

A **QUEEN**

AND

THREE SLAVES

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GOODMAN**

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A Queen and Three Slaves

Historical note: In 55 BC, after having conquered Gaul, Julius Caesar invaded Britain. His military expedition was not successful. He tried again in 54 BC, but had to pull back without victory.

He did bring back to Rome a number of British slaves which he might very well have given to Cleopatra.

After his conquest of Egypt, Caesar invited Cleopatra to Rome and she was living in one of his villas there in 44 BC.

Cast of Characters

- CLEOPATRA:** The temporarily out-of-work Queen of Egypt is frustrated, proud and haughty beyond belief. The more bossy and terrifying she is as a mistress, the more the comedy will work. Although the Ptolemy line was Macedonian (Greek), successive rulers prior to Cleopatra may have had African wives of mistresses and Cleopatra may very well have had African blood. She can be played by a black or white actress.
- BRIGHID:** She is a bold, sassy slave with a rough-diamond intelligence. She is not afraid to try anything to get out of her present situation.
- JENNIFER:** She is somewhat timid and afraid to take chances. She resents being a slave and doesn't want to be even more worse off than she is.
- GARETH:** He is a big hearted, somewhat foolhardy, boastful young slave. He is sure that he is destined to rescue his sisters and get them back to Britain.
- CAESAR:** He is the type of bully who likes to roll over weaker people and weaker nations. He takes what he wants because he feels he deserves it.
- MARK ANTONY:** He is a hopeless romantic who gets carried away by his own speeches. He cannot resist falling in love with beautiful women especially when charmed beyond reason.
- FULVIA:** Mark Antony's wife. She is wildly jealous of the other women in Mark Anthony's life. She aims to give him a taste of her anger that he will never forget.
- CALPURNIA:** Caesar's wife. She is convinced that her nightmares are completely truthful and that she must warn others of the dangers she has imagined. She is absolutely hysterical about this.

ACT I

(Scene: A large chamber in a Roman villa on the right bank of the Tiber in the year 44 BC. There are several chairs and a large couch in the centre of the room. Against the back wall a door leads to a small room which is a closet for some of CLEOPATRA'S clothing and wigs. A door on the left leads off to the entrance hall and other rooms in the village. A door on the right leads to CLEOPATRA'S other private chambers.)

As lights come up, CLEOPATRA, in her mid-twenties, is discovered sitting impatiently before her dressing table in a plain white tunic. She picks up a bell and rings it urgently as she looks toward the door. Nothing happens. She sighs in exasperation and removes a black wig with a fringe [in the style of an Egyptian goddess] from a wig stand on the table. She puts the wig on expectantly as if it will transform her into a supernatural being.

However, the wig does not fit. The fringe is too long and hangs over her eyes. One side of the wig has been curled into long ringlets, but the other side hangs down perfectly straight. CLEOPATRA picks up a bronze hand mirror, looks at herself and reacts with fury. She tears the wig from her head and throws it down on the table. Crossing angrily to a gong on a stand beside the door to her chambers, she grabs the clapper and bangs the gong repeatedly. Two saucy young women in white tunics come rushing in from the door left. They are rough and uneducated looking.)

CLEOPATRA

You there!

(The two women stop running and screech to a halt.)

THE TWO WOMEN

(In unison)

Yes.

CLEOPATRA

Who are you?

BRIGHID

I'm Brighid.

JENNIFER

Jennifer.

BRIGHID

Your new slaves.

JENNIFER

Given to you by Caesar.

CLEOPATRA

Why are you late?

BRIGHID

We were filling your bath with milk.

JENNIFER

It took flippin' ages to milk the donkeys!

BRIGHID

And then we had to haul it up from the bleedin' stables.

CLEOPATRA

There are two things I cannot stand.

BRIGHID

Yes.

CLEOPATRA

Lateness. (*The two stare at her expectantly.*) And excuses. Do you know what happened to the slaves that were here yesterday?

BRIGHID

Haven't the foggiest.

CLEOPATRA

They are being sold. And do you know who will buy them?

JENNIFER

The mind boggles...

CLEOPATRA

A trader. Who will then sell them to work in the mines. Or to carry heavy loads day after day. Until they drop dead from exhaustion!

BRIGHID

Steady! That's a bit over the top, innit?

CLEOPATRA

They are lucky. Because the next slaves that I dispose of...

JENNIFER

Will be very glad to go!

CLEOPATRA

Will be thrown to wild animals. As amusement for these barbarian Romans!

BRIGHID

Bloomin' harsh way to treat the help, Missus.

CLEOPATRA

(Indignantly)

Why do you call me "missus"? Do you know who I am?

BRIGHID

Yes, sir.

CLEOPATRA

How dare you call me "sir"!

BRIGHID

Sorry, uh...

CLEOPATRA

(She rises proudly and assumes a regal stance for each of her titles.)

Be quiet! Learn my name correctly: Cleopatra, Pharaoh and Ptolemy. Wearer of the Red Cobra Crown of Lower Egypt and the Vulture. Crown of Upper Egypt. Lady of Spells and Lady of Dread. Descendant of the Sun King Amon-Ra and Incarnation of the Goddess Isis. Queen of Egypt! Do you understand?

BRIGHID

Blimey, Charlie! We have to say all that?

JENNIFER

Every time we opens our gobs?

CLEOPATRA

Remember who I am or you will learn it by my anger.

JENNIFER

Right you are!

BRIGHID

Queen Cleopatra!

