage!*—else thy cheek so pays *shame* when shrill-tongued *Fulvia* scolds!

“The *messengers*,” she tells the attendant crisply; he bows and goes to fetch them.

Antony scoffs: “Let Rome in Tiber *melt*, and the wide arch of the rangèd empire *fall!* *Here* is my space!

“Kingdoms are *clay*; our dungy earth feeds beast and man alike. The *nobleness* of life is to do *thus!*” he says, clasping her to him. “When such a mutual pair *embrace*—and *such* a twain *can* do’t, which I bind the *world* to recognize, on pain of punishment—we stand up *peerless!*”

As he kisses her neck, Cleopatra is thinking. *Excellent falsehood! Why did he marry Fulvia and not love her? I’ll seem the fool I am not.* “Antony will be himself.”

“But stirred by *Cleopatra!*” he replies, with a charming smile. “Now, for the love of *love* and its soft hours, let’s not confound the time with conference harsh! There’s not a *minute* of our lives should stretch without some *pleasure* now!” He rubs his strong hands together eagerly. “What sport tonight?”

“Hear the ambassadors,” she insists.

“*Fie*, wrangling queen!” says Antony—adding, “whom *everything* becomes: to chide, to laugh, to weep—whose every passion fully strives to make itself, in thee, *fair* and *admirèd!*”

“No messages but *thine!* And all alone tonight we’ll wander through the streets and note the qualities of people! Come, my queen; *last* night you did *desire* it!”

He waves away the approaching emissaries: “Speak not to us.” He grasps her hand, she smiles, dark eyes flashing, and together Antony and Cleopatra leave the throne room and head toward her private quarters.

As the messengers, just arrived after a long voyage, turn to each other in surprise, the queen’s courtiers disperse.

Young Demetrius regards Philo with dismay. “Is Caesar by Antonius prizèd so slightly?” Octavius Caesar, a triumvir at twenty-two, governs the western part of the empire; from Italy and Sicily, it extends through Sardinia and Corsica to Gaul.

Philo nods, disgusted. “Sir, sometimes, when he is but *Antony*”—is disporting—“he comes too short of that great propriety which ever *should* go with Antonius.”

Demetrius is disturbed. “I am full sorry that he confirms the common liar, who speaks thus of him at Rome!

“But I will hope for better deeds tomorrow. Rest you happy.” The officers part for the day.

Demetrius goes to his billet—to write; his secret report will soon be on its way to Rome.

Near the queen’s own bed-chambers, in a large, luxuriously appointed room at the palace, two of her ladies while away their many idle hours in languorous entertainments. Alexas Laodician, one of the Greek noblemen in Cleopatra’s retinue, has promised to have their fortunes told this morning—and it is nearly noon.

Charmian greets him as he arrives: “Lord *Alexas*, *sweet* Alexas, most *anything* Alexas, almost *absolute* Alexas!—where’s the soothsayer that you praised so to the queen?”

“Oh, that I knew *that* husband—one you say could change his *horns* into *garlands!*” A man who can foresee cuckolding might—arguably—prevent it.

Alexas turns toward the door. “Soothsayer!”

“Your will?” says he, coming in.

“Is this the man?” asks Charmian, eying the sad-looking ancient dubiously. “Is’t you, sir, that *know* things?”

“In Nature’s infinite book of secrecy, a little I can read.”

“Show him your hand!” Alexas tells her.

Double doors at the front are pushed open, and Domitius Enobarbus, Antony’s chief lieutenant, enters the room, followed by three servants. “Bring in the banquet—*quickly!*” the massive officer tells the men. “Wine enough *Cleopatra’s* health to drink!”

He expects that she and Antony, after another night of carousing, will rise late, as usual, and want refreshment: fruit, cheese, nuts—and plenty of wine.

As the table is being furnished, Charmian holds out her hand. “Good sir, give me *good fortune!*” she says.

“I make not, only foresee,” the soothsayer replies.

“Pray, then, *foresee* me one!”

He examines her palm. “You shall yet be far fairer than you are.”

“He means in *flesh*,” says Charmian; she knows she can be contentious.

“*No*,” counters her slender young friend Iras, “you shall *paint* when you are old!”

Charmian laughs. “Wrinkles *forbid!*” she tells the visitor.

Alexas scolds them. “Vex not his *prescience*; be attentive!”

Charmian tells Iras, “*Hush*.”

The soothsayer looks at Charmian’s hand. “You shall be more loving than beloved.”

Her experience of love has been very diverse, but always temporary. “I had rather heat my liver with *drinking!*”

“Nay, *hear* him!” admonishes Alexas.

“Good now, some *excellent* fortune!” demands Charmian, imagining. Her eyes widen. “Let me be married to *three kings* in a *forenoon!*—and be *widow* to them all! Let me have a *child* at *fifty*, to whom Herod of Jewry may do *homage!* Find me to *marry* me with *Octavius Caesar!*—and *companion* me with my *mistress!*”

Iras laughs with her.

The soothsayer gazes at Charmian. “You shall outlive the lady whom you serve.”

“Oh, excellent!” she cries glibly. “I love long life better than *figs!*”

The soothsayer regards her. “You have seen and proven a fairer former fortune than that which is to approach.”

“Then belike my children shall have *no names*,” says Charmian dryly. She sighs as if resigned. “Prithee, how many boys and wenches must I have?”

The man smiles. “If every one of your *wishes* had a womb, and *fertile* every wish—a million.”

“*Out, fool!*” she laughs. “I’ll forego *thee* in such a wish!”

Alexas is laughing, too. “You think none but your *sheets* are privy to your wishes?”

Charmian pulls the old soothsayer toward her friend. “Nay, come!—tell Iras *hers!*”

“We’ll *all* know our fortunes!” says Alexas.

Behind them, Enobarbus has watched, and the gruff old warrior is amused. “Mine—and *most* of our fortunes, tonight—shall be: *drunk to bed!*”

Iras holds out a tiny hand demurely. “There’s a palm that presages *chastity*, if nothing else,” she claims.

Charmian laughs: “E’en as the o’erflowing *Nilus* presageth *famine!*”

“*Go to*, you wild bedfellow,” Iras tells her, blushing, “*you* cannot soothsay!”

“Nay, if an *oily palm* be not a fruitful prognostication, I cannot *scratch mine ear!*” retorts Charmian. “Prithee, tell but her *worky-day* fortune!”

“Your fortunes are alike.”

“But *how*, but *how?*” demands Iras. “Give me particulars!”

“I have said.”

Little Iras frowns. “Am I not an inch of fortune better than she?”

“Well, if you were but an *inch* of fortune better than I, where would you choose it?”

Iras grins. “Not in my husband’s *nose!*”

“Our *worser* thoughts, *heavens* mend!” laughs Charmian. She grasps an arm of the jovial Greek. “*Alexas!* Come, *his* fortune, *his* fortune!”

“Oh, let him marry a woman that cannot *come*, I beseech thee sweet *Isis*”—the beautiful Egyptian earth goddess. “And let her *die*, too—and give him a *worse!* Then let worse follow worse till the *worst of all* follows him, laughing, to his grave—*fifty-fold a cuckold!* Good *Isis*, hear me *this* prayer; though thou deny me a matter of more weight, good *Isis*, I beseech thee!”

“*Amen!*” laughs Iras. “Dear goddess, hear that *prayer of the people!* For, as it is heartbreaking to see a *handsome* man loose-wived, so is it a deadly sorrow to behold a *foul knave uncuckolded!* Therefore, dear *Isis*, keep decorum, and fortune him accordingly!”

“*Amen!*” says Charmian.

Even *Alexas* is laughing. “*Lo*, now!—if it lay in their hands to make me a cuckold, they would make themselves *whores* but they’d *do* it!”

Enobarbus has been watchful; he spots movement at the side entrance leading from the queen’s chambers. “*Hush!* Here comes *Antony!*”

“If not he, the queen,” says Charmian.

Cleopatra stalks into the room, alone. “Saw you my lord?”

“No, lady,” Enobarbus replies.

“Was he not here?”

Charmian answers. “No, madam.”

The queen stares down, thinking. “He was disposed to mirth; but on the sudden a *Roman* thought hath struck him.... Enobarbus.”

“Madam?”

“Seek him, and bring him hither. Where’s *Alexas?*”

He steps forward. “Here, at your service.” He nods toward the main doors. “My lord approaches....”

But suddenly Cleopatra is petulantly indignant: “We will not look upon him! *Go with us!*” The others all hasten to follow her.

Visitors and attendants trail *Antony* into the room, as he listens, intently now, to a courier from Rome. “*Fulvia*, thy wife, came *first* into the field,” the officer reports.

Antony frowns. “Against my brother *Lucius?*”

“Aye. But soon *that* war had end, and circumstance made friends of them, joining their forces ’gainst *Caesar*—whose better issue in the war drave them, upon the first encounter, from Italy!”

When stern Lady *Fulvia* raised an army in rebellion against *Octavius*, the first opposition she faced was from the Consul of Rome—*Lucius Antony*, *Mark*’s younger brother. When the in-laws parleyed, they decided to unite forces; but they were soon defeated, thirty leagues north of the capital, by *Caesar*’s legions.

Antony knows the messenger has much more. “Well, what *worst?*”

The soldier is apprehensive. “The nature of bad news infects the teller....”

“When it troubles a fool or coward! *On!*—things that are past are *done*; with me, ’tis thus: who tells me *true*, though in his tale lie death, I hear him as if he flattered.”

“*Labienus*—this *is* stiff news—hath with his Parthian force *extended Asia!* West from the *Euphrates* his conquering banners took from *Syria* to *Lydia*, then to *Ionia*, whilst—” The messenger flushes.

“‘*Antony*,’ thou wouldst say....” *Whilst Antony dallied in Egypt.*

“Oh... my lord—”

“*Speak it home* to me!—*mince* not the general tongue! *Name* *Cleopatra* as she is callèd in *Rome!*—rail thou in *Fulvia*’s phrase, and taunt my faults with such full license as both truth *and* malice have power to utter!

“Oh, we bring forth *weeds* when our quick winds lie still!”—when living voices are silent. “And our ills *told* to us is as our earing!”—*harvest*, with a play on *hearing*. The messenger is relieved—but prudently says nothing. “Fare thee well awhile.”

The officer bows. “At your noble pleasure.”

As the Roman leaves, Antony reflects. Quintus Labienus, an ally of the conspirators against Julius Caesar, fled after his murder to Orodes II, king of the Parthians, and now he has led their army from the Euphrates River—bordering between Rome’s empire and Parthia’s—west into Roman territory, rapidly occupying much of Asia Minor and threatening Greece. And he has moved without hindrance from the triumvir here.

Antony calls for another messenger. “From Sicyon, *ho*, the news! *Speak*, there!”

But an attendant steps forward. “The man from Sicyon—”

“*Is there such an one?*” grumbles Antony impatiently.

“He stays upon your will....” The messenger, irritated at having rushed to the palace only to be kept waiting, has drifted away.

“Let him appear.” Antony ruminates. *These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, or lose myself in dotage!* He sees the second courier approaching. “What have you?”

The man is stone-faced; he has traveled a long way, from Greece. “Fulvia thy wife is dead.”

“Where died she?”

“In Sicyon”—the city, sixteen leagues west of Athens, where she fled after the defeat at Perusia. He hands Antony a letter. “Her length of sickness, with what else more serious importeth thee to know, this bears.”

Antony nods gravely. “Forbear me.” The emissary bows stiffly and leaves.

Mark pictures Fulvia. *There’s a great spirit gone!*

Thus did I desire it, he admits—and he is surprised to feel some remorse. *Often what our contempt doth hurl from us we wish ours again; the present pleasure, by revolution lowering, does become the opposite of itself. She’s good, being gone; the hand would pluck her back that shoved her on.*

But increasingly he has felt burdened with pressing matters which can no longer be ignored. *I must from this enchanting queen break off! Ten thousand harms more than the ills I know of my idleness doth hatch!*

“How now?—*Enobarbus!*”

The veteran soldier has been waiting in the corridor. “What’s your pleasure, sir?”

“I must with haste from hence.”

Enobarbus doesn’t think he means it. “Why, then we kill all our *women!* We see how mortal any *unkindness* is to them; if they suffer our departure, *death*’s the word!”

Antony is resolved. “I must be gone.”

Enobarbus grins. “Under a *compelling* occasion, *let women die!*”—reach the climax during sex; he has enjoyed his time in Alexandria well. But he sighs. “It were pity to cast them away for nothing....”

“Though between them in a *great cause*”—erection—“there *should* be an *esteemèd* ‘nothing!’”

He sees now that Antony is serious. “*Cleopatra*, catching but the least noise of this, dies *instantly!*” he warns. “I have seen her die *twenty times* upon far poorer movement! I do think there is mettle in Death which commits some *loving act* upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying!”

Antony must laugh. “*She is cunning past man’s thought!*”

But the battle-scarred commander admires the young queen’s potent vivacity. “Alack, sir, no. *Her* passions are made of nothing but the finest part of *pure* love! We cannot call *her* winds and waters *sighs* and *tears*—they are greater *storms* and *tempests* than almanacs can report! This cannot be *cunning* in her, if it can be that she makes a shower of rain as well as *Jove!*”

“Would I had never *seen* her!”

“Ah, sir, you had then left unseen a *wonderful piece of work*—which not to have been blest withal would have discredited your *travel!*”

Antony stares down, thinking. “Fulvia is dead.”

“Sir?”

“Fulvia is dead.”

“Fulvia!”

Antony nods. “Dead.”

Enobarbus remembers the haughty, humorless lady. “Why, sir, give the gods a *thankful sacrifice!*”

“When it pleaseth their deities to take the wife of a man from him, it shows to men the *tailors* of the earth *comforting* them—in that when old robes are worn out, there are parts to make *new!*”

“Were there no more *women* but Fulvia, then had you indeed a *cut*, and a *case* to be lamented!”—both words also mean *pudenda*. “*This* grief is crownèd with *consolation*: your old *smock* brings forth a new *petticoat!*—and indeed the tears that should water *this* sorrow live in an *onion!*”

Antony will shed no tears for his troublesome late wife. “The business she hath broachèd in the state cannot endure my absence.”

The warrior’s smile is knowing. “And the business *you* have broached here cannot be without you—especially that of Cleopatra, which depends *in the whole* on your abode!”

Antony waves away the rude comment. “No more light answers!” He wants to proceed. “Let our officers have notice what we purpose.

“I shall break the cause of our expedience to the queen, and get her leave to depart. For not alone the death of Fulvia, but the *letters*, too, with a *more urgent* touch do strongly speak to us of our many conniving ‘friends’ in Rome, and petition us *home*.

“Sextus Pompeius hath *given the dare* to Caesar, and commands the empire of the *sea!*”

“Our slippery *people*, whose love is never linked to the deserver till his deserts are *past*, begin to throw ‘*Pompey the Great*’ and all its dignities upon his *son*, who, high in both name and power—higher than in blood and life,”—than is warranted, “stands up as the day’s *main soldier!*—whose quality, going on, the sides o’ the *world* may endanger!”

“Much is breeding which, like the courser’s hair, hath but life, and not *yet* a serpent’s *poison.*” Peasants believe a stallion’s fallen hair can grow into a snake.

“Say our pleasure to such whose place is under us! Require our quick remove from hence!”

Enobarbus bows. “I shall do’t.” He goes to arrange for the triumvir’s departure, and his party’s voyage north.

Frowning, and running a hand through his hair, Antony heads toward his chambers; more missives are waiting to be opened, at last, and read.

The ladies have returned to their chamber of amusements with Lord Alexas, and they are at the side table, picking over the unused repast.

Cleopatra again emerges alone from her flower-strewn bedroom. “Where *is* he?”

Says Charmian, “I did not see him since—”

“See where he is, who’s with him, what he does,” the queen tells Alexas—warning: “I did not send you. If you find him sad, say I am *dancing*; if in mirth, report that I am sudden *sick*. Quick, and return!” He bows and goes.

Charmian examines a grape. “Madam, methinks, if you did love him dearly, you do not hold the *method* to enforce the like from *him.*”

“What should I do that I do not?”

“In each thing give him way!—cross him in nothing.”

Cleopatra scoffs. “Thou teachest, like a fool, the way to *lose* him!”

“Tempt him not so *too* far!—forbear,” advises Charmian. “In time we *hate* that which we often fear.” She looks toward the bedroom. “But here comes Antony....”

He strides in—resolved, and holding several letters.
Cleopatra appears to pout. *I am sick and sullen.*
He begins, “I am sorry to give breathing to my purpose—”
“*Help me away, dear Charmian!*” Cleopatra knows his tone; she moans, faltering, “I shall *fall!* I cannot be thus strong—these sides of Nature will not sustain it!”
Antony expected this. “Now, my dearest queen—”
“Pray you stand further from me!”
“What’s the matter?”
She says, with dour sarcasm, “I know by that same eye there’s *some* good news. What says the married woman? That you may *go*? Would she had never given you leave to *come!* Let her not say ’tis *I* that keep you here—I have no power upon you; *hers* you are!”
“The gods best know—”
“Oh, never was there queen so *mightily betrayed!* Yet *at the first* I saw the treasons planted!”
“Cleopatra—”
“Why should I think you can be *mine* and *true*, when you have been false to *Fulvia* in so swearing as to *shake* the thronèd *gods!*” She shakes her head. “Riotous *madness*, to be entangled by those *mouth-made* vows which *break themselves* in the swearing!”
“Most sweet queen—”
“Nay, pray you, seek no *colour* for your going, but bid farewell and *go!* When you sued for *staying*, *then* was the time for words! No going *then!*—*eternity* was in my *lips* and *eyes*, *bliss* in my *brow’s* aim!—*none* of my parts so poor but it was a trace of *heaven!*”
“So they are *still!*—or art thou, the greatest *soldier* of the world, turned the greatest *liar?*”
“*How now, lady!*” cries Antony in protest.
“I would I had *thine* inches!” She does not mean just his height. “Thou shouldst know there were a *heart* in Egypt!”
“*Hear me, queen!*” cries Antony. “*Strong necessity* of the *time* commands our services a while!—but my full *heart* remains in use with *you!*”
“*Our Italy* shines o’er with *civil swords!*—*Sextus Pompeius* makes his approaches *at the ports of Rome!*”
Faced with her morose silence, he hastens to explain further. “Equality of two domestic *powers* breeds less-scrupulous *factions*: the *hated*, grown to strength, are newly become *belovèd!*”
“The condemnèd Pompey, rich in his *father’s* honour, creeps apace into the hearts of such as have not thrived within the present state—and whose *numbers threaten!* And quietness, grown sick of *rest*, would *purge itself* by any desperate change!”
He sees that civil strife and piracy do not interest her. “*My more particular*—and that the most by which *you* should vouchsafe my going—is *Fulvia’s death.*”
Cleopatra replies angrily: “Though age from *folly* could not give me freedom, it does from *childishness!* Can *Fulvia die?*”
“*She’s dead, my queen.*” He offers the letters. “Look here, and at thy sovereign leisure read the *garboils* she awaked! At the last, *best*: see when and where she died.”
Cleopatra brusquely pushes away the paper. “Oh, most *false* love! Where be the *sacred* vials thou shouldst *fill with sorrowful water?*”—tears. “*Now I see!*—I see in *Fulvia’s* death how *mine* shall receivèd be!”
Antony, resolute, proceeds. “Quarrel no more, but be prepared to know the *purposes* I bear—which are or cease as *you* shall give me advice! By the fire that quickens Nilus’ slime,”—the life-giving sun, “I go from hence *thy soldier, servant*—making war or peace as *thou affect’st!*”
The queen sags, seems about to faint: “Come Charmian, *cut my lace!*”—to loosen her bodice. She straightens. “But let it be. I am *quickly* ill and well—as Antony *loves!*”
“*My precious queen, forbear,*” he pleads, “and give ‘*true evidence*’ to this love, which withstands any honourable trial.”

“So *Fulvia* told me!” retorts Cleopatra. “I prithee, turn aside and *weep* for *her*—then bid adieu to me, and *say* the tears belong to *Egypt!* Good man, play one scene of excellent *dissembling*, and let it *look* like perfect honour!”

Antony shakes his head in frustration. “*You’ll heat my blood! No more!*”

She appraises that performance: “This is meetly, but you can do *better* yet.”

“Now, *by my sword*—”

“—‘and *shield!*’” adds Cleopatra, continuing with her stage-acting metaphor. “Still, he *mends*; but this is not the *best*... Look, prithee, Charmian, how this *Herculean* Roman does become the *carriage* of his chafe!”—simulates fury.

She knows how to goad him; Antony encourages comparison to his putative forefather.

“I’ll leave you, lady,” he growls.

As he starts away she catches his arm. “Courteous lord, one word! Sir, you and I must *part*—but that’s not it....” She frowns, apparently puzzled. “Sir, you and I have *loved*...—but there’s not it; that you know well. Something it is I would....” She sighs. “*Oh*, my oblivion is a very *Antony*—I have all *forgotten!*”

He pulls away, exasperated. “But that Your Royalty holds *Idleness* as your *subject*, I should take you for *Idleness itself!*”

She touches his chest. “’Tis a *sweating* labour to bear such idleness, when *this* heart is so near *Cleopatra’s*,” she reminds him. “But, sir, forgive me, since *my* comings *kill* me,” she says, with blatant sarcasm, “when they do not eye well to *you!*”

She pushes him away. “Your *honour* calls you *hence*; therefore be deaf to my unpitied *folly!* Then may all the gods go with you; upon your sword sit laurel victory. And smooth success be strewed before your feet.”

Antony regards her with open affection. “Let us go,” he says quietly, trying to take her by the hand. “Come, our separation abides *and* flies, so that *thou*, residing here, goest yet *with me*—and I, hence fleeting, here remain with *thee!*”

She turns her back on him.

With that, he storms out. “*Away!*”

Eyes averted, Charmian wisely holds her peace, certain that the queen has lost her lover.

Cleopatra knows he must return.

Chapter Two **Arguments, Agreements**

Rome is humid, but the full heat of summer sun has yet to penetrate the huge stone mansion of Octavius Caesar as he confers at a table with the third triumvir. Aemilius Lepidus, a general of fifty, has come here from Carthage; he governs the empire’s territories in northern Africa, including Numidia and Libya.

“You may see, Lepidus, and henceforth *know*: it is not Caesar’s *natural* voice to revile our great colleague”—Mark Antony. He opens a written report: “From Alexandria, this is the news: ‘he *fishes*, *drinks*, and wastes the lamps of night in *revels!* ... is not more *man*-like than *Cleopatra*, nor is the queen more womanly than *he!*... hardly gave audience, or vouchsafed to think he has *partners!*”

“You shall find, there,” Caesar says angrily, “a man who is the *abstract* of *all faults* that men follow!”

But Lepidus knows and respects Antony. “I must not think there are evils enough to darken all *his* goodness! His faults seem, in *him*, as the spots of heaven: more fiery by night’s blackness—*hereditary* rather than purchased—which he *cannot change*, more than what he *chooses.*”

“You are too indulgent,” says Octavius. “Let us grant it is *not* amiss to *tumble* on the bed of Ptolemy,”—Rome’s previous emissary to Egypt, “to *give away a kingdom* for *mirth*, to sit and *keep turns* tippling with a *slave*, to *reel* on the streets at *noon*, and stand the buffeting”—take blows in a brawl—“of *knaves* that smell of *sweat*!

“Say this *becomes* him—and his composition must be rare *indeed*, whom these things cannot blemish!—yet must Antony in no way be excused his soils when *we* do bear so great *weight* during his *lightness*! If he filled *his own* vacancy”—personal hours—“with voluptuousness, his fell surfeits and the dryness of his bones call on him for’t. But to *confound such a time*—that *drums* him from his sport, and speaks as loud as his own state and *ours*!—’tis to be chidden as we *berate boys* who, being immature in experience, pawn their knowledge for their *present pleasure*, and so rebel from *judgment*!”

Lepidus looks toward the door as a messenger hurries in. “Here’s more news.”

The man bows before Octavius. “Thy biddings have been done, and every hour, most noble Caesar, shalt thou have report how ’tis abroad.

“Pompey is *strong* at sea, and it appears he is beloved by those that only have *feared* Caesar. To the ports those discontented repair, and men’s reports find him to have been much *wronged*.”

Caesar nods, hardly surprised that his detractors are rallying to support Sextus Pompeius, now based in Sicily, which he has taken by force. “I should have known no less. It hath been taught us from the primal state that he who is ebbèd was *wishèd* so until he were, and a man ne’er loved, nor *worthy* of love, becomes dearer by *being lacked*! This *common* body,”—plebeians, “like a vagabond ship upon the stream, goes to and back, tacking with the varying tide, itself in *rotation* with the motion!”

Another messenger arrives. “Caesar,” he says, bowing, “I bring thee word: Menecrates and Menas, infamous *pirates*, make the sea, which they plow and wound with keels of every kind, *serve* them!” The two freebooters’ many stolen ships now support Pompey’s domination of the western Mediterranean. “Many hot inroads they make in Italy: the *oldest* mariners lack blood to *think* on’t, and flush *youth revolts*!

“No vessel can peep forth but ’tis *taken* as soon as *seen*! *Pompey’s* name strikes more fear than it could if his *wars* persisted!”—the late general’s reputation adds to his son’s.

In particular, the rebel lord’s seizing of grain shipments has meant persistent shortages of bread in the capital—a grave political problem for Caesar. He pounds the table in angry frustration. “*Antony*, leave thy lascivious *wassails*!”

