

CLEOPATRA 53-52 BC

Ki and the Indestructibles

~ or ~

Everybody's Movin', Everybody's Groovin' Baby

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FORWARD

This is a romantic comedy about a garage band in ancient Thebes. Like typical musicians, they all have day jobs and rarely meet each other except for gigs. By an incredible turn of luck, they perform before Co-regent Cleopatra when she visits Thebes and are contracted to perform at her coronation.

As they travel the Nile, they're desperate to increase their catalog of songs. Not really familiar with spending so much time together, their offbeat personalities are revealed. After all the traveling is done, their romances take on a life of their own.

Join priestesses, scribes, sailors, soldiers, merchant families, scholars, and the royalty of Alexandria along with the personal lives of band members. Struggle with song writing and the unexpected consequences of being a little Bohemian. What does it take to run a successful tavern just past Karnak? Ancient rap, moonwalking, stress disorders, depression, awkward relationships, a useless ichneumon and lost works of Aristotle: what's not to like?

This is a continuation of the "Young Cleopatra" series. It only contains Cleopatra in cameos, but continues the stories of some characters in her court, and adds a few. Adult situations but nothing vulgar. Not for the kiddies.

As in other books of the series, everything happens within the context of first century BCE and Cleopatra's court. There's lots of things that didn't happen, but there isn't anything that *couldn't* have happened.

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willing to bend an ear to discuss possibilities,
as well as editing the final product.

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Modified from Tomb of the Dancers, Dra Abu el-Naga
Currently in the Ashmolean Museum

To Sussa And Tippy
Glad to have you along.

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Part I – Travelin’ Band

Chapter I – Paid in Advance

A group of locals were milling about a ship docked opposite the Luxor Temple in Thebes. It was a special ship belonging to Alexandrian intelligence network.

“Captain? Who *are* those people? The girl is cute but the rest of them look like street scum.”

“They’re *musicians* ... by special order of the Co-Regent.”

“On an intelligence ship, Captain?”

“I think speed was required for the coronation ... otherwise I haven’t got a clue. The orders were pretty clear about hosting these ‘passengers’.”

“They act like they’ve never seen a ship, sir.”

“Be fair. Most peasants have never seen an intelligence ship up close ... We’re supposed to ‘make them comfortable’.”

“*WHAT?! ...* Captain, can we stick them below?”

“With the cat?! ... Ha ... ha ... Help them with their stuff.”

“*WHAT?! ...* Sorry, sir ... *ME*, sir?”

“Did I stutter? ... *Zelle?*”

“Aye, sir.” <to himself> “Worthless hobos.”

“Was there something else?”

“No, sir.”

“Ki! I’ve never seen you in a normal dress!”

“Did you think I wore sexy stage clothes in the souk to buy onions, Stuffy? ... *YOU* look exactly the same ... Like you just woke up in a back alley.”

“Why mess with perfection?”

“Felix! I thought you weren’t going to come!”

“I wasn’t, Ki ... Too scared of everything ... but they reassigned Magnus to protect us. He’ll be with me ...

us ... the whole time! Magnus said I’d be miserable without you guys to play with ... but I’m not really keen on the whole trip thing. At least I have Magnus.”

“We’ll all help. Glad you could make it.”

Stumpy: “Ki! ... Ki! ... Can you help with this clown? He won’t let me on the boat! ... Shall I just throw him off?”

Zelle: “Captain! This goon says he’s a *musician*!”

Ki: “What on earth are you doing? OF COURSE, he’s a musician! Are you blind?!! Look at what he’s carrying ... If you tick him off he’ll drive one of his pipes up your nose.”

“Zelle, would you be so kind as to escort this fine, massive musician aboard ... and *apologize* for your misunderstanding?”

“*WHAT?! ...* but Captain!”

“*ZELLE* ... You’re planning on staying in Thebes, then?”

“Fine ... I’m sorry to mistake you for a homeless guy ... not without good reason.”

Stumpy: “That’s an apology?”

Stumpy barely seemed to brush past him, but Zelle lost his balance enough that his feet left the deck and he had to grab the rigging. He had a “hurt puppy” look as he proceeded to rub his shoulder. Zelle puffed himself up when he saw Geech ambling up the plank.

Stumpy: “He’s with me, bonehead.”

Geech had some sticks and did a short drum roll on Zelle’s head.

Zelle: “OW! ... *Caaaptaaaan!* ... I’m expected to deal with these ... these ... *derelicts?!’*”

Magnus: “Captain? May we?” <Tilting his head toward Zelle.>

Captain: “You’re all here, right? My manifest says: Ki, Uncle Stuffy, Felix, Stumpy, Geech and Magnus for security.”

