

Adventure

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Twice a Month

The Purple Pirate (a novelette) . . .	TALBOT MUNDY	2
<p>Their battlefield was a sinking ship, and the fight was hopeless. One-eyed Conops leaped to the purple taffrail with the battle trumpet in his fist. "Lay aboard, all hands. Go in fast and gut her. Grapple before their arrows sweep our decks!" And from the quarter-deck Tros staggered to the thunder of crunching hulls and leaped down where the cymbals and the war-roar came. "Grappels—let go!"</p>		
Road Runner	HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS	55
<p>Stumbling to the ambush on the Dragoon trail, young Hardesty saw the sun glint on the sawed-off Springfield of the Apache Kid. "What I want, I get," said the Kid. And young Hardesty knew it was murder he wanted.</p>		
The Feud at Single Shot (Second of Five Parts)	LUKE SHORT	65
<p>"Pack your guns loose!" roared the mining man. "I'll kill you like a coyote the next time I see you." That night strange thunder rolled from the high peak of Old Cartridge.</p>		
Gone Native	WALT PEACHY	87
<p>Some time toward evening, when the water jugs were broken and the native bullets were getting uncomfortably close to the loopholes in our mahogany hut, we heard a frantic voice from the jungle: "For God's sake, open up! I've come thirty miles on foot to help you."</p>		
One Thing at a Time	BILL ADAMS	100
<p>The rain changed to mist, and the brig with the shifted cargo was lost to sight of the two in the longboat towed at her stern. Her skipper shouted, but his voice was drowned. "Cut!" said young Ross to the skipper's daughter, and the painter parted, leaving them alone on the dark and empty sea.</p>		
Cowards Are Bravest	PERRY ADAMS	106
<p>The colonel dropped his hand. The great gate swung open. Giving his helmet a jaunty tap a captain stepped out among the besiegers—the bloodiest tribe of the hills. The colonel raised his hand. His own brother was next, and already he could see him under the torture knives.</p>		
The Camp-Fire	<i>where readers, writers, and adventurers meet</i>	117
Ask Adventure	<i>information you can't get elsewhere</i>	122
Trail Ahead	<i>news of the next issue</i>	128
<p><i>Cover by Walter Baumhofer</i> <i>Illustrations by Neil O'Keeffe, I. B. Hazelton, V. E. Pyles</i></p>		

Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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THE PURPLE PIRATE

CHAPTER I

“ANGRY? AYE, EGYPT, I AM.”

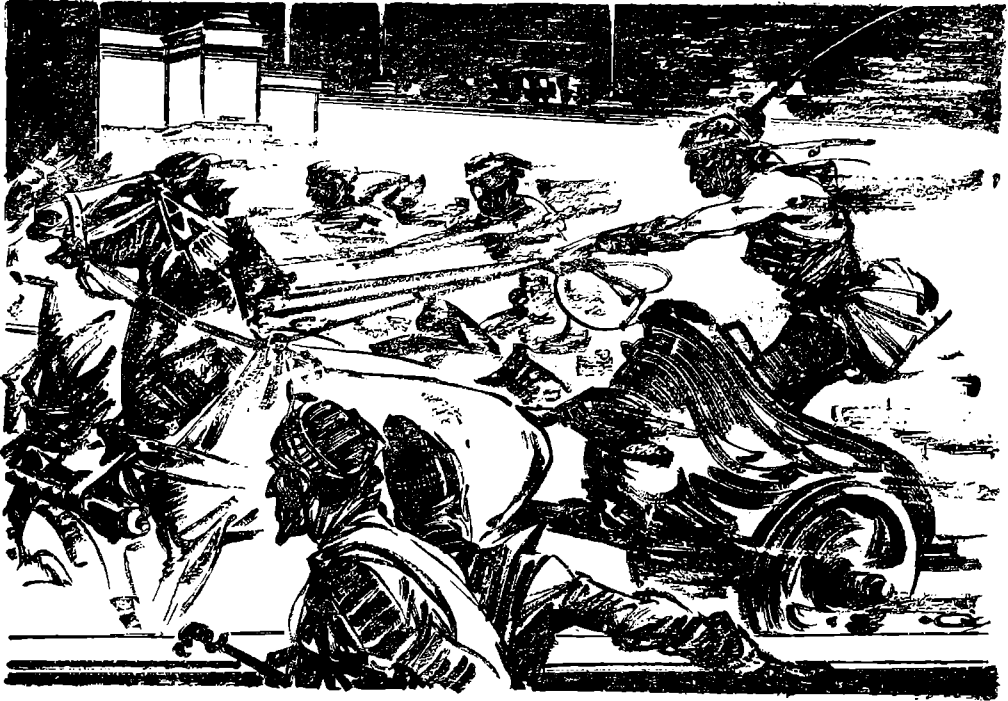
IT WAS race day; there was no doubt where to find Cleopatra that afternoon. The races had more effect than law and police on the behavior of the Alexandrine crowd. The priesthood of Serapis might have felt happier, but the crowd would have felt insulted if the queen had stayed away. Unable to compete with such a popular attraction, the priests had contrived to give chariot racing a vaguely religious significance; they had a row of reserved seats, into which they filed with solemn ceremony.

Royalty could not afford to miss the opportunity to arrive rather late and be more brilliantly ostentatious than the priests. True, Cleopatra herself was a priestess; on certain occasions she even wore the robes of divine Isis. But it was better politics to appear at the races as

royalty, with the priesthood in decidedly subordinate position.

So Tros, too, attended the races, after his own determined fashion. Too indignant to feel tired, even though he had worked furiously all night long to save Esias' docks and repair yards from destruction, he submitted to be washed and dressed in court apparel. Then he took one last look at the smoking ruin of his trireme, gave curt orders to his lieutenant Ahiram, and had himself carried in a curtained litter borne by eight slaves past the splendid temple of Serapis to the royal entrance of the Stadium.

Like the Baltic wife who was slain by a Roman arrow on the northern coast of Gaul, his beloved trireme, the finest warship the world had ever known, was dead. He couldn't prove it, but he knew the ship had been destroyed by Cleopatra's order, to prevent him from sailing away and leaving her without a man whom she could trust to accept no



A Tros Novelette
By Talbot Mundy

Roman bribes and to engage in no conspiracies against her. He was just superstitious enough to believe that the loss of his ship might signify another new beginning, stormier, more difficult than ever, but a new beginning.

Ever since his childhood on the rocky isle of Samothrace his life had been a series of stormy beginnings: battles by land and sea, far wanderings and baffled efforts to set forth on the great adventure—a voyage around the world. It was his fantastic belief that the world was round and revolved around the sun. It was his whole-souled ambition to set forth on a voyage of discovery to prove it.



MONEY and men he still had. He had gathered his crew, as he had built his ship, faithfully. To build a new ship, queen or no queen, would be easier than it would have been to get another such

crew together. He would get that crew to sea again, at all costs, soon, on some sort of ship, to keep them disciplined.

Tros was already storming the future. He looked the part in his gorgeous purple cloak, with the broad gold band binding his raven hair, and his sword in its green-and-vermilion sheath, with the jeweled sword-belt. But he had a greater, more dangerous problem on his hands even than the difficulty of rebuilding and setting forth on his voyage. He had a new woman. He had dared to take to himself, to become the mother of sons should Destiny permit, the queen's own younger sister—the one woman in the world whom Cleopatra feared. He did not yet know quite how much the queen had learned about it through her ubiquitous spies.

The royal entrance to the Stadium was as elaborate as architects could make. Fifty helmeted guardsmen stood like statues on either side of the mosaic

pavement between the parking place for litters and the marble entrance steps. Two junior guard officers, wearing a year's income in gilded armor and jeweled belts and hilts, saluted Tros but flinched from facing him. He looked too angry, too important. They turned him over to the captain of the guard, Leander, a tall, bored exquisite with intelligent gray eyes, who was at pains to appear humorously gracious. He accepted Tros' sword with his own beautifully manicured hands, instead of letting a slave receive it on a cushion. He himself, with his own hands, laid it on a rack in the guardroom.

"Permit me, Tros, to say how pleased I am that your name has been restored to the chamberlain's list. I hope you bear me no ill-will for having had to refuse you admission to the palace recently?"

Tros eyed him, sure, if of nothing else, that what Leander craved was money; not promises or fair words, money. He knew Leander—knew how deeply the man was in debt, how he loved his social position. So he put Leander at once on the defensive.

"I reserve my ill-will for my equals!"

Leander winced. He knew he wasn't Tros' equal by any standard of comparison. Tros, as Leander and every one else connected with the court knew, had refused a throne, more than once. In fair fight no two Leanders could have defeated him with any known weapon. Tros was a man whom men followed because he knew how to lead, whereas Leander was merely a parvenu aristocrat. But Leander was an Alexandrine, and in favor at court. His retort was as prompt as an asp's fangs:

"Equals? Has a purple pirate any equals? I suppose you do feel almost human since they burned your private navy! Have you learned who did it?"

"If you knew what I know, Leander, you would ask fewer questions."

"Omniscience! Was it envious Zeus

with his thunderbolts? Did the great god burn your trireme to prevent you from ravaging Olympus?"

"If I suspected you of having done it, Leander, you would be worth more."

"How so?"

"Feet first, on your way to the embalmer. He, at any rate, would have a profit of you. Is it your duty to keep the queen's guests gossiping at the foot of the stairs?"

"Way for the Lord Captain! Kindly tread upon my shadow and immortalize it." Suddenly Leander changed from spiteful raillery to a more familiar, friendlier tone. "Forget your trireme, Tros, and bet on Yellow in the big race; then you'll be feeling better tempered next time we meet. Bet early enough, and you may get odds of five to one, or even better. Red will be favorite, at odds on. Red's owner has been financed by a Roman money-lender, and the Romans have betted their last sesterce. But I think they'll lose their money. Let me do your betting for you."

Was Leander worth buying? Tros decided he might be—possibly. No Alexandrine courtier was very likely to be grateful; but easy money probably would whet his appetite for more, so it might be worth while to pretend to be fooled, with a view to the future. Yellow was probably the one chariot that could not possibly win. Leander would simply keep the money and laugh behind Tros' back. But later he might try another trick and find himself at Tros' mercy.

Tros turned on the lower step and tossed a fat purse to Leander's slave. It contained as much as two years' pay of a captain of the guards. Tros had brought it to give to his friend Olympus, the court astrologer-physician, who would pass it along by undiscoverable channels to the priests of far-off Philae. The way to get true information about India and even more distant countries was to keep on good terms with the priests of the really ancient Mysteries,

whose secret means of information reached to the world's ends. However, Olympus could wait.

"Very well, Leander, place a bet on Yellow and keep half the profit. See that your slave gets the right odds."



He didn't miss the scornful laughter in Leander's eyes as he turned on his way up the marble stairs between the frescoed walls. In the same sort of unexplainable way that he could smell his course through storms and fogs at sea, he had a feeling that he would laugh last, and for the better reason. Meanwhile, he went forward, upstairs, wishing he were going into battle rather than to interview Caesar's young widow, mother of Caesar's infant son, who was all the deadlier because her own brains and ambition were almost all the resources on which she knew she could depend.

The roar from the arena seats—the typical Alexandrine din of men's and women's voices shrilling with excitement—filled the air. The tumult almost drowned the blare of music. From the head of the stairs, at the end of the passage leading to the royal box, there was a view of sunlight tiers of people as gay to the eye as rows on rows of flowers stirring in the breeze.

The apartments above and behind the royal box were like a section of the palace in miniature, as sumptuously furnished. Slaves came running forward from the buffet-table at the end of a long room on the left, to urge Tros to rest and refresh himself. He refused. The buffet-room was full of overdressed courtiers, who stared and made witty remarks behind their hands. Every one knew about the burned trireme. Nobody except Olympus cared to risk Tros' anger by speaking to him about it.

Olympus, in his official black robes and ancient Egyptian headdress, came and smiled wanly, murmuring official non-

sense about conjunctions of stars and burning ships. Then he added, for Tros' real information:

"If I read the stars aright, the daughter of Zeus-Ammon"—he meant the queen; it was customary for the rulers of Egypt to claim divine parentage—"is angry and well informed, but in too grave peril to afford what malice prompts. Oh, Tros, you peril-lover! Must you do even your loving perilously? I believe the queen's need of a sword preserves you from her vengeance. But she is a Ptolemy. Beware of her treachery!"

"Thank you, Olympus. I will leave word with Esias to have a purse of money ready for you whenever you call."

Olympus sent a slave to inform the royal chamberlain, who presently came from his seat near the royal box—a splendidly dressed eunuch with secretive, experienced eyes, who was used to being treated deferentially, even by Roman ambassadors. He saw fit to be gracious:

"Take your time, Lord Tros. The queen is in one of her moods, and there is plenty of time before the next race. You have time for a bet. They tell me Red is a certain winner."

"Bet then on Red and be fortunate, but send my name in to the queen. She awaits me."

"Be discreet, Tros. She has had a sleepless night. You will need all your tact."

"I have it. Lead on."

"Too bad that you have lost your trireme. Too bad. Too bad. Come and fortify yourself. A little wine—a little pickled fish-roe, or perhaps a plate of birds' tongues in spiced sauce—"

"Thanks, I am already fortified—with anger. Is the queen in her box?"

"Yes—yawning. It looks well. The crowd mistakes it for royal boredom. Alexandrines like their rulers to appear fatigued with luxury. But the truth is, she listened all night to reports from

spies." He stared with his keen, secretive eyes but he could detect no alarm on Tros' face. "She detests the races, although I daresay she would like them well enough if she might drive her own chariot. But the Alexandrines would never stand for that. They still hold it against her that she once led her own army. She needs a consort—another man of deeds, not words. Do you know—I have always wished it had been you instead of Caesar! An amazing woman, Tros, amazing—incarnate energy. But I warn you, in a deadly temper. She had a royal row with Charmion this morning. Charmion is in tears at the palace."

"Lead on." Tros knew the chamberlain was trying to coax him to indiscretion. He knew, too, that none of the Queen's ministers knew all her secrets, and that there couldn't be a worse mistake than to confide in any of them.

"Lead on, Lord Chamberlain! My errand is urgent."



THE royal box was a roofed pavilion, banked in front with flowers. At the rear there were rows of raised seats, gay with guests—wreathed courtiers and jeweled women. In the midst, in front of the royal insignia—two tall ostrich-feather fans kept in stately motion by slaves who had been deafened and muted for the purpose—was the queen's divan, with room enough for two or three invited intimates; but at the moment there was only one woman seated beside the queen. There was a second's sensation—a change in the note of the tumult, as the Argus-eyed crowd saw Tros approach the divan and bow. Every one knew him by sight, and there was never a dearth of stories of his deeds of valor.

Cleopatra looked tired, and when she was tired she looked tiny—almost like a child, in her plain Greek dress of silk-like linen, with a kingdom's worth of pearls. She was the only woman in

white; all the other women in the royal party were as brilliant as peacocks; so she looked distinguished. And, despite the chamberlain's warning, she was as gracious to Tros as he had ever known her. She gave him both her hands to kiss and broke off flowers from her girdle for him to tuck into his belt. Then she suddenly remembered his leg was wounded, and that the wound was received in a battle in her behalf.

"Give him your seat, Hylas."

So the young wife of the wealthiest absentee-landlord in Alexandria had to pretend she liked yielding her place beside the queen to a man who considered her so unimportant that he didn't even trouble to smile when he nodded his thanks. Tros sat, favoring his wounded leg, waiting for the queen to speak first and trying to read what no one ever had read, the intention behind her gaze. When Cleopatra's eyes had that greenish hue she was fair to look at—and as deadly as a netted leopard.

For at least sixty seconds she was silent, vaguely smiling, perhaps letting him remember that he might have risen to share her throne in dead Caesar's place. She was Ptolemy enough to hate him to the death for having declined her offer. But she was statesmanly enough to hide the hatred, if she had it. She was much too wise to wreak unprofitable vengeance on a man as valuable to her as Tros had been and could be. But revenge, directed by a skillful woman, can be made to show a profit. She was ruthless. And now he had dared to love her younger sister—her hated rival. He had changed Arsinoe's name to Hero, had sent her into hiding near Pelusium, and Cleopatra knew it. Tros, wondering how much she knew, felt that she had him by a secret cord that might be harder to cut than a steel bar.

"And the trireme?" she asked, in the friendliest note of a voice that would have made a courtesan's fortune.

"Burned to the keel," he answered. He

saw no sense in telling her that he had saved his arrow-engines, ammunition, small-arms, and most of the ship's gear.

"You look, and you sound, as angry as—as—" she laughed, "there is nothing, is there, with which to compare you! No one can be as angry as Lord Captain Tros of Samothrace! Is it the pain of your wound? Do you scowl at me because some one near Memphis, whom you probably slew for his presumption, shot you with an arrow?"

He saw no use in any flippant answer.

"Angry? Aye, Egypt, I am."

"With poor me?"

"Aye, and why not?"

"Zeus-Ammon shield me! The Lord Tros has come to lecture me again! What on earth shall I do to appease him?"

Tros' big brown fist was resting on his knees. She laid her own little ivory-white hand on it, smiling at the contrast. Tros scowled at her hand, then at her.

"I will tell you, Egypt, what to do. Once and for all I will say it, then never again, for you are too intelligent to need twice or three times telling. Cease from cat-and-mousing with a man who—"

He hesitated. It hurt his pride to have to sing his own praises; that would be too much like an Alexandrine courtier. She prompted him:

"A man who—"

"Who, at the risk of life and fortune, has kept faith with you first and last."

"Yes?"

"Egypt, it was you who bade them burn my ship!"



"I?" She was still smiling, but she removed her hand.

"What makes you say it?"

Tros, unguarded conversation, overheard, has caused too many people recently to pay a call on the executioner. A mere trireme?"

"A man's hope. The fruit of his labors. His means to the end of his heart's desire!"

Her voice changed. "And are the

means I use, toward the end that I perceive, to be used for abuse against me? To be thundered at me? Make a song about the truth, Lord Captain! Sing it to me and my ladies! Sing to us the story of the queen my sister, whom you spared on the field of battle and so ingeniously pretended to send home to Cyprus! Who is Hero, who hides near Pelusium?"

Tros' blood ran cold, but the queen only guessed it. He showed her nothing of his thoughts. Not even his eyes changed. Smiling, Cleopatra probed with words that cut like lancets.

"You are not like my Alexandrines, who would desert a woman for a horse-race or a full meal. Now that you have lost your ship, and can't sail away with this mysterious Hero person, how do you propose to preserve her alive? Did you imagine me so ill-informed, or my arm so short and powerless that it can't reach Pelusium? I have a task that I wish you to undertake. Do we understand each other? I am not at the moment Cleopatra, I am Egypt speaking."

Tros was silent. His jaw came very slightly forward, but he gave no other sign of emotion. He hated her, who once had almost loved her. He was astonished that he had never before realized that he hated her. He was too fair-minded not to recognize how desperate she felt, with her throne in hourly peril from a hundred interwoven plots, intrigues, seditions, jealousies and the ravening greed of Rome. Small and gentle-seeming though she was, he knew she would no more hesitate to order her sister murdered, than to order a slave to crush a cockroach. If she really knew where Hero was, there could be only one possible reason why Hero had not been killed. She was to be held, in secret, as a hostage to compel Tros to obey.

