Caesar and Cleopatra - Act II

di George Bernard Shaw (1901)

ACT II

Alexandria. A hall on the first floor of the Palace, ending in a loggia approached by two steps. Through the arches of the loggia the Mediterranean can be seen, bright in the morning sun. The clean lofty walls, painted with a procession of the Egyptian theocracy, presented in profile as flat ornament, and the absence of mirrors, sham perspectives, stuffy upholstery and textiles, make the place handsome, wholesome, simple and cool, or, as a rich English manufacturer would express it, poor, bare, ridiculous and unhomely. For Tottenham Court Road civilization is to this Egyptian civilization as glass bead and tattoo civilization is to Tottenham Court Road.

The young king Ptolemy Dionysus aged ten is at the top of the steps, on his way in through the loggia, led by his guardian Pothinus, who has him by the hand. The court is assembled to receive him. It is made up of men and women some of the women being officials of various complexions and races, mostly Egyptian; some of them, comparatively fair, from lower Egypt; some, much darker, from upper Egypt; with a few Greeks and Jews. Prominent in a group on Ptolemy's right hand is Theodotus, Ptolemy's tutor. Another group, on Ptolemy's left, is headed by Achillas, the general of Ptolemy's troops. Theodotus is a little old man, whose features are as cramped and wizened as his limbs, except his tall straight forehead, which occupies more space than all the rest of his face. He maintains an air of magpie keenness and profundity, listening to what the others say with the sarcastic vigilance of a philosopher listening to the exercises of his disciples. Achillas is a tall handsome man of thirty-five, with a fine black beard curled like the coat of a poodle. Apparently not a clever man, but distinguished and dignified. Pothinus is a vigorous man of fifty, a eunuch, passionate, energetic and quick witted, but of common mind and character; impatient and unable to control his temper. He has fine tawny hair, like fur. Ptolemy, the King, looks much older than an English boy of ten; but he has the childish air, the habit of being in leading strings, the mixture of impotence and petulance, the appearance of being excessively washed, combed and dressed by other hands, which is exhibited by court-bred princes of all ages.

All receive the King with reverences. He comes down the steps to a chair of state which stands a little to his right, the only seat in the hall. Taking his place before it, he looks nervously for instructions to Pothinus, who places himself at his left hand.

POTHINUS: The King of Egypt has a word to speak.

THEODOTUS: *in a squeak which he makes impressive by sheer self-opinionativeness.* Peace for the King's word!

PTOLEMY: *without any vocal inflexions: he is evidently repeating a lesson.* Take notice of this all of you. I am the firstborn son of Auletes the Flute Blower who was your King. My sister Berenice drove him from his throne and reigned in his stead but--but *he hesitates*--

POTHINUS: *stealthily prompting.--but the gods would not suffer--*

PTOLEMY: Yes--the gods would not suffer--not suffer *he stops; then, crestfallen* I forget what the gods would not suffer.

THEODOTUS: Let Pothinus, the King's guardian, speak for the King.

POTHINUS: *suppressing his impatience with difficulty.* The King wished to say that the gods would not suffer the impiety of his sister to go unpunished.

PTOLEMY: *hastily.* Yes: I remember the rest of it. *He resumes his monotone.* Therefore the gods sent a stranger, one Mark Antony, a Roman captain of horsemen, across the sands of the desert and he

set my father again upon the throne. And my father took Berenice my sister and struck her head off. And now that my father is dead yet another of his daughters, my sister Cleopatra, would snatch the kingdom from me and reign in my place. But the gods would not suffer *Pothinus coughs admonitorily--the gods-- the gods would not suffer--*

POTHINUS: *prompting.--will not maintain--*

PTOLEMY: Oh yes--will not maintain such iniquity, they will give her head to the axe even as her sister's. But with the help of the witch Ftatateeta she hath cast a spell on the Roman Julius Caesar to make him uphold her false pretence to rule in Egypt. Take notice then that I will not suffer--that I will not suffer-- *pettishly, to Pothinus--What is it that I will not suffer?*

POTHINUS: *suddenly exploding with all the force and emphasis of political passion.* The King will not suffer a foreigner to take from him the throne of our Egypt. *A shout of applause.* Tell the King, Achillas, how many soldiers and horsemen follow the Roman?

THEODOTUS: Let the King's general speak!

ACHILLAS: But two Roman legions, O King. Three thousand soldiers and scarce a thousand horsemen.

The court breaks into derisive laughter; and a great chattering begins, amid which Rufio, a Roman officer, appears in the loggia. He is a burly, black-bearded man of middle age, very blunt, prompt and rough, with small clear eyes, and plump nose and cheeks, which, however, like the rest of his flesh, are in ironhard condition.

RUFIO: *from the steps.* Peace, ho! *The laughter and chatter cease abruptly.* Caesar approaches.

THEODOTUS: *with much presence of mind.* The King permits the Roman commander to enter!

Caesar, plainly dressed, but, wearing an oak wreath to conceal his baldness, enters from, the loggia, attended by Britannus, his secretary, a Briton, about forty, tall, solemn, and already slightly bald, with a heavy, drooping, hazel-colored moustache trained so as to lose its ends in a pair of trim whiskers. He is carefully dressed in blue, with portfolio, inkhorn, and reed pen at his girdle. His serious air and sense of the importance of the business in hand is in marked contrast to the kindly interest of Caesar, who looks at the scene, which is new to him, with the frank curiosity of a child, and then turns to the King's chair: Britannus and Rufio posting themselves near the steps at the other side.

