

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

Charles Brockden Brown

Table of Contents

<u>Death of Cicero, a Fragment</u>	1
<u>Charles Brockden Brown</u>	1
<u>TIRO TO ATTICUS</u>	1

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DEATH OF CICERO,
A FRAGMENT.

TIRO TO ATTICUS.

The task of relating the last events in the life of my beloved master, has fallen upon me. His last words reminded me of the obligation, which I had long since assumed, of conveying to his Atticus a faithful account of his death. Having performed this task, life will cease to be any longer of value.

Having parted with his brother, he went on board a vessel which lay at anchor in the road. The master was a Cyprian, ignorant of the Roman language; a stupid and illiterate sailor, whose provincial jargon was luckily understood and spoken by *Chlorus*, who was by birth a Cnidian. He served us as interpreter.

He was a stranger to the affairs of Italy, and his knowledge was so extremely limited, that he had never heard even the name of my master. This ignorance we were careful not to remove; and finding him unengaged, and merely waiting till some one should offer him a cargo, I tendered him a large sum if he would set sail immediately. This incident determined our course. No great deviation from his usual route was necessary to carry us to Tarsus, and there my master would not only be under the protection of Cassius, but in the midst of his Cilician clients. His ancient subjects would not fail to receive, with joy and gratitude, a patron from whom they had received so many benefits, and in case of any adverse fortune, their mountains would afford him concealment and security.

The vessel was small and crazy. It afforded wretched accommodation, but it behoved us to submit to every inconvenience, and to console ourselves with the hope that the voyage would be short. We had scarcely got on board, however, and made our bargain with the master when the wind, which had lately been propitious, changed to the southeast, and with this wind, the master declared it impossible to move from our present station.

This was an untoward event. Our safety depended upon the expedition with which we should fly from the shores of Italy. Our foot-steps would be diligently traced, and another hour might bring the blood-hounds within view.

One expedient was obvious. The search might be eluded, or, at least prolonged, by leaving this spot. It was possible to move by the help of oars along the coast. Further south, the country near the sea was still more desolate and woody than here, and we might be concealed in some obscure and unfrequented bay, till the wind should once more become favourable.

Additional rewards and promises induced the captain to adopt this scheme. The wind and the turbulence of the waves increased. My master had always an antipathy to voyages by sea, owing, probably, to the deadly sickness, with which the tossing of the billows never failed to afflict him. This sickness speedily came on, and added to the pent-up air, filthiness and inconvenience of the ship, plunged him into new impatience and dejection. He frequently declared his resolution to go on shore, and offer to his enemies a life which was a burden to him, and relinquished his design not till I had employed the most pathetic and vehement remonstrances.

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

We had not gone two leagues before night came on. This for a time suspended our toils. We came to anchor near the shore, and being somewhat sheltered from the wind, by the direction of the shore, the sea became more calm, and my master's sickness disappeared. Still he was unwilling to pass the night on board the vessel, and ordered us to land.

This proceeding was imminently dangerous. I endeavoured to convince him of this danger. The town of Circoeum was two or three miles distant, but the huts of which it consisted would afford him accommodation little better than that which the ship afforded. He would unavoidably be recognized by the inhabitants, and if they had not yet heard of the proscription, his appearance among them would lead them to suspect the truth, and what reliance could be placed upon their fidelity? This town might contain some tenant or retainer of Caesar, or it might at this moment be visited by the messengers of Anthony, at least, his appearance there would shortly be known, and would afford to his pursuers a new clue, by which they may be aided in their search. The same hazards would accompany his entrance into any of the neighbouring farmhouses.

These reasonings made him give up his resolution of going to Circoeum, but he retained his determination to land. If he should pass the night in the open air, though the ground was covered with snow, it was better than to breathe the poisonous atmosphere of the ship, and remain cooped up with the Cyprian and his crew.

Since he would not give up this design, I endeavoured to find reasons for approving it. One danger against which it was needful to provide, was the suspicion of the sailors. The grief and dejection of my master, our impatience to be gone from Italy, and the secret and abrupt manner of our embarkation, could not but excite their notice and make them busy at conjecture. They would be still more at a loss to conceive why, when a town was so near, we should prefer to spend the night on board their vessel, and the shelter of a tree or a rock, with the fire which might easily be kindled, were, in truth, not less safe or commodious than continuance in the ship. Preparations, were, therefore, made to land.