His answer was a blunt attempt to force the issue:

"No one need ever know I sent a

substitute Arsinoe to Cyprus. The substitute resembles her well enough."

"No one ever shall know," she retorted. "Let the wench you sent to Cyprus be Arsinoe and take the consequences! But you, also, take the consequences."

"For instance?"

"Trust me, you shall soon learn. Our friendship is as dead of your treason against me as some hundreds are dead of the plague that is sweeping the city. Never again speak to me of friendship, but of obedience!"

He sat silent, less displeased than he chose to appear. In the name of friendship there was almost nothing manly he would not attempt, if called on. But if Cleopatra chose to end the friendship, she, too, should face the consequences. He would not betray her. But the end had come of her power, which had been wholly based on friendship, to command his service at his own cost and his own risk.

CHAPTER II

"THE CITY WILL BE IN A BAD TEMPER."



THERE was a sudden fanfare of trumpets. A company of soldiers armed with whips advanced into the arena at the double and drove out the clowns and acrobats, who had been entertaining the spectators in the interval between races. That always put the crowd into a good temper, for the purely Alexandrine reason that it annoyed the rich parvenus who had paid huge prices for the troupes of entertainers. It was great fun to see expensive competitors for popularity interrupted and chased out of sight. The crowd boo-ed the patrons who had paid for the show and roared with laughter at the antics of the fleeing clowns.

Then, perhaps because her sense of strategy dictated a pause in the conversation, Cleopatra appeared to become as

interested in the arena as any one else. A slave brought her the gilded wreath of victory, to be tossed down to the winner of the next race. A gate at one end of the stadium opened and four four-horsed chariots came in with a burst of speed that was reined in, after fifty or sixty yards, to a spectacular canter. Passing beneath the royal box the charioteers saluted. Then, before reaching the turn at the western end, they wheeled and came back slowly to the starting post, which was a gilded pole exactly opposite the royal divan. The tumult of the excited crowd was like the roar of battle on a storm-bound beach.

This was the big race of the year. Fortunes depended on it. In Alexandrine estimation it was more important than war and politics. Unlike the crowd in Rome, they didn't care for scenes of carnage on the strewn sand, although dangerous driving excited them almost to madness. Where a Roman amphitheatre would have had trapdoors for admitting wild beasts, the Alexandrines had wooden gates in a marble wall for the swift removal of injured men and horses. Death was best out of sight, out of mind. They loved life swift and noisy. They loved fortunate people. The owner of the winning team, for a year to come, would be the most envied man in Alexandria. As likely as not, the losing owners would be almost bankrupt and might have to retire to their country estates, or even to flee the country to avoid creditors. Many a losing owner had been sold into slavery.

The crowd's tremendous roar was punctuated by the sharp yelps of the layers of last-minute odds in the betting booths beneath the tiers of seats. Streams of slaves were scampering along the corridors to make bets for their owners. The bookmakers were laying odds of three to one on Red, even money on White, three to one against Green and ten to one against Yellow. All the royal party seemed to favor Red; they

were grumbling at having to accept odds of one to three. Cleopatra glanced at Tros:

"Are you not betting? You, who take such chances! Or is your new woman already risk enough?"

He made a wry face. "Yellow!"

She looked at him intently. "Strange, how wise you sometimes are in little matters, and how foolish in great ones! You will win your bet."

He wondered what she might mean by that. Then he recalled the laughter in Leander's eyes.

"If I win, I shall not get paid," he answered.

"Why not?"

"I gave my money to the captain of your guard, Leander. He advised me to bet on Yellow. He will either have betted on Red or else have simply pocketed the money."

"Why did you entrust your money to him?"

"Because I knew he is badly in debt. I thought to buy his good-will. But if Yellow should win, he will be ashamed to face me. I shall have made an enemy instead of a friend. But no matter. He won't last long. I imagine, if you don't pay his debts, his creditors will make the city too hot to hold him."

"He is not worth it," she answered. But Tros knew she rather liked Leander, and he judged from her effort to appear uninterested, that he had lodged a thought in her mind. She was staring at the Romans, who had a whole block of seats, over on the left beyond the seats of the priests of Serapis and the block reserved for the city officials. They were nearly all of equestrian rank; their togas made of a solid splurge of color.



IT was a huge stadium, with an elongated oval wall, about four feet high, on the inside of the course, so that the narrowest parts of the course were at the

starting and finishing post directly beneath the royal box, and at the corresponding curve on the far side. There was barely room to get the plunging stallions in line for the start; it was an accepted principle, hugely enjoyed by the crowd, to injure one's opponent's team if it could be done without risk to one's own. So there was some marvelous manoeuvring—twenty or thirty false starts and at least as many hairbreadth escapes from disaster.

The charioteers even used their long whips on each other, and it seemed that Red got the worst of those exchanges. Red was drawn on the inside. The other charioteers seemed to be trying to make him smash his wheels against the low wall. Their efforts excited the crowd to spasms of frenzy that brought a curious smile to Cleopatra's rather sensuous, arrogant lips.

Yellow came in for almost none of the rough jockeying. Drawn on the outside, the charioteer was able to keep his stallions from becoming as frantic as the others. They were sweating less. But, on the other hand, they looked less spirited, and he less competent; he appeared to have none of the brilliant audacity that the Alexandrine crowd adored. The odds against him went to twelve to one before the drop of the starter's signal.

They were off at last, amid a tumult that echoed from the high marble walls of the stadium and made the blue sky seem to be a roof of solid noise. Tros almost missed seeing the start, because some one leaned over between the fans and whispered to the queen; she appeared not to notice the whisper, but her left hand tightened on a scrap of parchment. Surreptitiously she read the parchment, and then crumpled it, keeping it clenched.

Yellow tailed off at the start, three lengths in the rear, and made no effort to steal the lead at the first turn. Red was leading, with Green and White neck-

and-neck behind him. The crowd, for the moment, grew almost quiet until, beneath the royal box again at the end of the first round, White drew even with Red. The real battle began and the spectators lost their reason—lost all consciousness of anything but mad excitement. Excepting the queen and Tros, the royal party went as mad as the rest of them. Tros was watching the queen with the side of his eye. She was watching the Romans.

There was something ominous about the Romans. Their cheering was arrogant, organized, almost battle-angry, triumphant when Red regained the lead but changing its tone as the tactics of the other charioteers grew more evident. They were forcing the speed at the turns. The speed caused Red to swing wide, so that Green could cut in and steal the inside position. White fell into third place. At the next turn Green deliberately reined wide, forcing Red to sheer off, and leaving room for White to spurt up again on the inside. The Romans rose in their seats and had to be shouted down by the armed attendants; two or three Romans resisted and were thrown out. The Alexandrine stadium was better policed than the city streets.

"After the race," said Cleopatra, "you will find those Romans reasonable."

Tros laughed. "The only reasonable Roman is he who has won. You know their motto, don't you? *Parcere subjectis, sed debellare superbos!*"*

She spoke rapidly, as excited as he had ever seen her. She seemed to have forgotten her threat of enmity. Perhaps it was force of habit. Even in Caesar's day she had trusted Tros with her dangerous secrets; since Caesar's death she had talked more unreservedly to him than to any one else.

"This was the Roman's bid for popu-

* "Spare the conquered, but lick hell out of the proud!"

larity. Every one knows they have bribed the others to let Red win. Even I knew it! All the city has bet on Red."

"And you?"

"It was expensive. But mine is the deeper purse, and I am not so stupid as a Roman woman! The city will be in a bad temper. Now watch Yellow."

The spectators were already in a vicious temper, screaming, cursing, calling on a hundred gods, beating one another's heads and being beaten to their seats by attendants armed with batons for the purpose. Nothing but a miracle could save Red. Green and White were worrying like wolves at a stag, first one and then the other cutting in at the turns and forcing Red toward the outer wall. Yellow, three lengths in the rear, was using no whip; his stallions were going well within their strength, and he had lost his look of incompetence. He was awake and alert, his team in control; he seemed to know what was going to happen.

Red had the faster team, but they were worried and frightened by their opponent's tactics. He used his whip on the other charioteers and on their horses, but he could never get far enough ahead at the turns to prevent one of them from cutting in on the inside while the other crowded him outward. Six times around the course they fought it out amid a tumult, in which color, noise and motion were all mingled in a sunlit roar of agonied suspense. And then the end came, just before the finish of the sixth circuit within fifty feet of the royal box, with one more round to go.



AT the last turn Red had gained a slight lead, but his bullied stallions were tiring. White, on the inside, called on his team for a last spurt—the last ounce that was in them. Flailing with his whip,

he drew abreast and forced Red almost to the outer wall, letting Green through on the inside. That was the end of White; his exhausted horses faded and fell away into last place. Yellow, third now, began to drive like a winner—like Phoebus-Apollo pursuing defeated night behind the horses of the sun.

Green, on the inside, with a team that was nearly done for, made a furious bid for the lead. Red accepted the challenge. For fifty thundering strides they were neck-and-neck. Then Yellow challenged—drew even, on the inside. Within fifty yards of the royal box, twelve whip-mad stallions strained in a line that wavered like spring steel. Suddenly Green swerved. He crashed Red. There was a yell like the agonized death-cry of a nation. Green and Red went down in a dusty thunder-thump of broken-legged horses, splintered poles, smashed wheels, chariots and men. Yellow went on alone to win the race, with White following at hardly more than a trot.

The stadium slaves were on the job in a second. Before Yellow had made the last circuit at full gallop they were out with their mules and ox-hide sleds and had dragged the wreck out of sight, through a door in the wall beneath the royal box. The queen stood up, on a footstool, to lean over the bank of flowers and toss the gilded wreath to the winner. She looked delighted.

But the Romans, over on the left, were dour. The attendants were frightened, forming squads with their backs to the wall behind the topmost tiers of seats. The cheated crowd became a mob as suddenly as if a wind had smitten them and whipped them into fury. They poured into the arena, with the ominous riot-snarl that sounds more terrible than war, and began pelting the Romans with scraps of metal wrenched from the decorative emblems, marble fingers of statues—anything that could be broken off and used as a missile before the sol-

diers could interfere. And the soldiers were strangely dilatory, although some of the queen's guard, commanded by Leander in person, filed into the royal box and formed a crimson-cloaked screen on three sides.

The queen took Tros' arm, looking tiny beside him. Tros caught Leander's eye and smiled. Leander's grim and stony look was hardly likely to be due to the riot. He was surely not afraid for the queen. The crowd was unarmed. There were plenty of royal guards. Riots were of such common occurrence in Alexandria that the authorities looked on them as all in the day's work. The royal box and its apartments were as safe as a fortress; being built of marble, they were even fireproof. No, there was something else the matter with Leander. He avoided Tros' eyes. And when the queen looked up in his direction he deliberately looked away, pretending to be keeping an eye on his men.

The queen spoke, but she had to repeat it, because Tros was turning over in his mind the problem of what use he might make of Leander, who now owed him a sum of money that he never possibly could pay.

"Tros, I asked you to pick up that scrap of parchment."

He stooped for it.

"Keep it," she said. "Come with me and read it."

Olympus, standing in the corridor like a wan ghost in a black shroud, made a sign with his tau-handled staff—a bit unnecessary, Tros thought. He was already on guard with every nerve in his being. Gloomy old Olympus was a bit too fond of that air of mysterious, all-observing wisdom. However, there was one thing about Olympus: he never claimed personal fees for his friendly efforts to act like the finger of Fate. It was sufficient for Olympus that one made gifts to the priests of far-off Philae.

CHAPTER III

"GO AND KILL CASSIUS!"



THERE were three ambassadors in the buffet room. All three were unofficial, at cross purposes, but as diplomatically cordial to one another as they were eager to be first to obtain a private audience. Since Caesar had set the precedent, Cleopatra very often used the stadium as a means of holding secret, strictly unofficial conversations that she preferred not to trust to her ministers' ears. Those unofficial ambassadors were wary of the wine that was being pressed on them by the chamberlain and his staff of beautifully mannered courtiers. Cleopatra's wine had a curious reputation for loosening secretive tongues, though some said it was the queen's own witchery that did the damage.

One ambassador was a Syrian in Roman military uniform. One was a solemn-eyed Gaul, in trousers, with Marc Antony's name continually on his lips. The third was Herod's man, as sly-eyed and handsome as Herod himself, dressed as an Idumaeon but looking more like an Armenian. They moved to attract the queen's attention, but the chamberlain manoeuvred his crew of exquisites so as to make it easy for her not to notice them. She preceded Tros into a frescoed room floored with onyx and severely furnished. It had a window opening into a small courtyard with three blind walls and a view of the sky. Two deaf-mute fan-bearers followed; they could read nothing, write nothing, hear nothing, say nothing, do nothing except stand, and sway their jeweled fans, and see, and smile, and symbolize Egyptian thralldom to a Greek throne.

"Now," said Cleopatra, "read it."

She and Tros stood at the window, where she could watch his face and he could see the fine handwriting on the

parchment. It was one of those slips on which the queen received so many secret messages. It was sealed, but the signature was almost illegible, as if the writer had deliberately disguised it, from fear or some other motive.

In obedience to commands received by royal messenger, this commander of the royal fortress at Pelusium has this day arrested and imprisoned, secretly as directed, a certain woman calling herself Hero, representing herself to be the wife of a merchant of Memphis but wearing beneath her chiton a silken girdle with a golden buckle that undoubtedly did formerly belong to Tros of Samothrace. The bearer of this message has the girdle, and also the painted portrait of the woman, which was sent for identification and has been found to resemble her nearly enough, though she is some years older than the portrait suggests and the color and manner of wearing the hair seem different. This may be due to the painter's desire to flatter, and to the portrait having been made several years ago. In obedience to the royal command the prisoner was searched, but has not yet been questioned under torture, with the consequence that she has said nothing of any importance. Her mood is sulky and her manner toward her custodians insolent, in spite of good treatment. An accounting of the money found in her possession, and of her personal belongings, is on a separate sheet, properly attested.

Cleopatra held out a girdle for Tros to examine. It was of new silk and he had never seen that before, but the buckle was a beautiful piece of craftsmanship that had been given to him by Fflur, the wife of Caswallon, the king of a corner of Britain.

"Do you recognize that buckle?"

He was silent, remembering Fflur's Celtic second-sightedness and how she had told him he would one day give that buckle to his woman. It angered him to see it in Cleopatra's hands.

Few rulers on a tottering throne, surrounded by treachery, amid a populace accustomed to violence, would have dared to laugh at Tros as Cleopatra did then. There were only the unarmed deaf-mutes to protect her. Tros could have pitched them, with hardly an effort, through the window that was letting in

the roar of riot. True, there were guards outside the door, but he could have killed her before they could have burst in to interfere. The reddening fury in his eyes would have made a coward scream for help. Cleopatra laughed gayly and tossed him the buckle.

"Keep it—for a reminder of my mercy! In all your travels, impudent Lord Captain, have you known another queen who could forgive such treason as yours? Were you in such need of a woman? You, whose chastity has been a by-word! You could have had your choice of any woman at my court. Were she already married, I would have had her divorced to please you.

"But my sister! My bitterest rival! And instead of slaying the traitor Alexis, you have had the monstrous impudence to send him and that Etruscan rat Tarquinius to put one of my father's bastards on the throne of Cyprus in Arsinoe's place! You purple pirate! Before your first kiss from Arsinoe's lips was dry, Tarquinius had written to me! Did you think Alexis, who betrayed me, would not betray you in turn? He, too, has written. Too merciful, too credulous, too amorous Lord Captain Tros!"



SHE paused, between mockery and viperish anger. He stood silent, weighing the buckle as if in a scale against impulse. She continued:

"And so Arsinoe, for whom the throne of Cyprus wasn't good enough, has changed her name to Hero, has she, to become the paramour of the very pirate whom I sent to make an end of her! And Boidion, the bastard, has become Arsinoe and is Queen of Cyprus! Your Hero, is she so much lovelier than I, that you propose to share my throne with her? Is that it? What did you propose to do with *me*, Lord Captain?"

He did what he knew she hated him to do—folded his arms and paced the floor. Suddenly he turned on her:

"Egypt, let well alone! Hero—"

"Truly!" she interrupted. "You will say she is no longer my dangerous enemy! She shall be even less dangerous! Pausanias, who commands at Pelusium, is a little too much an admirer of you, Lord Captain. I will send another to replace him, who is less likely to love you and do your bidding."

She sat down in an ebony chair, as dignified as the painting of Penelope rejecting suitors, on the frescoed wall. Tros strode toward her, towering above her:

"Egypt, neither she nor I would have your throne as a gift. No, nor though you have burned my trireme, which was a cruel and faithless act, would I lift a hand against you. For I know your difficulties, and I pity your fear to trust man or woman. But—"

He hesitated. She was looking haggard. Her youth was gone. The underlying Ptolemaic savagery had overwhelmed her real genius. She was in a mood, at that moment, to summon the guard, and wreak vengeance.

"Yes?" she prompted. "What?"

He dared her:

"Harm you one hair of her of whom we speak, and count me from that hour your enemy forever."

Instead of summoning the guard she sneered:

"It is easier to deal with enemies than false friends!"

He knew the danger was gone for the moment. Sneer and threat were evidence enough that she had in mind something else than silly vengeance. He laughed. "Aye, you have your executioners. They can lop off loyal heads as easily as any. But they would have done their work on me already, unless your need of me were greater than your malice."

"Malice?" She glared.

"Aye, malice! Jealousy! Unqueenly, mean ingratitude!"

"Have a care, Tros!"

"Too little care I have had! I have saved you, at my own cost and my own

risk, how many times since the day when I snatched you, exiled and defeated, from a beach and brought you—a chit of a naked girl—to match your wits with Caesar's! Have I ever accepted a price, or a gift in return for the blows I have struck to save you on your throne? Have I ever grudged my loyalty, that you should cat-and-mouse me as you do your generals and ministers, who would sell you to the highest bidder if they dared? When have I sold you? When have I taken a bribe to betray you?"

"A man who can change my sister's name and substitute a bastard on the throne of Cyprus, could change his own coat!" she retorted. "I can't trust you not to sail away, and leave me like Dido weeping for Aeneas. No reward can hold a man like you. I even offered you a throne—my own throne! You refused that. Now you wench it with the sister who once stole my throne, who even drove me out of Egypt—who hates me with envenomed pride because I spared her, and begged her life after Caesar's triumph—who wasn't satisfied with Cyprus, but invaded Egypt to—"

Tros interrupted: "It was Boidion who invaded Egypt, and you know it! Arsinoe was betrayed into slavery by your rat Tarquinius, and escaped, and came to Egypt to prevent—"

"I know Arsinoe! She came looking for you, to inflame you—maddened you with kisses on a field of battle! Hero is her new name, is it? I will send Leander to command Pelusium! There shall be a fine new tale of Hero and Leander, if the Lord Captain Tros should disoblige me in a business that needs urgent doing!"

