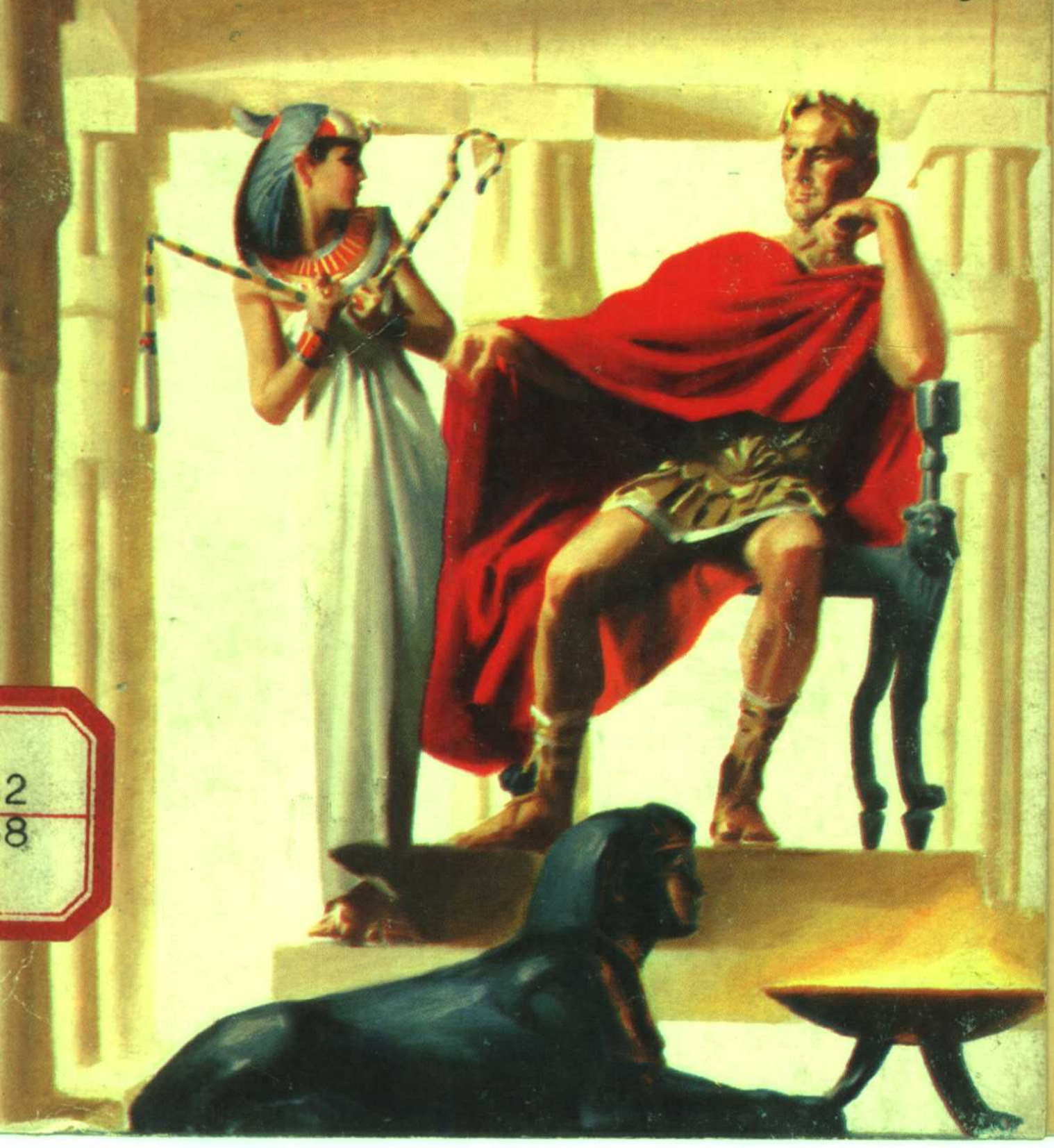


GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA

Introduction by Dr. Clarence A. Andrews Complete and Unabridged



28

CAESAR
AND
CLEOPATRA



GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

An Airmont Classic

*specially selected for the Airmont Library
from the immortal literature of the world*