CLEOPATRA

Don't say that, you stupid girl! The Romans are allergic to the word "queen". They cling like barnacles to the hull of this idiotic government they call a republic. *(She pauses as she thinks.)* For the time being, you can call me... "ma'am". *(With an ironic laugh)* Yes. "Ma'am." *(Disparagingly)* How republican!

BRIGHID

It's bloomin' lucky we can call you anything at all!

(CLEOPATRA stares at her angrily.)

JENNIFER and BRIGHID

(In unison) (As JENNIFER pokes BRIGHID in the ribs)

Ma'am!

CLEOPATRA

Stupid girls. Where do you come from?

BRIGHID

From Blighty, ma'am.

CLEOPATRA

Blighty? Where is that?

BRIGHID

North, ma'am.

JENNIFER

Ever so far north.

CLEOPATRA

Then it is cold. Or is it hot like this noisy slum called Rome?

BRIGHID

On the cold side, ma'am. Brass monkeys wevver...

JENNIFER

With lots of pea-soupers.

BRIGHID

And drizzle, drizzle, drizzle. People who ain't used to it don't know what to make of it.

JENNIFER

That's why Caesar did a bunk. Deadly for the Barnet, all that rain...

BRIGHID

Tried to finish off Britain twice, he did, but finally had to jack it in. Couldn't hack the dodgy weather.

CLEOPATRA

Lucky for you.

JENNIFER

Not us, ma'am. We was taken hostage. And brought here to Rome.

BRIGHID

With our bruvver, Gareth.

CLEOPATRA

And where is he?

JENNIFER

Haven't seen our dear heart since.

BRIGHID

But we hear he's a gladiator.

CLEOPATRA

Huh! He must at least be strong!

BRIGHID

(Boastfully)

He's like a bull. And dead handsome, too. With a right friendly way about him.

JENNIFER

Except for his temper.

CLEOPATRA

(Uninterested)

You don't say. In this country of yours, do you have houses better than in this dreadful place?

BRIGHID

Uh... Well, not exactly. The ones we have are not so grand.

JENNIFER

Smaller they are, with straw roofs.

BRIGHID

Makes you feel like you're living upside-down in a basket.

JENNIFER

(Cheerfully)

Everything is ever so quaint in Blighty!

CLEOPATRA

The whole place sounds like a backward barbarian hole! Are these people even civilised?

JENNIFER

Oh, yes! It's mind your manners this and mind you manners that.

BRIGHID

Drummed into us from cradle to grave, they are.

JENNIFER

The Druids – they're our priests – make sure of that. If you don't mind your manners, you might as well jack it in. They have you strung up and cut your head off.

CLEOPATRA

What else do these Druids do?

BRIGHID

They tell fortunes by looking at dead people's guts.

CLEOPATRA

(Suddenly becoming very interested.)

That sounds rather intriguing. Tell me more.

BRIGHID

(Very solemnly)

Well, let's see... When they do it, they wave around the branch of a blinkin' oak tree.

JENNIFER

With mistletoe growing on it.

BRIGHID

Dressed all in white robes, they are. And after that, two fat bulls come a cropper.

CLEOPATRA

(Thoroughly intrigued)

And why do they do all this?

JENNIFER

(Blithely)

There's not a cat in hell's chance those priests would tell us.

BRIGHID

Blood-curdling good show it is, though!

CLEOPATRA

(She wheels and turns on them.)

What I want is a love potion! From some dark, dark region of black magic. Do you know one? One that will not fail.

BRIGHID

I'll have to think about that, ma'am.

CLEOPATRA

Good. Don't let me down. I will expect you to tell me something within the hour.

(She sits down at the dressing table.)

As you are new, I will explain your duties. Once. So make sure you remember everything.

BRIGHID and JENNIFER

(Together)

Very good, ma'am.

CLEOPATRA

Your principal duty is to feed my two cats. *(With an ironic smile.)* I call them Romulus and Remus.

BRIGHID

Good eaters they are, ma'am! We already fed 'em all the food there is goin'.

CLEOPATRA

Give them whatever they want. Cats are sacred to Egyptians. When I was a girl, a foolish Roman killed a cat in Alexandria. Do you know what happened to him?

JENNIFER

He had something to eat before the flamin' cat got it.

CLEOPATRA

He was lynched by an angry mob.

BRIGHID

Crikey! That's a bit extreme, innit?

CLEOPATRA

Your second duty is to attend me. Forever attached to me. Forever at my feet.

BRIGHID

Makes us sound like comfy slippers!

CLEOPATRA

I cannot keep secrets from you. Do you know what that means?

JENNIFER

We never gossip, ma'am. We don't know a soul in Rome.

CLEOPATRA

It means your life is worth nothing.

(She flashes an intense look at them.)

Are you Caesar's spies?

BRIGHID

Not bloody likely! We hate Caesar.

JENNIFER

We told you he's the nob who took us away from our dear old Blighty.

CLEOPATRA

Someone may try to assassinate me.

BRIGHID

Blimey! How do you know that?

CLEOPATRA

I know! In my country, assassination is the way we change governments. If I am killed, you will be killed, too. I will make sure of it.

BRIGHID

Not to worry.

JENNIFER

We're not into that sort of thing.

CLEOPATRA

Well... I suppose not... You don't look bright enough to be assassins.

BRIGHID

You've nothing to fear from us.

CLEOPATRA

You must be very careful who you let in or out of this house. Even Caesar is not above suspicion. Perhaps because I bore him a son two years ago, you think Caesar and I are bound by love.

BRIGHID

Wouldn't know about that, ma'am.

JENNIFER

(Dreamily)

Stone the crows! It must be lovely to be in love!

CLEOPATRA

You silly foolish girl! You think I keep my throne by being a simple-minded romantic? My own brother tried to kill me to gain power. Do you know where he is now?

