

CLEOPATRA'S DAUGHTER

A Novel

Michelle Moran





Nefertiti

The Heretic Queen

CLEOPATRA'S
DAUGHTER

A NOVEL

MICHELLE
MORAN



CROWN PUBLISHERS | NEW YORK

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An Excerpt from Rebel Queen

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TIME LINE

323 BC	After the death of Alexander the Great in Babylon, the empire he had so rapidly built begins to disintegrate. Ptolemy, one of Alexander's Macedonian generals, seizes control of Egypt. Thus begins the Ptolemaic dynasty that will end with Kleopatra Selene.
47 BC	Julius Caesar's forces defeat Ptolemy XIII in the Battle of the Nile, and Kleopatra VII is installed on the throne of Egypt. Later that same year, she announces that she has borne Caesar a son, Caesarion ("little Caesar"). The relationship between Julius Caesar and Kleopatra will continue until his assassination.
46 BC	Juba I, King of Numidia, allies himself with the republicans' losing cause in their war against Caesar. After the calamitous Battle of Thapsus, his kingdom of Numidia is annexed as a Roman province, and a servant is instructed to take Juba's life. His infant son, Juba II, is taken to Rome and paraded through the streets during Caesar's Triumph. Juba II is raised by Caesar and his sister, forming close ties with Caesar's young adopted heir, Octavian.
44 BC	The assassination of Julius Caesar. In the aftermath, an uneasy alliance is formed: the Second Triumvirate, composed of his supporters Octavian, Marc Antony, and Lepidus. The three unite to defeat the forces of Caesar's killers, led by Brutus and Cassius, who have amassed an army in Greece.
42 BC	After victory over the forces of Brutus and Cassius at the Battle of Philippi, the three members of the Second Triumvirate go their separate ways. Marc Antony begins his tour of the eastern provinces by summoning the Queen of Egypt to meet him.
41 BC	Meeting of Marc Antony and Kleopatra VII. Antony is so charmed that he returns to spend the winter with her in Alexandria, during which time their twins are conceived.
40 BC	Birth of Kleopatra Selene and Alexander Helios. The following eight years see escalating mistrust and eventual hostilities between Octavian and Marc

	Antony.
36 BC	Triumvirate breaks up when Lepidus is removed from power by Octavian. Rome is now governed by Octavian and Marc Antony. Birth of Ptolemy, Queen Kleopatra and Marc Antony's third and last child together.
31 BC	Marc Antony and Kleopatra's forces are defeated at the sea battle of Actium by the young Octavian and his indispensable military aide, Marcus Agrippa.





CHARACTERS

Agrippa. Octavian's trusted general; father of Vipsania.

Alexander. Son of Queen Kleopatra and Marc Antony; Selene's twin brother.

Antonia. Daughter of Octavia and her second husband, Marc Antony.

Antyllus. Son of Marc Antony and his third wife, Fulvia.

Claudia. Daughter of Octavia and her first husband, Gaius Claudius Marcellus.

Drusus. Second son of Livia and her first husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero.

Gallia. Daughter of Vercingetorix, king of the defeated Gauls.

Juba II. Prince of Numidia, son of the defeated King of Numidia, Juba I.

Julia. Daughter of Octavian and his first wife, Scribonia.

Kleopatra VII. Queen of Egypt, mother to Julius Caesar's son Caesarion and to Marc Antony's children Alexander, Selene, and Ptolemy.

Livia. Wife of Octavian; Empress of Rome.

Maecenas. Poet; friend of Octavian.

Marc Antony. Roman consul and general.

Marcella. Second daughter of Octavia and her first husband, Gaius Claudius Marcellus.

Marcellus. Son of Octavia and her first husband, Gaius Claudius Marcellus.

Octavia. Sister to Octavian; former wife to Marc Antony.

Octavian. Emperor of Rome; known as Augustus from January 16, 27 BC, onward.

Ovid. Poet.

Ptolemy. Younger son of Queen Kleopatra and Marc Antony.

Scribonia. First wife of Octavian; mother of Julia.

Selene. Daughter of Queen Kleopatra and Marc Antony.

Seneca the Elder. Orator and writer.

Tiberius. Son of Livia and her first husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero.

Tonia. Second daughter of Octavia and Marc Antony.

Verrius. A freedman and a schoolteacher of great renown.


Vipsania. Daughter of Agrippa and his first wife, Caecilia Attica.

Vitruvius. Engineer and architect; author of *De architectura*.



ALEXANDRIA

August 12, 30 BC

 WHILE WE waited for the news to arrive, we played dice. I felt the small ivory cubes stick to my palms as I rolled a pair of ones. “Snake eyes,” I said, fanning myself with my hand. Even the stir of a sea breeze through the marble halls of our palace did little to relieve the searing heat that had settled across the city.

“It’s your turn,” Alexander said. When our mother didn’t respond, he repeated, “Mother, it’s your turn.”

But she wasn’t listening. Her face was turned in the direction of the sea, where the lighthouse of our ancestors had been built on the island of Pharos to the east. We were the greatest family in the world, and could trace our lineage all the way back to Alexander of Macedon. If our father’s battle against Octavian went well, the Ptolemies might rule for another three hundred years. But if his losses continued...

“Selene,” my brother complained to me, as if I could get our mother to pay attention.

“Ptolemy, take the dice,” I said sharply.

Ptolemy, who was only six, grinned. “It’s my turn?”

