Egyptian Bondage

A Book of Erotic Enslavement

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A Tribute to the 19th Century Tales of Theophile Gautier

CHAPTER ONE

The age of Octavian, soon to be reborn as Augustus, was shortly to dawn when a magnificently gilded and painted galley descended the Nile as rapidly as fifty long flat oars, crawling over the furrowed water like the synchronised legs of a gigantic spider, could impel it.

This galley was narrow and long, elevated at one end in the form of a new moon, elegantly proportioned, and admirably built for speed; the figure of a ram's head, surmounted by a golden globe, armed the point of the prow, showing that the vessel belonged to some personage of royal blood.

In the centre of the vessel arose a flat-roofed cabin—a sort of *naos*, or tent of honor—colored and gilded, ornamented with palm-leaf mouldings, and lighted by four little square windows.

Two chambers, both decorated with hieroglyphic paintings, occupied the horns of the crescent. One of them, the larger, had a second story of lesser height built upon it, while the other and smaller chamber, which also served as a pilot-house, was surmounted with a triangular pediment.

In lieu of a rudder, two immense oars, adjusted upon stakes decorated with stripes of paint, which served in place of our modern row-locks, extended into the water in rear of the vessel like the webbed feet of a swan; manoeuvred by the pilot as he stood upon the deck of the cabin above.

He was a swarthy man, tawny as new bronze, with bluish surface gleams playing over his dark skin; long oblique eyes, hair deeply black and all plaited into little cords, full lips, high cheek-bones, ears standing out from the skull—the Egyptian type in all its purity. A narrow strip of cotton about his loins, together with five or six strings of glass beads and a few amulets, comprised his whole costume.

He appeared to be the only one on board the galley; for the rowers bending over their oars, and concealed from view by the gunwales, made their presence known only through the symmetrical movements of the oars themselves, which spread open alternately on either side of the vessel, like the ribs of a fan, and fell regularly back into the water after a short pause.

Not a breath of air was stirring; and the great triangular sail of the galley, tied up and bound to the lowered mast with a silken cord, testified that all hope of the wind rising had been abandoned.

The noonday sun shot blazed and the ashen-hued slime of the river banks reflected the fiery glow that beamed down in its intensity, the azure of the sky whitened in the heat as a metal whitens in the furnace. Not a cloud appeared in the sky. A sky as mournful and changeless as Eternity.

The water of the Nile, sluggish and wan, seemed to slumber in its course, and slowly extend itself in sheets of molten tin. No breath of air wrinkled its surface, or bowed down upon their stalks the cups of the lotus-flowers, as rigidly motionless as though sculptured; at long intervals the leap of a fish or the progress of one of the many fierce river monsters caused a silvery gleam upon the current; and the oars of the galley seemed with difficulty to tear their way through the film of that curdled water. The

banks were desolate and a solemn and mighty sadness weighed upon this land, which was never aught else than a vast tomb, and in which the living appeared to be solely occupied in the work of burying the dead.

It was an arid sadness, dry as pumice stone but without neither melancholy nor reverie or one pearly gray cloud to follow toward the horizon, one secret spring wherein to lave one's dusty feet; the river a weary sphinx weary eternally gazing upon the desert, and unable to detach herself from the granite banks upon which she had sharpened her claws for twenty centuries.

So profound was the silence that it seemed as though the world had become dumb, or that the air had lost all power of conveying sound. The only noises which could be heard at intervals were the whisperings and stifled “chuckling” of the crocodiles, which, enfeebled by the heat, were wallowing among the bullrushes by the river banks with their fellow predators as the galley flew like an arrow over the smooth river-water, leaving behind it a silvery wake which soon disappeared; and only a few foam-bubbles rising to break at the surface of the stream bore testimony to the passage of the vessel, then already out of sight.

The ochre-hued or salmon-colored banks unrolled themselves rapidly, like scrolls of papyrus, between the double azure of water and sky so similar in tint that the slender tongue of earth which separated them seemed like a causeway stretching over an immense lake, and that it would have been difficult to determine whether the Nile reflected the sky, or whether the sky reflected the Nile.

The scene continually changed.

At one moment were visible gigantic gateways, whose sloping walls, painted with large panels of fantastic figures, were mirrored in the river; stairways guarded by huge crouching sphinxes, wearing caps with of fleshy folds and crossing their paws of black basalt below their sharply projecting breasts. Palaces, immeasurably vast, projected against the horizon the severe horizontal lines of their superstructure, where the emblematic globe unfolded its mysterious wings like an eagle's vast-extending pinions; temples with enormous columns thick as towers, on which were engraved processions of hieroglyphic figures against a background of brilliant white as scrawled witness to all the monstrosities of that Titanic architecture.

Again the eye beheld only landscapes of desolate aridity - hills formed of stony fragments from excavations and building works, crumbs of that gigantic debauch of granite which lasted for more than thirty centuries; mountains exfoliated by heat, and mangled and striped with black lines which seemed like the cauterizations of a conflagration; hillocks humped and deformed, squatting like the ram’s head of the tombs and projecting the outlines of their misshapen attitude against the sky-line where could be seen expanses of greenish clay, flour-white porous rock; and from time to time some steep cliff of rose-coloured granite, where yawned the black mouths of the stone quarries.

Away from the desolate splendour of the view from the deck, the interior of the quarters at the galley’s centre was painted white with green arabesques and bands of vermilion with fantastically shaped gilt flowers. An exceedingly fine rush matting covered the floor and at the further end stood a little bed, supported upon griffin's feet with a stool with four steps to enable one to climb into bed; and a sort of hemicycle of cedar wood,

supported upon a single leg, and designed to fit the nape of the neck so as to support the head of the person reclining.

Upon this strange pillow reposed a most charming head, one look of which once caused the loss of half a world.

An adorable head.

A divine head.

The head of the woman who, if not the most beauteous since the famed Helen, was certainly a candidate for most… *erotic*.

A woman fitted to be a queen of even the most kingly of men and, as it had been discovered to their cost, to rule them with an imperious will even they were unable to gainsay.

Cleopatra.

Beside her stood her favorite slave Brennus, waving a large fan of Peacock feathers, while a younger man named Teutorigus – for all her slaves were men and, apart from her Nubians, white-skinned Gauls - was moistening with scented water the little reed blinds attached to the windows of the quarters so that the air might only enter impregnated with fresh odours.

Either from caprice or policy, Cleopatra did not wear the Greek dress that day. She had just attended a public assembly and was returning to her summer palace still clad in the Egyptian costume she had worn at the festival.

For headdress Queen Cleopatra wore a kind of very light helmet of beaten gold, fashioned in the form of the body and wings of the sacred partridge. The wings, opening downward like fans, covered the temples, and extending below, almost to the neck, left exposed on either side, through a small aperture, an ear rosier and more delicately curled than the shell whence arose that Venus whom the Egyptians named Athor. The tail of the bird occupied a place at the join of neck and back, its body, covered with scaled feathers and painted in variegated enamel. This concealed the upper part of the head, and its neck, gracefully curving forward over the forehead of the wearer, formed together with its little head a kind of horn-shaped ornament, all sparkling with precious stones; a symbolic crest.

Hair dark as a starless night flowed from beneath this helmet, and streamed in long tresses over the fair shoulders whereof the commencement only, alas! was left exposed by a collarette, adorned with many rows of serpentine stones.

A linen robe diagonally cut - a mist of material seeming no more that woven air - undulated in filmy whiteness about an incredible body whose outlines it scarcely shaded with the softest shading.

This robe had half-sleeves, tight at the shoulder, but widening toward the elbows and permitting a glimpse of an adorable arm and a perfect hand. The arm being clasped by six golden bracelets and the hand adorned with a ring representing the sacred scarabæus. A girdle, whose knotted ends hung down in front, confined this free-floating tunic at the waist while a short cloak adorned with fringing completed the costume.

She was, and had proved the fact many times, a woman and a queen no mere man could match.

Finally, we must observe that Queen Cleopatra wore very thin, light sandals, turned up at the toes, and fastened over a gloriously arched instep, that seemed to all who gazed upon it, for some deep subliminal and sexual reason, to emphasise the authority that resided above.

But at this moment, Queen Cleopatra did not wear that air of satisfaction which becomes a woman conscious of being the epitome of all that was a man's desire for the fair sex. She tossed and turned in her little bed, and her sudden movements momentarily disarranged the folds of her gauzy couture, which Brennus as often rearranged with inexhaustible patience, and without ceasing to wave her fan.

"This room is stifling," said Cleopatra; "even if Pthah the God of Fire established his forges in here, he could not make it hotter; the air is like the breath of a furnace!" And she moistened her lips with the tip of her little tongue, and stretched out her hand like a feverish patient seeking an absent cup.

Teutorigus, ever attentive, at once clapped his hands and a black slave, clothed in a short tunic hanging in folds over his bare ebony legs and a panther-skin thrown over his shoulders, entered with the suddenness of an apparition, balancing a tray laden with cups, and slices of watermelon, and carrying in his free hand a long vase with a spout like a modern teapot.

The slave filled one of these cups, pouring the liquor into it from a considerable height with marvellous dexterity, and placed it in front of the queen before bowing at the waist and backing his way back out to the deck.

Cleopatra merely touched the beverage with her lips, laid the cup down beside her, and turning upon Teutorigus her beautiful liquid black eyes, lustrous with living light, exclaimed:

"O Teutorigus, I am weary unto death! Do come to your Mistress and apply your devoted tongue to the soles of her feet that she may know some repose."

CHAPTER TWO

Teutorigus, eyes fixated upon the high arches encased in the sandals and anticipating the taste of her flesh – be it from ever so humble a source -assumed a look of pained sympathy, and drew nearer to his female master.

"I am horribly weary!" continued Cleopatra, letting her arms fall like one utterly discouraged as the young Gaul dropped to his knees and reverently removed her footwear. "This Egypt crushes, annihilates me; this sky with its implacable azure is sadder than the deep night of Erebus; never a cloud, never a shadow, and always that red, sanguine sun, which glares down upon you like the eye of a Cyclops. I would give a pearl for one drop of rain! From the inflamed pupil of that sky of bronze no tear has ever yet fallen upon the desolation of this land. It is but the vast covering for a tomb. The dome of a necropolis. A sky dead and dried up like the mummies it hangs over. It weighs upon my shoulders like an over-heavy mantle; it constrains and terrifies me; it seems to me that I could not stand up erect without striking my forehead against it. And, moreover, this land is truly an awful land; all things in it are gloomy, enigmatic, incomprehensible. And yet…"

Her enigmatic eyes, feline and compelling at one and the same time, became teasing as the tongue of her chattel bathed the edge of a salty and aromatic arch:

"And yet… it fetches with it certain…" she allowed herself a languorous sigh, "…*compensations*."