Magnus: “Correct.”

Captain: “Go ahead.”

As the ship pulled away from the dock, Magnus and Stumpy played rock-paper-scissors. Magnus won, picked up Zelle, and threw him off the ship. It was a pretty good throw. Zelle almost made the shore.

Φ Φ Φ

“What about you Stuff? How did your Hatti take it?”

“She’s ECSTATIC that I’ll be gone for a few months, Ki.”

“You *know* that’s not true ... and how did your last night go, hmmmm?”

“heh heh ... Don’t wanna talk about it ... How ‘bout you, Stump?”

Stumpy: “I’m just along for the ride. Six months’ pay for playing music at the coronation party? I’ll believe that when we get the coins.”

Ki: “We already got half.”

Stumpy: “... and no one told me because?”

Felix: “Now, you ruined it, Ki.”

Stumpy: “You know, I could casually stretch out one of my arms on this boat, and you could find out that ‘*Ride the Crocodile*’ is more than just a barroom expression.”

Felix: “Magnus would never let you ...”

Stumpy: “I’ll do it when he’s sleeping ...”

Ki: “STOPPPPPP!!!!”

Uncle Stuffy: “We need a name.”

Felix: “We *HAVE* names.”

“**WE** need a name ... for our ‘*fine musical ensemble*’. Something catchy. Something people will remember. We were promised extra gigs in Alexandria. We need something more identifiable than ‘*those guys*’ so people can follow us.”

“Ki and Felix?”

“SERIOUSLY? ... Sorry, but no one comes to see YOU, Felix.”

“Ki and band?”

“You’re terrible at this. It sounds like we just threw it together.”

Stumpy: “We *DID* just throw it together. How about ‘Ki and the Stone Masons’?”

Uncle Stuff: “Why stone masons?”

“What’s wrong with stone masons? A readily identifiable group of common people? *I*’m a stone mason.”

“Oh really? It’s not like you’ve ever mentioned it ... *a 1000 times!*”

Geech: “Ki and the Indestructibles.”

There was a long silence.

Felix: “He can talk?”

Uncle Stuff: “I was wondering the same thing.”

Geech: “Ki is like the old North star, Thuban. We’re like Kochab and Mizar, the Indestructibles ... we spend the whole night revolving around her ... or is that analogy too complex for you *geniuses* to comprehend? It’s pithy, has a touch of Egypt to it, kind of a subtext only Egyptians will catch, Greeks will think it sounds cool, and it’s easy to remember.”

Ki: “Who knew you were so sweet?”

This received a rim shot.

Φ Φ Φ

Felix: “I’ve been thinking.”

Uncle Stuff: “You really didn’t mean to give me that big an opening, did you?”

Felix: “If we’re going to get more gigs in Alexandria, we can’t do the same thing over and over. It works in Thebes when it’s a month or more between performances, but I’m thinking it could be days. We need more material.”

Ki: “Have you got ideas? Is that why you brought it up?”

Felix: “No. I don’t. *THAT*’s why I brought it up.”

Stumpy: “I’ve got a song ... idea ... kind of.”

Felix: “What kind?”

“A Ki song.”

Ki: “Oh my! A romantic, getting-back-together song? Something you want to tell me, Stump?”

“Yeah ... ummm ... no. It’s the other kind of Ki song.”

“Well? ... WeHHHLLL?”

“I’ve really only got the chorus.”

“GODAMMIT! SING!”

*Catch my eye and you're caught,
Buy me a drink and you're bought
A little bit of kohl, a little bit of blue
You think you got me, but I got you*

Stumpy did this with very feminine hand movements and eye batting.

"Please let there be more."

"I was thinking you could change the last two lines of the chorus to keep them interested."

*A little bit o' thigh, a little bit of ... oh my!
You haven't got a chance once you've caught my eye*

"You did choreography, too?"

"I wouldn't dream of telling you what to do."

"Good boy."

Felix: "The last '*caught my eye*' is redundant with the first line ... kind of."

Stuffy: "It still works. '*can't say goodbye*'? ... '*you can't escape, don't even try*'? ... not as good. Gotta keep the '*oh my*'."

Geech had been playing a syncopated beat starting with the second line, and he kept it up to help them think.

Felix: "The tune works, too. Plenty for us to play with."

Sailor: "*You'll fall apart with just a little sigh*"

"That's good! I need something to write on."