CAESAR: *looking at Pothinus and Ptolemy.* Which is the King? The man or the boy?

POTHINUS: I am Pothinus, the guardian of my lord the King.

Caesar patting Ptolemy kindly on the shoulder. So you are the King. Dull work at your age, eh? To Pothinus Your servant, Pothinus. He turns away unconcernedly and comes slowly along the middle of the hall, looking from side to side at the courtiers until he reaches Achillas. And this gentleman?

THEODOTUS: Achillas, the King's general.

CAESAR: *to Achillas, very friendly.* A general, eh? I am a general myself. But I began too old, too old. Health and many victories, Achillas!

ACHILLAS: As the gods will, Caesar.

CAESAR: *turning to Theodotus.* And you, sir, are--?

THEODOTUS: Theodotus, the King's tutor.

CAESAR: You teach men how to be kings, Theodotus. That is very clever of you. *Looking at the gods on the walls as he turns away from Theodotus and goes up again to Pothinus.* And this place?

POTHINUS: The council chamber of the chancellors of the King's treasury, Caesar.

CAESAR: Ah! That reminds me. I want some money.

POTHINUS: The King's treasury is poor, Caesar.

CAESAR: Yes: I notice that there is but one chair in it.

RUFIO: *shouting gruffly.* Bring a chair there, some of you, for Caesar.

PTOLEMY: *rising shyly to offer his chair.* Caesar--

CAESAR: *kindly.* No, no, my boy: that is your chair of state. Sit down.

He makes Ptolemy sit down again. Meanwhile Rufio, looking about him, sees in the nearest corner an image of the god Ra, represented as a seated man with the head of a hawk. Before the image is a bronze tripod, about as large as a three-legged stool, with a stick of incense burning on it. Rufio, with Roman resourcefulness and indifference to foreign superstitions, promptly seizes the tripod; shakes off the incense; blows away the ash; and dumps it down behind Caesar, nearly in the middle of the hall.

RUFIO: Sit on that, Caesar.

A shiver runs through the court, followed by a hissing whisper of Sacrilege!

CAESAR: *seating himself.* Now, Pothinus, to business. I am badly in want of money.

BRITANNUS: *disapproving of these informal expressions.* My master would say that there is a lawful debt due to Rome by Egypt, contracted by the King's deceased father to the Triumvirate; and that it is Caesar's duty to his country to require immediate payment.

CAESAR: *blandly.* Ah, I forgot. I have not made my companions known here. Pothinus: this is Britannus, my secretary. He is an islander from the western end of the world, a day's voyage from Gaul. *Britannus bows stiffly.* This gentleman is Rufio, my comrade in arms. *Rufio nods.* Pothinus: I want 1,600 talents.

The courtiers, appalled, murmur loudly, and Theodotus and Achillas appeal mutely to one another against so monstrous a demand.

POTHINUS: *aghast.* Forty million sesterces! Impossible. There is not so much money in the King's treasury.

CAESAR: *encouragingly.* ONLY sixteen hundred talents, Pothinus. Why count it in sesterces? A sestertius is only worth a loaf of bread.

POTHINUS: And a talent is worth a racehorse. I say it is impossible. We have been at strife here, because the King's sister Cleopatra falsely claims his throne. The King's taxes have not been collected for a whole year.

CAESAR: Yes they have, Pothinus. My officers have been collecting them all the morning. *Renewed whisper and sensation, not without some stifled laughter, among the courtiers.*

RUFIO: *bluntly.* You must pay, Pothinus. Why waste words? You are getting off cheaply enough.

POTHINUS: *bitterly.* Is it possible that Caesar, the conqueror of the world, has time to occupy himself with such a trifle as our taxes?

CAESAR: My friend: taxes are the chief business of a conqueror of the world.

POTHINUS: Then take warning, Caesar. This day, the treasures of the temples and the gold of the King's treasury will be sent to the mint to be melted down for our ransom in the sight of the people. They shall see us sitting under bare walls and drinking from wooden cups. And their wrath be on your head, Caesar, if you force us to this sacrilege!

CAESAR: Do not fear, Pothinus: the people know how well wine tastes in wooden cups. In return for your bounty, I will settle this dispute about the throne for you, if you will. What say you?

POTHINUS: If I say no, will that hinder you?

RUFIO: *defiantly.* No.

CAESAR: You say the matter has been at issue for a year, Pothinus. May I have ten minutes at it?

POTHINUS: You will do your pleasure, doubtless.

CAESAR: Good! But first, let us have Cleopatra here.

THEODOTUS: She is not in Alexandria: she is fled into Syria.

CAESAR: I think not. *To Rufio* Call Totateeta.

RUFIO: *calling.* Ho there, Teetatota.

Ftatateeta enters the loggia, and stands arrogantly at the top of the steps.

FTATATEETA: Who pronounces the name of Ftatateeta, the Queen's chief nurse?

CAESAR: Nobody can pronounce it, Tota, except yourself. Where is your mistress?

Cleopatra, who is hiding behind Ftafateeta, peeps out at them, laughing. Caesar rises.

CAESAR: Will the Queen favor us with her presence for a moment?

CLEOPATRA: *pushing Ftatateeta aside and standing haughtily on the brink of the steps.* Am I to behave like a Queen?

CAESAR: Yes.

Cleopatra immediately comes down to the chair of state; seizes Ptolemy and drags him out of his seat; then takes his place in the chair. Ftatateeta seats herself on the step of the loggia, and sits there, watching the scene with sybilline intensity.

