**The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra Summary**

Adapted from <http://www.shmoop.com/antony-cleopatra/summary.html>

The complicated plot of *Antony and Cleopatra* has numerous twists and turns, and takes us across an ocean and back several times. We begin in Egypt with Mark Antony, one of the three leaders (or [triumvirs](http://www.unrv.com/fall-republic/second-triumvirate.php)) of the [Roman Republic](http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/HD/romr/hd_romr.htm), reveling with his powerful lover Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt. This drunken merry-making is getting in the way of his being an effective ruler in Rome, and the people at home are beginning to resent it. He gets news that his wife, Fulvia, alongside his brother, has been making war against the other triumvirs, and also that Sextus Pompeius, son of Pompey the Great (a former ruler of Rome), is threatening Rome as well. Also, there are pirates. Argh!

Antony finds out that his wife is dead, which solves the war problem—but he really does need to be getting back to Rome to address the Pompey situation. He leaves Egypt with Cleopatra’s half-hearted blessing and begins to fix stuff back home in Rome. He and Octavius Caesar (another triumvir) have a fight about the personal things between them, and decide to fix the situation by marrying off Caesar’s sister, Octavia, to Antony. Even though Antony hasn’t proven to be Mr. Marrying-Kind, the idea is that Octavia will form a bond between the two men—because she loves them both, they’ll love each other. It’s not two minutes before Antony meets with a soothsayer who tells him to get away from Caesar, because Caesar mutes his power. Antony agrees that he should head back to Egypt, where his pleasure lies.

Then, the triumvirs meet with Pompey to see if they can negotiate instead of going to war. Pompey is fighting to avenge his father’s death, but he gives in to the others and makes a truce. They agree that he gets a little piece of southern Italy, as long as he gives wheat to the Romans. They all celebrate drunkenly onboard Pompey’s ship that night. One of Pompey’s servants, Menas, suggests that they kill the drunk triumvirs while they have them, but Pompey is too honest to do this (though he wouldn’t have minded if someone else had done it without involving him). Murder aside, they go back to drinking. So much partying goes down that Lepidus (the third triumvir) gets carted out of drunken scene.

Later, the plan is for Antony is to head back to Athens with his new bride while Caesar stays in Rome. Caesar charges Antony to take good care of his sister, and Antony promises to do so. Also, Antony’s men have been fighting a war in [Parthia](http://www.parthia.com/) (modern-day Iraq) with good success, even without his leadership. Back in Egypt, Cleopatra has found out about Antony’s marriage, whipped the messenger, threatened to stab him, and then sent him to see if Octavia’s assets rival her own. Cleopatra is pleased to find out that Octavia looks plain, since it means she has a good chance of winning Antony back.

Back in Athens, Antony reports to Octavia that Caesar has already violated the pact with Pompey, is trash-talking Antony in public, and has dismissed Lepidus from office. Antony can’t abide by this and needs to fight for his honor. Octavia is torn between her brother and her husband, and asks to go back to Rome to see if she can make peace with her brother. Antony sends her off, and then promptly heads back to Egypt to begin preparing war for and also to hang out with his lover.

In Egypt, Cleopatra lends her ships to Antony while he gets ready to meet Caesar at sea. Although it’s not his arena of choice, Antony’s going for the sea showdown because Caesar has challenged him to a face-off on the ocean and he doesn’t want to be a chicken. Cleopatra stubbornly refuses to sit at home while all the action is outside, but once in the battle, even as things are looking up for Antony’s side, she runs away. Antony, essentially whipped, follows her and totally forfeits the battle. He admits she’s conquered his heart, and laments that he’s no longer a soldier. But then she gives him a kiss. He sends a schoolmaster, his children’s tutor, to give conditions of surrender to Caesar. He asks to either be left alone in Egypt, or to be allowed to be a private citizen in Athens.

Caesar won’t grant any of Antony’s wishes, but says Cleopatra can have anything she wants if she’ll either exile Antony or have him murdered in Egypt. Hearing this, Antony is not a happy camper, and resolves to murder Caesar in hand-to-hand combat (no more of this sea business). While he goes off to write an "I’m going to murder you in hand-to-hand combat" letter, another messenger from Caesar (named Thidias) slips in. This guy is supposed to use his cunning linguistic skills to whet Cleopatra’s appetite for treachery against Antony. She’s just about to give her allegiance to Caesar when Antony walks in, has Thidias whipped, and gives Cleopatra a piece of his mind. She says she’s sorry, and he forgives her. Then they party hard, preparing for a new battle the next day.