My caution led me to go on shore before him, that any danger which impended might be seasonably descried. Wandering over the strand, a small hut was discovered which appeared to have been formerly inhabited by fishermen. This was a season when the net was idle, and this hut was therefore deserted. The walls and roof were broken, but a good fire might render it tenable for a few hours. Here my master consented to repose himself.

The ground within the hut, as well as without, was covered with snow. This was removed and a kind of bed of withered sticks and dried leaves was provided for him. On this he lay down, and the servants seated themselves around him. He did not endeavour to sleep, but supporting his head upon his elbow, and fixing his eyes, in a thoughtful mood, upon the fire, he delivered himself up to meditation. A pause of general and mournful silence ensued.

Every one's eyes were fixed upon those venerable features. To behold one, so illustrious, one that had so lately governed the destinies of mankind, seated on the pinnacle of human greatness, and encompassed with all the goods of fortune, thus reduced to the condition of a fugitive and out-law, stretched upon the bare earth, in this wretched hovel, affected all of us alike. Every bosom seemed to swell with the same sentiment, and required the relief of tears. Chlorus set us the example of this weakness, and not one of us but sobbed aloud.

His attention was recalled by this sound. He lifted his head, and looked upon us by turns with an air of inexpressible benignity. My friends, said he, at length, be not discomposed. My life has been sufficiently long, since I have lived to reap the rewards of virtue. Those evils must indeed be great, which would not be compensated by these proofs of your affection. I need extort from you no other testimony of the equity and kindness of my treatment of you, than the fidelity and tenderness with which you have adhered to me in my distress. This is a consolation of which it is not in the power of the tyrants to bereave me. Let their executioners come: I am willing to die.

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

These words only heightened the emotions which they were intended to suppress. I desired for my own sake, to change or to terminate this scene, and to reflect that my duty forbade me to sit here in inactivity, when surrounded by so many dangers. None of us had eaten a morsel since we left Astura. Our master was too much absorbed in reflections connected with his fallen fortunes, to think of food. It was our duty to contend with his indifference or aversion, in this respect, as well as to supply our exhausted strength, and prepare for the hardships which we were yet to endure.

I determined, therefore, to go, with two or three companions, to Circoem and purchase necessaries, as well as ascertain what danger was to be dreaded from this quarter. My master was careless of necessity or danger, and the task of consulting and deciding for the welfare of himself and his servants, had entirely devolved upon me. This charge, it behoved me to perform with circumspection and zeal.

We set out, and crossing an angle of the forest, quickly reached the village. The utmost caution was necessary to be used, since many of the servants of Cicero, and particularly myself, were nearly as well known, especially in this district, as our lord. Chlorus was least liable to be detected, in consequence of having spent the greater part of his life at the Cuman Villa. He might be effectually disguised, likewise, by mimicking the accents of a Cyprian sailor, and pretending that he came from the vessel. Chlorus went forward, while I and Sura remained at a distance, awaiting his return. He came back in a short time, and with some tokens of alarm. He had crept into a tavern, and after purchasing some bread and dried fruits, had joined a knot of persons who were earnestly engaged in conversation in the portico. One appeared to be a stranger, who had just arrived, and was telling his news to the rest. The coalition of the tyrants was the theme of his discourse. Poedius, the consul, was said to be included in the sentence of proscription, and a tumult was affirmed to have been raised, on this account, in the city. The populace had aided the magistrate in arresting the emisaries from the armies, and the senate had created Poedius dictator.

After listening some time, Chlorus ventured to slide into the company, and inquired, in his broken Latin, of what proscription they were talking. The traveller repeated his news with great vivacity, and mentioned, among a thousand incredible circumstances, that the army of Brutus had revolted, and that diligent search was making for the Ciceros. He had just passed near Astura, and was told that a troop had been there, hunting for the fugitives, and finding them to have lately fled, they had dispersed themselves over the country, and he was sure they could not escape. Hearing this, Chlorus withdrew, and hastened to communicate his tidings to me.

The revolt of the Macedonian army was sufficiently probable. This was mournful news, but it shewed with new force the propriety of taking refuge in Asia, rather than in Greece. The last tale was no less probable, and convinced us that no time was to be lost in leaving this fatal shore.