JENNIFER

Haven't a clue, ma'am.

CLEOPATRA

Dead! Politics is not a sentimental profession.

BRIGHID

Not for that poor blighter!

CLEOPATRA

Every man wants his son to inherit what he has gained.

(She crosses her arms emphatically.)

So I wait in Rome until my son's inheritance is made clear. Caesar uses me and I use Caesar. That is the reality of power.

BRIGHID

Right you are, ma'am! Us gals has got to look out for our own.

CLEOPATRA

Your job is to help me. Only me.

JENNIFER

At your service, day and night!

CLEOPATRA

I'm expecting a visitor. And Caesar mustn't know about it. I need a protector! Do you understand?

BRIGHID

(With a wink)

Nod's as good as a wink, ma'am! Say no more.

JENNIFER

No need to get your knickers in a twist, ma'am. I mean, worry the old Cobra Crown.

CLEOPATRA

It's my image! In politics, image is everything!

JENNIFER

Yes, ma'am.

CLEOPATRA

Have you seen my image on coins? I look positively frumpish! You think I want to go down in history as a frump? I want to start a rumour of a romance – a romance that consumes the imagination of the entire world!

(Picking up a wig.)

Which brings me to this wig! Who did this?

JENNIFER

Jove is my uncle if that wasn't the girl's that was here before us.

CLEOPATRA

You must curl the hair every day! And trim the fringe of new wigs. When I appear, I should appear as a goddess. My image should be enshrined forever in the Temple of Venus!

(She throws the wig on the floor.)

Take it away.

(She indicates the closet.)

Bring me two others from the closet. I shall return in a few moments and I expect to be perfectly groomed. If you do not make me look like a goddess, you will be made to pay!

(CLEOPATRA goes out. BRIGHID picks up the wig and tosses it to JENNIFER who runs into the closet with it and returns with two other wigs, one in each hand. She tosses one to BRIGHID who looks it over carefully as she sits on the floor opposite JENNIFER who is examining the other wig. In rapid succession they try the wigs on each other as they adjust them by pulling and fluffing.)

BRIGHID

Wouldn't you know we'd pull one like this for a mistress!

JENNIFER

Rotten luck.

BRIGHID

Maybe we should leg it while the coast is clear.

JENNIFER

Not sure me nerves could stand it.

BRIGHID

As soon as we get a chance, distract her. I'll nip around back and check the portcullis.

JENNIFER

We wouldn't make it half way home to Blighty before she'd have our guts for garters.

BRIGHID

So what if she does?

JENNIFER

Instant death, dearie.

BRIGHID

I see what you mean... We've got to find some other way to get her to set us free.

JENNIFER

Are you daft? That one! Let's concentrate on steering clear of the bleedin' lions.

BRIGHID

Hang on. I'm having a brain wave... Maybe if we did her some sort of favour.

JENNIFER

Fat chance we have of that! We've got to make her look like a blinkin' goddess.

BRIGHID

She needs a love potion, doesn't he, if she's going to come up with this big romance?

JENNIFER

So what if she does?

BRIGHID

(Smugly.)

I can come up with a belter, I can!

JENNIFER

Oh, no! Don't try it, Brighid. Please! If it doesn't work, she'll put us to death for sure.

BRIGHID

Calm your head, my liege.

JENNIFER

Remember the one you tried on that Belgian chief!

BRIGHID

Forget about that one. I was havin' an off-day, that's all.

JENNIFER

He went off half-barmy and got all amorous with his horse!

BRIGHID

Didn't have the flamin' chant right. But now I know it!

JENNIFER

No! Please!

BRIGHID

This morning when I went through the garden next to the stables, you know what I found?

JENNIFER

No. And I ain't bovvered, neither!

BRIGHID

(She jumps up and runs in the closet.)

Just a minute. I'll show you. I put it in the closet.

JENNIFER

Forget about it.

BRIGHID

(She comes out holding a giant toadstool about a foot high.)

Look at this. A toadstool. The fairies must have left it there last night.

JENNIFER

Fairies? In Rome! I've 'eard it all now!

BRIGHID

Says you.

JENNIFER

Fairies, elves and sprites don't live in this place! Every kind of eccentric old thing lives in Blighty!

BRIGHID

Maybe some of them had a mind to travel.

JENNIFER

Not bleedin' likely!

BRIGHID

Well, just in case, I'm going to put it under the couch. Then if somebody sits over it...

JENNIFER

Be sensible. Put the little bleeder back in the closet.

BRIGHID

(She puts the giant toadstool under the couch on the left side.)

We've got to try everything.

(She turns clockwise in a circle, makes an "X" on the floor, knocks on wood and chants.)

Come you spirits bright as fire. Fill human hearts with love's desire.

(CLEOPATRA comes in.)

CLEOPATRA

Have you prepared the wigs?

JENNIFER

Oh, yes, the syrups, ma'am. Just getting them ready.

CLEOPATRA

(She sits at her dressing table)

Come here and put one on me.

(BRIGHID approaches and puts a wig on CLEOPATRA. CLEOPATRA picks up the hand mirror and looks at herself.)

That's better. Am I transformed before your eyes into a love goddess?

BRIGHID

Oh, yes, ma'am! Spittin' image of Venus!

JENNIFER

Couldn't tell you from Juno if me life depended on it!

CLEOPATRA

The test will be with the visitor I expect. If he agrees, perhaps you will live...

(CLEOPATRA turns and stares at JENNIFER who is holding the other wig in her hand.)

Come here!

(CLEOPATRA rises.)