"Use this."

"PORN? What am I supposed to do with this?"

"Use the back, Aristotle."

"I saw the captain writing. Do you think he'd loan me a stylus and ink?"

"No. He absolutely would not."

Geech: "Here. Remember where you got it."

Geech produced an elegant scribe kit: a closed, highly polished box that opened to red and black ink blocks, depressions for mixing, two styluses, and four brushes. All the other band members just stared at him in silence. The fact that he owned such a thing implied a lot more about him than they were ready to deal with.

"Take a good long look at how clean it is. I want it returned exactly in this condition ... or you're using two months pay to buy me a new one ... FELIX."

"Do you have papyrus, too?"

"Not for you ... use the porn."

Ki: "Let me try it out. Felix? Your harp? ... Save your hands, play soft."

*Catch my eye and you're caught,
Buy me a drink and you're bought
A little bit of kohl, a little bit of blue
You think you got me, but I got you*

*Catch my eye and you're caught,
Buy me a drink and you're bought
A little bit o' thigh ... A little bit of ... Oh My!*

Ship's crew: "OWWWWWWW!!!!!!!"

You'll fall apart with just a sigh.

Stuffy: "That worked ... a lot. Nice moves, Ki. If we could move the 'oh my' to the last line, it wouldn't break up the chorus when they yell."

Ki: "Maybe we could go back to the 'caught my eye' and finish with 'oh my' ... or keep 'just a sigh' ... hmm."

Felix: "What else ya' got, Stump?"

Φ Φ Φ

"You seem like you're avoiding me, Stump."

"Because I am, Ki."

"Oh, don't be like that. We can still be friends."

"Maybe ... but not yet. I'm not done feeling sorry for myself."

Felix: "What was that?"

Uncle Stuffy: "You heard him ... write it down."

"I put the stylus thing away."

"Don't do that anymore. I've got a feeling about this."

"Oh, Rocky. Don't be that like that. We had a good thing."

"Please don't call me that."

"... but you LOVE it when I do!"

"That's why I'm asking you not to use it."

"Awwwww ... my big stone mason."

"Please stop playing so hard to forget."

Uncle Stuffy: "See? SEE?! He's a goldmine!"

Felix: "... hard ... to ... forget." <Blows on the ink>

Ki: "What the hell are you two doing?"

Uncle Stuff: "Who tips the best?"

Ki: "Women."

Felix: "What kind of songs?"

Ki: "Love songs ... sad ones do really well. Broken-hearted-men songs are the best."

Uncle Stuff and Felix both raised their eyebrows, looked at each other, then looked at Ki.

Stumpy: "You're going to capitalize on my misery?"

Felix: "Only because it comes from the soul."

"I'm learning to really hate you guys."

Uncle Stuff and Felix, pen in hand, were anxiously waiting for the next interchange.

Stumpy: "Why don't you write about your OWN stuff?! Stuff makes it sound like Hatti breaks his heart every day!"

Felix: "Breaks ... heart ... every ..."

Stuff: "Shut up"

Geech: "*She's got a black rock in her heart that you could burn for heat.*"

Felix+Stuff: "Sweet Mother of Ptah!"

Stuff: <recovering first> "Shut your mouth ... and write! ... WRITE!"

Φ Φ Φ

"Maybe I made a mistake, Stump."

"Ki, I'm the direct opposite of your pretty, rich boys. I didn't have much to offer."

"But ... you really cared about me. We were good together."

"It sure was fun being good to you."

Ki: "Hey! Knuckleheads! This is a private conversation!"

Stuff: "Not if Stump's gonna do all our work for us."

Felix: "... good ... to ... you." <Blows ink>

Chapter II – Rock Me

Ki was having a hard time sleeping on the ship. She kept glancing at Stumpy's deeply breathing hulk, and remembering how cozy and secure it actually felt. It was a very still night, and the boat was anchored in the middle of the Nile for a change. Apparently, this area had hippos and stumbling into them in the dark was presented as a very bad idea. She could just hear the hint of a voice, and quietly got up to investigate. She saw Felix first, hiding behind the mast with a lamp ... writing. Then she saw Uncle Stuffy, as far from anyone as he could possibly be, gently strumming a harp and singing very softly to himself.

*Rock me baby wrap me in your arms
Rock me baby keep me safe from harm
Ooooooh ... baby rock me
Rock me baby like a new born child
Rock me baby with your kisses wild
Ooooooh ... baby rock me*

He was singing to his Hatti, a hundred miles away. Pouring out whatever of his soul she had left him. Ki and Felix felt like they were intruding on a very intimate moment, but they couldn't stop listening.