To leave it, however, was not in our power. The present state of the wind imprisoned us in this spot. To change it for another would merely multiply our perils. Here we must remain till it should please Jove to give us a prosperous gale, or till our enemies should trace us to our covert. It only remained for us to hasten back to the hut, and defend our master at the expense of our own lives.

We returned. No interruption or intrusion had been experienced during our absence. On entering the hovel, I found my master in profound sleep. His features were tranquil and placid, and his anxieties were, for a while, entirely forgotten. The bread and fruits we had brought were shared among our companions, and we continued to watch during the night.

Anxious attention was paid to the state of the air, and fruitless wishes and repinings were whispered by one to another. The morning light returned. The enemy was still distant, but the sky was as untoward as ever.

At length, my master awoke of his own accord. After noticing the day-light, and recollecting his situation, he turned to me, and said: Well, my dear Tiro, what is now to be done? I will tell thee what; we will go on board; the

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

Cyprian shall ply his oars and carry us to Formia, and there will I wait for my release.

He noticed the down-cast eyes and mournful looks, which these words occasioned. No one seemed inclined to move to such a purpose. He looked around him, and continued in the same tone; What else, my friends, would you purpose to be done? How unworthy of the saviour of Rome and of Italy is it to be thus clinging to a wretched life, and skulking from ungrateful foes, among rocks and woods? No: I have done my part: All that remains is to die with firmness and with dignity.

Hitherto, I have been the fool of passion and inconstancy. My purposes have wavered from day to day, but it is time to shake off this irresolution and trample on this cowardice. I am now resolved, and will be gone to Formia this moment.

With these words he rose from the ground, and put on an air of sternness and command, which left me no power to expostulate. We obeyed him in silence, and once more put ourselves on board the vessel. The crew were still asleep, but being roused by our arrival, were prevailed upon to row along the shore towards Formia.

My master seemed to have retrieved his wonted tranquillity, in consequence of having formed his ultimate resolution. He was still, for the most part, wrapt in meditation. He forebore to converse with me, but sat upon the deck, with his eyes fixed upon the water, which was now less turbulent than on the former day, and did not occasion sickness.

My own thoughts were occupied in devising some means of escape. We were now approaching Sicily, and it was possible that some conveyance could be gained to that island. This however must be found after our arrival at Formia, for beyond this the Cyprian refused to go, under pretence, which indeed, was probably true, of being unacquainted with the coast. Neither was I totally without hope that the wind would suddenly change, and permit us to leave the coast. On this event, I did not fear to obtain Cicero's concurrence, with a scheme so conducive to his safety. To despair of himself or the republic while the seas were open, and while Cassius was in arms, and furnished with the wealth of all the Asiatic provinces, was unworthy of his understanding and his virtue.

His purpose to go to any one of his villas was pregnant with danger. These places would be searched, by his enemies. As long as he remained in Italy, it was expedient to conceal himself in unsuspected corners. Could not such be found, where he might remain unmolested for years.

I now reflected that Formia being situated within a mile of the sea, might be the best asylum to which he could betake himself. A ship might be provided, ready to profit by the first wind, to sail away to Sicily, while, in the mean time, my master might be effectually secreted in some part of his dominion. The subterranean vaults, constructed to preserve wine and other provisions, on this estate, might afford him concealment till the opportunity of escape should offer.

While brooding over these images, we came in sight of Formia. It was now time to mention to him this scheme. He received it with disapprobation I am too old, said he, to undergo once more the hardships and hazards of a camp. I have witnessed long enough the ingratitude and perfidy of mankind. I am tired of the spectacle, and am determined to close my eyes upon it forever.

It shall never be said, that Marcus Cicero fled from the presence of tyrants, that he saved the miserable remnant of his old age, by making himself an exile from his country. I tell thee, Tiro, I am too old to become the sport of fortune, and the follower of armies. Cassius and Brutus are young, they are innured to war; it is their element. They fight for liberty and glory, which their age will permit them to enjoy for many years to come; but as to me, I have reached the verge of the grave already, and should I elude my enemies, and reach Rhodes or Tarsus in safety, I should only have reserved myself for a speedy and ignoble death. No: Here shall be the end of my wanderings.

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

I will go to my house. I will pass my time without anxiety or fear. When the executioners of Antony arrive, they will find their victim prepared. My resolution continued he, with some impatience, is taken. It is to no purpose to harass me with arguments and remonstrances, for I shall never swerve from it.