PTOLEMY: *mortified, and struggling with his tears.* Caesar: this is how she treats me always. If I am a King why is she allowed to take everything from me?

CLEOPATRA: You are not to be King, you little cry-baby. You are to be eaten by the Romans.

CAESAR: *touched by Ptolemy's distress.* Come here, my boy, and stand by me.

Ptolemy goes over to Caesar, who, resuming his seat on the tripod, takes the boy's hand to encourage him. Cleopatra, furiously jealous, rises and glares at them.

CLEOPATRA: *with flaming cheeks.* Take your throne: I don't want it. *She flings away from the chair, and approaches Ptolemy, who shrinks from her.* Go this instant and sit down in your place.

CAESAR: Go, Ptolemy. Always take a throne when it is offered to you.

RUFIO: I hope you will have the good sense to follow your own advice when we return to Rome, Caesar.

Ptolemy slowly goes back to the throne, giving Cleopatra a wide berth, in evident fear of her hands. She takes his place beside Caesar.

CAESAR: Pothinus--

CLEOPATRA: *interrupting him.* Are you not going to speak to me?

CAESAR: Be quiet. Open your mouth again before I give you leave; and you shall be eaten.

CLEOPATRA: I am not afraid. A queen must not be afraid. Eat my husband there, if you like: he is afraid.

CAESAR: *starting.* Your husband! What do you mean?

CLEOPATRA: *pointing to Ptolemy.* That little thing.

The two Romans and the Briton stare at one another in amazement.

THEODOTUS: Caesar: you are a stranger here, and not conversant with our laws. The kings and queens of Egypt may not marry except with their own royal blood. Ptolemy and Cleopatra are born king and consort just as they are born brother and sister.

BRITANNUS: *shocked.* Caesar: this is not proper.

THEODOTUS: *outraged.* How!

CAESAR: *recovering his self-possession.* Pardon him. Theodotus: he is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature.

BRITANNUS: On the contrary, Caesar, it is these Egyptians who are barbarians; and you do wrong to encourage them. I say it is a scandal.

CAESAR: Scandal or not, my friend, it opens the gate of peace. *He rises and addresses Pothinus seriously.* Pothiuus: hear what I propose.

RUFIO: Hear Caesar there.

CAESAR: Ptolemy and Cleopatra shall reign jointly in Egypt.

ACHILLAS: What of the King's younger brother and Cleopatra's younger sister?

RUFIO: *explaining.* There is another little Ptolemy, Caesar: so they tell me.

CAESAR: Well, the little Ptolemy can marry the other sister; and we will make them both a present of Cyprus.

POTHINUS: *impatiently.* Cyprus is of no use to anybody.

CAESAR: No matter: you shall have it for the sake of peace.

BRITANNUS: *unconsciously anticipating a later statesman.* Peace with honor, Pothinus.

POTHINUS: *mutinously.* Caesar: be honest. The money you demand is the price of our freedom. Take it; and leave us to settle our own affairs.

THE BOLDER COURTIERS: *encouraged by Pothinus's tone and Caesar's quietness.* Yes, yes. Egypt for the Egyptians!

The conference now becomes an altercation, the Egyptians becoming more and more heated. Caesar remains unruffled; but Rufio grows fiercer and doggeder, and Britannus haughtily indignant.

RUFIO: *contemptuously.* Egypt for the Egyptians! Do you forget that there is a Roman army of occupation here, left by Aulus Gabinius when he set up your toy king for you?

ACHILLAS: *suddenly asserting himself.* And now under my command. I am the Roman general here, Caesar.

CAESAR: *tickled by the humor of the situation.* And also the Egyptian general, eh?

POTHINUS: *triumphantly.* That is so, Caesar.

CAESAR: *to Achillas.* So you can make war on the Egyptians in the name of Rome and on the Romans--on me, if necessary--in the name of Egypt?

ACHILLAS: That is so, Caesar.

CAESAR: And which side are you on at present, if I may presume to ask, general?

ACHILLAS: On the side of the right and of the gods.

CAESAR: Hm! How many men have you?

ACHILLAS: That will appear when I take the field.

RUFIO: *truculently.* Are your men Romans? If not, it matters not how many there are, provided you are no stronger than 500 to ten.

POTHINUS: It is useless to try to bluff us, Rufio. Caesar has been defeated before and may be defeated again. A few weeks ago Caesar was flying for his life before Pompey: a few months hence he may be flying for his life before Cato and Juba of Numidia, the African King.

ACHILLAS:*following up Pothinus's speech menacingly.* What can you do with 4,000 men?

THEODOTUS: *following up Achillas's speech with a raucous squeak.* And without money? Away with you.

ALL THE COURTIERS:*shouting fiercely and crowding towards Caesar.* Away with you. Egypt for the Egyptians! Begone.

Rufio bites his beard, too angry to speak. Caesar sits on comfortably as if he were at breakfast, and the cat were clamoring for a piece of Finnan-haddie.

CLEOPATRA: Why do you let them talk to you like that Caesar? Are you afraid?

CAESAR: Why, my dear, what they say is quite true.

CLEOPATRA: But if you go away, I shall not be Queen.

CAESAR: I shall not go away until you are Queen.

POTHINUS: Achillas: if you are not a fool, you will take that girl whilst she is under your hand.

RUFIO: *daring them.* Why not take Caesar as well, Achillas?

POTHINUS: *retorting the defiance with interest.* Well said, Rufio. Why not?

RUFIO: Try, Achillas. *Calling* Guard there.