Octavius remembers privations which the valiant warrior has endured. “When thou once wast beaten from Modena, where thou slew’st Consuls Hirtius and Pansa, at thy heel did *Famine* follow!—whom thou fought’st against, though elegantly brought up, with patience more than *savages* could suffer!

“Thou didst drink the *stale of horses* from a greened-over puddle which *beasts* would cough at! Thy palate then did deign the roughest berry on the rudest hedge! Yea, like the stag when snow the pasture sheets, from the barks of trees thou grazed; on the Alps, it is reported, thou didst eat strange flesh which *some* did die to *look* upon!

“And *all that*—it now wounds thine honour that I speak it!—was borne so like a *soldier* that thy *cheek* not so much as lankèd!”

Lepidus laments the change: “’Tis pitiful in him.”

Caesar fumes. “Let his *shames* quickly *drive him to Rome*!” He regards Lepidus gravely. “’Tis time we twain did show ourselves *in the field*!—and to that end assemble we in immediate council. Pompey *thrives* in our *idleness*!”

Lepidus nods agreement. “Tomorrow, Caesar, I shall be furnishèd to inform you rightly with what, by both sea and land, I can be able to *confront* this present time.”

“Till which encounter, that is *my* business, too. Farewell.”

“Farewell, my lord,” says Lepidus. “What you shall know, meantime, of stirs abroad, I shall beseech you, sir, to let me be partaker.”

“Doubt not, sir.” Caesar frowns, thinking of Antony. “*I know it for my bond.*”

To Cleopatra, Alexandria seems dreary and dull lacking the lusty Antony, and too quiet, without his tough and hard-drinking corps of Roman officers. Left languishing, despite her palace’s extravagant luxury, the queen finds herself listless.

“*Charmian*,” she calls.

“Madam?”

Cleopatra yawns. “Give me, to drink, mandragora”—a medicine, but narcotic in larger doses.

“Why, madam?”

“That I might *sleep out* this great gap of time my Antony is away. “

“You think of him too much.”

“Oh, ’tis *treason!*” moans Cleopatra.

“Madam, not so, I trust.”

The queen looks around the court. “Thou—eunuch Mardian.”

The fat court musician comes to her and bows. “What’s Your Highness’ pleasure?”

“Not now to hear *thee* sing; I take no *pleasure* in aught an *eunuch* has,” she says, sourly.

“’Tis well for thee, being unscimitared, that *thy* freer thoughts may not fly forth from Egypt’s!”—emasculated, he must of necessity feel as she does.

She regards him curiously. “Hast thou *affections?*”

If he is offended, he does not show it. “Yes, gracious madam.”

“Indeed?” She is mildly surprised.

“Not in *deed*, madam,” says Mardian, “for I can do nothing but what indeed is *honest* to be done.” He opens his eyes wide to add, “Yet have I *fierce* affections in *thinking* of what Venus did with Mars!”

Trying, futilely, to escape awareness of her persistent—and growing—desire, she waves him away. As he turns and goes, her obvious frustration brings a satisfied smile to his round face.

Cleopatra sighs again, and stares at the ceiling. “Oh, Charmian, where think’st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he? Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse?”

“Oh, *happy* horse, to bear the weight of *Antony!* Do so *bravely*, horse!—for wot’st thou whom thou movest?—the demi-Atlas of this *earth*, the arm and burgonet of *men!*”

She closes her eyes. “He’s speaking now—or *murmuring*, ‘Where’s my serpent of old Nile?’—for so he calls me.”

But *old* stirs concern. “Now I feed myself with most delicious *poison!*” She asks her absent lover, “Think on *me*, that am with Phoebus’ amorous pinches *dark*, and *wrinkled* deep in *time?*”—sunburned and aging.

Charmian rolls her eyes. Cleopatra would never permit sunlight to make her resemble a native Egyptian laborer. She is descended from Alexander the Great’s Macedonian general Ptolemaios; her patrician ancestors, ruling Egypt for two hundred and fifty years, were all Greek. And Cleopatra VII is not yet thirty.

The queen recalls the days, eight years past, when Julius Caesar was her lover, and earlier, when Gnaeus Pompey—Sextus’ older brother—lingered in Alexandria amid rumors about his involvement with her.

“Broad-fronted *Caesar*, when *thou* wast here above the ground, I was a morsel for a *monarch!*”

“And ‘great Pompey’ would *stand*—make even his *eyes* grow—seeing my *face!* There would he anchor his aspect—then *die*, looking on his *life!*”—reach satisfaction while contemplating the young queen’s lovely features.

Cleopatra’s sensual reverie is interrupted by the return, from Rome, of the portly Lord Alexas. “Sovereign of Egypt, hail!” he says, bowing deeply.

“How *much* art thou unlike Mark Antony,” says Cleopatra. “Yet, coming *from* him, that great medicine hath with its tinct *gilded* thee! How goes it with my brave Mark Antony?”

Alexas smiles, and offers, held up between his fingers, a beautiful gift. “Last thing he did, dear queen, he kissed—the last of *many doubled* kisses!—this *orient pearl!* His speech sticks in my heart!”

“Mine ear must pluck it thence!” cries Cleopatra, clapping her hands together happily.

“‘Good friend,’ quoth he, *soberly*, ‘say the firm Roman sends this treasure of an oyster to great *Egypt*—at whose foot, to *mend* this petty present, I will increase her throne with *opulent kingdoms!* *All the East*, say thou, shall call her mistress!’

“He nodded, and did mount an armour-guarded steed, which neighed so high that what I would have spoken was beastly silenced by it!”

Cleopatra, taking the pearl without even glancing at it, frowns. “What was he, sad or merry?”

“Like to the time o’ the year between the extremes of hot and cold; he was neither sad *nor* merry.”

“Oh, *well*-divided disposition!” says Cleopatra. “Note him, *note* him good Charmian!—’tis *the man!* Just note him! He was not *sad*, for he would shine on those that make up their looks by his; he was not *merry*, which might tell them his remembrance lay in *Egypt*, with his *joy*—but *between both!*”

“O heavenly *mingler!* Be’st thou sad *or* merry, the violence of either becomes thee as it does no man else!”

She turns back to Alexas. “Met’st thou my posts?”

“*Aye*, madam!—*twenty* several messengers! Why do you send so thick?”

“Who’s born that day when I forget to *send to Antony* shall die *a-begging!*”—nothing will command attention. “Ink and paper, Charmian! *Welcome*, my good Alexas!

“Did I, Charmian, ever love *Caesar* so?” she asks, giddy with pleasure.

“Oh, that brave Caesar!”

“Be *choked* with *another* such emphasis!” warns Cleopatra. “Say, ‘that brave *Antony!*’”

But Charmian remembers. “Then ‘valiant’ Caesar.”

“By Isis, I will give thee *bloody teeth*,” says Cleopatra, “if thou wilt Caesar paragon against my *man of men!*”

Charmian backs away. “By your most gracious *pardon*, I sing but after *you!*”—echo her comments.

Cleopatra shrugs. “My *salad* days: then I was green in judgment, cold in blood, to have said as I said then.

“But, come, *away!*—get me ink and paper! He shall have every day *several* greetings, or I’d unpeople Egypt!”

Messina, in northeastern Sicily, is but one league from Italy, just across the narrow strait. At his stronghold in the port city, Sextus Pompeius, twenty-eight, impatiently holds council with his graying seafaring commanders, Menecrates and Menas—both formerly slaves of Pompey’s father, and now freed men. Menas has gone outside to talk with a spy.

The rebellious Roman is expecting war, given his attempt to overthrow the republic’s government, and Pompey wants to attack first. He tells Menecrates firmly, “If the great gods be *just*, they shall *assist* the deeds of justest men!”

The brigand has been urging caution. “Know, worthy Pompey, that what they do delay, they not *deny*....”

Pompey counters, “Whiles we are *suitors* to their throne, the thing we sue for *decays!*”

Menecrates relishes extorting riches from Rome—but facing its marshaled legions and advanced naval force is much less tempting. “We, ignorant ourselves, often beg our own *harms*, which the wiser powers deny us for our good; so we find profit by the *losing* of our prayers!”

But Pompey is confident: “I shall do *well!* The *people* love me, and the sea is *mine*; my powers are crescent,”—arcing upward, “and my auguring hope says it will come to the full!”—like a rising moon.

He holds the Triumvirate in contempt. “Mark Antony in *Egypt* sits at *dinner*, and will make no wars *out-of-doors!* Caesar gets *money* where he loses *hearts!* Lepidus flatters both, by both is flattered—but he *neither* loves, nor cares either for *him!*”

Menas comes in to them, alarmed. “Caesar and Lepidus are *in the field!*—a mighty strength they carry!”

“Where hear you this?” demands Pompey. “’Tis *false!*”

“From Silvius, sir.”

“He *dreams!* I know they are in *Rome* together, waiting for Antony.” Pompey smiles, thinking of what keeps Antony back. “By all the charms of *love*, salty Cleopatra, soften thy wanèd lip! Let *witchcraft* join with beauty, *lust* with both! Tie up the libertine on a field of *feasts!*—keep his brain *fuming!* May Epicurean cooks sharpen his appetite with cloyless sauces, so that *feeding* and *sleep* may prorogue his honour even to a *Lethe*—èd dullness!” The Lethe is Hades’ river of forgetfulness.

They are joined by the commander of Pompey’s land forces. “How now, Varrius?”

“This is most certain, which I shall deliver: Mark Antony is *every hour* in Rome expected! Since he went from Egypt, ’tis a space for *even further* travel!”

“I could have given less *matter* a better ear!” says Pompey, now feeling concern. “Menas, I did not think the amorous surfeiter would have donned his helm for such a petty war,” he admits—and frowns. “*His* soldiership is *twice* the other twain.

“But if our stirring can pluck the ne’er-lust-wearied Antony from the lap of Egypt’s widow, let this *rear the higher* our *own* esteem!” Cleopatra’s first two nominal husbands—her young brothers, wed to her under provisions of a tradition adopted from the Pharaohs, died.

Menas foresees strife in Rome. “I cannot believe Caesar and Antony shall well greet together! His wife that’s dead did *trespass* against Caesar; his brother *warred* upon him!—although, I think, not so movèd by Antony.”

Pompey ponders. “I know not, Menas, how *lesser* enmities may give way to *greater*. Were’t not that *we* stand up against them *all*, ’twere pregnant they should square off between themselves—for they have entertained *cause* enough to draw their swords!

“But how the fear of us may *cement* their forces, and bind up the petty difference, we yet not know.

“Be’t as our gods will have’t! Upon our *lives* it stands, only to use our *strongest hands!*”

“Come, Menas!”

The three repair to Pompey’s fleet, lying at anchor—and already taking on stores for battle.

Lepidus has offered his large house in Rome as a meeting place for the two other members of the Triumvirate: Octavius Caesar and Marcus Antonius. Standing at the center of the long dining hall just before they arrive, he is, as usual, urging moderation and restraint.

“Good Enobarbus, ’tis a worthy deed, and shall become you well, to entreat your captain to *soft* and *gentle* speech. . . .”

The blunt-speaking soldier shrugs. “I shall entreat him to answer like *himself*. If Caesar anger him, let Antony look over Caesar’s head, and speak as loud as Mars!”—the god of war. “By Jupiter, were *I* the wearer of Antonius’ beard, I would not *trim* it today!”—wouldn’t seem at all accommodating.

Lepidus frowns. “’Tis not a time for private challenge.”

“Every time serves for the matter that is then born in’t.”

“But small to *greater* matters must give way.”

“Not if the smaller *moves first!*”

“Your speech has passion, but, pray you, stir no embers up!” Lepidus hears a guest arriving. “Here comes the noble Antony.”

Listening to Mark Antony, beside the door of the hall, is his brilliant deputy commander, Publius Ventidius Bassus.

“And yonder, Caesar,” says Enobarbus. Conferring with Octavius at the opposite door are his admiral, Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, and Gaius Cilnius Maecenas, a renowned military officer.

- As they approach Lepidus, Antony tells his general, privately, “Hark, Ventidius: if we compose well here, *on to Parthia!*” He intends to drive back the eastern invaders there.

- Caesar pauses to reply: “I do not know, Maecenas; ask Agrippa.”

Lepidus greets both sides warmly. “Noble friends, that which *combined* us was most great!—then let not a leaner action *rend* us! What’s amiss, may it be *gently* heard; when we debate our trivial difference *loud*, we do commit murder on healing wounds.”

But the other two are sharply aware that their grievances have hardly been healing.

Lepidus persists. “Then, noble *partners*, the rather—for so I earnestly beseech—touch you upon the sourest points with sweetest terms; let not curstness grow in the manner!”

“’Tis spoken well,” says Antony. “Were we before our armies, about to fight, I should do thus.”

“Welcome to Rome,” Caesar tells the visitor curtly.

“Thank you.”

“Sit,” says Octavius, pointing to a heavy, carved-oak chair.

Antony waits. “Sit, sir.”

“Nay, thou.”

Antony glares. “I learn that you *take things ill* which are *not* so!—or so being, *concern* you not!”

Caesar scoffs. “I should be *laughed* at if I would say myself offended over either *nothing* or a *little*—or with *you* chiefly i’ the world! *More* laughed at if I should once name you *derogately*, when to sound your name concerns me not!”

“My being in *Egypt*, Caesar—what was’t to *you*?” demands Antony.

“No more than *my* residing here at *Rome* might be to you in Egypt. Yet, if you there did *move against my state*, your being in Egypt *might be my question!*”

“How intend you, ‘*move*’?”

Says Caesar—with bitter sarcasm, “You may be pleased to *catch at* mine intent by what did here *befall* me!—your *wife* and *brother* made *wars* upon me! And their theme for contestation was *you*—*you* were the word for *war!*”

“You do mistake your business,” says Antony coldly. “My brother never did cite *me* in his acts! I did *inquire* of it—and have *my* learning from reports of some who drew their true swords *with you!*”

“Did he not, rather, discredit *my* authority along with *yours*?—and make the wars to *my vexation*, having alike *your cause!* Of that my letters did satisfy you *before*; if now you’d *patch together* a quarrel—having wholly *no* matter to make it with!—it must not be with *this!*”

“You praise yourself by laying *defects* of judgment to me,” Caesar counters, “but *you* patched up: your *excuses!*”

Antony shakes his head. “Not so, *not so!* I know—I am *certain* of’t!—you could not lack the very *necessity* of *this* thought: that I, your *partner* in the cause ’gainst which my brother fought, could not with grateful eyes attend those wars which *confronted mine own peace!*”

“As for my *wife*, I would that you had *her* spirit in *thine!* A third o’ the *world* is yours, which with a bridle you may lead in peace—but *not with such a bride!*”

Enobarbus chuckles. “Would we *all* had such wives! So, the women might go to wars *with* the men!”

Antony continues: “One so *uncurbable*, Caesar, that her garboils, made out of her impatience—which lacked not shrewdness of *policy*, too, I grievingly grant—did you too much *disquiet!* As for that, you must but say *I could not help it!*”

Caesar glares. “I *wrote* to you! Rioting in Alexandria, you did *pocket up* my letters, and with taunts did gibe my emissary out of audience!”

Antony dismisses the issue: “Sir, he fell upon me *ere admitted*—when *three kings* I had newly *feasted*, and did lack of knowing *what I was* i’ the morning! But next day I told him of myself—which was as much as to have *asked his pardon!* Let that fellow be *nothing* in our strife; if we contend, out of our question wipe him.”

Caesar flares: “You have *broken the article of your oath!*—which you shall never have tongue to charge *me* withal!”

Their host flushes. “*Soft, Caesar!*”

“No, Lepidus, let him speak,” says Antony. “The honour is *sacred* which he talks of, now supposing that I lacked it. But, *on, Caesar:* the article of my oath...”

“To lend me *arms* and *aid* when I required them!—both of which you *denied!*”

Antony shrugs. “*Neglected*, rather—and *then* when poisoned hours”—those lost to alcohol—“had bound me up from mine own knowledge.”

He faces Octavius. “As nearly as I may, I’ll play the *penitent* to you; but mine *honesty* shall not make poor my *greatness*—nor place my *power* outside it! Truth is that Fulvia, to have me out of *Egypt*, made wars *here!*—for which myself, the ignorant motive, do so far ask pardon as befits mine honour to stoop in such a case.”

Lepidus nods, smiling. “’Tis nobly spoken.”

Maecenas addresses Caesar and Antony: “If it might please you to enforce no further the griefs between ye, remembering what *the present need* speaks were to atone you to *forget them quite!*”

“Worthily spoken, Maecenas!” says Lepidus.

Adds Enobarbus, “Or, if you *borrow* one another’s love for the instant, you may, when you hear no more words of *Pompey*, return it again. You shall have time to wrangle in when you have nothing *else* to do!”

Antony frowns at his rough lieutenant. “Thou art a *soldier only*; speak no more!”

“That *truth* should be *silent* I had almost forgot,” grumbles Enobarbus.

“You wrong this presence; therefore speak no more!”

“Go *to*, then,” mutters Enobarbus. He bows—too deeply. “Your considering *stone.*”

“I do not so much dislike the manner as the *matter* of his speech,” says Caesar. “For it cannot be that we shall remain in *friendship*, our conditions so differing in their acts!” At that, Lepidus is visibly upset.

“Yet,” adds Caesar, “if I knew what hoop could hold us staunch, from edge to edge o’ the *world* I would *pursue* it!” He is painfully aware that, in addition to the menace of Pompey and his pirates, they face that of the still-advancing Parthians, whose troops occupy Rome’s eastern provinces.

“Give me leave, Caesar...”

Caesar nods to him. “Speak, Agrippa.”

“Thou hast a *sister* by thy mother’s side: admirèd *Octavia*. Great Mark Antony is now a widower...”

Says Caesar wryly, “Say not *so*, Agrippa!—if *Cleopatra* heard you, your reproof were well deservèd for *rashness!*”

Antony ignores the gibe; he wants an amicable agreement. “I am not married, Caesar. Let me hear Agrippa further speak.”

“To hold you in perpetual amity,” says the admiral, looking from one to the other, “to make you *brothers*, and to knit your hearts with an unslipping knot, may Antony take Octavia to be his *wife!*—whose beauty claims no worse a husband than the *best* of men, whose virtue and whose general graces speak that which none else can utter!

“By this marriage, all little jealousies, which now seem great, and all great fears which now impart their dangers, would then be as *nothing!* *Truths* would be told where now *half-truths* be tales. Her love for you both would draw each to the other, and *all* loves after her, to *both!*”

“Pardon what I have spoken,” says Agrippa, “for ’tis a studied, not a present thought, by duty ruminated.”

“Will Caesar speak?” asks Antony. He doubts that the naval commander would have put forward such a bold idea unless he had discussed it with Octavius.

“Not till he hears how Antony is touched with what is spoken already.”

Antony tests: “What power is in Agrippa, if I would say, ‘Agrippa, be it so!’ to make this good?”

Caesar answers: “The power of Caesar, and his power unto Octavia.”

Antony beams. “May *I* never *dream* of impediment to this good purpose, that so *fairly* shows! Let me have thy hand! *Further* this act of grace!—and from this hour the hearts of *brothers* govern in our loves, and sway our great designs!”

“There is my hand,” says Caesar, smiling. As they shake hands, he regards Antony. “A sister I bequeath you whom no brother did ever love so dearly! Let her live to join our *kingdoms* and our *hearts*; and never fly off our loves again!”

Lepidus is delighted. “Happily, *amen!*”

Antony has one concern: “I did not intend to draw my sword ’gainst Pompey, for he hath laid unusual courtesies, and *great*, upon me of late. I must *thank* him—only lest my remembrance suffer ill report.

“At heel of *that*, *defy* him!”

“*Time* calls upon ’s,” warns Lepidus. “Pompey must be sought by us *immediately*, or else *he* seeks out *us!*”

Antony asks, “Where lies he?”

“About the mount Misenum,” says Caesar.

“What is his strength by land?”

“Great, and increasing—but by *sea* he is an absolute master!”

Antony nods. “So is the fame. Haste we for it! I would we had spoken together....”

“Yet, ere we put ourselves in *arms*, dispatch we the business we have talked of!”

“With utmost gladness!” says Caesar. “And I do invite you to my sister’s view, whither straight I’ll lead you.”

Antony turns to their host. “Let us, Lepidus, not lack *your* company!”

“Noble Antony, not *sickness* should detain me!”

The Triumvirate, nearly reunited, departs for the estate of Octavius Caesar.

Chapter Three **Confirming Alliances**

The grizzled warriors stay behind, and they renew acquaintance. Maecenas tells

Enobarbus, “Welcome from Egypt, sir!”

“Half the heart of Caesar, worthy *Maecenas!*” says Antony’s man heartily. “My honourable friend, *Agrippa!*”

“Good Enobarbus!” says the admiral.

“*We* have cause to be glad that matters are so well digested,” says Maecenas, smiling at a man with whom he might have fought. He glances at Enobarbus’s increased girth. “You’ve stayed *well* by’t in Egypt!” He has heard much about the dissolute life led by Romans there.

“*Aye*, sir,” says Enobarbus, “we did sleep *day* out of countenance, and made the night *light* by *drinking!*”

“*Eight wild boars* roasted, whole, at a *breakfast!*—and but twelve persons there!—is this *true?*”

“That was but as a *fly* to an *eagle!*” laughs Enobarbus. “We had *much* more shocking matter for feasting that worthily deserves noting!” he says, winking.

Maecenas pictures Cleopatra. “She’s a most *triumphant* lady, if report be square about her.” Enobarbus nods. “When she *first met* Mark Antony, upon the river Cydnus, she pursèd up his heart!”

“There she appeared *well indeed!*—or my reporter *devised* for her,” says Agrippa, obviously eager to hear more.

“I will tell you,” says Enobarbus.

He closes his eyes for a moment, remembering. “The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, *burned* on the water!—the deck was of *beaten gold*; *purple* the sails, and so perfumèd that the *winds* were love-sick with them; the oars were *silver* which to the tune of flutes kept time, and made the water which they beat to flow faster, as if *amorous* of their *strokes!*”

“As for her own person, it beggared all description! She did lie in her pavilion—cloth-of-gold on tissue—o’er-picturing that ‘Venus’ where we see *Fancy* outwork *Nature!* On each side of her stood pretty, dimpled boys, like smiling *Cupids*, with divers-coloured fans whose wind did seem to *glow* the delicate cheeks which they did cool, and what they did *undid!*”

Agrippa savors the floating image. “Oh, *rare!* For Antony!”

Enobarbus continues: “Her gentlewomen like the *Nereides*, so many attended i’ her eyes, and made their bends *adornings*; at the helm, a seeming *mermaid* steers—and the silken sails *swell yarely* with the touches of those flower-soft hands that frame the tackle!

“From the barge, a strange, invisible *perfume* hies to the senses on the adjacent wharfs!”

Enobarbus chuckles. “The city cast her people out to meet her—but *Antony*, enthronèd i’ the market-place, did sit *alone*, whistling to the *air!*—which, but for *vacancy*”—leaving a vacuum—“would have gone to gaze on Cleopatra, *too*, and made a gap in Nature!”

“Rare Egyptian!” breathes Agrippa, stirred by the exotic imagery.

“Upon her landing,” Enobarbus tells them, “Antony sent to her, invited her to supper. She replied that it should be better if *he* became *her* guest—which she entreated.

“Our courteous Antony—that ne’er has *woman* heard speak the word ‘no’—being barbered *ten times o’er!*—goes to the feast.

“And to settle the bill, pays his *heart* for what only his *eyes* eat!”

“Royal *wench!*” cries Agrippa. “She made great Caesar lay *his* ‘sword’ to bed!—he *ploughed* her, and she *cropped!*” Cleopatra’s young son, Ptolemy Caesar—Caesarion, as he is known—was fathered by Julius Caesar.

And Enobarbus has another story of a dissolute sovereign. “I saw her once *walk* forty paces through the public street!—and, having lost her *breath*, when she spoke so panted that she did make a defect *perfection*—and breathless *poured forth breath!*” The pampered queen, alighting from the canopied chair on which she is customarily carried by slaves, had briefly gone afoot, then—apparently exhausted—charmed onlookers by speaking to them.

Maecenas shakes his head: “And now Antony must leave her utterly!”

“*Never,*” says Enobarbus flatly. “He will *not!* Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety; other women cloy the appetites they feed, but *she* makes *hungry* where most she satisfies!—for vilest things *become* themselves in her, so much that the holy priests *bless* her when she is lecherous!”

But Maecenas is hopeful. “If *beauty, wisdom, modesty* can settle the heart of Antony, Octavia is a blessed lottery to him.” *If.* Even he, devoted to Caesar and his sister, wonders how the virtuous lady will fare against the sultry siren.

Agrippa is hungry. “Let us go. Good Enobarbus, make yourself my guest whilst you abide here!”

Antony’s general has many more tales to tell—over good wine, he hopes. “Humbly, sir, I thank you!”

At the house of Octavius Caesar, Mark Antony and Lady Octavia have met; and they are now betrothed. As they stand just outside, Antony takes her hand. He kisses it, and says,

sadly, “The world and my great office will sometimes divide me from your bosom....”

Octavia, tall, fair-haired and comely at twenty-six, replies softly. “All of which time, before the gods my knee shall bow in my prayers to them for *you*.”

“Good night, sir,” Antony says to Caesar. “My Octavia, read not my blemishes in the world’s report; I have not kept myself squared, but that *to come* shall all be done by the rule. Good night, dear lady.” He kisses her cheek.

She smiles. “Good night, sir.”

“Good night,” says Octavius.

He and his sister go into the mansion. Antony and his attendants head for his own house, previously the dwelling of a late Roman general, Pompey the Great.