Ki: <whispering> "Oh ... My ... God. I don't know whether to start crying or jump his bones."

Felix: <whispering> "I was thinking 'both'."

Ki noticed Felix' face was wet with tears, and they had smudged some of the words he was writing. She couldn't help herself, and crept closer to Stuffy. She started very softly, barely heard, and slowly increased her volume singing the high harmony. Stuffy finally heard her and glanced at her a little distressed, but he couldn't stop: he was caught up in emotion.

Ooooooh ... baby rock me

As if summoned by a spell, the other band members silently assembled. They added their voices one-by-one each time the chorus came around. Felix took the low harmony, Stumpy did bass ... and Geech doubled up on Ki's part with falsetto.

Ooooooh ... baby rock me

Stuffy's raw emotion and the combined voices made the sound ethereal. Stumpy's bass had the effect of physically grabbing any listener deep inside their chest.

Ooooooh ... baby rock me

When Stuffy stopped, Ki embraced him, and rubbed his back ... crying. When they turned around to go back to their places, they saw that everyone on the ship was awake, looking at them, with very sad expressions. There wasn't a man aboard that hadn't endured long separations from their soul mates.

Captain: "Could you sing it again? Please?"

Φ Φ Φ

"Stump, why do you sleep alone? ... When I know you don't like it."

Stuffy: "Now SHE's doing it!"

Felix: "Woof! Right from the get go. I'm still mixing ink."

"Hey, Ki ... can you pause until we catch up?"

Φ Φ Φ

"Ki? I could use your help."

"You're not trying to rhyme Per-Wadjet again, are you Felix?"

"Not this time."

"Shoot."

*If you'll be my 'Gyptian chicken, I'll be your Nubian lamb
and we can walk together down in Theban land.*

"I like the melody. What's a 'Gyptian chicken'?"

"Term of endearment? 'Egyptian' has too many syllables."

"Chicken? Which one is that? Boy or girl?"

"Boy. You know ... like a baby chick a girl could cuddle."

"Chicken? ... uhhhh, OK ... why Nubian?"

"Needed three syllables."

"Do they have sheep up there?"

"Dunno."

"Theban Land' ... Are you referring to Kalek's amusement park?"

"No ... no, no ... I was thinking walking hand-in-hand around Thebes."

"If you'll be my term of endearment, I'll be your term of endearment, and we can walk around someplace
romantic ... is that it?"

"Yeah"

"Ooooh ... that needs work."

Φ Φ Φ

"Do you ever think about getting back together, Stump?"

"I try very hard not think about that."

"I'm thinking about it more and more."

"That's just because I'm here. I don't want to be the one you're with. I want to be the one you can't be
without."

Stuffy: "Damn! It sounds like he's cracking. I hope he holds out ... we need more."

Felix: "... one ... you're ... with ... Rats! I'm running out of black, have to use red ..."

Geech: "Keeping my kit clean, are we?"

Φ Φ Φ

Ki: "What are you all up to? Everyone can see you 'conspiring' ... giggling like little girls."

Stumpy: "We're writing a song."

Ki: "Let me guess '*hold on to your tunic, I'm about to ravish you*' kind of song?"

Uncle Stuff: "No ... no, no. It's not a Ki song. Stumpy pointed out that people love it when you use their city name. We're writing an 'Alexandria' song."

Ki: "What? '*Oh great and noble city, sacred to ...*' something or other?"

There was dead silence.

"BWAHAHAHAHA ... eeee hee hee ... hahahahah ... ha ... haha ... no."

Stumpy: "Every other line in the chorus is '*Alexandria*' ... we all sing that in harmony, then we alternate voices with the other lines."

Ki: "What's mine?"

"Third line ...

'They're standing in the shadows waiting for a chump like you'

... We think your big voice would work best."

"My 'wake up the back row' voice?"

"That's the one."

Stuff: "It could be the opener ... and it can work anywhere with the right number of syllables ... and change of street names."

Geech started a slow, kind of 'slinky' beat. Felix was playing the bass harp, with a very simple repetitive line. Ki couldn't help move her shoulders, and her hips just followed along.