I was not totally discouraged by these declarations. I confided in my power to vanquish this resolution, as soon as the means of escape should be provided. Till then it was indeed useless to contend with his despair. His imagination saw nothing but cowardice and degradation, in hiding himself in vaults and pits. That he who was so long at the head of the Roman state, should seek his safety in shifts and stratagems like these, was ignominious and detestable. Death was not so terrible that it should be shunned, life was not so dear that it should be preserved at this price.

He proceeded to his house with an air of fearlessness and confidence. It was far from certain, that it was not occupied already by assassins, expecting and waiting his approach; of this, however, he testified no apprehension. As soon as he entered the porch, his arrival was rumoured through the building, and his servants hurried from all quarters to welcome him. Their looks betrayed anxiety as well as joy. It was easy to perceive that they were not unapprised of the dangers which encompassed their master, and that his appearance among them had been unexpected. He greeted and smiled upon each, and then retired to his chamber, whither he would not allow any one to follow him.

It was now time to adopt those measures on which my thoughts had been engaged. As soon as I parted from my master, I took Glauco the steward aside. I told him what had lately happened, and what I now designed to do, and desired his assistance to procure a vessel which might carry us without delay to Sicily.

I found that there was need of the utmost expedition, for Glauco informed me that, not many hours before, a troop of twenty horse-men, had come hither. They rode furiously into the court, and without inquiry or permission, rushed into the house. They entered every apartment, and not finding their victim, indulged their resentment in imprecations on the upstart of Arpinum, and in striking their swords against the furniture and pictures. Two busts, of Brutus and Ahala, which stood in the library, they overturned upon the pavement.

The servants, affrighted at the stern and sullen visages of these intruders, fled from their presence. After lingering for some time in the house, they mounted their horses and disappeared.

These tidings shewed me the magnitude and nearness of the danger. Not a moment should be wasted in deliberation or uncertainty. It was possible that the assassins might not speedily return, and the interval was to be employed in procuring the means of flight. The sea was to be crossed, and Cajeta was a league distant. At Cajeta only was it possible to find a vessel, suited to our purpose.

I now called some of the most faithful servants together, and charged them to guard the safety of their master, till Glauco and I should return, which should be in less than an hour. We were going, I told them, to Cajeta, in hopes of finding some immediate conveyance from this shore, and would return with the utmost expedition.

We set out, selecting the fleetest horses to carry us. Three barks were seen in the bay, Glauco imagined that he saw on one the stern and beak which is peculiar to Sicily. To this we immediately transported ourselves. Happily his penetration had not been deceived, and the Sicilian readily consented to take us on board, and proceed immediately to Sicily.

By exerting themselves with energy, they might bring the vessel in a short time to the shore nearest to my master's house. This was better than to bring him to Cajeta, where it would be impossible for him to escape observation, and to which he could come only by a public road, thronged and obstructed with passengers.

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

I left Glauco on board the vessel, to hasten the motions of the sailors and to direct them to the proper place. Meanwhile, I mounted my horse and rode back to Formia. The vessel would be ready to receive us by the time that we should reach the shore.

The domestics, whom I had posted in the atrium, were still assembled and received me with joy, but one event had taken place in my absence which filled me with foreboding and anxiety. A slave who wrought in the fields, who formerly belonged to the Cornelian family, and whose temper was remarkably perverse and malignant, had withdrawn himself immediately after my master's arrival. Glauco had frequently complained of the turbulent and worthless character of this slave, and had exhorted Cicero to part with him. In the multiplicity of more momentous concerns this affair had been overlooked by my master, and he still continued in the family.

It was now suggested to me that he had gone in order to recall the soldiers, and to avenge himself in this manner, for the punishments which his refractory and rebellious conduct had frequently incurred. This new danger was an additional incitement to my diligence. I went to my master's chamber and found him asleep. This was no time to be scrupulous or tardy. I awakened him.

On recovering his recollection, and finding me beside him, with every mark of trepidation and dismay, and silent, from my uncertainty in what manner to address him, he suspected that I brought fatal tidings. He looked at me without emotion, and said:

How is it with thee, my Tiro? With me, all is well. I have slept soundly, and am prepared to meet the worst. Thou wouldst tell me that they are coming. I rejoice to hear it: the sooner they arrive and execute the will of Anthony and his Octavius, the better.