JENNIFER

(Timidly)

Me?

CLEOPATRA

Yes, you! Don't be such a ninny! Hold yourself up as if you are a queen.

(JENNIFER stands up erectly, throws her shoulders back, and approaches with a swagger.)

Sit down at the dressing table.

(JENNIFER sits. To BRIGHID)

Put the wig on her.

(BRIGHID takes the wig from Jennifer's hand and slaps it on her head.)

There! You are transformed!

JENNIFER

Am I?

CLEOPATRA

Well... Not exactly. But enough to fool Caesar... Tell me. Does Caesar know you personally?

JENNIFER

No, ma'am. Never met the geezer.

CLEOPATRA

Where did you work?

JENNIFER

In his kitchen. We were scullery slaves.

BRIGHID

We were so busy washing dishes we never saw the light of day.

CLEOPATRA

(To JENNIFER)

Good. If Caesar comes unexpectedly, you will entertain him.

JENNIFER

Huh? How can I do that?

CLEOPATRA

Talk to him. Do anything he wants. Keep him busy while I'm in the other room.

JENNIFER

Thank you very much, ma'am. But I'd rather not.

CLEOPATRA

Don't argue with me, you fool. You have no choice. *(To BRIGHID)* You will be her attendant.

BRIGHID

Me?

CLEOPATRA

(Shaking her head impatiently.)

Ye gods! What did I do to deserve such slaves? *(Sarcastically)* No, not you! Romulus and Remus, my two pet cats!

BRIGHID

They're going to wait on Jennifer?

CLEOPATRA

No, you are, you idiot! Both of you will do as I say or you will make some other cats fatter!

BRIGHID

We don't want that, ma'am.

JENNIFER

Anything you say, ma'am.

CLEOPATRA

You will tell him you are my cousin, do you understand? Tell him your name is Berenice and you are visiting Rome.

JENNIFER

(In great consternation)

But, ma'am...

CLEOPATRA

Yes?

JENNIFER

The whole world knows about Caesar's flaming reputation.

BRIGHID

If Caesar gets her alone, she won't have a dog's chance.

JENNIFER

Just the other day, everyone in his house was rabbiting on about Caesar's affair with some bit of stuff from Mauritania.

CLEOPATRA

Exactly. He flaunts his conquests of women as if they were countries that had fallen before his armies.

JENNIFER

(Indignantly)

Codswallop! He ain't gettin' his Roman hands on this bird!

BRIGHID

Anyway, we heard it's all over with the Mauritanian bit of fluff. Finished. Water over the dam. Spilt donkey's milk.

CLEOPATRA

What difference does it make? Caesar is Caesar. He'll always be chasing something.

BRIGHID

Well, why let it get on your wick, ma'am?

CLEOPATRA

It doesn't, you fool. Don't you understand? There are times when I don't want Caesar to chase me. It's very important that he doesn't know everything I do. Today I am meeting Mark Antony. You will stand in for me. This is what is known as diplomacy.

BRIGHID

(Mumbling)

Sounds more like ruddy human sacrifice...

JENNIFER

I don't like this one bit. I'm caught in the middle.

JENNIFER (Cont'd)

(Indicating three parts of her body, one by one.)

Caesar will divide me in three parts and conquer each one, section by section by section!

(Sound of loud knocking.)

CLEOPATRA

Answer the door. I'll wait in my bedchamber. It may be Mark Antony.

JENNIFER

Anybody's all right as long as it's not Caesar...

CLEOPATRA

If it's Mark Antony, have him sit down. And then come immediately and get me!

BRIGHID

Yes, ma'am.

CLEOPATRA

But it may be Caesar.

JENNIFER

Gawds 'elpus.

CLEOPATRA

In which case, you will not come and get me. You will entertain Caesar and keep him busy. And if Mark Antony comes in the meantime, you will secretly bring him to me in my bedchamber.

(Loud knocking again.)

Go. Hurry. Get the door.

(CLEOPATRA goes out right. BRIGHID runs out left to answer the door. JENNIFER looks around for some place to hide. She considers getting under the couch, then goes and crouches behind a chair. BRIGHID comes back in almost immediately followed by GARETH, a rough-looking, clownish man wearing a white toga. He is out of breath.)

GARETH

Someone was on me tail, but I don't think they saw me duck in.

BRIGHID

(Calling)

Jennifer, where are you? Come out. You'll never guess who it is! It's our bruvver, Gareth!

*(JENNIFER jumps up with great relief and runs over.
GARETH hugs both of them, one in each arm.)*

GARETH

I've been looking all over Rom for me two skin and blisters. *(To JENNIFER)*
Aren't you all tarted up! Why the syrup of figs? You look like mutton dressed as a lamb.

JENNIFER

Aren't I a fright? The mistress makes me wear it.

BRIGHID

Thank gawd you found us!

JENNIFER

You're just in time! I was going to be sacrificed to that geezer Caesar.

GARETH

(Grimaces angrily)

Oh, don't mention him! Gives me the heebie jeebies!

BRIGHID

How did you manage to get here?

GARETH

I sloped off just at the right moment.

JENNIFER

When?

GARETH

Yesterday.

BRIGHID

How?

GARETH

Over the top.

BRIGHID

But wasn't Caesar watching you? Weren't you one of his gladiators?

GARETH

There were ten thousand eyes gawping at me.

BRIGHID

Caesar had ten thousand guards just for you?

GARETH

I was in the gladiators' ring and there were ten thousand people watching me do me punch-up.

JENNIFER

Oh, Gareth. You are a rum 'un.

GARETH

I was known as "Gareth the Brit". I was the kind of gladiator they call a hunter.

