

CLEOPATRA 54 BC

When Your Father Leaves You The Family Business

~or~

Who Let The Scribes Out?

In 54 BC, Egypt is in its death throes (5 years before Caesar steps foot in Egypt, 13 years before Antony) ... the latest of many rise-and-falls due to its last nine Ptolemies. The first three were the empire builders: once Alexander the Great chased out the Persians, Ptolemies I, II, and III expanded the Egyptian empire and stuffed its treasury to bursting. The remaining Ptolemies from IV through XII, just spent the money like it had no end ... which of course, was a mistake. To make matters worse, with no funds left in Egypt, Ptolemy XII borrowed enormous amounts of cash from Roman moneylenders, for bribes to put himself back on the throne ... twice.

At 15 years old, this is the empire Cleopatra begins to rule without a formal title: bankrupt and under crippling debt. Now that her dad has secured the empire as a “good friend” of Rome, he's done ... and retires from political life to relax and only participate in pleasant religious activities. As a side effect of Ptolemy's shenanigans, Cleopatra also has to deal with an embezzling Roman tax collector and pay the salaries and expenses of 2500 Romans stationed in Alexandria. She needs gold ... and lots of it.

So far, this is historic fact, and the fiction starts with Cleopatra as she tries one scheme after another to dig Egypt out of its financial hole. She romantically bonds two scribes to priestesses to make sure they return to Alexandria after a mission 1000's of miles away. She gets women in the tax collector's house to work against him, and deals with the soldiers by rewarding Egyptian women to bend Roman loyalties. Anticipating an upcoming civil war, Cleopatra plays both sides of a political game between Pompey and Caesar (leveraging the women in their lives), and covertly attempts to extend her influence behind the scenes in Rome. Between all that, she spends a little too much time obsessing over notes she took from an interview with one of the scribes ... stumbling into her own coming-of-age.

See how a woman is trained to snare a husband, without him realizing what's happening. What kind of dance is it, exactly, that the scribe does to amuse his paramour in her bedroom? What could that scholar have possibly done to get him banned-for-life from a woman's temple? Watch how a storytelling Macedonian warrior gets turned into a tongue-tied puppy at first glance of a friendly Kushite. Will the Romans ever figure out that they're being manipulated by the entire female population of Alexandria? What are that priestess' OTHER tattoos?

It's a world where women call the shots and men do the grunt work. Star-crossed, separated, reunited, desired ... people are just people, not puffed-up pompous elitist upstairs/downstairs snobs. They're more like the knuckleheads that live in your neighborhood.

It's a story about how people deal with unexpected situations and unintended consequences, and how sometimes the heart just wants what the heart wants.