THE SPECIAL CONTENTS OF THIS EDITION

© Copyright, 1966, by
Airmont Publishing Company, Inc.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Caesar AND Cleopatra



GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Introduction

Caesar and Cleopatra has many virtues as a play, one of which is that it brings together in one literary package two people who became legends in the Ancient World—Julius Caesar and Cleopatra—and one who became a legend in the Modern World—George Bernard Shaw. Just as the name Cleopatra became a household synonym for feminine temptation, just as the name Julius Caesar became a family word for political and military power, so the name of George Bernard Shaw came to be identified firmly and surely with the English-speaking theater. Everyone knows *Major Barbara*, *Arms and the Man* (or its musical form, *The Chocolate Soldier*), *Pygmalion* (or its musical form, *My Fair Lady*), *The Devil's Disciple*, *Androcles and the Lion*, *St. Joan*, *Dön Juan in Hell*.

Shaw, who, as most critics now concede, is second as an English dramatist only to Shakespeare, was born in Dublin, Ireland, July 26, 1856, and died, a person of remarkable wit, vitality, and spirit almost to the end, at Ayot St. Lawrence, England, on November 2, 1950. He claimed to be descended from that MacDuff, Thane of Fife, whom

Shakespeare immortalized in *Macbeth*, and from Oliver Cromwell, who, according to Shaw, "ruled in [Shaw's] Caesar's fashion until he died." At the age of twenty, Shaw followed his musically inclined mother to London, where he immediately vowed never to do another "honest day's work," and, in fulfillment of that vow, began a literary career which netted him only about a penny a day (on the average) for the next nine years.

There followed a somewhat more fruitful period (1885-1898), during which he attempted five novels, became an established critic of art, literature, music, and drama, and undertook the role of spokesman for the Fabian Society, the group which was the forerunner of the Socialist Party and modern British Socialism. As a drama critic he attacked the state of the English theater, published depreciations of both Shakespeare and the reigning English dramatic idol, Sir Henry Irving, and conducted a crusade for public acceptance of the plays of the Norwegian, Henrik Ibsen, and the so-called New Drama. He had help in this latter effort from William Archer, who translated some of Ibsen's plays into English, and from Sir Edwin Gosse.

Shaw's first attempt at drama was in an unsuccessful 1885 collaboration with Archer. Seven years later, Shaw remodeled the play. As *Widowers' Houses*, it became his first successful play. But this "tract" on slum landlordism scandalized the ordinary play-going public, and found a hostile reception in the London press. In the meanwhile, his next play, *The Philanderer* (1893), was taken by Archer as a personal insult because it satirized the Ibsenites. It also satirized the "new woman"; you will find a reference to this sterling personage in *this* play. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893, first performed 1902) explored the economic basis of prostitution quite frankly. When the play was offered to the theater owners, they were embarrassed because they were afraid it would offend their capitalist customers. But the Official Censor saved the day for them by stepping

in to prohibit public performances. This censorship remained in effect for more than thirty years.

Unable to reach audiences with performances of his plays, Shaw decided to publish them in book form for a reading audience. So the three plays just mentioned were offered (with *Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, and two others) in a two-volume work, *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898). Shaw followed this with *Three Plays for Puritans* (1901), which contains *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, *The Devil's Disciple*, and our present play. With these publications, Shaw's fortunes began to improve; his plays were acted in Germany and America first, then in England, and by established actors and actresses. By 1907, his fame as a dramatist was secure.