(He takes out a red handkerchief and waves it.)

First I fought a bull... He kept charging me again and again until he gave up and dropped dead. Fought hard, I did.

(He puts the handkerchief away.)

BRIGHID

Your upbringing has done you proud!

GARETH

Then they loosed a leopard on me. I fought him up on stilts.

JENNIFER

Coo! The leopard was on stilts?

GARETH

No, me old china. I was up on stilts with a spear.

BRIGHID

The stilts had a spear in them.

GARETH

No, no. Picture it. I'm up on high and I got a spear in me hand.

JENNIFER

Blimey! Somebody threw a spear right into your hand?

GARETH

The spear was for the leopard, love.

JENNIFER
Do they fancy them?

GARETH
Not bloody likely.

JENNIFER
Well, how'd you get shot of him?

GARETH
I threw me cloak over the stupid pillock. He burned himself up rolling around in it, growling and scratching himself to pieces.

BRIGHID
(Impressed)
Oh, my giddy aunt!

GARETH
The crowd roared.

JENNIFER
And Caesar let you go?

GARETH
He sent out a tiger and a panther.

BRIGHID
So you went at it hammer and tongs?

GARETH
Not on your nelly.

JENNIFER
What did you do?

GARETH
I ran like the clappers.

JENNIFER
Oh, my gawds...

GARETH
But they didn't follow.

BRIGHID
Gave you the swerve, did they?

JENNIFER

Jacked it in at the sight of you.

GARETH

They turned on each other and fought till they dropped.

JENNIFER

What a palaver!

BRIGHID

Lucky break!

JENNIFER

So Caesar let you sky off?

GARETH

He sent out a whacking rhinoceros.

BRIGHID

Crikey! This is giving me the collywobbles!

GARETH

It came charging toward me. Faster and faster. I got off the stilts and crouched down. Lower and lower. The rhinoceros kept slogging toward me.

BRIGHID and JENNIFER *(Together)*

(Covering their eyes as if they're afraid to look.)

Faster and faster.

GARETH

And just in the nick of time.

BRIGHID and JENNIFER *(Together)*

Yes?

GARETH

I jumped to the side. And the rhinoceros piked right on through the wall of the stadium and into the stands. And the people started scarpering here and there. And the rhinoceros kept slogging away after them.

JENNIFER

Oh, Gareth!

BRIGHID

Serves the ruddy Romans right!

GARETH

And nobody was looking at me any more. So that's when I sloped off. Legged it over the top. Kept me head down till nightfall. And then I nicked this toga from somebody's clothes line.

BRIGHID

But how did you ever find us?

GARETH

I was snooping around near the kitchen at Caesar's villa. And I heard that the dirty dishes were piling up since the two slaves were sent to Cleopatra's!

BRIGHID

Cheeky blighter. Thank heavens you made the connection!

JENNIFER

But Gareth. I'm frightened. You're up the spout if Caesar catches you!

BRIGHID

You'll be crucified!

GARETH

Don't worry. I'm going to make it back to Blighty. And you're coming with me.

(Sound of knocking at the door)

BRIGHID

Crikey! There's somebody at the door! Maybe you were followed!

JENNIFER

It might be Caesar...

BRIGHID

(To GARETH)

Blast it! You've got to hide.

GARETH

(Angrily)

Hang on! I'm not going to let that cheeky so 'n so take advantage of Jennifer!

BRIGHID

Forget about Caesar!

JENNIFER

Thanks, Gareth. You can't do anything at the moment.

BRIGHID

Just hide. Don't put the three of us in danger. I'll get the door.

(She goes out.)

JENNIFER

(To GARETH)

Go in the closet. There's a good lad. It's better you don't let that temper of yours get the better of you.

(She pushes him into the closet. Almost immediately BRIGHID returns leading CAESAR, a man in his mid 50s. CAESAR wears a white toga and a bright purple cloak. He has a wreath of laurel on his head. He is very arrogant and self-assured.)

CAESAR

(Catching sight of JENNIFER)

Hello, hello! And who would you be, my pretty?

(He sits on the couch on the right side.)

BRIGHID

Her name is Bernice. She's Cleopatra's cousin from Alexandria.

(Note – The slaves pronounce “BERENICE” as “BERNICE”.)

CAESAR

(To JENNIFER)

Can't you talk for yourself?

JENNIFER

To tell the truth, I'm feeling rough today. I think I've got the mumps.

(She sits on a chair as far away from Caesar as possible.)

CAESAR

Really?

BRIGHID

It's very contagious.

CAESAR

I've had it.

JENNIFER

Hades!

BRIGHID
Blasted luck!

CAESAR
What?

JENNIFER
That you caught if, I mean.

CAESAR
We soldiers in the Roman army are tough. We are fed a daily ration of garlic. It protects us!

BRIGHID
(Coughing)
So that's what makes your enemies pass out.

CAESAR
(Exhaling vigorously)
Caesar vanquishes all!

BRIGHID
Cleopatra has told us all about you...

CAESAR
Has she?

BRIGHID
You're a cagey one with all those charges and frontal assaults.

CAESAR
I've got to see Cleopatra immediately. It's about my will.

BRIGHID
Perhaps by and by. She's not receiving at the moment.

CAESAR
(To JENNIFER, as he pats the place next to him on the couch.)
Come over here and sit next to me.

JENNIFER
(Twisting herself into a knot.)
Damn and blast it! I've such a cramp in me leg!

BRIGHID
Poor thing is knackered. We'd best let her rest.

CAESAR

(Leaning back wearily)

What a day this has been! And it's only just begun!

