

CLEOPATRA 53-52BC

Gold Is Where You Find It

~or~

Supersize Me!

Marian Marion Kebab

A bookkeeper makes a business call

This was a good day. Nefertari had finished two clients by lunch, and had two more to fill out the afternoon. She wasn't just "a" bookkeeper: she was "the" bookkeeper of Thebes. When the tax collectors examined books and saw her stamp, there were no audits, no questioning, ... they just copied her figures, picked up the tax, and moved on. She didn't work "for" the government, and that was the beauty of her business. She used every corner of the law to save a client money, but never exceeded it. In her five years of operation, not a single client had been fined. The government liked her because she saved them time. Her clients liked her because she saved them money.

The front door was open, and Nefertari did a quick knock and strode in ... to see three grown men cowering in a corner, fighting to be the one with his back against the wall. In front of them was a full grown, eight-foot-long Egyptian cobra, its head and full hood swaying while it examined the men.

For its part, the cobra was tasting the air, and was wondering if any of the men were carrying any small rodents in the folds of their clothing ... or maybe a tasty black rat.

"Oh, for crap's sake! Can the three of you just grow a pair? ... You big whiny babies!"

Nefertari stepped back out through the door and selected a stick from the half dozen leaning against the wall. They were pretty much all the same: a relatively straight five-foot stick with a "Y" on the end. She walked back into the room.

"Cooooossss, coos, coos, coos ... coooooossss, coos, coos, coos."

The cobra excitedly turned to see what kind of food it was going to get, and Nefertari pinned its head to the floor with the "Y". She grabbed the snake behind the Y with both hands and dragged it outside. The building next door had a low wall and she pulled the snake over to it. With some effort, she kicked the tail-end to middle of the snake over the wall, then tossed the head-end over with a great heave.

"Hey! HEYY!!! Anyone there? Ya got a runner!!!"

When Nefertari got back, the men were still cowering in the corner. One had wet himself. Another had done something else.

“Is it gone, Tari?”

“You call yourselves ‘men’? What the Hell is wrong with you?!”

“It was a POISONOUS COBRA!!”

“That a child could have handled, you big frickin’ babies!”

“It surprised us! It just appeared out of nowhere!!”

“Out of nowhere my ass. They BREED them next door you idiots. What did you think the sign ‘Sacred Cobra Nursery’ meant?”

“We can’t read Egyptian.”

“... said by someone trying to do business in the heart of Egypt. Does your mother know you left home?”

Why did you think this place was so cheap? Didn’t you wonder about the *smell*? Frickin’ MORONS!”

“Will it come back?”

“Probably not. I scared it. There’s nothing stopping its brothers and sisters, though. I would strongly advise you to go next door and have them show you how to handle a stick. Goddamn stupid halfwits ... WHAT are **you** doing, jackass?”

“Errrrmm ... I’m ... closing the door? ... so they won’t come in?”

“Never, EVER close the door. They WILL get in a hundred different ways in this rat trap. Always make sure they can LEAVE! How did you guys ever get this far? That snake has more sense ... You’ve got records for me?”

“Oh ... yes, yes ... right here. There’s not much.”

“Poor sales, I’m guessing? You two, please get changed, the smell is pretty bad ... and you, watch for snakes ... Don’t just stare at the front door, moron. Keep your eyes moving around the room ... look for movement. Isis frickin’ mother of us all, what a bunch of clowns.”

The books were done quickly.

“You’re not very good at this. Perhaps you should do something else, or move somewhere else. No matter what you do, your very next step should be to learn how to handle snakes from your neighbor. I’ll bet you a copper you get two more before sunset ... Lord knows how many in the night. You might want to sleep someplace else.”

Stupid empty-headed Greek merchants: the Med isn’t big enough for them? They have to come HERE?! Scared of a stupid snake. What next?

Φ Φ Φ

“Hey, Tari! You *know* I could show you a good time ...”

“How would I *know* that? Your girlfriend says you’re a bit substandard.”

“Hey, baby! Don’t be like that ...”

He put a hand on her shoulder. She put her fist to his jaw. He went down like a stone.

The divine Pharaoh visits his co-regent daughter

The Pharaoh was in a good mood. Most of the previous day had been spent in a religious ceremony. He had forgotten which deity. He used a boilerplate speech which he had pretty much memorized over the years, and it had spots to insert the deities' names and unique traits. He had taken to writing these on his hand to avoid mistakes in delivery, but they were all smudged now. That looked like a "B": Bastet? Bes? Babi? Babi didn't make any sense ... he didn't remember any baboons. Bastet maybe? It felt like more of a Bes party afterwards, and it was a great one. He played his flute along with the band, the dancers were very nice, the wine was alright (but he preferred his own palace-made beer), and that new girl from the Black Sea tried very hard to separate herself from the pack and please him. All in all, it was very good to be Pharaoh.

Then he stepped into Cleopatra's office.

The first thing he saw was the top of his daughter's head, as she had her head down and was examining documents. The desk was STACKED with them. Documents always meant unpleasant questions, usually concerning money. The Pharaoh knew this wasn't going to turn out well, and he tried to beat a hasty retreat.

"Come right in, oh Divine Horus, Lord of the Two Lands ... take a seat. Let's talk."

She hadn't even lifted her head. The Pharaoh started to squirm.