“Yes,” I lied, and when he laughed, his voice echoed in the silent halls. I glanced at Alexander, and perhaps because we were twins, I knew what he was thinking. “I’m sure they haven’t abandoned us,” I whispered.

“What would you do if you were a servant and knew that Octavian’s army was coming?”

“We don’t know that it is!” I snapped, but when the sound of sandals slapped through the halls, my mother finally looked in our direction.

“Selene, Alexander, Ptolemy, get back!”

We abandoned our game and huddled on the bed, but it was only her servants, Iras and Charmion.

“What? What is it?” my mother demanded.

“A group of soldiers!”

“Whose men?”

“Your husband’s,” Charmion cried. She had been with our family for twenty years, and I had never seen her weep. But as she shut the door, I saw that her cheeks were wet. “They are coming with news, Your Highness, and I’m afraid—”

“Don’t say it!” My mother closed her eyes briefly. “Just tell me. Has the mausoleum been prepared?”

Iras blinked away her tears and nodded. "The last of the palace's treasures are being moved inside. And ... and the pyre has been built exactly as you wanted."

I reached for Alexander's hand. "There's no reason our father won't beat them back. He has everything to fight for."

Alexander studied the dice in his palms. "So does Octavian."

We both looked to our mother, Queen Kleopatra VII of Egypt. Throughout her kingdom she was worshipped as the goddess Isis, and when the mood took her, she dressed as Aphrodite. But unlike a real goddess, she was mortal, and I could read in the muscles of her body that she was afraid. When someone knocked on the door, she tensed. Although this was what we had been waiting for, my mother hesitated before answering, instead looking at each of her children in turn. We belonged to Marc Antony, but only Ptolemy had inherited our father's golden hair. Alexander and I had our mother's coloring, dark chestnut curls and amber eyes. "Whatever the news, be silent," she warned us, and when she called, in a steady voice, "Come in," I held my breath.

One of my father's soldiers appeared. He met her gaze reluctantly.

"What is it?" she demanded. "Is it Antony? Tell me he hasn't been hurt."

"No, Your Highness."

My mother clutched the pearls at her neck in relief.

"But your navy has refused to engage in battle, and Octavian's men will be here by nightfall."

Alexander inhaled sharply, and I covered my mouth with my hand.

"Our *entire* navy has turned?" Her voice rose. "My men have refused to fight for the queen?"

The young soldier shifted on his feet. "There are still four legions of infantry—"

"And will four legions keep Octavian's whole army at bay?" she cried.

"No, Your Highness. Which is why you must flee—"

"And where do you think we would go?" she demanded. "India? China?" The soldier's eyes were wide, and, next to me, Ptolemy began to whimper. "Order your remaining soldiers to keep filling the mausoleum," she instructed. "Everything within the palace of any value."

"And the general, Your Highness?"

Alexander and I both looked to our mother. Would she call our father back? Would we stand against Octavian's army together?

Her lower lip trembled. "Send word to Antony that we are dead."

I gasped, and Alexander cried out desperately, "Mother, no!" But our mother's glare crossed across the chamber. "What will Father think?" he cried.

"He will think there is nothing to return for." My mother's voice grew hard. "He will flee from Egypt and save himself."

The soldier hesitated. "And what does Your Highness plan to do?"

I could feel the tears burning in my eyes, but pride forbade me from weeping. One of the children wept, and I was already ten.

"We will go to the mausoleum. Octavian thinks he can march into Egypt and pluck the treasure of the Ptolemies from my palace like grapes. But I'll burn everything to the ground before I let him touch it! Prepare two chariots!"

The soldier rushed to do as he was told, but in the halls of the palace, servants we-

already beginning to flee. Through the open door Alexander shouted after them, “Cowards! Cowards!” But none of them cared. The women were leaving with only the clothes on their backs, knowing that once Octavian’s army arrived there would be no mercy. Soldiers carried precious items from every chamber, but there was no guarantee that those items would end up in the mausoleum.

My mother turned to Charmion. “You do not have to stay. None of us knows what will happen tonight.”

But Charmion shook her head bravely. “Then let us face that uncertainty together.”

My mother looked to Iras. The girl was only thirteen, but her gaze was firm. “I will stay as well,” Iras whispered.

“Then we must pack. Alexander, Selene, take only one bag!”

We ran through the halls, but outside my chamber, Alexander stopped.

“Are you frightened?”

I nodded fearfully. “Are you?”

“I don’t think Octavian will leave anyone alive. We have defied him for a year, and you remember what happened to the city of Metulus?”

“Everything was burned. Even the cattle and fields of grain. But he didn’t set fire to Segestica. When Octavian conquered it, he allowed those people to survive.”

“And their rulers?” he challenged. “He killed them all.”

“But why would the Roman army want to hurt children?”

“Because our father is Marc Antony!”

I panicked. “Then what about Caesarion?”

“He’s the son of Julius Caesar. No one’s in more danger than he. Why do you think our mother sent him away?”

I imagined our brother fleeing toward India. How would he ever find us again? “Antyllus?” I asked quietly. Though our father had children with his first four wives, and with perhaps a dozen mistresses, Antyllus was the only half brother we’d ever known.

“If Octavian’s as merciless as they say, he’ll try to kill Antyllus as well. But perhaps he’ll spare your life. You’re a girl. And maybe when he realizes how clever you are—”

“But what good is being clever if it can’t stop them from coming?” Tears spilled from my eyes, and I no longer cared that it was childish to cry.

Alexander wrapped his arm around my shoulders, and when Iras saw the two of us standing in the hall, she shouted, “We don’t have the time. Go and pack!”