The decision to publish his plays was a somewhat fortuitous circumstance for Shaw, for he thus had an opportunity to present his plays both as drama and as literature. Shaw's plays, therefore, need to be read as well as seen. For instance, one's reading of the present play will lead him to passages of "stage directions" which are obviously impossible to dramatize or characterize. Furthermore, Shaw usually added lengthy prefaces, prologues, and epilogues to his plays. His epilogue to *Pygmalion* (the play on which the musical comedy *My Fair Lady* is based) is simply an extended stage direction which explains why Liza Doolittle and Henry Higgins would not and could not marry.

In drawing on the co-adventures of Caesar and Cleopatra, Shaw was mining subjects which had occupied the attentions of writers for twenty centuries. Gaius Julius Caesar, who at the time the action of the play takes place had not yet become undisputed master of the Roman Empire, was born about 102 B.C. (the actual year is in dispute), and was about fifty-five when he went to Egypt. He was in pursuit of his former political partner, Pompey, whom he had defeated at the battle of Pharsalus on the plain of Thessaly. Landing at Alexandria, Caesar learned that Pompey had

been murdered. Shortly he met Cleopatra and, fascinated by her charms (according to some authorities), undertook the Alexandrine War in her behalf, thus embroiling himself in the political machinations of the Egyptian royal family.

Cleopatra is the most widely known of a number of Egyptian queens in the Ptolemaic dynasty who bore the same name. At the age of seventeen, she married her younger brother, Ptolemy Dionysus, according to Egyptian custom, and assumed the throne with him. A family quarrel ensued, and she fled to Syria, where she was when Caesar came to Egypt in 47 B.C. Shaw shows her as a somewhat callow girl of sixteen, but most historians agree that she would have been about twenty-two when she met Caesar, and a somewhat more mature woman already locked in a power struggle for the Egyptian throne.

Caesar left behind a substantial body of documents, and he was soon the subject of essays and biographies by other Romans: Suetonius, Plutarch, Cicero, Sallust, Lucan. He became famous for his epigrams: "*Veni, vidi, vici* (I came, I saw, I conquered)," and "*Iacta alea est* (The die is cast)." In the middle ages he became the subject of historic romances, lays, and *romans*, in some of which his relationships with Cleopatra were romanticized.

The Queen herself was well known to medievalists and writers of the Renaissance, particularly in such stories as that one of Plutarch's which related how, coming from Syria to Caesar, she stripped herself of her clothing, then had herself rolled up in a bed-covering and delivered to Caesar by the Syrian Apollodorus—a pretty package indeed. With Helen of Troy, she became one of the legendary symbols of the *femme fatale*, and the story of her suicide and Mark Antony's (he on his sword, she by the application of an asp to her breast) caught the attention of writers of tragedy who saw in the fall of the royal pair one more application of the notion of the medieval wheel of fortune.

The greatest of those who wrote about Cleopatra and the Caesars was Shakespeare, who turned to her affair with Mark Antony to create one of his great tragedies on the theme of a world lost for love. "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety," he wrote of Cleopatra, and called Antony "the noble ruin of her magic."

Shaw rejected these romantic notions. ". . . Caesar was a real flesh and blood man," he wrote in the 1908 *Play Pictorial*, "and not a statue with a phonograph in its mouth repeating 'I came; I saw; I conquered' and 'Et tu, Brute!'"

Turn-of-the-century playgoers may have been so irritated by Shaw's rejection of romanticism and so titillated by Shaw's statement that he was not guilty of *Bardolatry* that they failed to see Shaw's real accomplishment in this play. That accomplishment is the delineation of Caesar as a human being rather than as a hero:

Caesar was a very modern man indeed: first a young man about town dressed in the height of fashion; then a demagogue . . . with mobs in his pay; then at forty, discovering that handling a provincial army was child's play to a man accustomed to manipulate Roman mobs; then conqueror and explorer; then by force of circumstance and gameness for any destiny, political adventurer gambling with Pompey for the empire of the civilized world and winning; finally, dead and turned to clay . . .