Her laughter tinkled in the enclosed space with the whoosh of the oars from outside cutting through the river upon which they were borne as if they were a kind of nautical counterpoint.

"Remove my sandals, Teutorigus, and give your Master a suitably abject demonstration of your devotion to her."

She was obeyed on the instant.

"Imagination," she went on, "has produced in my land down the ages only monstrous chimeras and monuments immeasurable. Its architecture and its art fill me with fear and foreboding capable of consuming a lesser person. Those colossi, whose stone-entangled limbs compel them to remain eternally sitting with their hands upon their knees, weary me with their stupid immobility; they trouble my eyes and my horizon. When, indeed, shall the giant come who is to take them by the hand and relieve them from their long watch of twenty centuries? For even granite itself must grow weary at last! Of what master, then, do they await the coming, to leave their mountain-seats and rise in token of respect? Of what invisible flock are those huge sphinxes the guardians, crouching like dogs on the watch, that they never close their eyelids, and forever extend their claws in readiness to seize? Why are their stony eyes so obstinately fixed upon eternity and infinity? What weird secret do their firmly locked lips retain within their breasts?

She allowed herself a sigh as the young Gaul's tongue swept up from her heel to bathe her sole with its saliva and she slid a familiar hand under the tunic of Brennus as he continued to fan her upper body; the older and equally enslaved and intoxicated Gaul not missing a beat as her tiny and perfectly formed hand cupped and jiggled a scrotum heavy with the man-cream he could not expend without her express command – a vivid

memory of the beatings handed out to him, this by her Nubians the last time he had seen fit to satisfy himself, all he required not to repeat his disobedience.

"Mystery and granite," she breathed. "This is Egypt! Truly a fair land for a young queen to provide her male subjects the firm hand they deserve."

She squeezed the pulpy jewels of his manhood a little more forcefully and felt the usual rush of power when he winced but made no move to escape her grasp of him.

"Ah, truly is Egypt a sinister kingdom and, apart from its constant aridity, perfectly suited to its young queen and her… *darkness*."

The laughter that bubbled from her full and seductive lips into the dry-heat of her quarters was neither mirthful nor inclusive and her two Gallic servitors knew better than to laugh along with her.

"But what can wretches such as you understand of a young woman who is as superior to you as the aqueducts of Rome are to the bogs of barbarian Germanica?"

She felt the tip of Teutorigus' tongue insert itself between her gaily painted toes and brought up her free foot to berate his face for his impertinence.

"Imbecile!" she barked, anger translating itself to the grip she maintained upon the scrotum of the slave still fanning her and causing his legs to buckle. "Did your Master, command you to place your unworthy tongue between her toes?" she barked, foot slapping against his face repeatedly as languid repose was transformed in an instant to unreasoning fury.

Poor Teutorigus withdrew the offending tongue and immediately prostrated himself with his forehead placed against the fine matting of the floor. Almost instinctively, the young queen's deserted foot came to rest upon his neck and pressed his face to the matting with some force. With the other she maintained a drumbeat of punishment against the side of his appealing young face.

"Where is the passion and the… *achievement*… in ruling chaff such as you? It is a real man I want… *Need*… A man who, while not being my equal, would at least be recognizable enough as an elevated example of masculinity to gild the lily that is my own perfection."

She laughed, tiny hand maintaining the pressure on the captive ball-sac while her foot continued to slap away at the face of the servitor beneath her.

"But then, after all, who could ever consider himself my equal? To see me, to touch me, to… *smell*… me, is to lose one's desire to ever know another woman."

The question that followed was obviously rhetorical; even to the two subjugated and enthralled chattels at her fore and hindmost:

"Has there *ever* been in this existence a man I have been unable to make… *submissive?*"

Cleopatra became pensive as she imagined the kind of man she wished to own on a long-term basis. A true man. A warrior and a statesman. A man whose obvious enslavement to her – even as he ruled others – ensured he was as much a victim of her cruelties and caprices as the two wretches currently fawning upon her. A man the whole

world knew as her property – even as that same world bent at the knee before her vassal's approach.

It was a heady elixir of power and cruelty she had experienced before and wished to experience again.

There was nothing on earth the equal, she told herself, than the obedient tongue of a man with self-respect forced to worship at the womanly orifices of both cunt and arse.

With another big sigh, she took her foot from the neck of Teutorigus and wriggled her toes beneath his lowered chin and his neck to raise his face to hers.

The eyes that met hers were a mixture of shame and desire.

But more desire.

"That is why I am weary, Teutorigus. With the right man, this grim and arid Egypt would seem to me fairer than even Greece with her ivory gods and her temples of snowy marble with her groves of laurel and fountains of cooling water. There I should never be lost for diversion or dream ever again of the weird face of Anubis and the ghastly terrors of the cities underground."

Although he offered no objection to the arguments of his mistress, a vague smile which played about the lips of the handsome Gallic slave told Cleopatra he was picturing himself as her *"right man"*.

His presumption both amused her and took the edge from her boredom for a few moments.

For if there was anything she enjoyed it was the dismantling of male preconceptions – be they ever so imaginary.

Cupping the sac of Brennus less forcefully, her savagery assuaged by the fact he had not stopped fanning her body despite his discomfort, she waited for the lessened pressure to provoke the inevitable erection and lightly fanned its length with teasing fingers. Though he was not of a size comparable to her Nubians, he was nonetheless well-endowed and the thrill of mastering the beast at the source of his manhood provided the same perverse joys she had enjoyed since she was a young girl in the palace of an indulgent and tolerant father and then under the guidance of her older sister, Berenice.

"How long has it been since I gave you permission to empty your manly balls, Brennus?" she asked, eyes still staring into those of the abject and love-sick young man with her toes beneath his chin.

The croaked reply was made in the Egyptian mother-tongue he was still only semi-versed in, despite the many beatings he had received to encourage his speedy assimilation:

"The dawn has broken many, many, times since you allowed me such a pleasure my Master," he told her, using the masculine honorific by which she insisted she be respected.

The deep and sensual, unholy and malevolent, pleasure she took from having this former warrior and still physically powerful male abase himself to her in such a way played upon her warped womanhood with its usual power. But…?

Not for the first time she asked her herself if such command as she held over him would ever have been possible had she been an ordinary woman not blessed with the regal trappings of a queen. How much more determinedly and cunningly would she have had to go about fulfilling her desires to rule the male beast without the power and authority of an ancient kingdom at her behest. And yet…

As the familiar sensations inspired by absolute control ran the length of her body, from the top of her costumed head, past sensuous lips and still full and pert breasts over a flat stomach towards a perfectly depilated cunt before upper body branched into a pair of flawless and excitingly shaped legs, she felt assured her womanly charms would have assured continued dominion over the defenceless male so desperate to experience them. The sexuality that thrived upon having itself obeyed; sometimes in the most humiliating of ways for a proud man; would have been satisfied *whatever* her station in life. Even if she could do no more than confess that the trappings of a queen, and the power to imprison or execute that went with it, made gratification of such base needs so much less… *problematical*.

With a featherlight touch guaranteed to inflame rather than take over the edge, she stroked the uncut cock of her bondsman and allowed her lips to curl in a smile as his gasp of delight and hope hissed in her ears.

“You see the joy to be had if you serve me well, naughty Teutorigus?” she spoke into the eyes of the adoring and equally enflamed young Gaul kneeling motionless at her feet.

“Y-Yes, Master,” he gasped, struggling to keep his eyes upon hers now he was aware of the actions of her little hand upon the cock of his fellow slave. This thanks to the peripheral vision that had always been beyond the ordinary with him and had seemed to enlarge itself during his service to the woman who was still but a girl in terms of years and yet had made him her property in ways far beyond the straightforward definition of ancient indenture.

“But you did not serve me well, did you my lad?” she asked, revelling in talking down to a man who was at least two years her senior, thrilling at the colour of pure embarrassment she could so easily fetch to her young servant’s comely cheeks. “I am not only your queen; I am your owner. You are my property and property does *not* take it upon itself to take liberties with the body of its owner.”

“Your abject slave is sorry, Master,” he told her, the words and the sentiment behind them as close as possible to sincere, given the sense of shame his young warrior manhood experienced from his being able to utter them so convincingly. Memories of more independent days and the women he had bedded so commandingly flitted across his inner vision and he knew how impossible he would have found it at the time were it to be suggested he might find himself the emasculated and obedient slave of a younger woman in an eastern land. The fate he now lived made worse and less palatable to his manly pride by the fact that this enticing slip of a girl dominated his every thought so entirely that the prospect of being denied her presence struck him with the power of a physical blow whenever the possibility occurred to him.

“My intention was only to ease my Master’s discomfort and to cool the toes of her superior feet,” he ended in a voice that sounded cur-like and cringing even to him.

“Then at least your intent meets with my approval,” she told him. “Even if you remain a lowly dog from whom such initiative is neither expected nor desired.”

Again, she accompanied her verbal chastisement of him by slapping his cheek forcefully with the sole of one delicious foot, lip curling with evil content as the muscled and physically more powerful Gaul took it without flinching or even a flicker of retaliation.

“And now,” she went on, “is it still your intent to ease the discomfort of your female Master?”

“Always, Master,” he answered earnest and sincere in a way only a man riddled with the most potent mix of lust and need could be.

“That is as it should be,” she told him, still holding her eyes still holding his with complete confidence in their ability to… *manage*… him. “Then you will be dismayed to learn that my delicate young hand is becoming fatigued as it tries to please your fellow slave here.”

She saw the look of uncertainty flitter across his handsome features and saw also the distaste contained within them as he responded in the way he knew she expected.

“Your abject slave will do whatever you require of him to ease your fatigue, my Master.”

“That is the correct answer, my good boy,” she cooed down at him, full and sultry lips promising a reward that would, perhaps, match his dreams if his words were to be backed with actions. “Then you will have no problem – will deem it an honour, in fact – to step in for my delicate young hand and supply needy Brennus here with the reward for which he has strived so hard to earn these past weeks.”

Cleopatra’s veins burned with the fire inspired by her unholy passion for command, as the reactions inspired by her suggestion conveyed itself to her via the rigid cock upon which she still maintained a hold and from the blood draining out of the face of the younger chattel. Both responses underpinning her sovereignty in both the physical and the metaphysical sense. Yet more evidence that, here, and for now, at least, she ruled totally.

