

PICKING UP CLEOPATRA

A 10:00 minute Drama

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SYNOPSIS:

CLEOPATRA, an OLD WOMAN, is pushing a shopping cart through a park. In addition to the bags of belongings in her cart she has a cat carrier with feral cat she has caught and tamed and now calls CLEOPATRA.

CLEOPATRA stops at a bench where she encounters HERMES, a homeless, disabled Desert Storm vet. They strike up a conversation about her cat.

They engage in a conversation which extends from Ancient Egypt to the modern day and even includes the symbology and numerology of a 357 Magnum Colt Python. Using the secret numerology of the riddle of the Sphinx, they prove to each other that they are actually CLEOPATRA, QUEEN OF EGYPT and the vet is actually her former private magician, HERMES TRISMEGISTUS.

Once their identities are confirmed, signs are recognized and ancient rituals are obeyed (and the "cat is out of the bag" so to speak) they realize that their being reunited is actually a destiny moment of world historic proportions. Typhon, the being of universal ignorance whom they once conquered with wisdom, has returned and driven out the old sciences and replaced them with new forms of ignorance. Typhon must be stopped and only the ancients can do this.

CHARACTERS:

CLEOPATRA: 70-something beauty with queenly carriage and grace. She pretends to be a bag woman but the disguise is easily penetrated.

HERMES: 60-something, wounded, walks with a cane; weather beaten, sly and formerly dapper. He speaks with a voice which commands attention and suggests he knows far more than what he says.

CLEOPATRA (THE WOMAN), is pushing a shopping basket filled with her possessions. CLEOPATRA (THE CAT) is in a cat carrier atop the basket.

HERMES SITS sipping a can in a brown paper bag. Nearby is his cane and rucksack.

CLEOPATRA (THE WOMAN) takes out a bag of cat treats and feeds CLEOPATRA (THE CAT).

CLEOPATRA:
(getting cat treats) All rig-ht Cleopatra! All right...! I'll give you a nibble but you must stop complaining! (feeding CLEOPATRA)

HERMES:
(Looking up) What'd you call her? Cleopatra?

CLEOPATRA:
That's right! She's the reincarnation of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt and she expects to be treated like a queen... isn't that right? Yes it is...

HERMES:
(sipping) I was in Egypt and Iraq.

CLEOPATRA:
When?

HERMES:
The first time was lifestimes ago. More recently, Desert Storm, 16 January 1991 the bombardment of Iraq started. I landed in Egypt on 21 January.

CLEOPATRA:
Iraq was once known as Babylon, wasn't it?

HERMES:
Known as? Iraq WAS Babylon... In the good old days, as they say. The Tigres and Euphrates rivers are the cradle of civilization.

CLEOPATRA:
Cleopatra told me that when she was Empress of Egypt she ruled that whole region including Babylon and Ethiopia, didn't you Cleopatra? Uh-huh, yes you did...!

HERMES:

With an iron fist. If that cat really IS Cleopatra, doesn't she object to being confined?

CLEOPATRA:

She would run away otherwise. She's been on a desperate search to reunite with the Emperor of the Romans.

HERMES:

Caesar.

CLEOPATRA:

Like many women, she's been hurt deeply. She turned wild, feral. She feels safer in here.

HERMES:

Huh. Well, reincarnation will change you, I suppose. How'd you catch her?

CLEOPATRA:

The usual way you catch any sentient being... love and hunger. Cleopatra was starving so I coaxed her into my house with bits of cat food... Sheba brand, how ironic! She was VERY particular... Weren't you Cleopatra? She ONLY wanted to be on my sofa. (*putting her hand up to whisper*) And, she was pregnant!

HERMES:

What did you do?

CLEOPATRA:

After a long while of coaxing and feeding and petting, she let me pick her up. By the time the kittens came, she trusted me and let me handle them. She had five. I found homes for three and kept two. I talked my vet into fixing Cleopatra and the two kittens. It cost me \$200!

HERMES:

Two hundred bucks! You paid two hundred bucks!?

CLEOPATRA:

She IS Cleopatra! Empress of Egypt and my sofa. A queen. She deserves the best! She's had a hard destiny. Can you imagine being Queen of an empire, losing your soul mate and winding up on the streets pregnant and starving?

HERMES:

Yeah, well, you tell her that you've run into an old friend of hers.

CLEOPATRA:

Meaning you?

HERMES:

(*puts down can*) Yeah.

CLEOPATRA:

And who might you be?

HERMES:

Hermes Trismegistus <TRIS-MA-GIST-US>. Cleopatra's personal magician... (*ticking on fingers*) I have divine knowledge of mathematics, chemistry, law, art, astrology, music, rhetoric, magic, philosophy, geography, medicine, anatomy, oration. I've added divine knowledge of the Veterans Administration, welfare and psychiatric services systems.

