

The God Abandons Anthony

By Constantinos P. Cavafy

When suddenly there is heard at midnight
A company passing invisible
With wonderful music, with voices, -
Your fortune giving way now, your works
Which have failed, the plans of a lifetime
All turned illusions, do not mourn uselessly.
As one prepared long since, courageously,

Say farewell to her, to Alexandria who is leaving.
Above all do not be tricked, never say it was
All a dream, and that your hearing was deceived;
Do not stop to such vain hopes as these.

As one prepared long since, courageously,
As becomes one worthy as you were of such a city,
Firmly draw near the window,
And listen with emotion but not
with the complainings and entreaties of cowards,
Listen, your last enjoyment, to the sounds,
The wonderful instruments of the mystic company,
And say farewell, farewell to Alexandria you are losing.

The Poems of C.P. Cavafy.

(Translated by J. Mavrogordatos)

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The incident comes from Plutarch's "Life of Anthony":

That night, it is related, about the middle of it, when the whole city was in a deep silence and general sadness, expecting the event of the next day, on a sudden was heard the sound of all sorts of instruments, and voices singing in tune, and the cry of a crowd of people shouting and dancing, like a troop of bacchanals on its way. This tumultuous procession seemed to take its course right through the middle of the city to the gate nearest the enemy; here it became loudest, and suddenly passed out.

Shakespeare included the scene in "Anthony & Cleopatra."

SCENE III.

Alexandria. Before CLEOPATRA's palace

Enter a company of soldiers

FIRST SOLDIER. Brother, good night. To-morrow is the day.

SECOND SOLDIER. It will determine one way. Fare you well.

Heard you of nothing strange about the streets?
FIRST SOLDIER. Nothing. What news?
SECOND SOLDIER. Belike 'tis but a rumour. Good night to you.
FIRST SOLDIER. Well, sir, good night.
[They meet other soldiers]
SECOND SOLDIER. Soldiers, have careful watch.
FIRST SOLDIER. And you. Good night, good night.
[The two companies separate and place themselves
in every corner of the stage]
SECOND SOLDIER. Here we. And if to-morrow
Our navy thrive, I have an absolute hope
Our landmen will stand up.
THIRD SOLDIER. 'Tis a brave army,
And full of purpose.
[Music of the hautboys is under the stage]

SECOND SOLDIER. Peace, what noise?
THIRD SOLDIER. List, list!
SECOND SOLDIER. Hark!
THIRD SOLDIER. Music i' th' air.
FOURTH SOLDIER. Under the earth.
THIRD SOLDIER. It signs well, does it not?
FOURTH SOLDIER. No.
THIRD SOLDIER. Peace, I say!
What should this mean?
SECOND SOLDIER. 'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd,
Now leaves him.
THIRD SOLDIER. Walk; let's see if other watchmen
Do hear what we do.
SECOND SOLDIER. How now, masters!
SOLDIERS. [Speaking together] How now!
How now! Do you hear this?
FIRST SOLDIER. Ay; is't not strange?
THIRD SOLDIER. Do you hear, masters? Do you hear?
FIRST SOLDIER. Follow the noise so far as we have quarter;
Let's see how it will give off.
SOLDIERS. Content. 'Tis strange. Exeunt