The brief cloud that dimmed her eyes and reminded her of the imminent arrival of her Roman lover, hot on her heels after she had departed the battlefield that was the seaborne carnage of Actium, was swiftly banished as the prospect of the impervious victor of that battle making his own leisurely but inevitable journey to her palace brought a sense of dread and finality to her heart.

The former her lover and diminished lapdog, Mark Anthony; the latter his one-time ally and avenger of Caesar, Octavian, and a man who appeared singularly immune to her many and varied charms – though she sensed he had more use for her as both trophy and puppet ruler of the country her people had long led than he reserved for the man who had once wooed and left his mother.

But concerns of the kind were for later. She remained queen, at least until the latter of these two Romans arrived, and possibly after. For now, however, her word was law in her own land and she would continue to voice it in a manner of her own choosing.

And to her own pleasure.

“Come Teutorigus,” she smiled, making the command seem more of a suggestion while the fire in her eyes belied any possibility of the latter being an option for the appalled younger man. “Do your Master’s bidding and wrap your manly lips about the man-rod of your fellow slave that you might show her how committed you are to providing her with the service she deserves.”

The briefest of hesitations on the part of the youth gave her cause to engage her love of cruelty once again and belabour his cheeks with the sole of a swinging foot.

“So you are not only disobedient,” she hissed, shapely and feline body fair writhing with the anger of mock indignation, “but a liar also!”

The fear written large across the young Gaul’s face banished further thoughts of the oncoming Romans from her mind, as the pure sexual charge of dominating a beast of the opposite sex created a whirlpool of arousal beneath the tranquil and depilated mound of her ravenous little cunt. And yet, in the midst of a growing erotic frenzy, it did not escape the young queen that Brennus remained as bolt hard as ever, desire so great it refused to be diminished even by the prospect of another man being the chosen tool of his release.

“Please, Master,” begged the young Gaul upon the matting, peppering her clubbing foot with kisses between his entreaties and the impact of demeaning sole with chastised cheek, “it is true that I have no desire for what you ask of me…”

Again, her foot punished his cheek and again he peppered it with kisses as it departed its target; shamed to the core by his own submissiveness towards a young woman, queen or not, yet feeling in his veins once again that indefinable excitement of knowing himself mastered and helpless before her.

An excitement of which the rigid cock that was at least a match for that of his fellow slave she intended him to satisfy provided ample and incontrovertible evidence.

“…But I will do exactly as you desire if such is your wish,” Teutorigus finished.”

Her punishing foot was lowered and she stared at him in such a way as to make him feel he was an insect whose existence she was considering stamping out.

Then, reaching out to take a handful of his thick golden hair, she jerked his head towards the cock he had thought his hands would be intended to satisfy.

“As you hesitated when I so considerately asked you to supply your fellow peasant a release with your hands,” she told him, pulling him forward until his eyes were but inches from the older man’s pulsating manhood and its scent heady and repulsive in his nostrils, “you will now please him with your mouth as your Master observes. Open your mouth.”

Horrified at what she was commanding him to do and the consequences should he refuse, Teutorigus found himself unable make his mouth do his bidding.

Until:

“Or would you rather I ask my Nubians to… *persuade*… you?”

His mouth opened without further ado and he closed his eyes to the monstrosity he would soon be tasting as it invaded his virgin mouth, the words of the *girl* who owned him ringing in his ear as a death-knell:

“Use him Brennus. Thrust into his waiting mouth as if he were one of the whores you were so accustomed to using before I took your freedom and your manhood from you.”

It was not a second later that a needy and sorely deprived Brennus did exactly that.

CHAPTER THREE

After watching her captive Gaul's make oral love unwillingly, fascinated at the sight of the two fully matured males humbling themselves in such a way at the bequest of a queen who, though she inhabited the body of an earthly goddess, was but a slip of a girl still; despite her many linguistic and political accomplishments; a great weariness had come over her. So great she declined the urge to have the older Gaul whose longings had just been satisfied – if not in a way he would have chosen – use his tongue to tease her clitoris to climax before she drifted into the arms of consoling Morpheus. Knowing how less than pleasing he would find it – at least to begin with – to be forced to taste her secretions when his own sexual urgency had been at least temporarily sated.

As it was, she satisfied herself with the gentle tongue of Teutorigus and allowed him to gently bathe her feet with his tongue as she slipped off into slumbers she prayed would not be troubled by the calamities she both sensed and knew were hot on her heels after the debacle of Actium.

Grateful to taste the salty perspiration of her glorious feet after the slimy and invasive phallus of his companion in bondage, Teutorigus licked away at one while gently tickling the sole of the other with a peacock's feather as consoling Morpheus sprinkled his golden dust upon the beautiful eyes of the now departed Ptolemy's wiser and infinitely more wicked sister.

Outside, as Cleopatra slept, the galley continued its progress beneath a glorious sunset. A broad band of violet color, warmed deeply with ruddy tints toward the west, occupied all the lower portion of the sky; encountering the zone of azure above where violet melted into a clear lilac and faded through half-rosy tints into the blue beyond. Afar, where the sun, red as a buckler fallen from the furnace of Vulcan, casts his burning reflection, the deeper shades turned to pale citron hues, and glowed with turquoise tints. The water, rippling under an oblique beam of light, shone with the dull gleam of the quicksilvered side of a mirror, or like a damascened blade – a combination of effects that brought the reeds, and all objects along the shore into a sharp black relief against the bright glow.

By the aid of this crepuscular light perceived from afar, like a grain of dust floating upon light from burning wax, a little brown speck trembled in the network of luminous ripples.

Is it a teal diving?

A tortoise lazily drifting with the current?

A crocodile raising the tip of his scaly snout above the water to breathe the cooler air of evening, or the belly of a hippopotamus gleaming in midstream?

Perhaps it was a rock, left bare by the falling of the river that would shortly be replenished by the rains pouring down from Mountains of the Moon.

But no, it is none of these fanciful and romantic explanations.

It is, in fact, no more than a man.

A man who, at first glance, seems to walk or to skate, upon the water!

Until, that is, the frail bark which sustains him becomes visible.

A very nutshell of a boat, a hollow fish; three strips of bark fitted together (one for the bottom and two for the sides), and strongly fastened at either end by cord well smeared with bitumen.

The man himself stands erect, with one foot on either side of this fragile vessel, which he impels with a single oar that also serves the purpose of a rudder. So effective is this combination that; and although the royal galley moves rapidly under the efforts of the fifty rowers; the little black bark visibly gains upon it.

The sleeping Cleopatra who desired some strange adventure with a man worthy of her… *attributes* – having sexually vanquished and outlived the father of Caesarion and the ruler of the known world, and then the handsome and courageous, if somewhat self-deluding Roman who would have proclaimed himself his successor – was understandably unaware that this little bark moving so mysteriously alongside her royal galley was conveying to her that exact adventure.

Or, at least, an adventurer.

Another would be hero for the ages.

Perhaps.

Should he not prove a final and most fitting victim.

Or, perhaps, the final indulgence of her perverse sexuality before the would-be successor's suicide and the bite of the asp into a welcoming breast deprived the world of her commanding charms forever and consigned them to the oral and written tributes and critiques that would flow in the centuries to follow.

A final indulgence Cleopatra could be forgiven for being unaware of as she nestled securely and deeply in the arms of Morpheus as her smitten and utterly emasculated body-servant continued to lick, kiss, and tickle, the feet and toes her temporary removal from the real world as we know it made available for his uninterrupted and un-scolded attentions.

Hero or victim, the navigator of the shallow vessel was, at any rate, a handsome Sardinian of some four-and-thirty years; with hair so black it seemed to own a tinge of blue. His skin was somewhat fair for a man from his Mediterranean island, thigh his form was so perfectly proportioned that he might have been taken for a bronze statue by Lysippus. Although he had been rowing for a very long time he betrayed no sign of fatigue, and not a single drop of sweat bedewed his forehead.

The sun had half sunk below the horizon now and against this broken disk figured the dark silhouette of a far distant city, undetectable by the naked eye were it not brought into stark relief by this accidental effect of light. Its heated radiance soon faded altogether away, and the stars, fair night-flowers of heaven, opened their chalices of gold in the azure of the firmament as the royal galley, closely followed by the little bark, stopped before a huge marble stairway, whereof each step supported one of those sphinxes that Cleopatra so much detested.

They had reached the landing-place of her summer palace.

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Some hours after the galley had moored at the summer palace – no soul, slave or entourage, daring to wake the young queen from her slumbers and knowing only too well of her displeasure and to what it could lead if she were disturbed from her dreams unnaturally, a refreshed Cleopatra, leaning upon Teutorigus, passed swiftly, like a gleaming vision, between a double line of lantern-bearing slaves towards the palace.

Having kept pace with the royal galley and moored his own, infinitely humbler, vessel upon the embankment, our would-hero or victim, as it may transpire, took from the bottom of his little boat a great lion-skin, threw it across his shoulders to fend off the chill of air now deprived of the sun, and wended his way towards the summer dwelling of the queen.

But who is this handsome Sardinian whose skin is as pale as that of a Gaul and with hair as dark as any native Iberian? A man who dares follow the royal galley and is able to contend in a race of speed against fifty strong rowers from the land of Kush, all naked to the waist, and anointed with palm-oil that they may be suitably pleasing when their female Master took it upon herself to step below deck to inspect their efforts and, sometimes, to urge them to even greater labours – mostly with the help of a flaying whip she wielded equally as well as one of her brutal overseers? What secret motive urged him to this swift pursuit?

It is not a very easy thing to guess at precisely what a fully matured man in a strange land who followed the barge of Cleopatra, queen and goddess Evergetes, on her return from the battle that would finally end both her reign and her life.

But we shall make the effort notwithstanding.

Antoninu, son of Giuanne, was a man of strange character; nothing by which ordinary minds are affected made any impression upon him. He seemed to belong to some loftier race, and might well have been regarded as the offspring of some divine adultery. His glance had the steady brilliancy of a falcon's gaze, and a serene majesty sat on his brow as upon a pedestal of marble; a noble pride curled his upper lip, and expanded his nostrils like those of a fiery horse.

Despite his masculine appearance, he owned a grace of form almost balletic in its smoothness, and yet, beneath his graceful exterior were hidden sinews of steel and the strength of Hercules.

As Cleopatra was amongst women a divinity of sexual attraction and irresistible to men, so Antoninu held a similar position within the ranks of the opposite sex.

If without the river of perversity, cruelness, and royal provenance that defined the queen of Egypt.

