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Charles Busch's Cleopatra

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

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FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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CHARLES BUSCH’S CLEOPATRA was first produced by the Theatre for the New City (Crystal Field, Executive Artistic Director) in New York City on March 25, 2016. The performance was directed by Carl Address, with sets and graphics by B.T. Whitehill, costumes by Jessica Jahn, lights by Zach Blane, sound by Bart Fasbender, and wigs by Katherine Carr. The cast was as follows:

CLEOPATRA	Charles Busch
CAESAR/CALPURNIA/LEDIPUS	Tony Sheldon
MARK ANTONY	Joe Zaso
OCTAVIAN/OCTAVIA	Jennifer Van Dyck
CHARMION	Ashley Austin Morris
IRAS	Jennifer Cody
SOOTHSAYER	Andy Halliday
APOLLODORUS/ACHMED	Larry Bullock

CHARACTERS

CLEOPATRA – Legendary Queen of the Nile. Beautiful, tough and alluring.

CAESAR – Magnetic Roman leader in his late middle age.

MARK ANTONY – Handsome, gruff warrior with a fatal weakness for women.

OCTAVIAN – Young, ruthlessly ambitious heir to Caesar.

APOLLODORUS – Musclebound devoted slave to Cleopatra.

SOOTHSAYER – Nervous, highly emotional wandering prophet.

CHARMION – Beautiful young handmaiden to Cleopatra and very much in charge/

IRAS – Lovely handmaiden to Cleopatra, with a bawdy sense of humor

CALPURNIA – Caesar's imposing and imperious wife.

OCTAVIA – Octavian's gentle and delicately beautiful twin sister.

LEPIDUS – A worldly and dignified elder Roman Senator.

ACHMED – A violent, unscrupulous slave trader.

CASTING NOTE

The original production had a cast of eight actors, with several roles doubled. The play can also be performed with a larger cast each playing only one role.

Several roles in the original production used cross gender casting. This is not a necessity. What is important is that each role be played with total conviction. The humor must not derive from the role being played by someone of the opposite sex, but from the lines and situation being comic.

Suggested doubling and gender crossed casting

Octavian/ Octavia... played by a woman

Caesar/ Calpurnia/ Lepidus...played by a man

Apollodorus/ Achmed...played by a man

Cleopatra... played by a man

Scene One

(CAESAR and MARK ANTONY enter. The actor playing ANTONY announces "A camp near Tarsus!" The lights shift and we are in the scene.)

ANTONY. Personally, Caesar, if it was up to me, Egypt would be a Roman state. I'd teach these Cobra worshipping mystics the way of the world with my bare fists and the lash.

CAESAR. Mark Antony, I pray in time that a wise head shall be placed upon that glorious torso. It is in Rome's best interests to make Egypt a grateful ally rather than a bitter conquest.

ANTONY. Forgive my brutish ways. I've spent too many years sweating and grunting among men in battle.

(YOUNG OCTAVIAN enters.)

OCTAVIAN. Great Uncle, there you are. I searched for you throughout this military encampment. And here I find you in a billet barely suitable for a foot soldier.

CAESAR. Octavian, your young eyes have been dazzled by the grandeur you've observed on your travels.

OCTAVIAN. What an education you have provided for me. With Father dying so unexpectedly and Mother being, well, *Mother*, the man I am today is what you have made of me.

CAESAR. And we're still working on it. You are acquainted with the Tribune Mark Antony?

ANTONY. An honor, young Gaius Octavius.

OCTAVIAN. We met once before, Tribune. Years ago when I was a lad of twelve you escorted Mother and me to a chariot race at the coliseum. I sat beside you and had the privilege of wiping your dripping brow.

ANTONY. It was murderously hot that day.

OCTAVIAN. No, it was unseasonably frigid. *Mother* has a way of making even the most cool headed perspire. Great Uncle, do you know your military encampment is replete with a wild-eyed Soothsayer?

CAESAR. Well, that's what makes it camp.

OCTAVIAN. This Soothsayer claims to have prophecies for both you and for Queen Cleopatra of Egypt.

ANTONY. He won't find the Egyptian wench here.

CAESAR. That is cause for celebration. It is my unpleasant task to choose an Egyptian ruler among embattled royal siblings who believe they are descended from wild beasts of prey.

OCTAVIAN. I trust you've arrived at a conclusion.

CAESAR. I have. Rome will be in support of young King Ptolemy. Can't say I'm terribly impressed with the lad. Generations of inbreeding have given him crossed eyes and a most unpleasant sneer.