The loggia immediately fills with Caesar's soldiers, who stand, sword in hand, at the top of the steps, waiting the word to charge from their centurion, who carries a cudgel. For a moment the Egyptians face them proudly: then they retire sullenly to their former places.

BRITANNUS: You are Caesar's prisoners, all of you.

CAESAR: *benevolently.* Oh no, no, no. By no means. Caesar's guests, gentlemen.

CLEOPATRA: Won't you cut their heads off?

CAESAR: What! Cut off your brother's head?

CLEOPATRA: Why not? He would cut off mine, if he got the chance. Wouldn't you, Ptolemy?

PTOLEMY: *pale and obstinate.* I would. I will, too, when I grow up.

Cleopatra is rent by a struggle between her newly-acquired dignity as a queen, and a strong impulse to put out her tongue at him. She takes no part in the scene which follows, but watches it with curiosity and wonder, fidgeting with the restlessness of a child, and sitting down on Caesar's tripod when he rises.

POTHINUS: Caesar: if you attempt to detain us--

RUFIO: He will succeed, Egyptian: make up your mind to that. We hold the palace, the beach, and the eastern harbor. The road to Rome is open; and you shall travel it if Caesar chooses.

CAESAR: *courteously.* I could do no less, Pothinus, to secure the retreat of my own soldiers. I am accountable for every life among them. But you are free to go. So are all here, and in the palace.

RUFIO: *aghast at this clemency.* What! Renegades and all?

CAESAR: *softening the expression.* Roman army of occupation and all, Rufio.

POTHINUS: *desperately.* Then I make a last appeal to Caesar's justice. I shall call a witness to prove that but for us, the Roman army of occupation, led by the greatest soldier in the world, would now have Caesar at its mercy. *Calling through the loggia* Ho, there, Lucius Septimius *Caesar starts, deeply moved:* if my voice can reach you, come forth and testify before Caesar.

CAESAR: *shrinking.* No, no.

THEODOTUS: Yes, I say. Let the military tribune bear witness.

Lucius Septimius, a clean shaven, trim athlete of about 40, with symmetrical features, resolute mouth, and handsome, thin Roman nose, in the dress of a Roman officer, comes in through the loggia and confronts Caesar, who hides his face with his robe for a moment; then, mastering himself, drops it, and confronts the tribune with dignity.

POTHINUS: Bear witness, Lucius Septimius. Caesar came hither in pursuit of his foe. Did we shelter his foe?

LUCIUS: As Pompey's foot touched the Egyptian shore, his head fell by the stroke of my sword.

THEODOTUS: *with viperish relish.* Under the eyes of his wife and child! Remember that, Caesar! They saw it from the ship he had just left. We have given you a full and sweet measure of vengeance.

CAESAR: *with horror.* Vengeance!

POTHINUS: Our first gift to you, as your galley came into the roadstead, was the head of your rival for the empire of the world. Bear witness, Lucius Septimius: is it not so?

LUCIUS: It is so. With this hand, that slew Pompey, I placed his head at the feet of Caesar.

CAESAR: Murderer! So would you have slain Caesar, had Pompey been victorious at Pharsalia.

LUCIUS: Woe to the vanquished, Caesar! When I served Pompey, I slew as good men as he, only because he conquered them. His turn came at last.

THEODOTUS: *flatteringly.* The deed was not yours, Caesar, but ours--nay, mine; for it was done by my counsel. Thanks to us, you keep your reputation for clemency, and have your vengeance too.

CAESAR: Vengeance! Vengeance!! Oh, if I could stoop to vengeance, what would I not exact from you as the price of this murdered man's blood. *They shrink back, appalled and disconcerted.* Was he not my son-in-law, my ancient friend, for 20 years the master of great Rome, for 30 years the compeller of victory? Did not I, as a Roman, share his glory? Was the Fate that forced us to fight for the mastery of the world, of our making? Am I Julius Caesar, or am I a wolf, that you fling to me the grey head of the old soldier, the laurelled conqueror, the mighty Roman, treacherously struck down by this callous ruffian, and then claim my gratitude for it! *To Lucius Septimius* Begone: you fill me with horror.

LUCIUS: *cold and undaunted.* Pshaw! You have seen severed heads before, Caesar, and severed right hands too, I think; some thousands of them, in Gaul, after you vanquished Vercingetorix. Did you spare him, with all your clemency? Was that vengeance?

CAESAR: No, by the gods! Would that it had been! Vengeance at least is human. No, I say: those severed right hands, and the brave Vercingetorix basely strangled in a vault beneath the Capitol, were *with shuddering satire* a wise severity, a necessary protection to the commonwealth, a duty of statesmanship--follies and fictions ten times bloodier than honest vengeance! What a fool was I then! To think that men's lives should be at the mercy of such fools! *Humbly* Lucius Septimius, pardon me: why should the slayer of Vercingetorix rebuke the slayer of Pompey? You are free to go with the rest. Or stay if you will: I will find a place for you in my service.

LUCIUS: The odds are against you, Caesar. I go. *He turns to go out through the loggia.*

RUFIO: *full of wrath at seeing his prey escaping.* That means that he is a Republican.

LUCIUS: *turning defiantly on the loggia steps.* And what are you?

RUFIO: A Caesarian, like all Caesar's soldiers.

CAESAR: *courteously.* Lucius: believe me, Caesar is no Caesarian. Were Rome a true republic, then were Caesar the first of Republicans. But you have made your choice. Farewell.

LUCIUS: Farewell. Come, Achillas, whilst there is yet time.