When Antony reaches his home, he spots, frowning among the household servants, the aged soothsayer, brought with him from Alexandria to Rome.

“Now, sirrah, do you wish yourself in Egypt?”

The soothsayer is even more dour than usual. “Would I had never come from thence—nor *you thither!*”

“If you can say, your *reason?*”

“I *see* it in my mind, have it not in my tongue—but yet, *hie you to Egypt again!*”

Antony is thinking. “Say to me: whose fortunes shall rise *higher*, Caesar’s or *mine?*”

“*Caesar’s*—therefore, O Antony, stay not by his side! Thy daemon—that’s thy spirit, which keeps thee—is noble, courageous, high—*unmatchable!*—while Caesar’s is not. But, *near* him, thine angel becomes afeared of being *o’erpowered!* Therefore make space enough between you!”

“Speak this no more.”

The soothsayer nods. “To none but *thee*; no more but when to thee.” He continues: “If thou dost play with him at any game, thou art sure to *lose*—and in that natural luck, he beats thee *’gainst the odds*. Thy lustre fades when *he* shines nearby!

“I say again: thy *spirit* is all afraid to govern thee near him; but, he away, ’tis *noble*.”

Antony waves the man off. “Get thee gone! Say to Ventidius I would speak with him; he shall go to *Parthia*.”

The soothsayer bows, then goes to summon the commander. Antony is sending his legions, to be led by Ventidius, into Syria and Asia Minor to drive back Labienus’s invaders.

Antony ruminates on the graybeard’s words concerning Octavius. *Be it art or hap, he hath spoken true!*

The very dice obey him!—and in our sports my better cunning faints under his luck! If we draw lots, he wins; his cocks do win the battle over mine even when it is all-to-nought; and, quail inhoopèd, his ever beat mine, despite odds!

And now he thinks of Cleopatra. *I will go to Egypt!*

And though I make this marriage for my peace, my pleasure lies in the east!

The general finds him.

“Now, come, Ventidius; you must to Parthia. Your commission’s ready; follow me, and receive’t.”

Maecenas and Agrippa have been meeting with Lepidus to complete preparations for combining their powerful force, most of them already on the move. They are to unite near Mount Mesena, a promontory overlooking the harbor at Misenum, about thirty leagues from Rome on the eastern coast of Italy.

The town is the stronghold of Sextus Pompeius: from there his predatory ships set forth to seize shipments of grain arriving from Sicily, Africa and Egypt. Their success has meant that Rome’s citizens face famine.

“Trouble yourselves no further,” urges Lepidus. “Pray you, hasten you generals after!”

Agrippa, too, is convinced that the political division has ended. “Sir, Mark Antony will e’en but *kiss* Octavia and we’ll follow!”

“Till I shall see you in your *soldiers’* dress, which will become you both,” says Lepidus, “farewell!”

“We shall, as I conceive the journey, be at the Mount before you, Lepidus,” says Maecenas. With Agrippa, he will travel by sea.

Lepidus concurs. “Your way is shorter; my purposes do draw me much about. You’ll win two days upon me.”

“Sir, *good success*,” Agrippa wishes the triumvir, as he and Maecenas head for the harbor.

Lepidus waves. “Farewell!”

He signals for his own assembled troops to begin the march southward.

In the tall throne room of her sprawling palace at Alexandria, the indolent Queen of Egypt holds desultory court this afternoon, sitting with her jaded followers.

“Give me some music—*music*, moody food of us that trade in love.”

A languid attendant calls to another. “The music, *ho!*” Soon, men bring in their instruments and begin to play softly. Mardian has entered with them, and he bows.

“Let it alone,” Cleopatra tells the musicians, rising and pushing back her hair. “Let’s to billiards. Come, Charmian.”

“My arm is sore,” whines Charmian. “Best play with Mardian.”

Cleopatra retorts, peeved, “A woman plays as *well* with an eunuch as with a woman. Come, you’ll *play* with me, sir?”

“As well as I can, madam.”

“And when good *will* is showed, though’t come too *short*,” she tells the bald eunuch, “the actor may plead pardon.” But she changes her mind. She sighs. “I’ll none now.”

“Give me mine angle”—fishing gear. “We’ll to the river. There, with *my music*”—her lover—“playing far off, *I* will betray—tawny-finnèd *fishes!* *My* bended hook shall *pierce* their slimy jaws; and, as I draw them up, I’ll think them every one an *Antony*, and say, ‘*Aha!*—you’re *caught!*’”

Charmian glances up, remembering a prank played on Antony down along the delta. “’Twas merry when you *wagered* on your angling!—and your *diver* did hang a *salted* fish on his hook—which he with *fergency* drew up!”

“*That* time, of all the times, I laughed him *out of patience!*” Cleopatra smiles. But that *night* I laughed him *into* patience! And next morn, ere the ninth hour I’d *drunk him to his bed*—then put my *tire and mantles*—hair-piece and clothes—“on *him*, whilst *I* wore his *sword*, Phillippan!”—named for his victory at Phillipi.

A messenger enters the throne room and bows. “Madam,—“

“Oh, from Italy *ram* thou thy fruitful tidings into mine ears, that long time have been barren!” Cleopatra is most eager for news.

“—madam—”

“Antonio’s *dead!*—If thou say so, villain, thou *kill’st* thy mistress! But *well* and *free*—if thou *so* yield him,” she says, taking coins from her pocket, “here is *gold!*—and here my bluest veins to kiss—a hand that *kings* have lipped, and *trembled* kissing!”

He kisses her hand. “First, madam, he is well—”

“Why, there’s *more gold!*” Suddenly she frowns. “But, sirrah, mark: we used to say the *dead* are ‘well’—*well off*, beyond care. “Bring it to *that*, and the gold I gave thee will I *melt* and pour down thine ill-uttering *throat!*”

“Good madam, *hear me!*” cries the young courtier in frustration.

“Well, go to, I *will!*” She eyes him narrowly. “But there’s no *aptness* in thy *face*: if Antony be free and *healthful*, *too tart* a favour to trumpet such good tidings; if *not* well, thou shouldst come like a *Fury*, crownèd with *snakes!*—not like an ordinary man!”

The messenger presses on: “Will’t please you *hear me?*”

“I have a mind to *strike* thee ere thou *speak'st!*” She wrings her hands. “Yet if thou say Antony *lives*, is *well*, or is *friends* with Caesar, or not *captive* to him, I'll set thee in a *shower* of gold, and hail rich *pearls* upon thee!”

“Madam, he's well—”

“Well *said!*”

“—and friends with Caesar.”

“Thou'rt an *honest man!*”

“Caesar and he are greater friends than ever!”

“Make thee a *fortune* from me!”

“But yet, madam—”

“I do not like ‘*But yet*’—it does *allay* the good precedence! *Fie* upon ‘*But yet!*’—‘*But yet*’ is as a *jailer*, to bring forth some monstrous *malefactor!*”

“Prithee, friend, pour out the *pack* of matter to mine ear, the good and bad together! He's friends with Caesar; in state of health thou say'st; and thou say'st free...,”

“*Free*, madam? No, I made no such report—he's bound unto Octavia.”

She frowns; why would he be beholden to *her*. “For what good turn?”

The messenger—a handsome bachelor—grins. “For the *best* turn—i' the *bed!*”

Cleopatra gasps. “I am pale, Charmian.”

“Madam, he's *married* to Octavia,” the man adds.

“*The most infectious pestilence upon thee!*” cries Cleopatra, bringing a hand up to smack him. Startled, he falls to the marble floor, left ear ringing as he reaches to retrieve his hat.

“Good madam, *patience!*” he pleads, kneeling.

“What *say* you!” she shrieks. “*Hence, horrible villain*, or I'll spurn thine *eyes* like *balls* before me—I'll *unhair thy head!*” She grabs his curly hair, shaking his head up and down. “Thou shalt be *whipped with wire*, then *stewed in brine!*—*smarting* in a lingering *pickle!*”

“Gracious madam!” he cries, “I that do bring the *news* made not the match!”

“Say '*tis not so*,” the queen tells him, as he gets to his feet, “and a *province* I will give thee, and make thy fortunes *proud!* The blow thou hadst shall make thy peace for moving me to rage—and I will reward thee with whatever gift *beside* thy modesty can beg!”

The man spreads his arms apologetically—then holds his hands before him for protection. “He's married, madam.”

“*Rogue*, thou hast *lived too long!*” Cleopatra draws a thin dagger.

“Nay, then I'll run!” He does. Nearing the entrance, he looks back. “What *mean* you, madam? I have made no fault!” As she starts for him, he dashes out.

“Good madam, keep yourself *within* yourself!” chides Charmian. “The man is innocent!”

“*Some innocents* 'scape not the *thunderbolt!*” says the queen.

Cleopatra paces, distraught. “*Melt*, Egypt, into the Nile! And *kindly* creatures, turn you all into *serpents!*” she cries, livid. “Call the slave again! Though I am *maddened* I will not bite him. *Call!*”

Charmian goes to look into the corridor. “He is afeard to come.”

“I will not *hurt* him,” says Cleopatra contemptuously. Charmian steps out.

The queen feels some guilt. *These hands do lack nobility, that they strike a meaner than myself, since I myself have given myself the cause!*

Charmian returns, pulling the fearful messenger by the arm.

“Come hither, sir,” says the queen. “Though it be *honest*, it is never *good* to bring *bad news!* Give to a gracious message an *host* of tongues, but let *ill* tidings *tell themselves*, when they be *felt!*”

“I have done my *duty*,” the man whimpers.

“Is he married?” She sees that he is quavering. “I cannot hate thee worser than I *do* if thou again say yes.”

“He's married, madam.”

“*The gods confound thee!*” she shrieks. “Dost thou *hold there still?*”

“Should I *lie*, madam?” the man asks, backing away.

“Oh, I would thou *didst!*”—lie dead. “*Half my Egypt* is there *submergèd*, and made a *cistern* for *scalèd snakes!* *Go, get thee hence!* Hadst thou *Narcissus* in thy face, to *me* thou wouldst appear most *ugly!*” She heads toward the throne, and he starts to leave.

She turns back. “He is married?”

“I crave Your Highness’ pardon....”

“He is *married?*”

“Take no *offence*, for I would not *offend* you! To punish me for what you *make* me do seems much unequal!” He backs further away. “He’s married to Octavia.”

Her eruption is instant: “Oh, that *his* fault should make a *knave* of *thee!*—to impart so surely what thou’rt *not sure of!* *Get thee hence!* These *merchandise* which thou hast brought from Rome are all too dear”—costly—“for *me!*—lie they upon *thy* hand! And *be undone by ’em!*”

The poor messenger bows and turns away, his sore pate throbbing.

“Good Your Highness, *patience!*” urges Charmian, carefully watching the man go.

The queen grows pensive. “In praising Antony, I have dispraisèd *Octavius....*”

Charmian nods. “Many times, madam.”

“I am *paid* for’t now.

“Lead me from hence: *I faint!*—oh, *Iras, Charmian!*” Then she waves them back. “’Tis no matter.

“Go to the fellow, good Alexas; bid him report the feature of Octavia—her years, her inclinations—let him not leave out the colour of her hair! Bring me word quickly!” Alexas bows and goes.

Cleopatra thinks mournfully of Antony: “Let him go, forever

“Let him *not*, Charmian!—though he be painted *one* way like a *Gorgon*,”—a snake-haired female, “the other way’s a *Mars!*”

She sends Mardian too: “Bid you Alexas bring me word how *tall* she is!

“*Pity* me, Charmian!—but do not *speak* to me.

“Lead me to my chamber!”

Chapter Four **Aboard with Pirates**

Above Pompey’s many warships, masts wrapped in bright sails bristle proudly in the harbor at Misenum, an area he controls in eastern Italy, where he is about to parley with the Triumvirate late this sunny afternoon.

The triumvirs’ vessels, too, sway slowly in the gentle breeze, riding at anchor off the port city; many of their centurions have come ashore and are amassed not far from the bay—waiting, now, in menacing readiness.

Pompey and Menas emerge from the contingent of fully armed men who protect them on the wharf. They stride forward to meet the arriving Roman lords, now passing, with martial flourishes of trumpet and drum, through their own shielding ranks.

Pompey is abrupt: “Your hostages I have—so have you mine; and we shall *talk* before we fight.”

“Most meet that first we come to *words*,” says Octavius, “and therefore have we our written purpose before us sent. Which, if thou hast considered, let us know if ’twill tie up thy discontented sword—and carry back to Sicily much tall youth that else must perish here.”

But Sextus Pompeius has strong grievances. His father, Pompey the Great, one of the original triumvirs along with Julius Caesar, rebelled against Caesar, who defeated him in the field and later had him murdered—in Egypt. Sextus knows that the noblemen who killed Julius Caesar

were moved, in part, to avenge the general's death—and he resents this Second Triumvirate's having warred against them.

He asks, with angry sarcasm, “You, all three, the sole senators over this great *world*, chiefest factors for the *gods*, what was't that movèd pale *Cassius* to conspire? And what drove the all-honoured, honest Roman *Brutus* and the armèd rest, courtiers to *beauteous Freedom*, to drench the Capitol, but that they would have *one* man be *but a man!*”—and not an *emperor*, as Julius Caesar's supporters intended to make him.

“I do not know how my father, having a *son* and *friends*, could lack *revengers* since *Philippi*, where good *Brutus* was ghosted by *Julius Caesar*,”—he haunted his killer—“who saw you there *labouring* for him!

“And that is what hath made me rig my *navy*, at whose burthen the angered *ocean* foams!” cries Pompey, “with which I meant to *scourge* the ingratitude that despiteful Rome cast on my *noble father!*”

Octavius listens calmly: “Take your time.”

Says Antony, “Thou canst not affright *us*, Pompey, with thy sails. We'll *speak* with thee at sea—and on *land*; thou know'st how much we do *o'er-count* thee!” Even in Sicily, Pompey commands fewer men than the triumvirs can bring.

“On land thou dost in *deed* account o'er me—in *my father's house!*” sneers Pompey. Antony bought that property in Rome, but after Pompey the Great's rebellion failed, he did not pay for it. “But, since a *cuckoo-bird* builds not for itself, remain in't while thou mayst!”

Lepidus wants progress. “Be pleased to tell us—for that is aside from the present—how you take the *offer* we have sent you.”

Caesar concurs. “There's the point.”

“Which do not be *entreated* to,” says Antony sternly, “but weigh what it is *worth*, embracèd.”

“And what may *follow*,” adds Caesar.

Says Pompey, “You have made me offer of Sicily and Sardinia; I must rid all the sea of pirates, then send measures of grain to Rome—and, that 'greed upon, depart with unhackèd edges, and bear back our targes undinted”—shields intact.

“That's our offer,” says Lepidus.

Pompey regards them. “Know, then, I came before you here a man prepared to *take* this offer—but *Mark Antony* puts me to some impatience!” He looks at Antony. “Though I lose the *praise* of it by telling, you must know that when *Caesar* and your brother were at blows, your *mother* came to Sicily, and did find her welcome *friendly*.”

“I have heard it, Pompey,” says Antony, “and am well studied for the liberal thanks which I do *owe* you.” He bows.

Pompey, surprised by the unexpected candor and courtesy, smiles. “Let me have your hand!” But he can't resist small dig. “I did not think, sir, to have met *you* here.”

Antony nods as they shake hands. “The beds i' the east *are* soft. But *thanks* to you for calling me timelier than my purpose hither, for I have *gained* by 't.”

Caesar is pleased by that, but he is watching Pompey carefully—the firebrand is suddenly reasonable. “Since I saw you last, there is a change upon you....”

Pompey is a proud man. “Well, I know not what harsh Fortune casts upon my *face*; but in my bosom she shall never come to make my *heart* her vassal.”

Lepidus wants to secure the new amity. “*Well met* here!”

“I hope so, Lepidus,” says Pompey. “Thus we are agreed! I crave that our composition may be written, and sealed between us.”

Caesar concurs. “That's the next to do.”

“We'll *feast* each other ere we part!” says Pompey, “and let's draw lots who shall begin.”

“That will *I*, Pompey,” says Antony.

“No, Antony, take part in the lot. But, first or last, your fine *Egyptian* cookery shall have the *fame*; I have heard that *Julius Caesar* grew *fat* with feasting there!” taunts Pompey.

Antony's eyes narrow. "You have heard much."

"I have *fair* meanings, sir."

"Put fair words to them."

"And so *much* have I heard—I have heard Apollodorus carried—"

"No more of *that*," says Enobarbus. "He did so."

Pompey persists: "—*what*, I pray you?"

"A certain queen to Caesar in a mattress pad"—one in which the young Cleopatra had wrapped herself—nude, rumor insists—to be carried surreptitiously to Julius.

Pompey grins at the famously frank general. "I know *thee* now!—how farest thou, soldier?"

"Well," says Enobarbus, "—and well am likely to do, for I perceive that *four feasts* are toward!"

"Let me shake thy hand!" Pompey goes to him. "I never hated *thee*!—I have seen thee *fight*, and I have envied thy behavior!"

"Sir, I never loved *you* much," says Enobarbus, "but I *have* praised ye—when you have well deserved *ten times* as much as I have *said* you did!"

Pompey laughs. "I enjoy thy plainness!—it nothing ill-becomes thee!"

"Aboard my galley I invite you all! Will you lead, lords?"

"Show us the way, sir," says Lepidus, smiling.

"Come!" says Pompey, escorting Caesar and Antony, followed by Agrippa and Maecenas, to the boat slip.

As it begins to set, the Mediterranean sun now shines on a fourth joint ruler.

—

Two burly, sunburned warriors are left waiting for the boatman to return for them—and for the wine to be poured. Enobarbus steps away briefly to inform his army's captains of the compact, and to order the Roman soldiers to stand down. There is to be no fighting.

Menas is thinking, glumly. *Thy father, Pompey, would ne'er have made this treaty!*

The scarred freebooter wanted much more. He watches Enobarbus return. "You and I have met, sir."

"At sea, I think."

"We have, sir."

"You have done well by water," Enobarbus admits.

"And you by land."

"I will praise any man that will praise *me*—though it cannot be *denied*, what I have done by land."

"Nor what I have done by *water*."

"Yes, *some* of it you can deny—for your own *safety*! You have been a great *thief* by sea!"

"And *you* by land!" counters Menas.

Enobarbus laughs. "Then I *deny* my land service! But give me your hand, Menas!" As they shake, he glances at their hands: "If our *eyes* had permission, here they might picture *two thieves* kissing!"

Menas offers a sly smile. "All men's *hands* are true, whatsoe'er their faces are."

"But there is never a *fair* woman has a true face!"

Menas concurs: "No slander—*they* steal *hearts*!"

In the golden sunset, the men gaze around the harbor at the galleys, their oars dry, canvas sails still furled, and at the Roman troops, now marching away to encampment. Enobarbus seems almost wistful. "We came hither to fight with you."

"For my part, I am sorry it is turned to a *drinking*. Pompey doth this day *laugh* away his *fortune*."

"If he do, it's sure he cannot *weep* it *back* again."

Menas nods. "You've *said*, sir." He turns to face the sea. "We looked not for Mark Antony here. Pray you, is he married to Cleopatra?"

Enobarbus's face is blank; he is appraising Pompey's fleet. He shakes his head. "Caesar's sister is called *Octavia*."

"True, sir; she was the wife of Caius Marcellus."

"But she is now the wife of Marcus Antonius."

Menas is surprised. "I pray ye, sir!"

"'Tis true."

"Then are Caesar and he forever knit together."

But Enobarbus makes a face. "If I were bound to divine of *that* unity, I would not prophesy so."

"I think the *policy* of their *purposes* made more in the marriage than the love of the parties."

"I think so, too," Enobarbus tells him. "But, you shall find, the band that seems to bind their friendship together will be the very *strangler* of their amity; Octavia is of a holy, cold, and still conversation."

The pirate is nonplussed. "Who would not have his wife so?"

"Not he that *himself* is not so—which is Mark Antony!"

"He will to his Egyptian dish again. Then shall the sighs of Octavia blow the *fire* up in Caesar; and, as I said before, that which is the strength of their amity shall prove the immediate author of their *variance*. Antony will *use* his affection where it *is*; he married but his *occasion* then."

Menas hears laughter coming from the deck of Pompey's own tall ship. "And thus it may be." It is time to drink. "Come, sir, will you aboard? I have a health for you!"

"I shall *take* it, sir! We *have* used our *throats* in Egypt!"

"Come, let's away," says Menas. He, too, is thinking of throats.

Misenum is quiet tonight. Under the starry sky, small cooking fires flicker beside soldiers' dusty canvas tents on the hillsides and promontory above the bay's calm waters, glimmering in moonlight. Aboard his galley, her anchors cast to hold her steady, Sextus Pompeius has called on sailors to provide music. Standing on the deck at the bow, his guests have already consumed copious quantities of fine Italian wine.

Below, two of Pompey's servants work in the officers' mess-room to set forth a supper.

"Here they'll be, man," says the taller, bringing pewter plates. He shakes his head. "Some o' these plants are ill-rooted *already*: the least wind i' the world will blow them down!"

His companion, lighting oil lamps, nods. "*Lepidus* is highly coloured"—flushed.

"They have made him drink *alms*-drinks!"—as a beggar for peace, amid the other noblemen's pointed gibes. "As they *pinch* one another in their dispositions, he cries out, '*No more!*'—reconciles them to his *entreaty*—and himself to the *drink!*"

"That but raises a greater war: between him and his authority," scowls the smaller one, setting down a platter of meats. "Why, this is to have but a *name* in great men's fellowship! I had as lief have a *reed* that will do me no service as a partisan"—an ax-bladed weapon—"I could not heave!"

The other pirate concurs. "To be called into a huge sphere, but not to be seen to *move* in't—there are *holes* where *eyes* should be, which pitifully disaster the cheeks!"

Above, a trumpet sounds a sennet, and the boisterous celebration begins to move below-deck. Pompey brings Caesar, Antony and Lepidus. Agrippa and Maecenas follow, talking with Menas and Enobarbus; after them come the musicians.

Antony is telling Caesar about Egyptian agriculture. "Thus do they, sir: they measure the flow o' the Nile by certain scales i' the pyramid! They know—by the height, the lowness, or the mean—if dearth or foison follow. The *higher* Nilus swells, the more it *promises*; as it ebbs, the seedsman upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain—and shortly comes to harvest!"

Lepidus blinks, thinking of the great river's vast delta. "You've strange serpents there."

"Aye, Lepidus," says Antony, as his cup is refilled.

Although the ship lies tranquil, Lepidus steadies himself at a timber below a beam. “Your serpent of Egypt is bred, now, of your *mud*, by the operation of your *sun*,” he comments sloppily. “So is your crocodile.”

Antony nods vigorously. “They *are* so.”

“Sit—and some *wine!*” cries Pompey. “A *health* to Lepidus!”

“I am not so *well* as I should be,” laughs he, “but I’ll ne’er out!”

- “Not till you have *slept*,” mutters Enobarbus. “I fear me you’ll be *all in* till then.”

Joining the other lords seated at the table, the tipsy Lepidus informs Antony, “Aye, certainly I have heard the Ptolemies’ *pyramises* are very goodly things! Without contradiction, I have *heard* that!”

As Antony expounds, loudly, on the merits of the tombs—built for the Pharaohs two thousand years before the Greek Ptolemaios, Ptolemy I, seized Egypt—Menas touches the host’s arm. “Pompey, a word...”

“Say in mine ear; what is’t?”

“Forsake thy seat, I do beseech thee, captain,” says Menas quietly, “and hear me speak a word.”

“*Forbear* me till anon,” says Pompey, raising his cup and calling a salute to a guest: “*This wine for Lepidus!*”

Lepidus beams, and again drinks deeply. “What *manner* o’ thing is your crocodile?”

Antony considers. “It is shaped, sir, like itself; and it is as broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own limbs. It lives by that which nourisheth it; and, the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.”

“What colour is it of?”

“Of it own *colour*, too.”

Lepidus belches, and ponders. “’Tis a *strange serpent*.”

“’Tis so,” Antony confirms. “And the tears of it are *wet*.”

Caesar, still sober, of course, watches, disgusted. “Will that description *satisfy* him?” he wonders aloud.

“Along with the *health* that Pompey gives him!” replies Antony, laughing, “else he is a very *epicure!*”—far too demanding.

But Pompey is annoyed; Menas is again seeking his attention. “Go *hang*, sir, *hang!*—tell me about *that! Away!* Do as I bid you!” He looks for his steward. “Where’s the *cup* I called for?”

Menas leans closer; he glares, and whispers intently: “If for the sake of *profit* thou wilt hear me, *rise* from thy *stool!*”—with a play on *shit*.

Pompey, startled, gapes. “I think thou’rt *mad!*” He hears a peal of unruly laughter from the men at the table, but he stands, and the two move aside. “The matter?”

Menas begins. “I have ever held my cap off to thy fortunes...”

“Thou hast served me with much faith. What’s else to say?” Pompey calls to the table: “*Be jolly*, lords!”

Antony is propping up the man sagging beside him. “These *quick*-sands, Lepidus—keep off them, or you’ll *sink!*”

- Menas moves to face Pompey. “Wilt thou be lord of all the world?”

- Pompey blinks. “What say’st thou?”

- “Wilt thou be *lord* of the *whole world?*” he hisses, commanding attention. His is a look of warning; “That’s *twice*.”

- “How should that be?”

- “But *entertain* it,” urges Menas, “and, though thou think me *poor*, I am the man will give thee *all the world!*”

- “Hast thou *drunk* too well?”

- “*No*, Pompey, I have kept me from the cup. Thou art—if thou *darest* be—the earthly *Jove!*” he insists in a hush. “Whate’er the ocean encompasses or sky inclips is *thine*, if thou wilt ha’t!”