Saying this, he half rose from the couch, and stretching his feet towards the stove, he continued: Thanks to Jove, that, at a time like this, nothing but my feet are cold. I have done with hope and with fear, and Cæsar's ministers shall find that my heart's blood has lost none of its warmth. He may deface and mangle this frame, but my spirit shall be found invincible.

I could no longer forbear, but while the tears flowed down my cheeks, I pulled him by the arm towards the door, and exclaimed: We have found a vessel that will carry us to Sicily. She lies at this moment near the shore ready to receive us. Hasten, I beseech you, beyond the reach of the tyrants. Why would you glut the vengeance of Anthony, and not rather live to raise up the republic?

He shook his head, and resisting my efforts: It is too late, said he: I never can die in a fitter season and place than the present, and hence I will not move.

O! Heaven! Does Cicero love his enemies better than his friends? Is he willing to sacrifice his country to parricides and traitors? Shall he seek death because, while he lives, liberty is not extinguished; because the triumph of the wicked can only be completed by his death?

Has Antony merited so well at your hands, that you are willing to die, that his ambition may be fully gratified? Is this the issue of your warfare? After contending with his treason so long, do you now fall of your own accord at his feet, put the poniard in his hand and call upon him to strike? Thus will mankind regard your conduct when the means of escape are offered you, when the arms and treasures of Sicily and Greece and Asia are ready to be put into your hand, you reject the gift, you abandon the cause of your country, of liberty, of your friends; you invite infamous assassins to your bosom; you die at the moment when your life is of most value to mankind, and nothing but your death is wanting to ensure the destruction of Rome.

O! let it not be said that in his last hours, Marcus Cicero was a recreant and coward. That so illustrious a life was closed with infamy, that his eulogies on liberty, his efforts for the salvation of Rome, the claims of gratitude and

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

friendship were forgotten or despised. That mankind called on their deliverer, that armies and provinces were offered to be employed by him in the rescue of his country, and the ruin of tyrants, in vain.

The road is open and direct, there is nothing to create momentary hindrance or delay. In a few hours, he may laugh at the impotent resentment of Antony; and arm himself to punish the ingratitude and perfidy of Cæsar. But no, he will thrust himself within their grasp; he will patiently wait till their assassins have leisure to execute their sentence; he will beg them to except his homage, and since his death is indispensable to their success, he will stretch out his neck to receive it.

Perceiving that my master's resolution began to falter. I redoubled my remonstrances, I called up the images of his brother, his son and his nephew, of Cassius and Brutus and Pompeius. I painted the effect which the tidings of his death would produce in them; their transports of grief awakened not so much by the injury redounding to the common cause, as by the infatuation and folly to which his death must be ascribed. With their humiliation and terror, I contrasted the exultation of his enemies, to whose malice he was thus making himself a voluntary victim. What indignities would not be heaped upon his lifeless remains! How would Fulvia and Anthony feast their eyes upon his head, which, torn from the trunk, will be carried to their toilets, and how will the folly of inviting their revenge and crouching to the stroke of their assassins be made the endless theme of ridicule and mockery?

At this moment, the servants entered the chamber with a litter. I had given previous directions to this effect. I had resolved if persuasion should prove inefficacious, to carry him away by force. One of the bearers was Chlorus, whose looks betokened the deepest consternation, and by his eyes and gestures besought me to use dispatch. I made a sign to the attendants, who approached their master with diffidence and reverence and prepared to remove him from his couch to the litter.

I renewed my supplications and remonstrances, to which he listened in silence, and though his looks testified reluctance and perplexity, he made no resistance. He was placed in the litter. I led the way into the garden. Chlorus had now an opportunity to whisper me that the soldiers had scented their prey anew and were hastening to the house. This intelligence induced me to strike into an obscure path which led through a wood and to quicken the pace of my companions.

The litter was surrounded by sixteen domestics well armed. They were all faithful to their trust. Most of them were grey with age, but vigorous and resolute. All of them had been, during many years, personal attendants on their lord, and were eager to shed their blood in his defence; I was not without hope that should we be overtaken and attacked, such resistance might be made, as, at least, to secure the retreat of my master to the shore.