Caesar, seeing that Rufio's temper threatens to get the worse of him, puts his hand on his shoulder and brings him down the hall out of harm's way, Britannus accompanying them and posting himself on Caesar's right hand. This movement brings the three in a little group to the place occupied by Achillas, who moves haughtily away and joins Theodotus on the other side. Lucius Septimius goes out through the soldiers in the loggia. Pothinus, Theodotus and Achillas follow him with the courtiers, very mistrustful of the soldiers, who close up in their rear and go out after them, keeping them moving without much ceremony. The King is left in his chair, piteous, obstinate, with twitching face and fingers. During these movements Rufio maintains an energetic grumbling, as follows:--

RUFIO: *as Lucius departs.* Do you suppose he would let us go if he had our heads in his hands?

CAESAR: I have no right to suppose that his ways are any baser than mine.

RUFIO: Psha!

CAESAR: Rufio: if I take Lucius Septimius for my model, and become exactly like him, ceasing to be Caesar, will you serve me still?

BRITANNUS: Caesar: this is not good sense. Your duty to Rome demands that her enemies should be prevented from doing further mischief. *Caesar, whose delight in the moral eye-to-business of his British secretary is inexhaustible, smiles intelligently.*

RUFIO: It is no use talking to him, Britannus: you may save your breath to cool your porridge. But mark this, Caesar. Clemency is very well for you; but what is it for your soldiers, who have to fight tomorrow the men you spared yesterday? You may give what orders you please; but I tell you that your next victory will be a massacre, thanks to your clemency. I, for one, will take no prisoners. I will kill my enemies in the field; and then you can preach as much clemency as you please: I shall never have to fight them again. And now, with your leave, I will see these gentry off the premises. *He turns to go.*

CAESAR: *turning also and seeing Ptolemy.* What! Have they left the boy alone! Oh shame, shame!

RUFIO: *taking Ptolemy's hand and making him rise.* Come, your majesty!

PTOLEMY: *to Caesar, drawing away his hand from Rufio.* Is he turning me out of my palace?

RUFIO: *grimly.* You are welcome to stay if you wish.

CAESAR: *kindly.* Go, my boy. I will not harm you; but you will be safer away, among your friends. Here you are in the lion's mouth.

PTOLEMY: *turning to go.* It is not the lion I fear, but *looking at Rufio* the jackal. *He goes out through the loggia.*

CAESAR: *laughing approvingly.* Brave boy!

CLEOPATRA: *jealous of Caesar's approbation, calling after Ptolemy.* Little silly. You think that very clever.

CAESAR: Britannus: Attend the King. Give him in charge to that Pothinus fellow. *Britannus goes out after Ptolemy.*

RUFIO: *pointing to Cleopatra.* And this piece of goods? What is to be done with HER? However, I suppose I may leave that to you. *He goes out through the loggia.*

CLEOPATRA: *flushing suddenly and turning on Caesar.* Did you mean me to go with the rest?

CAESAR: *a little preoccupied, goes with a sigh to Ptolemy's chair, whilst she waits for his answer with red cheeks and clenched fists.* You are free to do just as you please, Cleopatra.

CLEOPATRA: Then you do not care whether I stay or not?

CAESAR: *smiling.* Of course I had rather you stayed.

CLEOPATRA: Much, MUCH rather?

CAESAR: *nodding.* Much, much rather.

CLEOPATRA: Then I consent to stay, because I am asked. But I do not want to, mind.

CAESAR: That is quite understood. *Calling* Totateeta.

Ftatateeta, still seated, turns her eyes on him with a sinister expression, but does not move.

CLEOPATRA: *with a splutter of laughter.* Her name is not Totateeta: it is Ftatateeta. *Calling* Ftatateeta. *Ftatateeta instantly rises and comes to Cleopatra.*

CAESAR: *stumbling over the name.* Ftatafeeta will forgive the erring tongue of a Roman. Tota: the Queen will hold her state here in Alexandria. Engage women to attend upon her; and do all that is needful.

FTATATEETA: Am I then the mistress of the Queen's household?

CLEOPATRA: *sharply.* No: I am the mistress of the Queen's household. Go and do as you are told, or I will have you thrown into the Nile this very afternoon, to poison the poor crocodiles.

CAESAR: *shocked.* Oh no, no.

CLEOPATRA: Oh yes, yes. You are very sentimental, Caesar; but you are clever; and if you do as I tell you, you will soon learn to govern.

Caesar, quite dumbfounded by this impertinence, turns in his chair and stares at her.

Ftatateeta, smiling grimly, and showing a splendid set of teeth, goes, leaving them alone together.

CAESAR: Cleopatra: I really think I must eat you, after all.

CLEOPATRA: *kneeling beside him and looking at him with eager interest, half real, half affected to show how intelligent she is.* You must not talk to me now as if I were a child.

CAESAR: You have been growing up since the Sphinx introduced us the other night; and you think you know more than I do already.

CLEOPATRA: *taken down, and anxious to justify herself.* No: that would be very silly of me: of course I know that. But, *suddenly* are you angry with me?

CAESAR: No.

CLEOPATRA: *only half believing him.* Then why are you so thoughtful?

CAESAR: *rising.* I have work to do, Cleopatra.

CLEOPATRA: *drawing back.* Work! *Offended* You are tired of talking to me; and that is your excuse to get away from me.

CAESAR: *sitting down again to appease her.* Well, well: another minute. But then--work!

CLEOPATRA: Work! What nonsense! You must remember that you are a King now: I have made you

one. Kings don't work.

