

ANTONY + CLEOPATRA | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

After Julius Caesar died (that's a whole other play!), the Roman Empire was divided into three parts. **Mark Antony** rules one of them, but he mostly spends his time hanging out in Egypt, all because of **Cleopatra**, who is Egypt's queen.

Antony loves Cleopatra. Cleopatra loves Antony. Nice, right? Trouble is, Antony is married. Uh-oh! Antony's antics do not amuse **Octavius Caesar** (no relation to Julius—"Caesar" is a title, not a name), who rules a different part of the Roman Empire. He and Antony start arguing, and their alliance begins to fall apart.

And then things get messy: A messenger arrives to say that Antony's wife has died. Antony goes home to Rome for the funeral, and Cleopatra rejoices, assuming that Antony will return and marry her. But in Rome, Antony decides that the best way to renew his alliance with Caesar is to marry Caesar's sister, **Octavia**.

Cleopatra, who is at home with **Charmian**, **Iras**, **Alexas**, and **Mardian** (her attendants), doesn't know about the marriage. (Not yet...)

The Shakespeare

Enter a Messenger.

MESSENGER

Madam, madam—

CLEOPATRA

Antonyus dead!—If thou say so, villain,
Thou kill'st thy mistress; but well and free,
Thou so yield him, there is gold, and here
My bluest veins to kiss; a hand that kings
Have lipp'd, and trembled kissing.

MESSENGER

First, madam, he is well.

CLEOPATRA

Why, there's more gold.
But, sirrah, mark, we use
To say the dead are well; bring it to that,
The gold I give thee will I melt and pour
Down thy ill-uttering throat.

MESSENGER

Will't please you hear me?

CLEOPATRA

I have a mind to strike thee ere thou
speak'st:
Yet if thou say Antony lives, is well,
Or friends with Caesar, or not captive to
him,
I'll set thee in a shower of gold, and hail
Rich pearls upon thee.

MESSENGER

Madam, he's well.

CLEOPATRA

That's well said.

MESSENGER

And friends with Caesar.

CLEOPATRA

Thou'rt an honest man.

MESSENGER

Caesar and he are greater friends than ever.

CLEOPATRA

Make thee a fortune from me.

MESSENGER

But yet, madam—

CLEOPATRA

I do not like 'But yet,' it does allay
The good precedence; fie upon 'But yet'!
'But yet' is as a gaoler to bring forth
Some monstrous malefactor. Prithoe, friend,
Pour out the pack of matter to mine ear.
The good and bad together; he's friends with Caesar:
In state of health thou say'st; and thou say'st free.

MESSENGER

Free, madam! no; I made no such report:
He's bound unto Octavia.

CLEOPATRA

I am pale, Charmian.

MESSENGER

Madam, he's married to Octavia.

CLEOPATRA

The most infectious pestilence upon thee!
Strikes him down.

MESSENGER

Good madam, patience.

CLEOPATRA

What say you? Hence,
Horrible villain! or I'll spurn thine eyes
Like balls before me; I'll unhair thy head;
She hales him up and down.
Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in brine,
Smarting in lingering pickle.

MESSENGER

Gracious madam,
I that do bring the news made not the match.

CLEOPATRA

Say 'tis not so, a province I will give thee,
And make thy fortunes proud; the blow thou hadst
Shall make thy peace for moving me to rage;
And I will boot thee with what gift beside
Thy modesty can beg.

MESSENGER

He's married, madam.

CLEOPATRA

Rogue, thou hast lived too long. *Draws a knife.*

MESSENGER

Nay, then I'll run.
What mean you, madam? I have made no fault.
Exit.

CHARMIAN

Good madam, keep yourself within yourself.
The man is innocent.

CLEOPATRA

Some innocents scape not the thunderbolt.
Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures
Turn all to serpents! Call the slave again,
Though I am mad, I will not bite him. Call!

CHARMIAN

He is afraid to come.

CLEOPATRA

I will not hurt him.
These hands do lack nobility that they strike
A meaner than myself, since I myself
Have given myself the cause. Come hither, sir.
Enter the Messenger again.
Though it be honest, it is never good
To bring bad news. Give to a gracious message
An host of tongues, but let ill tidings tell
Themselves when they be felt.

MESSENGER

I have done my duty.

CLEOPATRA

Is he married?
I cannot hate thee worse than I do,
If thou again say yes.

MESSENGER

He's married, madam.

CLEOPATRA

The gods confound thee, dost thou hold there still?

MESSENGER

Should I lie, madam?

CLEOPATRA

O, I would thou didst;
So half my Egypt were submerg'd and made
A western forscald snake! Go, get thee hence!
Hadst thou Narcissus in thy face, to me
Thou wouldst appear most ugly. He is married?

MESSENGER

I crave your Highness' pardon.

CLEOPATRA

He is married?

MESSENGER

Take no offense that I would not offend you;
To punish me for what you make me do
Seems much unequal. He's married to Octavia.