BRIGHID

Off to a panting start, are we?

CAESAR

I need to have a little fun to help me relax. My wife kept me awake all night with lurid nightmares.

BRIGHID

That must have been a good show!

CAESAR

She dreamed I'd be murdered today.

BRIGHID

Crikey... Why today of all days?

CAESAR

Because it's the ides of March.

BRIGHID

Nothing special there. Just another spring day. Besides, who would do you in?

CAESAR

No one. Caesar's life is of more value to Rome than it is to himself.

BRIGHID

Get away! I'm sure there are some blokes who agree.

CAESAR

Of course there are! For politicians, popularity is the only reality.

BRIGHID

Plain as a pikestaff it's not modesty.

CAESAR

Modesty is for slaves.

BRIGHID

That's a dead cert! If we ain't popular, we're bleeding dead!

CAESAR

I'm even more upset about yesterday.

BRIGHID

What happened then?

CAESAR

A rhinoceros got loose in the gladiators' ring.

BRIGHID

You don't say. What a shame! Did it trample lots of Romans to death?

CAESAR

No. They all escaped. Together with the beast. This fool gladiator caused the whole thing to happen.

BRIGHID

Fancy that.

CAESAR

The crowd got completely carried away.

BRIGHID

Italians are so bloody emotional.

CAESAR

I was so angry I considered burning down the stadium. *(Looking at JENNIFER.)*
And how is Bernice feeling now?

(Patting a place on the couch next to him.)

Come here and sit by me.

JENNIFER

(Putting her hand to her forehead.)

Ooh, I've got such a head! I feel like I've been run over by a chariot.

CAESAR

Everyone gets that feeling with Caesar. *(To BRIGHID)* You can go now.

(BRIGHID hesitates. CAESAR rises and approaches JENNIFER.)

Now look. Whatever Caesar wants, Caesar takes.

(He grabs JENNIFER'S arm and pulls her to him.)

Caesar did not conquer the world so that he could surrender at the doorstep of one little Egyptian girl.

(Suddenly the door to the closet flies open and GARETH comes out. He has put on the lop-sided wig with the long bangs and his wearing one of CLEOPATRA'S tunics. He carries a large fan made of feathers.)

GARETH

Leave her alone!

CAESAR

(Turning and staring at GARETH.)

Who are you?

GARETH

Wouldn't you like to know?

CAESAR

Yes!

GARETH

(Fluttering his fan.)

Who am I, he asks?

CAESAR

That's right!

GARETH

(To BRIGHID)

Tell him who I am.

BRIGHID

Uh... Who is it?

CAESAR

Yes! Who?

BRIGHID

Uh... This is Bernice's twin sister.

CAESAR

Her twin?

BRIGHID

She's also visiting from Alexandria.

CAESAR

I've never seen twins where one was so big and the other so small.

BRIGHID

Uh... It's the poxy water in Rome. She didn't used to be like that. Since she came here, the water has just built up in her.

GARETH

(Fanning himself vigorously)

That's the long and short of it...

CAESAR

(To GARETH)

What's your name?

GARETH

My name?

CAESAR

Yes! Don't you have a name? A good common Egyptian name?

GARETH

(To BRIGHID)

Do I?

BRIGHID

Yes... Uh...

GARETH

An Egyptian name?

BRIGHID

It's... uh... Bernice.

CAESAR

What? She has the same name as her twin sister?

BRIGHID

Yes!

CAESAR

Why?

(BRIGHID and GARETH can't think of an answer. They look blank.)

JENNIFER

(Blurts out)

Er, 'cause our parents were rotten so 'n so's, that's why...

CAESAR

What's that got to do with it?

JENNIFER

When they wanted us, they couldn't bother to call twice.

CAESAR

(Suspiciously)

I'm beginning to wonder if you've ever been out of Rome.

GARETH

I'll have you know I've got around quite a lot. I know the world like the back of me hand.

(He flutters his fan and sits down on the couch on the right side.)

CAESAR

Lady, I have conquered the world!

(He sits in a chair.)

GARETH

(Smugly)

Says who? Don't wind me up! You missed by a long shot!

CAESAR

What's that supposed to mean?

GARETH

(With a dramatic flourish of the fan)

It means I know of an island in the north that the great Caesar was unable to call his.

CAESAR

There's no place that Caesar could not subdue!

GARETH

A place where the geezers are braver than the Romans. And the birds are more beautiful even than us Egyptians.

JENNIFER

Bloody right! That's the gods' truth!

CAESAR

It must be some place you dreamed of.

GARETH

A place more unusual than any other in the world.

CAESAR

Must be full of demigods!

GARETH

A place called Great Britain.

CAESAR

(Rises furiously)

Don't mention that place! I can't stand those lunatics!

GARETH

(Angrily)

Hang on a minute! Mind what you say!

(He pulls a feather from his fan and crushes it in his hand.)

JENNIFER

(She rises and goes over to stand beside GARETH. She tries on to calm him by patting his hand.)

Steady on! *(To CAESAR)* Some do say the Brits are a bit "different". But hold yer horses. It's a bit much to say they're all lunatics.

CAESAR

It's not too far at all! They're the weirdest people in the world.

GARETH

(He rips the feather apart angrily.)

They're not as bonkers as the crowds in the arenas of Rome!

CAESAR

There's no comparison. Those barmy Britons run around like a bunch of eccentric cavemen.

(GARETH jerks another feather out of his fan.)

They're primitive! They sleep on the floor on the skins of wild animals!

BRIGHID

Clever thinking to my mind... What with all that cold and rain.

CAESAR

And their food... Ugh...