- Pompey frowns, puzzled. "Show me which way."

- "These three *world-sharers*, these *partners*, are *in thy vessel!* Let me cut the cable—and, when we are put off, *fall to their throats!* All then is *thine!*"

- Pompey considers—momentarily. "*Ah, this thou shouldst have done,*" he protests. "'Tis not my *profit* that does lead mine honour!—mine honour, *it.*"

"Repent that e'er thy *tongue* hath so betrayed thine *action!* It being done *unknown*, I should have found it afterwards *well done,*" he allows, "but now I must condemn it.

"Desist, and *drink!*" he cries, returning happily to the table.

Menas is disgusted—and angry. *For this, I'll never follow thy pallèd fortunes more! Who seeks but will not take when once 'tis offered shall never find it more!*

Pompey is ebullient. "This health to *Lepidus!*"

Antony laughs—Lepidus has passed out, and will drink no more tonight. "Bear him ashore," he tells the attendants. "I'll pledge it *for* him, Pompey!" he offers, quaffing the other man's wine.

Enobarbus finds the chief pirate. "Here's to *thee*, Menas!"

"Enobarbus, welcome!"

"*Fill*, till the cup be hid!"—*overflows*, demands Pompey.

Enobarbus gestures toward the man hauling Lepidus away. "There's a *strong* fellow, Menas!"

"Why?"

"He bears a *third part of the world*, man! See'st not?"

"The third part, then, is *drunk!*" replies Menas—thinking sourly, *Would it all were, that it might go on wheels!*

Enobarbus sees that his mood is dour. "*Drink* thou!—*increase* the revels!"

Menas nods. "Come." He tops off their cups from a flagon.

Pompey sees that two guests are quiet. "This is not yet an *Alexandrian* feast!"

"It ripens *towards* it!" says Antony. "Strike the vessels, *ho!*" he cries, clapping his pewter mug against Pompey's. "Here is to *Caesar!*"

Octavius declines another drink. "I could well forbear't. It's abominable labour when I *wash* my brain and it grows *fouler.*"

"Be a child o' the *time!*" urges Antony.

"*Possess* it, I'll make answer," Caesar tells him. "And I had rather *fast from all* for *days*, than *drink* so much in *one!*"

Enobarbus comes to Antony. "*Ha*, my brave *emperor!* Shall we dance now the *Egyptian* bacchanals, and *celebrate* our drink?"

"Let's *ha't*, good soldier!" cries Pompey. He waves forward the ship's piper, who immediately begins striking his tabor.

Antony rises. "*Come*, let's all take hands till the conquering wine hath steeped our senses in soft and delicate *Lethe!*"—forgetfulness.

"All take *hands!*" shouts Enobarbus. "Make *battery* to our ears with a *loud music!* The while I'll place you!—*then* the boys shall *sing!* The holding"—refrain—"every man shall bear, as loud as his strong sides can volley!"

As the tune begins, he lines up the commanders, links their hands, and bellows out his drinking song. The noblemen, stamping from side to side on the planking, intone the words:

*Come, thou monarch of the vine,
Plumpy Bacchus with pink eyne!
In thy vats our cares be drownèd,
With thy grapes our hairs be crownèd!
Cup us, till the world go round,
Cup us till the world spin round!*

After a another hearty refrain, Caesar decides that the occasion is complete. “What would you more?” he asks, as the others settle to catch their breath. “Pompey, good *night!*” Octavius faces Mark. “Good brother, let me request you off! Our graver business frowns at this levity.

“Gentle lords, let’s part; you see we have *burnt* our *cheeks!* Strong *Enobarb* is weaker than the wine, and mine *own* tongue spits what it speaks!” he laughs. “The wild disguise”—inebriation—“hath almost anticked us all! What needs more words? *Good night!*”

“Good Antony, your hand!”

“I’ll try *you* on the shore!” says Pompey, of Caesar’s obligation to provide a feast.

“As shall *I*, sir!” cries Antony. “Give ’s your hand!”

Pompey is blearily magnanimous. “Oh, Antony, you have my father’s house. But, *what?*—we are *friends!*”

“Come, down into the boat!” He leads the noblemen up to the deck.

“Take heed you not fall!” cautions Enobarbus, amused, as Antony staggers away. He turns to his companion. “Menas, I’ll go ashore....”

“No!—to my *cabin!*” He catches the musicians before they can leave. “These *drums!*—these *trumpets, flutes!* *What?*—let *Neptune* hear us bid a loud *farewell* to these great fellows!

“Sound and be hanged!” he orders the players. “*Sound out!*”

Beyond, down in the boat, the revelers laugh to hear the blaring salute.

Enobarbus cries, “*Ho!*—says I, ‘*There’s my cup!*’”

“*Ho!* Noble captain, *come!*” Menas reels toward his cabin, and each of them grabs a full flagon of wine as he goes.

Chapter Five **Dubious Assurances**

On a sweltering plain in Syria, Roman soldiers stand victorious after the latest round of furious, bloody warfare. Ventidius has been driving Labienus and his army from Asia Minor back to the east, and has killed him. Here, in three battles, the empire’s legions have fought Parthians led by Pacorus, son of King Orodes.

As Ventidius watches, standing with his chief commander, Silius, before the arrayed ranks of their troops, the prince’s corpse, with an arrow in the neck, is carried to him.

“Now, darting Parthian, art *thou* struck!—and now pleased Fortune does of Marcus Crassus’ death make me *avenger!*”

Crassus was a triumvir with Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great; he was killed fifteen years ago in Mesopotamia after suffering a disastrous defeat at Parthian hands near Carrhae. King Orodes had ordered molten gold poured into the mouth of his severed head.

“Bear the king’s son’s body before our army,” orders Ventidius. “Thy Pacorus, Orodes, pays *this* for Marcus Crassus!”

Silius is exuberant. “Noble Ventidius, whilst yet with Parthian blood thy sword is *warm*, the fugitive Parthians *follow!*” he urges. “Spur through Media, Mesopotamia—any shelters whither the routed fly!

“Then shall thy grand captain, Antony, set thee on a *triumphant chariot*, and put *garlands* on thy head!”

But Ventidius, an older man, shakes his head. “No, Silius. Silius, I have done enough; a lower place, note well, may make *too* great an act. For learn this, Silius: better to leave undone, than by our deed acquire too high a fame when him we serve’s away.

“Caesar and Antony have ever won more through their *officers* than persons. Sossius—once of my rank, Antony’s lieutenant in Syria—for quick accumulation of *renown* which he achieved by the minute lost his *favour*.

“Who does it the wars more than his captain can become his *captain’s* captain—and ambition as a *soldier’s* virtue rather makes choice of *loss* than gain which *taints* him!

“I could do more to do Antonius good, but ’twould offend him—and in his offence should my performance perish!”

Silius nods, accepting the politic wisdom. “Thou hast, Ventidius, that without the which a soldier and his sword gain scant distinction.” And as elation wanes, he, too, grows more cautious, aware that threatening a powerful enemy in his home territory should not be undertaken in haste—if at all. “Thou wilt write to Antony?”

Ventidius smiles wryly. “I’ll humbly signify what in *his* name—that *magical* word of war!—we have effected; how, with *his* banners and *his* well-paid ranks, the ne’er-yet-beaten horsemen of Parthia we have jaded out o’ the field!”

“Where is he now?”

“He purposeth to Athens,”—Rome has governed Greece for more than a century, “whither, with what haste the weight we must convey with us will permit, we shall appear before him.” He takes the reins of his roan stallion from an attendant, and mounts.

“*On*, there!” he commands the infantry captains. “Pass along!”

At Caesar’s house in Rome, Enobarbus waits in a side room with his naval counterpart. “What, are the *brothers* parted?” asks Agrippa; in sobriety, the empire’s triumvirs and their new ally have resumed personal testiness. Still, their contentious conference here has been completed.

“They have dispatched with Pompey; he is gone,” Enobarbus reports. Grain from Sicily and beyond will again nourish Italians and their capital. “The other three are sealing. Octavia weeps to part from Rome; Caesar is sad.

“And *Lepidus*, since Pompey’s feast, is, as Menas says, ‘troubled with the *green* sickness!’”—girlishness.

Agrippa chuckles. “’Tis a noble Lepidus!”

“A very fine one! Oh, how he *loves* Caesar!”

“Aye, but how dearly he *adores* Antony!”

“*Caesar*?” says Enobarbus. “Why, he’s the *Jupiter* of men!”

“What’s *Antony*? The *god* of Jupiter!” counters Agrippa.

“Spake you of *Caesar*? How?—the *nonpareil*!”

Agrippa mimics the peace-loving triumvir. “O *Antony*! O thou *Arabian bird*!”

Enobarbus can match the mock: “Would you *praise* Caesar? Say ‘*Caesar*’—go no further!”

Agrippa laughs heartily. “Indeed, he plied them both with *excellent* praises!”

“But he loves Caesar *best*; and yet he loves *Antony*—how? Hearts, tongues—*figures*! Bards, poets, scribes cannot sing, rhyme or write—*think* or *speak* but to mumble of love for *Antony*!

“But as for *Caesar*!—*kneel down*, kneel down and *wonder*!”

“Both he loves,” concludes Agrippa dryly.

“They are his shards,”—*dung*, “and he their *beetle*,” grumbles Enobarbus.

They hear trumpets sound. “So, this is to horse. Adieu, noble Agrippa!”

“Good fortune, worthy soldier; and farewell!” The aging warriors walk outside, where some of Antony’s troops await. The military contingent will escort him and his new wife to the river for the start of their sea voyage to Athens.

From their meeting room, Caesar and Lepidus emerge with Antony and Octavia into the pale light of a damp, overcast day.

“No further, sir,” Antony tells Caesar, courteously, at the door.

“You take from me a great part of myself,” Octavius tells him. “Use me well in’t!” He turns to the bride. “Sister, prove such a wife as my thoughts make thee, and as my farthest bond shall pass on thine approval!”

“Most noble Antony, let not this piece of Virtue, which is set betwixt us as the cement of our love to keep it builded, become a ram to batter the fortress of it; for better might we have loved *without* this means, if on both parts this be not cherished!”

There is a edge to Antony’s voice. “Make me not offended at your distrust.”

“I have said.”

“You shall not find, though you be therein curious,”—*inquire*, “the least cause for what you seem to fear,” Antony assures him. “So. The gods keep you, and make the hearts of Romans serve your ends! We will here part.”

“Farewell, my dearest sister, fare thee well!” says Caesar. “The elements be kind to thee, and make thy spirits all of comfort! Fare thee well!”

“My noble brother!” she says, tearfully.

“The April’s in her eyes!” notes Antony softly. “It is love’s *spring*, and these the showers do bring it on. Be *cheerful*,” he urges her.

Octavia tells her brother, “Sir, look well to my husband’s house; and—”

“What, Octavia?”

“I’ll tell you in your ear.” She and Octavius speak privately.

Her tongue will not obey her heart, thinks Antony, nor can her heart inform her tongue! She’s a swan’s down-feather that floats upon the swell at full of tide, yet neither way inclines.

Over by the horses, Enobarbus, under his breath, asks Agrippa. “Will Caesar weep?”

- “He has a cloud in ’s face,” the admiral admits.

- “He were the *worse* for that”—being afflicted with watery eye—“were he a *horse*. So is he being a *man*.”

- “Why, Enobarbus, when *Antony* found Julius Caesar dead, he cried almost to *roaring*,” says Agrippa, “and he *wept* when at Philippi he found *Brutus* slain!”

- “That year, indeed, he was troubled with a rheum”—the sniffles—says Enobarbus dryly, drawing a laugh. “What he willingly did *defeat* he bewailèd, believe’t, till *I* wept, too!”

Caesar reassures his sister: “No, sweet Octavia, you shall hear from me ever!—the time shall not out-go my thinking of you!”

“Come, sir, come; I’ll wrestle with you in my strength of love!” says Antony, grasping his hand and shaking it warmly with both of his. “Look: here I have you; thus I let you go—and give you to the gods!”

Caesar smiles at them both. “*Adieu!* Be happy!”

Beside him, Lepidus beams at the couple. “Let all the number of the stars give light to thy fair way!”

Caesar kisses Octavia’s cheek. “Farewell, *farewell!*” he cries, as Antony helps her step up into her carriage.

“Farewell!” calls Antony to Caesar.

Trumpets sound and the horses neigh as the married pair and their military escort pull away, bound for a new home almost two hundred leagues to the east, in Greece.

Athens is about that same distance north of Alexandria.

Where *is* the fellow?” demands Cleopatra, at her palace. She must learn more about Antony’s new wife.

“Half afeard to come!” says Lord Alexas.

“Go to, go *to!*” The messenger enters the throne room—trembling. “Come hither, sir.”

Alexas has sympathy for the man. “Good Majesty, *Herod of Jewry* dare not look upon you but when you are well *pleasèd!*”

“Then Herod’s *head* I’ll have!” says Cleopatra angrily. She looks down, sadly. “But *how?* When Antony is gone, through whom might I command it?”

She beckons the quailing messenger. “Come thou near.”

“Most Gracious Majesty—”

“Didst thou behold Octavia?”
 “Aye, dread queen.”
 “Where?”
 “Madam, in Rome; I looked her in the face, and saw her led between her brother and Mark Antony.”
 “Is she as tall as I?”
 He lies. “She is not, madam.”
 “Didst hear her speak? Is she shrill-tongued or low-?”
 “Madam, I heard her speak; she is *low-voicèd*.”
Masculine sounding, “That’s not so good,” she says, pleased. “He cannot like her long.”
 “Like *her*?” cries Charmian. “O *Isis!*—’tis impossible!”
 Cleopatra nods. “I think so, Charmian. Dull of tongue, and dwarfish!” She ponders. “What majesty is in her gait? Remember, if e’er thou lookedst on majesty.”
 He takes her meaning. “She *creeps*,” he tells the queen. “Her motion and her station are as one: she shows as a *body*, rather than a life—a *statue* than a breather!”
 “Is this certain?”
 “Or I have no observance!”
 “*Three* in Egypt cannot make *better* note!” says Charmian—who has coached the grateful young man in the art of responding to her mistress.
 Cleopatra nods. “He’s very knowing; I do perceive’t! There’s *nothing* in her yet. The fellow has good judgment.”
 Charmian, smiling warmly at him, must agree. “Excellent!”
 “Guess at her years, I prithee.”
 “Madam, she was a widow—”
 “*Widow!* Charmian, hark!” Cleopatra is encouraged.
 “—and I do think she’s thirty.”
Older! Cleopatra nods. “Bear’st thou her face in mind? Is’t long or round?”
 “*Round*, even to faultiness!”
 “For the most part, too, they are foolish that are so,” Cleopatra pronounces. “Her hair, what colour?”
 “*Brown*, madam—and her *forehead*,” he says, with an arch look, “as low as she would wish it...”
Too low. Cleopatra is satisfied. She hands him a pouch of coins. “There’s gold for thee! Thou must not take my former sharpness ill. I will employ thee *back* again! I find thee most *fit* for business! Go, make thee ready; our letters are preparèd.”
 The messenger, relieved, bows and goes.
 Charmian watches his strong stride. “A proper man!”
 “Indeed, he is so! I repent me much that so I harried him.” The queen is relieved, regarding a rival. “Why, methinks, by him, this creature’s no such thing!”
 “*Nothing*, madam!”
 “The man hath seen some *majesty*, and should know.”
 “He *hath* seen majesty—*Isis* else *defend!*—in serving *you* so long!”
 “I have one thing more to ask him yet, good Charmian... But ’tis no matter; thou shalt bring him to me where I will write. All may be well enough.”
 “I warrant you, madam!” Charmian will help the youth further, confident that he will again rise to the occasion for her.
 Soon, he and his gold will sail for Rome. But neither will ever return to Egypt.

While Athens is quiet and cool this morning, in his new home, now the base for command of Rome’s eastern territories, Antony rages, furious over what he has learned concerning his brother-in-law.

“Nay, nay, Octavia, not only *that*—that were excusable, that, and thousands more of semblable import—but he hath *wagèd new wars* ’gainst *Pompey!*—and *made his will*, read it to *public ear!*—but spoke scantily of *me!*”

“When perforce he could not pay me *but* with terms of *honour*, cold and *sickly* he vented them—most-narrow measure lent me! When the best opportunity was given him, he took’t not!—or spoke it *in his teeth!*”—almost inaudibly.

Caesar has been bolstering his own reputation, often at Antony’s expense. And, having stored sufficient grain for a protracted struggle, he is now attacking Sextus Pompeius in Sicily.

Octavia is distressed. “Oh, my good lord, believe not *all!*—or, if you must believe, be not *aggrieved* by all!”

“If thus *division* happens, a more unhappy lady ne’er stood *between*, praying for both parts! The good *gods* will mock me presently, when I shall pray, ‘O bless my lord and husband!’—then undo that prayer, by crying out as loud, ‘O bless my brother!’”

“*Husband* win, win *brother*, she prays—and *destroys the prayers!*”—no midway ’twixt these extremes at all!”

“Gentle Octavia, let your *best* love draw you to that point which seems best to *preserve* it,” Antony advises. “If I lose mine *honour*, I lose *my self!* Better I were not yours, than yours so *unbranchèd!*”—stripped. “But, as you requested, *yourself* shall go between us!”

“In the mean time, lady, I’ll raise the preparation of a *war* that shall *stain* your brother!” he warns. “Make your soonest haste! Thus your desires are yours.”

“*Thanks* to my lord!” says Octavia. “The power of Jove makes *me*—most weak, most *weak!*—your reconciler. War ’twixt you twain would be as if the *world* should cleave!—and *slain men* should solder up the rift!”

“When it appears to you where this *began*,” Antony tells her, certain that Octavius has reneged on other promises, “turn your displeasure *that way!* For our faults can never be so equal that your *love* can equally *move between them*,” he says sternly.

“Provide for your going: choose your own company, and command what cost your heart has mind to.”

She curtseys, and hurries away, in tears.

Sitting in his chambers at the Romans’ military quarters in Athens, Enobarbus carefully sharpens the edge of his sword with emery. He looks up as one of Antony’s closest personal guards—Greek, a former slave—finds him. “How now, friend Enos!”

“There’s strange *news* come, sir!”

“What, man?”

“Caesar and Lepidus have made wars upon Pompey!”

Enobarbus keeps working on the steel blade. “This is old; what is their success?”

“Caesar, having made *use* of him in the wars ’gainst Pompey, presently denied him *equity*—would not let him partake in the *glory* of the action!” Despite their joint victory, Lepidus acquired no new territory for himself. “And not resting there, Caesar *accused* him, using letters he formerly wrote to Pompey—and upon his own appeal, *seized* him!”

“So the poor third is *mewed up* till death enlarge his confine!”

Caesar has assumed control of the African dominions, and he finished subduing Pompey’s pirates. Lepidus is no longer a triumvir; Octavius and Antony now rule the Romans’ empire.

Enobarbus stands, wipes his sword clean, and slides it into the battered scabbard. “Then, world, thou hast a *pair* of jaws, no more. And, throw between them all the food thou hast, they’ll *grind*, the one on the other!”

“Where’s Antony?”

“He’s walking in the garden, thus”—Enos stalks about, kicking angrily at the fresh greens strewn to carpet the stone floor—“and *spurns the rush* that lies before him; cries, ‘*Fool, Lepidus!*’ And *threatens the throat* of the officer who murdered Pompey!”

Enobarbus considers. “Our great navy’s rigged.” Agrippa has restored and stocked it, and provided it with men. Octavius is ready to move again at any time.

Enos nods. “For Italy and *Caesar*.” Then he says, apologetically, “More, Domitius: my lord desires you presently. My *news* I might well have told thereafter...”

Enobarbus is calm. “’Twill be naught; just let it be.” He is already calculating time for sea travel south. “Bring me to Antony.”

“Come, sir.”

Very soon, Antony will return to Alexandria—to his mighty legions of infantry and horsemen, his fleet of stout vessels and doughty sailors, and their allied Egyptian forces.

And to Cleopatra.

At his estate in Rome, Caesar meets with Maecenas, his chief military commander, and Agrippa, admiral of Octavius’s newly augmented naval forces.

Caesar has shared the most recent reports on Mark Antony. “*Condemning Rome*, in Alexandria he has done all *this*—and *more!*”

“Here’s the *manner* of ’t: in the market-place, Cleopatra and himself, in *chairs of gold*, were by a silvered tribunal publicly *enthronèd!*”

“At their feet sat Caesarion, whom they called *my father’s* son, and all the unlawful issue that their *lust* since then hath made between them!

“Unto her he *gave* the *’stablishment* of *Egypt!*—and made her of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia, *absolute queen!*”

Maecenas is stunned. “This in the public eye?”

Caesar nods angrily. “In the common show-place where they exercise! His *sons* he there proclaimed the kings of *kings!* Great Media, Parthia, and Armenia he gave to Alexander; to Ptolemy he assignèd Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia!”

He leans forward at the table. “*She* in the habiliments of the *goddess Isis* that day appeared!—and, as ’tis reported, oft *before* gave audience so!”

Maecenas is appalled by Antony’s display—and more by his giving away hard-won pieces of the empire. “Let Romans be thus informèd,” he says gravely. Octavius vies with Mark for the populace’s good will.

“Who, already queasy with his insolence, will their good thoughts *cull from him!*” says Agrippa.

Caesar frowns. “The people know of it—and have now received *his accusations!*”

Agrippa is surprised. “Whom does *he* accuse?”

“*Caesar!*—in that, having Sextus Pompeius despoilèd in Sicily, we had not provided Antony *his part o’ the isle!*”

“Then does he say he lent me some ships—*unrestored!*”

“Lastly, he frets that Lepidus of the Triumvirate is *deposèd*—and that *we* retain all his revenue!”

“Sir, this should be *answered!*” says Agrippa.

“’Tis done already, and the messenger gone,” Caesar replies. “I have *told* him: Lepidus was grown too *cruel*—that he his high authority *abusèd*, and did *deserve* his change.” The others do not contradict those patent falsehoods.

Caesar pictures imperious Antony. “As for what I have conquered, I’ll *grant* him part—but then, of Armenia and other of *his* conquered kingdoms, *I demand the like!*”

Maecenas looks grim. “He’ll never yield to that.”

“Nor must not be yielded to in *this*, then!” insists Caesar, tossing the spy’s letter onto the table.

The three are surprised when the doors swing open to admit an unexpected visitor. “*Hail*, Caesar and my lord! Hail, *most dear* Caesar!” His sister goes straight to Octavius and kisses him. Octavia is followed by several new attendants, Greeks.

Caesar is delighted. But he says regretfully, "That ever I should call thee *castaway!*"
"You have not called me so," says she, as he takes her hands. "Nor have you *cause* to." She has come for a purpose.

"Why have you *stolen upon us* thus!" he chides. "You come not like *Caesar's* sister!

"The wife of Antony should have an *army* for an usher, and the neighs of many horse to tell of her approach long ere she did appear! The trees by the way should have borne *men*, and expectation *fainted*, longing for what it had not! Nay, the *dust* raised by your populous troops should have ascended to the *roof of heaven!*"

"But you are come like a market-maid to Rome, and have prevented the *ostentation* of our love! We should have met you by sea and land, supplying every stage with an augmented greeting! What's left unshown is often left unloved!"

Such public ceremonies, she knows, would have served as much to benefit him in public opinion as to honor her. But he must wonder why she has left Athens—and what it implies about Antony. "Good my lord, to come thus was I not constrained, but did my free will," Octavia tells her brother. "My lord Mark Antony, hearing that you prepare for *war*, acquainted my grievèd ear withal, whereon I begged his pardon for return."

"Which he *soon granted*," says Caesar, "you being an obstruction 'tween his *lust* and him!"

"Do not say so, my lord!"

"I have *eyes* upon him, and his affairs come to me on the *wind!*" He regards her. "Where is he now?"

"My lord, in Athens."

"*No*, my most-wrongèd sister!—*Cleopatra* hath nodded him to *her!* He hath given his empire up to a *whore*—and now is levying the kings of the earth for *war!*"

"He hath assembled Bocchus, the king of Libya; Archilaus, of Cappadocia; Philadelphos, King of Paphlagonia; the Thracian king, Adullas; King Mauchus of Arabia; the king of Pont; Herod of Jewry; Mithridates, King of Comageat; Polemen and Amyntas, the kings of Mede and Lycaonia—with a more larger list of sceptres!"

The would-be peacemaker is distraught. "*Ay me*, most *wretched*, to have my heart parted betwixt two *friends* who do *afflict* each other!"

Caesar takes her hand. "*Welcome* hither! Your letters *did* withhold our breaking forth—till we perceived both how you were *wrongly led*, and we negligent of *danger!*"

"Cheer your heart; be you not troubled with the time, which drives o'er your contentment these strong necessities, but let things determined by destiny hold their sway unbewailèd.

"Welcome to Rome! Nothing's more dear to me!" he says, kissing her hand. "You are abusèd beyond the mark of thought!—but may the high gods, to do you *justice*, make themselves ministers of us and all those that *love* you! Best of *comfort*; and ever welcome to us!"

Agrippa bows, smiling. "Welcome, lady!"

"*Welcome*, dear madam," says Maecenas, bowing. "Each heart in Rome does love and pity you. Only the *adulterous Antony*—most large in his *abominations*—turns you away, and gives his potent regimen to a *trull* that *noises against us!*"

She looks at Caesar. "Is it so, sir?"

"Most certain.

"Sister, welcome! Pray you, be ever known to *Patience*, my dearest sister!"

