Caesar's wife, a comedy in three acts

Maugham W Somerset
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CÆSAR'S WIFE
By the same Author

THE UNKNOWN
THE CIRCLE
THE EXPLORER
JACK STRAW
LADY FREDERICK
LANDED GENTRY
THE TENTH MAN
A MAN OF HONOUR
MRS. DOT
PENELOPE
SMITH
THE LAND OF PROMISE

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
CÆSAR'S WIFE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

W. S. MAUGHAM

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1922
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This play was produced at the Royalty Theatre, on March 27th, 1919, with the following cast:

Sir Arthur Little .. .. C. Aubrey Smith
Ronald Parry .. .. George Relph.
Henry Pritchard .. .. V. Sutton Vane.
George Appleby .. .. Townsend Whitling.
Osman Pasha .. .. George C. Desplas.
Violet .. .. Fay Compton.
Mrs. Etheridge .. .. Eva Moore.
Mrs. Pritchard .. .. Helen Haye.
Mrs. Appleby .. .. Mrs. Robert Brough.
CHARACTERS

Sir Arthur Little, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.
Ronald Parry.
Henry Pritchard.
Richard Appleby, M.P.
Osman Pasha.
Violet.
Mrs. Etheridge.
Mrs. Pritchard.
Mrs. Appleby.

An English Butler; Native Servants; an Arab Gardener.

The scene is laid in Cairo, in the house and garden of the British Consular Agent.
CAESAR'S WIFE

ACT I

Scene: The morning-room in the Consular Agent's house at Cairo. The windows are Arabic in character and so are the architraves of the doors, but otherwise it is an English room, airy and spacious. The furniture is lacquer and Chippendale, there are cool chintzes on the chairs and sofas, cut roses in glass vases, and growing azaleas in pots; but here and there an Eastern antiquity, a helmet and a coat of mail, a piece of woodwork, reminds one of the Mussulman conquest of Egypt; while an ancient god in porphyry, graven images in blue pottery, blue bowls, recall an older civilisation still.

When the curtain rises the room is empty, the blinds are down so as to keep out the heat, and it is dim and mysterious. A servant comes in, a dark-skinned native in the gorgeous uniform, red and gold, of the Consular Agent's establishment, and draws the blinds. Through the windows is seen the garden with palm-trees, oranges and lemons, tropical plants with giant leaves; and beyond, the radiant blue of the sky. In the distance is heard the plaintive, guttural wailing of an Arab song. A gardener in a pale blue gabledine passes with a basket on his arm.

Servant.

Es-salām 'alākum (Peace be with you).
GARDENER.

U’alèkum es-Salam warahmet Allâh wa barakâta (And with you be peace and God’s mercy and blessing).

[The Servant goes out. The Gardener stops for a moment to nail back a straggling creeper and then goes on his way. The door is opened. Mrs. Appleby comes in with Anne Etheridge and they are followed immediately by Violet. Anne is a woman of forty, but handsome still, very pleasant and sympathetic; she is a woman of the world, tactful and self-controlled. She is dressed in light, summery things. Mrs. Appleby is an elderly, homely woman, soberly but not inexpensively dressed. The wife of a North-country manufacturer, she spends a good deal of money on rather dowdy clothes. Violet is a very pretty young woman of twenty. She looks very fresh and English in her muslin frock; there is something spring-like and virginal in her appearance, and her manner of dress is romantic rather than modish. She suggests a lady in a Gainsborough portrait rather than a drawing in a paper of Paris fashions. Luncheon is just finished and when they come in the women leave the door open for the men to follow.]

MRS. APPLEBY.

How cool it is in here! This isn’t the room we were in before lunch?

ANNE.

No. They keep the windows closed and the blinds drawn all the morning so that it’s beautifully cool when one comes in.
CAESAR'S WIFE

MRS. APPLEBY.
I suppose we shan't feel the heat so much when we've been here a few days.

ANNE.
Oh, but this is nothing to what you'll get in Upper Egypt.

VIOLET.
[As she enters.] Is Mrs. Appleby complaining of the heat? I love it.

ANNE.
Dear Violet, wait till May comes and June. You don't know how exhausting it gets.

VIOLET.
I'm looking forward to it. I think in some past life I must have been a lizard.

MRS. APPLEBY.
I dare say the first year you won't feel it. I have a brother settled in Canada, and he says the first year people come out from England they don't feel the cold anything like what they do later on.

ANNE.
I've spent a good many winters here, and I always make a point of getting away by the fifteenth of March.

MRS. APPLEBY.
Oh, are you staying as late as that?

ANNE.
Good gracious, no. You make Lady Little's heart positively sink.
VIOLET.

Nonsense, Anne, you know we want you to stay as long as ever you can.

ANNE.

I used to have an apartment in Cairo, but I've given it up now and Lady Little asked me to come and stay at the Agency while I was getting everything settled.

MRS. APPLEBY.

Oh, then you knew Sir Arthur before he married?

ANNE.

Oh, yes, he's one of my oldest friends. I can't help thinking Lady Little must have great sweetness of character to put up with me.

VIOLET.

Or you must be a perfect miracle of tact, darling.

MRS. APPLEBY.

My belief is, it's a little of both.

ANNE.

When Arthur came to see me one day last July and told me he was going to marry the most wonderful girl in the world, of course I thought good-bye. A man thinks he can keep his bachelor friendships, but he never does.

MRS. APPLEBY.

His wife generally sees to that.

VIOLET.

Well, I think it's nonsense, especially with a man like Arthur who'd been a bachelor so long and natur-