CLEOPATRA

O, that his fault should make a knave of thee,
That art not what th'art sure of. Get thee hence;
The merchandise which thou hast brought from
Rome
Are all too dear for me. Lie they upon thy hand,
And be undone by 'em! *Exit Messenger.*

CHARMIAN

Good your Highness, patience.

CLEOPATRA

In praising Antony I have dispraised Caesar.

CHARMIAN

Many times, madam.

CLEOPATRA

I am paid for't now.
Lead me from hence:
I faint. O Iras, Charmian! 'Tis no matter.
Go to the fellow, good Alexas, bid him
Report the feature of Octavia, her years,
Her inclination; let him not leave out
The color of her hair. Bring me word quickly.
Exit Alexas.

Let him for ever go—let him not, Charmian—
Thou he be painted one way like a Gorgon.
The other way 's a Mars. *(To Mardian)* Bid you Alexas
Bring me word how tall she is. Pity me, Charmian,
But do not speak to me. Lead me to my chamber.
Exeunt.

The Translation

Enter a Messenger

MESSENGER

Madam, madam—

CLEOPATRA

Antony's dead! If you say that, you low-life,
you'll kill me, your Queen. If you say he's
healthy and free, I'll give you money and
you may kiss my hand. Kings have
trembled to kiss this hand.

MESSENGER

Let me say first, madam, that he is well.

CLEOPATRA

Well then, here's more money for you. But
you know, man, we customarily say that
the dead are well. If that's what you mean,
I'll melt this gold and pour it down your
throat that speaks these hateful words.

MESSENGER

Good madam, let me speak.

CLEOPATRA

I have half a mind to hit you before you
speak again. But if Antony is alive, healthy,
friendly with Caesar, and not Caesar's
prisoner, I'll shower you with gold and
pearls.

MESSENGER

Madam, he's well.

CLEOPATRA

That's well spoken.

MESSENGER

And he's friends with Caesar.

CLEOPATRA

You're an honest man.

MESSENGER

Caesar and he are even better friends than
ever.

CLEOPATRA

I'm going to make you a rich man.

MESSENGER

But yet, madam—

CLEOPATRA

I don't like the sound of that "but yet." It reverses all
the good words that came before it. Curse those
words: "But yet!" "But yet" is like a jailer about to
bring out some horrible criminal. Please, my friend,
give me all the news, both good and bad, at the
same time. You say he's friendly with Caesar, healthy,
and free?

MESSENGER

I didn't say "free," madam. I didn't say that. He's tied
to Octavia.

CLEOPATRA

I feel sick, Charmian.

MESSENGER

Madam, he's married to Octavia.

CLEOPATRA

May you die of the worst disease! *(She knocks him
down.)*

MESSENGER

Good madam, be patient!

CLEOPATRA

(She hits him again.) What did you say to me? Get
out, you horrible low-life, or I'll kick your eyes like
soccer balls! I'll scalp you. *(She drags him across the
stage.)* I'll have you whipped with wire and then
pickled in brine, to make your pain last longer.

MESSENGER

Gracious madam, I only brought the news! I didn't
perform the wedding!

CLEOPATRA

If you tell me that your news is not true, I'll give you a
bunch of land and a fortune to make you rich. I hit
you already, so that makes up for upsetting me. On
top of that, I'll give you whatever you ask for.

MESSENGER

He's married, madam.

CLEOPATRA

Rogue, you've lived too long! *(She draws a knife.)*

MESSENGER

No way! I'll run! What is the matter with you,
madam? I haven't done anything to you! *(He exits.)*

CHARMIAN

Good madam, restrain yourself. The man hasn't
done anything wrong!

CLEOPATRA

Even innocents cannot always escape disaster. May
Egypt drown in the Nile and all good creatures turn
into poisonous snakes. Call that servant back. Even
though I'm mad, I won't bite him. Call him!

CHARMIAN

He's afraid to come in.

CLEOPATRA

I won't hurt him. My hands are tainted if they hit an
inferior, especially since I myself am the cause of
my own distress. *(The Messenger returns.)* Come
here, sir. It may be honest, but it's never wise to
bring bad news. You can give good news in many
ways, but let bad news interpret itself as you tell it.

MESSENGER

I've only done my duty.

CLEOPATRA

Is he married? I can't hate you any more than I
already do if you repeat that he is.

MESSENGER

He's married, madam.

CLEOPATRA

May the gods destroy you! Do you maintain the
same story?

MESSENGER

Do you want me to lie, madam?

CLEOPATRA

Oh, I wish you had lied, even if it meant half my
kingdom would be submerged and filled with
snakes. Go, get out! Even if you were as handsome
as Narcissus, your face would be ugly to me. Is he
really married?

MESSENGER

I beg your highness' pardon.

CLEOPATRA

Is he really married?

MESSENGER

Please don't be offended that I don't want to offend
you any more. It's not fair to punish me for
something you make me do. He's married to
Octavia.

