Caesar and Cleopatra - Act III

di George Bernard Shaw (1901)

ACT III

The edge of the quay in front of the palace, looking out west over the east harbor of Alexandria to Pharos island, just off the end of which, and connected with it by a narrow mole, is the famous lighthouse, a gigantic square tower of white marble diminishing in size storey by storey to the top, on which stands a cresset beacon. The island is joined to the main land by the Heptastadium, a great mole or causeway five miles long bounding the harbor on the south.

In the middle of the quay a Roman sentinel stands on guard, pilum in hand, looking out to the lighthouse with strained attention, his left hand shading his eyes. The pilum is a stout wooden shaft 41 feet long, with an iron spit about three feet long fixed in it. The sentinel is so absorbed that he does not notice the approach from the north end of the quay of four Egyptian market porters carrying rolls of carpet, preceded by Ftatateeta and Apollodorus the Sicilian. Apollodorus is a dashing young man of about 24, handsome and debonair, dressed with deliberate astheticism in the most delicate purples and dove greys, with ornaments of bronze, oxydized silver, and stones of jade and agate. His sword, designed as carefully as a medieval cross, has a blued blade showing through an openwork scabbard of purple leather and filagree. The porters, conducted by Ftatateeta, pass along the quay behind the sentinel to the steps of the palace, where they put down their bales and squat on the ground. Apollodorus does not pass along with them: he halts, amused by the preoccupation of the sentinel.

APOLLODORUS: *calling to the sentinel.* Who goes there, eh?

SENTINEL: *starting violently and turning with his pilum at the charge, revealing himself as a small, wiry, sandy-haired, conscientious young man with an elderly face.* What's this? Stand. Who are you?

APOLLODORUS: I am Apollodorus the Sicilian. Why, man, what are you dreaming of? Since I came through the lines beyond the theatre there, I have brought my caravan past three sentinels, all so busy staring at the lighthouse that not one of them challenged me. Is this Roman discipline?

SENTINEL: We are not here to watch the land but the water. Caesar has just landed on the Pharos. *Looking at Ftatateeta* What have you here? Who is this piece of Egyptian crockery?

FTATATEETA: Apollodorus: rebuke this Roman dog; and bid him bridle his tongue in the presence of Ftatateeta, the mistress of the Queen's household.

APOLLODORUS: My friend: this is a great lady, who stands high with Caesar.

SENTINEL: *not at all impressed, pointing to the carpets.* And what is all this truck?

APOLLODORUS: Carpets for the furnishing of the Queen's apartments in the palace. I have picked them from the best carpets in the world; and the Queen shall choose the best of my choosing.

SENTINEL: So you are the carpet merchant?

APOLLODORUS: *hurt.* My friend: I am a patrician.

SENTINEL: A patrician! A patrician keeping a shop instead of following arms!

APOLLODORUS: I do not keep a shop. Mine is a temple of the arts. I am a worshipper of beauty. My calling is to choose beautiful things for beautiful Queens. My motto is Art for Art's sake.

SENTINEL: That is not the password.

APOLLODORUS: It is a universal password.

SENTINEL: I know nothing about universal passwords. Either give me the password for the day or get

back to your shop.

Ftatateeta, roused by his hostile tone, steals towards the edge of the quay with the step of a panther, and gets behind him.

APOLLODORUS: How if I do neither?

SENTINEL: Then I will drive this pilum through you.

APOLLODORUS: At your service, my friend. *He draws his sword, and springs to his guard with unruffled grace.*

FTATATEETA: *suddenly seizing the sentinel's arms from behind.* Thrust your knife into the dog's throat, Apollodorus. *The chivalrous Apollodorus laughingly shakes his head; breaks ground away from the sentinel towards the palace; and lowers his point.*

SENTINEL: *struggling vainly.* Curse on you! Let me go. Help ho!

FTATATEETA: *lifting him from the ground.* Stab the little Roman reptile. Spit him on your sword.

A couple of Roman soldiers, with a centurion, come running along the edge of the quay from the north end. They rescue their comrade, and throw off Ftatateeta, who is sent reeling away on the left hand of the sentinel.

CENTURION: *an unattractive man of fifty, short in his speech and manners, with a vine wood cudgel in his hand.* How now? What is all this?

FTATATEETA: *to Apollodorus.* Why did you not stab him? There was time!

APOLLODORUS: Centurion: I am here by order of the Queen to--

CENTURION: *interrupting him.* The Queen! Yes, yes: *to the sentinel* pass him in. Pass all these bazaar people in to the Queen, with their goods. But mind you pass no one out that you have not passed in--not even the Queen herself.

SENTINEL: This old woman is dangerous: she is as strong as three men. She wanted the merchant to stab me.

APOLLODORUS: Centurion: I am not a merchant. I am a patrician and a votary of art

CENTURION: Is the woman your wife?