In opposition to the object of his desire he had seen only from afar, Antoninu was a kind man who did not use his obvious attraction for the opposite sex to either demean or impoverish them. Neither did he use the wealth of his cotton merchant father to bully or belittle those with whom his business in Egypt on behalf of his father ensured he must meet. He was, in point of fact, as good as he was handsome.

But, as with all qualities – we need reflect only upon the deficiencies present in the young woman he had just followed – there were, along with his gifts, certain weaknesses observed in him by both merchant father and nurturing mother.

Antoninu of Feronia, for all his manly attributes and much vaunted skill in combat, was a hopeless romantic for whom tales of the young Cleopatra had triggered a growing desire to make the acquaintance of this queen among queens who had tamed the mighty Caesar and enchanted his would-be successor. A romantic disposition that explained how he was able, and with much ease, to dismiss the tales he had heard of her sexual venalities and the mental and physical cruelties in which she was said to indulge towards members of his own sex. That same disposition having led him here, to her summer palace, in the hope of making the great queen's acquaintance.

For it was those actions that were guaranteed to energise his body with the influx of adrenalin that drew him most. Of all things he loved the perilous or the unachievable; preferring to walk where it seemed impossible for any human being to obtain a foothold, or to swim in a raging torrent. Though not without wisdom, the contemplative mindset that came with maturity had yet lay its foundations within him and it was this lack of judgement – along with the aforementioned desire for risk – that had led him to his present position.

Without his being in any way aware of the danger, the allure of the young queen and the impossibility of experiencing it at close quarters had ensured he would take one risk *too* many.

The Abyss awaited!

For Antoninu, son of Giuanne.

For some time now his moods had been growing more savage than ever. During long periods, he would bury himself in the business of trade on behalf of his father and allow nothing to deflect him from his commerce. But his boredom was growing more and more marked and the usual diversions open to a man of his looks and wealth were becoming more and more tiresome and predictable by the wine-soaked evening. The people of this North African kingdom he had once found so fascinating and charming now made no impact upon his sensibilities save for the selling of his father's wares and it had been some time since he had been with a woman who had made the slightest impact upon him.

He was, you will have gleaned, a man *ripe* for adventure.

And the adventure, he had come to assure himself, was Cleopatra.

He had at first striven to tame this wild passion for a woman barely out of her formative years; had wrestled fiercely with his own illogic. But the infatuation of a man for a woman, whatever her age and his romantic vulnerabilities, cannot be strangled as one would wring the neck of a chicken and the strength and dexterity of the mightiest and most able warrior avails nothing in such a contest. The arrow had found its illogical mark and had remained in the wound for him to carry it with him *everywhere*.

The radiant and splendid image of young Cleopatra.

Nightly, nay daily, images of her assailed his waking and sleeping thoughts. Whether it was with her golden-pointed diadem and her imperial purple, standing above a nation on their knees, or being attended as she bathed by the coal black Nubian said to both guard and attend her, his nightly dreams and his waking thoughts were consumed by her. Like some imprudent man who has dared to look at the sun and forever thereafter beholds an impalpable blot floating before his eyes, so Antoninu ever beheld young

Cleopatra. Not knowing or caring that, while eagles may gaze undazzled at the sun, no man with a romantic eye such as his could with impunity fix itself upon a beautiful woman, a beautiful queen, without being forever altered.

Perhaps damaged beyond all hope of repair.

He commenced at last to spend his life in wandering about the neighbourhood of the royal dwelling when she was in attendance, that he might at least breathe the same air as his idee fixe. That he might sometimes see the almost imperceptible print of her foot upon the sand and imagine the shapely young legs above as she strolled along the beach having such thoughts as young queens of her kind have. He attended the sacred festivals and games while striving to obtain one beaming glance of her eyes and perhaps hold them with his own. To catch in passing one stealthy glimpse of the inner and outer loveliness his delusional romantic nature ensured him she possessed, despite rumours to the contrary regarding the latter. At other moments, filled with sudden shame of this sad obsession for a man of his years with a woman of hers, he gave himself up to commerce with redoubled commitment and sought by fatigue to tame the fire in his blood and the furnace of his desires.

He had heard of her return from the campaign resulting in Actium and sensed she would soon head for what was said to be her favourite place of relaxation. The summer-palace. And, in the vague hope of beholding the face and form of his obsession once again, had followed her galley in his boat when it made its inevitable appearance upon the river - the sharp stings of the sun upon his upper body and legs as nothing to the obsession that raged within him as a fever; its heat intense enough to make the panting sphinxes melt in lava-sweat upon their reddened pedestals.

And then he felt that the supreme moment was nigh, that the decisive instant of his life was at hand, and that he could not die with his obsession unfulfilled within his breast.

Such were the motivations of the love-struck and obsessed Antoninu.

Lying upon the sand, supporting his chin on his palms, he permitted himself to be lifted and borne away by the inexhaustible current of reverie; he sketched out a thousand projects, each madder than the last. He felt convinced that he was seeking after the unattainable, but he lacked the courage to frankly renounce his undertaking, and a perfidious hope came to whisper some lying promises in his ear, assuring him that if Cleopatra once looked upon him then her obsession would be a match for her own.

Which was the exact point when Antoninu resolved upon a desperate expedient.

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As if the fates were aligning with each other to ensure the crossing of their paths, Cleopatra was, at that very moment, invoking the goddess Athor to deliver her from both the anger of the lover she had left behind at Actium and the conqueror so impervious to her charms who would follow, armed with greater calamities for her to endure, in Mark Anthony’s wake.

Were she not to be blessed by the favour of the goddess in this, she prayed for at least a new pleasure until inescapable fate overtook her.

A fresh sensation that the wait for inevitable eternity and the damnation she sensed possible might be made more… *endurable*.

As she reclined languidly upon her couch she thought to herself that the number of the senses was sadly limited, that the most exquisite refinements of delight soon yielded to satiety, and that it was truly no small task for a queen to find means of occupying her time when all was available to her and became so swiftly nothing more than an act of tired and growingly jaded repetition.

To test new poisons upon slaves.

To make men fight with tigers.

Or gladiators with each other.

To drink pearls dissolved or to swallow the wealth of a whole province.

All these things, once novel and exciting to the senses, had become commonplace and insipid.

It was at this point, in her chamber, with none but besotted and emasculated Teutorigus in attendance at the feet by which he was so entranced, that the goddess to whom she had addressed her appeal seemed to respond.

Suddenly, a whistling sound was heard, and an arrow buried itself, quivering, in the cedar wainscoting of the wall.

Cleopatra well-nigh fainted with terror and it was Teutorigus who leapt from his servile position at her feet and ran to the window, leaned out, and beheld only a flake of foam on the surface of the river below.

A scroll of papyrus encircled the wood of the arrow.

It bore only these words, written in Phœnician characters:

“I love you!”

CHAPTER FOUR

“I love you,” repeated Cleopatra, making the serpent-coiling strip of papyrus writhe between her delicate white fingers. “Those, are the words I longed for. What intelligent spirit, what invisible genius has thus so fully comprehended my desire?”

And thoroughly aroused from her languid torpor, desirous of acquainting herself and enslaving a man with courage and boldness enough to dare contact a queen of Egypt in such a way, she sprang out of bed with the agility of a cat which has scented a mouse, placed her little ivory feet in her embroidered slippers, threw a filmy tunic over her shoulders, and ran to the window from which Teutorigus was still gazing.

The night was clear and calm. The risen moon outlined with huge angles of light and shadow the architectural mass of the palace, which stood out in strong relief against a background of bluish transparency and the waters of the river, wherein her reflection lengthened into a shining column, were frosted with silvery ripples. A gentle breeze, such as might have been mistaken for the respiration of the slumbering sphinxes, quivered among the reeds and shook the azure bells of the lotus flowers; the cables of the vessels moored to the Nile's banks groaned feebly, and the rippling tide moaned upon the shore like a dove lamenting for its mate. The night was suddenly sweet with perfume.

The perfume of adventure!

“Do you not see far over there, almost in the middle of the river,” she pointed, nipples erect beneath the film of her tunic and arresting the eyes of her Gallic slave as if he had just been placed in a sexual trance. “Is that not the head of a man swimming?”

The slave forced his eyes in the direction of her finger.

“See,” she almost screeched in her excitement. “He crosses that track of light, and passes into the shadow beyond! He is already out of sight!”

Then, supporting herself upon Teutorigus's all too willing shoulder, she leaned out, with half of her desirous young body beyond the sill of the window. All in the effort to catch another glimpse of the mysterious swimmer. Efforts thwarted when a grove of Nile acacia-palms flung their deep shadow upon the river in that direction and protected the flight of the daring fugitive.

If the obsessed Antoninu had but had the courtesy and daring (for he was already aware of the danger to him that might result from his act) to look back, he might have beheld Cleopatra, the girl queen, eagerly seeking him through the night gloom. He, the love-smitten and sexually obsessed Sardinian with what appeared to be an incurable case of unrequited love for a young woman he had yet to see form less than a distance of fifty yards.

“Teutorigus, Teutorigus,” the young queen was screeching, “send hither Phrehipephbour, the chief of the rowers, and have two boats despatched in pursuit of that man!”

Phrehipephbour soon appeared, a man of the race of Nahasi, with large hands and muscular arms, wearing a red cap not unlike a Phrygian helmet in form, and clad only in a pair of narrow drawers diagonally striped with white and blue. His huge torso,

entirely nude, black and polished like a globe of jet, shone under the lamplight. He received the commands of the queen and instantly retired to execute them.

*****

Two long, narrow boats, so light that the least inattention to equilibrium would capsize them, were soon cleaving the waters of the Nile with hissing rapidity under the efforts of the twenty vigorous rowers, but the pursuit was all in vain. After searching the river banks in every direction, and carefully exploring every patch of reeds, Phrehipephbour returned to the palace, having only succeeded in putting to flight some solitary heron which had been sleeping on one leg, or in troubling the digestion of some terrified crocodile.

So intense was the vexation of Cleopatra at being thus foiled, that she felt a strong inclination to condemn Phrehipephbour either to the wild beasts or to the hardest labour at the grindstone. Happily, Teutorigus interceded for the trembling unfortunate, who turned pale with fear, despite his black skin. It was the first time in Cleopatra's life that one of her desires had not been gratified as soon as expressed, and she experienced, in consequence, a kind of uneasy surprise; a first doubt, as it were, of her own omnipotence.

Or perhaps a second; given the coming arrival of Octavian.