(GARETH crushes the feather in his hand.)

They eat fish with vinegar!

BRIGHID

Listen, my duck, it's proper lovely nosh when you sprinkle a little salt on it and wrap it in leaves before you take it home.

CAESAR

They are not beautiful! I say they are grotesque! They paint themselves blue and go around half naked!

(GARETH puts the feather in his mouth and grinds it between his teeth.)

BRIGHID

Hang on a minute. I'm not havin' that. No, they don't!

CAESAR

How would you know?

BRIGHID

It so happens I come from there!

CAESAR

Well, keep out of this. You're prejudiced.

BRIGHID

Somebody's got to put you in the picture, don't they? Before battle, you see, the men – only the men – paint themselves with these lovely blue tattoos. You can't fancy how nice they look! They make their hair all stiff with lime. And shape it into lovely pointy quills.

(GARETH proudly sticks the feather into his wig.)

JENNIFER

Sounds ever so stylish, if you ask me!

BRIGHID

Then with the horns and trumpets blaring away, they rush into battle, screaming at the top of their lungs. And they're all starkers except for their cloaks streaming in the wind. And their flaming gold bracelets and torcs.

JENNIFER

Completely starkers. I like the sound of that.

GARETH

Scared the bleeding Romans half to death!

(GARETH pulls the feather from his wig, throws it to the floor, and flourishes his fan.)

CAESAR

Nonsense! That is not the way history will describe it.

JENNIFER

And how would you know that?

CAESAR

Because history is written by the victors, not the vanquished.

BRIGHID

Hang on a minute. You didn't win in Britain.

CAESAR

I made a temporary withdrawal.

JENNIFER

Is that what you call it?

CAESAR

Because there was no silver there. And no booty except for some wretched half-witted slaves with vacant expressions.

BRIGHID

The Brits hardly ever show their feelings in public.

JENNIFER

You'd be surprised what they get up to.

BRIGHID

No matter how much garlic their enemy's been eating.

GARETH

(Fanning himself proudly)

It seems to me you couldn't pull a fast one in Britain. So you had to 'ave it on your toes! Leg it out of there.

CAESAR

Enough of that wretched place! Let's talk about my other conquests.

(CAESAR gets up and moves across the room with the intention of sitting next to JENNIFER on the couch. As he approaches, she moves away. He sits down next to GARETH on the left side over the toadstool. CAESAR shakes his head and touches his forehead as a strange feeling appears to be coming over him.)

GARETH

You all right, mate?

CAESAR

(He stares at GARETH passionately.)

I didn't realise what an irresistible creature you are.

(He moves a little closer and GARETH moves a little away. A typical Roman couch was large enough for three people to lie upon – probably about the size of a queen-size bed, so GARETH has lots of room to move away as CAESAR tries to close in on him.)

GARETH

(Peering suspiciously over the top of his fan.)

Get away.

CAESAR

I have the strangest feeling.

GARETH

(Uneasily)

I'd thank you to keep your feelings to yourself.

CAESAR

This must be the real thing.

GARETH

Stone me.

CAESAR

(As he tries to sit closer)

There's something that looks so familiar about you.

GARETH

(As he moves away)

Get stuffed.

CAESAR

(As he follows)

Take off that wig for just a minute. Let me see your natural beauty.

GARETH

(Moving away again)

Like Hades I will!

CAESAR

(Following)

Were you by any chance in the arena yesterday?

GARETH

(He begins to crawl away across the couch on his hands and knees.)

What arena?

CAESAR

(He follows on his hands and knees.)

The gladiators' arena.

GARETH

I don't fancy that sort of show.

CAESAR

Why not?

GARETH

Last time I went, I was too close to the flipping action.

JENNIFER

(Looking at CAESAR and GARETH crawling across the sofa. To BRIGHID.)

Look at that! What's cooking in that pot?

BRIGHID

(To JENNIFER)

Must be the toadstool.

JENNIFER

You mean it's working?

BRIGHID

Well, look! The old duffer is grinning like a butcher's dog.

CAESAR

(As he follows behind GARETH on the couch.)

You have the most attractive ankles!

GARETH

(Kicking backwards)

Just leave the ruddy things alone!

(GARETH continues crawling around the couch with CAESAR following.)

JENNIFER

(To BRIGHID)

Looks like he's fallen hook, line and sinker.

BRIGHID

(To JENNIFER)

Didn't I tell you? Who can resist such charms?

JENNIFER

Gods help us if it is working! *(To CAESAR)* I have something to say to you!

CAESAR

Go away and leave us alone.

JENNIFER

It's about my twin sister. She's already spoken for.

BRIGHID

Yes! She was just talking about her fiancé just before you came.

GARETH

It's the bloody truth! I'm engaged to a big Egyptian toff.

BRIGHID

From a very noble family.

CAESAR

So what? I'll soon be Emperor and no one is more noble than that.

BRIGHID

Hate to tell you, but her fiancé is!

CAESAR

I'm also dictator for life!

BRIGHID

Her fiancé is very noble. No mucking about.

CAESAR

Don't tell me he's a pharaoh because that's nothing compared to an emperor.

BRIGHID

Higher than that.

CAESAR

Impossible!

BRIGHID

(To JENNIFER)

Quick! What's higher than an Emperor and a Dictator?

JENNIFER

(Perplexed)

Blimey, I dunno.

BRIGHID

There must be something. Something very Egyptian...

JENNIFER

How about a sphinx?

BRIGHID

Sounds about right. That'll do. *(To CAESAR)* She's engaged to a sphinx.

GARETH

(As he continues crawling away with CAESAR following.)