APOLLODORUS: *horrified.* No, no! *Correcting himself politely* Not that the lady is not a striking figure in her own way. But *emphatically* she is NOT my wife.

FTATATEETA: *to the Centurion.* Roman: I am Ftatateeta, the mistress of the Queen's household.

CENTURION: Keep your hands off our men, mistress; or I will have you pitched into the harbor, though you were as strong as ten men. *To his men* To your posts: march! *He returns with his men the way they came.*

FTATATEETA: *looking malignantly after him.* We shall see whom Isis loves best: her servant Ftatateeta or a dog of a Roman.

SENTINEL: *to Apollodorus, with a wave of his pilum towards the palace.* Pass in there; and keep your distance. *Turning to Ftatateeta* Come within a yard of me, you old crocodile; and I will give you this *the pilum* in your jaws.

CLEOPATRA: *calling from the palace.* Ftatateeta, Ftatateeta.

FTATATEETA: *Looking up, scandalized.* Go from the window, go from the window. There are men here.

CLEOPATRA: I am coming down.

FTATATEETA: *distracted.* No, no. What are you dreaming of? O ye gods, ye gods! Apollodorus: bid your men pick up your bales; and in with me quickly.

APOLLODORUS: Obey the mistress of the Queen's household.

FTATATEETA: *impatiently, as the porters stoop to lift the bales.* Quick, quick: she will be out upon us. *Cleopatra comes from the palace and runs across the quay to Ftatateeta.* Oh that ever I was born!

CLEOPATRA: *eagerly.* Ftatateeta: I have thought of something. I want a boat--at once.

FTATATEETA: A boat! No, no: you cannot. Apollodorus: speak to the Queen.

APOLLODORUS: *gallantly.* Beautiful Queen: I am Apollodorus the Sicilian, your servant, from the bazaar. I have brought you the three most beautiful Persian carpets in the world to choose from.

CLEOPATRA: I have no time for carpets to-day. Get me a boat.

FTATATEETA: What whim is this? You cannot go on the water except in the royal barge.

APOLLODORUS: Royalty, Ftatateeta, lies not in the barge but in the Queen. *To Cleopatra* The touch of your majesty's foot on the gunwale of the meanest boat in the harbor will make it royal. *He turns to the harbor and calls seaward* Ho there, boatman! Pull in to the steps.

CLEOPATRA: Apollodorus: you are my perfect knight; and I will always buy my carpets through you. *(Apollodorus bows joyously. An oar appears above the quay; and the boatman, a bullet-headed, vivacious, grinning fellow, burnt almost black by the sun, comes up a flight of steps from the water on the sentinel's right, oar in hand, and waits at the top.)* Can you row, Apollodorus?

APOLLODORUS: My oars shall be your majesty's wings. Whither shall I row my Queen? To the lighthouse. Come. *She makes for the steps.*

SENTINEL: *opposing her with his pilum at the charge.* Stand. You cannot pass.

CLEOPATRA: *flushing angrily.* How dare you? Do you know that I am the Queen?

SENTINEL: I have my orders. You cannot pass.

CLEOPATRA: I will make Caesar have you killed if you do not obey me.

SENTINEL: He will do worse to me if I disobey my officer. Stand back.

CLEOPATRA: Ftatateeta: strangle him.

SENTINEL: *alarmed--looking apprehensively at Ftatateeta, and brandishing his pilum.* Keep off there.

CLEOPATRA: *running to Apollodorus.* Apollodorus: make your slaves help us.

APOLLODORUS: I shall not need their help, lady. *He draws his sword.* Now soldier: choose which weapon you will defend yourself with. Shall it be sword against pilum, or sword against sword?

SENTINEL: Roman against Sicilian, curse you. Take that. *(He hurls his pilum at Apollodorus, who drops expertly on one knee. The pilum passes whizzing over his head and falls harmless. Apollodorus, with a cry of triumph, springs up and attacks the sentinel, who draws his sword and defends himself, crying)* Ho there, guard. Help!

Cleopatra, half frightened, half delighted, takes refuge near the palace, where the porters are squatting among the bales. The boatman, alarmed, hurries down the steps out of harm's way, but stops, with his head just visible above the edge of the quay, to watch the fight. The sentinel is handicapped by his fear of an attack in the rear from Ftatateeta. His swordsmanship, which is of a rough and ready sort, is heavily taxed, as he has occasionally to strike at her to keep her off between a blow and a guard with Apollodorus. The Centurion returns with several soldiers. Apollodorus springs back towards Cleopatra as this reinforcement confronts him.

CENTURION: *coming to the sentinel's right hand.* What is this? What now?

SENTINEL: *panting.* I could do well enough for myself if it weren't for the old woman. Keep her off me: that is all the help I need.

CENTURION: Make your report, soldier. What has happened?

FTATATEETA: Centurion: he would have slain the Queen.