She, Cleopatra, wife and sister of dead Ptolemy - she who had been proclaimed goddess Evergetes, living queen of the regions Above and Below, Eye of Light, Chosen of the Sun – she who had found a first insurmountable obstacle in her path at Actium and now a second within the security and imperium of her homeland, had spoken and *not* had her wishes obeyed! As well be the wife of some wretched corpse-cutter as be the queen of a great land if she could not be obeyed in a matter of such prosaic consequence.

It was monstrous, preposterous, and she knew that only her fixation upon discovering the identity of her bold suitor and having him delivered to her, prevented the ordering for execution of this most miserable of Nubians!

Her wish for one last adventure before calamity overtook her reign and she became a footnote in the annals of history, had been gratified. And then torn from her grasp. Her kingdom was not so dead or familiar and without surprise as she had deemed it. It was not the stony arm of a statue which shot that arrow; it was not from a mummy's heart that came those three words which had moved her at a time when she should have been despairing of her future. Those three words, for a young woman who had smilingly looked on as poisoned slaves dashed their heads and beat their feet upon her beautiful mosaic and porphyry pavements in the convulsions of death-agony; she who even applauded the tiger which boldly buried its muzzle in the flank of some vanquished gladiator; had moved her pulse to a frenzy and she could think of nothing more than finding her suitor and tormenting him for his love before her own life was stripped from her.

The task of the slaves who must dress her to-morrow, she knew, would not be a grateful one. They would be lucky to escape with nothing more injurious than blows.

She screamed into the indifferent night her frustration.

She wanted diversion.

She wanted to experience for a final time the dismantling of a proud man who thought he might win her.

She needed a victim in whom she could take an interest, that the long days, perhaps weeks, maybe even months, before first her Roman lover, and then her would-be lord and master arrived, were made not just bearable but… *exciting*. Wise beyond her years in the ways of both men and their politics, she knew her time as queen was finite and would last only as long it took the second of the two Romans to find his way to her and her location within the kingdom she still, at this point, ruled. At which point her young and self-determined existence would be stripped of its… *lustre*.

"Who could have had the audacity to send me this avowal upon the shaft of an arrow?" she railed aloud as a trembling Teutorigus prayed her anger would not turn upon him. "Could it have been the Nomarch Amoun-Ra who fancies himself handsomer than the Apollo of the Greeks? Or perhaps Cheâpsiro, commander of Hermothybia, who is so boastful of his conquests in the land of Kush? Or is it not more likely to have been young Sextus, that Roman debauchee who paints his face, lisps in speaking, and wears sleeves in the fashion of the Persians?"

She gazed again at the empty river from whence her message of love had been delivered.

"What think you, Teutorigus?"

"M-My Queen, m-my Master, m-my owner," he began, choosing his words carefully but unable to keep a stammer from corrupting those same words it was none of those. "None of those mentioned have the courage to approach you in such a way. Though you are indeed the fairest of women, you are also the strongest, and the men of which you speak are no more than reeds in a hurricane by comparison. In my humble opinion, this act is beyond the capacity of any of them."

"I believe you to be right, loyal Teutorigus," she said, much to his relief. "But it is of no help. Now there is a man bold enough to approach me in such a way and I wish him found."

Young eyes becoming basilisk hard of a sudden, she approached the trembling Gaul and took his chin between her fingers:

"Ensure the word is made plain to all," she told him. "I want this man found by tomorrow."

Moving closer to stare up into his eyes, her warm breath enflaming his senses even as he remained terrified of her intent, she said:

"And, if he is not, you will not be the only one praying never to have been born."

*****

Cleopatra that night sought slumber in vain.

She tossed feverishly upon her couch, and long and vainly invoked Morpheus, the sympathetic brother of Death.

She incessantly repeated, in the way of any wilful child spoiled into the belief that even the slightest setback concerning it was an injustice of worthy of none but the most draconian of punishments.

But let us leave for a while, Cleopatra and her quest for fugitive sleep.

Let us now return to Antoninu, and, as we are much more sagacious than Phrehipephbour, chief of the rowers, we shall have no difficulty in finding him.

Suddenly terrified of his own daring and a return to behaviour more befitting of someone a deal less than half his years, Antoninu had thrown himself into the crocodile infested Nile, and had succeeded in swimming the current and gaining the little grove of acacia-palms before Phrehipephbour had even launched the two boats in pursuit of him.

When he had recovered breath, and brushed back his long black locks, all damp with river foam, behind his ears, he began to feel more at ease, more inwardly calm and better able to analyse behaviour that placed his well-being, and possibly that of his family, in peril. What hold had this Cleopatra over him that he would risk so much to make even such a tenuous contact? He, a handsome and worldly man some fifteen years her senior. Why, knowing of her reputation for sexual aberrance and cruelty as he, along with the whole world, did, would he be possessed to do something so rash, simply to bring himself to her attention in a way which afforded him no advantage whatsoever?

The self-made answer was as flimsy as it was exciting to this thrill-seeking Sardinian who had known only autonomy in his dealings with the female sex.

Though she knew not his name, communication had now been established between them.

Cleopatra was thinking of *him*.

He, Antoninu, was, perhaps even at this moment, uppermost in the thoughts of the same young woman who had taken the cock of the great Caesar and made of it her bauble, her plaything. The lesser triumph that had been the seduction and sexual and spiritual enslavement of the less than great Anthony doing nothing to detract from the thrill he took at knowing he was in her thoughts. Albeit anonymously.

Even if it did strike him that her thoughts on his behalf might be primarily thoughts of anger that one of her subjects might have the temerity to not just contact her highness but to do so with an arrow that could easily have proved injurious to her illustrious person. Were that the case, then he had at least been able to awake some feeling within her. Whether she acted upon it or not, she had been forced to the consciousness of his existence.

It was true that he had forgotten to inscribe his name upon the papyrus scroll, but what more of him could the queen have learned from the inscription:

Antoninu, Son of Giuanne?

In her eyes at this moment, he dreamed of her considering both subject and monarch equal. A goddess in choosing a commoner for her lover stoops no lower than in choosing a patrician or a king – should that commoner be a man such as he. The Immortals from a height so lofty, he told himself more with hope than conviction, can behold only… *possibilities*… in the lover of their choice.

The thought which had weighed upon his breast like the subduing knee of a colossus of brass, had at last departed. His message had traversed the air and even reached the queen herself. The apex of the triangle. The inaccessible summit. It had, he encouraged himself, aroused curiosity in that impassive heart and, he prayed, a fire of sexual curiosity where sensuous and alluring upper body made joining with the shapely and lithe legs comprising the lower part of her exquisite presence.

Of course, even such a romantic and fantasist such as Antoninu never suspected that he had so thoroughly succeeded in this wise, but even without this belief he felt more tranquil, for he had sworn unto himself that he would move the heavens themselves that he might find himself the accepted lover of Cleopatra.

Though it were but for a single night.

Though for only a single hour.

Though it should cost him his life and even his very soul.

It was to such thoughts that Antoninu lay secreted upon the riverbank and, as was so frequently the case these days, used his imagination and a feverish hand to satisfy longings that seemed to increase by the day.

The Abyss was calling with, and its voice was more and more pronounced.

Once assured that Phrehipephbour had returned with his rowers and the ardour lessened by his self-pleasuring had returned, he again threw himself into the current and once more swam like a man possessed toward the palace of Cleopatra, whose lamp still shone through the window curtains like a painted star. Never did Leander swim with more courage and vigour toward the tower of Sestos as Antoninu promised himself an end to the torments of longing his body and looks had proved no barrier in their eventual assuaging. Was a strong blow from the keen lance of a Nubian, after all, a greater pain than the growing agonies a man such as he received from seeing the object of his lust – and perhaps love – so close to hand and yet as near untouchable as those stars in the night sky watching his progress towards the palace?

In a perfect storm of emotion that clouded all wisdom and made danger but foreplay, he swam close under the walls of the palace, which bathed its marble feet in the river's depths, and paused an instant before a submerged archway into which the water rushed downward in eddying whirls. Twice, thrice he plunged into the vortex unsuccessfully. At last, with better luck, he found the opening and disappeared.

He had entered the archway that was the opening to a vaulted canal which conducted the waters of the Nile into the baths of Cleopatra.

CHAPTER V

Cleopatra found no rest until morning, at the hour when wandering dreams re-enter the Ivory Gate. Amid the illusions of sleep she beheld all kinds of lovers swimming rivers and scaling walls in order to come to her, and, through the vague souvenirs of the night before, her dreams appeared fairly riddled with arrows bearing declarations of love. Starting nervously from time to time in her troubled slumbers, she struck her little feet unconsciously against the head of Teutorigus, who lay across the foot of the bed to serve her as a cushion.

When she awoke, a merry sunbeam was playing through the window curtain, whose woof it penetrated with a thousand tiny points of light, and thence came familiarly to the bed, flitting like a golden butterfly over her lovely shoulders, which it lightly touched in passing by with a luminous kiss. Happy sunbeam, which the gods might well have envied.

In a faint voice, like that of a sick child, Cleopatra asked to be lifted out of bed.

It was the hour for the bath.

“I wish to bathe alone,” she told a baffled Teutorigus who confessed himself both relieved to escape her vexed presence after the events of the night before and disappointed not to be able gaze once again upon the body that had seduced Rome itself.

“I trust things are in hand and our archer of last night will soon be making his queen’s acquaintance?”

“The guard are searching as you ask, Master,” he assured her, forcing his words past a blockage of fear that constricted his throat, so great was his terror of what she would have done to him were that search to prove unsuccessful.

Cleopatra went in to bathe without further ado, as Teutorigus sat on his haunches and waited before the heavy cedar doors she had closed behind her.

The baths of Cleopatra were built in the midst of immense gardens filled with mimosas, aloes, carob-trees, citron-trees, and Persian apple-trees, whose luxuriant freshness afforded a delicious contrast to the arid appearance of the neighboring vegetation. There, too, vast terraces uplifted masses of verdant foliage, and enabled flowers to climb almost to the very sky upon gigantic stairways of rose-colored granite; vases of Pentelic marble bloomed at the end of each step like huge lily-flowers, and the plants they contained seemed only their pistils; chimeras caressed into form by the chisels of the most skilful Greek sculptors, and less stern of aspect than the Egyptian sphinxes, with their grim mien and moody attitudes, softly extended their limbs upon the flower-strewn turf. A double row of such statuary lined the alley which led from the palace to the bathing halls.