That threat stirred Tros almost beyond self-control.

"Shall I bargain with a queen who burned my trireme to escape from keeping a promise?"

"No. For I will not bargain with a man who takes into his bed my rival,

whom I sent him secretly to kill!"

"So then what?"

"You will obey, Lord Captain."



THAT suited Tros perfectly. He recovered his self-control. But he dissembled it beneath a scowl that would have frightened any ordinary woman. Pride in his own integrity would have compelled him to keep a bargain. There was no man or woman on earth who could make him obey. Agreement and good faith, yes. Obedience, no; that was something that he demanded of the free men whose captain he was. He was not Cleopatra's subject. He had never accepted her commission.

Cleopatra misunderstood his scowl. She mistook it for irresolution. "Should you disobey, your Hero will endure the fate of my elder sister Berenice, who usurped my father's throne for a while in the days when you were pirating in Gaul, Lord Captain. You may have heard how Berenice died? Not comfortably. And your friend Esias, who I know is your banker, and who sold me your pearls for a price that would build a fleet of triremes, shall hand over your fortune to my treasurer."

Tros did his best to look scared. But he knew she would never dare to antagonize the Jews too much. The Jewish bankers were capable of making government impossible in defense of their right to protect their clients' interests. They were good bankers, and bad subjects, easy to scare into secret opposition or open rebellion, and extremely difficult to rob by any other means than force of arms. And if she should secretly murder her prisoner, then her hold over Tros would be gone. Thinking of that, he breathed more freely, though he knew he would need his utmost guile and perhaps, too, his most reckless audacity, to set Hero free. The queen would never release her, no matter what she might promise.

"This must be a desperate business," he suggested.

She nodded. "Cassius is nearly ready to invade. Marc Antony can send me no help, though he warns me that Cassius is intriguing with Herod to seize my throne. Herod is to have his choice of my sister or me. I dread Herod's brains more than Cassius' legions. How many men have you? I know you sent more than a hundred down the Pelusiac arm of the Nile, including your brawling Northmen, whom you had the impudence to release from a prison camp without my order. I know those are now billeted among the villages near Pelusium. How many men have you here in the city?"

It was no use lying. She probably knew, and, if she didn't, she could find it out in an hour.

"Two hundred and forty and some odd, counting officers," he answered.

"Can you arm them?"

"Yes. Their arms were ashore when the ship burned."

"You have then about three hundred and fifty men, well armed and fit for battle?"

"If you would let me have my Basques, whom your lately demoted governor of the city sentenced to enlistment in the Red Sea Coast Patrol, I should have five hundred men."

She pondered that a moment. She knew how loyal he was to his men. Those Basques were one more hold she had on him.

"Even you admitted they were lucky not to be more severely dealt with," she answered. "Theft, murder—those are capital offenses. And they are too far away. It would take too long to summon them. Cassius has demanded that I send to him all the Romans in Alexandria who are fit for military service: the two legions that Caesar left here, the old Gabinian irregulars and every Roman citizen of military age. It is a trick—an excuse for invading Egypt.

Cassius thinks I can't do it. He thinks the Romans will refuse to leave; they would rather wait for him here, and be first at the loot. Cassius would then say it was I who refused to send them."



SHE paused. She appeared to be listening to the din through the open window, but she was studying Tros, evidently weighing in her mind how much or how little to tell him. The din in the stadium had perceptibly lessened when she picked up the thread of her monologue:

"That is the meaning of this riot. Now perhaps you understand why I have spent so much money to make the Alexandrines believe the Romans have swindled them over a chariot-race. There is no easier way than that to enrage them and make them murderous. I have more than a thousand agents in the city spreading the rumor that the Romans all betted on Yellow. By tonight the Romans will be glad enough to go to Cassius, and the ships are ready for them.

"They are not good ships. There will be a North wind, will there not, at this time of year? They will not reach Syria. You understand me? Cassius' excuse will be gone. Nevertheless, he will think of another, unless I give him something else to think about. Cassius needs money. Having murdered Caesar, he hates me for being the mother of Caesar's son, who he knows I intend shall inherit Caesar's conquests. Cassius knows my army is in no condition to oppose his seven legions. And he knows that unless he moves swiftly Antony may come to my aid. Far more than I trust Antony, Cassius fears him."

Tros laughed gruffly. "At the lowest estimate Cassius has twelve or fourteen thousand men! Do you expect me, with three hundred and fifty, to go and defeat them?"

"I would not send even you to try to

do that," she answered. "Listen to me. My spies have reported that Cassius has mobilized five legions at Jericho. Egypt is his only possible objective. But I don't dare to mobilize. Some of my regiments are mutinous; others are only half-trained. Several of my generals are disloyal, and some are incapable. If I should mobilize an army to defend the frontier, Cassius would call that an act of war. He would march. My army would surrender to him."

"You have at least three loyal generals and some good troops," Tros objected.

"But I need my loyal troops to guard the Red Sea coast against Arabs, and the southern and western frontiers against Ethiopians, and Nubians, and Senussi, who would plunder Egypt if they saw a moment's chance. Besides, I tell you, I don't care to be openly Cassius' enemy. Rome hates him. Even Brutus, his ally and co-murderer, loathes him. Antony and Octavian intend to rid the earth of him. But Rome would never tolerate my taking up arms against a Roman proconsul. Though the Romans hate him worse than they hate me, they would call it an insult to the Roman people. They would avenge the insult. Such an excuse as that might even end their civil war. They might make common cause against me. So, you understand, I must employ a man whom I can disown, who is not my subject, who has never held my commission, but who has a motive of his own for hating Cassius."

Tros put his hands behind his back and kept silence. He could have told her how little he cared whether Cassius lived or died. He had nothing but contempt for the man, and he hadn't the least intention any longer of risking life and fortune for Cleopatra's sake. But if Hero was in Pelusium, a prisoner, and if Cassius should invade, and seize Pelusium, and learn who Hero really was, the situation would be just that

much worse. He looked sourly incredulous, in order to tempt the queen to tell him more than she might do otherwise.

"Caesar was your friend," Cleopatra continued. "You were in Rome, and you yourself saw Cassius kill Caesar. It was you who came and told me. So you have a motive for hating Cassius. And you are a pirate, even though you say you are not. You were denounced as a pirate by the Roman Senate, and by my minister of state in response to Roman protests. I have caused your trireme to be burned because Cassius demanded it, as punishment for your having sunk two Roman biremes. And you are the only man I know who has a little private army of dependable men who would follow you to the death, no matter where you led them."

"What is the errand?" he asked her at last.

"Go and kill Cassius!"



HE stared in astonished silence.

"You may have your Hero, and go whither you will, in exchange for the head of Gaius Cassius Longinus, Roman proconsul of Syria. Failing his head, I will show you her head, on the end of the torturer's pike! Do we understand each other?"

He turned his back on her and paced the floor. She mistook the strangle-grip of his hands behind his back, the tension of his forearms and the way he averted his eyes when he turned, for signals of defeat. But the truth was, he wished her not to see the battle-anger in his eyes. He knew it was there; he could not possibly suppress it, not for a minute or two. Had he answered her then, he could not have controlled his voice. At the moment he had only one thought, and he had to dismiss that before he could think reasonably and speak calmly. Could he, he was wondering, seize Pelusium with three hundred and fifty men? There were probably not less than

three thousand men under arms in Pelusium! He must drown that thought, and think of something practical.

"Stand still, Tros! You irritate me when you pace up and down. Remember: bring me the head of Cassius, or proof of his death, and you shall have your Hero, to go whither you will. I will help you to build a new ship."

He laughed. The laugh meant that he would never again trust her, not though she should swear on the secret scrolls of the Hierophants of Philae. But she thought it meant he yielded, and he had his eyes in control at last. His cunning obeyed him; he discovered words to flatter her self-confidence and yet not make a promise such as self-respect might forbid him to break.

"When do you wish me to go?"

"Now—swiftly and in silence—just as soon as you can get your men together and equip them. I will send a secret order to permit you to take from the government arsenal whatever you need and can't get from Esias."

"If I return with the head of Cassius," he answered, "I will hold you to the last word of your promise." But he said that to deceive her. He knew she had no more intention of letting Hero go free than he himself had of running a murderer's errand.

"I shall send word to Pelusium," she said, "to have your Hero killed if you attempt a rescue. You will go by land, because I wish to be sure of your movements, and because I understand that Cassius has a fleet in the harbor of Gaza that could easily catch you at sea. Yours is to be a land-foray, and the price of failure will be the death of the fool who threw her throne away for your sake! Fortune favor you, Lord Captain. No need to inform me of your plans; I shall receive reports of all your doings. On your way out, kindly tell my chamberlain to bring in the Gaul."



HE backed out, bowing low to hide his facial expression. By the time the door had closed behind him he was smiling, and none could have guessed his thoughts—unless Olympus did. Olympus watched him, and he wondered how much, or how little Olympus actually knew of Cleopatra's secrets. Certainly Olympus knew enough to make Charmion jealous. And how much did Charmion know? Charmion's quarrels with the queen were usually due to the fact that Charmion was the more or less secret director of the queen's spies and the queen's secret police. How much did Olympus know of Charmion's envenomed hatred and suspicion of one who had dared to reject her queen's offer of marriage? Tros couldn't guess, and he didn't dare to be seen talking to Olympus—not then.

The riot had been quelled in the arena. Many of the seats were empty, but the racing had resumed. For the time being the remaining spectators were in a state of harmless ecstasy. Tros found Leander at the foot of the stairs, and Leander returned him his sword.

"See here, Tros—"

"Hold your tongue, Leander, lest you say the wrong word! I know well what you did. And now you owe what all your boon companions would call a debt of honor. Can you pay it?" Tros had a sudden inspiration. "Grateful for your tip, and not yet realizing you had tricked me, I spoke to the queen about you. Should she promote you to the command of Pelusium, you may thank me for it. If so, then remember who befriended you instead of compassing your ruin."

Their eyes met. They exchanged salutes. There was no knowing what such a man as Leander would do, or not do. If the queen should send him to command Pelusium, he might try to repay his debt to Tros by being complaisant. He might let the secret prisoner escape.

Or he might try to wipe out the personal debt, and to strengthen himself in the queen's favor, by setting such a trap as should eliminate Tros forever.

It was even possible that was Cleopatra's real intention. Rather than be criticized for handing over to the executioners a man who had befriended her through thick and thin, perhaps she preferred sending him on a foray that would give her a perfectly good public excuse for ordering her troops to block his way and kill him and all his men, somewhere between the city and the border.

Leander was probably treacherous. But it would be safer to trust Leander than the queen. Cleopatra had forfeited the confidence of Tros of Samothrace, irrevocably and forever.

CHAPTER IV

"WHAT MATTER A BURNED TRIREME—?"



TWO Romans invited themselves into Tros' litter. They were lean men, but the added burden made the Negro bearers show the whites of their eyes; Tros and the sumptuous litter were weight enough for eight slaves, already terrified by the rioting which had spread to the streets. All the Romans had fled from their seats in the stadium. Some of the enraged spectators had pursued them and were hunting them high and low, assisted by a mob that neither knew nor cared why. Even with the curtains drawn there was a chance that the two equestrians might be spotted and dragged out to be beaten to death.

"A bad business," said the smaller of the Romans, sitting facing the rear beside his friend. He leaned to draw the curtains closer. "Tros, did you lose any money?"

"I betted on Yellow."

"*Dioscuri!* Why? How did you know? Who told you?"

"One of the queen's officers."

"There! Orosius, didn't I tell you it was a put-up job? Tros, Polyclem the banker had it all set for Red to win. He has been planning it since last year—spent a fortune on it. This is a trick of Cleopatra's—and a smart trick, too—to put us Romans in peril. When enough Romans have been murdered by the crowd to make a good showing she will turn out the troops to protect the rest of us—and then claim credit for being the friend of the Roman people!"

Orosius grunted. "Have you heard the rumor that she intends to put every Roman of military age aboard that fleet of rotten ships and send us all to Cas-sius in Syria?"

"Of course I've heard it. Ugh! Cassius would be a fine host! He is so avaricious and mean, he would make a cold in the head pay dividends! This may be part of the inducement, to make rotten ships look safer to us than a riotous city!"

"I have not even packed," said Orosius.

"Then you'd better do it, if you don't want your belongings looted," said the other.

"I intend to stay here. Like you, my friend, I came here to enjoy myself and not be liable to military conscription. I hope this wantoning queen may catch the plague!"

"Anyhow, Tros, we are grateful to you for the protection of your litter."

There was more protection than Tros could explain, although the two Romans took for granted that he had an armed escort. Tros had brought no escort with him. But he could hear the tramp of armed men, on either side of the litter. Was he under arrest? Had he angered the queen too deeply? Were the queen's guards obeying a secret order to escort him to a dungeon? He found that hard to believe, but it was possible. He peered through the curtain. One glance was enough. It changed him from a man with heart-ache to a man whose heart

thumped with the surge of daring. He leaned against the back of the litter and, for the first time since he had watched the fire devour his trireme, laughed with the love of life.

It was an almost noiseless belly-laugh, homeric, huge, a familiar, humorous compliment to fortune. Not luck. Fortune. Tros never flattered luck. He played his own men fair; so forging fortune on the anvil of events that, though it might seem to fall from heaven, it was his by right of deeds well done and loyalty well led. It stirred the roots of his warrior's humor.

"You laugh, Tros. What on earth do you find to laugh at—you and your burned trireme! Do you find our predicament funny?"

"No, no, I laugh at memories. Where do you wish to be set down?"

"At the house of Polyclem the banker. We must find out what is to be done to prevent that cursed queen from ruining us all."



THE clanking thirty-inch marching step of men in armor was a key to the right of way through even Alexandrine rioters in quest of heads to break before the city police should interfere. It was only unarmed, unescorted Romans who were being made to wish, for once in their lives, that they looked like other people. Tros' guests dived through the curtains and into a house almost before the litter had come to a halt. Then a snub-nosed face with one eye, under a crestless helmet, peered through the off-side curtains.

"Where now, master?"

"To wherever *she* is!" Conops, alive and saucy, was absolute proof that Conops' charge was out of harm's reach. Somebody — probably Conops — must have fooled the queen. Hero could not possibly be a prisoner in Pelusium; otherwise Conops would be there too, or else be dead.

The face vanished. The litter proceeded on its way toward the Rhakotis docks.

"Conops! Climb in."

Seaman style, as if he were rolling into a hammock, Conops invaded the litter and squatted, facing Tros. His one eye was as alert and shameless as a bird's. His smile was of brass, his armor as bright as polishing could make it. There wasn't a hint in his manner that anything on earth was unusual, or even dangerous.

"Is the hurt leg all right, master?"

"Well enough. You disobedient rogue! I sent you in charge of the men to Pelusium. Where are they?"

"All safe, master; all accounted for. Seven of 'em died of wounds on the way down-river, but the rest of the wounded have got 'em a wench apiece to cherish 'em and they'll be fighting fit again in no time. Sigurdson's in charge; he's bled enough to fill a water-cask, but he's well enough already to crave a crack at me with his battle-axe.

"The men are billeted in five villages, all within sound of a bugle-blast; the flies are bad, but the grub's good, liquor scarce and wenches plenty. There was a bit o' trouble with the village men-folk, but we didn't touch marketable virgins, so there wasn't much they could do about it. All the way down-Nile we'd no trouble at all, barring a couple of fights or so, and one man caught by a crocodile. The fool went swimming. But I saved his armor. Near Pelusium a black he-slave belonging to Esias' partner came up-river looking for us, and then I knew we'd reached the end of a run o' luck and had the dirty end o' trouble to begin on."

"What mischief have you been up to now?"

"Saving your grace and presence, master, I was forced to give a licking to the lady you said was to mind my orders. She can fight back. She was tougher licking than a lad o' twice her weight,

what with her pulling a knife, and me not wanting to spoil her good looks, and one thing and another. But she's your woman. You said she was to mind me. I made her do it."

"Uh-huh!"

"She's in Esias' office. Old Esias has offered her some slave-girls and a soft bed, but she made him dig out armor that really fits her. Last I saw of her, an hour ago, she was watching the smiths make a change in the set of a shoulder-piece. Esias is scared half-crazy."

Tros scowled. "Understand me. If she wants you flogged, I will do it. Even if I think you did right, I will do it. You have laid your hand on your superior. If she complains to me, you will take the consequences."

"Aye, aye, master."

"Tell your story."



"ESIAS' partner's black slave came up-Nile and warned us that the queen's men in Pelusium were watching for a lady calling herself Hero. Seems the queen had reports from her spies. Like as not that dog Tarquinius, that you saw fit not to kill, had told all about your swapping one princess for another. Or maybe it was just the bad luck along of changing a girl's name, same as changing a ship's. Anyhow, the queen knew. A man had killed a racing camel, carrying a secret message along the sea-road from Alexandria to Pelusium, ordering the arrest of a woman named Hero; and the commander of Pelusium, Pausanias, had sent for Esias' partner to warn him to detain her and hand her over if she should turn up. He'd sent a lieutenant and twenty men up-river to look for her.

"That was when the trouble started between her and me. Right then. She was for setting an ambush for the queen's men, and then for fighting our way across the border and sending word

to you. You never saw the like o' the way she tried to take command, until I'd proved I'd sew her up in a sail if she didn't obey me, same as you said, 'board-ship fashion, quick and handy and no back-talk."

"Did you hurt her?"

"No more than I had to, master. She'd a wrenched arm that hurted a trifle, along of her pulling a knife, but she can use her arm again, and I let her keep the knife. She'd a bit of a sore rib, and her wrist was skinned. But I was thoughtful not to hurt her good looks."

"Well, what else happened?"

"You remember, she'd two slave girls. One of 'em nursed Sigurdson so good that he begged leave to buy her. And your lady's generous. She gave him the girl—a nice buxomy, motherly wench and just the thing for that homesick Northman. But I took the other and I made bold to promise her freedom, and a good dowry to boot, if she'd do as I said. She's smaller, but about your lady's shape. They don't look much alike, and their hair's not the same color, but I made her put on your lady's fine clothes and she was passable.

"I learned her. I drilled her. I took that British buckle you'd given your lady, and had her sew it to a girdle and wear it next her skin, as if it was a secret; and I dressed up your lady to look like a slave. She and the slave-girl swapped names—Mariamne her name is—she's from Idumaea—and I took the slave-girl, calling herself Hero, with pretty near all your lady's fine apparel, along ahead in the leading boat, me and the boat's crew acting deferential.

"She's a good girl. She acted pretty when the queen's men from Pelusium came swooping out from an ambush in the reeds. It wasn't us they wanted; Esias' partner's slave had made me sure o' that, so I could afford to be impudent, and I was. I told 'em what they'd catch for pirating your woman, and a nice

new young woman at that, with the bloom still on her. And they didn't like it, master. Your name's big in Pelusium. But they'd their orders, so they carried her off, she play-acting like a sulky queen, same as I'd learned her, treating the officer like so much dirt and saying mighty little. She was easy learning; she'd waited on quality; she knew how a princess behaves when she's out o' patience."

"Well, and then what?"