Shaw's play is the first in the modern tradition, and his accomplishment has been the guide for dramatists, novelists, poets, and historians who have written since—not only about Caesar but about every other major personage:

Our concept of heroism . . . changed [wrote Shaw.] . . . We want credible heroes. The old demand for the incredible, the impossible, the superhuman, which was

supplied by bombast, inflation, and the piling of crimes on catastrophes and factitious raptures on artificial agonies, has fallen off; and the demand now is for heroes in whom we can recognize our own humanity, and who, instead of walking, talking, eating, drinking, sleeping, making love and fighting single combats in a monotonous ecstasy of continuous heroism, are heroic in the true human fashion; that is, touching the summits only at rare moments, and finding the proper level of all occasions, condescending with humour and good sense to the prosaic ones as well as rising to the noble ones, instead of ridiculously persisting in rising to them all on the principle that a hero must always soar, in season and out of season.

To partially bring his accomplishment about, Shaw has Caesar speak some quite modern-sounding lines which at the same time are pure Shaw: "He who has never hoped can never despair . . . One year of Rome is like another, except that I grow older, whilst the crowd in the Appian Way is always the same age . . . Taxes are the chief business of a conqueror of the world."

These "shavianisms" often become anachronisms. Here Shaw followed Shakespeare, who was also guilty of anachronisms. Shakespeare put a billiard table in Cleopatra's palace; Shaw put a steam engine in Alexandria! Shaw asserted that his use of anachronisms was "the only way to make the historic past take form and life before our eyes." And it is true that Shaw's anachronisms remind us that ancient Rome and modern London are pretty much alike—but they do more than that. They also make us smile at Shaw's wit. "The new woman," "art for art's sake," "Egypt for the Egyptians," and "Peace with Honour" are, however, phrases which were on everyone's lips in Shaw's time.

Caesar and Cleopatra, as presented in this text, has some very dramatic scenes. There can be no more exciting scene in the theater than the ironic one in which Caesar and

Cleopatra, unaware of each other's identity, meet in the desert beneath the shadow of her "dear little kitten of a Sphinx"; we see Caesar's quick grasp of an improbable situation and his gentle handling of the girl queen so that she never suspects his identity until they stand side by side on her throne and hear the centurions shout "Hail Caesar!" Or that other scene in which Rufio chides Cleopatra for the way in which Ftatateeta has bungled the murder of Pothinus, then effectively demonstrates that he can follow his own advice—and at the same time teach her a lesson with respect to her own aspirations to deceive Caesar and perhaps destroy him through treachery.

I say: as presented in this text. The publishing history of *Caesar and Cleopatra* is a very complicated one. Shaw's 1901 text carried the play as you see it here; in this form it very closely matches a "Special Matinee" presented for copyright purposes on Wednesday, March 15th, 1899—a matinee in which the immortal Mrs. Patrick Campbell played Cleopatra and a soon-to-be famous Granville Barker played Lucius Septimus.

When the play came to be presented in Berlin, the part of Caesar was played by Sir Johnston Forbes Robertson, for whom Shaw wrote the play:

Without [Forbes-Robertson] *Caesar and Cleopatra* would not have been written; for no man writes a play without any reference to the possibility of a performance: you may scorn the limitations of the theater as much as you please; but for all that you do not write parts for six-legged actors or two-headed heroines, though there is great scope for drama in such conceptions.

Forbes-Robertson pointed out to Shaw that the play, as written, could stand some alterations, alterations which Shaw made at once. He later noted that no accurate copy

of the play could be made without reference to the actor's prompt book.

But something even more interesting happened in Berlin: the third act "proved so entertaining that the audience got positively drunk with it and could hardly settle down to the graver business of the fourth act." So when the play was presented at the Savoy in 1907 (under the direction of Granville Barker), the third act was omitted. Later because of protests from those who had read the play, Shaw replaced the third act. Then, to shorten the play, he eliminated the scene in Act Four between Cleopatra and her maids, and he listed the first scene of the play (in the courtyard of the palace) as an "alternate prologue." Finally, he wrote a new prologue to be spoken by the "great God Ra." Personally, I prefer the play as it is presented here.