At the end of this alley was a huge fountain-basin, approached by four porphyry stairways. Through the transparent depths of the diamond-clear water the steps could be seen descending to the bottom of the basin, which was strewn with gold-dust in lieu of sand. Here figures of women, terminating in pedestals like Caryatids, spurted from their breasts slender jets of perfumed water, which fell into the basin in silvery dew-drops. In addition to this task these Caryatids had likewise that of supporting upon their heads an entablature decorated with Nereids and Tritons in bas-relief, and furnished

with rings of bronze to which the silken cords of an awning might be attached. From the portico was visible an extending expanse of freshly humid, bluish-green verdure and cool shade, a fragment of the Vale of Tempe transported to Egypt.

True to say, the famous gardens of Semiramis would not have borne comparison with these.

We will not pause to describe the seven or eight other halls of various temperature, with their hot and cold vapours, perfume boxes, cosmetics, oils, pumice stone, gloves of woven horsehair, and all the refinements of the antique art of bathing brought to the highest pitch of voluptuous perfection.

It was through these halls that came Cleopatra, most unusually alone, reflective and lost within her own thoughts with neither her Gallic body-servants or her Nubians in her train.

Even preoccupied, she was no less a goddess in a highly sexual setting.

A tender tint of rose commenced to suffuse the transparent skin of her cheeks, refreshing their passionate pallor; while a blue network of veins relieved the amber blondness of her temples; her marble forehead, low like the antique foreheads, but full and perfect in form, united by one faultless line with a straight nose, finely chiselled as a cameo, with rosy nostrils which the least emotion made palpitate like the nostrils of an amorous tigress. The lips of her small, rounded mouth, slightly separated from the nose, wore a disdainful curve and, at one and the same time, an unbridled voluptuousness, an indescribable and vital warmth glowed in the brilliant crimson and humid lustre of the under lip. Her eyes were shaded by level eyelids, and eyebrows slightly arched and delicately outlined. To experience their gaze was to know the human fire – as well as a languor, a sparkling limpidity which might have made even the dog-headed Anubis giddy. Every glance of her eyes was in itself a sensual poem richer than any sang by Homer. An imperial chin, replete with force and power to command, worthily completed this charming profile.

She stood erect upon the upper step of the basin, in an attitude full of proud grace; her figure slightly thrown back, and one foot in suspense, like a goddess about to leave her pedestal, whose eyes still linger on heaven, even as she contemplates the decadent joys to be found on earth. Her robe fell in two superb folds from the peaks of her wondrous breasts to her shapely feet. Had Cleomenes been her contemporary and enjoyed the happiness of beholding her thus, he would have shattered his idealised Venus in a despair of envious rage.

Usually, it was her custom to enter the water crowned with reeds and lotus-flowers like a water divinity. But not today. On this particular morning, for reasons she could not explain to herself, she wished her beauty unadorned. And thus it was that her liberated hair fell in black cascades over her shoulders and shadowed her beautiful cheeks in rich bunches as if they were ripening grapes.

Then the linen tunic, which had been confined only by one golden clasp, glided down over her marble body, and fell in a white cloud at her feet, like the swan at the feet of Leda....

And Antoninu, you ask, impatient for the meeting of womanly perfection and its masculine opposite, where was he?

Think of a man, frozen rigid within sight of an impossible dream, unmoving as if he were no more than the cold and smooth examples of statuary about him as his idee fixe paraded its charms before him while utterly oblivious to his own, and your question is answered.

Jealousy of rivals not physical pained him as he looked on from the concealment of the lush foliage of this exotic chamber. That so many insensible objects should enjoy the favours which would ravish a lover with delight and of which he was nightly and daily tormented enraged him. The wind which toys with a wealth of perfumed hair, or kisses beautiful lips with kisses which it is unable to appreciate; the water which envelops an adorably beautiful body in one universal kiss, and is yet, notwithstanding, indifferent to that exquisite pleasure; the mirror which reflects so many charming images; the buskin or sandal which clasps a divine little foot; the…

Oh, the contemplation of favours he had yet to know, and may not still, tortured his smitten sensibilities.

Cleopatra dipped her pink heel in the water and descended a few steps. The quivering flood making a silver belt about her waist and silver bracelets about her arms, scented water rolling in pearls like a broken necklace over her bosom and shoulders; her wealth of hair, lifted by the water, extending behind her to create a royal mantle. For even at her ablutions she was a queen. To and fro, she swam upon back, distended nipples accusing the morning sky for the continued absence of her anonymous lover as she tried to envisage the person of this diversion sent her by the fates before that assigned to her brought the world of self-autonomy and queen-dom she so adored to an abrupt and final end.

Clinging now to the balustrade of the basin, physical treasures concealed below water and revealed above making this vision of youthful and warped womanhood seem all the more desirable, she pondered how she would play with this new toy once it had been acquired for her use.

Before, suddenly she choked off a cry that would have proved every bit as shrill as that of Diana surprised by Actæon, had not her queenly dignity prevented her displaying such evidence of womanly frailty before… *anyone*.

For through the neighboring foliage, she had spied a burning eye.

An eye as yellow, phosphoric, and *hungry* as the eye of a crocodile or lion.

It was Antoninu, who, crouching behind a tuft of leaves, and trembling like a fawn in a field of wheat, was intoxicating himself with the dangerous pleasure of beholding the queen in her bath and ordering all his manly discipline not to take his engorged manhood in his hands and satisfy his longing though it be beneath the gaze of love.

Though, as we have seen, brave even to temerity, the shock upon the features of Cleopatra as she spied him passed through his heart. As coldly piercing as the blade of a sword. A death-like sweat covered his whole body and, of a sudden, his arteries hissed through his temples with a sharp sound as of flowing water making a swift pass over the rocks and pebbles of rapids.

The iron hand of anxious fear had seized him by the throat and was strangling him.

At no more than a clap of her hands, the baths were entered and several fearsome Nubian eunuchs rushed forward, lances in hand. Cleopatra pointed out to them the group of trees, where they found Antoninu crouching in concealment. Defence was out of the question and he attempted none – though he were more than capable of the most severe resistance and even though he sensed they were prepared to kill him with that cruel and stupid reactionary characteristic of eunuchs born or forced to service. But Cleopatra, who, in the interim, had covered herself with her tunic made signs to them to stop, and bring the intruder before her.

Not quite believing his unmanly reaction to finding himself in the presence of his beloved, Antoninu fell upon his knees when released and stretched forth suppliant hands to her, as to the altars of the gods.

“Are you some assassin bribed by Rome or the followers of my deceased brother,” she asked, sensing even as she said it that he was neither and that the fates had simply answered her prayers for diversion. “For what purpose have you entered these sacred precincts from which all men save slave and eunuchs are excluded?” she demanded imperiously, thrilling to the look of adoration with which this most handsome of men bathed her person.

The tips of the eunuch’s lances not inches from his pale and unblemished skin, Antoninu raised himself to his knees that he might address his divinity with more ease:

“May my soul be found light in the balance of Amenti, and may Tmeï, daughter of the Sun and goddess of Truth, punish me if I have ever entertained a thought of evil against you, O queen!” he answered as her gaze overrode the mortal peril in which he had placed himself and sang in his veins as if it were the sweetest and most fruitful wine from Olympus itself.

Sincerity and loyalty were written upon his countenance in characters so transparent that Cleopatra immediately banished her suspicions, and looked upon the Sardinian with a look less stern and wrathful; he initial evaluation of him as *“beautiful”* reinforced by a more *discerning* scrutiny.

“Then what motive could have prompted you to enter a place where you could only expect to meet death?” she asked softly, her voice a feast of sensuality to match the fire inspired by her eyes.

“I love you!” murmured Antoninu in a low, but distinct voice; for his courage was back with him and, along with it, a desire to appear *worthy* in her eyes.

“Ah!” cried Cleopatra, bending toward him, and seizing his arm with a sudden brusque movement, “so, then, it was you who shot that arrow with the papyrus scroll! By Oms, the Dog of Hell, you are a very foolhardy wretch!... I now recognize you. I long observed you wandering like a complaining Shade about the places where I dwell.... You were at the Procession of Isis, at the Panegyris of Hermonthis.”

Despite the accusatory tone in her voice, his thoughts thrilled.

She had noticed him.

“You followed the royal galley. My pilot spoke of the strange man keeping pace in our rear. What is your name?”

“Antoninu of Sardinia, my goddess.”

Her smile was both regal and mocking.

“Goddess already, is it? My, you are a bold one.”

A smile cracked the faces of even her joyless eunuchs at their owner’s irony.

“And you must have a queen?... Is that it? The easy attentions of women beguiled by your not inconsiderate charms have given rise to a sense of entitlement and you now see fit to lay siege to the stars?”

She rested a foot, still wet from the scented waters of her bath, upon a thigh his position upon his haunches presented to her, and felt his body virtually quiver and sing upon this first contact with her, a sigh softer than the lightest breeze upon the flesh of a lily stirring the water upon the knee before it and giving yet more evidence of his powerlessness before her own… *charms*.

“You have no mean ambitions, Antoninu of Sardinia,” she observed. “You expect, without doubt, to be well paid in return for placing yourself in my service. Assuredly I am going to love you for bestowing such honour upon me... Why not?”

Her laughter was not pleasant and yet, still, he was unable to be anything but charmed by it.

“Queen,” returned Antoninu with a look of deep melancholy, “do not dismiss me. I am mad, it is true. I have deserved death; that is also true. If you have no use for me, then be humane and bid your eunuchs to kill me.”

The expression across the face of the ages was unreadable.

Until:

“No. I have taken the whim to be clement to-day. I will give you your life.”

The eyes looking up into her own, though they were a decade and more her senior, spoke of nothing except the purest of loves.

“What would you that I should do with life if it is not to be spent at your side?” he blurted out. “I love you!”

“You are even more bold than I at first imagined. Either that or your own wishful thinking has demoted your intelligence to a degree only slightly above that of a useful animal.”

“If… If that is your opinion, my goddess, then I am willing to be used.”

“Oh, Antoninu of Sardinia, I can see this is not going to end well for you. You are a strange kind of lover who offers himself as a beast of burden without first attempting to win his beloved,” answered Cleopatra. “Or have you indulged yourself in wild and extravagant dreams to such an extent you fancy such an offer will win me?”

She took his chin between her slender fingers and stared into eyes she sensed were becoming magnetised to her own.

“Your desires have crossed an impassable threshold, Antoninu of Sardinia. You imagined yourself to be Cæsar or Mark Antony and, in your delirium, you have been able to believe that, under some condition of things which takes place but once in a thousand years, Cleopatra might come to love you.

By exaggerating her breathing, she allowed her perfumed breath to play over his handsome features and for the perfume accompanying her enunciation to madden his already enflamed senses further.