I stepped into my chamber and began searching at once for my book of sketches. Then I filled my bag with bottles of ink and loose sheets of papyrus. When I glanced at the doorway, Alexander was standing with our mother. She had exchanged her Greek chiton for the traditional clothes of an Egyptian queen. A diaphanous gown of blue silk fell to the floor, and strings of pink sea pearls gleamed at her neck. On her brow she wore the golden vulture crown of Isis. She was a rippling vision in blue and gold, but although she should have had the confidence of a queen, her gaze shifted nervously to every servant running through the hall.

“It’s time,” she said quickly.

A dozen soldiers trailed behind us, and I wondered what would happen to them once we were left. If they were wise, they would lay down their weapons, but even then there was no

guarantee that their lives would be spared. My father had said that Octavian slaughtered anyone who stood against him—that he would kill his own mother if she slandered his name.

In the courtyard, two chariots were waiting.

“Ride with me,” Alexander said. The two of us shared a chariot with Iras, and as the horses started moving, my brother took my hand. We sped through the gates, and from the Royal Harbor I could hear the gulls calling to one another, swooping and diving along the breakers. I inhaled the salty air, then exhaled sharply as my eyes focused in the dazzling sun. Thousands of Alexandrians had taken to the streets. My brother tightened his grip. There was no telling what the people might do. But they stood as still as reeds, lining the road that ran from the palace to the mausoleum. They watched as our chariots passed, then one by one they dropped to their knees.

Alexander turned to me. “They should be fleeing! They should be getting as far away from here as they can!”

“Perhaps they don’t believe Octavian’s army is coming.”

“They must know. The entire palace knows.”

“Then they’re staying for us. They think the gods will hear our prayers.”

My brother shook his head. “Then they’re fools,” he said bitterly.

The dome of our family’s mausoleum rose above the horizon, perched at the rim of the sea on the Lochias Promontory. In happier times, we had come here to watch the builders at work, and I now tried to imagine what it would be like without the noise of the hammers and the humming of the men. *Lonely*, I thought, *and frightening*. Inside the mausoleum, a pillared hall led to a chamber where our mother and father’s sarcophagi lay waiting. A flight of stairs rose from this room to the upper chambers, where the sun shone through the open windows, but no light ever penetrated the rooms below, and at the thought of entering them, I shivered. The horses came to a sudden halt before the wooden doors, and soldiers parted to make way for us.

“Your Majesty.” They knelt before their queen. “What do we do?”

My mother looked into the face of the oldest man. “Is there any chance of defeating them?” she asked desperately.

The soldier looked down. “I’m sorry, Your Highness.”

“Then leave!”

The men rose in shock. “And ... and the war?”

“*What war?*” my mother asked bitterly. “Octavian has won, and while my people scrape and bow at his feet, I’ll be waiting here to negotiate the terms of my surrender.” Across the courtyard, priestesses began to scream about Octavian’s approaching soldiers, and my mother turned to us. “Inside!” she shouted. “Everyone inside!”

I gave a final glance back at the soldiers’ fear-stricken faces, then we plunged in. Within the mausoleum, the summer’s heat vanished, and my eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness. Light from the open door illuminated the treasures that had been taken from the palace. Gold and silver coins gleamed from ivory chests, and rare pearls were strewn across the heavy cedar bed that had been placed between the sarcophagi. Iras trembled in her long linen cloak, and as Charmion studied the piles of wood stacked in a circle around the hall, her eyes began to well with tears.

“Shut the doors!” my mother commanded. “Lock them as firmly as you can!”

“What about Antyllus?” Alexander asked worriedly. “He was fighting—”

“He’s fled with your father!”

When the doors thundered shut, Iras drew the metal bolt into place. Then, suddenly, there was silence. Only the crackling of the torches filled the chamber. Ptolemy began to cry.

“Be quiet!” my mother snapped.

I approached the bed and took Ptolemy in my arms. “There’s nothing to be afraid of,” I promised. “Look,” I added gently, “we’re all here.”

“Where’s Father?” he cried.

I stroked his arm. “He is coming.”

But he knew I was lying, and his cries grew into high-pitched wails of terror. “Father,” he wailed. “Father!”

My mother crossed the chamber to the bed and slapped his little face, startling him into silence. Her hand left an imprint on his tender cheek, and Ptolemy’s lip began to tremble. Before he could begin to cry again, Charmion took him from my arms.

“I’m sorry,” I said quickly. “I tried to keep him quiet.”

My mother climbed the marble staircase to the second story, and I joined Alexander on the bottom step. He shook his head at me. “You see what happens from being kind?” he said. “You should have slapped him.”

“He’s a *child*.”

“And our mother is fighting for her crown. How do you think she feels, hearing him crying for Father?”

I wrapped my arms around my knees and looked at the piles of timber. “She won’t really set fire to the mausoleum. She just wants to frighten Octavian. They say his men haven’t been paid in a year. He needs her. He needs all of this.”

But my brother didn’t say anything. He held the pair of dice in his hands, shaking them again and again.

“Stop it,” I said irritably.

“You should go to her.”

I looked up the stairs to the second story, where my mother was sitting on a carved wooden couch. Her silk dress fluttered in the warm breeze, and she was staring out at the sea. “She’ll be angry.”

“She’s never angry at you. You’re her *little moon*.”

While Alexander Helios had been named for the sun, I had been named for the moon. Although she always said her *little moon* could never do anything wrong, I hesitated.