*There's a band that plays real tight
They're hot and heavy, and sound just right
I heard they're goin' ALL night long*

*Start yerself at the Moon Gate
Right at temple Hecate
Go right down to Egypt town ... and see what's goin' on*

*You can't miss it from the street
Go in when you hear the back beat
Don't worry about that big thug at the door*

You'll know he just ain't lookin'

*When you hear the band a-cookin'
That fool's watchin' all the ladies dancin' on the floor*

*Alex-Ahhn-dria
You better hope you can run real fast
Alex-Ahhn-dria
They'll pull you off the street and kick your ASS
Alex-Ahhn-dria
They're standing in the shadows waiting for a chump like you
Alex-Ahhn-dria
Don't stop or look around ... just keep movin' right on through
Go on, go on ... don't look back ... keep movin'*

*Inside ... walls are shakin'
Outside ... doors are breakin'
It ain't no place to be without a knife*

*Those ladies tryin' to grab your coat
Got a pimp that wants to CUT YOUR THROAT
You'll wind up bandaged like a mummy in the House of Life*

*Big sister told him not to go
His momma told him too
But he just wouldn't listen ... mmm mmm mmm*

*He walked all the way from the Pharos
Now the cops took him out flat, comatose
Old woman say: 'That's just the way it goes in Alexandria.'*

*Alex-Ahhn-dria
You better hope you can run real fast
Alex-Ahhn-dria
They'll pull you off the street and literally kick your ASS
Alex-Ahhn-dria
They're standing in the shadows waiting for a chump like you
Alex-Ahhn-dria
Don't stop or look around ... just keep movin' right on through
For Ptah's sake, don't look back ... keep movin'*

The crew had been singing along with “Alex-Ahhn-dria” and the captain was yelling: “BACK TO WORK!”

Ki: “Eee hee hee ... is that it?”

Felix: “We wish. We've got about ten more verses. This stuff writes itself ... even the crew helped. We're trying to trim it down, then we think of new ones.”

Stuffy: "It's *hard!* There's a lot of good stuff in there."

Ki: "By any chance is there a verse about some kind of wanton woman revealing herself while dancing?"

Stuffy: "Errr ... yes? How did you ...?"

"Wild guess."

Φ Φ Φ

Geech: "*She broke his heart into pieces and scattered them about, he collected some remains and just stumbles in & out.*"

Stuffy: "Where did that come from?"

"Stuff happens."

Ki: "HEY! If that's about me, it's just MEAN!"

Geech: "I was thinking of Stuffy's Hatti."

"Oh ... Then it's really good."

Φ Φ Φ

Stumpy: "Try this. You're the one who's separated from your lover, Ki. You're trying to get back to him, but there are distractions."

Stuffy: "*Naughty* distractions."

Stumpy: "No one would blink an eye if it was a man, just a few chuckles. If it's *you*, they'll listen close."

Ki: "I *might* be OK with this ... Who's doing what?"

Stumpy: "It's my idea, and my chorus ... Stuff's gotta sing it for you 'cuz I have a music idea."

Stumpy was doing something new. He was playing his twin pipes in notes close together, making a very mournful sound ... full of longing.

*Caught a raft from Meriotis
Two boys and a cargo of lotus
They started out shy
But in the blink of an eye
That flower made us lose our focus*

*Then I caught a ride with a load of wine
That merchant knew his goods just fine
Sweet red got me dreamy
The cabin got steamy
Don't know what happened to all that time*

*I'm tryin' hard to get back to you
That's all that I wanna DOOOOO
Look for me, baby
A week or two, maybe*

I got somethin' SPICY ... just for you

Stumpy: "If it was a man singing about women, it would just be funny."

Ki: "Multiple men? Getting back to one I really care about? That's a bit much, even for me."

Stuffy: "It gets much worse."

Φ Φ Φ

"I can't play at love, Ki. I was serious last time. I didn't realize you weren't."

"Sometimes I don't think things out all the way. I was born full speed ahead."

Stuffy: "Nice one."

Chapter III – Alexandria

As the musicians' fastboat pulled into the lake port, Kalek (kind of a promoter) was there to greet them. He had received a pigeon script about their new name and had made a wood poster of them in action poses, with a bright star being circled by two other stars at the top. At the bottom, bold letters spelled out "*Ki and the Indestructibles*" in Greek and Egyptian. Tacked to the poster was a piece of papyrus that said "First Appearance in Alexandria! Ezekiel's Tavern, Mars Day, 8 Bells."

Kalek: "Enh? Enh?!"

Stumpy: "I thought we were doing the coronation party."

Kalek: "Bad weather on the Med. Eastern potentates are delayed at least a week."

Uncle Stuff: "Mars day is in a week."

Kalek: "No! This is TONIGHT!"