Chapter Six Stratagem and Warfare

Mark Antony has sailed to the northwestern coast of Greece, where his army of Roman soldiers is now encamped near Actium; his combined fleet of five hundred vessels, including some of the queen's, is close by

Cleopatra has accompanied Antony here. But as they prepare to launch a full invasion west, across the sea and into Italy, dissention has developed. Among the troops are many who are loath to go to war against other Romans—especially in Italy, and in support of a foreign queen. Some have already deserted.

Despite all objections, Cleopatra intends to be at the front of the fighting. “I *will* be even with thee, doubt it not,” she tells Enobarbus.

“But *why, why, why?*”

She glares at him. “Thou hast *forspoke* my being in these wars, and say'st it is not *fit!*”

“Well, *is* it?—*is* it?”

The queen will not deign to give answers, and she uses the royal plural in her questions. “Is't not announced as *against us?*” Mindful of divided Roman allegiance, Octavius has declared war on Cleopatra, not Antony. She looks out from their hilltop site to watch the many ships being readied for battle on the water below. “Why should not we be here in person?”

“Well, I *could* reply,” mutters Enobarbus. *If we should serve with horse and mare together, the horse were merely for lust; the mare would bear the soldier—then bear his horse!*

Cleopatra turns back. “What is't you say?”

Enobarbus is exasperated. “Your presence needs must disturb Antony!—take from his *heart*, take from his *brain*, from's *time* what should not then be spared!” he blurts out. “He is already traduced for *levity*—and 'tis said by Photinus in Rome that an *eunuch* and *your maids* manage this war!”

“*Sink, Rome!*—and may their tongues *rot* who speak against us!” says Cleopatra. “A *duty* we bear i' the war—and, as the premier of my kingdom, *I will appear here like a man! Speak not against it!*—I will not *wait behind!*”

Enobarbus throws his hands up in frustration. “Nay, I have done!” He looks past her. “Here comes the *emperor*,” he says—ironically; Julius Caesar was killed by nobles who feared he would be crowned as an emperor.

Antony joins them on the promontory overlooking the sea. He is walking with one of his most trusted officers. “Is it not strange, Canidius, that from Tarentum and Brundisium he could so *quickly* cut the Ionian Sea, and make way to Toryne?”

Rome's rebuilt navy, under Lord Agrippa, has sailed east from the two Italian ports toward the Greek harbor of Toryne, north of Actium—where his ships are to disgorge thousands of Caesar's troops.

Antony smiles at Cleopatra. “You have heard of't, sweet?”

“*Celerity* is never more admired than by the *negligent!*” she says tartly; she *has* heard—but not from him.

Antony laughs. “A good rebuke!—which might have well-becomed the best of *men* who belittle slackness!” She ignores the ribaldry.

He turns away. “Canidius, we will fight with him by sea.”

Cleopatra is watching her ships. “By sea; how *else?*”

But Canidius Crassus frowns; they control the ground here, and taking the port would be difficult, even for Caesar's fast new ships—and Antony will soon face soldiers attacking from the north. “Why will my lord do so?”

“Because he *dares* us to't.”

“So hath my lord dared him to *single fight*,” counters Enobarbus, who has little patience with such bravado.

“Aye—and to wage this battle at *Pharsalia*,” adds Canidius, “where Caesar fought with Pompey”—Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great. “But those offers which serve not for his advantage, Octavius shakes off—and *so should you!*”

“Your *ships* are *not well manned!*” argues Enobarbus vehemently. “Your ‘mariners’ are *muleteers, reapers*, people ingrossèd by swift impress!”—just recently forced into service. “In *Caesar’s* fleet are those that often have ’gainst *Pompey* fought! Their ships are *yare*, yours *heavy!*”

“No disgrace shall befall you for refusing him at sea, being already preparèd for *land!*” And, Enobarbus believes, Antony commands more soldiers than Caesar has sent—ten thousand more, as it turns out.

But Antony shakes his head. “By sea, by *sea!*” He wants to come face to face with smug Octavius—and watch his defeat.

Enobarbus pleads: “Most worthy sir, you therein *throw away* the absolute soldiership you have *by land!*—distract your *army*, which doth most consist of war-markèd infantry; leave *unexecuted* your own renownèd knowledge; quite forego the way which promises *assurance*—and from *firm security* give up yourself wholly to *chance* and *hazard!*”

Antony is adamant. “I’ll fight at sea.”

“I have *sixty sails!*” says Cleopatra proudly. “Caesar none better!”

Antony, eager to please her, has considered the dearth of reliable seamen. “*Our* overplus of shipping we will *burn*—and, with the rest *fully manned*, from the headland of Actium beat the approaching Caesar!”

He regards the other lords. “And if we fail, *then* we can to’t by land.” A messenger comes running up to them. “Thy business?”

The man bows hastily. “The news is *true*, my lord!—he is *descried!*—*Caesar* has taken *Toryne!*”

Antony is surprised. “Can he be *there* in person? ’Tis impossible! Strange, that his powers should be....”

He ponders the double threat. “Canidius, our nineteen legions thou shalt hold by land, and our twelve thousand horse.

“We’ll to our ship!” He takes Cleopatra by the hand. “Away, my *Thetis!*”—sea goddess.

A sergeant intercepts them just as they reach the path. Antony salutes him: “How now, worthy soldier?”

The man bows awkwardly, and holds his red-plumed helmet under an arm. “O noble emperor, do not fight by *sea!* Trust not to rotten *planks!*”

“Do you misdoubt this *sword*, and these my *wounds?*” He touches his own battle-scarred face. “Let the *Egyptians* and the *Phoenicians* go a-ducking!—*we* have used to conquer standing on the *earth*, and fighting foot by foot!”

“Well, well,” mumbles Antony, brushing past him. “Away!” he says to the queen; and they proceed, followed by Enobarbus, down toward the ships.

The worried sergeant watches them go. “By Hercules, I think I am i’ the right!”

“Soldier, thou *art*,” says Canidius, from behind him, “but his whole action grows not according to the *power* of it! So our leader is *led*—and *we* are a *woman’s* men!”

“You keep by land—the legions and the horsemen, do you not?”

Canidius nods. “Marcus Octavius, Marcus Justeius, Publicola and Caelius are for sea, but we keep the whole for land.” He shakes his head, amazed. “This *speed* of Caesar’s carries beyond belief!”

“While he was yet in Rome, his powers went about with such distractions as beguiled all spies.”

“Who’s his lieutenant, hear you?”

“They say, one *Taurus.*”

“Well I know the man,” says Canidius thoughtfully.

A soldier rides to them. “The emperor calls Canidius!” he cries without dismounting, and spurs his horse back down toward the shore.

Canidius frowns; the republic has no *emperor*. “The time is *in labour* with *news*—and throws some forth each *minute!*”

Octavius Caesar is leading his legions southward across the plain toward Actium.

“Taurus!” he calls.

The marshal, Titus Statilius Taurus, second in command only to Agrippa, rides forward. “My lord?”

“*Strike not by land*; keep whole,” orders Caesar. “Provoke not battle till we have done *at sea*.”

“Do not exceed the prescript of this scroll,” he says urgently, handing it to him. Taurus rides back to pass the order to his captains.

Caesar peers ahead, well aware of Antony’s larger army. *Our fortune lies upon this jump....*

From shore, Antony points up to the right. “Set we our squadrons in eye of Caesar’s battalions”—so as be seen—“on yond side o’ the hill,” he tells Enobarbus, “from which place we may the number of the ships behold, and so proceed accordingly.”

Up on the wide coastal plain, Antony’s huge forces of foot and horse, commanded by Canidius, wait, as Caesar’s legions follow Taurus toward them.

Below, on the sea, the battle has begun. Some of the vessels glide forward under bulging canvas sails; others are propelled by slaves, sweating as they strain to pull the galleys’ long oars.

As they reach each other, men hurl ropes and chains outward to grapple the ships together in deadly embrace; deck-to-deck, wooden bridges are lowered, creaking and groaning even as men swarm across them to leap onto enemies’ decks, and climb the rigging, valiantly swinging swords, and gripping bloody daggers in their fists. They are all shouting, and calling for *death!*

To many, death soon comes.

Above, on the heights, Enobarbus watches. “*Naught*, naught, *all naught!*” he cries, nearly frantic. “I can behold no longer! The *Antoniad*, the Egyptian admiral, and *all their sixty* turn the rudder and *fly!*” He backs away, furious. “To see’t mine eyes are blasted!” He paces on the dry grass.

Scarus, still watching the ships flee, gasps. “*Gods and goddesses!*—all the whole *synod* of them!”

“What’s *thy* vexation?”

The captain shakes his head in disgust. “The *greater mantle of the world* is lost through very *ignorance!*—we have *kissed* away *kingdoms* and *provinces!*”

“How appears the fight?”

“On *our* side like the *tokened pestilence*,”—plague with visible symptoms, “where death is sure!

“Yon *red rag* of piebald *Egypt*—whom *leprosy* o’ertake!—in the midst o’ the fight, when vantage like a pair of *twins* appeared, both as the same—or rather *ours* the *elder!*—the breeze upon her, *hoists sails* and *flies!*”

Enobarbus groans. “That I beheld!—mine eyes did sicken at the sight, and could not endure a further view!”

Scarus has more. “*She* once being loosed, the noble *ruin* of her magic—*Antony*—claps on *his* sea-wing,”—unfurls sail, “and, like a doting mallard, *flies after her!*—*leaving* the fight *at its height!*”

“I never *saw* an action of *such shame!* Experience, manhood—*honour* ne’er before did so *violate itself!*”

“*Alack, alack!*” moans Enobarbus.

Canidius rushes up the hill to them. “Our fortune on the sea is out of breath, and sinks most lamentably!” he tells the other soldiers. “Had our general been what he once knew himself, it had gone well.” He stares down at the gulf. “Oh, he has given *example* for our flight, most *grossly*, by his *own!*” he growls.

Enobarbus has been fearing further desertions. “*Ay!*—are *you* thereabouts? Why, then, *good night indeed!*”—it’s over. After the disgraceful exits, and the disaster now occurring below, he will not argue.

“Toward Peloponnesus”—southern Greece—“are they fled,” says Canidius, of other officers and their troops.

Scarus nods. “And there *I* will attend what further comes. ’Tis easy to ’t,” he notes, familiar with the territory. He, too, will wait to rejoin Antony.

“Six *kings* already show me the way—of *yielding!*” says Canidius. “To Caesar will I render my legions and my horses.”

The two stride away quickly, now, each to follow his chosen path.

Enobarbus turns to look down, sadly, at the ships scattered across the glistening waters.

I’ll yet follow the wounded chance of Antony, though my reason sits in the wind against me.

With their diminished fleet and his remaining troops, Antony and Cleopatra have fled from Greece and sailed, separately, to Egypt. Now in the capital he climbs the marble steps before the palace, aware of the hollow sound his boots make in the sullen silence of his return.

Hark, the land bids me tread no more upon ’t—it is ashamed to bear me!

He turns to address his loyal Roman followers. “Friends, come hither. I am so belatedly back in the *world* that I have lost my way forever!

“I have a ship laden with *gold*; take that, divide it—fly, and make your peace with Caesar!”

He knows that Octavius, pursuing with his forces, will soon land at Alexandria.

Voices cry out in loyal protest: “*Fly? Not we!*”

But Antony, tormented by guilt, faces the crowd. “I have fled *myself!*—have shown cowards how better to *run* and show their shoulders!” he cries, flushing at the memory of Actium.

“Friends, be *gone*; I have resolvèd upon a course which has no need of you. *Be gone!* My treasure’s in the harbour—*take it!*”

“Oh, I followed what I *blush* to look upon! My very *hairs* do mutiny!—for the *white* reprove the brown for *rashness*—and they *them*, for *fear* and *doting!*”

“Friends, be gone. You shall have letters from me to some friends that will sweep your way for you. Pray you, look not sad, nor make replies of loathness; take the tenor which my despair proclaims; let that be *left* which leaves *itself!*”

“To the sea-side! Straight way I will possess you of that ship and treasure.

“Leave me, I pray, a little—pray you, *now!*” He calls out over their objections: “Nay, *do* so! For, indeed, I have lost *command*; therefore I *pray* you.

“I’ll see you by and by,” he says, as they straggle away, dejected.

Antony sits, alone now, on the top step, and stares down at his hands.

Behind him, Cleopatra, still in a daze, emerges from the palace onto the wide portico; Charmian and Iras are at each arm, supporting and guiding her.

With them is Antony’s guard Enos. “Nay, gentle madam, *to* him, *comfort* him!” he tells the queen.

“*Do*, most dear queen!” pleads Iras.

“*Do!*” says Charmian. “Why, what else?”

Cleopatra feels weak. “Let me sit down. *O Juno!*”

Antony, anguished and unaware of her unsteady approach, cries out to sky, “*No, no!*” The others come nearer as he wails. “*No, no no!*”

Enos stops near him and nods toward Cleopatra. “See you here, sir....”

But Antony’s face is hidden in his hands. “Oh, *fie, fie, fie!*”

“Madam!” says Charmian, tightening her grip as the queen falters. Iras, too, brings Cleopatra forward. “Madam, O good empress....”

“Sir,” says Enos gently, “sir....”

Antony, oblivious in his pain, is picturing Julius Caesar—and wondering what he would think of young Octavius’s new victory. *Yes, my lord, yes! He at Philippi kept his sword e’en like a fencer, while I struck the lean and wrinkled Cassius; and ’twas I that the mad Brutus ended!*

He dealt on lieutenantry alone, and had no practise in the brave squaring off of war! Yet now— He shakes his head sorrowfully. *No matter....*

With effort, Cleopatra straightens. “*Ah,*” she sighs, stepping away from her ladies, “stand near.”

“The queen, my lord, the *queen!*” says Enos.

Iras urges her on. “Go to him, madam; *speak* to him!—he is *unqualified* with very shame!”

“Well, then, sustain me.... *Oh...*” groans Cleopatra, as she moves closer to him.

Respectfully, Enos touches Antony’s shoulder. “Most noble sir, arise!—the *queen* approaches! Her head’s declined, and death will seize her, unless your comfort makes the rescue!”

“I have offended *reputation!*” cries Antony. “A most *un-noble* swerving!”

“Sir, the queen...” says Enos, motioning toward her.

Antony comes to his feet. “Oh, whither hast thou led me, Egypt?” He turns away from her and faces the sea. “See how I convey my *shame* out of thine eyes by looking back at what I have left behind, destroyed in dishonour!”

“Oh, my lord, my lord, forgive my fearful sails!” cries Cleopatra. “I little thought you would have *followed!*”

Antony protests bitterly: “Egypt, thou knew’st *only too well* that my heart was tied by its strings to thy rudder, and that thou shouldst tow me after! O’er my *spirit* thy full supremacy thou *knew’st*—and that thy beck might from the bidding of the *gods* command me!”

Cleopatra weeps. “*Oh, my pardon!*”

Antony scowls, thinking angrily of Octavius. “Now I must to a younger man send humble *entreaties*, dodge and palter in the shifts of *lowness*—*I*, who with half the bulk o’ the *world* played as I pleased, making and marring fortunes!

“You did *know* how much you were my conqueror,” he says, nearing tears, “and that my sword, made weak by my *affection*, would obey *it* in all cases!”

“*Pardon,*” moans Cleopatra, arms hanging limp at her sides, “*pardon!*”

Antony embraces her, comfortingly. “Let fall not a tear, I say.” Tenderly, he touches each droplet on her cheek. “*One* of them rates all that is won and lost!

“Give me a kiss,” he says, smiling at her upturned face. “Even *this* repays me!” He draws her closer.

They turn to go into the palace. “We sent our schoolmaster; is he come back?” he asks. An aging civilian who teaches their children has gone to face Caesar, and to act as Antony’s emissary. Cleopatra, her throat sore from sobbing, shakes her head; the man has yet to return.

Mark Antony is weary. “Love, I am full of lead.”

But he brightens as they near the tall doors. “Some *wine*, within there!” he calls to the servants just inside, “and our *viands!*”

He glances defiantly out at the sky. “*Fortune* knows: *we* scorn her most when most she offers *blows!*”

An expanding military camp is being erected at the edge of Alexandria. Bristling with the spears of Octavius Caesar's disembarking legions, it extends almost to the palace grounds. As yet his forces have encountered no opposition in Egypt.

Caesar is expecting a noble emissary. "Let him appear who's come from Antony," he tells Dolabella; the young lord is the son of a Roman consul who had once served in Alexandria. "Know you him?"

"Caesar, 'tis his *schoolmaster!*—an argument that he is *plucked*, when hither he sends so poor a pinion off his wing, who had superfluous *kings* for messengers not many moons gone by!" He signals to soldiers.

The apprehensive citizen is led forward. "Approach, and speak," Caesar tells him.

Euphronius bows. "Such as I am, I come from Antony. I was, of late, as petty to his ends as is the morning dew on the myrtle-leaf to his grand sea of—"

"Be't so," says Octavius impatiently. "Declare thine office."

"Lord of his fortunes, he salutes thee, and requires to live in *Egypt*—which not granted, he lessens his requests, and to thee sues to let him breathe between the heavens and earth as a private man in Athens. This for him.

"Next, Cleopatra does confess thy greatness, submits her to thy might, and of thee craves the circle of the Ptolemies"—their crown, Egypt's—"for her heirs, now hazarded to thy grace."

Caesar tells him curtly, "As for Antony, I have no ear to his request.

"The *queen* of audience nor desire shall fail—if she from Egypt drive her all-disgracèd friend, or take his life here. This if she perform, she shall not sue unheard.

"So to them both."

Euphronius bows. "Fortune pursue thee."

"Take him through the bands." One from Caesar's guard goes with the teacher, to escort him safely past the perimeter lines of Roman sentries.

Octavius turns to Thidias, a courtier known for subtlety and guile, with an assignment: "From Antony win Cleopatra.

"*Promise*, then, in our name, what she requires—and *more* offer, from thine invention,. Women are not in their *best* fortunes strong, and *want* will conjure a ne'er-touched vestal.

"Test thy cunning, Thidias. Make thine own edict for thy pains,"—choose a reward, "which we will answer as if law."

Thidias bows. "Caesar, I go."

"Observe how *Antony* becomes her *flaw*," says Octavius, "and what thou think'st his every action speaks of the *power* that *perturbs!*" He wants to savor Antony's caged humiliation.

"Caesar, I shall."

As he goes, Thidias ponders what offers, however specious, he should make to influence Egypt's defeated queen.

Chapter Seven **Challenges, Retorts**

Cleopatra has watched from a high window in the palace this evening as Caesar's amassing forces encroach into the areas near her stable and parade ground—ignoring her soldiers as they do so. Now, in the throne room, attended by Charmian and Iras, she is distraught.

"What shall we *do*, Enobarbus?"

He shrugs. "Think, and die."

"Is Antony or *we* in fault for this?"

"*Antony only!* Who would make his *will* lord of his *reason?*" asks the commander harshly.

"What?—though you fled from that great face of *war*, whose several ranges frightened each other,

why should he follow? The itch of his affection should not have nicked his *captainship* at such a point, when *half to half the world* was opposed, he bearing the utmost question!

“Then ’twas a *shame* as great as his *loss*, to follow your flying flags, and leave his navy gaping!”

Cleopatra sees Antony coming. She lifts a hand. “Prithee, peace....”

Asks Antony, as he and Euphronius walk toward the throne. “Is *that* his answer?”

“Aye, my lord.”

“The queen shall have *courtesy*, if she will yield us up?”

Euphronius nods. “He says so.”

“Let her know’t,” says Antony, going to stand before the throne. He tells Cleopatra, “To the *boy Caesar*, send this grizzled *head*, and he will fill thy wishes to the brim with *principalities!*”

She touches his face lovingly—and grins. “*That* head, my lord?”

Antony laughs and kisses her.

He turns back to the teacher. “*To* him again! Tell him he wears the rose of *youth* upon him,”—Octavius is twenty years younger than Antony, “from which the world should note something in particular: his coins, ships, legions, may be a *coward’s!*—whose ministers would as soon prevail in the *service of a child* as i’ the command of Caesar!

“I *dare* him therefore to lay his companions apart and answer *me*, *sword* inclined against *sword*—ourselves alone!

“I’ll *write* it!” he tells the wide-eyed tutor; he wants to express the challenge most strongly. “Follow me.” Antony leads the man to his chambers.

Enobarbus’s face reveals his disgust. *Yes, likely enough!—high, armed Caesar will unstate his own good fortune, and be staged in a show against a sword!*

I see men’s judgments are a parcel of their fortunes, and things outward do draw the inward quality after them, to suffer all alike!

He shakes his head, amazed. *That he should dream full Caesar, knowing all measures, would answer his emptiness!*

Caesar, thou hast subdued his judgment, too!

A courtier comes to the queen and bows. “A messenger from Caesar.”

“What, no more ceremony?” She glances at Iras and Charmian. “See, my women: against the *blown* rose they may stop their noses, who *kneeled* unto the bud!” The other ladies look down, silent; never before have they seen the queen receive an unaccompanied emissary from another power.

“Admit him, sir,” says Cleopatra.

The gentleman bows and returns to the visitor.

Enobarbus has been increasingly torn. *Mine honesty and I begin to square up. Loyalty well held to fools does make our faithfulness mere folly!*

Yet he who can endure, following with allegiance a fallen lord, does conquer him that did his master conquer,—commands the victor’s respect—and earns a place in the story....

Thidias now comes to the queen; he smiles and bows, elegantly and deeply.

“Caesar’s will?” she demands.

He urges, quietly, looking at the others, “Hear it apart.”

“None but *friends*,” says Cleopatra. “Say boldly.”

Thidias cautions: “So perhaps are they: friends to *Antony*.”

Enobarbus interjects: “He needs as *many*, sir, as *Caesar* has, or he needs not *us!* If Caesar please, our master will leap to be his friend. As for *us*, you know that whose *he* is, *we* are—and that is *Caesar’s*.”

Thidias proceeds. “So. Thus, then: *thou*, most *renowned*, Caesar entreats to consider in what case thou stand’st no further than that *he* is *Caesar!*”

“Go on,” Cleopatra tells him, happy that no specific threat is offered—yet. “Right *royal*.”

“He knows that you embraced Antony not as you did *love* him, but as you *feared* him.”

“Oh?” Cleopatra is surprised by the odd notion.

Thidias continues his studied argument: “The scars upon your *honour*, therefore, he does *pity*, as *constrained* blemishes, not as *deservèd*.”

Her smile is demure. “He is a *god*, and knows what is most *right*,” she tells the emissary. She well remembers her first blissful night with Antony; she says truthfully, if equivocally, “Mine honour was not yielded, but *conquered* completely!”

Thidias thinks she is accepting his crafty prevarication.

But so does Enobarbus. *To be sure of that, I will ask Antony!* he thinks sourly. *Sir, sir, thou art so leaky that we must leave thee to thy sinking—for thy dearest quits thee!* Shaking his head, goes to warn his lord of perfidy.

“Shall I say to Caesar what you *require* of him?” asks Thidias, unctuously. “For he partly begs to be desired *to give!* It much would please him that of his fortunes you should make a *staff* to *lean* upon!

“But it would *warm his spirits* to hear from me that you had left Antony, and put yourself under *his* mantle—the *universal landlord’s!*”

Mantle—*winding sheet*. Cleopatra smiles again. “What’s your name?”

“My name is Thidias,” he says proudly, while she thinks.

She pictures Antony. “Most kind messenger, say to great Caesar this, in deputation: I kiss *his* conquering hand. Tell him I am prompt to lay my crown at *his* feet, and there to kneel. Tell him, from *his* all-obeyèd breath I hear the fate of Egypt.”

Thidias happily mirrors the calm smile. “’Tis your noblest course,” he says. “Wisdom and fortune combining together, if the former dare but what it *can*, no chance may shake it!

“Give me grace to lay my duty upon your hand”—a kiss, to seal the agreement.

Cleopatra reaches forward. “Your Caesar’s father oft, when he hath musèd on taking *kingdoms* in, bestowed his lips on that unworthy place.” *As if I were reigned by kisses!*

Just as the lips of Thidias touch her hand, Antony rushes toward the throne, followed by Enobarbus. “*Favours*, by Jove that thunders!” he cries, furious. “*Who art thou, fellow?*”

Thidias replies haughtily: “One that but performs the bidding of the *fullest* man—and *worthiest* to have command obeyed.”

Thinks Enobarbus, *You will be whipped!*

Antony motions to the queen’s guards. “*Approach*, there!” He glares at Thidias. “*Oh, you whore!*” He looks around angrily as the servants slowly approach. *Now, gods and devils!—authority melts from me! Of late when I cried ‘Ho,’ like boys unto a supper table, kings would start forth, and cry, ‘Your will?’*

“Have you no *ears?*” he shouts. “I am *Antony* yet!”

Four alarmed attendants rush forward and bow. “Take *hence* this Jack,” Antony tells them, “and *whip him!*”

Enobarbus smiles as young Caesar’s smooth surrogate stares. *’Tis better playing with a lion’s whelp than with an old one dying!*

“*Moon and stars! Whip him!*” shouts Antony. “Were’t *twenty* of the greatest tributaries that do acknowledge Caesar, should I find them so saucy with the hand of *she*, here—what’s her name?—she who was *Cleopatra!*

“*Whip him*, fellows, till you see him *cringe*, his face like a *boy’s*, and *whine aloud* for *mercy!* *Take him hence!*”

“Mark Antony!” pleads Thidias as he is seized.

“Tug him away!” demands Antony. “Being whipped, *bring* him again. This Jack of Caesar’s shall bear us an *errand* to him!”