We learn that Enobarbus, Antony’s loyal friend, has defected to Caesar’s camp because he thinks even Cleopatra has abandoned Antony (seeing her flirt with Thidias). He thinks Antony has no chance of winning. Later that same night, soldiers on watch hear strange music playing, and they conclude that this is the sound of Hercules (an ancestor of Antony’s) abandoning Antony.

The next morning, everyone is in high spirits about battle. Antony hears that Enobarbus has fled and instead of being angry he feels sorry for the guy, sending treasure chests after him. He laments that his own bad fortune has driven Enobarbus to switch teams. In that day’s battle, Antony soundly trounces Caesar’s troops, and there’s much celebrating. Antony is all courage again, and they have a big march in Alexandria, which they’ve won back. Meanwhile, Enobarbus stands under the moon and laments his broken heart. He regrets that he’s betrayed Antony, and wishes the world to remember him as the worst traitor ever. Some soldiers are watching him, unnoticed, and see him die of a broken heart.

It’s morning again, and perhaps with renewed courage from yesterday’s victory, Antony meets Caesar at sea. This time, he watches his fleet greet Caesar’s men as friends. Oops. The battle is lost and he’s furious. He blames Cleopatra, not the men, because he’s convinced that her treachery is at the root of his loss—she must have betrayed him to Caesar. He goes to the palace in a rage, resolving to kill her.

Seeing her lover’s rage, Cleopatra flees to her monument and locks herself up. She has her servant send word to Antony that she’s killed herself, to see how he’ll respond. He responds by deciding to kill himself too—thinking it was noble of Cleopatra to be the one who decided when her life was over. He’d like to be his own conqueror. He asks his friend Eros to kill him, and Eros chooses to kill himself instead rather than go through with it. Antony then takes it upon himself to fall on his sword, and he’s done a bad job of it apparently, so he doesn’t die immediately. Just then Diomedes enters, bringing the news that Cleopatra isn’t really dead. Antony, hearing this, asks to be taken to her, so he can die near her. He’s not even that mad.

Antony, bleeding all over the place, tells Cleopatra she should yield herself to Caesar for her safety and honor. He says she can’t trust anyone around Caesar except this one guy, Proculeius. Cleopatra says she won’t trust anyone but her own resolution and her own hand, which seems to mean she’s going to kill herself. As Antony’s dying, he asks to be remembered as a noble Roman who was conquered by himself and no other, especially not Caesar. He dies, and Cleopatra beings the preparations to kill herself, too.

Just then, Caesar’s guy Proculeius comes into the monument to negotiate with Cleopatra and give her basically whatever she wants. She asks for her kingdom, Egypt, to be given to her son. As Proculeius leaves, Cleopatra is overtaken by some of Caesar’s guards. She tries to kill herself, but they’re fast and stop her. Dolabella, one of Caesar’s more kindhearted guys, takes over, pitying Cleopatra as she tells him of Antony’s greatness. Dolabella confirms her fear that Caesar means to make her a central attraction in his victory parade. Caesar shows up, and there’s an episode where Cleopatra claims to have given him all her treasure. Unfortunately, her treasurer says she lied, so fighting follows. Anyway, Caesar says she can keep her stuff, and she shouldn’t worry, as she will direct how the Romans will treat her.

Once Caesar leaves, Dolabella tells Cleopatra that Caesar will send for her and her children in three days to be put in the victory march. Cleopatra wails that she doesn’t want to be breathed on and scowled at by filthy Romans. So, instead, she has a plan. She has her women dress her in her finest robes and then receives a rather harmless looking visitor. It turns out this harmless visitor brought her some figs in which he’s hidden some poisonous snakes ([asp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asp_%28reptile%29)) at her request. Cleopatra, all dolled up, says she’s going to meet her husband (that would be Antony). She kisses Iras, her servant, who dies immediately. Then, she puts an asp to her breast, and says some insulting things about Caesar. As Charmian cries out that there is a snake on her breast, Cleopatra applies another asp to her arm and dies. Charmian is very sad about this, so naturally she fixes her lady’s crown. Just then, Caesar’s guard enters, so Charmian applies an asp to herself. She says Cleopatra’s work was befitting for a royal princess descended of many kings, and then she dies.

Dolabella and then Caesar march in to find all the dead women, and wonder how they died. Dolabella discovers the wounds on Cleopatra’s chest and arms, and another guard finds the slimy trail of the poisonous snake in the figs. Caesar admits it was in Cleopatra’s royal nature to do what she pleased, and decrees that she’ll be buried next to Antony. The funeral will be attended by the solemn Romans, and then they’ll go back home to the former Roman Republic, which is now the new Roman Empire.