|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **All For Love Summary** | **[Next](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/epistle-dedicatory)**  [Epistle Dedicatory](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/epistle-dedicatory) |
|  |  |

*All For Love* begins with John Dryden’s dedication of the play to an aristocratic patron, Thomas Osborne. He praises Osborne for his loyalty to the crown during the English Civil War. This praise leads Dryden to a larger consideration of the merits of the English constitutional monarchy, which he calls the best form of government in the world. Dryden thinks that *all*attempts at “reform” are dangerous, since any rebellion strikes at “the root of power, which is obedience.”

Dryden then writes a preface about the play itself. The story of [**Antony**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters/antony) and [**Cleopatra**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters/cleopatra) has been “oft told,” most famously by William Shakespeare, but Dryden has made some changes. For instance, he has invented new characters and scripted a fictional meeting between Cleopatra and [**Octavia**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters/octavia), Antony’s Roman wife. He explains that Antony and Cleopatra are appealing protagonists because they are neither wholly good nor evil.

Two priests of the Temple of Isis, **[Serapion](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters/serapion)** and **[Myris](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters)**, observe that there have been several frightening omens in Egypt recently. For instance, the [**water**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/symbols/water) of the Nile overflowed and left behind monstrous sea creatures. They express their fears for the future of their kingdom, since Antony and Cleopatra have recently and disastrously lost the Battle of Actium to Antony’s rival for power in Rome, **[Octavius](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters/octavius)**. Antony has now locked himself away, hoping to cure himself of his love for Cleopatra. His old general **[Ventidius](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters/ventidius)** arrives to try to bring some hope. He tells Antony that he has an army in Lower Syria that is loyal to Antony’s cause. However, the army will only fight for Antony if he comes to them—they do not want to fight for Cleopatra in Egypt. In order to claim his army, then, Antony will have to leave her.

Cleopatra is in despair when she hears that Antony plans to leave her. She sends her eunuch, **[Alexas](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters/alexas)**, who gives Antony a ruby bracelet in the shape of bleeding hearts. Alexas petitions Antony to go see Cleopatra one last time, so that she can fasten the bracelet on his wrist, although Ventidius warns against this. When Cleopatra appears for her audience with Antony, she swoons and protests pathetically that she only wants to die. At this, Antony proclaims that will never abandon the woman who loves him, even if it costs him his life.

Several other visitors come to the Egyptian court: Antony’s old friend **[Dollabella](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters/dollabella)**, who is in love with Cleopatra, and Antony’s wife Octavia. Octavia has also brought their two daughters, Agrippina and Antonia. Octavia tells Antony that she is still loyal to him as a wife despite his abandonment of her. Ventidius and Dollabella urge Antony to abandon Cleopatra and take back Octavia. Octavia tells her daughters to go to their father. At their embrace, Antony is so moved that he tells Octavia he will leave Cleopatra.

Cleopatra again despairs at this news. She encounters Octavia in the palace and the two women exchange insults: Octavia accuses Cleopatra of stealing Antony’s wife, children, power, and political standing. Cleopatra says that she has suffered more because Octavia has the name of wife to protect her, whereas Cleopatra has lost her crown and reputation for Antony. Meanwhile, Antony asks Dollabella to break the news of his departure to Cleopatra. When Dollabella arrives, Alexas urges Cleopatra to use Dollabella’s feelings for her to make Antony jealous. Cleopatra begins flirting with Dollabella. Ultimately, Cleopatra is unable to go through with it and confesses that she still loves Antony. Dollabella admires her loyalty and constancy, but it is too late: Ventidius and Octavia observe Dollabella kissing Cleopatra’s hand and plan to tell Antony, hoping that this will drive a wedge between the lovers for good.

Ventidius and Octavia bring the news of Cleopatra’s infidelity to Antony. This backfires, since Antony becomes frantic with rage and distress. Coming to the realization that Antony still loves Cleopatra and will never love her, Octavia leaves the palace and returns to Octavius’s camp. Meanwhile, Antony rages at Dollabella and banishes him from Egypt. He banishes Cleopatra as well, who begs his forgiveness and leaves proclaiming that she still loves him. Antony weeps as they part but orders that they never see each other again.

The battle with Octavius continues to go disastrously for the Egyptians. As Antony watches from the roof of the palace, the Egyptian navy surrenders without a fight and joins the Roman forces. Antony becomes convinced that Cleopatra has betrayed him to Octavius. Alexas comes up with another plot, recommending that Cleopatra hide in her monument, which she does. Alexas tells Antony that Cleopatra was so distressed at his suspicions of her that she killed herself. At this news, all the fight goes out of Antony. He explains that all he wants now is to die, since Cleopatra was the “jewel” that made his life worth living. All his conquests, glory, and honors were merely the ransom he used to buy her love.

Now, Antony says, is the time to give up his power struggle with Octavius and let the world “know whom to obey.” Ventidius accepts Antony’s desire to die and expresses his wish to go with him, since his own life is not worth living without Antony. Antony then asks Ventidius to kill him first, but Ventidius stabs himself instead. Antony then falls on his sword but misses his heart and begins bleeding profusely. Meanwhile, discovering Alexas’s deception, Cleopatra rushes into the room and finds him on the ground. As Antony dies in her arms, he makes her promise to join him soon in the afterlife.

Cleopatra dresses herself in her royal robes and sits herself on the throne beside Antony. Her maids, **[Iras](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-for-love/characters)** and Charmian, bring her a poisoned asp that fatally stings her. Cleopatra proclaims that she will die with Antony as his wife, in a bond that no “Roman laws” will be able to break. As she dies, she challenges Octavius to ever separate them now. Iras and Charmian follow her example and also commit suicide. Serapion bursts into the throne room, leading Alexas in chains. When he sees the bodies, he remarks on how noble Antony and Cleopatra look, and expresses the hope that they will live a happier and freer life in heaven than they found on earth.