Two burly guards force Thidias from the throne room.

Antony turns scornfully to Cleopatra. “You were *half* withered ere I *knew* you!” he cries angrily. “Have I my pillow left unpressèd in Rome—forborne the getting of a *lawful* race, and by a *gem* of women—to be abused by one who looks on *feeders?*”—vassals.

“Good my lord—”

“You have ever been a *deceiver*; but when *we* in our viciousness”—lechery—“grow *hard—oh, misery* on’t!—the wise *gods* seal our eyes!—into *our own filth* drop our clear judgments—make us *adore* our *errors!*—*laugh* at us while we strut to our destruction!”

Cleopatra steps back as he rages. “Oh, is’t come to this?” she asks sadly.

“I found you as a *morsel*, cold upon dead Caesar’s platter! Nay, you were a fragment of Gneius *Pompey’s!*—besides whatever *hotter* hours, unregistered in vulgar fame, you have luxuriously pickèd out! For though I am sure you can *guess* what temperance *should* be, you *know not what it is!*”

Cleopatra is stunned: “*Wherefore* is this?”

Antony cries out in a jealous eruption: “To let a *fellow* that will take rewards”—*accept tips*—“be familiar with *my playfellow!*—*your hand*, this kingly seal and plighter to *high hearts!*—I say, ‘*God repay you!*’

“Oh, that I were upon the hill of Basan, *outroaring* the *hornèd herd!*”—bulls mentioned in Psalms. “For I have *savage cause!*—and to proclaim it *civilly* were like the haltered neck which does the hangman *thank* for being *yare* about him!”—killing quickly.

He sees the men returning; Thidias staggers between them, his head hanging low. “Is he whipped?”

“*Soundly*, my lord!”

Sweat drips from Thidias’s chin; his jaws are clenched in agony.

“Cried he? And begged ’a pardon?”

“He *did* ask favour.”

“If that thy *father* live,” Antony tells him, “let him *repent* thou wast not made his *daughter!*—and be *thou* sorry to follow Caesar in his triumph, since thou hast been *whipped* for following him! Henceforth if the white hand of a *lady* fever thee—*shake* thou to *look* on’t!

“Get thee back to Caesar—tell him of thy entertainment. Look thou say he makes me *angry* with him!—for he seems proud and disdainful, harping on what I am, not what he knew I *was!*”

“*He makes me angry!*—and at this time, most easy ’tis to do’t, when my good stars, that were my former guides, have *empty* left their orbs, and shot their fires into the abysm of *hell!*”

“If he *mislike* my speech and what is done, tell him he has Hipparchus, my enfranchisèd *bondman,*”—and one of the commoners who defected at Actium, “whom *he* may at pleasure whip, or hang, or torture, as he shall like, to acquit me!

“*Urge* it thou! *Hence* with thy *stripes!* “—welts. “*Begone!*”

The men release Thidias’s arms, and he nearly falls. He straightens, painfully, and shuffles from the throne room, leaving a trail of red splotches.

Cleopatra regards Antony. Jealousy resides between men; and a man feeling diminished is most subject to its torment. After a moment, she asks, “Have you done yet?”

His anger is nearly spent, and he grows disconsolate. “Alack, my *terrene moon*”—earthly luminary—“is now *eclipsed*, and that portends alone the *fall of Antony!*”

She comes to him and touches his arm. “I must stay his time,” she says softly.

But Antony’s temper flares. “To *flatter Caesar* would you mingle eyes with one that *ties his points?*”—fastens his clothing.

Asks Cleopatra quietly, “Not know me yet?”

Antony softens, his blue eyes searching her face. “Cold-hearted toward me?” he asks, a bit contrite.

She can now contest with his vehemence. “*Ah*, dear, if I be *so*, from my *cold heart* let heaven engender *hail!*—and *poison* it at the *source!*—and may the *first* stone drop *into my throat!*—and as it *dissolves*, so determine my *life!*”

“Let the next one *Caesarion* smite!—till by degrees the memory of *my womb*, together with my *brave Egyptians all*, by the disordering of this pelleted storm *lie graveless!*—till the *flies and gnats* of Nile have *buried* them as *prey!*”

Antony can't help but smile. "I am satisfied," he says dryly.

He considers—and begins to brighten. "Caesar *sits down* at Alexandria—where I will *oppose* his fate! Our force by land hath nobly *held*"—kept together. "Our severed *navy*, too, have *knit again* most *sea-like*—and they are *fleet, threatening!*

"Where hast thou *been, my heart?*" he cries, expectation rising. "Dost thou *hear, lady!* If from the field I shall return to kiss these lips once more, I will appear *in blood!* I and my *sword* will *earn our chronicle!* There's *hope* in't yet!"

She beams. "*That's my brave lord!*"

"I will be *treble-sinewed!*—*heartèd, breathèd!*—and fight *maliciously!*" cries Antony, feeling free, now, from chivalry's strictures. "When mine hours were fine and lucky, men did ransom *lives* from me by pleading for *rest*—but now I'll *set my teeth!*—and *send to darkness* all that bar me!

"Come, let's have *another gaudy night!* Call to me all my sad captains!—fill our cups once more!—let's *mock* the midnight bell!"

"It is my *birthday,*" Cleopatra tells him. "I had thought to have held it poorly—but since my lord is *Antony* again, I will be *Cleopatra!*"

"We will *yet* do well!"

Cleopatra tells her attendants, "Call all his noble captains to my lord!"

"*Do so!*" says Antony. "We'll *speak* to them!—and tonight I'll force the *wine* to peep through their *scars!*

"Come on, my queen; there's *sap* in't yet! The next time I do fight, I'll make Death *love* me, for I will *contend evenly* with his pestilent scythe!"

They head happily for her chambers, and the others leave the throne room.

All but Enobarbus.

Even from here, he can discern the pounding pulsation of the camp's drums.

Now he'll outstare the lightning! To be furious is to be frightened out of fear; and in that mood the dove will peck the hawk! And I see still that a diminution in our captain's brain restores his heart!

When valour preys on reason, it eats the sword it fights with!

He has seen enough, had enough. *I will seek some way to leave him.*

Standing before his tent with Agrippa and Maecenas, while Rome's massive force finishes assembling on a southern shore of the Mediterranean, Octavius crumples Antony's letter. "He calls me *boy*, and *chides* as if he had power to beat me out of Egypt! My messenger he hath whipped with rods!—dares *me* to personal combat!—*Caesar* to Antony!"

"Let the old ruffian know I have many *other* ways to die!—and meantime *laugh* at his challenge!"

Maecenas sees an opportunity. "Caesar must think that when one so great begins to rage, he's hunted even to falling! Give him no breath, but *now make boot* of his distraction! Anger never made good *guard* for itself."

But Caesar is in no hurry. "Let our best heads know that tomorrow is the last of the many battles we meant to fight." Once Egypt, the remainder of Rome's challenged territory, has been secured, he intends to consolidate the domination that will enforce peace in all of it.

He considers. "Within our files there are, among those that served Mark Antony but lately, enough to fetch him in." He would rather endanger the defectors than his own troops, and he prefers to keep turncoats in front of him, under watch. "See it done."

"And feast the army; we have store to do't, and they have earned the waste." The commanders bow and go to effect his prudent design: tonight hot food and sleep, then combat in the morning.

As the sun's red disk sinks behind him, Octavius gazes through the sultry air toward the palace, shimmering in the rising heat, and the vast delta city beyond.

“Poor Antony.”

In the queen’s elaborate chambers, Antony has received word from Caesar. “He will not fight with me, Domitius.”

Enobarbus is stolid. “No.”

“Why should he not?”

“He thinks, being of twenty times better *fortune*, he is twenty men to one.”

“*Tomorrow*, soldier, by sea and land I’ll fight!” vows Antony. “I will live, or bathe my dying *honour* in the blood that shall make *it* live again!

“Woo’t *thou* fight, as well?”

“I’ll strike, and cry, ‘Take all!’”

Antony claps an arm around his shoulders. “*Well said!*”

“Come on! Call forth my household servants! Let’s tonight be *bounteous* at our meal!”

He greets the men as they come to him. “Give me thy hand—thou hast been rightly honest! So hast thou... thou... and thou...and *thou!* You have served me well when *kings* have been your fellows!”—*have done the same.*

Cleopatra, watching beside Charmian, Iras and Alexas, is puzzled; she whispers to Enobarbus: “What means this?”

He replies, quietly, “’Tis one of those odd tricks which sorrow shoots out of the mind.”

Antony smiles at the servitors. “And thou art honest, too! I wish I could see *made* so many men—and all of them clapped up together into an *Antony*, so that I might do *you* service as good as you have done.”

“The gods forbid!” says one servant; they are very pleased, but sheepish.

“Well, my good fellows, wait on me again tonight,” Antony asks. “Scant not my cups; and make as much of me as when mine *empire* was your fellow, and suffered, too, my command.”

Cleopatra is concerned. “What does he mean?” she whispers.

Enobarbus is glum. “To make his followers weep.”

Antony speaks softly. “Tend me tonight; may be it is the period”—end—“of your duty. Perhaps you shall not see me more; or if so, a mangled shadow. Perchance tomorrow you’ll serve another master.”

The downcast men exchange troubled glances.

“I look on you as one who takes his leave. Mine honest friends, I turn you not away, but like a master *married* to your good service, stay till death. Tend me tonight two hours—I ask no more; and may the gods yield unto you for’t.”

In spite of himself, Enobarbus finds his feelings stirred. “What mean you, sir, to give them this discomfort? Look—they *weep!* Even *I* am an onion-eyed ass! *For shame!*—transform us not to women!”

“Now a witch take me if I meant it *thus!*” says Antony. But he adds, touched, “May grace grow where those drops fall.

“My hearty friends, you take me in too dolorous a sense!—I spake to you for your *comfort!*—did desire you to *burn this night with torches!*”

He waxes jovial. “Know, my hearts, I hope *well* of tomorrow; and will lead you where I’ll expect *victorious life* rather than death in honour!”

Mark Antony heads toward the dining hall. “Let’s to supper! *Come!*—and *drown* considerations!”

A thick night air, warm and still, hovers about Alexandria. Lines of torches range along the open ground between the waiting armies; and in the shadows on either side, halberd-gripping sentinels watch and listen intently from behind their iron-bound wooden shields—while anxiety clutches at their hearts.

In Octavius's camp, a Roman officer, much in need of sleep after his long voyage and brief march, then a long, uneasy watch here beneath the stars, tells another. "Brother, good night. Tomorrow is *the day!*"

The lieutenant has brought relief—other weary soldiers. He nods. "It will determine one way. Fare you well." He pauses. "Heard you of anything strange?"

"Nothing. What news?"

"Belike it's but a rumour." There is talk of a major defection. "Good *night* to you."

"Well, sir, good night."

Their men exchange places as well.

"Soldiers, have careful watch," advises, Philo, the lieutenant coming on duty with them.

"And you," two reply. The new sentries take up positions facing the no man's land. "Good night, good night," they tell each other.

"Here we *are!*" says one proud young soldier, as he settles in beside a small fire. "And if tomorrow our *navy* thrives not, I have an absolute hope we *landmen* will stand up!"

The older man sitting beside him merely nods. "'Tis a brave army, and full of purpose."

Their patch of scrub is eerily, ominously quiet.

An hour passes in a soft hiss of tedious stillness.

Privately, each man, sensing his own breathing and heartbeat, hopes the ephemeral flames wavering before them can ward off the inchoate horrors accumulating in the silent, surrounding dark.

—

Stirred from drowsiness, the Romans of Caesar's watch frown at hearing odd sounds: deep thumping, an occasional reedy tone, a note borne on a zephyr.... The wisps, hints of long-forgotten song, floating almost unheard—imagined, perhaps—disturb them.

A corporal, crouching, whispers, "*Peace*—what noise?"

Then a rhythm builds—an unearthly resonance, steady and low, that seems to come from the ground.

"List, *list!*"

Philo glances around. "Hark!"

"*Music* i' the air," breathes the first soldier.

"*Under the earth!*"

Asks the youngest one hopefully, "It signs *well*, does it not?"

"No." Foot soldiers share their fears; few superstitions offer *good* omens.

The corporal puts an ear to the ground. "*Peace*, I say! What should this *mean?*"

Thinks the lieutenant, '*Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, who now leaves him.* Philo can make out faint strains: music of Bacchanalia—revelry again rules in the palace.

The corporal rises. "Let's walk—see if other watchmen do hear what we do."

He and another soldier cautiously move to meet troops coming from an observation post to the south.

"How now, masters?"

There is a hushed conference: "How now!" "Do you hear this?"

"*Aye*; is't not *strange*?" "Do you hear, masters? Do you *hear?*"

"Follow the noise so far as we have quarter; let's see how it will give off," the youth proposes.

Philo has followed them. "Be content," the lieutenant tells the men, motioning them back; whatever danger may be near, he knows, will be seen soon enough.

But the soldiers, returning to their posts, still frown. "'Tis *strange!*"

Chapter Eight Glory, and Despair

Antony's call—"Enos! Mine *armour*, Enos!"—awakens Cleopatra. "*Sleep* a little," she moans, not ready to face the break of this day.

"No, my chuck. *Enos, come!*—mine *armour*, Enos!" The guard brings the heavy pieces. "Come good fellow, put mine iron on! If Fortune be not ours today, it is because we *challenge* her! Come!"

"Aye, I'll help, too," says Cleopatra, grasping a leather strap. "What's this for?"

Antony smiles. "*Ah*, let be, *let be!* Thou art the armourer of my *heart!*" She tries to fit a shoulder piece to his leg. "False, false," he laughs, showing her, "this, *this.*"

Cleopatra persists. "In sooth, love, I'll *help!* ... Thus it must be..."

"Well, well; we shall thrive *now!*" says Antony wryly, putting the shoulder piece front side to the front. "*Seest* thou, my good fellow?" he asks a smiling Enos. "Go put on *thy* defences."

The guard nods, continuing to adjust Antony's armor. "Briefly, sir."

Cleopatra tugs to tighten the breastplate over Antony's heart. "Is not *this* buckled well?"

"Rarely, rarely!" he assures her. "He that would unbuckle *this*—till *we* do please to daff't for our repose—shall hear a *storm!*"

"Thou *fumblest*, Enos, and my *queen's* a squire more tight at this than thou! *Dispatch!*"

"Oh, love, would that thou couldst *see* my wars today, and knew'st the *royal* occupation! Thou shouldst see a *workman* in't!" He accepts his helmet, and holds it under his left arm.

They move from her quarters through a large chamber, then down stone steps and into a tall corridor. From the door, an armored soldier rushes to them and salutes.

"Good *morrow* to thee! Welcome!" says Antony. "Thou look'st like him that knows a *warlike* charge! To business that we love we rise betime, and go to't with delight!"

"*A thousand*, sir, early though't be, have on their riveted trim, and at the port expect you!"

Outside, commands are shouted. Trumpets sound, and five captains, followed by ranks of soldiers, march up to stand before Antony, watching them from above on the stone steps.

"*This morn* is *fair!*" says a captain, bowing. "*Good morrow*, general!" The troops echo his words with enthusiasm and cheers, and trumpets sound.

Antony, glad to hear a martial flourish once more, beams. "'Tis well blown, lads! This morning, like the spirit of a youth that means to be of note, *begins betimes!*"

Enos brings his weapons. "So, so," says Antony, fastening a dagger at his waist. "Come, give me that." He puts on the belt from which Philippan is suspended, and adjusts it. "This way; well done."

Antony turns to Cleopatra. "*Fare thee well*, dame, whate'er becomes of me!" He pulls her to him. "Rebukeable and worthy of shameful check, it were, to stand on mere mechanic compliment. *This is a soldier's kiss!*" As he busses her firmly, the troops burst into applause. "I'll leave thee now, like a man of *steel!*"

He turns to the men. "You that will *fight*, follow me close!—*I'll bring you to't!*"

He leads his captains and their marching soldiers away.

"*Adieu!*" he calls to the queen.

Cleopatra has stood, watching, after he has gone.

Says Charmian, "Please you, retire to your chamber..."

"Lead me," says the queen weakly. "He goes forth gallantly.

"If only he and Caesar might determine this great war in single fight! Then Antony—

"But now—"

She takes Charmian's hand. "Well... on."

Harsh voices shout out over the field in the clear morning air, as the former centurion captains and Egyptian officers call instructions to their forces, bringing the allied units into order. Antony strides through his troops' fast-growing assembly, and trumpets blare as he approaches Enobarbus's big tent.

A sergeant, pulling back a canvas flap of the opening, greets him with a bow. "The gods make this a happy day to Antony!"

Antony recognizes him. "I would that thou and those thy scars had once prevailed to make me fight on *land!*"

The man smiles, but his gaze is piercing. "Hadst thou done so, the kings that have revolted—and the soldier that has this morning left thee—would still be following thy heels."

Antony frowns. "Who's gone this morning?"

"Who?—one ever near thee. Call for *Enobarbus*, he shall not hear thee—or from *Caesar's* camp, say, 'I am none of *thine!*'"

Antony is stunned. "What say'st thou?"

"Sir, he is with Caesar."

Enos points to the back of the tent as they enter. "Sir, his chests and treasure he has not with him."

Antony stares. "Is he *gone?*"

"Most certain," says the soldier.

Antony thinks for a moment. "Go, Enos, send his treasure after—*do it!* Detain no jot, I charge thee! Write to him—I will sign it—gentle greetings and adieu.

"Say that I wish he never find *more* cause to change a master.

"Oh, my fortunes have corrupted honest men!

"*Dispatch!*" he tells Enos, who is already seated and beginning to write; soon there will be no peaceful exchanges between the armies.

Antony looks sadly at the familiar, battered trunks. "Enobarbus...."

Before his tent, Caesar receives word that all is ready. "Go forth, Agrippa, and begin the fight," he orders. "Our will is that Antony be taken alive; make it so known."

Agrippa bows. "Caesar, I shall." He hurries out to the waiting legions.

Octavius watches solemnly, pondering, as his troops move forward, all along a front facing Alexandria.

The time of universal peace is near. Prove this a prosperous day, and the three-nookèd world shall bear the olive freely! His Mediterranean dominion will be firmly kept calm within.

A messenger brings word to Octavius: "Antony is come into the field!"

"Go charge Agrippa to plant those that have revolted in the vanguard," Caesar tells him, "so that Antony may be seen to expend his fury upon *himself!*"

Enobarbus, now waiting in Caesar's camp, ruminates gloomily.

Alexas did revolt: went to Jewry on affairs of Antony, and there did persuade great Herod to incline himself—to Caesar! For his pains, Caesar hath hanged him.

Enobarbus is walking among other Roman defectors' tents. *Canidius and the rest that fell away have acceptance, but no honourable trust.*

He shakes his head. *I have done ill!—of which I do accuse myself so sorely that I will joy no more!*

One of Caesar's soldiers finds him. "Enobarbus, Antony hath after thee sent *all thy treasure!*—with *his* bounty as *overplus!* The messenger came on my guard, and at thy tent is now unloading his mules."

Enobarbus pales, further stricken. “I give it you.”

“*Mock not, Enobarbus,*” laughs the soldier, “I tell you *true!* Best you safed the bringer out of the host; I must attend mine office, or would have done’t myself.” He thinks of the heavy, piled-up wealth. “Your emperor continues still a *Jove!*” He hurries back to join his fellows.

Listening as the battle swells and rages—without *him*—the regret-stricken warrior is overwhelmed by guilt. *I am alone the villain of the earth!—and must feel that I am so!*

O Antony, thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid my better service, when my turpitude thou dost so crown with gold!

This blow is to my heart! If swift thought break it not, a swifter means shall outstrike aught! But thought will do’t, I feel.

Bereft of proud service, he is beyond all comfort.

I fight against thee? No.

He returns to his tent; where the chests’ hoarded memories seem to reproach him. He stands before them, his strong arms dangling, the big hands empty.

I will go seek some ditch wherein to die; the foulest best fits my latter part of life.

Some time later, he rises from the field table, spilling wine across it.

“*Retire!*”

Agrippa—a very surprised general—signals urgently for his troops to pull back under the furious attack of Antony’s desperate troops.

“We have engaged ourselves too far!” he tells a captain, amazed, as they retreat. “*Caesar himself* has work, and our oppression exceeds what we expected!”

The field of battle is strewn with bodies of men, some still bleeding, many lying motionless. The wounded groan and call out, limping, crawling, trying to reach help to the east or west.

But for most, their agonized struggle under the searing and pitiless Egyptian sun will end by nightfall.

Vigorous pounding of drums and trumpets’ proud peals encourage Antony and Scarus, as their troops combine to press the advance on Caesar’s startled, now-beleaguered soldiers.

“Oh, my brave *emperor*, *this* is fought *indeed!*” cries the captain joyously. “Had we done so at first, we had *driven them home* with *clouts about their heads!*”

Antony spots the crimson staining the captain’s leg. “Thou bleed’st apace!”

Scarus jests, wincing, “I had a wound here that was like a *T*, but now ’tis made an *H!*”—pronounced as *ache*.

Antony sees that the enemy troops are turning away. “They do *retire!*”

Scarus jubilates: “We’ll beat ’em *through bench-holes!*”—openings for defecation. “I have room yet for *six scotches more!*” he cries, proudly slapping the wounded leg.

“*They are beaten*, sir!” cries Enos, running to Antony, “and our advantage serves for a fair *victory!*”

“Let us *score their backs,*” shouts Scarus, “and take ’em up as we snatch *hares*—from *behind!* ’Tis *sport*, to maul a *runner!*”

Antony starts after the fleeing Romans and their dazed stragglers. “I will reward thee once for thy good *valour*—and *ten-fold* for thy *spritely comportment!* *Come thee on!*”

Scarus limps, but he will not stop for rest. “*I’ll halt after!*”

Just after sunset, Antony returns to the palace, bringing his top officers and some notably valiant troops up onto the broad terrace facing Alexandria. He is highly pleased with the reversal inflicted on Caesar. “We have beat him to his camp!”

“Run one before, and let the *queen* know of our *guests!*” A young messenger trots away.

Antony calls out to the troops: “*Tomorrow* before the sun shall see us we’ll *spill* the blood that has today escaped!

“*I thank you all!*—for doughty-handed are you, and have fought not as if you *served* a cause, but as if it had been *each* man’s like *mine!* You have shown, all, as *Hectors!*”

“Enter the city, clasp your *wives*, your *friends!*—*tell* them your feats, whilst they with joyful tears wash the congealment from your wounds, and kiss the honourèd gashes to wholeness!”

As Cleopatra and her attendants hurry onto the portico, Antony turns to Scarus. “Give me thy hand!” He is shaking it warmly when she reaches him. “To this great fairy I’ll commend thine acts!—make *her* thanks bless thee!”

Cleopatra throws her arms up around Antony’s neck and kisses his face.

“O thou *day* o’ the *world!*—claim mine armored neck,” he tells her, “leap thou, attire and all, through proven hardness *into my heart*, and there *ride on*, panting in *triumph!*”

“*Lord of lords!*” she cries, delighted. “O *infinite* virtue, comest thou smiling from the world’s great snare *uncaught?*”

“My nightingale, we have *beat them to their beds!*” he exclaims. “*What*, girl? Though grey do somewhat mingle with our younger brown, *yet* have we a brain that *nourishes* our strength, and can *get*, goal for goal, from *youth!*”

“Behold *this* man,” he says, turning toward Scarus. “Commend unto his lips thy favouring hand!”

“Kiss it, my warrior!” he tells the captain, who happily complies. “He hath fought today as if a *god* had destroyed in such a shape, in hatred of mankind!”

Cleopatra beams at Scarus. “I’ll give thee, friend, an armour *all of gold!*—it was a *king’s!*”

“He has *deserved* it,” says Antony, “were it carbuncled like holy *Phoebus’* car!”

“Give me thy hand!” he tells her. He calls to the ranks: “*Through Alexandria* make a jolly *march!* Bear our hackèd targets”—shields—“like the men that *own* them!”

His broad wave takes in the troops. “Had our great palace the capacity to camp this host, we *all* would sup together, and drink carouses to the next day’s fate, which promises royal peril!”

“*Trumpeters,*” he calls, “with brazen din blast you the city’s ear!—make it tingle with rattling *tabourins!*—so that *heaven* and *earth* may strike their bounds together, applauding your approach!”

—

In the dark, along the forward reaches of Caesar’s camp, exhausted sentinels are drooping at their posts.

“If we be not relieved within this hour, we must return to the court of guard,” complains a soldier. He glances at the moon. “The night is waning; and they say we shall embattle by the second hour i’ the morn.”

“This *last* day was a *harsh* one to ’s!” His companions hope for better success in the fighting soon to come.

But now they all listen; from a distance behind them, slow, heavy footfalls approach on the gravelly ground. Away to their right, they can barely make out the shadowy form of a large man—an armored soldier, but with no helmet—alone. He staggers forward, then stumbles down the furrowed slope of a dry stream bed.

He rises, painfully, to his knees. “Oh, bear me *witness*, night!” he groans, a hand clutching at his chest.

- “What man is this?” whispers a young soldier.

- “Stand close, and list to him,” says another quietly.

The solitary supplicant looks upward, hands raised. “Be witness to me, O thou blessèd moon, when *revolted* men shall bear a *hateful* memory upon record, that poor Enobarbus did before thy face *repent!*”

- The soldiers know the general by reputation. “Enobarbus!”

- “*Peace!* Harken further...”

“O sovereign mistress of true melancholy,” moans the anguished warrior, “the poisonous damp of night disponge upon me, so *life*, a very rebel to my will, may hang no longer on me! Against the flinten hardness of my *fault* throw my *heart*—which, being dried with *grief*, will break to *powder*, and finish all foul thoughts!