SENTINEL: *bluntly.* I would, sooner than let her pass. She wanted to take boat, and go--so she said--to the lighthouse. I stopped her, as I was ordered to; and she set this fellow on me. *He goes to pick up his pilum and returns to his place with it.*

CENTURION: *turning to Cleopatra.* Cleopatra: I am loath to offend you; but without Caesar's express order we dare not let you pass beyond the Roman lines.

APOLLODORUS: Well, Centurion; and has not the lighthouse been within the Roman lines since Caesar landed there?

CLEOPATRA: Yes, yes. Answer that, if you can.

CENTURION: *to Apollodorus.* As for you, Apollodorus, you may thank the gods that you are not nailed to the palace door with a pilum for your meddling.

APOLLODORUS: *urbanely.* My military friend, I was not born to be slain by so ugly a weapon. When I fall, it will be *holding up his sword* by this white queen of arms, the only weapon fit for an artist. And now that you are convinced that we do not want to go beyond the lines, let me finish killing your sentinel and depart with the Queen.

CENTURION: *as the sentinel makes an angry demonstration.* Peace there. Cleopatra. I must abide by my orders, and not by the subtleties of this Sicilian. You must withdraw into the palace and examine your carpets there.

CLEOPATRA: *pouting.* I will not: I am the Queen. Caesar does not speak to me as you do. Have Caesar's centurions changed manners with his scullions?

CENTURION: *sulkily.* I do my duty. That is enough for me.

APOLLODORUS: Majesty: when a stupid man is doing something he is ashamed of, he always declares that it is his duty.

CENTURION: *angry.* Apollodorus--

APOLLODORUS: *interrupting him with defiant elegance.* I will make amends for that insult with my sword at fitting time and place. Who says artist, says duelist. *To Cleopatra* Hear my counsel, star of the east. Until word comes to these soldiers from Caesar himself, you are a prisoner. Let me go to him with a message from you, and a present; and before the sun has stooped half way to the arms of the sea, I will bring you back Caesar's order of release.

CENTURION: *sneering at him,* And you will sell the Queen the present, no doubt.

APOLLODORUS: Centurion: the Queen shall have from me, without payment, as the unforced tribute of Sicilian taste to Egyptian beauty, the richest of these carpets for her present to Caesar.

CLEOPATRA: *exultantly, to the Centurion.* Now you see what an ignorant common creature you are!

CENTURION: *curtly.* Well, a fool and his wares are soon parted *He turns to his men.* Two more men to this post here; and see that no one leaves the palace but this man and his merchandize. If he draws his sword again inside the lines, kill him. To your posts. March.

He goes out, leaving two auxiliary sentinels with the other.

APOLLODORUS: *with polite goodfellowship.* My friends: will you not enter the palace and bury our quarrel in a bowl of wine? *He takes out his purse, jingling the coins in it.* The Queen has presents for you all.

SENTINEL: *very sulky.* You heard our orders. Get about your business.

FIRST AUXILIARY: Yes: you ought to know better. Off with you.

SECOND AUXILIARY: *looking longingly at the purse--this sentinel is a hooknosed man, unlike his comrade, who is squab faced.* Do not tantalize a poor man.

APOLLODORUS: *to Cleopatra.* Pearl of Queens: the Centurion is at hand; and the Roman soldier is incorruptible when his officer is looking. I must carry your word to Caesar.

CLEOPATRA: *who has been meditating among the carpets.* Are these carpets very heavy?

APOLLODORUS: It matters not how heavy. There are plenty of porters.

CLEOPATRA: How do they put the carpets into boats? Do they throw them down?

APOLLODORUS: Not into small boats, majesty. It would sink them.

CLEOPATRA: Not into that man's boat, for instance? *Pointing to the boatman.*

APOLLODORUS: No. Too small.

CLEOPATRA: But you can take a carpet to Caesar in it if I send one?

APOLLODORUS: Assuredly.

CLEOPATRA: And you will have it carried gently down the steps and take great care of it?

APOLLODORUS: Depend on me.

CLEOPATRA: Great, GREAT care?

APOLLODORUS: More than of my own body.

CLEOPATRA: You will promise me not to let the porters drop it or throw it about?

APOLLODORUS: Place the most delicate glass goblet in the palace in the heart of the roll, Queen; and if it be broken, my head shall pay for it.

CLEOPATRA: Good. Come, Ftatateeta. *Ftatateeta comes to her. Apollodorus offers to squire them into the palace.* No, Apollodorus, you must not come. I will choose a carpet for myself. You must wait here. *She runs into the palace.*

APOLLODORUS: *to the porters.* Follow this lady *indicating Ftatateeta;* and obey her.

The porters rise and take up their bales.

FTATATEETA: *addressing the porters as if they were vermin.* This way. And take your shoes off before you put your feet on those stairs.