"Well, master, I tried to guess what you'd ha' done, saving your presence, if you'd ha' been me. Your orders were for me to stay in command of the men. Maybe I should have obeyed orders. Anyhow, I didn't. I made the best dispositions I could, and then left Sigurdson in charge; he's well enough to keep order, and too bad tempered not to.

"Seemed we were plenty near Pelusium. We were so near I could send Esias' partner's slave for money and a few things we needed. There were villages thereabouts and, as I said, wenches, so I billeted the men. It took a day and a night to get 'em settled down ship-shape and the fighting done with.

"By that time I'd begun to wonder how long it 'ud be before they'd learn they'd got the wrong girl in Pelusium, not to mention me having the right one, in a way of saying, under hatches. Pluto, she's a hot one, master! Sigurdson was battle-axeing mad about the way I'd handled her. He said she's blood-royal, and me no better than a mangy seaman showing her the butt-end of a boarding pike. One way and another, it was time to find you.

"So I took the eight Jews you'd left with me, and they're good lads. Time I've learned 'em, they'll be fit for any duty. I didn't dare try the canals, for fear o' queen's spies; and I didn't dare take one of our river-boats coastwise, for fear of upsetting it in the shoals; they chop up ugly in the least little bit of a

norther and our Jew-lads are no more seamen than I'm a rabbi.

"But we took our boat down-river in the night—only a third of a moon, and the big fort throwing a shadow as black as Baltic tar—and we came on a little jewel of a sponge-ship, in Pelusium for water, with her captain and crew aboard. They were three sheets to the wind on new wine, and only eight of 'em, so we got to sea with no worse than a couple o' knife-cuts, and the sail as full of arrows as a sea-urchin o' spikes. Those sponge-boats can go to windward, and I'd hoped to steal out and be gone before the fort 'ud know it.

"But there'd been a tidy bit o' head-cracking and swearing, and they'd heard us. They opened fire from the fort bastion. So we had to use sweeps, and well we did; it's a mean passage out through that mouth o' the Nile, in the dark.

"The rest was easy, master. We'd a fair wind. And when the spongers learned whose men we are, and saw we'd a fine lady with us, and her calling me such names as only a royal lady would ha' dared to use to any one, seaman or no seaman, and I'd promised 'em money, they made no trouble at all."



"WHEN did you reach Alexandria?"

"One hour after midday, master. And the first thing I saw was the bones of our trireme all black and gutted. Pluto! Then I knew you'd need me, no matter what else. Old Esias was in a panic. First eye-full, he knew who she was. He tried to hide her in a back-room. But all she wanted was armor to fit, and clean linen. I'd laundered what she had on, and it didn't look good, on account o' the mud in the sponge-boat water-cask.

"Old Esias warned me to go and hide in a sail-loft, and he overpaid the sponge-boat crew and bought their sponges to keep 'em quiet. Then he

wrung his hands and said the very sight o' me in the city might start worse trouble than was already. But I got hold of the other two Jews, and eleven fighting men can beat a ship-load o' trouble when they're so minded. I guessed you'd fouled your anchor on a bad lee and might be needing a hand.

"Esias wouldn't tell, but Ahiram said you'd gone to talk to the queen. So it was simple. I'd had the Jew-lads shine our armor, to keep 'em out o' mischief on the sponge-boat. I inspected 'em. We were fit to be any one's escort. So we marched through the city and acted we'd nothing to do but play knuckle-bones, in among the parked litters. Presently a riot started and we watched 'em chivvying the Romans. They scragged two. Then you came, and a couple o' Romans got in talk with you and got into the litter, so we minded our manners. I reckoned you'd notice us soon enough. That's all, master. Should I ha' stayed at Pelusium?"

Tros peered out. They were approaching the guarded gate of Esias' dock. He looked hard at Conops.

"Had you been anything else than the scoundrelly, damned disobedient, shameless dog that you are, you would have obeyed orders and stayed at Pelusium."

"Yes, master."

"And had you been anything else than the faithful, loyal, dirty-weather comrade that you are, I would reduce you for disobedience."

"Yes, master."

"I am well pleased. I would rather have seen your ugly face this afternoon than a hundred armed men."

Silence.

"You have done well."

Silence. The clank of the ten Jews marching. A shout, and the creak of the opening dock-yard gate.

"It would hurt my heart to have to thrash you."

Silence.

"I will do it, if she wishes."

"Aye, aye, master."

Conops rolled out of the litter before it came to a halt between Esias' office door and the dock where the bones of a splendid ship lay black and useless.

"Escort — 'ten-shun! Lord-Captain's salute—*pree*-sent arms!"

Clang.

Then Hero—not so long ago Arsinoe, Queen of Cyprus—ex-Queen of Egypt—outlaw—looking like a fair-haired lad in armor:

"Oh, my lord, my lord, how good to be with you!"

She saluted. There was a bruise beneath the bracelet on her right wrist. Gravely he acknowledged her salute. He loved that. He would have hated a sentimental scene before his men. But there was something else he would have hated more.

"You are in danger," he said.

"I love it!"

His amber eyes admired, but his words were careful:

"It is not the time for blandishments and courtesies. Have you been well served?"

"Aye, royally!" She made a reckless gesture toward the charred ruins of the great ship on which she had fought beside him, in a gale, against the pirates hard by Salamis, when she was a queen and he not yet an outlaw. "And what matter a burned trireme, Tros, when we have such men as this one!"

She looked at Conops. Conops eyed his master, unblinking, brass-faced.

"Fall away, little man. Go and get food and then muster the men. Have them fall in at the dock-side. Send Ahiram to me."

"Aye, aye, master. Lord Captain's escort—'ten-shun! Close order! Right—turn! By the right, quick—march! Left! Left! Left!"

CHAPTER V

"I AM NOT SHE ANY LONGER.
I AM HERO."



CONOPS had not exaggerated. Old Esias was a nervous wreck; he had the office shutters up; the dingy room was lit by little clay lamps, and he was chary of those. He refused to listen to Tros' plan, suddenly conceived and brilliant though it was. His gray-bearded face, shadowy and haggard in the dim light, twitched with anxiety. He kept tapping his old beautiful hands on the table in hysterical efforts to keep calm while Tros explained the plan to Hero. He kept interrupting.

"But I say you shall listen. You shall! This once, before you ruin me and mine, I will say to a she-Ptolemy's face what I think of you and all yours!—Hero now you call yourself! Jezebel it should be! The dogs ate Jezebel. You will wish you had died like Jezebel—yes, and I and my partners—yes, and Tros, too—yes, and many others—if your sister Cleopatra should even dream you are in Alexandria!

"Is this your gratitude for secret aid? For credits—money—clothing—slaves that I have given you? Fool! Ingrate! Were it not for the lord captain I would turn you over to the queen, your sister, to be mocked by the dungeon slaves, and whipped, and torn with hot pincers, and thrown to the dogs on the city dung-heap! Let a palace sorcerer learn but a hint of the truth, and go mumming to the queen and say he saw your face, in a dream, in my office—and then what? Then what! Ruin!

"You, who had a kingdom! Eh? Eh? Only Cyprus, say you? But a kingdom! Was it not a kingdom? And now Boidion has it—a bastard. Will she rest until she has betrayed you and every one of us who knows your secret? Ruin! You trust her? You fool! Will she trust

you? She will betray us all to death, lest you betray her!"

Tros tried to calm him. "Peace, Esias."

"Peace? You? You speak to me of peace? You have ruined us all! For the sake of this girl who was walked through Rome at Caesar's chariot tail—spat on by the Roman mob—who should have been strangled in the Tullianum—or sold into slavery to any fool who would buy! Why didn't you kill her on the field of battle? You, Tros, who might have married Egypt! And what a king, what a king for Egypt!"

He paused for breath. Tros sat silent, perceiving that Esias needed the comfort of released anger. Suddenly the old man resumed:

"You craved a girl? You had but to ask for the pick of all my slave-girls. Gladly, gladly, free, I would have given! Or was it a wife you wanted? One word—one word from you to me, and every nobleman in Alexandria who owes me money should have begged you to become his daughter's husband!"

The cause of Esias' anger, less well schooled than Tros in self-control, but careful not to offend Tros' dignity, tried quiet persuasion:

"Esias, it is true, if I were claiming the throne of Egypt, you would be in danger. But I am no longer Arsinoe. I am Hero, wife of the Lord Tros. So forget I was Queen of Egypt until Caesar came. Forget I was ever a Ptolemy—ever this queen's sister. Forget, if you will, that in those days all the Jews in Alexandria preferred me and begged Caesar to—"

"Forget?" He nearly screamed at her. "Jews forget nothing! Never! What a Jew was, he is; and what he is, he will be! Let a whisper—just a little whisper creep into the Jewish quarter—let the Jews even *hope* you are in the city—and then what?"

He snapped his fingers in her face. He

slapped the palms of his hands on the table.

"Then what? There would be an insurrection such as even Alexandria has not seen! My people can fight. They are fools, and they would fight. But could they overcome the queen's troops? We should all be butchered! Once again they would raise their shout: 'Plunder the Jews!'"

Hero shrugged her shoulders. "Not for my sake, Esias. Did the Jews defend me against Caesar? Not they! When Caesar gave them rights and privileges—"

Esias shook both fists at her and almost spat his anger:

"Rights that Cleopatra steals, ignores, denies—day by day, here a little, there a little! It is not Arsinoe whom they love. Why should they love you? It is Cleopatra whom they hate! Why should they not hate her? Could Arsinoe be worse than she is? The woman whom they hardly know seems better to them than the—"

"But I am not she any longer, Esias. I am Hero."

"Hero! You, Tros, my friend—what will you do with her? Where can you go? We have trusted each other. I have your money. Your pearl money, your corn money—you are wealthy. Where will you take your money? Into Syria, on this mad raid, where Cassius will get it, even if he doesn't catch and crucify you? Shall I give you a draft on Rome? How long, do you think, before Antony would be spending your money on sluts and actors—or Octavian spending it on sorcery to cure his pimples! Will you take it to Greece, and let Brutus seize it? The mealy-mouthed hypocrite Brutus is burning cities and selling noble people into slavery for the sake of the last drachma he can wring forth! Will you take it to Spain for Sextus—or to Gaul, for Lepidus to pay his legions?"

"I will leave it here, in your charge,"

Tros answered. It was time to bring

Esias to his senses. He shook the table with his fist. "I will trust you, Esias, until I find you false. Are we friends? For, if we are not, say so."



ESIAS stared, gaped and leaned back in his chair. His old eyes shone like jewels in the yellow lamplight, but he looked suddenly feeble and his face wan and tired.

"Eh! Eh! Your pardon, Lord Captain." He was trembling. "I am old, and I know these Romans. I saw what Pompey did to Mithridates. I saw him plunder Syria—aye, and Jerusalem. And too well I know these Ptolemies, and the wickedness of their women—massacres! Treacheries! Murders!—Have you not loyally served this woman's sister? And what has happened to your trireme?"

He flared again, pointed, leaning forward with an elbow on the table:

"You, girl, who call yourself Hero! Be you false to the brave lord captain in the least matter—in one small trifle—in one slyness—in one wantonness—in one deceit—in one unfaithful gesture of a finger—and may the God of Vengeance damn you into everlasting death!"

She kissed her hand to him. "Your armorers are good, Esias."

Tros laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Esias, the queen expects me to march overland. Sell me that ship that is hauled out, three docks along."

"It leaks, Tros. It—"

"Put the caulkers to work, day and night."

"No, no. Summon Eli. I am overwrought. Do as you will. Have anything you will. I will not listen."

"Say nothing, then. Know nothing. Leave it to me. I shall need a second ship."

"I have no other. They have taken everything in the harbor that will float to deport the Romans."

"Leave that also to me. Send word

through all your stores and workshops that my orders are to be obeyed."

"I will tell Eli."

Eli, a freedman with slate-colored eyes and a stoop, smiled his way into the room and eyed Tros with the air of a doctor waiting to be told the symptoms. He was capable of running all Esias' business. He had been a pupil of Sosigines the astronomer, trained to forget nothing he had ever seen or heard, and to carry exact figures in his head. He loved Tros, because Tros was nearly as quick a calculator as himself.

"Chariots, yes, Lord Captain. Thirty or forty chariots that Caesar ordered—built by Triphales and never paid for—stored in Triphales' warehouse—could be bought, no doubt, at less than half-price. Must be as dry as a bone by now. Wheels would need soaking to make the tires stay on. No harness, but the harness could be bought from Timon, supplier to most of the racing stables, and would be very expensive if made in a hurry—say a night and a day, if Timon's gangs were paid a bonus. Horses? Mules?"

"Yes, and camels—for a baggage-train for three hundred and fifty men. Have them hired and waiting by tomorrow morning. Understand, Eli: I don't want them. But I wish the queen's spies to believe I make ready to march."

Hero interrupted. "What can I be doing?"

"Imitating nothing, nowhere!" said Esias. "I have had a bed brought for you. Go to bed and await your lord." He shook his finger at her. "You! You! Any spy may recognize you, any minute! Do you wish us all to be burned like Tros' ship? You will hide where I tell you, though I change the hiding place ten times over!"

She shrugged carefree shoulders. "I will visit the armorer again, to have my breast-plate fitted."

"I will send a slave-girl to be fitted for it. You will do as I tell you!"



TROS interrupted: "Hero!"

He was speaking for Esias' benefit, and she knew it, but she thrilled to the sound of the new name that Tros had chosen for her, by the Nile, under the stars. There was something competent and gallant about her that made even old Esias stare with approval.

Young—she looked almost a child against the gloom of the office wall, with the lamplight shining on her fair hair—hers was the smile of youth that knows not yet, but means to know; that did not yet, but means to do; that has felt the reckless danger-love of nothing more to lose, and all to win. And she had chosen her man, earned him, won him, knew his worth. He should learn hers.

Little she guessed, yet, how he valued her, and she was likely not to learn that from his lips; Tros was no poet, no troubador, but a man of action, using what he found good for present needs and future far-viewed purpose. But that he understood her, as no one else had ever done, she began to perceive. That gave her confidence, which stole away the Ptolemy suspicion from her smile and left it clean, audacious, true.

"You will do as Esias says."

She mocked him, imitating Conops: "Aye, aye, master!"

One of his big hands seized both of hers, and she bit her lips. He was about as able to be gentle as a head-sea. But she didn't flinch, didn't try to withdraw her hands.

"You have not become a courtier's plaything. You have thrown in your lot with a man who owns no roof, no ship, and who must hack his way to what he will have—aye, and will do. You may look not to me for safety, other than as you and I together snatch it forth from danger. I live dangerously. Such is my religion. Sloth, ease, idleness—the love of safety and the fear of death—are no food for the soul. I will no more flinch from endangering you than I do, if I be-

lieve we can win. But I see no sense in frightening Esias, nor in peril for its own sake. So, until we go, you will obey Esias."

"I will not obey him! Have I thrown away a throne to run his errands?"

Tros laughed. "I have run Esias' errands—aye, and he mine—in the teeth of Rome! He has asked what I will of you, but he himself has said it. I will have you faithful. Comfort and mere obedience I can have of any boughten wench, who must obey or be whipped. But I wish to trust you as I do my own soul. If you wish that, you shall trust me also. We will have no secrets from each other. I have told you my plan. We have agreed on it. Having agreed, you obey. To the hilt, with all the mind you have, and all the marrow of your being, you will slam the meaning of my orders home into the teeth of destiny, and you will make me proud that I have such a woman to trust."

She stiffened her chin. "Did you hear him, Jew? I will obey because he said it. But—"

Esias interrupted. "Never in all my life have I needed a woman to tell me what orders to give! You will go to your room and be quiet. Go now! I will send you some slaves. Examine them. Use your intelligence. Select one who is fit to serve you as Conops serves Tros. I will send you men-slaves, women-slaves and eunuchs. If you choose the right one, that one will be my wedding-gift. But if you choose the wrong one—"

"Dealer in drabs! I have chosen a life. Do you think I need you to teach me how to choose a servant? Very well, I will go to my cage. And you may try, if you will, behind my back to make the Lord Tros regret that it wasn't you who chose his woman!"

She laid her hand on Tros' shoulder. "He will say I am the daughter of a drunken father, and the younger sister of two sluts whose milk is poison. What will you say?"

"I will speak of munitions, and money, and men," Tros answered. "There is a week's work to be done in two nights and a day."

It was nearly as hard for him as for Esias to take a girl into his confidence. He was already busy with stylus, beginning to write on waxed wood details of stores, tools and work to be done.

"Observe this, Eli—"

CHAPTER VI

"ONE OF THE QUEEN'S EARS."



THERE were dead rats. Some said they had fled from Tros' Trireme when it caught fire, but that didn't account for their lying around dead, in dozens. The gloomy Olympus, clutching a purse beneath his black robe, prodded a dead rat with his tau-handled staff as he stood talking to Tros under the flare of a guttering torch, in the doorway of the smithy, where Tros was watching the most skillful armorers in the world convert old war-material to new. They were forging portable emplacements for the deadly arrow-engines saved from the burned trireme.

"Has the queen sent you to read my thoughts and tell them to her?" Tros asked.

"She didn't send me. I came for the money of which you spoke. Esias gave it to me. When I next see the queen I will say I spoke with you about the stars that just now foretell danger from a woman."

It was a strange hour to choose for a visit. He could have had the money by sending his personal slave. But Olympus, who had even known some of Caesar's secrets, and had taught the incredulous Caesar some of the rudiments of astrology, was a learned ascetic to whom vanity and mystery and an amused self-mockery were one. A good friend, but an exasperating lover of

evasions and ominous hints. He went on speaking:

"I was casting the queen's horoscope, on the palace roof, two hours after dark, while the chariots waited below to take her to Eleusis. They will be gay until dawn at Eleusis, partly to forget this plague that is killing hundreds. *They* fear plague. *She* fears treason. The plague serves her at the moment."

"Aye, and me also. My seamen would have marched unwilling."

Olympus stared. "It is true then that you go by road?"

Tros nodded. He didn't quite trust Olympus. Well-meaning, yes, but a bit too fond of seeming all-wise. Olympus wouldn't betray a friend, but he might drop a hint to the queen, in order, after the event, to appear to have been all-knowing. Tros continued:

"Three of my seamen are ill of the plague. So now the others are willing to march to the world's end. Why else are they gay at Eleusis?"

"Because seven thousand Romans are already being herded on board that fleet of rotten ships. To be sent to Cassius, says the queen, because Cassius demands it. To escape the plague, say they; for they love not Cassius, nor will they admit that they fear the mob or obey the queen. They pretend that they go of their own free will. To escape from our wrath, say the Alexandrines, who will tolerate any infamy whatever except a chariot-race swindle. And it flatters the Alexandrines to see Romans driven from the city. Over the wine at Eleusis they are casting dice to determine who shall fall heir to the Romans' leavings."

Tros snorted. "As good as inviting Cassius to come and protect Romans' property rights! Are they mad?"

"No. Alexandrines. And the queen's guards, under a new commander, are already in possession, so the plunderers will be disappointed. She has sent Leander to command Pelusium—she says, be-

cause he is in debt, and might get into legal trouble in the city and therefore could be too easily bribed."