Stumpy: "We can't do it. Ki's just coming out of Black Water fever. Felix is out, too. They're our lead singers."

Stuff: "Big place or small?"

Kalek: "Probably only sixty people or so. I just wanted to get you guys out there. I can cancel. I'll tell them you were delayed by ... crocs. Always a good excuse."

"How long is the set?"

"90 minutes?"

"Can you make it 45? Call it a sneak preview? Just use 'Black Water Fever' ... that's always good, too."

"Done."

Stumpy: "What the Hell do you have in mind?"

Φ Φ Φ

Ki was better, the fever had broken, but she was a limp rag and not capable of performing. The ship's Dakka [physician] had made the duration a lot easier for her.

Felix was actually worse. Night winds had whipped up the waves and he had been quite sea-sick before they left the Nile for the canal. He had mostly recovered, although somewhat weak, when his depression fell on him like an anvil. Everyone could see it. He was normal Felix, chatting ... joking ... then a dark shadow fell on him, and his soul just seemed to leave. This malady was recognized but not well understood: most physicians still considered behavioral problems to be divinely caused. However, the witch-doctor Baskakeren and his nephew Dakka (top physician training all ship Dakkas) suspected it was similar to any other disease ... something that could be treated, and they'd had a little success with herbs. The ship's Dakka was trying combinations of chamomile, lavender, and saffron to help Felix. Magnus was trying to distract him by reminiscing about the good parts of their lives, telling him how he was needed.

Uncle Stuff, Stumpy, and Geech were left by themselves for the entertainment. With the musicians' hunger for any income, they were determined to still put on a show. The crowd didn't seem to find pure

musical numbers very appealing, so Stuffy tried some of the ribald tavern songs he knew. At one point, he tied a scarf around his head and wrapped some cloth around his waist to make a skirt ... and did his impression of their "*Dust Devil*" song, a Ki favorite in Thebes ... complete with feminine gestures including the kiss-throwing-complete-with-butt gesture. That went pretty well. Geech's falsetto covered most of the routine Ki songs, but they just weren't grabbing the crowd and they knew it.

Then Uncle Stuffy got a "look". Neither of the other two musicians knew what was coming, but they were paying close attention so they could jump in. Stuffy picked up the harp that was strung to bass notes, and started a simple repetitive hook: four ascending notes, with a slide down below the first note. When he spoke, he wasn't singing: it was more of a monotone, with clipped words, unless he wanted emphasis.

She cold, she hot ... no-tellin'-what-I-got
She cold, she hot ... my-Hatti-nice-or-not
She don't do ROMANCIN'
No point ADVANCIN'
Then she gets ENTRANCIN'
She-pull-my-puppet-string-until-I-get-to-DANCIN'

I just can't manage BALANCIN'

Most of the audience had their mouths open, quite surprised. They hadn't realized they were unconsciously moving to the beat, just a little.

"Cosmo? What language do you think that is?"

"Those are Greek words, Simon ... but it seems like the grammar was frightened away by that beat."

"Oh ... I see. I'm not used to hearing words chopped up like that."

"I think he's using them to make a rhythm." <Bobbing his head>

"How very curious"

She sour, she sweet ... sometime-she-give-a-treat
She sour, she sweet ... she-make-me-miss-a-beat
I-can't-predict-the ACTION
More-like-inACTION
No-interACTION
Then-she-get-all-nice-and-give-me-satisFACTION

There's no resisting her attRACTION

Geech had figured out the pattern pretty quickly and was drumming to complement Stuffy's delivery. Stumpy was just improvising, stopping dead for the last line. While the others played, Stuffy took a break to dance ... sort of. He touched his knees together to make an "X", then spread them out to make a diamond shape ... repetitively. He raised his elbows and moved his arms in odd ways, finishing off with a peculiar walk where it appeared his feet were stepping forward, but he was actually sliding backwards.

She soft, she hard ... she-keep-me-off-my-guard
She soft, she hard ... I-just-a-dog-tied-in-a-yard heh, heh
She-feel-so-damn GOOD
I-just-wish-she WOULD
No-tellin'-likeliHOOD
Then-she-take-me-down-and-wake-up-the-neighborHOOD

I just give up my manHOOD

She cold, she hot ... baby, you're on fire
She sour, she sweet ... oh so sweet
She hard, she soft ... just the right places
MMMM mmm mmm

When the song finished, there was a deathly silence. Uncle Stuffy opened his palms, ducked his head, and raised his eyebrows in a question.

A single voice shouted out "MORE!!"