She goes in, followed by the porters with the carpets. Meanwhile Apollodorus goes to the edge of the quay and looks out over the harbor. The sentinels keep their eyes on him malignantly.

APOLLODORUS: *addressing the sentinel.* My friend--

SENTINEL: *rudely.* Silence there.

FIRST AUXILIARY: Shut your muzzle, you.

SECOND AUXILIARY: *in a half whisper, glancing apprehensively towards the north end of the quay.* Can't you wait a bit?

APOLLODORUS: Patience, worthy three-headed donkey. *They mutter ferociously; but he is not at all*

intimidated. Listen: were you set here to watch me, or to watch the Egyptians?

SENTINEL: We know our duty.

APOLLODORUS: Then why don't you do it? There's something going on over there. *Pointing southwestward to the mole.*

SENTINEL: *sulkily.* I do not need to be told what to do by the like of you.

APOLLODORUS: Blockhead. *He begins shouting* Ho there, Centurion. Hoiho!

SENTINEL: Curse your meddling. *Shouting* Hoiho! Alarm! Alarm!

FIRST AND SECOND AUXILIARIES: Alarm! alarm! Hoiho!

The Centurion comes running in with his guard.

CENTURION: What now? Has the old woman attacked you again? *Seeing Apollodorus* Are YOU here still?

APOLLODORUS: *pointing as before.* See there. The Egyptians are moving. They are going to recapture the Pharos. They will attack by sea and land: by land along the great mole; by sea from the west harbor. Stir yourselves, my military friends: the hunt is up. *A clangor of trumpets from several points along the quay.* Aha! I told you so.

CENTURION: *quickly.* The two extra men pass the alarm to the south posts. One man keep guard here. The rest with me--quick.

The two auxiliary sentinels run off to the south. The Centurion and his guard run of northward; and immediately afterwards the bucina sounds. The four porters come from the palace carrying a carpet, followed by Ftatateeta.

SENTINEL: *handling his pilum apprehensively.* You again! *The porters stop.*

FTATATEETA: Peace, Roman fellow: you are now single-handed. Apollodorus: this carpet is Cleopatra's present to Caesar. It has rolled up in it ten precious goblets of the thinnest Iberian crystal, and a hundred eggs of the sacred blue pigeon. On your honor, let not one of them be broken.

APOLLODORUS: On my head be it. *To the porters* Into the boat with them carefully.

The porters carry the carpet to the steps.

FIRST PORTER: *looking down at the boat.* Beware what you do, sir. Those eggs of which the lady speaks must weigh more than a pound apiece. This boat is too small for such a load.

BOATMAN: *excitedly rushing up the steps.* Oh thou injurious porter! Oh thou unnatural son of a she-camel! *To Apollodorus* My boat, sir, hath often carried five men. Shall it not carry your lordship and a bale of pigeons' eggs? *To the porter* Thou mangey dromedary, the gods shall punish thee for this envious wickedness.

FIRST PORTER: *stolidly.* I cannot quit this bale now to beat thee; but another day I will lie in wait for thee.

APOLLODORUS: *going between them.* Peace there. If the boat were but a single plank, I would get to Caesar on it.

FTATATEETA: *anxiously.* In the name of the gods, Apollodorus, run no risks with that bale.

APOLLODORUS: Fear not, thou venerable grotesque: I guess its great worth. *To the porters* Down with it, I say; and gently; or ye shall eat nothing but stick for ten days.

The boatman goes down the steps, followed by the porters with the bale: Ftatateeta and Apollodorus watching from the edge.

APOLLODORUS: Gently, my sons, my children--[with sudden alarm] gently, ye dogs. Lay it level in the stern--so--'tis well.

FTATATEETA: *screaming down at one of the porters.* Do not step on it, do not step on it. Oh thou brute beast!

FIRST PORTER: *ascending.* Be not excited, mistress: all is well.

FTATATEETA: *panting.* All well! Oh, thou hast given my heart a turn! *She clutches her side, gasping.*

The four porters have now come up and are waiting at the stairhead to be paid.

APOLLODORUS: Here, ye hungry ones. *(He gives money to the first porter, who holds it in his hand to show to the others. They crowd greedily to see how much it is, quite prepared, after the Eastern fashion, to protest to heaven against their patron's stinginess. But his liberality overpowers them.)*

FIRST PORTER: O bounteous prince!

SECOND PORTER: O lord of the bazaar!

THIRD PORTER: O favored of the gods!

FOURTH PORTER: O father to all the porters of the market!

SENTINEL: *enviously, threatening them fiercely with his pilum.* Hence, dogs: off. Out of this. *They fly before him northward along the quay.*

APOLLODORUS: Farewell, Ftatateeta. I shall be at the lighthouse before the Egyptians. *He descends the steps.*

FTATATEETA: The gods speed thee and protect my nursling!

The sentry returns from chasing the porters and looks down at the boat, standing near the stairhead lest Ftatateeta should attempt to escape.