“O *Antony*, nobler than my revolt is *infamous*, forgive me in thine own particular, but let the *world* rank me in register as a *master-leaver*, and a *fugitive!*”

“O *Antony!* O *Antony!*” he sobs, collapsing, heartbroken, onto the cracked and hardened mud.

For a moment, the soldiers watch in silence. Then: “Let’s speak to him.”

“Let’s *hear* him—for the things he speaks may concern Caesar!”

Their corporal, nods watching Enobarbus. “Let’s do so. But he sleeps...”

“*Swoons* rather—for so bad a prayer as *his* was never yet for *sleep!*”

“Go we to him!” They move forward.

“Awake, sir, *awake!*” says the corporal, kneeling, and gently shaking the general’s shoulder. “Speak to us.”

“Hear you, sir?”

The corporal rises. “The hand of Death hath raught him.”

He looks away, hearing a clamor. “Hark: the drums *demurely* wake the *sleepers*,” he says, with weary irony. “Let us bear him to the court of guard; he is of note.

“Our hour is fully out,” he says, peering around as the drums beat louder; they will be glad to leave the front.

Two men, straining, lift Enobarbus. “Come on, then; he may recover yet...”

He will not.

This clear, brilliant morning, Antony is again clad in full armor. “Their preparation today is by *sea*,” he tells Scarus. “We *please them not* by land!”

Scarus laughs: “Nor *both*, my lord!”

“I would they’d fight i’ the *fire* or i’ the *air*—we’d fight *there*, too!”

“But thus it *is*: order for sea is given; they have put forth from the haven. Our foot-soldiers upon the hills adjoining the city shall stay with us, where their best appointment we may discover, and look upon their endeavour.”

The two mount horses and lead a small, armed party higher, to observe the naval battle.

Antony’s troops congregate in the shallow valleys below.

Octavius Caesar has been issuing orders to his centurions: he wants them to wait, while he gauges progress of the fleets’ clash on the sea.

“But for being charged, we will be still by land—which, as I take’t, we *shall*, for his best force is forth to man his galleys.

“To the vales, and hold our best advantage.”

Antony and Scarus, with Enos and a few other men following, ride up along a hillside overlooking the southern Mediterranean shore. They watch as the warships approach each other.

“Yet they are not joined,” notes Antony, dismounting. He points to the peak. “Where yond pine does stand, I shall discover all. I’ll bring thee word, straight, how ’tis like to go.” Despite the heavy armor, he climbs quickly and stands at the crest, shielding his eyes from the sun with the flat of a hand as he stares down.

Scarus holds Antony’s helmet. His thoughts are grave: *Swallows have built their nests in Cleopatra’s sails! The augurers say they know not, they cannot tell—but look grimly, and dare not speak their knowledge!*

Antony is valiant, then dejected—and by starts his fretted fortunes give him hope and fear, for what he has and has not.

He sees Cleopatra approaching from below, along the eastern slope, with a small retinue.

Scarus looks northward. Just off the coast the fight at sea has begun—silently, from this distance, and with an odd grace, as the vessels glide slowly into a jumble on the sparkling surface.

Antony clammers down, furious. “*All is lost! That foul Egyptian hath betrayed me!—my fleet hath yielded to the foe!—and yonder they cast up their caps, and carouse together like friends long lost!*”

“*Triple-turned whore!*” he cries, livid, spotting the queen’s train below. “‘*Tis thou hast sold me to this novice!—and my heart makes wars only on thee!*”

He takes back the helmet and the reins of his steed. Motioning toward their troops, he orders Scarus, “*Bid them all fly, for when I am revenged upon my charmer, I have done all!*” He waves the captain away. “*Bid them all fly!—begone!*”

Scarus, grim-faced, bows; he and his men ride away to inform the other commanders, waiting below.

Antony stares up. *O sun, thine uprise shall I see no more! Fortune and Antony part here; even here do we shake hands!*

All come to this? The hearts that spanieled me at heels—to whom I gave their wishes!—do as candy—melt their sweetness into a blossoming for Caesar!

And this pine, that overtopped them all, is disbarked!

Betrayed I am! Oh, this false soul of Egypt!—this deadly schemer whose eye becked forth my wars, then called them home!—whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end!—like a right gipsy hath as fast and loose beguiled me to the very heart of loss!

He calls to the guard still waiting nearby. “*What?—Enos! Enos!*”

Cleopatra has run ahead to meet him, but before she can speak he shouts: “*Oh, thou spell! Avaunt!*”

She stops. “*Why is my lord enraged against his love?*”

“*Vanish!*” he shouts, “*or I shall give thee thy deserving—and diminish Caesar’s triumph!*”

“*Let him take thee and hoist thee up before the shouting plebeians!*”

“*Follow his chariot, like the greatest blemish of all thy sex! Most monster-like be shown before poorest diminutives, or dolts!—and let patient Octavia plough thy visage up with her preparèd nails!*”

Cleopatra backs away, then runs, weeping, to her followers; they hasten down toward the palace.

He fumes. *’Tis well thou’rt gone—if it be well to live!*

His thoughts grow even darker. *But ’twere better thou fell’st to my fury—for one death might have prevented many!*

“*Enos, ho!*” he calls, waving; the guard hears, and starts toward him.

The shirt of Nessus is upon me! Teach me, Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage!—let me lodge Lichas on the horns o’ the moon!

Legend has it that, after unwittingly bringing Hercules the corrosive garment which soon killed him, Lichas, his servant, was hurled into the sea.

And with those hands that grasped the heaviest club, subdue my worthless self!

The witch shall die!

To the young Roman boy she hath sold me!—and I fall under his plot!

She dies for’t!

He puts on the helmet and mounts his stallion. “*Enos, ho!*” he howls.

Cleopatra’s footsteps echo in the high, deserted throne room as she rushes in, afraid.

“*Help me, my women!*” she cries, as Charmian and Iras hurry after. “*Oh, he is more mad than Telamon for his shield!—the boar of Thessaly was never so lathered and incensed!*”

“To the monument!” urges Charmian. “There *lock yourself*—and send him word you are *dead!* The soul and body rive not more than at parting! Greatness *going off*—”

“To the *monument!*” cries Cleopatra. “Mardian, go tell him I have *slain myself!*”

“Say that the last I spoke was ‘*Antony!*’—and word it, prithee, *piteously!* Hence, Mardian, and bring me how he takes my death!

“To the monument!”

Antony has reached the queen’s chambers at the palace. “Enos, thou yet behold’st me?” The guard looks at him, puzzled. “Aye, noble lord....”

“Sometimes we see a *cloud* that’s *dragonish*—the mist betimes like a bear or lion, a towered citadel, a pendent rock, a forkèd mountain, or blue promontory with trees upon’t—that but *mocks* our eyes with *air*, when they nod unto the world....

“Thou hast seen these signs that are vespers pageants?”—twilight images of imagination.

“Aye, my lord.”

“That which is now a *horse*... with even a thought, the vapour dislimns, and makes it indistinct as water is in water.”

“It does, my lord.”

The erstwhile emperor regards him sadly. “My good Enos, now thy captain is even such a body. Here I am *Antony*—yet cannot *hold* this visible shape as my *knave!*”

“I made these wars for *Egypt*,” he groans, “but the queen whose *heart* I thought I had—for she had *mine*, which whilst it *was* mine had annexed unto’t a *million more*, now *lost!*—*she*, Enos, has stacked the cards for *Caesar*, and false-played my glory into an *enemy’s triumph!*”

The loyal and devoted soldier shares that belief; he looks down sadly, then must turn away.

“Nay, weep not, gentle Enos; there is left us our *selves*, to *end* ourselves....”

But his anger flashes again when the queen’s chief eunuch enters the room. “Oh, thy *vile lady!*” cries Antony bitterly. “She has robbed *me* of *my sword!*”

Mardian only shakes his head sadly. “No, Antony. My mistress *loved* thee, and mingled her fortunes with thine entirely.”

Antony waves him away. “*Hence, saucy eunuch! Peace!* She hath *betrayed me!*—and shall *die the death!*”

“The debt of one’s person can be paid but once,” says Mardian mournfully, “and that she has discharged. What thou wouldst do is done, beyond thy hand. The last she spake was, ‘*Antony!*—most *noble Antony!*’”

“Then, in the midst of a *tearing groan*, she did *break* the name of Antony: it was divided between her heart and lips; she rendered unto *life* thy name, so burièd within her!”

Antony stares. “*Dead*, then?”

“Dead.”

Suddenly, Antony is exhausted. “Unarm, Enos. The long day’s task is done, and we must sleep.”

He tells Mardian, “That thou depart’st hence *safe* does pay thy labour *richly*. Go.” The courtier bows and leaves.

“Off, pluck *off!*” moans Antony, loosening armor as if to shed life. “The seven-fold shield of *Ajax* cannot keep the battering from my *heart!*” He throws aside his breastplate. “Oh, *cleave*, my sides! Heart, for once be stronger than thy containment—*crack* thy frail case!”

“Apace, Enos, *apace!*” he says, as the man helps him. “No longer on a *soldier*, bruisèd pieces, go; you *had* been nobly borne....”

His tears again well up. “From me awhile.” Enos bows and goes, wiping his own eyes.

Alone, Mark Antony grieves.

Slowly, he goes to a window, then stands for a moment, looking out at the azure sky. *I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra—and weep for pardon!*

So it must be, for now all length is torture! Since the torch is out, lie down, and stray no farther. Now all labour mars what it does; yea, very force entangles itself with strength.

Seal then, and all is done.

“Enos!” *I come, my queen!* “Enos!”

Wait for me! Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll go hand in hand, and with our spirited bearing make the ghosts gaze! Dido and her Aeneas shall lack troops, and all the haunt be ours!

The guard returns. “What would my lord?”

“Since Cleopatra died, I have *lived*—in such dishonour that the *gods* detest my baseness!

“I, who with my sword *quartered the world*, and o'er green *Neptune's* back bade *cities* of ships, condemn myself for lacking the courage of a *woman!*—less noble of mind than she who by her death tells Octavius, ‘*I am conqueror of myself!*’”

He moves closer. “Thou art *sworn*, Enos, that if the exigent should come—which now is come indeed!—when I should see behind me the inevitable persecution of *disgrace in honor*—that, on my command, thou then wouldst kill me.

“*Do 't*. The time is come. Thou strikest not *me*—’tis *Caesar* thou defeat’st!”

He sees that Enos is dismayed. “Put colour in thy cheek....”

“The *gods withhold* me!” protests the guard. “Shall *I* do that which all the Parthian *darts*—losing aim though *enemies*—could *not*?”

“Enos, wouldst thou be windowed in great *Rome* and see thy master *thus*”—Antony cringes, hands held behind his back—“with pleachèd *arms*, *bending down* his corrigible neck, his face subdued to penetrative *shame*, whilst from the wheelèd seat drawn before him, fortunate *Caesar* branded *baseness* on all who ensued?”

Enos looks down. “I would not see’t.”

“Come, then. For with a *wound* I must be *cured*,” says Antony. “Draw that thine honest sword, which thou hast worn most usefully for thy country.”

“Oh, sir, *pardon* me!” pleads Enos, not persuaded.

“When I did make thee *free*, sworest thou not then to do this when I bade thee? *Do it at once!*—or all thy precedent services are but accidents, unpurposèd! Draw, and come.”

“Turn from me, then, that noble countenance wherein lies the *worship* of the whole *world!*”

Antony nods and turns away. “Lo, there.”

“My sword is drawn.”

“Then let it do at once the thing why thou hast drawn it.”

“My dear master, my captain and my emperor, let me say, before I strike this bloody stroke, *farewell!*”

“’Tis *said*, man—and *farewell!*”

“Farewell, great chief. Shall I strike now?”

“*Now*, Enos!”

“Why, *there* then!” Enos groans; the sword’s hilt is pressed against the floor, and the blade cuts into his own middle. “Thus I do escape the sorrow of Antony’s death!” He pushes forward, forcing the blade inward. As Antony turns, Enos falls onto his side, his armor clattering on the stone.

The guard lies dead.

Thrice-nobler than myself! Thou teachest me, O valiant Enos, what I should do, and thou couldst not!

My queen and Enos have by their brave destruction gone ahead of me in nobleness of record. But I will be a bridegroom in my death, and run into’t as to a lover’s bed!

Come, then! He draws his sword. *And, Enos, thy master dies thy scholar!—to do thus I learned of thee!*

He places the jeweled hilt of Philippan on the floor at a wall, then falls against the sharpened steel—which wounds him grievously. With effort he straightens. Gasping, he pushes the blade free; it drops, clanging and spattering blood onto the marble.

Antony falls. Gritting his teeth, he turns himself to sit, staring, waiting for death.

But minutes pass, the pain growing with each. *How?—not dead? Not dead!*

He cries aloud: “The *guard, ho! Oh, dispatch me!*”

Three of Antony’s soldiers rush in from a side chamber, followed by an officer.

“What’s the noise?” asks Dercetas—and then he sees the commander’s grave injury.

“I have done *my work, my friends,*” Antony tells them. “Oh, make an *end* of what I have begun!”

The soldiers gape, aghast. “A star is *fall’n!*”

“And *time* is at its *period!*”

“Alas, and woe!”

Antony pleads: “Let him that loves me strike me dead!”

“Not I!”

“Nor I!”

“Nor any one!” The fearful guards back away, then run.

Dercetas tells the bleeding man, “Thy *fortune’s* death bids thy followers fly.” But he considers: *This sword, but shown to Caesar with these tidings, shall endear me with him!*

A Greek courtier comes into the chamber, unaware. “Where’s Antony?” he asks Dercetas.

“There, Diomed, there.”

Diomedes is appalled by the sight. Antony’s eyes are closed. “*Lives he?*” he asks, turning to stare down at the corpse of Enos. “Wilt thou not *answer, man?*” Diomedes looks up to see Dercetas hurrying away with Antony’s sword.

Antony moans. “Art *thou* there, Diomed? Draw thy sword, and give me strokes sufficient for death!”

“Most absolute lord, my mistress, Cleopatra, sent me to thee!”

Antony’s eyes open wide. “When did she send thee?”

“*Now, my lord!*”

“Where is she?”

“Locked in her monument! She had a prophesying fear of what hath come to pass! For when she saw you did suspect she had composèd with *Caesar*—which *never shall be found true!*—and that your rage would not be purgèd, she sent you word she was dead.

“But, since fearing how it might work, she hath sent me to proclaim the truth—and I am come, I dread, too late!”

Antony nods. “Too late, good Diomed. Call my guard, I prithee.”

Diomedes steps to the door and shouts. “*What ho!*—the emperor’s guard! *The guard, what ho! Come, your lord calls!*” Four young soldiers respond.

Despite his suffering, Antony smiles. “Bear me, good friends, where Cleopatra bides. ’Tis the last service that I shall command you.”

“Woe, *woe* are we, sir!” cries the corporal. He sees the pooled blood. *You may not live to wear out even your few followers!* But he sends a man running to fetch a litter.

“Most heavy day!” moans a soldier, stunned by the grim scene, as they bind Antony’s wounded side with bandages of clean linen.

“Nay, good my fellows, do not *please* sharp Fate by gracing it with your sorrows,” Antony tells them. “Bid *welcome* that which comes to punish us; then *we punish it*, seeming to bear it lightly!

“Take me up! I have led you oft; carry me now, good friends, and have my thanks for all!”

The soldiers lift him carefully onto the board, fasten the wide leather straps around him, and bear him away from Egypt’s palace toward her queen.

Chapter Nine Lovers Reunited

From a tall window high above the avenue, a shaft of pale sunlight slants into the upper tier in the latest of the huge stone memorials Cleopatra has built to herself—a tomb near the Temple of Isis. The queen looks out at the city below. “Oh, Charmian, I will never go from hence!”

“Be comforted, dear madam,—”

“No, I will not!—all *strange* and *terrible* events are welcome, but comforts we *despise*: our size of *sorrow* must be proportioned to our *cause*, as great as that which makes it!”

She hails Diomedes, below, as he returns from Antony. “*How now?* Is he dead?”

Diomedes calls up, “His death’s upon him, but not dead! Look out o’ the other side of your monument; his guard have brought him thither!”

“*O Sun, burn* the great sphere thou movest over!—let *darkling* stand the varying shores o’ the world! *O Antony, Antony, Antony!*” she cries, hurrying to the opposite window. “Help, Charmian, help; Iras, *help!* Help, friends below! Let us draw him hither!”

Iras finds a long hempen rope left by workmen and secures one end to a marble baluster, then drops the coil to slide down the sloping limestone face of the edifice.

Antony calls up to the queen: “*Peace!* Not *Caesar’s* valour hath o’erthrown Antony, but *Antony’s* hath triumphed on *itself!*” He needs to reach her as a warrior still.

Cleopatra nods. “So it *should* be, that none but Antony should conquer Antony—but *woe ’tis so!*”

“I am dying, Egypt. Dying; here I only importune Death a while—until, of many *thousand* kisses, the poor *last* I lay upon thy lips!” He motions for her to come down.

“I *dare not*, dear! Dear my lord, *pardon!*” She will not unlock the gate in the tall iron fence facing the bronze doors at the front. “I dare not, lest I be *taken!*”

“*Not ever* shall an imperious *show* of the full-fortuned Caesar be brooched with *me!*”

Antony’s malediction about being displayed to Rome moved her. “If *knife, drugs, serpents*, have *edge, sting, or operation*, I am safe!” she vows. “Your wife, Octavia, with her *modest* eyes and shrill *conclusions*, shall acquire no honour by demeaning *me!*”

Antony watches as the soldiers tie the rope to cradle his litter.

“But come, *come*, Antony!—*help me, my women!*—we must *draw thee up!* Assist, good friends!” With Charmian and Iras behind her, the queen herself grasps the rope and begins sliding the litter, slowly, up toward the opening.

“Oh, *quickly*,” he groans, “or I am gone!”

“Here’s a trial indeed,” pants Cleopatra. “How heavily weighs my lord!”

Antony closes his eyes. “Our *strength* has all gone into a heaviness”—*sorrow*.

She smiles. “*That* makes up the weight! Had I great *Juno’s* power, the strong-wingèd *Mercury* should fetch thee up, and set thee by *Jove’s* side! Yet come a little more....” They continue tugging. “*Wishers* were ever *fools!*” she says, tiring but persisting.

The litter nears the sill as the women edge backward, straining, pulling the hard, taut line with tender hands. “Oh, come, come, *come!*”

At last Antony is in her chamber. “And *well* come, *well* come!” cries Cleopatra, kneeling and unfastening the straps. She throws her arms about his neck. “Die where thou hast *lived!* *Quicken*”—come alive—“with *kissing!* Had my lips that power, thus would I *wear them out!*” She kisses his face, forehead, lips; but he can barely respond.

- “A heavy sight,” whispers Charmian sadly to pale Iras as they clear away the rope.

“I am dying, Egypt,” moans Antony weakly. “Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.”

“No, let *me* speak!” says Cleopatra, “and let me *rail so high* that the false hussy *Fortune*, provoked by my offence, *break her wheel!*”

“One *word*, sweet queen: from Caesar seek your *honour* with your safety!” He is gripped by a new throb of deep pain: “*Oh!*”

She shakes her head. “They do not go together.”

“Gentle, *hear* me! Trust none about Caesar but *Proculeius*.”

“My *resolution* and my *hands* I’ll trust, none about Caesar!”

Antony shifts, painfully, onto one side. “Neither lament my ending nor sorrow at the miserable *change* now, but please your thoughts by feeding them with those my *former* fortunes, wherein I *lived*—the greatest prince o’ the *world*, the *noblest*!”

“And do not *basely die*!—nor cowardly *relinquish my helmet* to my countryman—a Roman *by a Roman valiantly vanquished*!” He wants to be remembered as having denied Caesar a triumph.

“Now my spirit is *going* . . .” He lies back, very weak. His eyes close. “I can no more.”

“*Noblest of men*, woo’t *die*?—hast thou no care of *me*?” she challenges. “Shall *I* abide in *this* dull world?—which in thine absence is *no better than a sty*!”

But Antony cannot hear; he breathes no longer.

Cleopatra weeps. “Oh, *see*, my women: the *crown* o’ the *earth* doth *melt*!”

“*My lord*!” she sobs. “Oh, withered is the *garland* of *War*! The *soldier*’s pole is *fall’n*!—young boys, and *girls*, are level now with men! The difference is *gone*—and there is nothing remarkable left beneath the visiting moon!”

Touching his face, she is overwhelmed with grief. She faints, falling to lie beside Antony.

The women rush to her. “Oh, *quietness*, lady!” pleads Charmian.

“*She* is dead, *too*, our sovereign!” wails Iras, devastated.

“*Lady*!”

“*Madam*!”

Charmian rubs the queen’s hands. “Oh, madam, madam, *madam*!”

“*Royal Egypt! Empress!*”

Charmian sees that Cleopatra is reviving. “Peace, *peace*, Iras!”

Cleopatra sits up, dazed—and irked at having shown frailty. “No more but e’en a *woman*,” she moans, “and commanded by such poor passion as the maid that milks and does the meanest chores.”

With her ladies’ help, she rises to her feet.

“It were time for me to *throw my sceptre* at the injurious *gods*!—to tell them that *this* world *did equal theirs*, till they had stol’n our *jewel*!”

“All’s but *nought*!” she sobs. “Patience is *sottish*!—*impatience* does *become* a dog that’s gone *mad*!”

“Then is it sin to rush into the secret house of Death, ere Death dare come to us?”

She ruminates for a moment, and soon rallies. “How *do* you, women? What, *what*?—good *cheer*! Why, *how now*, Charmian! My noble girls!”

She regards Antony sadly. “Ah, women, *women*, *look*: our *lamp* is *spent*; it’s out.”

But she reaches down and touches his hand tenderly. *Good sir, take heart* . . .

Cleopatra stands, and squares her shoulders. “We’ll bury him, and then—what’s *brave*, what’s *noble*! Let’s do it after the high *Roman* fashion—and make Death *proud* to take us!”

“Come, away. This casing of that huge spirit now is cold.

“*Ah*, women, women, come—we have no friend but *resolution* in the briefest *end*.”

They lift the litter and carry the corpse down to the crypt deep below.

Outside his tent, Caesar meets in council with Maecenas, Agrippa and other commanders. He will send another emissary to Antony. “Go to him, Dolabella; bid him yield. Being so frustrate, tell him, he mocks the pauses that he makes.”

Dolabella bows. "Caesar, I shall." He leaves, headed for the gore-blotched stretch of ground between his army and Antony's—now a tattered force, further degraded by defection and desertion.

Octavius is surprised to see that a man has been permitted to approach his presence carrying a sword—unsheathed and blood-stained.

"Wherefore is *that*? And what art *thou* that darest appear thus to us?"

The soldier bows. "I am called Dercetas. *Mark Antony* I served, whose *best* was worthy best to be served. Whilst he stood up and spoke, he was my master; and I wore my life to spend upon his haters!"

He kneels. "If thou please to take me to thee, as I was to him I'll be to *Caesar*; if thou pleasest not, I yield thee up my life!"

Caesar frowns. "What is't thou say'st?"

"I say, O Caesar, Antony is dead."

Octavius looks at his stunned officers. "The breaking of so great a thing should make a greater crack!—the round *earth* should have shaken!—*lions* run into civil streets, and *citizens* to their *dens*! The death of *Antony* is not a *single* doom!—in *that* name lay *half of the world*!"

"He is dead, Caesar," says Dercetas. "Not by a public minister of justice, nor by a hired knife; but that self-same hand which writ his honour in the acts it did, hath, with the courage which the heart did lend it, splitted the heart.

"This is his sword; I robbed his wound of it. Behold it, stained with his most-noble blood!"

Octavius recognizes the distinctive weapon that Antony—formerly an ally—had wielded in the battle at Phillipi against Julius Caesar's murderers.

He sees that his officers, too, are solemn and tearful. "Look you *sad*, friends? The gods rebuke me, but it is tidings to wash the eyes of *kings*!"

"And strange it is," says Agrippa, taking the sword from Dercetas, "that nature must compel us to lament our most-*persisted* deeds."

Maecenas nods. "His taints and honours waged equal with him."

"A *rarer* spirit never did steer humanity," pronounces Agrippa. "But the gods will give us *some* faults to make us *men*." He sees Octavius turn away. "Caesar is touched."

"When such a *spacious* mirror's set before him, he needs must see *himself*," says Maecenas.

Caesar thinks of this adversary. *O Antony! have I followed thee to this? We do but launch diseases in our bodies!*

I must perforce have shown thee to such a declining day, or looked on mine! We could not abide together in the whole world!

And yet let me lament, thou my brother—my partner in the top of all designs, my mate in empire, friend and companion in the front of war, the arm of mine own body, and the heart where his thoughts mine did kindle—with tears as sovereign as the blood of heart, that our stars, unreconciliable, should divide our equalness thus!

He turns to the commanders. "Hear me, good friends—" He stops abruptly as an unarmed Alexandrian courtier approaches. "But I will tell you at some meeter season." His main concern, even more important now, is obtaining Cleopatra for his return to Rome. "The business of this man looks out of him, We'll hear him, what he says.

"Whence are you?"

The gentleman bows deeply. "A poor Egyptian. But the queen, my mistress, confined in all she *has*—her *monument*—of thine intents desires instruction, that she preparedly may frame herself to the way she's forced unto."

"Bid her have good heart," says Octavius. "She soon shall know of us, by some of ours, how *honourably* and how *kindly* we determine for her—for *Caesar* cannot live to be ungentle."