CAESAR: Oh! Who told you that, little kitten? Eh?

CLEOPATRA: My father was King of Egypt; and he never worked. But he was a great King, and cut off my sister's head because she rebelled against him and took the throne from him.

CAESAR: Well; and how did he get his throne back again?

CLEOPATRA: *eagerly, her eyes lighting up.* I will tell you. A beautiful young man, with strong round arms, came over the desert with many horsemen, and slew my sister's husband and gave my father back his throne. *Wistfully* I was only twelve then. Oh, I wish he would come again, now that I am a Queen. I would make him my husband.

CAESAR: It might be managed, perhaps; for it was I who sent that beautiful young man to help your father.

CLEOPATRA: *enraptured.* You know him!

CAESAR: *nodding.* I do.

CLEOPATRA: Has he come with you? *Caesar shakes his head: she is cruelly disappointed.* Oh, I wish he had, I wish he had. If only I were a little older; so that he might not think me a mere kitten, as you do! But perhaps that is because YOU are old. He is many, MANY years younger than you, is he not?

CAESAR: *as if swallowing a pill.* He is somewhat younger.

CLEOPATRA: Would he be my husband, do you think, if I asked him?

CAESAR: Very likely.

CLEOPATRA: But I should not like to ask him. Could you not persuade him to ask me--without knowing that I wanted him to?

CAESAR: *touched by her innocence of the beautiful young man's character.* My poor child!

CLEOPATRA: Why do you say that as if you were sorry for me? Does he love anyone else?

CAESAR: I am afraid so.

CLEOPATRA: *tearfully.* Then I shall not be his first love.

CAESAR: Not quite the first. He is greatly admired by women.

CLEOPATRA: I wish I could be the first. But if he loves me, I will make him kill all the rest. Tell me: is he still beautiful? Do his strong round arms shine in the sun like marble?

CAESAR: He is in excellent condition--considering how much he eats and drinks.

CLEOPATRA: Oh, you must not say common, earthly things about him; for I love him. He is a god.

CAESAR: He is a great captain of horsemen, and swifter of foot than any other Roman.

CLEOPATRA: What is his real name?

CAESAR: *puzzled.* His REAL name?

CLEOPATRA: Yes. I always call him Horus, because Horus is the most beautiful of our gods. But I want to know his real name.

CAESAR: His name is Mark Antony.

CLEOPATRA: *musically.* Mark Antony, Mark Antony, Mark Antony! What a beautiful name! *She throws her arms round Caesar's neck.* Oh, how I love you for sending him to help my father! Did you love

my father very much?

CAESAR: No, my child; but your father, as you say, never worked. I always work. So when he lost his crown he had to promise me 16,000 talents to get it back for him.

CLEOPATRA: Did he ever pay you?

CAESAR: Not in full.

CLEOPATRA: He was quite right: it was too dear. The whole world is not worth 16,000 talents.

CAESAR: That is perhaps true, Cleopatra. Those Egyptians who work paid as much of it as he could drag from them. The rest is still due. But as I most likely shall not get it, I must go back to my work. So you must run away for a little and send my secretary to me.

CLEOPATRA: *coaxing.* No: I want to stay and hear you talk about Mark Antony.

CAESAR: But if I do not get to work, Pothinus and the rest of them will cut us off from the harbor; and then the way from Rome will be blocked.

CLEOPATRA: No matter: I don't want you to go back to Rome.

CAESAR: But you want Mark Antony to come from it.

CLEOPATRA: *springing up.* Oh yes, yes, yes: I forgot. Go quickly and work, Caesar; and keep the way over the sea open for my Mark Antony. *She runs out through the loggia, kissing her hand to Mark Antony across the sea.*

CAESAR: *going briskly up the middle of the hall to the loggia steps.* Ho, Britannus. *He is startled by the entry of a wounded Roman soldier, who confronts him from the upper step.* What now?

SOLDIER: *pointing to his bandaged head.* This, Caesar; and two of my comrades killed in the market place.

CAESAR: *quiet but attending.* Ay. Why?

SOLDIER: There is an army come to Alexandria, calling itself the Roman army.

CAESAR: The Roman army of occupation. Ay?

SOLDIER: Commanded by one Achillas.

CAESAR: Well?

SOLDIER: The citizens rose against us when the army entered the gates. I was with two others in the market place when the news came. They set upon us. I cut my way out; and here I am.

CAESAR: Good. I am glad to see you alive. *Rufio enters the loggia hastily, passing behind the soldier to look out through one of the arches at the quay beneath.* Rufio, we are besieged.

RUFIO: What! Already?

CAESAR: Now or tomorrow: what does it matter? We SHALL be besieged.

Britannus runs in.

BRITANNUS: Caesar--

CAESAR: *anticipating him.* Yes: I know. *Rufio and Britannus come down the hall from the loggia at opposite sides, past Caesar, who waits for a moment near the step to say to the soldier.* Comrade: give the word to turn out on the beach and stand by the boats. Get your wound attended to. Go. *The soldier hurries out. Caesar comes down the hall between Rufio and Britannus* Rufio: we have some ships in the west harbor. Burn them.

RUFIO: *staring.* Burn them!!

CAESAR: Take every boat we have in the east harbor, and seize the Pharos--that island with the lighthouse. Leave half our men behind to hold the beach and the quay outside this palace: that is the way home.

RUFIO: *disapproving strongly.* Are we to give up the city?

CAESAR: We have not got it, Rufio. This palace we have; and--what is that building next door?

RUFIO: The theatre.