I have kept you too long from your enjoyment of Shaw's play, but before you turn the page let me whisper a secret that will not be a secret long: Gaius Julius Caesar may have become a legend in the Ancient World, but in this play the legend of Caesar is so closely involved with the legend of a great modern that the two are indistinguishable. In other words, Caesar and George Bernard Shaw are one and the same. And so Caesar will come to life on these pages because he speaks with all of the wit and grace and intelligence and sanity of one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century. To which statement George Bernard Shaw would have said "Amen!"

CLARENCE A. ANDREWS
English Department
University of Iowa

ACT I

An October night on the Syrian border of Egypt towards the end of the XXXIII Dynasty, in the year 706 by Roman computation, afterwards reckoned by Christian computation as 48 B.C. A great radiance of silver fire, the dawn of a moonlit night, is rising in the east. The stars and the cloudless sky are our own contemporaries, nineteen and a half centuries younger than we know them; but you would not guess that from their appearance. Below them are two notable drawbacks of civilization: a palace, and soldiers. The palace, an old, low, Syrian building of whitened mud, is not so ugly as Buckingham Palace; and the officers in the courtyard are more highly civilized than modern English officers: for example, they do not dig up the corpses of their dead enemies and mutilate them, as we dug up Cromwell and the Mahdi. They are in two groups: one intent on the gambling of their captain Belzanor, a warrior of fifty, who, with his spear on the ground beside his knee, is stooping to throw dice with a sly-looking young Persian recruit; the other gathered about a guardsman who has just finished telling a naughty story (still current in English barracks) at which they are laughing uproariously. They are about a dozen in number, all highly aristocratic young Egyptian guardsmen, handsomely equipped with weapons and armor, very unEnglish in point of not being ashamed of and uncomfortable in their professional dress; on the contrary, rather ostentatiously and arrogantly warlike, as valuing themselves on their military caste.

Belzanor is a typical veteran, tough and wilful; prompt, capable and crafty where brute force will serve; helpless and boyish when it will not: an effective sergeant, an incompetent general, a deplorable dictator. Would, if influentially connected, be employed in the two last capacities by a modern European State on the strength of his success in the first. Is rather to be pitied just now in view of the fact that Julius Cæsar is invading his country. Not knowing this, is intent

on his game with the Persian, whom, as a foreigner, he considers quite capable of cheating him.

His subalterns are mostly handsome young fellows whose interest in the game and the story symbolizes with tolerable completeness the main interests in life of which they are conscious. Their spears are leaning against the walls, or lying on the ground ready to their hands. The corner of the courtyard forms a triangle of which one side is the front of the palace, with a doorway, the other a wall with a gateway. The storytellers are on the palace side: the gamblers, on the gateway side. Close to the gateway, against the wall, is a stone block high enough to enable a Nubian sentinel, standing on it, to look over the wall. The yard is lighted by a torch stuck in the wall. As the laughter from the group round the storyteller dies away, the kneeling Persian, winning the throw, snatches up the stake from the ground.

BELZANOR: By Apis, Persian, thy gods are good to thee.

THE PERSIAN: Try yet again, O captain. Double or quits!

BELZANOR: No more. I am not in the vein.

THE SENTINEL (*poising his javelin as he peers over the wall*): Stand. Who goes there?

They all start, listening. A strange voice replies from without.

VOICE: The bearer of evil tidings.

BELZANOR (*calling to the sentry*): Pass him.

THE SENTINEL (*grounding his javelin*): Draw near, O bearer of evil tidings.

BELZANOR (*pocketing the dice and picking up his spear*): Let us receive this man with honor. He bears evil tidings. *The guardsmen seize their spears and gather about the gate, leaving a way through for the new comer.*

PERSIAN (*rising from his knee*): Are evil tidings, then, so honorable?

