Emmeline Prior

I love this speech from the final act of *Antony and Cleopatra*. It comes after a very dramatic moment when Caesar’s soldier, Proculeius, has just snatched away a dagger from the captured Queen of Egypt, thereby preventing her from killing herself. Cleopatra is determined that she will die by her own contrivance rather than submit to the will of Caesar.

Even though this is one of Cleopatra’s shorter monologues, to me it encapsulates so many aspects of her character: pride, bravery, impetuousness, and her unwillingness to bow to the power of Rome. It also emphasizes her regal nature; her love of Egypt; and her jealous derision towards Antony’s legal wife, Octavia.

Sir, I will eat no meat, I’ll not drink, sir.  
If idle talk will once be necessary,  
I’ll not sleep neither. This mortal house I’ll ruin,  
Do Caesar what he can. Know, sir, that I  
Will not wait pinioned at your master’s court,  
Nor once be chastised with the sober eye  
Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up  
And show me to the shouting varlety  
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt  
Be gentle grave unto me. Rather on Nilus’ mud  
Lay me stark naked and let the waterflies  
Blow me into abhoring. Rather make  
My country’s high pyramides my gibbet  
And hang me up in chains!

*Antony and Cleopatra* Act 5, Scene 2.