It was picked up as a rhythmic cheer: "MORE! MORE! MORE! ..."

Φ Φ Φ

Stumpy: "How are you feeling, Ki."

Ki: "I'm a little wobbly on my legs, but I just feel weak ... not sick. How did it go?"

Uncle Stuffy: "Any night where they don't ask for their money back is a good night."

Stumpy: "How's Felix?"

Ki: "I think he's coming out of it ... he's kind of in that in-between part where he's stoic ... I heard Stuffy did poetry?"

Uncle Stuffy: "No. Not really poetry."

Geech started drumming with his hands, and imitated Stuffy. Stumpy accompanied on the bass harp.

She sour, she sweet ... sometime-she-give-a-treat
She sour, she sweet ... she-make-me-miss-a-beat
I-can't-predict-the ACTION
More-like-inACTION
No-inteACTION
Gimme-gimme-gimme-gimme-satisFACTION

Stuffy: "That doesn't *sound* like me ... but that's a good line."

Geech: "You're welcome. He had two more verses and a capper ... plus the dance. It turned the crowd."

Ki: "How long have you been working on that?"

Stuffy: "I just made that up."

Felix: "WHAT?!! While you stood there?!!"

Stuffy: "Well, yeah. Haven't you ever been in a rhyming battle?"

Ki: "A what?"

Stuffy: "You're kidding! Were all of you raised by jackals or something?"

Felix: "I know a lot of musicians and I've never heard ANYTHING about 'rhyming battles'."

Stuffy: "Savages!"

Ki: "There was a dance?"

Stuffy: "*Kind of.*"

Ki: "Let's see it."

Geech drummed, Stuffy did his dance.

Ki: "EEEEEEEE HEEE HEEE ... That's wonderful! Hahahahaha ... Do it again ... I have an idea ... What's that last part? With your feet?"

Φ Φ Φ

Musicians like getting paid. Since the trio had success, Kalek got them another gig the next day, with Ki and Felix still off their feet. It was another preview for the full band. They planned to keep themselves to the songs that had worked the night before ... including Stuffy's rap ... until they took a good look at the audience.

Uncle Stuffy: "Well this is a fine mess. A tavern full of wound up men that look like they lifted rocks all day."

Stumpy: "What's wrong with that?"

"Criminy! How do we get them to not throw stuff at us?"

"I know how."

"What? Your stupid boring-man song? No love, no sex, no women, nothing fun going on?"

"It's perfect."

"Perfect to get us booted out, I guess. I don't have a better idea ... go for it."

*Grab your beer and sing along
We all work 'till the foreman's gone
We all drag ourselves through a long week fight
Fall in love from a kiss on 9th day night
We've all had our souls rejected
Closed down bars and felt dejected
Take a good look and tell me I'm wrong
The whole damn world's just one big tavern song*

*Who ... cuts the blocks all day?
Drags 'em around ... for a monkey's pay?
Dodges tools that are dropped by an idiot
Takes orders from a guy who's illiterate
Who builds a 30 foot wall 'cuz they're tough*

Gets yelled at for not bein' fast enough
Goes home at the end of a long, long day
Gets the kids from the wife who just runs away

A group of very large men in the back, looking a lot like Stumpy, bodies like large solid slabs of meat with thick arms and legs sticking out of them, slammed their table with their mugs and shouted "YEAH!" ... drowning out the chuckles from the last line. Stuffy looked around the tavern for another identifiable group ... and started looking for rhymes. He had a little time, since he knew Stumpy had another verse.

Grab your beer and sing along

...

Who ... pulls the fish from the Nile?
Who ... fights crocs as a LIFESTYLE?
Hippos and black flies are another day's work
Then you have to deal with buyer's who are jerks
How quaint ... fixing nets, breaking your backs
Tearing your hands with miles of flax
No one would pick this life on a wish
Cuz' at the end of the day, you smell like ... FISH! <The crowd screamed the last word>

Grab your beer and sing along

...

Stuffy was thinking of farmers, but there weren't many there ... that he could obviously tell. There were some merchants, but they weren't working class. What does a textile worker look like? Garbage collectors would work ... but he ran out of time and went for low hanging fruit.

Who ... is there to scratch your itch?
Who ... wears a smile if you're rich?
Who deals with chumps like they're her best friend?
Works harder than a man and has to pretend <female yelling started>

...

The lines got filthier and filthier and were great to get everyone onboard with the band, except the crowd made them perform the whole thing twice more. Stuffy had a good feeling, and spoke the words of the chorus quickly just before Stumpy got there, so everyone could sing along.