And a right royal bloke he is, too! He'd never try to take advantage of me feminine charms!

CAESAR

A sphinx is a creature with the body of a lion and the head of a human!

BRIGHID

Is he? Well, let's see...

JENNIFER

That's his nickname!

GARETH

He's ruddy hairy.

CAESAR

Well, this is Rome. And he's in Egypt. So forget about him.

(He grabs GARETH'S leg. They struggle.)

BRIGHID

(To JENNIFER)

Oh, my gods!

JENNIFER

(To BRIGHID)

What are we going to do? This yobbo has no self-control at all!

(GARETH extracts himself. He raises himself on his knees, crosses his arms definitely, and faces CAESAR. CAESAR does the same so that the two are kneeling on the couch and confronting each other.)

GARETH

Why is it you always got to take over everything?

CAESAR

A politician has got to establish an image! Why shouldn't I?

GARETH

Because, ducks, it's not at all matey!

BRIGHID

(To JENNIFER)

We've got to do something.

CAESAR

(To GARETH)

Conquest is the principal aim of life in the Roman Empire. In three days, I leave to subdue Parthia. My empire will be greater than Alexander the Great's!

GARETH

Look. I won't beat around the bush. You've got a problem with being too bloody pushy!

JENNIFER

(To BRIGHID)

Do you know how to undo the charm?

BRIGHID

I think so.

JENNIFER

Well, get to it!

(BRIGHID looks puzzled as she tries to remember.)

CAESAR

(To GARETH)

There is no limit to how far I can extend!

GARETH

(He moves away.)

You don't have to tell me!

CAESAR

(He follows.)

I do the world a favour by bringing civilisation wherever I go!

GARETH

Bloody hell! That's not what I call it!

CAESAR

(As he lunges toward GARETH)

And you'll have it, whether you want it or not!

(GARETH jumps off the couch and begins running around it. CAESAR chases after him.)

GARETH

You're a flaming nuisance, you are! The rest of the world just wants to do its own thing.

CAESAR

Well, they shouldn't.

GARETH

Push off! Give us a rest!

BRIGHID

(Trying to remember the charm. To JENNIFER)

Let's see... I've got to do it backwards, I think.

(She taps on wood, makes an "X", and turns counter-clockwise in a circle.)

CAESAR

(To GARETH as he chases him.)

I have power. I can give you anything in the world that you want.

GARETH

(As he runs away just ahead of Caesar.)

Anything, is it?

CAESAR

Yes, of course!

GARETH

Well, then, it would please me a great deal if you just... set all your slaves free!

CAESAR

Impossible.

GARETH

Seems little enough to ask.

CAESAR

I never do something for nothing.

(CAESAR jumps on GARETH and they fall to the ground.)

BRIGHID

(Trying to remember)

Now, let's see... Desire love's with hearts human fill. I think...

JENNIFER

(To BRIGHID)

Hurry up!

BRIGHID

Fire as bright spirits come you.

(The two men continue struggling.)

JENNIFER

(To BRIGHID)

He's still stuck on Gareth. You must have it wrong!

(CAESAR reaches towards GARETH'S wig.)

CAESAR

I'm going to pull that wig off your pretty head and see how you really look.

BRIGHID

(Blurts out quickly)

Fire as bright spirits you come.

(Suddenly CAESAR stops struggling. He sits up as if in a daze and shakes his head.)

GARETH

(GARETH sits up at the same time and straightens his tunic.)

You're beginning to get up my nose!

CAESAR

(Shaking his head disgustedly)

I don't know what I ever saw in you!

GARETH

It's about time you stopped swanking about grabbing everything you see!

CAESAR

Who wants everything?

(CAESAR gets up and heads for the door.)

Look, tell Cleopatra I can't wait around here all day. Some of my friends – Brutus, Cassius and the rest – are waiting for me at the Senate. They know how to appreciate a great leader!

(He stops at the door and turns.)

Tell Cleopatra I'll talk to her about my will later. What she wanted is out of the question. It's just not good politics.

(CAESAR goes out left.)

BRIGHID

Moody lot, those politicians.

JENNIFER

(With an indignant nod in GARETH'S direction.)

Thinks he's so smart trying to have a bit of how's-your-father with Gareth!

GARETH

(Straightening his wig)

Not to worry! He's all mouth and no trousers!

(Sound of gong.)

BRIGHID

That's the mistress! I'd better go quickly.

(She goes out right.)

JENNIFER

Quick, Gareth! Back in the closet.

(She pushes him into the closet. CLEOPATRA enters followed by BRIGHID.)

CLEOPATRA

What did Caesar want?

JENNIFER

A proper brought up girl like me is ashamed to say!

CLEOPATRA

I don't care about that, you idiot! Did he have any messages for me?

BRIGHID

He said to tell you he'll tell you about his will later.

CLEOPATRA

What?

BRIGHID

What you wanted isn't practical.

CLEOPATRA

(Suddenly very upset)

What do you mean?

BRIGHID

That's what the blighter said.

CLEOPATRA

(She slumps into her chair before the dressing table.)

How could you have let him say such a thing?

JENNIFER

Just passing along what we heard, ma'am.

CLEOPATRA

You idiots! You will be punished!

BRIGHID

Just doing out duty.

CLEOPATRA

You should never have let the conversation go in that direction.

BRIGHID

(Mumbling)

I suppose we might have gagged the old berk.

CLEOPATRA

(She turns in her chair and faces them.)

Didn't I tell you I wanted a love charm?

BRIGHID

Yes, ma'am.

JENNIFER

Trouble is the one we know is ruddy unreliable. Can't say for sure it's going to work the proper way.