

The Death of Alexander

by Gabriel Ricou

A corridor in Alexander's palace. Enter servants and attendants with Macedonian captains (Terius and others). Two guards and a servant stand by the entrance

SERVANT 1

What's the problem? We heard a lot of commotion from the banquet hall.

ATTENDANT 1

Alexander is unwell; part way through the feast he fell out of his chair groaning in pain. He's been taken to his chamber.

SERVANT 1

He seemed well enough when I brought him to the feast. Then again he seems to act quite strange these days.

TERIUS

Do you forget what he did for us? The glorious campaigns and victories he led us through? I remember, I was with him at Granicus, where despite inferior numbers he boldly led us through the raging river, leading the cavalry up the banks against the enemy. His bravery led us all the way here against the strongest armies in the world.

GUARD 1

I was at Granicus too when I was just a foot soldier. Many thought it rash of Alexander to lead them through the river up through the mud in a rain of arrows. We had many losses and I lost my best friend. Even having cleared the bank, Alexander almost died at the hands of Rhoesaces and Spithridates and would have, had not Clytus saved him. It was a costly victory.

Enter Alexander's physician, Philip

ATTENDANT 1

Ah, here's Philip. What news of the king?

PHILIP

He's very sick from all the feasting and unhealthy habits

SERVANT 1

Aye, that's what comes of all these extravagant feasts and excessive luxury. It's bad for one's health. Did you hear that his friend Hephaestion actually drank himself to death after his wedding? His highness seemed to sober up for a bit after that but he got back to feasting and revelry pretty soon.

GUARD 2

You wouldn't be so quick to judge him if you'd traveled through the burning sands up from India like I had. Marching through thick sand under a hot sun, Alexander carried all his own armor encouraging us all and refused any more water than the rest of us. He asked for nothing less than complete loyalty and honor and in exchange trusted us, treated us as equals and brought us to greatness.

GUARD 1

Was he so caring for his soldiers when they marched through the deserts of Egypt just so the king could go sight-seeing at the temple of libya? Thousands of horses died needlessly and soldiers struggled through the sand, subject to burying sandstorms and oppressive heat with little or no water. He is ambitious, overconfident and rash. He even refused peace, which would have saved his much beloved soldiers and supplies, as with king Darius and Taxiles, unable to bear the dishonor of not fighting and needing complete and utter unquestionable victory. And do you recall Parmenio and Cytus, two of his closest friends? They both died to his mindlessness and drunkenness, killed in cold blood.

Enter Perdiccas and Nearchus

PERDICCAS

Philip, Alexander needs you; he's gotten worse. And Terius, you come too, all the captains and generals are assembled in the king's room.

TERIUS

He's not . . . dying, is he?

PERDICCAS

He's very ill. You had better come quick.

Perdiccas, Nearchus, Terius and Philip go to the king's bedchamber where Alexander and his chief physicians and generals are.

ALEXANDER

Ah, Philip, thank you for coming now. I am dying now. I thought I was in the prime of my spirit but am brought low by extravagance and sickness like common men. It's strange—I always thought I would die in battle, fighting in the heat of conquest, or after conquering the world in some strange eastern country. I was finally able to see what's around me, here at the end. I dismissed the courtiers and I remember the life I chose in my youth. I will die with my loyal generals near instead of greedy flatterers, waiting for my death to take everything I own.

PHILIP

My king, do not give up hope. Do you forget how I healed you from your fever by the river Cydnus? You overate a bit, perhaps, but you are still in fine health.

ALEXANDER

Oh Philip, my physician of life. I know your abilities but I can feel it coming in my whole being. No, this is the end, old friend. I put some pictures in my journal of the exotic plants and animals I saw on my conquests, as Aristotle said I should. Please give them to him.

PHILIP

If this is the end, I would not have chosen any other life than this, had I been king of the world.

ALEXANDER

Strange how much clearer it seems at the end. I see the folly of my actions and the mistakes I made. I killed Parmenio and dearest Clytus. Now I will see them and make amends. In my youth I resented my father, afraid his greatness would outshine mine; his conquests leave nothing for me to do. But he paved the way, and with my steadfast army and my ambition and strength, we managed to conquer the world.

TERIUS

If only you had died in fierce battle, then we could have rushed to your side and died with you. Nonetheless, you raised us up and your greatness will be recognized forever.

NEARCHUS

You and I have oft been at odds and I do not forget your immorality, cruelty, and hot temper; but you inspired your men and captains and did what no one else could have.

GENERAL 1

Parmenio was my uncle and fought with Philip in Greece and later by your side. You were surrounded by corrupt flatterers and blinded by luxury and killed him. He would tell me about your youth when you would lead all the lads in military training and your fearlessness and skill in leadership. He knew that with a spirit like yours, the world was going to be shaken up and turned upside down.

MANTINEUS

I grew up in the palace with you and as soon as we could, we joined the army together. You became king and I a general, and we had the life we had dreamed of. I remember when you saw that we were hindered by all our spoil, you burned all our carriages and threw away our useless priceless artifacts. And also at Sardis and Ephesus where you had the people use their gold to rebuild their temples and buildings.

PERDICCAS

You respected and rewarded bravery and fearlessness in your friends and foes alike.

STERION

your strength of spirit brought together tactical generals, glory seeking individuals, and loyal steadfast soldiers.

Enter Roxana and Aridaeus

ALEXANDER

Roxana, farewell. I loved you and am sorry that I am leaving you already. Men like me do not fear death and so never last long. I expected these wars to kill off all my friends, dying in battle beside me, but worse, I killed them myself or brought them to their death. Many of my old generals are still here though, and many of my new young captains. You will all need courage, strength, honesty, and wisdom in the times of uncertainty ahead.

You must lead now, Perdiccas. With all your wisdom and experience, try to keep my realm from splintering into factions. I am not hopeful though I know you are an experienced and noble general. There is no man who can hold this kingdom and these people together forever. I wish you the best of luck and strength to face the challenges ahead.

The world will not long remember these rich kings who bought their way into greatness or traitors and flatterers who climb their way to power. It is honorable deeds, courage in the face of hopelessness and doom, simplicity, and faith, loyalty, and justice. It's Pericles, Leonides, Achilles and Ulysses. Men can be great for good or for evil affecting the people and the environment surrounding them. I used all my ingenuity, strength, bravery, and knowledge, and took it as far as I could. Now I go down in history as Great. Whether I was good or evil is for the world and the Gods to judge.