"And you say?"

"That he has gone to Pelusium. I came to tell you."

Tros examined Olympus' sallow face, but the eyes told nothing. No one could guess what Olympus was thinking. He had his own way of making his listener guess.

"Were you speaking of me to the queen?" Tros asked him.

"Yes. We spoke of you. Then she invited me to midnight supper in her pavilion at Eleusis. But she asks too many questions." He smiled. "She remembers too well my answers. It is never safe not to tell her the truth. I said I would rather go and talk to you, even than watch the beauty of naked bodies in lantern-light on Eleusis beach. She is intensely curious to know what the stars have to say about you and women. She and Charmion have quarreled. They are not yet reconciled."

"And—"

"Leander has gone to Pelusium."

"You ominous old raven, keep your Delphic utterances for palace banquets. You are not standing now at the end of a table to remind the revelers of death. Speak me, as I speak you, in plain words."

"Leander is a handsome, unscrupulous man, who would sell next year's prospect for this year's gain—aye, and sell cheap," said Olympus. "Have you heard there was a woman prisoner at Pelusium?"

"Aye." Tros ceased looking sideways at the armorers. "Was, say you? What of her?"

"It is a clear night," said Olympus. "The stars distinctly indicate a crisis when Leander takes over the command at Pelusium. He has almost had time to reach there. And there are pigeons. Before he went he had word with Charmion."

"Pluto! What else have you overheard?"

"That the queen's police are in search of rotting corpses, to destroy them before they infect the whole city. The city police have no right to enter private premises, but the queen's police do as they please. Crinagoras is with them."

"That snooper? Charmion's spy? He hunts plague corpses, say you? That is a curious task for a man of Crinagoras' rank, reptile though he is!"

"Who knows what else he looks for? Did you hear of the slave, who wanted sponges for the palace stables, who is said to have seen a girl in armor? Crinagoras, you may remember, is the man who has found so many dead bodies of suspicious people, and strangely they are always full of dagger-wounds. Crinagoras may be here already. Esias' guards might not dare to refuse to admit him through the dock-yard gate if—they admitted me, for instance—"

"Count me your debtor!"



PLUTO! Why couldn't the man have told his story in ten words! Tros was on his way, cursing because he had given his bodyguard leave to sleep, and they had his armor. What Hero called her "cage" was a suite of three rooms, reached by a stair with an iron reinforced door that opened into a narrow passage between Esias' office and a warehouse, by the dock where the bones of the trireme lay. It was two hundred yards from the smithy, by devious alleys, clamorous with hammer-blows, thronged with shadowy, hurrying men in smoky torchlight. Every yard of the distance was cluttered with war-material and ship's fittings of one sort or another, and with slaves who counted stores and struggled to bring order out of chaos.

Esias' sheds could have fitted out almost an army, in time; but they could not pretend to do one thing, and do

another within forty-eight hours, without pandemonium of yelling foremen, scurrying slaves and clamorous, impossible demands from petty officers, not one of whom knew Tros' actual intentions. Conops guessed, but not even he had been told, for fear an unguarded word might inform the queen's spies. Only Tros and Hero knew the entire plan. Even Eli and Esias believed that the ships were being secretly readied to carry baggage for men on the march.

By torchlight, from the midst of men who toiled at the packing and wrapping of war munitions, overseen by agonized storekeepers who tried to keep count, Conops' sharp eye noticed Tros thrusting his way through the throngs. Conops knew crisis when he saw it. He blew his whistle. The ten Jew bodyguards knew Conops and his knife-hilt way of speeding laggards. They awoke from sleep on wheat-straw on a corner, snapping armor-buckles, ready for a fight before their eyes were open. One of them ran with Tros' sword, another with his helmet; a third clapped a helmet awry on Conops' head.

"Fall in! Lively there! All ready, master! Bodyguard, at the double, forward!"

They went through the crowd like a battering-ram, until Tros halted them at the edge of the drunken torchlight, on the dock, between Esias' office-building and the burned ship. There were long rows of packages that looked as if they were ready for mules and camels. Between those and the office was a long, wide, shadowy fairway. Midway down that, beneath a hanging lantern, was a group of armed men, bending over something. Tros strode forward. Conops kept his voice low:

"Line up behind him—two deep! Leave him room to step back! Bodyguard, draw—swords! Now, wait for the word. You, Jeshua, remember your point, the way I told you. A sword isn't an axe, nor a cook-spoon either. Hold

your wrist high—foot, knee, rump and shoulder all behind your wrist—lunge quick—slow recover. I don't want to have to find a new Jew to fit your armor, so mind my teaching! Left! Left! You're out o' step, Simeon. Left! Left! Into wedge, like lightning when I give the word, and clear your captain's left flank. Take care to give him sword room. Halt! On your toes now—ready!"



AT the edge of the circle of lantern-light, at the feet of a group of thirteen men, twelve of whom leaned on spears, lay a girl in a pool of blood. The lamplight gleamed on a polished shoulder-piece, but she had no weapon, no other armor. She was quite dead, face downward. Her dress was plain white, blotched with the blood from a dozen wounds. The thirteenth man, who had been down on one knee raising the girl's head by the hair, stood up, with his hand on his hilt, and faced Tros. He had a pleasant enough smile and easy manners. He looked confident, uncrafty, in the prime of life, strong, capable. He was nearly as big as Tros, and better armed, for he was wearing mail, whereas Tros had on only a helmet.

"Your woman?" the man in armor asked. "Who do you suppose killed her?"

Tros drew his sword. "Are these *your* men?"

"The queen's men, hunting bodies that have died of plague. Who are you?"

"There is blood on their spears. Who are you?"

"Who asks?"

"Are you Crinagoras?"

"You know me evidently. Better indulge your good judgment, hadn't you? I am used to more respectful manners."

"Finder of daggered corpses! Show your warrant."

"To whom? Are you Tros of Samothrace?"

"I am who I am. Show your warrant."

"Queen's officers need none. Do you know this girl? Look closely. Did she come, do you happen to know, on a sponge-boat? It appears to me remarkable, Captain Tros, that a dead girl, wearing a piece of armor, should excite you so that you forget your manners."

"Draw, if my manners offend you!"

"If I draw, it will be in the queen's name!"

"She shall need a new night-cart captain! Draw!"

"See here, Tros—"

Crinagoras' men rallied silently behind him. Their spears became a hedge of bronze points. From behind Tros' back the sound of Conops' long knife-blade tapping the palm of his hand punctuated his low-voiced comments:

"Wait for the word o' command, I tell you! Wait for it. Then make it sudden, forming wedge on number one."

Tros voice had grown deadly quiet. "I won't warn you again, Crinagoras."

But Crinagoras took his time. He tugged as if his sword was too tight in the scabbard. Suddenly he stepped backward. His men's ranks closed around him. They began to retreat, like a big, dark bristling crab, into the pitch-black darkness beyond the zone of the lantern-light.



TROS gave no word of command. The crash of battle was as sudden as the thunder of sails that are taken aback in a flurry of wind at midnight. The only shout was from three of Crinagoras' men, who fell like gutted cattle and lay bellowing for quarter. The spearmen's ranks broke at the first assault. Tros' men, obeying Conops' sharp, whip-crack orders, lunged at their faces, forcing them on guard, points upward, and the spears were worse than useless once a swordsman had got close. They tried to give ground to regain the advantage of length

of weapon. Tros' men kept too hard after them. Backed on to their heels, they were gutted, or stabbed in the throat—killed to the last man.

But Tros had to deal with a man of a different type, a courtier whose trade was murder. He was well armed and a cunning swordsman. He parried Tros' lunges with desperate skill, edging his way back toward the light, with his back to the wall, until he could turn with the light behind him and in Tros' eyes. Then he took the offensive, and for a minute he held it, until one of Tros' terrific lunges pierced his cuirass. The inbent broken edges of the metal tore him to the bone—hurt him—slowed him—limited his reach. It put most of the burden on wrist and elbow. He dropped to one knee, as if beaten, and stabbed upward, but Tros sprang clear and was at him again almost before he could recover stance. It was only a question then of how long he could last, how soon another thrust would pierce his armor. Conops, having made sure that the bellows for quarter were no longer in need of it, wiped his knife on the clothing of one of them and came and watched the duel, fascinated by the ruthless, faultless skill with which Tros wore down and weakened his man.

Crinagoras cried out at last and took the risk of throwing up his left hand.

"Hold! Hold!"

Tros stepped backward. Conops yelled:

"Watch him, master!"

The trick failed by less than the depth of the sweat of a man's skin. Crinagoras drew his long dagger and sprang. It was Tros' left fist, not his sword, that sent the queen's man reeling on his heels against the wall. The dagger went spinning among the shadows as the first-blow nearly stunned him. His sword fell at his feet with a clatter that nearly silenced his surrender:

"I yield!"

He had forfeited the right to single

combat: even the right to surrender. Such a trick as his was outlaw, even among pirates. Conops approached with his knife-point flickering like a snake's tongue and picked up the sword. He didn't even offer it to Tros. It was a dishonored thing.

"You yield what?" Tros demanded. "You treacherous dog, your life isn't yours to yield!"

Crinagoras was panting for breath, and a pain, but he forced out a frantic answer:

"What could a dead man tell you? Better listen to me! Spare my life, and I may save yours! There is yet time."

"Bring him this way, Conops."

"Did you hear him? Follow the lord captain, or I'll—"

Tros went and stood by the girl's dead body. He raised the head—saw the face of the girl whom Esias had lent to dress Hero's hair. She had been sent to the cells for stealing Hero's money—a light-haired Circassian, chosen because recently arrived from Athens and very unlikely to know who Hero was or to whom it might pay to betray her. The ten Jews, their work finished, gathered in a group behind Conops. Tros and Crinagoras faced each other, in lamplight.

"You have asked for your life, Crinagoras. But you have too long worn a manly cloak above a beast's heart. What is your bid for your life?"

"Beast, you call me? Some one must do the dark errands, Captain Tros, or could a throne survive? I am no torturer. I tear no secrets from the living victim. I have made many a secret die and do no more harm."

"I will give you to my men to kill, this instant, unless you tell me why you are here."

"If I tell, you will have to protect me, Captain Tros—I would rather die on your men's knives than as a betrayer of the queen's trust."

"That is for me to decide. You have one minute."



CONOPS drew near with his knife. A long knife, to a beaten man, looks worse than a sword. Crinagoras spoke quickly:

"A rumor reached the queen's ears

"She and the queen had a recent quarrel?"

"Yes. Charmion urged the queen to have you seized and executed for treason."

"And—? Come on now—out with the whole of it!"

"The queen said you are too valuable, and too manageable to need killing.



that you had bribed Pausanias, who commands at Pelusium."

"So? Why should I bribe that drunkard? Come on, speak up!"

"Pausanias is supposed to have released a female prisoner, who came by boat, wearing armor, and was seen in Esias' office."

"Reached the queen's ear, say you?"

"I am one of the queen's ears."

"You flatter yourself! Charmion is both ears! Did Charmion send you?"

"It was she with whom I spoke, yes."

They quarreled, accusing each other of being in love. The queen called Charmion a barren Fury, poisoned by the bile of unrequited passion. Those were her words. I heard them."

"So—you are Charmion's retort to the queen's jest?"

"She sought to teach the queen a lesson. Having heard this rumor—"

"From whom?"

"From me. She sent me to investigate it—"

"Unknown to the queen?"

"Yes. It is Charmion's office to discover treasons that any women have a hand in."

"And—"

"She sent me to look for this girl—and to kill her—why not? Sooner than leave another thankless problem for the queen to worry over!"

"Did she name her?"

"Hero."

"What else?"

"Then to kill you, if possible, also for treason, and to bring both bodies to the palace—"

"For the queen's education?"

"Yes and to prove Charmion's loyal vigilance in spite of anger. She said: what is to prevent you from joining Cassius, and with him invading Egypt, to put this woman Hero on the throne? That is the whole truth."

"Yes, it sounds like a part of the truth," said Tros. "You may have your life. Lock him up, Conops. Set a watch to keep him from having speech with any one."

"Aye, aye, master."

Crinagoras tried to get in another word in his own behalf, but Tros was gone, striding down the dark passage to the door at the foot of the stairs. The door was locked. He thundered on it with his sword-hilt—thundered—thundered—and no answer.

CHAPTER VII

"SAY I WILL MARCH AT DAYBREAK."



ESIAS' slave opened the door at last—his old personal, confidential fetch-and-carry man, with a cataract on one eye and a pock-marked face of the color of damp smoke—a slave who knew everything and understood nothing—lantern in hand, so sure of his cripple's advantage that he dared to stand in Tros' way and make admonishing gestures.

"No one here now, Lord Captain. She has—"

Tros pushed past him. Esias was at the stairhead—unmistakably Esias, even though the gloom half hid him; Esias' shadow was as personal to himself as the smell of a familiar book. He retreated past a curtain, Tros after him, and the two stood together, for a moment speechless, Tros prodding the carpeted floor with the point of his naked sword. In that moment he could almost have killed his old friend, and Esias knew it.

"Tell me. I listen."

Esias hesitated. He and Tros were brother members of one Mystery. Violence between them would have been sacrilege. But he could smell the sweat of battle and he knew the vigor of Tros' anger. The room was tidy. The big bed looked as if no one had ever slept in it. In the next room, facing the open door, was the dressing table—bare—no pots of unguents—not a sign of a woman, not even a sniff of perfume. The room reeked of strewn herbs, said to be effective against the plague. A whole gang of slaves must have been busy at top speed, but they had done their perfect work and vanished.

Esias found words at last: "She has obeyed me. Did you not so order it?"

Tros restrained himself, in silence. Esias, fighting emotion, spoke on:

"Lord Captain, Olympus came to me, an hour ago, for the purse of money. I gave it to him. Then he spoke mysteriously, saying queen's men come searching for bodies that died of plague. 'The plague,' he said, 'is deadly, but the queen fears treason. Should they find here what the queen dreads, who shall save you?' And he added: 'There are queen's troops on the march, none knows whither. Could the lord captain resist a thousand of the queen's troops? But would he not try to resist? Better let there be no treason to discover.' And I understood I must save us all from a charge of treason, so I acted in great

haste."

Tros spoke, through set teeth: "Curses on Olympus and his raven's croaking! Curses on his mystery making! What then?"

"Said you not she should obey me?"

"Yes, I said it."

Suddenly Esias' self-restraint broke. Age, anxiety, indignation, racial temperament and love for Tros all melted into one Semitic anguish that shook him, tore him, stuttered into agonized invective:

"Ruin! Treason! Confiscation! Do you understand that? Do you care? Do you care? All this—me—my partners—sons—grandsons—at the mercy of a girl you wanton with—you! You! Did I invite her? Do I love her? Is she anything to me or to mine, that I should suffer torture for her—confiscation—crucifixion—slavery for all my family—because you, you madman, rut like a bull—for the queen's sister—an outlaw—a Ptolemy ingrate—a rebel—a—"

"Tell what happened!"

Tros laid both hands on his hilt. The blade beneath them bent under the pressure of impatience. But no need, nor agony, nor anger might excuse violence between him and Esias. He waited.

"Happened? Nothing! Nothing happened! I never saw—heard—had speech with her! I never knew her! She never darkened my door—never fouled my dwelling! And you—what have you done?—slain the queen's men?—brought vengeance upon me?"

Tros went and opened the window-shutter—thrust his head out—shouted:

"Conops!"

Silence, solid with the roar of the workshops—footsteps, running—then Conops' voice:

"I have him lashed to a spar in the rope-shed, master."

"Fetch your trumpet. Sound the assembly—all hands! Send Ahiram to me, here."

"Aye, aye, master."

"And now, Esias—?"

"Tros, Olympus' words had shaken me. I brought in slaves to bundle up her things. I drove her forth, in secret, in the shadows, down the floor of the dock to the waterside."

"Alone?"

"No—the slave I gave her and three others. She went away in your little sail-boat—she and her baggage. Oh, good riddance to her! Tros, you—"

"Left she no message for me?"



ALARM awoke, vibrant, awful, sudden. Conops' golden trumpet clarioned the "Stand to arms and fall in!" The din of the workshops ceased on the clang of an armorer's sledge. Then a drum-beat—the tump-burra-tump of the signalers marking the line for the men to form on—torchlight, the clatter of weapons and hurrying feet. Esias talked on:

"Tros, there was a slave-girl—that hairdresser—the thief—the Circassian girl who stole Hero's money and was waiting to be whipped—I had her fetched—put a piece of armor on her—I told her the police had come to take her to the execution place—so she ran—"

"What was Hero's message to me?"

Tump-burra-tump-burra-tump—"Fall in there!—archers in the rear rank!—where's your helmet, you?—go get it!—hit that man, decurion—is he drunk or asleep?—well, wake him up!—squad-commanders, roll-call!—here—here—here—here!—From the left—by squads—number!—"

"What was Hero's message to me, Esias?"

Ahiram came three or four steps at a time, breathless. He saluted, waited, eyeing Tros with a kind of sulky what-new-madness-now? look.

"Ahiram, have the slaves finished caulking that hull on the ways, three docks along?"

"Aye."

"And are the arrow-engines from the trireme aboard?"

"Aye, there's barely room to work ship, so many gadgets."

"Launch her! Take fifty men to do it, and warp her around to the pier at the end of this dock. Get the water-casks into the after hold. They're full and ready! Manhandle 'em out of the wine-shed. They're in a row by the door."

"In the dark?"

"In an hour, or I'll have a new lieutenant! Then load her—every last package that's ready—ammunition on deck, under paulins."

"All those mules? Those camels?"

"Dunderhead! Am I a cattle-boat captain? I let you go a-wenching in Rhakotis while another did your work, because I wanted the slatterns to tell the queen's spies we are marching overland. I hired the cattle for the same reason. Fall away and turn to!—Esias, some of the trireme's gear is under hatches in that wine-ship that came in yesterday in ballast. She's to follow me to Pelusium. I need a crew."

Esias wrung his hands. "Tros, Tros, my crews have all been pressed to take the Romans to Syria."

Tros leaned through the window:

"Conops!"

"Coming, master!"

"Now Esias! What was Hero's message?"

Esias fumbled in his clothing and produced a folded scrap of linen. He unfolded it and gave it to Tros with a trembling hand, irritably beckoning the old slave to hold the lantern closer. Greek characters had been scrawled on the linen with carmine pigment.

"Tros, Tros, let not a woman's pen cause enmity between us!"

Tros read in silence:

My lord:

I obey the Jew because you said it. And it is true, my presence here is too

dangerous. But he said not whither I should go. Therefore lest this fall into the wrong hands, be the destination secret. I will rejoin you. As I trust you, trust me.

Hero.



TROS crunched the scrap of linen. Conops appeared at the stair-head.

"Yes, master? All hands under arms and ready! Where's the lady?"

"You're to command the wine-ship."

"Aye, aye, master."

"Pick a crew—you may have the eight Gauls and as many more as you think you'll need. Follow my ship to Pelusium."

"Aye, aye, master."

"Wait!"