Suddenly, she took a few steps backward that she might take in his position of supplication more fully.

And now it was Egypt’s young, but no less powerful, queen whose senses verged upon the molten.

There below her was a man who was at least the physical equal of any man she had laid eyes upon during her short but eventful time on earth.

And he was declaring himself hers.

In *any* form in which she saw fit to accept him.

“Well, Antoninu of Sardinia,” she began, “what you thought impossible is actually about to happen. I will transform your dream into a reality. It pleases me, for once, to secure the accomplishment of a mad hope. I am willing to inundate you with glory and splendour.”

His senses thrilled as she proposed more than he had ever hoped to achieve.

Or at least they did for a few moments.

“Unfortunately,” she continued, “my largesse does not extend to you either sharing or experiencing the luxuries and exotica of my birthright, rather than that you may look upon your *‘goddess’* as you describe her, as she makes use of these things that to her are as normal as breathing.”

As besotted and beguiled as he was to be so close to this long held object of desire, Antoninu felt the grip of something cold at his entrails. Upon closer inspection of his obsession, it was obvious that a capacity for cruelty, equally the match of her beauty, was not a myth of rumour mongers and sensation seekers. Suddenly, his boldness seemed to match her description of it as the stupidity of an animal.

It was to get worse.

“You are obviously an affluent man and of no small education,” she observed, the curl of her lip ridding the observation of anything resembling praise. “A man, I hazard to guess, at the summit of his own narrow world. But now, and for your temerity and my pleasure, I intend to take you to the very bottom of the ladder. I am about to demote you to servitude. Abruptly, suddenly, without a transition. I take you out of your substance and reduce you to nothingness. And for this I am generous to you rather than cruel. I have but a short time to enjoy this life and your arrival in it is most fortuitous. In return for granting you a presence at my feet, you will be my entertainment. I gave you your life a few moments ago and you returned it to me. So be it. You are now my property and will serve as my slave for so long as breath is granted me.”

It was only now that Antoninu fully became acquainted with the full horror of his cockled foolhardiness and the life he had known not hours before began to seem so much more… *palatable*… to him.

And his present was about to become worse.

Cleopatra gave her eunuchs a nod and Antoninu felt the sharpened point of a lance at the small of his back as his hands were grasped in grips of steel and he was lifted to his feet; knowing his own strength and prowess in combat was no match for the three of them.

Though it did not stop him struggling when the incarnation of his desires lessened them further:

“Take him to the physician and fetch him back to me only when his manhood resembles yours.”

EPILOGUE

Our world of to-day is puny indeed beside the antique world.

Our banquets are mean and niggardly, compared with the appalling sumptuousness of the Roman patricians and the princes of ancient Asia.

Their ordinary repasts would in these days would be regarded as frenzied orgies, and a whole modern city could subsist for eight days upon the leavings of one supper given by Lucullus to a few intimate friends.

With our miserable habits, we find it difficult to conceive of those enormous existences, realizing everything vast, strange, and most monstrously impossible that imagination could devise. Our palaces are mere stables, in which Caligula would not quarter his horse. The retinue of our wealthiest constitutional king is as nothing compared with that of a petty satrap or a Roman proconsul. The radiant suns which once shone upon the earth are forever extinguished in the nothingness of uniformity. Above the dark swarm of men no longer tower those Titanic colossi who bestrode the world in three paces, like the steeds of Homer.

One marvels that men did not revolt against such confiscation of all riches and all living forces for the benefit of a few privileged ones, and that such exorbitant fantasies should not have encountered any opposition on their bloody way. It was because those prodigious lives were the realizations by day of the dreams which haunted each man by night, the personifications of the common ideal which the nations beheld living symbolized under one of those meteoric names that flame inextinguishably through the night of ages.

To-day, deprived of such dazzling spectacles of omnipotent will, of the lofty contemplation of some human mind whose least wish makes itself visible in actions unparalleled, in enormities of granite and brass – as well as in evil and cruelty - the world becomes irredeemably and hopelessly dull.

Man is no longer represented in the realization of his imperial fancy.

It is the story which we are writing, and the great name of Cleopatra which appears in it, that has prompted us to these reflections, so ill-sounding, doubtless, to modern ears. But the spectacle of the antique world is something so crushingly discouraging, even to those imaginations which deem themselves exhaustless, and those minds which fancy themselves to have conceived the utmost limits of fairy magnificence, that we cannot here forbear recording our regret and lamentation that we were not cotemporaries of Sardanapalus; of Teglathphalazar; of Cleopatra, queen of Egypt; or even of Elagabalus, emperor of Rome and priest of the Sun.

It is our task to describe a supreme orgy - a banquet compared with which the splendours of Belshazzar's feast must pale.

One of Cleopatra's nights.

How can our civilized and Anglophonic tongue, so chaste, so icily prudish, and so correct, describe that unbounded transport of passions. That huge and mighty debauch which feared not to mingle the double purple of wine and blood. Those furious outbursts

of insatiate pleasure, madly leaping toward the Impossible with all the wild ardour of senses as yet untamed by the long fast of Christianity?

The promised night should well have been a splendid one, for all the joys and pleasures possible in a human lifetime were to be concentrated into the space of a few hours.

Anthony had already made his way towards the long dark night and, so Cleopatra's scouts told her, it would be less than two sunsets before the arrival of her nemesis, and a man impervious to either her precocious and depraved sexuality or her advanced political skills.

Octavian, she knew, was the end of her life and she was determined that its ending should be one of her own choosing rather than being transported back to might Rome in his train as a conquest and a possession.

And, she had decided, it was necessary that the life of Antoninu should accompany her to that meeting with Anubis and what awaited her beyond – for it was inconceivable that one such as she should not be served in death as she had in life.

Let us transport our readers to the banquet-hall.

Our existing architecture offers few points for comparison with those vast edifices whose very ruins resemble the erosion of mountains rather than the remains of buildings. It needed all the exaggeration of the antique life to animate and fill those prodigious palaces, whose halls were too lofty and vast to allow of any ceiling save the sky itself—a magnificent ceiling, and well worthy of such mighty architecture.

The banquet-hall was of enormous and Babylonian dimensions; the eye could not penetrate its immeasurable depth. Monstrous columns - short, thick, and solid enough to sustain the heavens themselves - heavily expanded their broad-swelling shafts upon socles variegated with hieroglyphics, and sustained upon their bulging capitals gigantic arcades of granite rising by successive tiers, like vast stairways reversed. Between each two pillars a colossal sphinx of basalt, crowned with the *pshent*, bent forward her oblique-eyed face and horned chin, and gazed into the hall with a fixed and mysterious look.

The columns of the second tier, receding from the first, were more elegantly formed, and crowned in lieu of capitals with four female heads chiselled into the stone and wearing caps of many folds with all the intricacies of the Egyptian headdress. Instead of sphinxes, bull-headed idols - impassive spectators of nocturnal frenzy and the furies of orgy - were seated upon thrones of stone, like patient hosts awaiting the opening of the banquet.

A third story, constructed in a yet different style of architecture, with elephants of bronze spouting perfume from their trunks, crowned the edifice; above, the sky yawned like a blue gulf, and the curious stars leaned over the frieze.

Prodigious stairways of porphyry, so highly polished that they reflected the human body like a mirror, ascended and descended on every hand, and bound together these huge masses of architecture.

We have as yet spoken of the banquet-hall only, without referring to the guests.

Let us do so now, for Cleopatra and Antoninu are waiting for us.

We see them drawing near....

…Cleopatra was apparelled in a robe of pale green, open at either side to reveal the outer halves and the décolletage of her firm and self-supporting, the areolae surrounding aroused nipples painted purple. Two bracelets of immense pearls gleamed around her naked arms while upon her head glimmered the golden-pointed diadem. Despite the smile on her lips, a slight cloud of preoccupation shadowed her fair forehead and the piercing radiance of her eyes seemed diluted by some yet to arrive crisis she knew could not be forsworn. From time to time, as she acknowledged the lascivious fawning of her male guests and the jealous sycophancy of the gathered females who knew they could never hope to match her attraction for the masculine half of the species, her brows became knitted in a feverish manner and the heady delights of personal cruelty she had visited upon her newest slave over the past few days could not take her mind from Roman cloud gathering momentum within her kingdom as its now unchallenged Caesar made haste to end her existence as she had known it until now.

She knew her guests were biting sorely pressed lips in order to prevent themselves inquiring after the coming storm and what might be he fate when the latest of her Roman's arrived and enjoyed still the royal authority that prevented them giving voice to the subject in her hearing. She remained queen still and a queen's displeasure was potent up until that final second when it was stripped away and, suddenly, it was no longer. But for now, and until Octavian's arrival, she was still arrayed in the full authority of her birthright and the tortures she could inflict upon any who displeased her were enough to fetch sycophancy and false support from the lips of those nearest her.

On the subject of that black cloud drifting ever closer towards her?

Well, she had thought of flight, of course. But what kind of existence would the option avail her? Save for a life spent amongst barbarians and Silesian pirates, where could she find a kingdom willing to accept her money that would ensure she not only remained safe from Octavian and his iron will, but was able to live a life that appealed to her… *tastes*?

The power of Rome was everywhere and would soon, no doubt, encompass even the unstructured and mercenary worlds of barbarian and pirates; there was, she knew, *nowhere* for her to be safe were she to flee.

Better, her young and somewhat black-and-white mind told her, if she simply placed her existence away from any influence Octavian might wield over her in life and entrust her charms and her future good fortune to the god Anubis himself, in the hopes the after-life was all her priests assured her it would be.

But, for now, there was still some *dark* pleasure to be had from the short time left to her and she again found herself thrilling to the picture she made for her guests as she manoeuvred her pet through the throng with the help of the chain held lightly between her fingers and attached to the collar encasing the neck of possibly the most exotic beast to be found this side of the pillars of Hercules.

Antoninu was on all-fours, completely naked and with his head lowered. The collar about his neck denoted him as property of the lowest kind and served also as a proclamation heralding the bonfire his owner had made of his manhood.

Curious women followed in Cleopatra's train simply to see the sight of her pet's meaty cock dangling between its legs as he crawled behind his Master who, from time to time, and if a guest was of sufficient interest, would stop to speak and rest her pert buttocks upon her kneeling animal as she sipped from an ornate and queenly goblet.

This as she either listened or commented upon what she heard.

Of course, these were women of the world, with wealthy husbands, and there was not much they had not witnessed in their pampered and carefree lives to now - so the simple swaying of a considerable cock on an attractive man reduced to the status of canine was not enough of itself to spike their interest so deeply.