There was a huge sigh from the Princess, then she lifted her head. When she was reading documents on the right, her hair had gotten in the way and she had made a random pony tail on that side. The same thing happened on the left. The oddly angled hair bunches were quite cute in a little girl way, but there was a very angry face in front of them.

"Tell me, oh great Pharaoh, have you *EVER* looked at financial records? ***EVER?!!!***"

"Ummm ... I have good advisors?"

"Don't you **DARE** try to blame this on your advisors. They do what you tell them."

"Is there a problem of some sort?"

"A **problem**? Why, yes ... now that you mention it. There **is** a problem ... ***YOU!!***"

"I'll go get Dios. He was in charge of the treasury."

"Don't bother. I have his records ... and **notes** right in front of me. He burst into joyful tears when I relieved him of that responsibility ... and stay right where you are. I'm nowhere near done."

"Yes, Patti."

"Don't 'Patti' me ... do you even **KNOW** the state of the treasury?"

"Err ... I was just there the other day. It appears to be empty. Not even a copper."

"Good, good ... glad to know you're keeping up ... and why do you suppose that is?"

"Romans took all the gold?"

"Your poor advisors. I'd give them all raises for putting up with you, **IF WE HAD ANY MONEY!** You've single-handedly bankrupted the empire!"

"... but didn't you get gold from Gabinus?"

"How do you think the army is getting paid? The administrators? The palace food suppliers? The police? The navy? The city water workers? The waste handlers? We can't afford new construction ...

maintenance to prevent ancient buildings from falling on people is killing us! I knew things were bad from those Roman bribes, but you've been letting our system of government collapse on itself."

Cleopatra had come out from behind her desk and was stalking him ... like an animal.

"Umm ... ummm ... I'm sorry? Really, sorry?"

"AAAHHHHH!!!! You're '*sorry*'?! I feel like hitting you with something ... like a temple column."

"I'm your **FATHER!**"

"Yes, you are ... and I love you dearly ... but by any chance do you know what last night's party cost? I just totaled up the receipts."

"Errrr ... isn't that a religious expense?"

"What the *Hell* are you talking about? We can't expense-out our bills from our taxes. We don't PAY taxes, we COLLECT taxes ... I know you have no idea. I'm making a point. That one party cost 3500 silver we don't have. You have independent resources to cover it?"

"Well, no ... I ..."

"No, you don't. This can't go on. From now on, all your expenses come through me for approval BEFORE you spend the funds. You're on an allowance. I'll give you 750 a month. If you want a big party, learn to save."

"YOU'RE TREATING THE DIVINE PHARAOH OF EGYPT LIKE A CHILD!!"

"If it walks like a duck ..."

"**PATTI!!!**"

"... and no more foreign food imports."

"Patti, please ..."

"... or foreign fabric ... or foreign women ... you can *think* global, just *buy* local."

"You're taking all the fun out of it."

Cleopatra was patting her father's head.

"It's alright, daddy. It's just until I can get us back on our feet. A little belt tightening now, then back to normal."

"Don't wanna."

Caesar plans to fight against overwhelming odds

Caesar was looking at his war table and it wasn't a pretty sight. Quintus Cicero's camp was laid out, but they had surrounded it with pebbles. Each pebble stood for a hundred Nervii. There were 600 of them, mostly around the camp but spread out in the terrain as well. As the reports came in, they were moving to the opposite side of a valley from Caesar's encampment, where he had come to rescue Quintus. Caesar had 70 wooden cubes on his side.

How the Hell did Quintus survive this long?

"Get me Antonius."

"*Marcus Antonius, Proconsul?*"

"We have another one?"

"Isn't there an Antonius who's a quartermaster, Proconsul?"

"What? *Atticus?*"

"Ummmm ... an Antonius who handles livestock, Proconsul?"

"*Aridius?!! WHY* would I want to talk to any of those people ... *RIGHT NOW?!!*"

"Ummmmm ..."

"Who the Hell are you again?"

"Cook, Proconsul."

Goddammit.

"Why are you wearing an infantry uniform ... and armor?"

"It looked like it might get a little ... dicey? ... Proconsul?"

Jupiter's Balls! There's just no end to it.

"I would greatly appreciate it if you would be so kind as to inform the cavalry officer, Marcus Antonius, that his presence is requested ... AND GODDAMN GET HIM HERE IN TWO SECONDS!"

A vein on Caesar's head was throbbing.

Two women at a fastfood booth try to improve their income

Hatti-1: “What are you doing with those pins? We’re supposed to save those, and give them away to foreigners only, for ... ummm ... *advertising*.”

Hatti-2: “It’s an experiment in maximizing tips. How does this look?”

Hatti-1: “Going for side boob?”

Hatti-2: “Yep.”

Hatti-1: “Bend over and shimmy ... ooooh, that’s not good ... unless you wanted that to happen.”

Hatti-2: “No. I just wanted to tease, not deliver the goods.”

Hatti-1: “Let me help ... now try ... that should work ... very *enticing*.”

The girls kept close track of their tips on the first wave of customers. Hatti-1 adopted the use of pins as well, after that.

Androcles was very disappointed when he came in the morning, and again at lunchtime. He didn’t realize they were only open for a short time in the late afternoon. Now, as he approached, he saw the lovely backs of the girls, then they turned around.

YEEOW!!

Hatti-2: “*An-dro-cles*” <said in a very sweet sing song> “My favorite customer!” <with the tiniest of shimmies>

Hatti-1: <whispering> “You’re *shameless!*”