Esias clutched Tros' arm. Echoed and re-echoed by the limestone housefronts along a paved street in the distance, came drum-and-tuba music and the clanking tramp of armed men marching amid a tumult.

"Tros, Tros!" said Esias.

Tros was gone, Conops at his heels, to the roof by a winding stairway, through cluttered attics, to a trap-door and a pigeon-loft, thence along a parapet to a temple roof, from where, between winged sphinxes, they could see northward and southward the full length of the city from the Hepta-stadium to Lake Mareotis. There were priests on the roof, like sleepy monkeys staring at catastrophe.

Beneath, in a blood-red river of smoky torchlight, poured a column of mounted men, infantry, loaded wagons. Queen's cavalry were leading, plumes and pennoned lances dancing like flood-borne flotsam—plumed horses' heads—torchlight on brass—staccato hoof-beats. Then a Roman standard, followed by a column of men who marched too slackly to be regular Roman troops, but they all wore Roman helmets, Roman armor. Even from that height, at that angle, it was easy to tell they were out

of training. They were men of the Gabinian legions, left behind by Caesar—well armed, but a rabble. Few but the officers and centurions had ever seen Rome. Wagons. Wagons.

Presently another standard, and the remnants of another legion. Behind that, away up the street to the right as far as the flares reflected on Lake Mareotis, shuffled a mob of burdened slaves and men too poor to own slaves, who carried their own baggage: Roman citizens—exiles, old enough and not too old to serve, but who had never marched with a legion—food for Cassius' ambition—on their way to be drilled, marched to an unknown battlefield, and buried—or perhaps to be drowned on their way—or to die of plague in overloaded, rat-infested hulls. The street was lined with women, most of them wives being left behind—wives and children wailing, shrilling, shouting. Tuba music—drum-beat—mob-roar—tramp-tramp-tramp. Eddies among the women, where gangs of roughs elbowed their way to pelt the departing Romans with rotten vegetables.

To the left, the Heptastadium was a seven-furlong stream of smoky crimson. It looked like lava pouring along the harbor-surface. Thousands of torches revealed hundreds of boats—fishing-boats, ships' boats, barges, any boat whatever that could be pressed into service—all with their sterns to the causeway, ready to take the Romans to the ships that lay at anchor waiting for them. The ends of the wide Street of Canopus, east and west, were blocked by Cleopatra's infantry, presumably to keep the departing Romans from having a change of heart and bolting east or west into the city.

Conops spoke: "Where is the lady?"

Tros told him, very careful what he said about Esias, because Conops kept no middle ground worth mentioning between friend and enemy.

"Master, I could take the Gauls and

a boat and maybe find her. She can't have gone far."

"She has her rights," Tros answered, "you and I our duty. She obeyed my order to obey Esias. Now she demands that I trust her. I will—aye, even as I trust you. If she is the woman I take her to be, she has more brains than her sister. That is why Caesar preferred Cleopatra to her. He could outwit Cleopatra. I believe she will make for Pelusium, and we may overtake her. This is a grim night, Conops! Do you know why those Romans are leaving?"

"Queen's orders. Good riddance, I'd say. A-sea or ashore, master, we could beat that lot with our few!"

"Aye, they're a rabble." He began to talk to take his mind off Hero. "Cassius—unless I'm out on my reckoning—means to invade Egypt suddenly."

"Across that desert?"

"By land and sea, both. He wants those Romans out of reach of the Alexandrine mob, that might tear them to pieces at the first news of a Roman raid. He would like to be able to boast to the Roman senate of how thoughtful he was for Romans' safety. Cassius craves to do what Caesar did—loot Egypt for corn and money. But he hasn't Caesar's guts, nor Caesar's brains. Caesar let the world go hang or await his pleasure while he took what he wanted. Cassius clings to Syria and Palestine, that writhe in his grip. Caesar would have snatched Egypt and then have turned back on Syria. Cassius is a mean man, Conops; an envious, treacherous, spiteful coward frightened by a bold man's chance. He despises his ally Brutus. Yet he fears Brutus might join Antony and march against him unless he marches into Asia Minor to Brutus' aid, against Antony. So he hesitates. I count on Cassius to make a move as stupid as this move the queen has made to subject and humiliate me. We could be caught here like rats in a trap if

Charmion were not so sure we intended to march by land."

"The lady Charmion?"

"Aye."

"I warned you against that one, master. All the flat-breasted ones ever I knew were fit for nothing but to spite their betters."

"Charmion thinks she serves the queen well—listen!"



CONVERSATION with Conops hadn't helped. Every emotion in him, every instinct, furiously urged him to send or go in search of Hero. It was another—a new alarm that changed irresolution into quick decision. Esias' old smoky-faced slave came hurrying along the parapet, shouting "Lord Tros! Lord Tros!"

He and Conops awaited the man, and temple priests came snooping along roof-tiles to overhear what they might, since private secrets are a temple's principal resource. But Conops rapped a priest on the ear with the back of his knife and thumped another's skull with the hilt. The priests withdrew to a less inconvenient distance.

"Lord Tros! Lord Tros! Come the queen's men to the main gate, and the Lord Esias—"

The old slave nearly fell from the roof in the wind of Tros' and Conops' wake. He followed as fast as he could run, but he wasn't even in time to see them charge past Esias and down the stairs to the dock-side. Fifty men had piled arms and had gone with Ahiram; they had already launched the newly-caulked ship; they were singing the old reprehensible song about what was wrong with Dido, as they hauled the ship around to the pier. Already the ton-weight water-butts were being rolled from the wine-shed. (There were wine-casks going too, but that was for the overseer to prevent if he could, or to tally if he could, in the darkness.)

Down at the end of the yard the main gate thundered to the assault of spear-butts and the shouts of men demanding admission.

"Open! In the queen's name, open!"

A hundred men fell in behind Tros and he marched them and formed them in front of the gate.

"Front rank, draw—swords!—Archers—ready!"

Then he opened the heavily grilled port and looked through.

"Open!" A captain of queen's police, with fifty men behind him, thrust a sword-point through the grille to emphasize impatience. He missed Tros by a hair's breadth. Conops seized the sword and broke it. Tros ordered ten archers and a decurion to the nearest roof, whence they could command the approach to the gate.

"In whose name?"

"In the queen's name."

"I know the queen is at Eleusis. Who sent you?"

"Where is Captain Crinagoras?"

"Oh, is that your trouble? You may have him and his booty. You may send in four-and-twenty men without their weapons."

Evidently these men lacked the queen's authority. Tros' guess was right: they were Charmion's messengers, sent out to prove to the queen how vigilant was Charmion, how treacherous was Tros, how wise the queen would be to listen always to Charmion's secret advice. Their officer agreed to Tros' terms—something he would never have dared to do if the queen herself had sent him.

Tros' ten-man bodyguard, at Conops' signal, came and stood beside the postern, ready to deal with any armed man, or with any attempt at a rush. Tros opened the postern and counted aloud, until twenty-four were inside. Then he shot the bolt again and told the officer to wait.

"Fetch Crinagoras. Fetch those dead

men. Fetch that slave-girl's body. Lay it on a sheep-skin."

The dead bodies, and their armor and weapons, were laid in a line in the lantern-light. Crinagoras came limping from the bite of the cord with which Conops had lashed him to a spar in the rope-loft. He had recovered a bit of his insolence; he recognized the queen's police and half-suspected Tros was in deperate straits. But he had his eye on Tros' sword, and he could hardly have failed to see that the police were unharmed.

"What now?" he demanded, pitching his voice to a neutral note.

"Your friends have come for you. You and your booty go back to the Lady Charmion, who sent you. Tell her to tell the queen whatever lies she pleases. Say I will march at daybreak, straight down the Street of Canopus, and if she dares let her try to stop me!"

Crinagoras laughed.

"If I were you," he said, "which I thank the gods I am not, I would rather quarrel with the queen herself than with the Lady Charmion. The queen has magnanimity. Charmion has only zeal. However, when they crucify you, I will come and cut your throat in return for your having spared me. Until then, Lord Captain, farewell."

CHAPTER VIII

"WE SHALL ALL HAVE TO DIE FOR THE WOMAN!"



TROS sent fifty of Esias' slaves into the city, most of them to spread rumors, but some to try to find responsible officials and beg them to clear the Street of Canopus before daylight, so that he might march away unhindered. With the queen at Eleusis, a sea-shore resort a few miles eastward of the city, and most of her court there roistering and bathing as a precaution against plague, it would have been easy enough for the

official Charmion to contrive a raid on Esias' dock-yard. He had to provide against that, and he knew no way to do it except to tempt her to try a less dangerous trick. She could allege almost any excuse; and almost any officer commanding queen's troops would obey Charmion, it was so well known she had the queen's ear, managed the queen's spies and secretly did for the queen what Cleopatra herself could not do openly without too great scandal.

But Tros understood the embittered virgin. He knew what delight she took in surprises and suddenly-sprung traps. He outguessed her accurately, counting on her closing the eastern city gate against him, if he could convince her that he really intended to march overland. She could pretend she believed he was marching on Eleusis to take vengeance for his burned trireme. It would be easy for her to forge the evidence. Or she could truthfully say she had heard that Arsinoe, calling herself Hero, had escaped from Pelusium and had come to the city to raise a rebellion with Tros' little army to aid her. It would be a simple business, one any ambitious officer could manage, to start a fight near the Gate of Canopus and massacre Tros and his entire force before the queen at Eleusis could even suspect what was happening. It would not be the first time that Charmion had interfered, on her own responsibility, and had saved herself from dismissal or worse by claiming she had saved the queen's life.

A miracle had to be done. Tros did it. He had loaded, manned and warped into the harbor, two ships, half an hour before daybreak. The seasonal north wind filled his sails as he headed westward, out through the mouth of the Harbor of Happy Return. In the torch-lit darkness he easily slipped past an anchored fleet, on which pandemonium reigned as the luckless Romans were brought aboard by the boat-load, quar-

reling, complaining, protesting, shouting from ship to ship. He was not even hailed until he had passed through the anchored line of harbor guard-ships, whose captains probably supposed two freighters with corn or wine were passing seaward. They hailed too late, and though they might have slipped anchor and overtaken him, they were too busy watching the Romans.

At break of day he turned eastward, with the Pharos lighthouse on his right hand and well out of range of the Pharos archers. The sky was cloudy to the northward and he was dreading rough weather even more than the risk of pursuit. Both ships were unseaworthy. They were loaded almost awash. Their decks were so crowded with gear, last-minute loads and exhausted men, that it was hardly possible to manage the sails. Rowing was even more of a problem. The oars that had been saved from the trireme were too long. There were only hastily improvised tholes. Tros' oarsmen were splendidly trained and took pride in being masters of the sea in almost any weather, but they were used to well designed oar-ports, room and calculated leverage—used to a ship that leaped to the catch of the blades as they swung together. However, with the north wind almost on the port beam and a dangerous lee shore to starboard, there was nothing for it but the oars.

There were more than a hundred miles to go, by any reckoning, and a girl only the gods knew where, who drew at Tros' heart-strings. She was probably somewhere in-shore—perhaps swamped in the surf—perhaps cast ashore, perhaps on the Eleusis beach, where Cleopatra was probably having her early morning swim amid bored guards and naked girls. It would be a marvel if Hero had sailed past Eleusis without being seen; an even greater marvel if she had escaped the guard-boats that plied off-shore. Between Eleusis and the city, slightly to

the southward of the main road, close to the slums outside the city wall, were the gibbets—a little forest of them, plainly visible from sea. Hero would be hardly likely to get further than the gibbets, if she had been caught and recognized.

However, Tros turned seaward—northeast. It was not that he feared the guard-boats, or feared being recognized. The news of his flight would be known already; not improbably the queen had already heard the news by galloper. But to head seaward was good strategy and tactics. It was even possible the queen might have seen him from the beach and have jumped to the false conclusion that he had Hero aboard and was escaping toward Syria to drive a bargain with Cassius. If so, that would give Hero a better chance to escape, if she had not been caught already. But it also served to disguise Tros' real intention. And by gaining a wide offing far out of sight of land, he would be able, about night-fall, to change helm, hoist sail again and make for Pelusium with a quartering wind. There might be too much wind by evening, but even so, that would be better than too little.

Conops, on the wine-ship, had the easier task; a less littered and crowded deck, a lighter vessel; but both ships labored dangerously on the moderate sea; the oar-work was heart-breaking, even though there were plenty of men and they rowed in delays. Progress was agonizingly slow.



AT LAST Ahiram dared an attempt at a conference and found Tros communicative. He trusted Ahiram at sea and was thoughtful of the Phoenician's dignity; it was only on land that he classed him with all the other drunken sailors.

"And now what, Lord Captain? Come a blow, we drown. And come a Roman ship, we get pirates' dues. We've wa-

ter, I'd say, for three days, maybe food for a week, if we can find it and get it up out of the fold. We can't fight, and we can't run—"

"Not in these two crates, no. But Cassius, the Roman proconsul, has seized all the shipping of Sidon, Tyre, Joppa and Gaza. Those are good ships."

"Aye, Lord Captain, of their size there are none better—cedar of Lebanon, bronze, good flax cordage—"

"Cassius is planning to invade Egypt, Ahiram. He has a fleet in the harbor of Gaza. If I remember, there is seven fathom of water there."

"Aye—six-and-a-half, seven."

"But it is a small harbor, so it must be a small fleet."

"Aye, not many vessels."

"But likely good ones. Cassius has had his pick. He plans a very swift pounce on Egypt. He has called me a pirate. I will teach him what it means to call a free-born captain by a foul name."

"So we make for Gaza?"

"Not yet. Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, also has called me a pirate. I have more than a hundred men near Pelusium, who are in peril of her vengeance."

"There is no room for them on these overloaded vessels," said Ahiram.

"Hero has gone to find those men."

"Aye, aye, you have a woman. I forgot her. I suppose we shall all have to die for the woman."

Tros turned on him suddenly, savagely, setting his jaw, scowling.

"You Phoenician ingrate! Dog of a shipwrecked pirate's helmsman, whom I saved from Romans and the oarbench! Show me a man of all my men who doesn't owe me his freedom! You wenching toss-pot! Grudge me, do you? Shall I leave good, gallant seamen to be hanged or worse, and leave my loyal lady at the mercy of Caesar's widow, to preserve you, you glutton, for debauch in dock-side taverns?"

"Oh, aye," Ahiram answered, "we're your freedmen, true enough. And you pay us. You're a man of your word, Lord Captain. I for one won't flinch. You lead well. But—but—"

"But what?"

"Hitherto we were venturers, with a stout ship and a safe harbor. Now we're pirates. No good ship. No harbor. If we're caught we'll be enslaved or crucified. And then, there's Sigurdson. You'll fetch him and all his men from wherever they are, no matter what risk to us all, and if we fetch them out alive that leaves me second mate again, with that big battle-axing savage to order me hither and yon—"

"Ten times the seaman you are! Ten times your guts, Ahiram! He can out-grumble, out-drink, out-wench, out-brawl, out-swine you—aye, and then out-sail and out-battle ten of you! I can count on Sigurdson. And by the Baltic nor'easter that blows in his lungs, he may count on me!"

"Oh, as for that, you can count on us all," said Ahiram. But Tros was in no mood to be flattered.

He was savage with himself on many counts, all contradictory, all challenging and stirring in him the very stuff that once had caused Caesar to offer him the command of all Rome's navies: the same stuff that had made him decline the offer—the stuff that had made him Caesar's enemy, and then Caesar's friend.

Self-critical because of his early Samothracian training, and taught from his youth to be mistrustful and even scornful of all women, he cursed himself for having fallen into Cleopatra's clutches; for having been her friend; for having trusted her. Paradoxically, he cursed himself for having left Hero to her own resources. Educated by his father, Perseus, initiate of the Mysteries and Prince of Samothrace, never to let love of woman come between him and duty, he had brought away his men and let the

woman take care of herself if she could, telling himself he trusted her as he expected her to trust him.



HE DID not trust her, as he knew he could trust Conops. He feared for her because he loved her. Having saved his men first, he intended to risk his own life and theirs, too, in an utterly desperate attempt to find her and snatch her from danger, that she might share with him even greater dangers!

She was a willful, audacious girl whom it delighted him to master—a beautiful, brave, reckless girl who had escaped from a throne, and very bravely escaped, to be free to love whom she pleased. Tros had no doubt whatever that she loved him. And he knew why. She loved the very quality that made him capable of taking her at her written word and leaving her to her own resources in the midst of danger, within reach of her sister's deadly hatred. He knew she loved being left to her own resources.

It was characteristic of him that he suddenly dismissed anxiety and went to work, with almost incredible attention to detail, making ready to seize by the throat the unpredictable and shake from that the freedom of the seas. First, last, always the sea was his element. As some men yearn for a home and luxury, he burned for the great adventure into unknown oceans. And he laughed with new zest. He imagined himself showing all those hard-won sights to Hero, wondering under what strange skies she was destined to bear him sons.

It stirred him. Almost impossible things began to happen. Rowing never ceased, except for the few moments when he signaled Conops to come alongside for instructions; then Conops, too, began making miracles. Sleep never ceased. Relays of men lay snoring amid a tumult of hammer-and-adze. Even Tros snatched four hours' sleep

amid the legs of straining men who pulley-hauled the heavy arrow-engine fittings from the hold.

Work never ceased for an instant. They rigged a false bulwark, fitting it over the tholes while the oarsmen kept on swinging to the ceaseless drum-beat. They sewed long canvas curtains hung on iron rings, to protect the decks from arrow-fire, furled until needed. And when night fell, and Tros changed helm southward toward Pelusium, a steadily increasing north wind drove the wallowing hulls so fast that the new caulking, hurriedly done by torchlight in Esias' yard worked out in places from between the planking and they had to man the water-hoist.

Conops was easily able to keep station by the blue-white glare of the charcoal-forge on Tros' deck and by the sparks as the armorer's sledges struck new purpose upon old and broken gear. They made grapnels and repaired old chain to be spliced to the warps. They rigged derricks for dropping the grapnels to an enemy's deck. They set up arrow-engines and protected them with screens of wood covered with beaten iron. And all night they toiled in relays at the clumsy water-hoist.

Tros watched the stars. It was pitch-dark—no moon. Even he, past-master navigator, did not dare to try conclusions in the dark with the shoals off Nile-mouth. He knew them too well. It had been through those shoals, soon after Pompey's murder on the beach, that he had brought the girl Cleopatra away from her beggarly army of borrowed Arabs, and had taken her to Alexandria, to sneak into her palace and stand naked in Caesar's presence.

But that had been in daylight. Now he had to time his land-fall by dead reckoning, without water-clocks, with nothing to guide him but the stars, his intuition, the feel of the wind and that rare, sensed accuracy that distinguishes



the great sea-captain from lesser men who are merely competent and bold.

He made it. He heard the first cry of the sea-birds, as the rim of the golden sun uprose into the mauve of the eastern skyline. He heard the breakers, saw the gulls' wings, ordered the leadsman to the chains and signaled Conops, two

or three hundred yards astern, to follow him closely.

"Down sail! Out oars! Stations!"