ANTONY. A decadent wastrel. Oh, yeah, I can just see the boy Pharaoh bent over a sarcophagus with his royal retinue taking turns boffing him in his hairless Egyptian ass.

OCTAVIAN. (*Trying to focus despite his attraction to ANTONY.*)
Pray, Uncle, what made you side against his sister Cleopatra?

CAESAR. She is nowhere to be found. It is said that she has fled to Syria. An odd way to fight for a crown.

OCTAVIAN. Perhaps she was "assisted" in her flight.

CAESAR. Are you saying that her brothers' advisors may have *reunited* the Queen with her ancestors?

ANTONY. It is also said that the young Queen is a creature of the rarest beauty.

CAESAR. Well, her beauty is one for the ages. We can only assume that she is dead and her remains blown through the desert winds.

(**APOLLODORUS** enters carrying a large rolled up rug.)

APOLLODORUS. A rug of Persia. A gift for Caesar from Nayan the merchant.

CAESAR. (*Impatiently.*) Yes, yes, put it down, man, and go. We have business here.

ANTONY. (*Suspicious.*) Tradesman, would it not be easier to sling the rug over your shoulder?

APOLLODORUS. Not a rug of this rare quality.

(**APOLLODORUS** gently places it on the ground.)

CAESAR. Antony, lend me your sword. This rug may require some cutting.

APOLLODORUS. (*Alarmed.*) Cutting?

(**ANTONY** gives **CAESAR** his sword.)

APOLLODORUS. Please don't. The rug is such a delicate weave.

CAESAR. We shall see about that.

(*Before CAESAR can violently plunge his sword into the rug, APOLLODORUS unrolls it and lo and behold inside is the ravishing young CLEOPATRA.*)

APOLLODORUS. All hail Cleopatra! Kindred of Ra, beloved of the moon and sun, and of Upper and Lower Egypt, Queen.

CLEOPATRA. Greetings, Caesar, from Egypt.

CAESAR. Most amusing. But I am far too busy for levity. Merchant, take away the rug and your young charge.

(**APOLLODORUS** throws the rug over his shoulder.)

CLEOPATRA. But hey! Wait just a minute. Dontcha recognize my face from the coin?

CAESAR. No. Can't say I do. Away with you.

CLEOPATRA. I am Queen I tell you. I have the royal beauty mark behind my ear to prove it.

(**ANTONY** looks behind her ear.)

ANTONY. She's got it.

CAESAR. But why are you so much fairer than all others on your dark continent?

CLEOPATRA. Well, it might be on account of my second cousin on my mother's side being a white leopard.

OCTAVIAN. It takes more to be a Cleopatra than a pale complexion and a beauty mark. Come, girl.

(ANTONY and OCTAVIAN reach for her arms. She shakes them both off.)

CLEOPATRA. Great Caesar, you gotta listen. I am Cleopatra. My brother had me abducted me to the desert and left there to die. My loyal servant Apollodorus with great daring brought me all the way here for your protection.

ANTONY. *(Looking at APOLLODORUS.)* She saved you from death? Ha! Don't make me laugh.

CLEOPATRA. How dare you!

(She springs at him like a tigress. He grabs her wrists.)

ANTONY. Wildcat! Hellion!

CLEOPATRA. Nobody insults Apollodorus. And I'm the only one allowed to call her "she."

CAESAR. Antony, under the circumstances, I believe you owe the fellow an apology.

ANTONY. *(Begrudgingly.)* If you insist, Great Caesar, then... I apologize.

APOLLODORUS. I accept.

(He winks at ANTONY lasciviously.)

CLEOPATRA. You may leave us. Wait for me without.

APOLLODORUS. As you wish, Mistress.

CLEOPATRA. Thanks, Doris.

(APOLLODORUS exits.)

CAESAR. I must inform you, Cleopatra of Egypt, that in your absence I have forged an alliance with your brother, Ptolemy.

CLEOPATRA. Don't trust him for a minute. My father wished upon his death that I be crowned Queen of the Nile. He had to throw in my brother as part of the deal. Lo and behold, my husband had me kidnapped in dead of night.

CAESAR. Your husband? I thought you said your brother had you kidnapped.

CLEOPATRA. I meant my brother.

CAESAR. But you clearly said your husband.

CLEOPATRA. I meant my husband.

CAESAR. But first you said your brother. Don't lie to me, child! Who was it?!

CLEOPATRA. He's my brother and my husband! That's how we royals do things in Egypt. We were married four years ago. Some wedding. The day every girl dreams about. You walk down the aisle and who's waiting for you but your crazy kid brother. *(She starts to sob.)*

CAESAR. Get ahold of yourself, child.