We had now accomplished half the journey, and were inspired with new confidence in our good fortune. Turning an angle, however, a band of men appeared in sight. They discovered us in a moment, and shouting aloud, made towards us with the utmost expedition. There was now room but for one choice. Fly, said I, to those that bore the litter, fly with your burden to the shore and leave us to contend with these miscreants.

The enemy had been discovered by my master as soon as by us. He now raised himself up, and exclaimed in a tone of irresistible authority; No: I charge you stir not a step. Set down the litter and await their coming. Put up your swords, continued he, turning to the rest, who had, in imitation of my example unsheathed their weapons: Put up your swords. By the duty which you owe me, I command you to forbear.

With whatever sternness these commands were delivered, they would not have made me hesitate or falter. I was prepared to conduct myself, not agreeable to his directions, but to the exigencies of the time; I was willing to preserve his life even at the hazard of offending him beyond forgiveness; but my companions were endowed with less firmness.

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

Go on, said I, to the bearers, heed not the words of a desperate man. It is your duty to save him, though you forfeit your lives by your disobedience. They once more stooped to raise up the vehicle, but were again forbidden. What! said he, am I fallen so low as to be trampled on by slaves? Desist, this moment! Appalled and confounded by the energy of his accents, they let fall the litter, and stood with their eyes down-cast and motionless.

The delay which this altercation produced, rendered his escape impossible. The veteran and well-accoutred band that was approaching, left us no hope of victory. All that I had meditated, was to retard their progress so long that my master might reach the ship in safety. For this end, we were to lay down our own lives, but as long as he continued in this spot all opposition would be fruitless.

To stay and behold violence committed on that venerable head was not in my power. I went forward to meet the assassins. It was not, however, till I had discerned the person of their leader that I had any hopes of diverting them from their design. He was a tribune in the army of Cæsar, and his name was Popilius Lænas.

This man had been formerly accused of murdering his wife's brother. This brother had considerable property to which Lænas expected to succeed, but on some dissention between them, the brother had selected a new heir and Lænas was said to have gratified his vengeance by his death. His wife and children were among his accusers, and there was too much reason to believe the truth of the accusation.

In this extremity he besought Cicero to be his advocate. Lænas had been active in the Clodian tumults, had sided with Milo and the Senate, and had, consequently, promoted the interests of my master. This service was now his plea, and, joined with unwearied importunities, accomplished his end. Cicero was an enthusiast in gratitude, and was not used to scrutinize suspiciously or weigh accurately, this kind of merit. Benefits received from others were, if possible, repaid an hundred fold. He made himself the advocate of a cause, which, without his assistance, would doubtless have been desperate, and Lænas was acquitted. His vows of gratitude and service were unbounded, and now that I discovered him at the head of Cæsar's executioners was scarcely credible.

After a moments pause, I advanced towards him, and offered him my hand. He rejected it with scorn and rage, and thrusting me aside, Out of the way, villain, said he, and thank my mercy that you do not share the fate of the traitor you serve.

His followers surrounded me with drawn swords, and looking at the tribune, seemed to wait only for his signal to put me to death. Come on, he cried; Our prize is in view. Cut down every one that opposes, but leave the peacable alone. They left me and hastened towards the litter.

My eyes followed them instinctively. Shuddering and a cold dew invaded my limbs. With the life of Cicero, methought, was entwined the existence of Rome. The stroke by which one was severed, would be no less fatal to the other. It was indeed true that liberty would be extinguished by his death, and then only would commence the reign of Anthony, and the servitude of mankind.

Would no effort avail to turn aside the stroke? Should I stand a powerless spectator of the deed? Might I not save myself at least the ignominy and horror of witnessing the fall of my master, by attacking his assassins or falling on my own sword?

These impulses of grief, were repressed by the remembrance of the duties, which his death would leave to be performed by me and of the promises by which I was bound.

During these thoughts my eyes were fixed upon the litter. My master, perceiving the approach of the tribune, held forth his head, as if to facilitate the assassin's office. His posture afforded a distinct view of his countenance, which was more thoughtful and serene than I had seen it during our flight from...

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

The eyes of the ruffians sparkled with joy at sight of their victim. They contended which should be foremost in guilt. The domestics, struck with consternation, looked upon each other in silence. The soldiers, full of eagerness to secure the reward which Anthony had promised for the head of his enemy, were too much occupied to speak to each other, or to heed any foreign object.