They were a proud crew who stood to arms, crowded, but each in his place and a decurion to each ten. They had come near rebuilding a ship in a day and a night. A poxy, evil-smelling barrel of a coastwise rats' refuge looked now like something to be reckoned with. Leaky she was. Slow and unhandy she was; deep-laden and down by the head. But they had even painted the false bulwark bright blue with Tyrian dye-stuff stolen from Esias' sheds. She was a bristling battle-engine, fit at least to engage and to grapple and spew forth men beneath a hail of arrows.

Neither Tros, nor a man, nor a ship's lad grinning beside his arrow-basket, cared what came of her, so be they saw some better ship that lacked room to run. There was nothing even theoretically wrong with piracy, from their viewpoint, not with a good lord captain on the quarter-deck and a whole world full of loot and wine and women.

And as the wine and roasted wheat came up for breakfast from the cookstove in the after hold, the good news came down with a roar from aloft:

"Ship at anchor—ahead—in the channel! Two ships! Romans!"

CHAPTER IX

"GRAPNELS—LET GO!"



THE crew gorged wine and hot wheat in silence except for the gurgle and munch. Ahirom took the helm. Half-a-dozen oars on either side kept the ship in mid-channel. Tros went aloft, to con the situation with his own eyes. They were afire with desperate intelligence. Of only one thing he was absolutely sure: he could not put back to sea in those crowded and leaking ships. The first touch of an enemy's warbeak would send either of them to the bottom. They

would have served their last purpose when they brought their crews close to better ships, whose captains lacked guts, alertness or the gift for keeping what Tros needed. Pirate, was he? He would have the profit along with the name. Tros was taking all chances, that day-break.

True. The masthead man was right. They were Romans anchored in the fairway. One was a Tyrian-built bireme, Roman manned, and beaked with iron. She looked reasonably fast—no catapults—no cumbersome mid-ship citadel—a clean-lined, lateen-rigged cruiser, recently built. No corvus. No dolphin. Ample deck-space. The other, smaller vessel was of the liburnian type, two-masted, without a ram, also a bireme, but built more lightly than the other. Both ships had narrow engines and were heavily manned by men in Roman armor. More ominous yet, on the deck of the larger bireme, the red war-cloaks of several lictors were unmistakable.

Lictors were the inseparable attendants of a Roman magistrate. A proconsul would have ten in his own territory, but he was forbidden by Roman law to take them with him on foreign soil. Tros could count six on deck, and there might be others below or behind the deckhouse cabin. It would be just like Cassius to move secretly; equally characteristic of him to refuse to dispense with a full complement of solemn living emblems of a proconsulship snatched by force of arms. But would Cassius dare to be in Pelusium with only two ships?

The Romans should have seen Tros' top-mast, but they were keeping no mast-head watch. They appeared to expect no attack from the sea. That was as typical of Roman arrogance, which they flattered themselves was confidence, as the presence of lictors.

It was a beast of a passage into Pelusium, blind with reeds and curving between sand-banks, narrow, with un-

marked shoals and almost unnegotiable by a deeply-laden ship. But near Pelusium, where the great granite fortress overlooked the ford across the Nile, the passage widened, and beyond the ford there was quite an extensive harbor with bulkheads and narrow canals, in which numbers of Egyptian vessels were moored.

A huge scow-shaped ferry lay at the ford's western end; it was said to be able to carry a hundred camels. Nobody ever waded that ford if he could help it. It was low-Nile—not deep enough to let the Roman biremes pass to the pool beyond—probably just deep enough for shoal-draft Nile-boats—about shoulder deep to a man, and muddy. The centuries had seen more than one army perish trying to cross that ford. The fort parapets and bastions could sweep its full width with arrow-fire.

The Egyptian, western bank of the river was densely cultivated. So was a narrow, irregular margin on the eastern bank; but beyond that was desert. Just visible, filing across the desert from the eastward, along the summit of a dune, with the early sun silvering their lance-points, came eight hundred or a thousand Arab horsemen with a sprinkling of Roman cloaks and helmets.

Whose men? Was an army behind them? Rome's was an infantry genius; even Caesar had never developed an efficient cavalry; but cavalry were indispensable for swiftly terrorizing and suppressing newly-conquered provinces. So there was almost no doubt that the Arabs must be Cassius' irregulars, newly raised for the looting of Palestine, less expensive than Roman legions, superbly mounted and probably ably led by their own chiefs, held to the mark and critically bear-led by Roman centurions. There were also probably two or three Roman tribunes, wearing Arab costume; that was the usual system.

It looked as if Cassius' invasion had

already commenced, in a typical, secretive way—it could be called a raid by bandits or a diplomatic excursion should it happen to miscarry. There was a mysterious absence of warlike demonstration from the fort. The city, clustered around the fort, was as still as a jungle when beasts of prey are prowling. The sentinels on the parapet appeared to take no notice of Tros' ships, although from that height they could easily see them. At the Egyptian end of the ford, on high ground, barely beyond range of arrow-fire from the Roman biremes, was a small force of Egyptian cavalry—not more than a hundred men—perhaps fewer; the sun shone on their brass accoutrements, and they made a brave show, but they looked about as useful as painted statuary against the oncoming Arabs. It was just possible to distinguish the plumes of the horses' heads that proclaimed them a detachment of the queen's bodyguard. Was the queen secretly treating with Cassius?



AND now another puzzling detail. Half a mile to the northward, down the Nile, toward the ford, came ten row-boats, crowded with men in armor, and by an armed people who might be women. The boats were rather badly rowed by dark-skinned men, undoubtedly Egyptian peasants. In the bow of the leading boat, with his armor aflash in the rising sun, stood a giant—who might be Sigurdson—who probably was Sigurdson—too distant yet to be clearly recognized but—yes, Sigurdson, the Viking, by his gestures!—Sigurdson bringing the billeted men from the villages where Conops left them—bringing them straight into a trap, with Arab cavalry to his right, the fort on his left and Roman warships waiting for him with their anchors down near the bed of the ford.

Sigurdson must have Hero with him.

Who else could have summoned him down to the sea? But how swift she had been. And what a blazing, loyal, dunderheaded fool was Sigurdson! Thoughtful of saving his men for battle-duty, he had brought Egyptians to man the oars, and then undone his forethought by rank stupidity! Was the man drunk?

"Stand to arms! Ahoy there—Conops!"

Tros returned to deck. He put on his armor and donned his purple cloak over it. The crew knew what that meant. They would be able to see that cloak and rally to him. His ten Jew freedmen formed in line and went down on one knee so as not to obstruct his view, but ready—ready for anything. The two ships came together perilously, stem to stern, and Conops leaped the taffrail with his golden trumpet in his left fist.

"Sound the rally! Sigurdson is bringing our flotilla head-on into two Roman biremes. Probably he thinks they're ships we've taken!"

"Your lady must have found him mighty sudden, master! Where's her sail-boat?"

"Sound the rally!"

The trumpet-call startled a million birds from the reeds in the swamps on either bank. Perhaps Sigurdson heard it, perhaps not. It was the best that could be done at the moment. Certainly the Romans heard it. Tubas began blaring on the biremes, around the bend, a quarter of a mile away. Tros beckoned Ahiram to overhear the orders he gave to Conops and thus save precious seconds.

"The biremes haven't room to turn. If they slip their cables they'll come toward us stern-first. I'll take the big one. You take the other, Conops. Open fire the moment you can see them. Go in fast and grapple! Lay aboard all hands and gut them before they can bring their archery to bear on Sigurdson's boats!"

Conops leaped the taffrail, shouting orders to his crew. Tros wasted no more seconds.

"Cymbals! Both sides—full speed ahead!"

Tros to starboard, Ahiram to port, they coned the winding course, as the pulsing cymbal and drum-beat stirred the oarsmen. They whipped up a wake that boiled in the river reeds.

"Archers—ready!"

Off came paulins. Dry bow-strings. Arrow-engines squeaked taut. Ships' lads, alert and trembling with excitement, crouched by the baskets of arrows and had to be cuffed for getting too close with their ready reloads. Master-archers took sighting-shots at birds on the wing.

"Cymbals—Starboard easy! Full ahead, the port side! Faster! Faster! Now then—both sides, let her have it! Full speed! Archers—engage!"



AROUND a blind island of reeds, with every seam leaking to the strain of the oars, and only a hundred yards to go. The Romans were caught napping, disciplined but bewildered. They launched a hail of arrow-fire, but it was baffled by Tros' sail-cloth curtains that came clashing on their rings along the lines and protected his crowded crew. Tros' and Conops' arrow-engines—twelve arrows to each volley—made it impossible for the Romans to man their bulwarks.

"Grappels—let go!"

Crash. The thunder of colliding hulls. A slithering volley of javelins from the Roman deck. The battle-roar: "Tros! Tros!" Polished steel and purple, Tros and his ten-Jew bodyguard were away in the lead of a steel-shod company that stormed the bireme's bulwarks like a blast of roaring flame.

"Tros! Tros!"

The unarmed lictors fled into the cabin. Perhaps because they represented Rome's dignity and majesty, or perhaps

because of battle-madness, some one shut them in with an iron bar that passed through iron slots and was locked by a wedge that needed a key to extract it. The Roman sea-infantry stood to their arms and fought with the well drilled fatalism of the farm-born conscript. The arrow-engine fire had killed all but one of their officers—a young tribune; he leaped to the cabin roof and they rallied around him, too crowded to use their weapons to advantage. Again and again they locked shields and smashed their way toward Tros, who was javelin-proofed by the shields of his bodyguard. Those who did get near Tros died; his Jews were careful to give him sword-room. But he was hard-pressed.

A Roman centurion, rallying men in the bireme's bow, caught sight of Sigurdson's flotilla. Sigurdson was having trouble with his rowers; they were refusing duty and being thrown overboard. Men in armor were manning the oars, but Sigurdson's cow-horn trumpet was blaring the news that he was hurrying to Tros' aid. The centurion hacked through the bireme's cable, hoping to drift to the eastern bank within reach of the Arab cavalry. Ahiram killed him, but the grappled ships began to drift seaward, until the leaky old tub that Tros had turned into a warship touched bottom. Conops' vessel and the other bireme, grappled together, a floating shambles, drifted down toward them, struck the sunken ship and hung there, all four vessels locked in one death-grip.

Romans climbed to their masthead and were shot down by Tros' archers. Tros crashed through the rallying Roman line and leaped to the cabin roof, where he slew the young tribune. Two of his bodyguard were down; four others were back-to-back in the midst of a *mêlée*; they lacked Conops to rag and bully-damn them; they had been wedged apart by the charging Romans; but the remaining four reached Tros.

He sent them leaping over Romans' heads to their comrades' rescue. He had time for one glimpse, then, of the whole field of battle.

Sigurdson, in mid-ford, had been engaged by the Arab cavalry on horses that could barely touch bottom, disorganized, plunging, slaughtered by the flotilla's arrow-fire. Conops appeared to have the other bireme almost won; he was leading a charge along the deck and some of the Romans were leaping overboard. Ahiram, too, had done well; he had taken no prisoners; the forward deck was littered with dead and dying, hard to distinguish at a glance from the fettered oarsmen, slaves who lay under their seats and bleated, "*Servus! Servus! Parcite servos!*" probably almost all the Latin they knew. On the lower bench there was pandemonium; the rowers were trying to wrench their fetters loose; they had broken their oars in the oar-ports and were using the inboard ends for levers. On the western bank, the cohort of the queen's cavalry remained exactly where it had been. The fort was silent.

Tros leaped into the midst of the mêlée on the after deck. He led a charge that swept the whole stern of the ship from mast to taffrail. The Romans were not good at surrendering. Those who didn't die where they stood, leaped overboard and were drowned by the weight of their armor. The few who did surrender were recruits from the conquered Syrian towns, whom Cassius had levied to replace the wastage of his legions from disease and guerrilla warfare.



THERE was no time yet to get the bireme under control, nor even to force the cabin door and see who was imprisoned in there. The cabin ports were fastened on the inside. Tros set sentries around the cabin. Then he leaped to the grounded ship and got the arrow-engines to bear on the Arab cavalry. He

had to beat his master-archers to their posts; they were mad for the loot of the Roman ship. It was not until Conops leaped aboard and joined him, and Tros himself laid and fired one engine and Conops cranked it, that he was able to bring to bear the full terrific hail of his screaming arrow-blasts and clear the ford for the flotilla. The river was full of dead and drowning horses, dead and drowning men.

Then came Sigurdson, storm-angry because he was late. Northmen, Cilician ex-pirates, Gauls and Spaniards clambered aboard behind him, and some women behind them, all clamoring for plunder. They began to strip dead Romans of their armor. They had to be flat-bladed by decurions before they were under control. Then Tros had time to demand news:

"Where is Hero?"

Sigurdson stared. Conops, with the sweat of battle on him and the blood running down from a scalp-wound because nothing could make him wear his helmet out of sight of Tros, no matter what the odds against him, flared like something spilled in hot fat:

"You Baltic herring-eater, do you mean you've lost her?"

"I haven't seen her," said Sigurdson, speaking to Tros. It was beneath his dignity to answer Conops. "Hero sent her slave on horseback. I have the hag with us. The horse was half-dead; it drowned when she swam the river. She said Hero was in hiding near Pelusium and we were to come in a hurry. I have a prisoner, but I can't understand him, nor he me."

Tros gave his orders to Conops:

"Clear away the grapnels but stay fast to the sunk ship, ready to let go. Set a sharp watch—keep an eye on the horsemen on both banks. Then count dead and wounded. Tell Ahiram to get the Roman rowers under control. He may tell 'em they'll be set free if they behave. Count Roman prisoners and put them

under guard on the stern of my bireme.”

“Aye, aye, master.”

It was already “my bireme.” Tros returned to it. Sigurdson followed. Tros wrenched at the iron bar on the cabin door. It wouldn’t yield. Sigurdson battle-axed the woodwork; three blows and the bar was loose enough for Tros to break it from the slots. Six of his bodyguard came and formed up behind him as he wrenched at the door. It opened outward. He expected a rush of armed men. Stale air came forth and a kind of solid silence. He could see the red cloaks of lictors lined against the forward bulkhead; but it was too dark to distinguish much else except a table down the midst and a number of men in a group, all standing.

“Open those ports!” Tros commanded.

Some one opened one port. He could see then. The cross-light fell full on Hero’s face. She was gagged. She was being held by two men with her hands tied behind her. A third man, from behind, held the edge of a dagger so close to her throat that if she had moved it would have drawn blood.

“Do you recognize me, Tros? I am Alexis,” said the man’s voice. “You have while I count ten, to pledge your oath in the name of Samothrace, and Philae and the holy Mysteries, that you will let every one—you understand me?—every one in this cabin go free, unquestioned, unmolested, armed and unpunished. Otherwise, at the word of ten, I will cut this woman’s throat.”



THERE were plenty of men who had heard and who could see through the open door, but Tros could not make signals to them because Sigurdson was in the way, peering over his shoulder. He knew Alexis too well to risk a sudden rush. Alexis would cut that graceful throat without hesitation, and very likely stab himself to death afterward. But

there was an archer staring into the cabin through the open port. The man was a crack shot, but a dunderhead. He might or he might not dare to put an arrow through Alexis’ ear without being told to do it. Hero’s eyes were gallant, angry. Alexis began to count.

“One—two—three—fo—”

The word ended in a gasp. A dagger struck him from behind, in the neck. He fell backward. His own dagger dropped to the floor. The dagger that had killed him flicked out through the open port and clattered on the deck, where the archer pounced on it. Tros went into the cabin in three strides and the men who had been holding Hero flinched away. Some one’s armor clanked as he sat down on a bench in a shadowy corner. With his dagger Tros cut the bandage from Hero’s mouth, severed the cord that bound her wrists.

“Hurt?”

“No, not much. All well?”

“Aye.”

He stared around him. “Open all ports!”

Sigurdson opened them. From outside, battle-grimy faces crowded them for a view of the cabin. Sigurdson’s fist struck one face. Tros’ bodyguard attended to the others, stumbling over shadowy legs as they hurried to deliver their punches through the ports. Then the decurions got busy on the deck and the low-roofed cabin filled with light. Tros stood chafing Hero’s wrists as he counted prisoners and examined faces. Some were standing, some were seated behind the others, as if they expected no quarter and might as well show no courtesy. One man lay on a cot against the starboard bulkhead, with a scarlet cloak over his blanket and his head on a pillow in shadow. Including ten lictors, all those who were standing seemed unimportant. Tros stared at the seated men, one by one, and named them, changing the inflection of his voice to convey his opinion of each in turn.



"Pausanias! Retiring Commander of Pelusium! I regret, Pausanias, that we should meet thus."

Pausanias scowled, with his beard to his chest. He looked dignified and said nothing, but he leaned forward and laid his jeweled sword on the table.

Tros named three others, who were all Pausanias' subordinates. Beside them were two Romans whom he didn't know; he ignored them for the moment, but Sigurdson took their swords and laid them on the table. Tros faced about, toward the port side.

"Herod! Exquisite Prince Herod! Trying to steal a kingdom?"

The ringleted, intelligent Idumaeon smiled. Instead of laying his scimitar on the table with the others, he offered it to Tros, who touched the hilt before he let Sigurdson take it. He neither trusted, admired nor respected Herod, but he couldn't help liking him. Herod was a graceful and resourceful rogue

who had the wit to see life as a game. That wasn't Tros' idea of life, but it was better than the ravening envy of the wolves of the Tiber.

An even more surprising person sat beside Herod. He was looking comfortable but magnificent in the uniform of a captain of the queen's guard.

"Well, Leander, your advice to me to bet on Yellow lined your pocket. Have you finished laughing at me?"

Leander laid his sword on the table.

"Tros," he said, "you are the only man in this cabin who has a sense of honor." He glanced at the cot on the starboard side. The man on the cot was hardly visible because the lictors had moved, so that three stood between him and Tros.

A man in the shadowy, far port corner stood up. Blood from the dead Alexis' neck had splashed his tunic, but he looked very smart in a Roman tribune's uniform.

"Lars Tarquinius, the Etruscan! I

had it in mind to slay you on sight.

"You waste words. Do you think I didn't know that?" The Etruscan's insolence was perfect. He didn't even offer to toss his sword upon the table. "I have paid for my life, so spare your homilies!" He kicked the dead Alexis. "If it hadn't been for my dagger, you would be needing a new woman."

Hero interrupted, laughing. "I beg the dog's life, Lord Captain! If he weren't a treacherous snake, I might be in Cyprus yet. Forgive him for having betrayed me to a better fortune!"

"Take his sword," Tros commanded. Sigurdson strode forward and took it.



AND now the choice morsel. Tros had saved it for the last. He had known from the first who lay so silent on the cot behind the lictor's cloaks. He knew perfectly how to stir the sour spleen of Caesar's murderer. The man who had ganged a group of malcontents to stab his benefactor for being too ambitious, and who now aped his victim's power-lust without that victim's skill, was likely to be touchy of Roman dignity.

"Throw out those lictors, Sigurdson! Strip them. Throw their *fasces in the river, and set the lazy lackeys to scrubbing decks!"