CLEOPATRA:

(*Cackling laugh*) Well, aren't you the handy one, then!?

HERMES:

Once I conquered Typhon who is the being of universal ignorance.

CLEOPATRA:

Really?

HERMES:

Typhon: part serpent, part crocodile, part hog, and what we would call today, a loan shark or an investment banker. (*picks up can*) Typhon swallows up the spiritual nature of man. You tell your Cleopatra that you've now met Hermes Trismegistus and see what she says to that!

CLEOPATRA:

Okay... Cleopatra, my pet? I've run into someone who says he was a friend of yours a long time ago. His name is Hermes Trismegistus. (*listens to CLEOPATRA*) Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Really!?

(*to HERMES*) She says that if you're the REAL Hermes Trismegistus that you will know the secret of the Sphinx. *

HERMES:

Compared to the V.A. and insurance companies, the Sphinx is easy! The Sphinx was... IS... or what's left of it IS a sculpture about 200-feet long, 70-feet high, and about 38-feet wide between the shoulders. I know that last figure because I helped do the calculations while it was being carved.

CLEOPATRA:

And it's location?

HERMES:

It's a homie to the Great Pyramid. Here's a little known fact... Tell her majesty that NO WAY was the Great Pyramid built as the tomb of Pharaoh Cheops as modern men say.

CLEOPATRA:

Okay. (to cat) Cleopatra? Hermes says that the Great Pyramid was NOT built as the tomb of Pharaoh Cheops, is that correct? (listens) Uh-huh... oh, I SEE! You want me to say THAT? (listens) As you request. (to HERMES) Cleopatra says you are correct. But, she says that any slave who wiped his butt with papyrus would know that. The Empress asked what is the secret of the sphinx? And then you should respond to the ritual question: "Are you ready to die?"

HERMES:

(grumbling) Still the impatient and demanding Cleopatra I see. Hasn't changed after... What's it been now, 2,000 years? Give or take? (sigh) Okay. Secret of the Sphinx. In design, it is a sacred, secret symbol. A riddle in plain sight. A sculpture with the head and breasts of a woman, the front part of the body is that of a male lion, the back part of the body is that of a female lion, and it has the wings of an eagle.

CLEOPATRA:

What does it mean?

HERMES:

You have to consider a second puzzle. The verbal riddle which was asked all who seek the meaning of the Sphinx: what animal walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three legs in the evening?

CLEOPATRA:

Yes, she knows that. What does it mean?

HERMES:

The most obvious answer is one which just about any schoolgirl knows... the human being. The human crawls on all fours when they are an infant, walks on two legs when they are mature, and with a cane at the end of their life.

CLEOPATRA:

Cleopatra... he said... (a beat) Oh, I see. <pause> All right. (to HERMES) She said all that's correct. But, what is the deeper answer? What is the answer which ONLY Hermes Trismegistus would know?

HERMES:

Things are rarely ONLY as they seem, aren't they? I mean, who would believe a cat in a kitty carrier pushed around by an old woman, is REALLY an ancient Egyptian Empress, for example?

CLEOPATRA:

Don't be impudent!

HERMES:

It's a serious question. How would a magician hide a puzzle in an answer? (a beat) Use a lost and discredited science like numerology. That's the ticket. Does your kittypatra know numerology?

CLEOPATRA:

Still the impudent Hermes, I see... talking down to your Queen!

HERMES:

Four legs, two legs and three legs. Four, two and three. That's a magic number series. It adds up to nine. And, nine is the number of the human being. Which is, of course, the same answer as the obvious riddle. We ancients use this technique to confirm many things. As above, so below. As within, so without.

CLEOPATRA:

Cleopatra... He said... (a beat) Yes. Yes. <pause> All right. (to HERMES) She said you were correct. Now, she wants the answer to the ritual question: "Are you ready to die?"

HERMES:

You know, it's been several incarnations since I've had such a nice conversation with someone who actually knows all the old rules, signs and codes. You're using love and hunger, on me the same way you caught the cat.

CLEOPATRA:

Don't tell me what you think I'm doing! If you are the REAL Hermes Trismegistus, you are obligated to carry a SIGN with you at all times which signifies the answer to the ritual question and the riddle of the Sphinx.