One blow severed the devoted head! No sooner had it fallen, than the troop set up an horrid shout of exultation. Lænas grasped the hain and threw the head into a large bag, held open by one of his companions for that purpose.

Come, lads, he cried: Post we, with our prize, with all speed to Rome? Anthony will pay us well for this service. So saying, they hastened away with as much expedition as they came.

All passed in a moment. Nothing but the headless trunk, stretched upon the floor of the litter, which floated in blood, remained. I approached the vehicle without being fully conscious of my movements, and gazed upon the mutilated figure. My thoughts were at a stand, as well as my power of utterance suspended. My heart seemed too small to embrace the magnitude of this calamity. It was not a single man who had fallen, or whose violent catastrophe was the theme of everlasting regret. The light of the world was extinguished, and the hopes of human kind brought to an end.

My mind gradually recovered some degree of activity. I mused upon the events that led to this disaster. It seemed as if the most flagitious folly, had given birth to this insupportable evil. Nothing was easier than to have fled to the shore; to have embarked in the Sicilian vessel, and quickly to have moved ourselves beyond the reach of our enemies. At one time, I loaded myself with the most vehement upbraidings: Why did I not exert myself to hinder him from leaving the Cyprian barque? Had we proceeded to Cajeta, without delay, we might have put ourselves on board the Agrigentine, and set danger at defiance. The Cyprian refused to proceed, but menaces would have been successful where rewards had failed. He and his feeble crew, would have easily been mastered by our superior number.

But was not Cicero himself the author of his evil destiny? Irresolute, desponding or perverse, he thwarted or frustrated the measures conducive to his safety. More sensible to the stings of ingratitude and his personal humiliation, than to the claims of his fellow citizens; prone to despair of liberty, though the richest and most populous portion of the empire was still faithful to its cause; though veteran armies and illustrious officers were still ranged under its banners in Sicily, Greece and Asia, he lingered on this fatal shore, and threw himself before the executioner.

There were a thousand recesses on this desolate coast, and caverns in the Apenine, and unsuspected retreats on his own estate, where he might have been effectually concealed, till Cassius and Pompey had restored the republic, till the pursuit of his enemies had slackened, and time and his faithful servants had supplied the means of his escape. Had he even permitted the generous sacrifice which his attendants were zealous to make, and profited by the interval, which their contest with the ruffians would have afforded, to reach the shore; had he looked, with a stern eye, on the tribune and his followers, and rebuked them with the eloquence whose force had been so long irresistible; had he called up the memory of past benefits, and thundered indignation in the ears of the apostate Lænas, who knows but the blood-hounds would have been eluded or baffled, or disarmed of their sanguinary purpose? They were wretches, incited by the lust of gain, void of enmity to Cicero, or love of his oppressors. The bribe with which Anthony had bought their zeal, might have easily been doubled by Cicero, to purchase their connivance at his flight. The hope of promotion in the legions of the east, might have changed them into guardians of our safety, and companions of our voyage. Thus had the magnanimity of Marcus snatched him from worse perils, and kept him from despairing of his life, and his cause, though labouring under a greater weight of years, encompassed by enemies more numerous and more triumphant: lonely, succourless, in chains and immured in a dungeon!

Death of Cicero, a Fragment

But why do I calumniate the memory of Cicero? Arraign the wisdom of his conduct, and the virtue of his motives? Had he not lived long enough for felicity and usefulness? Was there cowardice or error in refusing to mingle in the tumults of war? In resigning to younger hands, innured to military offices, the spear and the shield? Is it more becoming the brave to struggle for life; to preserve the remnant which infirmity and old age had left, than serenely to wait for death, and encounter it with majestic composure? Is it dishonourable to mourn over the triumph of ambition, and the woes of our country? To be impatient of life, when divorced from liberty, and fated to contemplate the ruin of those schemes, on which his powers had incessantly been exercised, and whose purpose was the benefit of mankind?

Yes. The close of thy day was worthy its beginning and its progress. Thou diest with no stain upon thy virtue. The termination of thy course was coeval with the ruin of thy country. Thy hand had upheld the fabric of its freedom and its happiness, as long as human force was adequate to that end. It fell, because the seeds of dissolution had arrived at maturity, and the basis and structure were alike dissolved. It fell, and thou wast crushed in its ruins.