“You can’t let her sit there alone, Selene. She’s afraid.”

I mounted the steps, but my mother didn’t turn. Clusters of pearls gleamed in her braid while above them, the vulture crown pointed its beak to the sea as if it wished it could leap away and take flight. I joined her on the couch and saw what she was watching. The wide expanse of blue was dotted with hundreds of billowing sails. All of them were pointed toward the Harbor of Happy Returns. There was no battle. No resistance. A year ago our navy had suffered a terrible defeat at Actium, and now they had surrendered.

“He’s a *boy*,” she said without looking at me. “If he thinks he can keep Antony’s half of Rome, then he’s a fool. There was no greater man than Julius, and the Romans left him dead on the Senate floor.”

“I thought *Father* was Rome’s greatest man.”

My mother turned. Her eyes were such a light brown as to be almost gold. “Julius loves power more than anything else. Your father loves only chariot races and wine.”

“And you.”

The edges of her lips turned down. “Yes.” She gazed back at the water. The fortunes of the Ptolemies had first been shaped by the sea when Alexander the Great had died. As the empire split, his cousin Ptolemy had sailed to Egypt and later made himself king. Now, this same sea was changing our fortunes again. “I have let Octavian know I am willing to negotiate. I even sent him my scepter, but he’s given me nothing in return. There will be no rebuilding of Thebes.” Sixteen years before her birth, Thebes had been destroyed by Ptolemy IX when the city had rebelled. It had been her dream to restore it. “This will be my last day on Egyptian throne.”

The finality in her voice was frightening. “Then what do we have left to hope for?” I asked.

“They say Octavian was raised by Julius’s sister. Perhaps he’ll want to see Julius’s son on the throne.”

“But where do you think Caesarion is now?”

I knew she was picturing Caesarion, with his broad shoulders and striking smile. “Caesarion with his tutor, waiting for a ship to take him to India,” she said hopefully. After the Battle of Actium, my eldest brother had escaped, and the princess Iotapa, who had been promised in marriage to Alexander, had fled back to Media. We were like leaves being blown about by the wind. My mother saw the look on my face, and took off her necklace of pearls and sea pearls. “This has always brought me protection, Selene. Now I want it to protect you.” She placed it over my head, and its golden pendant with small onyx gems felt cold against my chest. Then her back stiffened against the wooden couch. “What is that?”

I held my breath, and above the crashing waves I could hear men pounding on the door below us.

“Is it he?” my mother cried, and I followed the silk hem of her gown to the bottom of the stairs. Alexander was in front of the door, and his face was gray.

“No, it’s Father,” Alexander said. But he held out his hands before she could come close. “He tried to kill himself, Mother. He’s dying!”

“Antony!” my mother screamed, and she pressed her face against the metal grille in the door. “Antony, what have you done?” Alexander and I couldn’t hear what our father was saying. Our mother was shaking her head. “No,” she said, “I can’t... If I open this door, any one of your soldiers could seize us for ransom.”

“*Please!*” Alexander cried. “He’s dying!”

“But if she opens the door—” Charmion began.

“Then use the window!” I exclaimed.

My mother had already thought of it. She was rushing up the stairs, and the five of us followed swiftly at her heels. The mausoleum wasn’t complete—no one could have predicted it would be needed so soon. Workmen’s equipment had been left behind, and my mother shouted, “Alexander, the rope!”

She flung open the lattice shutters of the window overlooking the Temple of Isis. Below, waves crashed against the eastern casements. I can’t say how long it took for my mother to do the unthinkable. Of course, she had Alexander and Iras to help. But as soon as our father

bloodied litter on the ground below was fastened to the rope, she lifted him two stories and moved him onto the floor of the mausoleum.

I stood with my back pressed against the marble wall. The happy sound of the gulls outside had faded, and there were no more waves, or soldiers, or servants. Nothing existed but my father, and the place where he had pushed his own sword between his ribs. I could hear Alexander's ragged breathing, but I couldn't see him. I only saw my mother's hands, which came away bloodied from my father's tunic.

"Antony," she was crying. "*Antony!*" She pressed her cheek to my father's chest. "Do you know what Octavian promised after the Battle of Actium? That if I had you killed, he would let me keep my throne. But I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't do it!" She was becoming hysterical. "And now ... what have you done?"

His eyelids fluttered. I had never seen my father in pain. He was Dionysus, larger than life, bigger than any man who stood next to him, faster, stronger, with a louder laugh and a wider smile. But his tanned good looks had gone pale, and his hair was wet with perspiration. He looked unfamiliar without his Greek robes and crown of ivy, like a mortal Roman soldier struggling to speak. "They said you were dead."

"Because I told them to. So you would *flee*, not kill yourself. Antony, it's not over." But the light in his eyes was growing dim.

"Where are my sun and moon?" he whispered.

Alexander led me forward. I don't think I could have crossed the chamber without his help.

My father's eyes fell on me. "Selene...." He took several deep breaths. "Selene, will you bring your father some wine?"

"Father, there's no wine in the mausoleum." But he didn't seem to understand what I was saying.

"Some good Chian wine," he went on, and my mother sobbed. "Don't cry." He touched her braids tenderly. "I am finally becoming Dionysus." My mother wept loudly, and he had enough strength to grasp her hand in his.

"I need you to stay alive," she begged, but our father had closed his eyes. "*Antony!*" she screamed. "*Antony!*"

Outside the doors of our tomb, I could hear the Roman soldiers approaching. Their chanting carried over the water, and my mother clung to my father's body, grasping him to her chest and pleading with Isis to bring him back.