Sigurdson took two of them by the necks and hurled them toward the door, where they were seized by eager arms and dragged out. Their sacred fasces were pitched after them. He on the cot sat up suddenly.

"Tros, you vile pirate, you will pay with your life for this, if it takes all Rome's resources to bring you to book!"

Out went two more lictors. Sigurdson compelled the others to carry out Alexis' corpse. He slammed the door behind them. Conops' face peered through a port on the starboard side.

"All shipshape, master. Ready now

to cast off. Cavalry on both flanks doing nothing. Thirty-two men dead or dying. Thirty-seven wounded. Ahiram is hurt. I've ordered corn and wine for the fettered rowers; they're acting sensible; they're mostly Jewish prisoners o' war. Not counting rowers, nor the badly wounded that we've pitched over-side, we've forty-one prisoners, three o' 'em Romans and the others Gauls and Syrians in Roman armor. Along near the ford on the east bank there's a crowd o' Pelusiumites, men, women, children—all scared, doing nothing, curious. The women that Sigurdson brought along are starting trouble. They want—"

"Clout them! Put them to work keeping the flies off our wounded."

"Aye, aye, master; but there's one here I can't manage short of killing her. She's bit me. She's a tough hag. A crack of a knife-butt only 'livens her. I've got her roped—"

"Let her in," said Hero.

"Tros," said the man on the cot; he pointed; his hand trembled with malarial ague, "there is only one possible way for you to save yourself from vengeance for this insult to the Roman people! You will be hounded, caught, crucified—"

Sigurdson opened the door and slammed it again behind a bronze-bodied hag, who fell at Hero's feet and kissed them, blubbering a torrent of mixed Greek and some other language. Tros kicked her for silence, but it was not until Hero had stooped and dog-patted her that she swallowed her sobs and sat still. She was Esias' wedding gift—the slave that Hero had picked from a dozen or more.

Cassius sat upright, pale, his eyes alight with fever, thin-lipped, lean. He laid an elbow on his knee and pointed, about to speak. Tros spoke first:

"Gaius Cassius Longinus, in case your dignity is so offended that you find life

*A bundle of rods enclosing an axe borne by lictors as a symbol of power.

unendurable, you may have your choice of these swords. I would like to watch you kill yourself."

Cassius glared. He glanced self-consciously around the cabin and then leaned back against the bulkhead.

Herod laughed.

CHAPTER X

"AND NOW YOU, CASSIUS!"



CONOPS reported again: nothing stirring from the city, but a boat from the eastern bank containing two officers, one Roman and one Arab, with a palm branch, asking armistice and parley. Tros ordered them admitted, without their weapons. They came in and stood staring—a big Arab, smelly with horse-sweat, who stared at Herod, and a red-haired Roman who saluted Cassius with a splendid gesture and then eyed Tros with unqualified admiration and even envy.

"Half our force dead!" he remarked. "You father of arrows! I would like to catch you on land! Who are you?"

Sigurdson gathered the surrendered swords and stood them in a corner. Tros laid his own sword across the end of the table furthest from the door. Sigurdson laid his battle-axe beside it. Tros sat down facing the door, signing to Hero to be seated at his right hand, Sigurdson on his left. Then he ordered his bodyguard outside and called to Conops to set a deck-watch, to prevent eaves-dropping and to be ready to enter the cabin if summoned.

"Cassius," he said then, "you may take the seat opposite me."

Cassius sneered. "You pirate, you will listen to my remarks from where I choose. I am ill. I have been seasick. I have the ague—"

"And you have my leave to live," said Tros, "if you obey. Not otherwise. Assist him to the table, some one."

Tarquinius offered his arm. Cassius snarled.

"You vile traitor, don't dare to soil me with your touch! You serpent!"

He got to his feet unaided and went and sat down with his back to the door between two of his Roman officers, who whispered to him. Herod went and sat on the cot, where he could keep his liquid, laughing eyes on Hero. He spoke beautiful Greek:

"Tros, if promises are what you crave, my tongue can utter them in golden words, as good as any one's. But I advise you that Cassius' gold is more substantial. I have none. Cassius has plenty. As proconsul he has had opportunities, haven't you, Cassius?"

"You Jew!" snarled Cassius.

Herod's beautiful white teeth flashed in a malicious smile.

"I wish I were. The Jews call me a Roman, which I thank whatever gods there be I am not either. Tros, hadn't you better kill us all except me? Cut throats are messy but they don't re-criminate."

"I would rather show you no discourtesy," Tros answered. "May I enjoy the favor of your silence?"

"Yes," said Herod. "There are going to be some curious evasions of the truth. I, too, would like to listen to them. I will save my equivocations until the pious Cassius has spent his."

But the key to the truth sat at Tros' right hand. He began with Hero, speaking to her as if she were one of his officers.

"By whose orders," he asked, "were you gagged, with your throat against Alexis' dagger?"

"Lars Tarquinius suggested it. Cassius ordered it."

Conops' voice, going his rounds: "All well, master."

"Tell your story," said Tros, and Hero began speaking in a voice that had found the middle of the note since Tros first spoke with her in Cyprus.

"Last night, about two hours after dark, we—that is I and my four slaves—were upset in the surf, not far from here. There was a village. I found a horse. I sent this slave, Taia, who is Egyptian and knows the district well, to find Sigurdson and bring him. I planned to wait on the beach until daylight, and then to watch for your sail, for I knew you would come by sea. I waited close by where Pompey was murdered. My three slaves were trying to haul the upset boat on to the beach when some men came, who I thought in the dark were robbers. My slaves tried to protect me. They were slain and I was seized. Then I recognized Lars Tarquinius. He had a squad of sailors with him."

Tarquinius interrupted: "Yes. And if you had told me Tros was coming, I would have known what to do. I owed Tros a favor for his treatment of me in Cyprus. Tell him the truth: how did I treat you?"

"Impudently," said Hero. "I remember I called you a mangy jackal, which is less than the truth, and you marched me away to this ship, with my hands tied, and you and Cassius discussed me like a slave for sale. The only man who was polite to me was Herod."

Herod smiled: "Unscrupulous politeness at the feet of beauty! I am the only rogue in the cabin."



HERO continued: "From then, until you came, Lord Captain, I have been continually questioned, insulted and threatened with torture. I have told them nothing. The proconsul Cassius sent a messenger to the fort, and it was only about an hour before you arrived that Pausanias came, and then Leander. Cassius had to send his secretary, his ship's captain and his commander of the troops to the fort, as hostages for Pausanias. Pausanias wouldn't believe who I am, although he admitted I far

more resemble Arsinoe's portrait than does the prisoner whom he holds in the dungeon. But Leander knew me. Pausanias and Leander quarreled, because Pausanias has refused to turn over the command of the fort to Leander, and Leander with a hundred men has had to stay outside the city. The proconsul Cassius was very angry. He accused Pausanias of having accepted a bribe to surrender the fort, and now of demanding more than twice as much money. Herod kept urging Cassius to pay."

"Such honesty as theirs inflamed my eagerness," said Herod.

Cassius glared at him. "Silence! Do you hear me?"

Hero continued: "The whole plot came out because Alexis objected I was overhearing too much. But Cassius said it didn't matter because I was to be killed in any event unless I would tell all I know. Herod said it would be a pity to kill me; he would rather have me than Cleopatra. Then Cassius complained that the Arab cavalry were late. Herod said that was probably because Cassius hadn't paid them what he promised. They snarled at each other—"

"Did I snarl?" asked Herod.

"Until it came out that the plan was to occupy Pelusium, unite with some of Cleopatra's mutinous regiments, march on Alexandria and marry Herod to Cleopatra, thus making him King of Egypt, and Egypt Cassius' ally."

"My cousin Cleopatra," said Herod, "is used to being married to a man who had at least one other wife."

"Shut up!" snapped Cassius. "What do you want, Tros? Are you Cleopatra's envoy? According to my latest information she has proscribed you."

Tros nodded to Hero to continue.

"They were all quarreling, except Leander, and except that Herod was making fun of them; he kept insisting he couldn't wait to take Cleopatra in his arms. Alexis kept on urging Cassius

to have me killed, for fear the story might get out that there is a false me on the throne of Cyprus, and another false me in the dungeon.

"I dared Cassius to be brave and kill me himself while my hands were tied. I said it would be much safer than murdering Caesar, who had a pen to defend himself with. It was then that Alexis gagged me with a towel. He pulled out his dagger and offered to cut my throat; he said he didn't mind doing it because Cleopatra would be so pleased and it would make it safe for him to return to Alexandria and be forgiven.

"Then you came, and your trumpet sounded, and there was a panic, and the lictors fled into the cabin, and Leander shut the door and held it, because he said it wasn't safe for Cassius to go on deck, and then some one fastened the door on the outside. Alexis was for killing me there and then, but Leander—"

"Leander," said Herod, "appreciates beautiful eyes. He behaved with romantic ferocity. I shall always be glad it wasn't Leander who slew Alexis. He would have slain me next for having looked at her."

Tros looked at Leander. Then he glanced at Hero. Hero nodded.

"Continue," said Tros.

"It was Lars Tarquinius who thought of the plan to hold a dagger at my throat. Cassius agreed and bade Alexis do it. That is all," said Hero.

"A very masterly skein of lies!" said Cassius. "I deny that this girl is who she says she is, and I deny each and every one of her statements."

"I have not once told you who I am," she retorted. "Tarquinius and Alexis told you. I say I am Hero. I am the great Lord Captain's—"

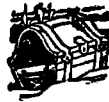
Cassius interrupted: "Concubine, eh? Well, Tros, you have her. Now what else do you want?"

"I will take what I want," Tros answered. "It was you who commanded Cleopatra to denounce me as a pirate.

It was at your insistence that she burned my trireme."

Sigurdson clutched his axe. "Burned our good ship? The hag said it. I disbelieved her. Lord Captain, let me slay him!"

Herod chuckled. Lars Tarquinius licked his lips.



"THE money," he said, "is in a chest beneath that cot, Lord Captain."

Tros looked straight at Pausanias:

"How much has Cassius paid you?"

Pausanias was silent.

"At any rate, you have not surrendered the fort?"

Pausanias, looking very uncomfortable and avoiding Cassius' eyes, stroked his black beard and answered:

"Tros, you and I have known each other well since Caesar's day. You know me to be loyal to the queen."

"Then you will obey her order to make over the command to Leander?"

"Has he his warrant?"

Leander flourished a parchment warrant, bearing the royal seal. He pushed it under Pausanias' nose. Pausanias made a show of reading it.

"Very well," he said sourly. "Why did you send me an insolent verbal message, instead of sending in the warrant for my proper information?"

"Because a warrant in the hand is worth two in your fire," said Leander. "Do I take over?"

"Yes."

"There is a woman prisoner in the dungeon," said Tros.

Leander nodded.

"After you have satisfied yourself that she is a slave belonging to this lady," he laid his hand on Hero's shoulder, "and that she was arrested by mistake, will you be good enough to send her out to this ship?"

"Certainly." Leander stood up. He saluted. He smiled.

"The queen told me," said Tros, "that she thought you not worth the amount of your debts. I differ. There is a chest under the cot. You make take it. Give half of the money to Sigurdson, to be distributed to my crew."

Cassius snarled and struck the table with his fist:

"See here, Tros—"

Tros' hand touched the sword on the table and Cassius closed his thin lips, glaring.

"Yes," said Tros, "I don't doubt there are documents! You may have your sword, Leander. So may you, Pausanias."

Sigurdson returned their swords.

"Cassius' officers," said Tros, "will go with you, Leander, to be held as additional hostages. Open the chest and give me all the documents it contains."

Cassius writhed, but there was nothing he could do. Leander dragged out a bronze chest. It was heavy. He stood waiting for the key. Tros laid a hand palm upward on the table and looked straight at Cassius.

"You want the key?" asked Cassius. "My secretary has it. He is in Pelusium. Have a care, Tros! This is—"

"Take the chest on deck and break it open!" Tros commanded. "Bring all documents to me. Send Conops."

Sigurdson and Leander carried out the chest, Leander motioning to all Cassius' officers to precede him to the deck. Conops came in and saluted:

"Nothing moving, master. Cavalry on both banks dismounted and standing easy. The crowd at the ford is looting dead men's armor."

"Excepting this officer who came under flag of truce, and excepting the proconsul Cassius and Lars Tarquinius, you will send all the Roman officer prisoners to the fort with Captain Leander. Send them ashore in one of our flotilla boats and lay two arrow-engines to protect their landing."

"Aye, aye, master."



SOMEWHERE on the deck the bronze chest clamored beneath a seaman's hammer.

Cassius set his teeth. Sigurdson returned with a very neat docket of papers, which he laid on the table.

"There is a lot of money," he remarked.

"See that Leander gets only half of it. Keep the rest for the crew."

Sigurdson went out again and shut the door. Tros, fingering the papers, stared at Pausanias.

"If I should send these to the queen," he said, "there might be one more head upon the gibbets by the eastern gate. What say you?"

"We have been friends, you and I," Pausanias answered.

Tros nodded. "I will put your friendship to a test, Pausanias. Go to the queen. Go swiftly. You may tell her that Pelusium is still hers. And say this:" he tapped the documents. "Memorize my words well. Say to her: 'Lord Captain Tros of Samothrace awaits a letter from her, in her own hand, thanking him for having saved Pelusium and conferring upon him the freedom of the port of Alexandria with her personal, solemn guarantee of immunity for himself, for his wife Hero, and for all his men.' You are to add: 'the Lord Captain Tros is impatient to know in whose interest he shall employ a fleet of warships that are presently his.'"

"Fleet?" asked Herod.

Tros ignored him. "If such a letter from the queen, Pausanias, is in my hands by daybreak, the day after tomorrow, she shall never see these documents nor know from me which of her commanders may have been in secret correspondence with Cassius. But if not, let her look to her throne; and look you to your head! You may go ashore with Leander. Ride swiftly, Pausanias, and may my friendship ride with you."

Pausanias hesitated.

"It is a difficult mission, Tros."

"So? Hint to a few ministers and generals that I hold their correspondence, and then see how swiftly they will hurry to the queen to plead your suit!"

Pausanias nodded. He saluted Tros. He bowed to Herod and to Hero. He even made a gesture to Tarquinius. Then he walked out, ignoring Cassius.

Cassius stared at Herod. "I would like to speak with Captain Tros alone!"

"You, Prince Herod?" Tros asked. "Shall I send you back to Idumaea with your Arabs?"

"In the names of their curious gods, no!" said Herod, looking startled, serious. "They would accuse me of having inveigled them into a profitless trap. I would prefer almost anything. I wish to go to Rome. Cassius and I don't like each other. I will stay here and watch you manage Cassius."

"You shall be a witness whether I kill him or not," Tros answered. He had no thought of ever trusting Herod, but he enjoyed his company, and he wished above all to make Cassius feel humiliated. He addressed the Arab chieftain and the red-haired Roman officer beside him:

"You may go. The proconsul has no use for you. If you are on the march eastward within an hour there shall be no pursuit from Pelusium."

He turned to Lars Tarquinius. "And now you, you viper. I have sailed all known seas. Never—north, south, east, or west have I known such a treacherous scavenger of shame as you are! Four times have I neglected the duty to slay you—on my trireme, in Cyprus, near Memphis, and again now! Stand up!"

Tarquinius stood, very soldierly. He jerked his head, businesslike, at Hero:

"But for me, she would be dead. I slew Alexis. You can't overlook that."

"Why did you throw your dagger through the port?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I was afraid. I wasn't sure I hadn't made a mistake. I had to think quickly. I was-

n't sure Cassius hadn't a surprise up his sleeve, he lay so quiet. If the cat had jumped the wrong way, I intended to accuse Herod of having killed him."

"Why flatter me?" asked Herod.

"I have never pretended to you, Captain Tros, to be anything else than a needy fellow looking for a profit. Why don't you employ me?"

"If I ever catch you," said Cassius, "you shall die on a tree, you scoundrel."

"I will employ you," said Tros, "at your own trade. Fall away. Report to Conops."

"To that one-eyed miscreant?"

"Yes—or else swim for the shore. Take your choice. Fall away."



HEROD punched Cassius' pillow and adjusted it so that he could lean in comfort.

"And now you, Cassius!"

"Look here, Tros, it is true you have me at a disadvantage. But you have been proscribed as a pirate, and you know you can't last long at that trade. You could hold me for ransom. You would be paid, no matter what you demand. But remember: pirates once held Caesar for ransom, when he was no more popular in Rome than I am. He raised the money. But what happened to the pirates later? Crucified!"

"You compare yourself to Caesar?" Tros asked.

"Caesar in those days was unimportant," said Cassius. "I am proconsul of Syria. Convey me to Gaza, set me ashore, and I will forgive this outrage—these insults—this piracy. I will name you the ally of Rome and—"

Tros laughed. "Cassius, I saw you kill Caesar, your benefactor, to whom you had sworn allegiance. I was in Rome. I say I saw you do it. Caesar had forgiven you for having been his enemy."

"Were you not his enemy?" Cassius retorted.

"Aye. And I fought him openly. When I became his friend, I stood by

him. You became his friend, and slew him. You are a coward. I will make no bargain with you."

"What then?"

"You have a fleet in Gaza, ready to invade Egypt if this filibuster had succeeded. How many ships?"

"Eleven biremes."

"Manned?"

"Yes."

"You have heard my message to the queen of Egypt. While I await her answer, you will stay on this ship, hidden and well guarded. My crew will unload the sunken ship on to some other vessel. Should there be a Roman vessel in the harbor, I will take that for the purpose."

"The day after tomorrow, one hour after daybreak, we will weigh for Gaza, taking with us two or three of your officers, whom you will send ashore with your written orders to the captains of those eleven biremes to abandon ship. I will put my own crews aboard. When the fleet is at sea under my command, I will set you ashore in Gaza."

"Should the letter that I expect from the queen have arrived, you may have these documents. But if there is any trickery—any treachery, Cassius—I will not only take those ships, but I will take you to sea and hand you over to a bleating fleet of thirty rotten ships that are loaded with Romans whom you summoned from Alexandria! By that time,

they will be ready to love you, I don't doubt! That is all, Cassius. If you would prefer to kill yourself, I will lend you a weapon. Otherwise, you may have your choice of cabins, except this one."

Cassius stood up, livid with anger.

"As you will," he answered. "But I warn you! Rome will not rest until this outrage has been avenged."

Tros buckled on his sword. He shouted:

"Conops!"

"Coming, master!"

"Find the proconsul a cabin and set him a guard. He may have one of his personal slaves in attendance, if you can find one alive. If not, give him one of the lictors."

"Aye, aye, master."

Cassius followed Conops. Herod stood up, crafty looking in his Idumæan head-dress, but cavalierly at ease. His eyes laughed into Hero's and glanced at Tros:

"I, too," he said, "am capable of madness—be she only lovely!" He turned in the cabin doorway. "Tros, may I visit Pelusium? I may find something fit to eat and drink. May I use your row-boat? May I have an escort?"

Tros gave the order to Sigurdson. Then he took hold of the hag by the neck and pitched her out. He slammed the cabin and bolted it.

"Hero!"

"Tros! Lord Captain! Lover!"