*

HERMES:

The sign... Yes, of course, the sign. Gotta have the sign. The sign always seals the deal, doesn't it? (*growing anger*) The world has grown so ignorant but I have not forgotten the old rules. Moderns will find out who you they are dealing with! We live our LIVES by the SIGNS! I change the world to reflect the SIGNS! That's what a real magician DOES! (*reaching into rucksack*) You want a sign!? Here's MY sign that I'm the REAL Hermes Trismegistus! (*pulls out chrome plated 357 Magnum Colt Python pistol*) I am sure that Cleopatra, her feline Empress-ness does not know that this is a 357 Magnum, one of the most powerful hand guns in the world. Brand name? Colt Python. Python. Rhymes with Typhon. Python is an anagram for Typhon. Typhon, the being of universal ignorance who swallows the spiritual nature of man. Typhon who is also characterized as a snake. Maybe a Python! The Colt Python is designed for one thing... to kill. To rapidly swallow someone's consciousness. Typhon, python. That's the outer symbol here's the inner reality. (*Gets cane and stands, looking at pistol*) This is a three five seven. But not a life giving three five seven, a death giving three five seven so we will use subtraction rather than addition to reach the inner meaning. The number three... the perfect trine. Don't mess with three. Subtracted from zero yields three. Then five minus three is two. Seven minus three is four. Two three four! Adds up to nine, the number of the human being. The secret of the Sphinx. It confirms my sign and who I am. A magician who changes death into life.

CLEOPATRA:

So it appears. Thank you Hermes Trismegistus. But, what is your answer to the ritual question: "Are you prepared to die?"

HERMES:

The ritual response is four magic words... (*HERMES points the pistol at his head*) ..."I will kill myself." (*draws the hammer*) Out of death, life.

CLEOPATRA:

Cleopatra had no doubt about your devotion to the symbols, signs or rituals... (*to cat*) ...do you, Cleopatra? You may put the pistol down.

HERMES:

(*aiming the pistol at OLD WOMAN*) Can you just stop with this shallow charade? It is driving me nuts! The cat is NOT Cleopatra. But are YOU Cleopatra?

CLEOPATRA:

Am I? You doubt your Queen?!

HERMES:

You made ME prove conclusively that I am Hermes Trismegistus. Now I want YOU to prove that you are Cleopatra and not some reincarnated Typhon hoochie. Show me Cleopatra's sign and answer the ritual question.

CLEOPATRA:

(Taking the pistol) Cleopatra's sign is not an OBJECT but a PROCESS, the intimate process of death revealed in how she killed herself. She put a poisonous snake to her breast and let it bite. Here we have a Colt Python, which, as you say is one of the most powerful killing devices in the world. *(aims the pistol at her chest)* The ritual question is: "Am I prepared to die?" The ritual answer is the four magic words: "I will kill myself." *(pulls trigger)* Out of death, life! *(it clicks harmlessly)*

HERMES bows deeply.

HERMES:

My Queen!

CLEOPATRA:

(looking at pistol) Unloaded?

HERMES:

No! Loaded and as potent as any sign or symbol could be. This is an historical destiny moment! Consider... *(Takes pistol)* The world has fallen into ignorance. Typhon has filled the world with a new ignorance. The old sciences and arts are now called ignorant superstition. Men are easily fooled by money, power and technology. *(a beat)* And here is Cleopatra the cat who walks on four legs... Cleopatra my Queen who walks on two legs... and Hermes who walks with three legs. Surely this no chance combination but is a sign! A sign from the gods that we must fight Typhon.

CLEOPATRA:

Fight Typhon, again?

HEMES:

Hasn't that always been the task?

CLEOPATRA:

(a beat) Starting now. Here? We two?

HERMES:

And the cat.

CLEOPATRA:

Isn't this just old vanity?

HERMES:

People of today are ignorant to the old ways. We know the old sciences and arts. The new ones are ineffective against Typhon. The old signs and symbols all still work.

CLEOPATRA:

(a beat) There are others ancients whom I must contact. It may take some time. We will meet again to discuss this further.

HERMES:

(he bows) Time seems to be something we have plenty of.

CLEOPATRA:

Where will I find you when the time is at hand?

HERMES:

I regularly use four magic words that unlock the heart forces of compassion and generosity of even the harshest policeman or severest critic. They have never failed to yield up to me three hots and a cot.

CLEOPATRA:

Three hots and a cot?

HERMES:

Three hot meals and a place to sleep.

CLEOPATRA:

And what are these four magic words that open even the hardest heart to compassion and love?

HERMES:

The same words with which we recognized one another: "I will kill myself."

CLEOPATRA:

(Cackling) You say that, and they cart you off to the loony bin!

HERMES:

That's right!

CLEOPATRA:

So I should look for you at the psychiatric unit of the local hospital?

HERMES:

Makes sense to me.

HERMES:

My Queen?

CLEOPATRA:

Yes...?

HERMES:

Can you give your favorite magician \$20-bucks?

CLEOPATRA:

For what? Go make yourself DISAPPEAR! (*Cackles at her own joke.*)
I tell a magician to disappear! That's funny.

CLEOPATRA EXITS WITH CAT CARRIER.

FADE LIGHTS OUT.