"What is that?" Alexander asked fearfully.

"The *evocatio*," Charmion whispered. "Octavian's soldiers are calling on our gods to switch sides and accept them as the rightful rulers."

"The gods will *never* abandon us!" my mother shouted, frightening Ptolemy with her rage. He buried his head in Charmion's lap as Mother stood. My father's blood stained the blue silk of her gown; it soaked her chest, her arms, even her braids. "Downstairs!" she commanded. "If they try to break down the door, we will set fire to every piece of wood in that chamber!"

We left my father's body on his litter, but I turned to be sure he wasn't moving.

"He's gone, Selene." My brother was weeping.

"But what if—?"

"He's *gone*. And the gods only know what's happening to Antyllus."

I felt a tightening in my throat, as if the air I was breathing suddenly wasn't enough. At the

top of the stairs, my mother handed daggers to Charmion and Iras. "Stay here and watch the windows," she commanded. "If they force their way in, you know what to do!"

My brothers and I followed my mother's bloodied steps to the first floor. Outside, soldiers were beating on the door and pressing their faces, one by one, to the grille.

"Stand behind me," my mother instructed.

We did as we were told, and I dug my nails into Alexander's arm while our mother approached the door. There was the muffled sound of voices as she appeared before the grille, and then a man on the other side of the door told her to surrender. She raised her chin so that the vulture's carnelian eyes would look directly at this Roman soldier. "I will surrender," she told him through the iron bars, "when Octavian gives me word that Caesarion will rule over the kingdom of Egypt."

We moved closer to the door to hear the soldier's reply.

"I cannot give that assurance, Your Majesty. But you may trust that Octavian will treat you with both respect and clemency."

"I don't care about clemency!" she shouted. "Caesarion is the son of Julius Caesar and the rightful heir to this throne. The Ptolemies have ruled over Egypt for nearly three hundred years. What do you propose? To have Roman rule? To burn down the Library of Alexandria and do murder in the streets of the greatest city in the world? Do you think the people will stand for it?"

"Your people are already falling over themselves to show deference to Caesar Octavian."

My mother reeled back as though the man had slapped her from the other side of the door. "He has taken Julius's name?"

"He is the adopted son and heir of Gaius Julius Caesar."

"And Caesarion is Caesar's son by blood! Which makes them brothers."

I had never thought of it this way, and as I moved forward to glimpse the soldier's face through the window, a man's arm caught me around the waist, and I felt the cold tip of metal at my neck.

"Mother!" I screamed, and before Alexander could leap forward to defend me, a line of soldiers descended the stairs from the second story. They had come through the open window. Two held Iras and Charmion, and a third held Ptolemy by the arm.

My mother unsheathed the dagger at her waist, but a broad-shouldered Roman caught her wrist in his hand while another man unlocked the door.

"Let go of me!" My mother's voice was a sharp warning, and although she had no power to command Roman soldiers, once the man had disarmed her, he freed her wrist. He was built like my father, with well-muscled legs and a powerful chest. He could have snapped her arm if he had wanted to. I wondered if this was Octavian.

"Take them to the palace." His words were clipped. "Caesar will wish to see her before he speaks with the people of Alexandria."

My mother raised her chin. "Who are you?" she demanded.

"Marcus Agrippa. Former consul of Rome and commander in chief of Caesar's fleet."

Alexander looked across the chamber at me. Agrippa was the general who had defeated our father at Actium. He was the secret behind every one of Octavian's military successes, and the man our father had feared above any other. His face was round, and although I knew from our father's descriptions that he was already thirty-one or thirty-two, he looked much

younger.

“Agrippa.” My mother caressed his name like silk. She spoke Latin to him, and though she knew eight languages flawlessly, her words were accented. “Do you see this treasure?” She indicated the leopard skins on the floor, and the heavy chests wrought from silver and gold that nearly obscured the rugs from view. “It can be yours. All of Egypt can be yours if you wish. Why give it to Octavian when you are the one who conquered Antony?”

But Agrippa narrowed his eyes. “Are you proposing that I betray Caesar with you?”

“I am saying that, with me, you would be accepted as Pharaoh, by the people. There would be no war. No bloodshed. We could reign as Hercules and Isis.”

The man holding my arm chuckled softly, and my mother’s eyes flicked to him.

“You are asking Agrippa to betray Octavian,” he said. “You might as well ask the sea to stop meeting the shore.”

Agrippa clenched the hilt of his sword. “She is desperate, and doesn’t know what she is saying. Stay here with the treasure, Juba—”

“*Juba.*” My mother said his name with as much loathing as one word could carry. “I know you.” She stepped forward, and Juba unhandled me. But there was nowhere for me to run. The mausoleum was surrounded by Octavian’s soldiers. I stood next to Alexander as my mother advanced on the man who wore his black hair longer than any Roman. “Your mother was a Greek, and your father lost his Kingdom to Julius Caesar. And now look.” Her gaze shifted from his leather cuirass to his double-edged sword. “You’ve become a Roman. How proud that would have made them.”

Juba clenched his jaw. “If I were you, I’d save my speeches for Octavian.”

“So why isn’t he here?” she demanded. “Where is this mighty conqueror of queens?”

“Perhaps he’s looking over his new palace,” Juba said, and the suggestion robbed my mother of her confidence. She turned to Agrippa.

“Don’t take me to him.”

“There is no other choice.”

“What about my husband?” She drew his gaze toward the top of the stairs, where my father’s body lay illuminated by the afternoon sun.