It was, rather, what was missing from the rear view of Cleopatra's human-pet that laid claim to both their curiosity and some dark desires of their own.

For, where once would have swung a pair of sizable and full testicles, there was nothing but a loose flap of skin, still an angry red from the attentions of the young queen's physicians.

A lack that, though the handsome and physically impressive man would still be capable of achieving erection, ensured his line had been eradicated for all eternity and neither he nor any future partner would know the joy of bringing a fresh life into the world.

Antoninu had been neutered.

As he felt the warmth of his owner's buttocks upon his naked back, a look of deep and heartfelt sadness ensured his face took on the mien of those more dolorous looking canines. Never, in all of the possible outcomes his dreams had pictured, had the situation in which he found himself occurred to his idealised imagination when it came to the young woman by whom he was fixated. But then, and notwithstanding her reputation and the tales of sexual debauchery and insensate cruelty circulating in her regard, had he once faced the possibility that those tales and rumours could have any substance, and still less that he, the handsome and much sought after Antoninu of Sardinia, could find himself collared and powerless at the sharp end of his young idee fixe and her depravity.

He heard the buzz of conversation around the woman who had neutered him but it was meaningless to him, so far lost was he to self-recrimination for his own stupidity. He had allowed a sexual and romantic fixation for a young stranger to make him dissatisfied with a life many would have killed to possess. And all that she might… *know him*. That he might be acknowledged in her eyes and seen, at least as a possible suitor.

Well, his obsession had indeed been *"acknowledged"* and the looks other women swooned over deemed so far unworthy of making him her suitor she had bade her physician to neuter him. Worse, she had deemed him unsuitable even as a servitor – o how he had come to envy young Teutorigus, who not only got to attend his younger Master's body but, should her mood and his behaviour prove languid on the one part and servile enough on the other, got to feel either her tiny hand or the creamy soles of

her exquisite feet about his manhood. He, Antoninu of Sardinia, had been deemed worthy only of a life at her side as a pet; albeit of the exotic variety.

Hence, along with his neutering, the young woman his dreams had pictured as his soul-partner for eternity had insisted that same physician destroy the tendons at his heel and make it more natural, as well as less painful, for him to crawl after the manner of a beast than upon his hind legs as a man.

His thoughts went to his parents and how he had betrayed them with his idealized and wishful imbecility. What pain would his mother know were she ever to discover his fate? And what of his father and the business he had entrusted to his son? What would become of that without Antoninu in place to both administer and grow his overseas enterprise?

Suddenly, he felt the pressure of her buttocks depart his back and a rush of cooler air chilled the vacated skin.

The chain lead tightened at his collar and he again began to crawl forward in the wake of the young woman who owned him in the most absolute and binding of ways.

Ahead of him he could see the sandaled feet he had grown so accustomed to bathing with his tongue over the past few days and the sight led him to contemplate once again the flawless body above to which his tongue had also paid homage. The circular rose-bud through which she emitted what had once been sustenance and glorious cunt with its depilate mound and the delightful clit that took on the aspect of a smaller replica of a men's penis when she bade him to suck it into his *"dog mouth"*. In the days since he had assumed the role of queen's beast, Antoninu had become familiar with all her most intimate smells. From foot, to cunt, to arse, and up to and including the valleys beneath her arms, he could differentiate even with eyes closed the taste of each individual part of his owner's anatomy.

She had made of him the *most* humble of her many chattels.

Womanly giggles from behind him made their way into his preoccupations and self-pity and he realised his thoughts as he trailed in the wake of his Master had led the working cock above his now vanquished scrotum to come to full tumescence.

His shame knew no earthly bounds.

And did *nothing* to lessen his manhood's treacherous response to his dishonour.

When she had uttered the words sparing his life in her baths, Antoninu felt as if he had reached the goal of his life. Though he were to live to the age of Nestor or Priam, he recalled thinking at the time, though he should behold his veined temples hoary with locks whiter than those of the high priest of Ammon, he could never know such heights of fulfilment again. His maddest hope had been so much more than realized that there was nothing in the world left for him to achieve.

At least, it had been so for a few seconds before the caprice of the young queen set his new world upon its head.

Suddenly, he realised they were climbing the steps to her throne and soon he was at her side upon his haunches, still erect cock visible to slave and guest alike as his owner toyed with the chain attached to his collar, lost in her thoughts.

Unable to blot out or look away from the ridicule and disgust he saw coming from the men and the hunger and, perhaps, envy he saw in the eyes of their women, Antoninu felt moistness at his eyes and realised he was on the verge of unmanly tears – *before and audience* – for the first time since his lessons as a child and the corrections of an over-zealous teacher.

Above and next to him, Cleopatra sat upon a throne with golden griffins on either side, and then, allowing his chain to drop to the stone floor, clapped her little hands together in signal.

Instantly lines of fire, bands of sparkling light, outlined all the projections of the architecture—the eyes of the sphinxes flamed with phosphoric lightnings; the bull-headed idols breathed flame; the elephants, in lieu of perfumed water, spouted aloft bright columns of crimson fire; arms of bronze, each bearing a torch, started from the walls, and blazing aigrettes bloomed in the sculptured hearts of the lotus flowers.

Huge blue flames palpitated in tripods of brass; giant candelabras shook their dishevelled light in the midst of ardent vapours.

Everything sparkled, glittered, beamed. Prismatic irises crossed and shattered each other in the air. The facets of the cups, the angles of the marbles and jaspers, the chiselling of the vases—all caught a sparkle, a gleam, or a flash as of lightning. Radiance streamed in torrents and leaped from step to step like a cascade, over the porphyry-stairways so that it seemed the reflection of a conflagration on some broad river.

Had the Queen of Sheba ascended thither she would have caught up the folds of her robe, and believed herself walking in water, as when she stepped upon the crystal pavements of Solomon.

Viewed through that burning haze, the monstrous figures of the colossi, the animals, the hieroglyphics, seemed to come alive; the black marble rams bleated ironically, and clashed their gilded horns; the idols breathed harshly through their panting nostrils.

It was the signal for the orgy to commence and thong of guests began shedding their robes and finery to partake of all manner of couplings with a partner of their choice, or whoever happened to be nearest them.

Not one woman seemed bereft of a cock in either mouth cunt or anus and not one of the men was denied the attentions of either a female tongue or the cock of a fellow male in those orifices he called they called their own.

Not one woman or one man.

Save for the queen surveying them and the unhappy but aroused dog at her side whose luxuriant hair she was now stroking in a way the further enflamed and demeaned him.

For many minutes the young Cleopatra surveyed the panorama of carnality below her dais and, as she did so, she realised her interest in the proceedings was remarkable only for being absent in its entirety. At an age when most young women were still discovering the multitudinous joys to be found in sexual commerce her senses had become inured to what she had seen and experienced so early. She was bored, and when one was bored one went to ever greater lengths to ease that boredom, to once again taste

that novelty which, if experienced too often became a chore of repetition demanding fresh conquests and a more *piquant* form of conquering.

"Heel!" she said suddenly at the height of the carnality, rising from her throne and pulling her pet towards an opening surrounded by ornate columns chiselled with the likenesses of the ancient Argonauts – an opening that led to her private chambers.

Upon hands and knees, tendons severed and manhood neutered, Antoninu of Sardinia followed in the wake of the young girl who owned him and prayed she was of a mind to deliver him an escape from his misery and self-recriminations for a few precious, if dehumanizing, moments by presenting to him the silky-smooth skin of her golden calf and allowing him to hump his way towards a sweet but all too short oblivion.

It was but seconds after their entrance into her chamber that Cleopatra came to a halt at the foot of her divan and answered his prayers.

Taking up the slack of the chain at his collar, she gazed down into her pet's eyes and saw, despite all she had taken from him, how he melted into her attentions.

It was almost enough for her to take pity on him.

In fact, it was, and as she heard the distant clarions from far in the north that announced Octavian's arrival in Thebes, she determined to place an end to her existence that was based on an act of clemency – two, in fact – rather than meet Anubis on the back of yet more cruelty.

"You have been an admirable pet these past few days, loyal Antoninu," she said into his beaten but still adoring eyes. "And for that your owner is going to allow you to rub your doggy manhood against my most superior leg that you may experience pleasure from me for the very last time."

She saw the feat that rose with his desire and smiled, almost kindly.

"No, Antoninu. It is not my loyal and obedient dog who is going to another world; but his young Mistress."

The light of realisation dawned in the suddenly bright eyes of Antoninu but had not the power to quench the unholy desire he felt as she presented the outside of a dimpled calf for his enjoyment.

"Be sure to hump quickly, my pet," she urged him, "as your Master has much to do after you found your beastly pleasure."

Needing no further urging, and too far gone in his lust to evaluate her meaning further, Antoninu of Sardinia pressed his neutered but painfully erect cock against her glorious young skin and began to hump away as if he truly were her animal and had never known the joys of being a man.

*****

It was an angry and thwarted Octavian who surveyed the scene in the queen's bed-chamber some two hours later.

For the new emperor of Rome and, by extension, the known world, had more in common with the pathetic and desolate man-dog sprawled at the foot of the young queen's divan as he peppered her lifeless foot with kisses intended to rejuvenate her departed spirit.

Like Antoninu, the emperor had dreams of his own and, if they were not as personal in nature as those of the neutered one, they were equally as glorious in their own way.

But no longer.

There was no glory to be had from entering Rome with the lifeless corpse of a queen in his train.

No matter how beauteous or how famed her history.

The equally lifeless asp, throttled no doubt by her inconsolable dog-man, had already ensured that Octavian would not be allowed the triumph of her penitent entry into the city as she walked at the side of his carriage, impossible.

He shook his head with amazement at the handsome man still peppering the whore of Egypt's feet with kisses and felt nothing but haughty contempt for the sobbing with which his adorations were interspersed.

What manner of circumstance, the dry and logical emperor reasoned, could bring a man so low as to debase himself in such a fashion before a woman?

And a dead one, at that.

An aide appeared at his side.

"What would you have us do with the queen?" the grizzled man in his mid-fifties asked, still head-to-foot in dust from the most recent of the forced marches necessary to reach Thebes in so short a space of time.

Octavian's response was instant:

"Bid her people preserve the body," he ordered. "It will return with us to Rome."

The aide indicated the sobbing man:

"And that… *creature?*"

To this, the usually decisive emperor had no ready reply and contented himself to think upon the lowly matter for a few moments.

Until:

"Give him two-pieces of silver and send him back to whatever pitiful existence he had before now."

THE END