The emissary bows again. "So may the gods preserve thee." He leaves, and returns to the queen.

“Come hither, Proculeius,” Caesar tells the nobleman urgently. “Go and say we purpose her no shame. Give her whatever comforts the quality of her passion shall require, lest, in her greatness, by some *mortal* stroke she do defeat us; for her life in Rome would be *eternal*—in *our triumph!*”

“Go!—and at your speediest, bring us what she says, and how you find of her.”

Proculeius bows. “Caesar, I shall.” He bows, and hurries away to soothe Cleopatra.

“Gallus, go you along,” Caesar orders a captain. He intends to bring home a living emblem of his victory over Egypt, to conciliate the restive citizens at Rome.

“Where’s Dolabella, to second Proculeius?” Considering the desperate woman’s sensuality, a visceral appeal may be more persuasive. Attendants call for the young officer, well known for his strong effectiveness with women. “Let him alone; for I remember now how he’s employed,” says Octavius. “He shall in time be ready.”

“Go with me to my tent,” he tells the influential officers, “where you shall see how *hardly* I was *drawn into* this war—how calmly and gently I ever proceeded in all my writings.”

He is concerned about the way his battles—waged against other Romans, soldiers led by a popular former hero—may be perceived in the Senate.

“Go with me, and see what I can show in this!”

Chapter Ten **Farewell, and Peace**

At ground level in the dim, torch-lit stillness of the immense stone monument’s central chamber, Cleopatra’s resolve only strengthens. *My desolation does begin to make a better life.*

She eases open, just a crack, one of the massive double doors at the building’s main entrance. With the two gentlewomen behind her, she watches as citizens pass on the street; she is expecting a visitor.

’Tis paltry to be Caesar!—not being Fortune, he’s but Fortune’s knave—a minister of her will! And it is great to do that thing that ends all other deeds—which shackles accident, and bolts up change—which sleeps the dug, never more nurses the palates of babes—or Caesars!

From afternoon shadows surrounding the edifice’s walls, a silver-haired Roman emerges, coming to stop just outside the locked iron gate. “Caesar sends greeting to the Queen of Egypt!” calls the nobleman, “and bids thee study on what fair demands thou mean’st to have him grant thee!”

“What’s thy name?” asks Cleopatra, pushing the heavy door open, and looking at him, waiting beyond the tall bars.

“My name is Proculeius.”

She approaches the fence. “Antony did tell me of you, bade me trust you. But I, who have no use for trusting, do not greatly fret about being deceived.

“If your master would have a *queen* as his beggar, you must tell him that *majesty*—to keep decorum—must beg no less than a *kingdom*. If he please to give me conquered *Egypt* for my son—and so he gives me so much of *mine own*—I will kneel to him with thanks.”

Charmian and Iras exchange glances; the queen will never kneel to Caesar—no more than he will ever relinquish Egypt.

“Be of good cheer!” Proculeius tells her. “You’re fall’n into a *princely* hand. Fear nothing! Make your full reference freely to my lord, who is so full of *grace* that it *flows over*, onto all who need! Let me report to him your sweet dependency; and you shall find a conqueror that will *pray for aid* in kindness, when he for grace is kneeled to!”

The queen regards the glib emissary. "Pray you, tell him I am his *fortune's* vassal—and I send him the greatness he has *got*," she says, with a cold formality. "I hourly learn the doctrine of obedience—and would gladly look *him* i' the face," she adds, indignantly.

"This I'll report, dear lady," says Proculeius. "Have *comfort*, for I know your plight is pitied by him that caused it." He sees her flush at the word *pitied*.

He also sees that Gallus has completed his task: with two men from Caesar's guard, the captain has brought a long ladder and climbed in through a window of the story above. The officer and soldiers now hurry down the wide stone steps into the main chamber behind Cleopatra.

Gallus calls to him, "You see how easily she may be surprised!" The soldiers brush past the queen to unlock and push open the heavy iron gate.

"Guard her till Caesar come," Proculeius tells them, walking in.

"*Royal queen!*" cries Iras fearfully.

"*Oh, Cleopatra!*" moans Charmian, "thou art *taken*, queen!"

Cleopatra draws her dagger. "Quick, *quick*, good hands!"

But Proculeius grabs her wrist and wrests the slender knife from her hand. "*Hold*, worthy lady, *hold!* Do not yourself such *wrong*, who are in this *relieved*, not betrayed!"

"From *what?*" she asks angrily. "From *death*, too, that rids our *dogs* of anguish?" Her women stare, appalled that anyone has dared touch the sovereign's regal person.

Says Proculeius, "Cleopatra, do not abuse my master's *bounty* by the undoing of yourself! Let the world *see* his nobleness *well acted*—which your death will never let *come forth!*"

"*Where art thou, Death?*" cries Cleopatra impatiently. "Come *hither, come! Come—come* and take a queen worth *many* babes and beggars!"

"Oh, *temperance*, lady!"

The word inspires her: "*Aye*, sir!—I will *eat no meat*; I'll not *drink*, I'll not *sleep*, either! This mortal house I'll *ruin*, do Caesar what he can!"

"Know, sir, that I will *not* wait, *pinioned*, at your master's court!—nor *once* be chastised by the sober eye of dull Octavia!"

"Shall they hoist *me* up, and *show* me to the shouting varletry of censuring *Rome*? Rather a *ditch* in Egypt be gentle *grave* unto me! Rather on Nilus' *mud* lay me *stark naked*, and let the *water-flies* blow me unto *abhorring!* Rather make my country's high obelisk my *gibbet*, and hang me up in *chains!*"

Proculeius shakes his head. "You do extend these thoughts of horror further than you shall find cause in Caesar," he tells her, as a handsome officer arrives—freshly bathed and newly dressed.

Dolabella nods curtly to him. "Proculeius, what thou hast done, thy master, Caesar, knows, and he hath sent for thee. As for the queen, I'll take her under my guard."

"That, Dolabella, shall content me best," says Proculeius, relieved to be dismissed. "Be gentle to her." He turns to Cleopatra. "To Caesar I will speak what you shall please, if you'll employ me to him."

She scowls. "Say I would *die*."

Proculeius bows and goes.

Dolabella looks at the beautiful queen; he anticipates a pleasant challenge. "Most noble empress, you have heard of me?"

Her thoughts are far away. "I cannot tell."

"Assuredly you know me."

"No matter, sir, what *I* have heard or known." Cleopatra glances at the slick courtier. "You laugh when women—or *boys*—tell their *dreams*; is't not your trick?"

"I understand not, madam."

She turns away and paces, slowly. "*I* dreamed there was an *emperor—Antony!*" she says wistfully. "Oh, for such *another* sleep, that I might see but such another *man!*"

“If it might please ye—”

But the queen is in a reverie. “His *face* was as the *heavens*’—and therein were stuck a sun and moon which kept their course, and lighted the little ‘O’ of the *earth*!”

“Most sovereign creature—”

“His *legs* bestrid the *ocean*; his rearèd *arm* crested the *world*; his *voice* was propertied as *all the tunèd spheres*! That to friends—but when he meant to *quail* and *shake* the orb, he was as rattling *thunder*!

“As for his *bounty*, there was no *winter* in’t—an autumn, ’twas, that *grew the more* by reaping!

“His *delights* were *dolphin*-like: they showed his back above the element they lived in!

“In his livery walked *crowns* and *crownets*!—*realms* and *islands* were dropped as if from creases in his *pocket*!”

In spite of himself, Dolabella is impressed by the strength and depth of her devotion.

“Cleopatra...”

“Think you there was, or *might be*, such a man as this I dreamed of?”

He says sadly, “Gentle madam, no.”

“You *lie*, up to the hearing of the *gods*!” she sobs.

Cleopatra’s conception of Antony is vivid. “And if there be, or ever *were*, one such, it surpasses the *size* of dreaming! Nature lacks materials to vie with Fancy in strange forms, but *imagining* an *Antony* were Nature’s piece ’gainst Fancy, condemning ‘shadows’ quite!”

“Hear me, good madam,” pleads Dolabella, moved. “Your loss is, as *yourself*, *great*—and you bear it answering to that weight!”

Aware that she perceives his assignment, he is suddenly ashamed of his skills; he reaches an epiphany. “Would I might never o’ertake a pursued ‘success’ but that I do feel, as by the rebound of *yours*, a grief that smites my very heart at root!” he says earnestly.

She wipes her eyes. “I thank you, sir.” She believes him. “Know you what Caesar means to do with me?”

He looks down. “I am loath to tell you what I would you knew.”

“Nay... pray you, sir.”

“Though he be honourable...”

“He’ll *lead* me, then, in a *triumph*?”—a parade celebrating victory.

“Madam, he will; I know’t.”

A flourish of trumpets heralds the arrival of more Romans. They cluster outside the open gate; then a harsh voice cries, “Make *way* there!” and announces, “Octavius *Caesar*!” With him are Maecenas and other commanders, along with several Greek men of the Egyptian court.

“Which is the Queen of Egypt?” demands Octavius, striding forward—as if he could not tell.

Dolabella, annoyed by the slight, tells her, “It is the emperor, madam.”

Pretending to faint, she starts to sink.

Octavius seizes her arm. “*Arise*, you shall not *kneel*!” he says for the others to hear. “I pray you, rise!—*rise*, Egypt!” She seems subdued, and he releases her.

She looks down. “Sir, the gods will have it thus: my *master* and my *lord* I must obey.”

He nods, thinking she means him, and condescends: “Take to you no hard thoughts; the record of what injuries you did us, though written in our flesh, we shall remember as things but done by *chance*.”

“Sole *sir* o’ the *world*, I cannot project mine *own* cause so well as to make it so *clear*”—a dig; she means *transparent*, like his. “But I do confess I have been laden with such frailties as before have often shamed our sex.” She turns to Iras and speaks softly.

He assumes she has asked for something, a palliative, perhaps—or a poison. “Cleopatra, know we will *extenuate* rather than enforce,” Caesar assures her. “If you apply yourself to our intents, which towards you are most *gentle*, you shall find a *benefit* in this change.”

“But if you seek to lay on me a cruelty, by taking *Antony’s* course, you shall bereave yourself of my good purposes, and put your children to that destruction which I’ll guard them from, if thereon you rely.”

He wants to lead his party away, to install his deputies in office at Egypt’s palace and to assume full control of his new territory. “I’ll take my leave,” he tells Cleopatra, with a slight bow.

“And *may*, through all the *world*,” she says, in seeming admiration. “’Tis *yours!*—and we, your scutcheons and your signs of conquest, shall hang in what place you please.” Iras brings her a roll of papyrus. “Here, my good lord,” says the queen, handing him the document.

“You shall *advise* me in all for Cleopatra,” says Caesar, with pointed politeness.

“This is the brief of money, plate, and jewels I am possessed of. ’Tis exactly valued, *petty* things not admitted.” She looks to the Egyptian officials. “Where’s Seleucus?”

“Here, madam.”

“This is my treasurer,” Cleopatra tells Octavius. “Let him speak, my lord, upon his peril, that I have reservèd nothing to myself. Speak the truth, Seleucus.”

He seems apprehensive. “Madam, I had rather seal my lips than, at my peril, speak that which is not—”

“What have I kept back?” demands Cleopatra imperiously.

Seleucus shrugs. “Enough to *purchase* what you have *made known*.”

Caesar laughs. “Nay, *blush not*, Cleopatra! I approve your *wisdom* in the deed!”

“*See*, Caesar!—oh, *behold* how pomp is followed! *Mine* will now be *yours!*—as, should we shift estates, yours would be mine.” Maecenas stifles a smile at the childish notion; she is addressing the emperor as a peer.

Cries the furious queen, “The *ingratitude* of this Seleucus does even make me *wild!* *Oh, slave*, of no more *trust* than *love that’s hired!*”—a whore’s. The treasurer edges away. “What goest thou *back?* Thou *shalt* go back, I warrant thee!” She reaches toward him, nails flashing. “But I’ll *catch* thine eyes, though they had *wings!* *Slave*, soulless *villain!*—*dog!*—oh, most *rarely* base!”

Caesar chuckles as she is blocked by guards. “Good queen, let us *entreat* you!” The burst of childish temper convinces him that her thinking is trivial, that she will be malleable.

Cleopatra looks very upset. “Oh, *Caesar*, what a wounding *shame* is this, that *thou*, vouchsafing here to visit me—doing the honour of thy *lordliness* to one so meek—that mine own *servant* should excel the sum of my *disgraces* by addition of his envy!

“Suppose, good Caesar, that I some *lady-trifles* have reservèd—immoment *toys*, things of such dignity as we *greet* modern friends withal! And say some nobler *tokens* I have kept apart for *Livia* and *Octavia*”—Octavius’s wife and sister—“to induce their mediation. Must I be *exposèd* by one that I have *bred?* *Ye gods!*” she cries. “It *smites* me to beneath the fall I *have!*”

“*Prithee* go *hence!*” she tells Seleucus, “or through the ashes of my *luck* I shall show the *embers* of my *spirit!* Wert thou a *man*, thou wouldst have *mercy* on me!”

Caesar motions the treasurer to silence. “*Forbear*, Seleucus.” He has heard enough.

Cleopatra commiserates. “Be it known that *we*, the *greatest*, are mis-thought of for things that *others* do! When we fall, we answer others’ demerits done in our name—and are therefore to be *pitied!*”

Caesar hardly feels pitiable; but he seems to sympathize. “Cleopatra, we put on the roll of conquest not what you have ‘reserved’ nor what acknowledged: *be’t still yours!*—bestow it at your pleasure! And believe Caesar’s no *merchant*, taking as prizes from you things that merchants *sold!*”

“Therefore be *cheered!*—make not your thoughts your prisons! No, dear queen; for we intend so to dispose you as *yourself* shall give us counsel.

“Feed, and sleep! Our care and pity is so much upon you that we remain your *friend!* And so, adieu.”

Pity. “My master and my lord,” she mutters.

“Not *so!*” insists Octavius jovially. “Adieu!”

Under another loud flourish, Caesar, quite satisfied, departs with his train. Roman guards move to close off the tomb’s entrance—its only exit.

Cleopatra, alone briefly with her ladies, is shaking with rage. “He *words* me, girls, he *words* me!—as if I would not be *noble to myself!*”

“But hark thee, Charmian.” She whispers instructions.

Charmian nods. “Finish, good lady. The bright day is done, and we are for the dark.”

“Hie thee again,” urges Cleopatra. “I have spoken already, and it is provided; go put it to the haste!”

“Madam, I will.” Charmian moves forward and waves to hail an Egyptian peddler standing beyond, on the street. He approaches, and the guards, watching Cleopatra closely as she goes back into the monument, do not interfere when Charmian speaks with him through the thick black bars.

Dolabella, having conferred with Proculeius, now returns and passes through the gate. “Where is the queen?” he asks Charmian.

“Behold, sir.” She points, and leads him inside, past the gleaming doors.

Cleopatra greets the officer. “Dolabella.”

He bows. “Madam, as I am sworn to do, upon your command—which my love makes religion to obey—I tell you this: Caesar intends his journey through Syria—but within three days, you, with your children, will he send *to Rome!*”

“Make your best use of this,” he says. “I *have* performed your pleasure—and my *promise.*”

Cleopatra’s smile is genuine. “Dolabella, I shall remain your debtor.”

He bows. “I, your *servant. Adieu*, good queen; I must attend on Caesar.”

“Farewell, and thanks,” she says as he goes.

Eyebrows raised in question, she looks at Charmian, who silently nods.

Now, Iras, what think’st thou?” asks the queen. “*Thou* as an Egyptian puppet shalt be shown in Rome, as well as I! *Mechanicals*—*slaves* with greasy aprons, hammers, and rules—shall uplift us to view!—in their thick breaths, rank with gross diet, shall we be enclouded, and forced to drink-in their vapour!”

“*The gods forbid!*”

“Nay, ’tis most *certain*, Iras! Saucy underlings will *catch* at us like *strumpets*, and scolding rhymers *ballad* us *out o’ tune!* The quick comedians extemporally will *stage* us, and present our Alexandrian revels! ‘Antony’ shall be brought *drunken* forth—and I shall see some *boy* ‘*Cleopatra*’ squeaking my greatness in the posture of a *whore!*”

“Oh, the good *gods!*”

“Nay, that’s certain.”

Iras is appalled. “I’ll never *see* ’t!—for I am sure my *nails* are stronger than mine *eyes!*”

Cleopatra nods. “Well, that’s a way to foil their preparation, and to conquer their most-absurd intents.

“Now Charmian, show me, my women, like a *queen!* Go fetch my best attire! I am again bound for Cydnus—to meet *Mark Antony!* Sirrah, *go!*” she tells Iras almost gaily. “Now, noble Charmian, we’ll *dispatch indeed!*”—*hurry*, and *execute.* “When thou hast done *this* chore, I’ll give thee leave to *play till doomsday!* Bring our crown, and all.”

The gentlewomen go to fetch the full accoutrements of the queen’s station.

Cleopatra hears a disturbance at the gate. “Wherefore’s this noise?” she calls.

A Roman guard comes into the chamber. “Here is a *rural fellow* that will not be denied Your Highness’ presence!” The soldier is annoyed. “He brings you *figs.*”

Cleopatra shrugs. “Let him come in.” The guard goes, and she smiles to herself. *What may so poor an instrument do?—a noble deed: he brings me liberty!*

My resolution's calm, and I have nothing of woman in me: now from head to foot I am marble-constant!—now mine is no planet of the flighty moon!

The guard returns with the dusky old peddler, who now carries a rustic's brown basket woven of tough rushes. "This is the man."

"Avoid, and leave him," she orders. The guard goes back to the gate, shaking his head; for a fallen *queen*, figs.

Cleopatra stares at the covered basket. "Hast thou the pretty serpent of Nilus there, that kills, yet pains not?" Charmian asked him to bring hooded Egyptian asp.

"Truly, I *have* him; but I would not be the party that should desire you to *touch* him," says the man, grinning with his few brown and broken teeth, "for his biting is *immortal*: those that do die of it do seldom or never recover!"

The wicker lid holds her attention. "Rememberest thou any that *have* died of't?"

"Very *many* men!—and *women*, too. I heard of one of them no longer ago than yesterday—a very honest woman, but somewhat given to *lie*—as a woman should not do but in the way of *honesty!*"—lying *to* men, not with them. "As to *how* she died from the biting of it, what *pangs* she felt: truly, she made a very good report o' the snake!

"But," he adds knowingly, regarding such women, "he that will believe half what they *say* shall never be saved, given all that they *do!*" He glances down at the basket. "But this *is* most fallible: the serpent's an *odd* worm!"

Cleopatra waves him away. "Get thee hence; farewell."

"I wish you all joy of the snake!" says the merchant, as he sets the basket on a narrow couch. He rubs his hands together, eager for a tip.

She is not looking at him. "Farewell."

The queen had inquired before about poisons, and he assumes that she has a state victim in mind. "You must know this, look you—that the serpent will do as his kind!"

"Aye, aye; *farewell*," she says brusquely.

He sees that she is touching the lid. "Look you, a snake is not to be trusted but in the keeping of wise people; for, indeed, there is no goodness in snakes!" he warns.

Cleopatra looks up. "Take thou no care; it shall be heeded."

"Very good. *Give* it nothing, I pray you," he says pointedly, removing his hat, "for it is not worth the feeding."

But Cleopatra frowns, stricken with a new concern: "Will it *eat* me?"

The man's laugh is coarse. "You must not think I am so simple as not to know that *the Devil himself* will not eat a woman!

"I know that a woman is a dish for the *gods*—if a devil has not *trimmed* her!

"But truly these same whoreson devils do the gods great *harm* in their women: for in every ten that they make,"—father, "the devils *mar five!*"

Cleopatra, annoyed, again waves him away. "Well, get thee *gone*; farewell."

"Yes, forsooth. I wish you joy o' the *worm*." Peeved, he bows and goes to the gate.

Iras returns. Weeping softly, she brings the queen her most regal raiment.

"Give me my robe; put on my crown," says Cleopatra, her eyes glistening. "I have immortal longings in me! Now no more the juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip!

"Yare, yare, good Iras; *quickly!* Methinks I hear *Antony* call!—I see him rouse himself to praise my noble act!—I hear him mock the *luck* of Caesar, which the gods give men to excuse their wrath *after!*

"*Husband*, I come!—now to that name may my courage prove my title!

"I am *fire and air*—my other elements I give to baser life!

"So; have you done? Come then, and take the last warmth of my lips. Farewell, kind Charmian!" she says, and kisses her cheek.

"Iras," she says, "long fare well!" She kisses the delicate, sobbing lady—who falls, in a paroxysm of sorrow.

“Have I the venom in my *lips*?” asks Cleopatra, kneeling beside Iras. “Dost fall? If thou and Nature can so gently part, the stroke of Death is as a *lover*’s pinch, which hurts, yet is *desired*! Dost thou lie still? If thus thou vanishest, thou tell’st the world it is not worth leave-taking!”

Little Iras’s heart is broken; she no longer wants to live—and soon, the others see, she is gone.

“*Dissolve*, thick cloud, in *rain*,” moans Charmian, “that I may say the *gods themselves* do weep!”

Cleopatra sits on the couch, and smiles down at Iras. “This proves me base,” she murmurs. “If *she* first meet the curled Antony, he’ll make demand of her, and spend that kiss which is *my* heaven to have!”

She lifts the basket’s cover, and carefully, calmly, reaches in to seize an asp.

“Come, thou deadly wretch—with thy sharp teeth this intricate knot of life at once untie!” She holds the snake’s head to her breast. “Poor venomous fool be *angry*, and *dispatch*!” she demands. “Oh, couldst thou *speak*, that I might hear thee call great Caesar ‘*ass un-policied*!’”

Charmian watches, dismayed. “O eastern *star*!”

“Peace, *peace*!—dost thou not see my *baby* at my breast, that sucks the nurse asleep?”

Charmian sobs, clutching at her heart, “Oh, *break*! Oh, *break*!”

“As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle— Oh! *Antony*!” Cleopatra, bitten, finds another serpent in the basket. “Nay, I will take thee too.” Impatiently, she holds it out, the hood flaring wide, next to her exposed arm. “What?—must I *wait*...?”

“In *this vile world*?” adds Charmian.

The snake strikes. Cleopatra blinks, then lies back, and her head falls gently to one side. In a moment she lies dead.

Says Charmian, “So, *fare thee well*. Now *boast* thee, Death!—in thy possession lies a lass unparalleled!” She moves to sit on the couch, and tenderly reaches to touch Cleopatra’s lids. “Downy windows, close—and, golden Phoebus, never again behold eyes so royal!”

She smiles, even as she wipes away tears. “Your crown’s awry. I’ll mend it... and then *play*.”

A Roman soldier, one who knows her well, hurries into the chamber. “Where is the queen?”

Charmian rises. “Speak softly, wake her not.”

“Caesar hath sent—”

“Too slow a messenger.” Charmian has raised a hissing serpent; she presses its head against her arm. “Oh, *come apace*!—*dispatch*!” She falls to the stone floor beside the couch, and stares at the poised, reptile head. “I partly feel thee...” She releases the asp.

“*Approach, ho*!” the man calls toward the gate. “*All’s not well*!—Caesar’s *beguiled*!”

A guard rushes in and sees the three women; he gasps. “There’s *Dolabella*, sent from Caesar—I’ll call *him*!”

As the guard runs, the soldier looks from the queen to Iras, then to the gentlewoman who is struggling to sit up and lean against the couch. “What *work* is *here*? Charmian, is this *well done*?”

She nods. “It is *well done*, and fitting for a princess descended of so many royal kings!” She smiles warmly at him. “Ah, *soldier*...” And with that, she dies.

Dolabella enters the chamber. “How goes it here?”

“All *dead*!”

The officer stares. “Caesar, thy *thoughts* reach their *effects* in this! Thyself art coming to see, *performèd*, the dreaded act which thou so sought to hinder!”

They hear men approaching outside, and a call: “A *way* there!—a way for *Caesar*!”

In a moment, Octavius comes in, followed by attendants.

“Oh, sir, you are too sure an augurer,” says Dolabella. “What you did fear is done!”

Octavius looks at Cleopatra. “Bravest at the last, she perceived our purposes, and, being *royal*, took her *own* way.

“The manner of their deaths?” he asks Dolabella. “I do not see them bleed...”

Dolabella asks the guard, “Who was last with them?”

“A simple countryman that brought her figs. This was his basket.”

“Poisoned, then,” mutters Caesar.

“Oh, Caesar, this Charmian *lived* but *now!*” the soldier tells him. “She stood and *spake!* I found her trimming up the diadem on her dead mistress. Tremblingly she stood, then on the sudden dropped!”

Caesar gazes at the lovely queen. “*Ah, noble weakness!* If they had swallowed *poison* ’twould *appear*, by external swelling; but this looks like *sleep*—as if she would catch another Antony in her strong snare of grace.”

Dolabella points. “Here, on her breast, there is a hint of blood, and something the like is dribbled on her arm.”

The soldier looks. “This is an asp’s trail,” he says. He peers into the basket. “And these fig-leaves have slime upon them such as the snake leaves about the caves of Nile.”

Caesar nods. “Most probable that so she died; for her physician tells me she hath pursued conclusions infinite on easy ways to die.

“Take up her bed; and bear her women from the monument.

“She shall be buried beside her Antony. No grave upon the earth shall clasp within it a pair so famous! Such events as these describe those that make them—and *her* story is no less in pity than *his* in the glory which brought them to be lamented.

“Our army shall in solemn show attend this funeral; and then to Rome.

“Come, Dolabella; see to high order in this great solemnity.”