Agrippa frowned, perhaps since the Romans did not recognize our parents’ marriage. “He will be given a burial that befits a consul.”

“Here? In my mausoleum?”

Agrippa nodded. “If that’s what you wish.”

“And my children?”

“They will be coming with you.”

“But what ... what about Caesarion?”

I saw the look that Agrippa passed to Juba, and I felt a tightening in my chest.

“You may ask Caesar yourself what will become of him.”



MY MOTHER

paced her room. She had changed from her blood-stained gown into one of purple and gold, colors that would remind Octavian that she was still Queen of Egypt. But even the new pearl necklace at her throat didn't disguise the fact that she was a prisoner. The red plumes on the helmets of the Roman soldiers waved in the breeze outside every window and when my mother had tried to open the door to her chamber, soldiers were posted there as well.

We were hostages in our own palace. The halls that had rung with my father's songs now echoed with the gruff commands of hurried men. And the courtyards, where evening was beginning to fall, were no longer filled with servants' chatter. There would be no more dinners on candlelit barges, and never again would I sit on my father's lap while he recounted the story of his triumphant march through Ephesus. I pressed closer to Alexander and Ptolemy on my mother's bed.

"Why is he waiting?" My mother paced the room, back and forth, until it made me sick to watch her. "I want to know what's happening outside!"

Charmion and Iras implored her to sit down. In their plain white tunics, huddled on my mother's long blue couch, they reminded me of geese. *Geese who don't know that they've been penned for slaughter.* Why else would Octavian be keeping us under guard? "He's going to kill us," I whispered. "I don't think he's ever going to set us free."

There was a knock, and my mother froze. She crossed the room and opened the door. "What?" She looked at the faces of the three men. "Where is he?"

But Alexander scrambled from the bed. "It's him!" He pointed at the man who was standing between Juba and Agrippa.

My mother stepped back. The blond man with gray eyes wore only a simple *toga virilis*. Although extra leather had been added to his sandals in order to increase his height, he was nothing like the man my father had been. He was thin, fragile, as unmemorable as one of the thousands of white shells that washed up daily along the shore. But what other man would be wearing the signet ring of Julius Caesar? "Then you are Octavian?" She spoke to him in Greek. It was the language she'd been born to, the language of official correspondence in Egypt.

"Don't you know any Latin?" Juba demanded.

"Of course." My mother smiled. "If that's what he prefers." But I knew what she was thinking. Alexandria possessed the largest library in the world, a library even larger than Pergamon's, and now it would all belong to a man who didn't even speak Greek.

"So you are Octavian?" she repeated in Latin.

The smallest of the three stepped forward. "Yes. And I presume you are Queen Kleopatra.

"That all depends," she said as she sat down. "Am I still the queen?"

Although Juba smiled, Octavian's lips only thinned. "For now. Shall I sit?"

My mother held out her hand toward the blue silk couch with Iras and Charmion. Immediately they stood and joined my brothers and me on the bed. But not once did Octavian's gaze flicker in our direction. He had eyes only for my mother, as if he suspected she might grow wings like those on her headdress and take flight. He seated himself while the other men remained standing. "I hear you have tried to seduce my general."

My mother threw Agrippa a venomous look, but didn't deny it.

"I'm not surprised. It worked on my uncle. Then on Marc Antony. But Agrippa is a different kind of man."

Everyone in the room looked to the general, and although the power of kings rested on his shoulders, he glanced away.

"There is no one more modest or loyal than Agrippa. He would never betray me," Octavian said. "Neither would Prince Juba. I suppose you know that his father was King of Numidia once. But when he lost the battle against Julius Caesar, he gave his youngest son to Rome and then took his own life."

My mother's back straightened. "Is that your way of telling me I shall lose my throne?"

Octavian was silent.

"What about Caesarion?"

"I am afraid your son will not be able to take the throne either," he said simply.

Some of the color drained from her face. "Why?"

"Because Caesarion is dead. And so is Antyllus."

My mother gripped the arms of her chair, and I covered my mouth with my hands.

"However," Octavian added, "I will allow them a burial with Marc Antony in the mausoleum that you have prepared."

"Caesarion!" my mother cried, while Octavian turned his eyes away. "Not Caesarion!" Her favorite. Her beloved. There was heartbreak, and betrayal, and a mother's deep anguish in her voice, and that was when I knew the *evocatio* had worked. The gods had really abandoned Egypt for Rome. I wept into my hands, and my mother tore madly at her clothes.

"Stop her!" Octavian rose angrily.

Agrippa held her arms, but my mother shook her head wildly. "He was your *brother!*" she shouted. "The child of Julius Caesar. Do you understand what you've done? You've murdered your own brother!"

"And you murdered your own sister," Octavian replied coolly.

My mother lashed out with her feet, but Octavian easily avoided her wrath.

"In three days, I will sail with you and your children to Rome, where you will take part in my Triumph."

"I will never be paraded through the streets of Rome!"

Octavian gave Juba a sideways glance, then rose to depart. When he reached the door, my mother cried out. "Where are you going?"

"To the Tomb of Alexander, the greatest conqueror in the world. Then on to the Gymnasium, where I will address my people." He turned, and his gray eyes settled on me. "Shall your children come?"

I ran from the bed and fell to my knees at my mother's feet. I wrapped my arms around her legs. "Don't send us with him. Please, Mother, please!"

She was shaking uncontrollably. But instead of looking down at me, she was watching

Octavian. Something seemed to pass between them, and my mother nodded. "Yes. Take my children with you."