BELZANOR: O barbarous Persian, hear my instruction. In Egypt the bearer of good tidings is sacrificed to the gods as a thank offering; but no god will accept the blood of the messenger of evil. When we have good tidings, we are careful to send them in the mouth of the cheapest slave we can find. Evil tidings are borne by young noblemen who desire to

bring themselves into notice. (*They join the rest at the gate.*)

THE SENTINEL: Pass, O young captain; and bow the head in the House of the Queen.

VOICE: Go anoint thy javelin with fat of swine, O Black-amoor; for before morning the Romans will make thee eat it to the very butt.

The owner of the voice, a fairhaired dandy, dressed in a different fashion to that affected by the guardsmen, but no less extravagantly, comes through the gateway laughing. He is somewhat battlestained; and his left forearm, bandaged, comes through a torn sleeve. In his right hand he carries a Roman sword in its sheath. He swaggers down the courtyard, the Persian on his right, Belzanor on his left, and the guardsmen crowding down behind him.

BELZANOR: Who art thou that laughest in the House of Cleopatra the Queen, and in the teeth of Belzanor, the captain of her guard?

THE NEW COMER: I am Bel Affris, descended from the gods.

BELZANOR (*ceremoniously*): Hail, cousin!

ALL (*except the Persian*): Hail, cousin!

PERSIAN: All the Queen's guards are descended from the gods, O stranger, save myself. I am Persian, and descended from many kings.

BEL AFFRIS (*to the guardsmen*): Hail, cousins! (*To the Persian, condescendingly*) Hail, mortal!

BELZANOR: You have been in battle, Bel Affris; and you are a soldier among soldiers. You will not let the Queen's women have the first of your tidings.

BEL AFFRIS: I have no tidings, except that we shall have our throats cut presently, women, soldiers, and all.

PERSIAN (*to Belzanor*): I told you so.

THE SENTINEL (*who has been listening*): Woe, alas!

BEL AFFRIS (*calling to him*): Peace, peace, poor Ethiop: destiny is with the gods who painted thee black. (*To Belzanor*) What has this mortal (*indicating the Persian*) told you?

BELZANOR: He says that the Roman Julius Cæsar, who has landed on our shores with a handful of followers, will make himself master of Egypt. He is afraid of the Roman

soldiers. (*The guardsmen laugh with boisterous scorn.*) Peasants, brought up to scare crows and follow the plough. Sons of smiths and millers and tanners! And we nobles, consecrated to arms, descended from the gods!

PERSIAN: Belzanor: the gods are not always good to their poor relations.

BELZANOR (*hotly, to the Persian*): Man to man, are we worse than the slaves of Cæsar?

BEL AFFRIS (*stepping between them*): Listen, cousin. Man to man, we Egyptians are as gods above the Romans.

THE GUARDSMEN (*exultingly*): Aha!

BEL AFFRIS: But this Cæsar does not pit man against man: he throws a legion at you where you are weakest as he throws a stone from a catapult; and that legion is as a man with one head, a thousand arms, and no religion. I have fought against them; and I know.

BELZANOR (*derisively*): Were you frightened, cousin?
The guardsmen roar with laughter, their eyes sparkling at the wit of their captain.

BEL AFFRIS: No, cousin; but I was beaten. They were frightened (perhaps); but they scattered us like chaff.
The guardsmen, much damped, utter a growl of contemptuous disgust.

BELZANOR: Could you not die?

BEL AFFRIS: No: that was too easy to be worthy of a descendant of the gods. Besides, there was no time: all was over in a moment. The attack came just where we least expected it.

BELZANOR: That shews that the Romans are cowards.

BEL AFFRIS: They care nothing about cowardice, these Romans: they fight to win. The pride and honor of war are nothing to them.

PERSIAN: Tell us the tale of the battle. What befell?

THE GUARDSMEN (*gathering eagerly round Bel Affris*): Ay: the tale of the battle.