CLEOPATRA. I can't.

OCTAVIAN. Tears are not becoming for one with claims to a throne.

ANTONY. With your permission, Caesar, I must return to my legion. Gaius Octavius, you may join me.

OCTAVIAN. That would be an honor. Farewell, Great Uncle.

(ANTONY and OCTAVIAN turn to leave.)

CLEOPATRA. *(Imperiously.)* I haven't dismissed you yet!

OCTAVIAN. The child has the arrogance of a Queen if not the footwear.

(CLEOPATRA checks her shoes.)

(They exit.)

CLEOPATRA. I hate them. I hope they are stricken with the plague. I hope they get run over by a team of horses. I hope they...

CAESAR. Come, child, sit on my lap.

CLEOPATRA. Okay.

(She sits on his lap. Still whimpering. He dips into a bowl and takes out a delicacy.)

CAESAR. Here, have a piece of dried chuba root. It's a delicacy. You'll like it.

CLEOPATRA. Never had chuba before. I'm scared. Maybe it's poisoned.

CAESAR. I'll tell what I'll do. I'll break it in two and I'll eat half.

(He breaks it in half and eats one and bugs his eyes out and makes a big comic chewing sound of delight. Hesitantly, she eats the other half. At first she makes a face that it tastes disgusting but then gradually she shows that she likes it and licks her lips.)

CAESAR. What do you think?

CLEOPATRA. I like it. *(Giggles.)* Gee, you're a funny old man.

CAESAR. The way you're perched on my knee, you remind me of a silky Persian cat. From where do you get your flame colored tresses?

CLEOPATRA. It's an ancient Egyptian secret.

CAESAR. Reveal it to me.

CLEOPATRA. I daren't. It is a sacred secret.

CAESAR. Do tell. I'll give you a shiny gold piece.

CLEOPATRA. How about a kiss?

CAESAR. I'm too old for that.

CLEOPATRA. No, you're not. You're not at all.

(They kiss.)

CAESAR. Now tell me the secret of your ruby red hair.

CLEOPATRA. A cup of henna to a gallon of water.

CAESAR. I beg your pardon.

CLEOPATRA. You've never heard of Egyptian henna?

CAESAR. No, I haven't.

CLEOPATRA. You've got a lot to learn.

CAESAR. And there is much I could teach you. Cleopatra, do you appreciate history?

CLEOPATRA. I like stories. Someday you shall be a story. And so shall I.

CAESAR. You are so young. My story has mostly been told.

CLEOPATRA. It's not over. Make me a part of your story.

CAESAR. You must have heard that I have a wife, the noble Calpurnia.

CLEOPATRA. And?

CAESAR. She is my wife.

CLEOPATRA. One hears that she is a river that has run dry. She has made you childless.

CAESAR. I see no reason to discuss this further.

CLEOPATRA. My breasts are filled with love and life. My hips are rounded and well apart. Such women have sons and sons build empires.

CAESAR. So at last you have told me what you want of me.

CLEOPATRA. Out of us. We will succeed with your dreams. Your ambitions. One world. Our world.

CAESAR. (*Assessing her.*) I think perhaps I can make a queen of you at that.

CLEOPATRA. But I am a queen.

CAESAR. A true queen. A queen of substance and honor.

CLEOPATRA. Yes, that is my destiny. My Lord, make of me as you desire me.

(*The SOOTHSAYER enters.*)

SOOTHSAYER. Prophecies! Prophecies! Mine is the gift of prophecy.

CAESAR. Ah, the Soothsayer. What brilliant news of the future are you here to give me?

SOOTHSAYER. Caesar, as supreme as you are, you will know far greater triumph.

CLEOPATRA. You see what I told you?

CAESAR. For such a fine prophecy, I shall reward you with ten dinera.

SOOTHSAYER. (*Quick to anger.*) My gift of prophecy cannot be bought and sold. You degrade me! I spit on your coins!

CLEOPATRA. He was just being polite. You gave your forecast. Now kindly depart.

SOOTHSAYER. There is more. And not for Caesar. For you, royal Egypt.

CLEOPATRA. A message for me? Yeah?

SOOTHSAYER. (*Searching his soul for a vision.*) I see... I see... a vision. It's cloudy. You are making an entrance.

CLEOPATRA. What am I wearing?

SOOTHSAYER. A gown of solid gold.

CLEOPATRA. Sounds heavy but proceed.