<grab your beer and sing along>
Grab your beer and sing along
<we all work 'till the foreman's gone>
We all work 'till the foreman's gone

...

“How did you know stone masons would be here?”

“Duh. This is Egypt. Stone masons are everywhere.”

Φ Φ Φ

Ki and the Indestructibles had heated discussions about the order of songs. They decided their best song was Stumpy’s “*Oh My!*” song. With only two days before the next show, they expanded it, added some stagecraft, and really made it something people would talk about.

Stumpy wanted it right up front to knock people out of their seats. Felix thought that if they did that, the audience would expect more of the same and be disappointed with the rest of the show. They finally agreed to use it to end the show with a bang that would be remembered.

Their first full-band performance in Alexandria went very well. They tried out some of their new songs: some hit, some miss. Their old standards like “*Dust Devil*” and “*I Shouldn’t Be Alone With You*” grabbed the crowd just like they did in Thebes. As expected, any song that featured an aggressive Ki was a hit. At the end, they let the crowd settle, then jumped into “*Oh My!*”

Ki was flirty with the first verse, and naughty with the second which got yells from the crowd. Then Uncle Stuffy moved stage center and did some rhyming, while Geech gave him a driving beat, and Ki, Felix, and Stumpy did the “Uncle Stuffy dance” in synchrony behind him. Stuffy finished by joining the synchronous dancing and Stumpy moved to the front. The music changed to a very dainty version of the song, with Stumpy showing off his massive thigh and revealing a muscled shoulder with very feminine movements. The crowd ROARED. Ki finished it off with another verse and one last “*Oh My!*” chorus. Geech gave it a thunderous finish. The applause was explosive. Ki and the Indestructibles did formal bows, but the applause wouldn’t stop ... it just went on and on and on.

Felix: “Oh crap! They don’t know that was the finale! What are we gonna do?”

Stuffy: “What happens if we just walk off?”

Stuffy turned his back and made to leave ... and there was an ugly undercurrent in the room.

Stumpy: “Play it again?”

Felix: “Unprofessional.”

“Yeah ... but maybe they’ll just leave.”

Ki: “*Rock Me.*”

Stuffy: “NO! That’s PERSONAL!!”

“It’s perfect. They’re as high as they can be, that will push them way down.”

“Thanks for that.”

“In a nice way ... the women will be crying. They’ll remember BOTH songs.”

“Don’t wanna.”

The music for “*Rock Me*” started. Ki pushed Stuffy to the front, and he sang. They added their harmonies one-by-one, just like they did on the boat. The rowdy crowd succumbed to the emotional love and separation song. Couples embraced each other as they listened. When the song was done, the applause was more polite than thunderous, and it seemed like all the couples just got up and left, like they had something important to do.

The band was relieved and started packing up their instruments, but Geech couldn’t help noticing that most of the remaining audience milling about were women. Some were starting to cluster around Stuffy. To everyone’s surprise, Geech tore into a drum introduction to get everyone’s attention, then started singing.

Ya’ gotta kiss somebody ... like a drummer in a Theban band
Ya’ gotta kiss somebody ... c’mon and take my hand
There’s nothin’ worse than an empty bed
Just take a chance, try me instead
Ya’ gotta kiss somebody ... somebody like ME

Ki: “For the love of Ptah!”

Stuffy was looking at the audience. Mature, determined women, presumably affected by Stuffy’s song, were closing in on him, but a group of young ones were flowing like a river towards Geech. Stuff made up a verse and sang it. Felix and Stumpy played along.

Ya’ gotta kiss somebody ... like a drummer in a Theban band
Ya’ gotta kiss somebody ... c’mon and take his hand
Everyone can use a little change
So try yourself a little bit of strange
Ya’ gotta kiss somebody ... somebody like HIM

Geech and Stuffy traded a couple of versus, then nodded at each other and sang the first one again. There was only a little applause, just mostly screaming, as Geech disappeared under a swarm. The women interested in Stuff surrounded him.

“I” rock you, baby ... like you can’t believe.”
“I’m sorry, ladies. My Hatti owns my soul.”
“I’m a Hatti!”
“Me, too!”
“I” be your Hatti ... as long as you want ... *baby* ... no soul required.”

Ki: “All in all, this was a pretty good night.”
Stumpy: “They’ll remember us. I bet word will get around.”
Felix: “I like seeing Stuff uncomfortable, but we should go rescue him.”
Stumpy: “What about Geech?”
Ki: “He’s getting exactly what he wanted.”