CAESAR: We will have that too: it commands the strand, for the rest, Egypt for the Egyptians!

RUFIO: Well, you know best, I suppose. Is that all?

CAESAR: That is all. Are those ships burnt yet?

RUFIO: Be easy: I shall waste no more time. *He runs out.*

BRITANNUS: Caesar: Pothinus demands speech of you. It's my opinion he needs a lesson. His manner is most insolent.

CAESAR: Where is he?

BRITANNUS: He waits without.

CAESAR: Ho there! Admit Pothinus.

Pothinus appears in the loggia, and comes down the hall very haughtily to Caesar's left hand.

CAESAR: Well, Pothinus?

POTHINUS: I have brought you our ultimatum, Caesar.

CAESAR: Ultimatum! The door was open: you should have gone out through it before you declared war. You are my prisoner now. *He goes to the chair and loosens his toga.*

POTHINUS: *scornfully.* I YOUR prisoner! Do you know that you are in Alexandria, and that King Ptolemy, with an army outnumbering your little troop a hundred to one, is in possession of Alexandria?

CAESAR: *unconcernedly taking off his toga and throwing it on the chair.* Well, my friend, get out if you can. And tell your friends not to kill any more Romans in the market place. Otherwise my soldiers, who do not share my celebrated clemency, will probably kill you. Britannus: Pass the word to the guard; and fetch my armor. *Britannus runs out. Rufio returns.* Well?

RUFIO: *pointing from the loggia to a cloud of smoke drifting over the harbor.* See there! *Pothinus runs eagerly up the steps to look out.*

CAESAR: What, ablaze already! Impossible!

RUFIO: Yes, five good ships, and a barge laden with oil grappled to each. But it is not my doing: the Egyptians have saved me the trouble. They have captured the west harbor.

CAESAR: *anxiously.* And the east harbor? The lighthouse, Rufio?

RUFIO: *with a sudden splutter of raging ill usage, coming down to Caesar and scolding him.* Can I embark a legion in five minutes? The first cohort is already on the beach. We can do no more. If you want faster work, come and do it yourself?

CAESAR: *soothing him.* Good, good. Patience, Rufio, patience.

RUFIO: Patience! Who is impatient here, you or I? Would I be here, if I could not oversee them from that balcony?

CAESAR: Forgive me, Rufio; and *anxiously* hurry them as much as--

He is interrupted by an outcry as of an old man in the extremity of misfortune. It draws near rapidly; and Theodotus rushes in, tearing his hair, and squeaking the most lamentable exclamations. Rufio steps back to stare at him, amazed at his frantic condition. Pothinus turns to listen.

THEODOTUS: *on the steps, with uplifted arms.* Horror unspeakable! Woe, alas! Help!

RUFIO: What now?

CAESAR: *frowning.* Who is slain?

THEODOTUS: Slain! Oh, worse than the death of ten thousand men! Loss irreparable to mankind!

RUFIO: What has happened, man?

THEODOTUS: *rushing down the hall between them.* The fire has spread from your ships. The first of the seven wonders of the world perishes. The library of Alexandria is in flames.

RUFIO: Psha! *Quite relieved, he goes up to the loggia and watches the preparations of the troops on the beach.*

CAESAR: Is that all?

THEODOTUS: *unable to believe his senses.* All! Caesar: will you go down to posterity as a barbarous soldier too ignorant to know the value of books?

CAESAR: Theodotus: I am an author myself; and I tell you it is better that the Egyptians should live their lives than dream them away with the help of books.

THEODOTUS: *kneeling, with genuine literary emotion: the passion of the pedant.* Caesar: once in ten generations of men, the world gains an immortal book.

CAESAR: *inflexible.* If it did not flatter mankind, the common executioner would burn it.

THEODOTUS: Without history, death would lay you beside your meanest soldier.

CAESAR: Death will do that in any case. I ask no better grave.

THEODOTUS: What is burning there is the memory of mankind.

CAESAR: A shameful memory. Let it burn.

THEODOTUS: *wildly.* Will you destroy the past?

CAESAR: Ay, and build the future with its ruins. *Theodotus, in despair, strikes himself on the temples with his fists.* But harken, Theodotus, teacher of kings: you who valued Pompey's head no more than a shepherd values an onion, and who now kneel to me, with tears in your old eyes, to plead for a few sheepskins scrawled with errors. I cannot spare you a man or a bucket of water just now; but you shall pass freely out of the palace. Now, away with you to Achillas; and borrow his legions to put out the fire. *He hurries him to the steps.*

POTHINUS: *significantly.* You understand, Theodotus: I remain a prisoner.

THEODOTUS: A prisoner!

CAESAR: Will you stay to talk whilst the memory of mankind is burning? *Calling through the loggia* Ho there! Pass Theodotus out. *To Theodotus* Away with you.

THEODOTUS: *to Pothinus.* I must go to save the library. *He hurries out.*

CAESAR: Follow him to the gate, Pothinus. Bid him urge your people to kill no more of my soldiers, for your sake.

POTHINUS: My life will cost you dear if you take it, Caesar. *He goes out after Theodotus.*

Rufio, absorbed in watching the embarkation, does not notice the departure of the two Egyptians.

RUFIO: *shouting from the loggia to the beach.* All ready, there?

CENTURION: *from below.* All ready. We wait for Caesar.