APOLLODORUS: *from beneath, as the boat moves off.* Farewell, valiant pilum pitcher.

SENTINEL: Farewell shopkeeper.

APOLLODORUS: Ha, ha! Pull, thou brave boatman, pull. So Ho-o-o-o-o! *He begins to sing in barcarolle measure to the rhythm of the oars*

My heart, my heart, spread out thy wings: Shake off thy heavy load of love--

Give me the oars, O son of a snail.

SENTINEL: *threatening Ftatateeta.* Now mistress: back to your henhouse. In with you.

FTATATEETA: *falling on her knees and stretching her hands over the waters.* Gods of the seas, bear her safely to the shore!

SENTINEL: Bear WHO safely? What do you mean?

FTATATEETA: *looking darkly at him.* Gods of Egypt and of Vengeance, let this Roman fool be beaten like a dog by his captain for suffering her to be taken over the waters.

SENTINEL: Accursed one: is she then in the boat? *He calls over the sea* Hoiho, there, boatman! Hoiho!

APOLLODORUS: *singing in the distance.* My heart, my heart, be whole and free: Love is thine only enemy.

Meanwhile Rufio, the morning's fighting done, sits munching dates on a faggot of brushwood outside the door of the lighthouse, which towers gigantic to the clouds on his left. His helmet, full of dates, is between his knees; and a leathern bottle of wine is by his side. Behind him the great stone pedestal of the lighthouse is shut in from the open sea by a low stone parapet, with a couple of steps in the middle to the broad coping. A huge chain with a hook hangs down from the lighthouse crane above his head.

Faggots like the one he sits on lie beneath it ready to be drawn up to feed the beacon.

Caesar is standing on the step at the parapet looking out anxiously, evidently ill at ease. Britannus comes out of the lighthouse door.

RUFIO: Well, my British islander. Have you been up to the top?

BRITANNUS: I have. I reckon it at 200 feet high.

RUFIO: Anybody up there?

BRITANNUS: One elderly Tyrian to work the crane; and his son, a well conducted youth of 14.

RUFIO: *looking at the chain.* What! An old man and a boy work that! Twenty men, you mean.

BRITANNUS: Two only, I assure you. They have counterweights, and a machine with boiling water in it which I do not understand: it is not of British design. They use it to haul up barrels of oil and faggots to burn in the brazier on the roof.

RUFIO: But--

BRITANNUS: Excuse me: I came down because there are messengers coming along the mole to us from the island. I must see what their business is. *He hurries out past the lighthouse.*

CAESAR: *coming away from the parapet, shivering and out of sorts.* Rufio: this has been a mad expedition. We shall be beaten. I wish I knew how our men are getting on with that barricade across the great mole.

RUFIO: *angrily.* Must I leave my food and go starving to bring you a report?

CAESAR: *soothing him nervously.* No, Rufio, no. Eat, my son. Eat. *He takes another turn, Rufio chewing dates meanwhile.* The Egyptians cannot be such fools as not to storm the barricade and swoop down on us here before it is finished. It is the first time I have ever run an avoidable risk. I should not have come to Egypt.

RUFIO: An hour ago you were all for victory.

CAESAR: *apologetically.* Yes: I was a fool--rash, Rufio--boyish.

RUFIO: Boyish! Not a bit of it. Here. *Offering him a handful of dates.*

CAESAR: What are these for?

RUFIO: To eat. That's what's the matter with you. When a man comes to your age, he runs down before his midday meal. Eat and drink; and then have another look at our chances.

CAESAR: *taking the dates.* My age! *He shakes his head and bites a date.* Yes, Rufio: I am an old man--worn out now--true, quite true. *He gives way to melancholy contemplation, and eats another date.* Achillas is still in his prime: Ptolemy is a boy. *He eats another date, and plucks up a little.* Well, every dog has his day; and I have had mine: I cannot complain. *With sudden cheerfulness* These dates are not bad, Rufio. *Britannus returns, greatly excited, with a leathern bag. Caesar is himself again in a moment.* What now?

BRITANNUS: *triumphantly.* Our brave Rhodian mariners have captured a treasure. There! *He throws the bag down at Caesar's feet.* Our enemies are delivered into our hands.

CAESAR: In that bag?

BRITANNUS: Wait till you hear, Caesar. This bag contains all the letters which have passed between Pompey's party and the army of occupation here.

CAESAR: Well?

BRITANNUS: *impatient of Caesar's slowness to grasp the situation.* Well, we shall now know who your

foes are. The name of every man who has plotted against you since you crossed the Rubicon may be in these papers, for all we know.

CAESAR: Put them in the fire.

BRITANNUS: Put them--[he gasps]!!!!