SOOTHSAYER. I see a triumphant entrance to Rome. Thousands line the streets to greet you as a Goddess. But alas, you shall also know bitter defeat.

CLEOPATRA. You Soothsayers are all the same. You had to give me the last part so I'll come back for more.

SOOTHSAYER. (*Suddenly has a new vision.*) A girl. I see a young girl.

CLEOPATRA. Well, that's me.

SOOTHSAYER. A younger girl.

CLEOPATRA. Oh.

SOOTHSAYER. She has a mole.

CLEOPATRA. I have a mole.

SOOTHSAYER. This girl has ten moles.

CLEOPATRA. That's not me.

SOOTHSAYER. Treasure her. She will be of great importance to you.

(**CHARMION**, a beautiful young girl, enters carrying a shallow bowl of figs.)

CHARMION. Pardon me. I have been sent to provide you, Great Caesar, with a small repast.

CAESAR. How thoughtful. I am feeling rather peckish.
What have you?

CHARMION. Figs, my Lord. Plump and juicy. Freshly picked from the Ficus tree.

SOOTHSAYER. FIGS! FIGS! I have a vision of figs!

CLEOPATRA. Yeah, there they are. In that bowl.

SOOTHSAYER. Different figs. Years from now. A ghastly vision. No! No! Do not make me see!!

CAESAR. Well, at the moment, I shall take one of *these* figs. I am quite famished.

(He's about to dip his hand into the bowl of figs.)

CHARMION. August One, I have no doubt that you are as gracious as you are brave, but should you not ask the young lady to dip her hand first into the bowl of figs?

CAESAR. How piggish of me. My dear?

CLEOPATRA. Don't mind if I do.

(CLEOPATRA is about to dip her hand into the bowl of figs. Suddenly, CHARMION stops her.)

CHARMION. No! Don't! You mustn't!!

CAESAR. What goes with you, child? Are you mad?

CHARMION. There is hidden among the figs a venomous snake. One bite delivers instant death. Your Highness, I am to blame. Chop off my head. Disembowel me. I am yours to butcher.

CLEOPATRA. Yet, you saved my life. You stopped me from touching those figs. But why?

CHARMION. I was sent here by your brother, King Ptolemy. You were followed. He has spies everywhere. They found me on the streets. A prostitute. I was desperate, hungry and without friends or family. I took their evil money and pledged to provide them with your death. Kill me! Kill me! Plunge a dagger into my heart. I do not deserve to breathe the same air as you, most ravishing and exquisite of all human beings.

CLEOPATRA. What's your name, honey?

CHARMION. Charmion.

CLEOPATRA. Look, Char, it's not easy in this world for any female, royal or otherwise.

CHARMION. But to bring death to one so fair. You with your delicate features, your slim figure and your lustrous ruby red hair.

CLEOPATRA. Well, don't beat yourself up.

CAESAR. My dear, a Queen must fight against sentiment. This girl, contrite though she may be, should be brought to the executioner and swiftly.

CLEOPATRA. Wait a minute. What was that prophecy? (*Snaps her fingers.*) I was gonna meet a girl with ten moles.

CHARMION. I don't have ten moles.

CLEOPATRA. But you got ten count 'em ten freckles. Soothsayer, that's good enough for me. Caesar, I want this girl saved and couldn't you put her on the payroll? It would please me so.

CHARMION. What?

SOOTHSAYER. What?

CAESAR. I am frankly dubious of the child's change of heart, but we shall see that she is well taken care of.

CLEOPATRA. Thank you, Julius.

CAESAR. If you will excuse me, I must convene with my Generals. Cleopatra, we shall speak anon.

(**CAESAR exits.**)

SOOTHSAYER. (*With great sentiment.*) That was a *very* beautiful thing to do.

CLEOPATRA. Okay, you. Out with it. Was it my brother who put you up to this or his cronies?

CHARMION. Your brother, King Ptolemy. He personally gave the order.

CLEOPATRA. I thought so. Ptolemy has gone too far. He's tried to murder me twice in one week. That karma lovin' son of a bitch isn't gettin' a third chance.

SOOTHSAYER. You must rid your heart of vengeance.

CLEOPATRA. You're annoying me but you're a good one to have around. I'm putting you also on the payroll.

SOOTHSAYER. My sacred gifts are not to be bartered. I shall not be insulted. I spit upon your gold coins!

CLEOPATRA. Shut up, Eight ball, and listen. Charmion, you're going to find me the whiskers of a black cougar. We'll chop 'em up and you'll put them in my brother's food. The sharp whiskers will perforate Ptolemy's intestines, providing a painful but untraceable death.