CLEOPATRA

It's too bad that Antony's fault should make you
look like a jerk. You didn't have anything to do with
it. Go away. The merchandise you bring from Rome
is too expensive for me. Let it stay in your inventory
until it bankrupts you. *(The Messenger exits.)*

CHARMIAN

Be patient, your highness.

CLEOPATRA

When I have praised Antony, I've insulted Caesar.

CHARMIAN

Many times, madam.

CLEOPATRA

I'm being repaid for that now. Help me out of here.
I feel faint. Oh, Iras, Charmian! It doesn't matter.
Good Alexas, go ask that fellow to describe Octavia.
How old is she? What kind of disposition does she
have? Don't let him leave out the color of her hair.
Bring me his answers quickly. *(Alexas exits.)* Let
Antony be purged from my life forever—but no,
don't let him, Charmian. Even though half of him is
like a Gorgon, the other half is like Mars. *(to
Mardian)* Ask Alexas to also ask him how tall she
is. Feel sorry for me, Charmian, but don't talk to me.
Help me get to my bedroom.



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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

Write

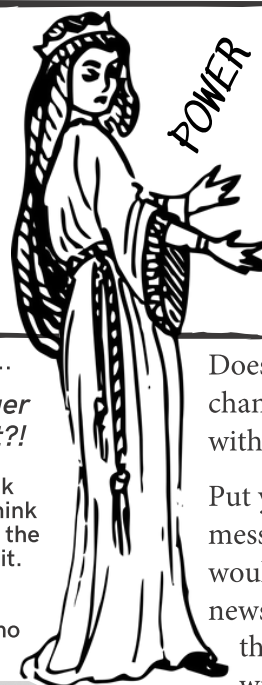
ACT IT OUT

Talk about it

Draw

THINK ABOUT IT

... up to you!



Cleopatra is one of the most powerful people in the world, and the messenger is... just a messenger. Think of all the ways in which that fact affects the scene and the characters in it.

Does the power dynamic change who you sympathize with?

Put yourself in the messenger's shoes. How would you break the bad news to Cleopatra? What's the best way to be straight with people in power?

How would you stage this scene?

There's some action that's required by stage directions, but other than that, this scene is wide open! What does it look like in your mind?

***pathos**
is the essence of tragedy: something that makes you feel pity or sadness.



You might be thinking to yourself...

What did that poor messenger do to deserve this treatment?!

Good question! Why do you think Cleopatra reacts how she does? Think about what she's just learned from the messenger, and how she learned it.

Also:

What is going on inside a person who flies off the handle like that?

Oh, about Narcissus...

He was a Greek mythical hunter who was so good-looking that he fell in love with his own reflection. (His girlfriend, Echo, was pretty broken up about it and just started repeating everything he said!)



This scene comes from a tragedy, but you could play it for **comedy** or for **pathos**. * Shakespeare mostly keeps his comedies pretty light, but the tragedies are not dark all the way through. He liked to mix them up, to give the audience a break... and to keep them guessing!

Re-read the scene and really go for the *comedy*—what would make this scene funny?

Then try it again, but really go for *pathos*—what would make the audience feel pity and sadness?

Which do you prefer? Or would you try to strike a balance? (That would make the scene "tragicomic!")

No one loves the messenger who brings bad news...

(That's from ANTIGONE, a play by the Greek philosopher Sophocles written in 442 B.C.)

The messenger in *Antony & Cleopatra* is not the only one in Shakespeare to break bad news to a king or queen. Check out these bits from other plays. What's similar? What's different?

RICHARD III

MESSENGER

My lord, the army of the Duke of Buckingham—

RICHARD III

Out on you, owls! Nothing but songs of death?

He strikes him.

Take that, until thou bring me better news.

MESSENGER

The news I have to tell your majesty
Is that, by sudden floods and fall of waters,
Buckingham's army is dispersed and scatter'd;
And he himself wander'd away alone,
No man knows whither.

RICHARD III

I cry thee mercy:
There is my purse to cure that blow of thine.

MACBETH

MACBETH

The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!
Where got'st thou that goose look?"

SERVANT

There is ten thousand—

MACBETH

Geese, villain?"

SERVANT

Soldiers, sir.

MACBETH

Go prick thy face, and over-red thy fear,
Thou lily-liver'd boy. What soldiers, patch?
Death of thy soul! Those linen cheeks of thine
Are counselors to fear. What soldiers, whely-face?"

SERVANT

The English force, so please you.

MACBETH

Take thy face hence.

"These are all ways of saying that the servant's face is white (because he's a coward). How many of the images can you figure out?"

Macbeth is "suggesting" that the servant bloody his face... so it won't be so white!

Style isn't the only difference between these passages. Richard III and Macbeth are both power-hungry tyrants who've been backed into a corner toward the very end of each play. Cleopatra is definitely not in that position, and her scene happens right in the middle of the play. What does that tell you?

You knew this was coming...

RICHARD III
was written in
1592ish.

MACBETH
WAS
1606ish.

ANTONY &
CLEOPATRA
was 1607ish.

DO YOU SEE AN
EVOLUTION IN
SHAKESPEARE'S
STYLE?