CAESAR: In the fire. Would you have me waste the next three years of my life in proscribing and condemning men who will be my friends when I have proved that my friendship is worth more than Pompey's was--than Cato's is. O incorrigible British islander: am I a bull dog, to seek quarrels merely to show how stubborn my jaws are?

BRITANNUS: But your honor--the honor of Rome--

CAESAR: I do not make human sacrifices to my honor, as your Druids do. Since you will not burn these, at least I can drown them. *He picks up the bag and throws it over the parapet into the sea.*

BRITANNUS: Caesar: this is mere eccentricity. Are traitors to be allowed to go free for the sake of a paradox?

RUFIO: *rising.* Caesar: when the islander has finished preaching, call me again. I am going to have a look at the boiling water machine. *He goes into the lighthouse.*

BRITANNUS: *with genuine feeling.* O Caesar, my great master, if I could but persuade you to regard life seriously, as men do in my country!

CAESAR: Do they truly do so, Britannus?

BRITANNUS: Have you not been there? Have you not seen them? What Briton speaks as you do in your moments of levity? What Briton neglects to attend the services at the sacred grove? What Briton wears clothes of many colors as you do, instead of plain blue, as all solid, well esteemed men should? These are moral questions with us. CAESAR. Well, well, my friend: some day I shall settle down and have a blue toga, perhaps. Meanwhile, I must get on as best I can in my flippant Roman way. *Apollodorus comes past the lighthouse.* What now?

BRITANNUS: *turning quickly, and challenging the stranger with official haughtiness.* What is this? Who are you? How did you come here?

APOLLODORUS: Calm yourself, my friend: I am not going to eat you. I have come by boat, from Alexandria, with precious gifts for Caesar.

CAESAR: From Alexandria!

BRITANNUS: *severely.* That is Caesar, sir.

RUFIO: *appearing at the lighthouse door.* What's the matter now?

APOLLODORUS: Hail, great Caesar! I am Apollodorus the Sicilian, an artist.

BRITANNUS: An artist! Why have they admitted this vagabond?

CAESAR: Peace, man. Apollodorus is a famous patrician amateur.

BRITANNUS: *disconcerted.* I crave the gentleman's pardon. *To Caesar* I understood him to say that he was a professional. *(Somewhat out of countenance, he allows Apollodorus to approach Caesar, changing places with him. Rufio, after looking Apollodorus up and down with marked disparagement, goes to the other side of the platform.)*

CAESAR: You are welcome, Apollodorus. What is your business?

APOLLODORUS: First, to deliver to you a present from the Queen of Queens.

CAESAR: Who is that?

APOLLODORUS: Cleopatra of Egypt.

CAESAR: *taking him into his confidence in his most winning manner.* Apollodorus: this is no time for playing with presents. Pray you, go back to the Queen, and tell her that if all goes well I shall return to the palace this evening.

APOLLODORUS: Caesar: I cannot return. As I approached the lighthouse, some fool threw a great leathern bag into the sea. It broke the nose of my boat; and I had hardly time to get myself and my charge to the shore before the poor little cockleshell sank.

CAESAR: I am sorry, Apollodorus. The fool shall be rebuked. Well, well: what have you brought me? The Queen will be hurt if I do not look at it.

RUFIO: Have we time to waste on this trumpery? The Queen is only a child.

CAESAR: Just so: that is why we must not disappoint her. What is the present, Apollodorus?

APOLLODORUS: Caesar: it is a Persian carpet--a beauty! And in it are--so I am told--pigeons' eggs and crystal goblets and fragile precious things. I dare not for my head have it carried up that narrow ladder from the causeway.

RUFIO: Swing it up by the crane, then. We will send the eggs to the cook; drink our wine from the goblets; and the carpet will make a bed for Caesar.

APOLLODORUS: The crane! Caesar: I have sworn to tender this bale of carpet as I tender my own life.

CAESAR: *cheerfully.* Then let them swing you up at the same time; and if the chain breaks, you and the pigeons' eggs will perish together. *He goes to the chairs and looks up along it, examining it curiously.*

APOLLODORUS: *to Britannus.* Is Caesar serious?

BRITANNUS: His manner is frivolous because he is an Italian; but he means what he says.

APOLLODORUS: Serious or not, he spoke well. Give me a squad of soldiers to work the crane.

BRITANNUS: Leave the crane to me. Go and await the descent of the chain.

APOLLODORUS: Good. You will presently see me there *turning to them all and pointing with an eloquent gesture to the sky above the parapet* rising like the sun with my treasure.

He goes back the, way he came. Britannus goes into the lighthouse.

RUFIO: *ill-humoredly.* Are you really going to wait here for this foolery, Caesar?

CAESAR: *backing away from the crane as it gives signs of working.* Why not?

RUFIO: The Egyptians will let you know why not if they have the sense to make a rush from the shore end of the mole before our barricade is finished. And here we are waiting like children to see a carpet full of pigeons' eggs.