"No!" I cried. "I won't go."

"Come," Juba said, but I wrenched my arm from his grasp.

"Don't make us go!" I screamed. "Please!"

Ptolemy was crying, and Alexander was pleading with her.

At last she threw up her hands and shouted, "Go! Iras, Charmion, get them out of here!"

I didn't understand what was happening. Charmion pushed us toward the door, where my mother embraced Alexander. Then she came to me, touching my necklace and running her hands over my hair, my arms, my cheeks.

"Mother," I wept.

"Shh." She put a finger on my lips, then took Ptolemy onto her lap, burying her head in his soft curls. I was surprised that Octavian waited so patiently. "You listen to whatever Caesar says," she told Ptolemy. "And you do as you're told, Selene." She turned to my twin brother. "Alexander, be careful. Watch over them."

My mother stood, and before her face could betray her entirely, Charmion shut the door and we children were alone with our enemies.

"Walk next to me and keep silent," Agrippa said. "We go first to the Tomb of Alexander, then on to the Gymnasium."

I held one of Ptolemy's hands in mine, and Alexander held the other, but it was as if we were walking through a foreign palace. Romans occupied every room, sniffing out our riches to fill Octavian's treasury. The carved cedar chairs, which had graced our largest chamber, had disappeared, but everything left was being taken. Silk couches, cushions, ebony vases and towering silver tripods.

I whispered to Alexander in Greek, "How does he know these men aren't stealing things for themselves?"

"Because none of them would be so foolish," Juba responded. His Greek was flawless. Alexander's eyes were full of warning.

For the first time, Octavian looked at us. "The twins are handsome children, aren't they? More of their mother than their father, I think. So you are Alexander Helios?"

My brother nodded. "Yes. But I go by Alexander, Your Highness."

"He is not a king," Juba remarked. "We call him Caesar."

Alexander's cheeks reddened, and I sickened at the thought that he was speaking to the man who had killed our brothers. "Yes, Caesar."

"And your sister?"

"She is Kleopatra Selene. But she calls herself Selene."

"The sun and moon," Juba said wryly. "How clever."

"And the boy?" Agrippa asked.

"Ptolemy," Alexander replied.

The muscles clenched in Octavian's jaw. "That one's more of his father."

I tightened my grip protectively on Ptolemy's hand, and as we reached the courtyard in front of the palace, Agrippa turned to us.

"There will be no speaking unless spoken to, understand?" The three of us nodded. "They will prepare yourselves," he warned as the palace doors were thrown open.

Evening had settled over the city, and thousands of torches burned in the distance. It seemed as though every last citizen of Alexandria had taken to the streets, and all of them were making their way to the Gymnasium. Soldiers saluted Octavian as we approached the gates, with right arms held forward and palms down.

“You can forget a horse and chariot,” Juba said, surveying the crowds.

Octavian stared down the Canopic Way. “Then we will go by foot.”

I could see Juba tense, and he checked the sword at his side and the dagger on his thigh. He was younger than I had first assumed him to be, not even twenty, but he was the one Octavian trusted with his life. Perhaps he would make a mistake. Perhaps one of my father's loyal men would kill Octavian before we sailed for Rome.

We waited while a small retinue was gathered, some Egyptians and Greeks, but mostly soldiers who spoke Latin with accents that made them hard to understand. Then we began to walk from the palace to the tomb. Every dignitary who came to Alexandria wished to see it, and now Octavian wanted to pay obeisance to our ancestor as well.

I wished I could speak with Alexander, but I kept my silence as I had been instructed, and instead of weeping over my father, or Antyllus or Caesarion, I studied the land. *Perhaps this will be the last night I will ever see the streets of Alexandria*, I thought, and I swallowed against the increasing pain in my throat. On the left was the Great Theater. I tried to remember the first time my father had taken us there, climbing with us to the royal box that was erected so high it was possible to see the island of Antirhodos. Beyond that was the Museion, where my mother had sent my father to become cultured, and professors had taught him Greek. Alexander and I had begun our studies there when we were seven, walking the marbled halls with men whose beards fell into their flowing himations. North of the Museion were the towering columns of the Library. Half a million scrolls nestled on its cedar shelves, and scholars from every kingdom in the world came to learn from the knowledge stored inside. But tonight, its pillared halls were dark, and the cheerful lamps that had always lit the porticos from within had been extinguished. The men who studied there were making their way to the Gymnasium to hear what would become of Egypt now.

I blinked back tears, and as we reached a heavy gate, a Greek scholar whom I had often seen in the palace produced a key from his robes. We were about to enter the Soma, the mausoleum of Alexander the Great, and as the gate was drawn open Agrippa whispered, “*Misere Fortuna!*”

I noted with pride that even Octavian stepped back. I had sketched the building a dozen times, and each time Alexander had wanted to know why. He wasn't moved as I was by the luminous marble dome, or the beautiful lines of heavy columns that stretched like white soldiers into the night.

“When was this built?” Octavian asked. Instead of turning to either Alexander or me, he looked at Juba.

“Three hundred years ago,” Juba replied. “They say that his sarcophagus is made of crystal and that he's still wearing his golden cuirass.”

Now Octavian turned to my brother and me. “Is it true?”

When I refused to answer him, Alexander nodded. “Yes.”

“And the body?” Agrippa asked Juba. “How did it come here?”

“Stolen, by his cousin Ptolemy.”