BEL AFFRIS: Know then, that I am a novice in the guard of the temple of Ra in Memphis, serving neither Cleopatra nor her brother Ptolemy, but only the high gods. We went a journey to inquire of Ptolemy why he had driven Cleopatra

into Syria, and how we of Egypt should deal with the Roman Pompey, newly come to our shores after his defeat by Cæsar at Pharsalia. What, think ye, did we learn? Even that Cæsar is coming also in hot pursuit of his foe, and that Ptolemy has slain Pompey, whose severed head he holds in readiness to present to the conqueror. (*Sensation among the guardsmen.*) Nay, more: we found that Cæsar is already come; for we had not made half a day's journey on our way back when we came upon a city rabble flying from his legions, whose landing they had gone out to withstand.

BELZANOR: And ye, the temple guard! did ye not withstand these legions?

BEL AFFRIS: What man could, that we did. But there came the sound of a trumpet whose voice was as the cursing of a black mountain. Then saw we a moving wall of shields coming towards us. You know how the heart burns when you charge a fortified wall; but how if the fortified wall were to charge y o u ?

PERSIAN (*exulting in having told them so*): Did I not say it?

BEL AFFRIS: When the wall came nigh, it changed into a line of men—common fellows enough, with helmets, leather tunics, and breastplates. Every man of them flung his javelin: the one that came my way drove through my shield as through a papyrus—lo there! (*he points to the bandage on his left arm*) and would have gone through my neck had I not stooped. They were charging at the double then, and were upon us with short swords almost as soon as their javelins. When a man is close to you with such a sword, you can do nothing with our weapons: they are all too long.

PERSIAN: What did you do?

BEL AFFRIS: Doubled my fist and smote my Roman on the sharpness of his jaw. He was but mortal after all: he lay down in a stupor; and I took his sword and laid it on. (*Drawing the sword*) Lo! a Roman sword with Roman blood on it!

THE GUARDSMEN (*approvingly*): Good! (*They take the sword and hand it round, examining it curiously.*)

PERSIAN: And your men?

BEL AFFRIS: Fled. Scattered like sheep.

BELZANOR (*furiously*): The cowardly slaves! Leaving the descendants of the gods to be butchered!

BEL AFFRIS (*with acid coolness*): The descendants of the gods did not stay to be butchered, cousin. The battle was not to the strong; but the race was to the swift. The Romans, who have no chariots, sent a cloud of horsemen in pursuit, and slew multitudes. Then our high priest's captain rallied a dozen descendants of the gods and exhorted us to die fighting. I said to myself: surely it is safer to stand than to lose my breath and be stabbed in the back; so I joined our captain and stood. Then the Romans treated us with respect; for no man attacks a lion when the field is full of sheep, except for the pride and honor of war, of which these Romans know nothing. So we escaped with our lives; and I am come to warn you that you must open your gates to Cæsar; for his advance guard is scarce an hour behind me; and not an Egyptian warrior is left standing between you and his legions.

THE SENTINEL: Woe, alas! (*He throws down his javelin and flies into the palace.*)

BELZANOR: Nail him to the door, quick! (*The guardsmen rush for him with their spears; but he is too quick for them.*) Now this news will run through the palace like fire through stubble.

BEL AFFRIS: What shall we do to save the women from the Romans?

BELZANOR: Why not kill them?

PERSIAN: Because we should have to pay blood money for some of them. Better let the Romans kill them: it is cheaper.

BELZANOR (*awestruck at his brain power*): O subtle one! O serpent!

BEL AFFRIS: But your Queen?

BELZANOR: True: we must carry off Cleopatra.

BEL AFFRIS: Will ye not await her command?

BELZANOR: Command! a girl of sixteen! Not we. At Memphis ye deem her a Queen: here we know better. I will take her on the crupper of my horse. When we soldiers have carried her out of Cæsar's reach, then the priests and the