The chain rattles, and is drawn up high enough to clear the parapet. It then swings round out of sight behind the lighthouse.

CAESAR: Fear not, my son Rufio. When the first Egyptian takes his first step along the mole, the alarm will sound; and we two will reach the barricade from our end before the Egyptians reach it from their end--we two, Rufio: I, the old man, and you, his biggest boy. And the old man will be there first. So peace; and give me some more dates.

APOLLODORUS: *from the causeway below.* So-ho, haul away. So-ho-o- o-o! *The chain is drawn up and comes round again from behind the lighthouse. Apollodorus is swinging in the air with his bale of carpet at the end of it. He breaks into song as he soars above the parapet.*

APOLLODORUS: Aloft, aloft, behold the blue

APOLLODORUS: That never shone in woman's eyes

APOLLODORUS: Easy there: stop her. *He ceases to rise.* Further round! *The chain comes forward above the platform.*

RUFIO: *calling up.* Lower away there. *The chain and its load begin to descend.*

APOLLODORUS: *calling up.* Gently--slowly--mind the eggs.

RUFIO: *calling up.* Easy there--slowly--slowly.

Apollodorus and the bale are deposited safely on the flags in the middle of the platform. Rufio and Caesar help Apollodorus to cast off the chain from the bale.

RUFIO: Haul up.

The chain rises clear of their heads with a rattle. Britannus comes from the lighthouse and helps them to uncord the carpet.

APOLLODORUS: *when the cords are loose.* Stand off, my friends: let Caesar see. *He throws the carpet open.*

RUFIO: Nothing but a heap of shawls. Where are the pigeons' eggs?

APOLLODORUS: Approach, Caesar; and search for them among the shawls.

RUFIO: *drawing his sword.* Ha, treachery! Keep back, Caesar: I saw the shawl move: there is something alive there.

BRITANNUS: *drawing his sword.* It is a serpent.

APOLLODORUS: Dares Caesar thrust his hand into the sack where the serpent moves?

RUFIO: *turning on him.* Treacherous dog--

CAESAR: Peace. Put up your swords. Apollodorus: your serpent seems to breathe very regularly. *He thrusts his hand under the shawls and draws out a bare arm.* This is a pretty little snake.

RUFIO: *drawing out the other arm.* Let us have the rest of you.

They pull Cleopatra up by the wrists into a sitting position. Britannus, scandalized, sheathes his sword with a drive of protest.

CLEOPATRA: *gasping.* Oh, I'm smothered. Oh, Caesar; a man stood on me in the boat; and a great sack of something fell upon me out of the sky; and then the boat sank, and then I was swung up into the air and bumped down.

CAESAR: *petting her as she rises and takes refuge on his breast.* Well, never mind: here you are safe and sound at last.

RUFIO: Ay; and now that she is here, what are we to do with her?

BRITANNUS: She cannot stay here, Caesar, without the companionship of some matron.

CLEOPATRA: *jealously, to Caesar, who is obviously perplexed.* Aren't you glad to see me?

CAESAR: Yes, yes; I am very glad. But Rufio is very angry; and Britannus is shocked.

CLEOPATRA: *contemptuously.* You can have their heads cut off, can you not?

CAESAR: They would not be so useful with their heads cut off as they are now, my sea bird.

RUFIO: *to Cleopatra.* We shall have to go away presently and cut some of your Egyptians' heads off. How will you like being left here with the chance of being captured by that little brother of yours if

we are beaten?

CLEOPATRA: But you mustn't leave me alone. Caesar you will not leave me alone, will you?

RUFIO: What! Not when the trumpet sounds and all our lives depend on Caesar's being at the barricade before the Egyptians reach it? Eh?

CLEOPATRA: Let them lose their lives: they are only soldiers.

CAESAR: *gravely.* Cleopatra: when that trumpet sounds, we must take every man his life in his hand, and throw it in the face of Death. And of my soldiers who have trusted me there is not one whose hand I shall not hold more sacred than your head. *Cleopatra is overwhelmed. Her eyes fill with tears.* Apollodorus: you must take her back to the palace.

APOLLODORUS: Am I a dolphin, Caesar, to cross the seas with young ladies on my back? My boat is sunk: all yours are either at the barricade or have returned to the city. I will hail one if I can: that is all I can do. *He goes back to the causeway.*

CLEOPATRA: *struggling with her tears.* It does not matter. I will not go back. Nobody cares for me.

CAESAR: Cleopatra--

CLEOPATRA: You want me to be killed.

CAESAR: *still more gravely.* My poor child: your life matters little here to anyone but yourself. *(She gives way altogether at this, casting herself down on the faggots weeping. Suddenly a great tumult is heard in the distance, bucinas and trumpets sounding through a storm of shouting. Britannus rushes to the parapet and looks along the mole. Caesar and Rufio turn to one another with quick intelligence.)*

CAESAR: Come, Rufio.