We passed through the heavy bronze doors, and the scent of burning lavender from a tripod filled the empty antechamber. Torches blazed from iron brackets on the wall, sputtering in the rush of night air we'd let in. The priests here had not abandoned their duties, and an old man in golden robes appeared.

"This way," he said, and it was clear we were expected.

We followed the old man's footsteps through a maze of halls, and the soldiers who had chattered all the way there like monkeys, without ever once pausing for breath, were silent. In the dull glow of the priest's lamp, the men regarded the painted exploits of Alexander. I had sketched these images so many times that I knew them by heart. There was the young king with his wives Roxana and Stateira. In another scene Alexander was lying with Hephaestion, the soldier he loved above all others. And in a last mosaic he was conquering Anatolia, Phoenicia, Egypt, and the sprawling kingdom of Mesopotamia. Octavian reached out and touched the painted locks of Alexander's hair.

"Was he really blond?"

The priest frowned, and I was certain he had never heard such a question before. "He is depicted on these walls as he was in life, Caesar."

Octavian gave a small, self-satisfied smile, and I realized why he had wanted to compare himself. Facially, there did not appear much difference between the painting of Alexander and Octavian. Both men were fair, with small mouths, straight noses, and light eyes. No wonder Octavian imagined himself as Alexander's heir, the next conqueror not just of Egypt, but of the world. Hadn't his great-uncle, Julius Caesar, already begun the conquest for him?

We reached a flight of stairs descending into greater darkness, and I heard Ptolemy whimper. "It's only a few steps down," I whispered, and when I saw that he was going to protest, I put my finger to my lips.

The priest led the way, and the only noise was the whisper of our footsteps and the crackling of torches. Juba was the last to descend. When the door swung shut behind us, my brother let out a frightened cry. Immediately, Alexander put his hand to Ptolemy's mouth.

"Not here," he whispered angrily. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

But no one was paying attention to Ptolemy. In the dimly lit chamber, the men's gazes were fixed on the crystal coffin of the world's greatest king. The air smelled heavily of embalming spices: cinnamon, myrrh, and cassia.

Octavian approached the coffin with hesitant steps, and the priest pulled back the lid so that everyone could observe Alexander as he had been. There was a gasp of admiration throughout the chamber, and even Ptolemy wanted to draw closer.

"Only thirty-two," Octavian said. The king's face was beautiful in its three-hundred-year repose; his arms against the muscled cuirass were still pink with flesh and strikingly large. Octavian called Agrippa and Juba to his side, and although Octavian's hair was a similar gold, it was Juba, with his broad shoulders and impressive height, who most resembled Alexander. In the poor light of the tomb, I studied the Numidian prince. From his hobnailed sandals to his scarlet cloak, he was every bit a Roman soldier, and only his long dark hair betrayed his ancestry.

"Agrippa, the crown," Octavian said, and from the folds of his cloak Agrippa produced a thin golden diadem of twisted leaves. Octavian placed it carefully on Alexander's head, and when he straightened, he caught sight of the Conqueror's ring. He bent closer to inspect it, and

when he saw that it had been engraved with Alexander's profile, he announced, "This shall be the ring of Imperial Rome."

"But, Caesar, that belongs—"

Agrippa turned, and the priest's protest died on his lips.

Octavian held the stiff hand of Alexander, but as he tugged on the ring his elbow swept back and there was a sickening crunch.

"His nose!" the priest cried. Octavian had broken off Alexander's nose.

There was a moment of terrified silence. Then Octavian exclaimed, "What does it mean?" He spun around. "Shall I send for the augurs?"

"No," Juba said.

"But then what does it portend?"

"That you will break the Conqueror's hold on the world and reconquer it yourself," Juba replied. His dark eyes gleamed, and though I thought he was being sarcastic, Agrippa nodded.

"Yes, I agree."

But Octavian didn't move, and his hand with the golden signet ring was frozen over the king's body.

"It can only be a good sign," Agrippa repeated.

Octavian nodded. "Yes.... Yes, a sign from the gods," he suddenly declared, "that I am the successor of Alexander the Great."

The priest asked meekly if Octavian wished to visit the rest of our ancestors. But Octavian was too full of his prophecy.

"I came to see a king, not a row of corpses."

I looked back at the shattered face of the great man who was responsible for the long reign of the Ptolemies, and wondered if Egypt would have a similar fate.



Although Juba and Agrippa had proclaimed the breaking of Alexander's nose a good portent, Octavian's retinue fell into an uneasy silence as we made our way up the stairs through the Soma. But the throngs of people in the streets—soldiers, Alexandrians, foreign merchants, even slaves—were loud enough to wake the gods. The soldiers were rounding up every Alexandrian they could find.

"What's happening?" Ptolemy worried.

"We're going to the Gymnasium," Alexander said.

"Where Father gave me a crown?"

Juba raised his brows. Although Ptolemy had only been two and could not have had many memories from that time, he clearly recalled the Donations of Alexandria, when our father had seated himself with our mother on a golden throne and proclaimed our brother Caesarion not just his heir, but the heir to Julius Caesar as well. That evening, he'd announced his marriage to our mother, even though Rome had refused to recognize it. Then he'd given Alexander the territories of Armenia, Media, and the unconquered empire of Parthia. I received Cyrenaica and the island of Crete, while Ptolemy became king of all the Syrian lands. Although the Ptolemies wore simple cloth diadems bedecked with tiny pearls, our father had presented us with gold-and-ruby crowns, and this was what had stayed in Ptolemy's memory. Only now, those crowns were being melted to pay Octavian's men, and

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