CAESAR: Tell them Caesar is coming--the rogues! *Calling* Britannicus. *This magniloquent version of his secretary's name is one of Caesar's jokes. In later years it would have meant, quite seriously and officially, Conqueror of Britain.*

RUFIO: *calling down.* Push off, all except the longboat. Stand by it to embark, Caesar's guard there. *He leaves the balcony and comes down into the hall.* Where are those Egyptians? Is this more clemency? Have you let them go?

CAESAR: *chuckling.* I have let Theodotus go to save the library. We must respect literature, Rufio.

RUFIO: *raging.* Folly on folly's head! I believe if you could bring back all the dead of Spain, Gaul and Thessaly to life, you would do it that we might have the trouble of fighting them over again.

CAESAR: Might not the gods destroy the world if their only thought were to be at peace next year? *Rufio, out of all patience, turns away in anger. Caesar suddenly grips his sleeve, and adds slyly in his ear.* Besides, my friend: every Egyptian we imprison means imprisoning two Roman soldiers to guard him. Eh?

RUFIO: Agh! I might have known there was some fox's trick behind your fine talking. *He gets away from Caesar with an ill-humored shrug, and goes to the balcony for another look at the preparations; finally goes out.*

CAESAR: Is Britannus asleep? I sent him for my armor an hour ago. *Calling* Britannicus, thou British islander. Britannicus!

Cleopatra, runs in through the loggia with Caesar's helmet and sword, snatched from Britannus, who follows her with a cuirass and greaves. They come down to Caesar, she to his left hand, Britannus to his right.

CLEOPATRA: I am going to dress you, Caesar. Sit down. *He obeys.* These Roman helmets are so becoming! *She takes off his wreath.* Oh! *She bursts out laughing at him.*

CAESAR: What are you laughing at?

CLEOPATRA: You're bald *beginning with a big B, and ending with a splutter.*

CAESAR: *almost annoyed.* Cleopatra! *He rises, for the convenience of Britannus, who puts the cuirass on him.*

CLEOPATRA: So that is why you wear the wreath--to hide it.

BRITANNUS: Peace, Egyptian: they are the bays of the conqueror. *He buckles the cuirass.*

CLEOPATRA: Peace, thou: islander! *To Caesar* You should rub your head with strong spirits of sugar, Caesar. That will make it grow.

CAESAR: *with a wry face.* Cleopatra: do you like to be reminded that you are very young?

CLEOPATRA: *pouting.* No.

CAESAR: *sitting down again, and setting out his leg for Britannus, who kneels to put on his greaves.* Neither do I like to be reminded that I am--middle aged. Let me give you ten of my superfluous years. That will make you 26 and leave me only--no matter. Is it a bargain?

CLEOPATRA: Agreed. 26, mind. *She puts the helmet on him.* Oh! How nice! You look only about 50 in it!

BRITANNUS: *Looking up severely at Cleopatra.* You must not speak in this manner to Caesar.

CLEOPATRA: Is it true that when Caesar caught you on that island, you were painted all over blue?

BRITANNUS: Blue is the color worn by all Britons of good standing. In war we stain our bodies blue; so that though our enemies may strip us of our clothes and our lives, they cannot strip us of our respectability. *He rises.*

CLEOPATRA: *with Caesar's sword.* Let me hang this on. Now you look splendid. Have they made any statues of you in Rome?

CAESAR: Yes, many statues.

CLEOPATRA: You must send for one and give it to me.

RUFIO: *coming back into the loggia, more impatient than ever.* Now Caesar: have you done talking? The moment your foot is aboard there will be no holding our men back: the boats will race one another for the lighthouse.

CAESAR: *drawing his sword and trying the edge.* Is this well set to-day, Britannicus? At Pharsalia it was as blunt as a barrel-hoop.

BRITANNUS: It will split one of the Egyptian's hairs to-day, Caesar. I have set it myself.

CLEOPATRA: *suddenly throwing her arms in terror round Caesar.* Oh, you are not really going into battle to be killed?

CAESAR: No, Cleopatra. No man goes to battle to be killed.

CLEOPATRA: But they DO get killed. My sister's husband was killed in battle. You must not go. Let HIM go *pointing to Rufio. They all laugh at her.* Oh please, PLEASE don't go. What will happen to ME if you never come back?

CAESAR: *gravely.* Are you afraid?

CLEOPATRA: *shrinking.* No.

CAESAR: *with quiet authority.* Go to the balcony; and you shall see us take the Pharos. You must learn to look on battles. Go. *She goes, downcast, and looks out from the balcony.* That is well. Now, Rufio. March.

CLEOPATRA: *suddenly clapping her hands.* Oh, you will not be able to go!

CAESAR: Why? What now?

CLEOPATRA: They are drying up the harbor with buckets--a multitude of soldiers--over there *pointing out across the sea to her left--they are dipping up the water.*

RUFIO: *hastening to look.* It is true. The Egyptian army! Crawling over the edge of the west harbor like locusts. *With sudden anger he strides down to Caesar.* This is your accursed clemency, Caesar. Theodotus has brought them.

CAESAR: *delighted at his own cleverness.* I meant him to, Rufio. They have come to put out the fire. The library will keep them busy whilst we seize the lighthouse. Eh? *He rushes out buoyantly through the loggia, followed by Britannus.*

RUFIO: *disgustedly.* More foxing! Agh! *He rushes off. A shout from the soldiers announces the appearance of Caesar below.*

CENTURION: *below.* All aboard. Give way there. *Another shout.*

CLEOPATRA: *waving her scarf through the loggia arch.* Goodbye, goodbye, dear Caesar. Come back safe. Goodbye!

Le note di scena sono tra parentesi *quadre* o *(tonde).*

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