CLEOPATRA: *scrambling to her knees and clinging to him.* No, no. Do not leave me, Caesar. *He snatches his skirt from her clutch.* Oh!

BRITANNUS: *from the parapet.* Caesar: we are cut off. The Egyptians have landed from the west harbor between us and the barricade!!!

RUFIO: *running to see.* Curses! It is true. We are caught like rats in a trap.

CAESAR: *ruthfully.* Rufio, Rufio: my men at the barricade are between the sea party and the shore party. I have murdered them.

RUFIO: *coming back from the parapet to Caesar's right hand.* Ay: that comes of fooling with this girl here.

APOLLODORUS: *coming up quickly from the causeway.* Look over the parapet, Caesar.

CAESAR: We have looked, my friend. We must defend ourselves here.

APOLLODORUS: I have thrown the ladder into the sea. They cannot get in without it.

RUFIO: Ay; and we cannot get out. Have you thought of that?

APOLLODORUS: Not get out! Why not? You have ships in the east harbor.

BRITANNUS: *hopefully, at the parapet.* The Rhodian galleys are standing in towards us already. *Caesar quickly joins Britannus at the parapet.*

RUFIO: *to Apollodorus, impatiently.* And by what road are we to walk to the galleys, pray?

APOLLODORUS: *with gay, defiant rhetoric.* By the road that leads everywhere--the diamond path of the sun and moon. Have you never seen the child's shadow play of The Broken Bridge? "Ducks

and geese with ease get over"--eh? *He throws away his cloak and cap, and binds his sword on his back.*

RUFIO: What are you talking about?

APOLLODORUS: I will show you. *Calling to Britannus* How far off is the nearest galley?

BRITANNUS: Fifty fathom.

CAESAR: No, no: they are further off than they seem in this clear air to your British eyes. Nearly quarter of a mile, Apollodorus.

APOLLODORUS: Good. Defend yourselves here until I send you a boat from that galley.

RUFIO: Have you wings, perhaps?

APOLLODORUS: Water wings, soldier. Behold!

He runs up the steps between Caesar and Britannus to the coping of the parapet; springs into the air; and plunges head foremost into the sea.

CAESAR: *like a schoolboy--wildly excited.* Bravo, bravo! *Throwing off his cloak* By Jupiter, I will do that too.

RUFIO: *seizing him.* You are mad. You shall not.

CAESAR: Why not? Can I not swim as well as he?

RUFIO: *frantic.* Can an old fool dive and swim like a young one? He is twenty-five and you are fifty.

CAESAR: *breaking loose from Rufio.* Old!!!

BRITANNUS: *shocked.* Rufio: you forget yourself.

CAESAR: I will race you to the galley for a week's pay, father Rufio.

CLEOPATRA: But me! Me!! Me!!! What is to become of me?

CAESAR: I will carry you on my back to the galley like a dolphin. Rufio: when you see me rise to the surface, throw her in: I will answer for her. And then in with you after her, both of you.

CLEOPATRA: No, no, NO. I shall be drowned.

BRITANNUS: Caesar: I am a man and a Briton, not a fish. I must have a boat. I cannot swim.

CLEOPATRA: Neither can I.

CAESAR: *to Britannus.* Stay here, then, alone, until I recapture the lighthouse: I will not forget you. Now, Rufio.

RUFIO: You have made up your mind to this folly?

CAESAR: The Egyptians have made it up for me. What else is there to do? And mind where you jump: I do not want to get your fourteen stone in the small of my back as I come up. *He runs up the steps and stands on the coping.*

BRITANNUS: *anxiously.* One last word, Caesar. Do not let yourself be seen in the fashionable part of Alexandria until you have changed your clothes.

CAESAR: *calling over the sea.* Ho, Apollodorus: *he points skyward and quotes the barcarolle*

The white upon the blue above--

APOLLODORUS: *swimming in the distance*

Is purple on the green below--

CAESAR: *exultantly.* Aha! *He plunges into the sea.*

CLEOPATRA: *running excitedly to the steps.* Oh, let me see. He will be drowned. *Rufio seizes her.* Ah--ah--ah--ah! *He pitches her screaming into the sea. Rufio and Britannus roar with laughter.*

RUFIO: *looking down after her.* He has got her. *To Britannus* Hold the fort, Briton. Caesar will not forget you. *He springs off.*

BRITANNUS: *running to the steps to watch them as they swim.* All safe, Rufio?

RUFIO: *swimming.* All safe.

CAESAR: *swimming further of.* Take refuge up there by the beacon; and pile the fuel on the trap door, Britannus.

BRITANNUS: *calling in reply.* I will first do so, and then commend myself to my country's gods. *A sound of cheering from the sea. Britannus gives full vent to his excitement* The boat has reached him: Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!

END OF ACT III.

Le note di scena sono tra parentesi *quadre* o *(tonde).*

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