CHARMION. Done.

CLEOPATRA. Here's where you come in, Ouija. You'll use your gift of prophecy to tell us when the coast is clear. You can give us a five minute warning.

SOOTHSAYER. I cahn't! I cahn't! I cahn't!

(The SOOTHSAYER runs off in hysteria.)

CLEOPATRA. He'll be back.

CHARMION. Your Majesty, I think I've got a connection to get you them whiskers.

CLEOPATRA. Good girl. We need to work swiftly. Honey, this is what we're gonna do.

(She puts her arm around CHARMION's waist and the two dames exit.)

End of Scene

Scene Two

(CAESAR's villa in Rome. CAESAR enters with ANTONY and OCTAVIAN. ANTONY announces "Caesar's villa in Rome." Lights shift.)

CAESAR. You plague me with your good intentions. I will hear no more! No more!

ANTONY. Then listen to the voice of the people!

OCTAVIAN. They are greatly disturbed by your mad infatuation with the Egyptian Queen.

CAESAR. The people adore Cleopatra. Her entrance into Rome atop that monumental gold sphinx was the greatest spectacle since Romulus and Remus. Women and eunuchs, young and old, are copying her eye makeup.

OCTAVIAN. That's all well and good, but her state visit was to be for a fortnight.

ANTONY. It's now six months to the day.

OCTAVIAN. No one expected her to set up housekeeping and arrange for laundry service.

ANTONY. Great Caesar, I implore you. Give her one more good fuck and send her packing.

CAESAR. The Queen of Egypt is a visiting dignitary and must be treated with the utmost respect.

OCTAVIAN. No woman is respected who is rumored to have murdered her own brother.

CAESAR. Her brother was a deranged despot and besides he died of a rupture to the intestine. A beautiful woman is always the subject of gossip.

OCTAVIAN. Is it mere gossip that the Egyptian Queen is encouraging you to turn the Republic into a dictatorship?

CAESAR. I thought you knew me better than that. Cleopatra's infatuation with me is a very useful tool.

ANTONY. I'll say it again, Caesar. Don't make her your consort. Just ball her.

CAESAR. Watch yourself, Antony. Even a beloved protégé can overstep his position.

OCTAVIAN. Antony speaks out of the deepest respect. As we all do. There is also widespread affection for your noble wife Calpurnia. The citizens of Rome do not think kindly of a leader who brings disgrace to this woman of great dignity.

CAESAR. Calpurnia is contentedly ensconced in her villa in Pompeii. She has the good sense to keep her own council. Now, if you men will excuse me, I must occupy myself with something other than idle gossip.

(CAESAR exits.)

OCTAVIAN. If the people turn on Caesar, they could very well turn on his Senate as well.

(CLEOPATRA enters unseen by ANTONY and OCTAVIAN. She listens to them plotting against her.)

ANTONY. As long as Calpurnia is in Pompeii, Caesar feels free to corn hole the Egyptian whore.

OCTAVIAN. I have persuaded my Great Aunt Calpurnia to return immediately to Rome. Perhaps a virtuous wife is the best foil against the overblown charms of the sluttish serpent of the Nile.

(CLEOPATRA reveals her presence.)

CLEOPATRA. You boys certainly know how to make a girl feel welcomed.

OCTAVIAN. Madame, you cut me to the quick. You will permit me to withdraw.

(He bows and exits. ANTONY is about to follow him.)

ANTONY. I too should be on my way.

CLEOPATRA. Not so fast, Muscles. You've had it in for me ever since we met in Tarsus. What did I ever do to you?

ANTONY. It is what you are doing to great Caesar and to Rome that concerns me. You don't love Caesar.

CLEOPATRA. You couldn't be more wrong. I do love Caesar. I love him very much. More than I ever thought possible.

ANTONY. He's old enough to be your grandfather.

CLEOPATRA. I must admit to being stimulated by his... gravitas. Caesar has taught me statesmanship. He has taught me diplomacy. He has taught me how to love.

ANTONY. He hasn't taught you to respect a man's marriage.

CLEOPATRA. I've been taught by experts never to trust any man's fidelity.

ANTONY. For a Daughter of the Sun and Moon, that sounds almost human. Someday you may grow a woman's heart and it will bring about your doom.

CLEOPATRA. That sounds almost sympathetic.

ANTONY. It wasn't meant to be.

CLEOPATRA. Why should you be different from anyone else? I've never felt as lonely as I have here in Rome this spring.

ANTONY. The answer to your social dilemma might be simply...to leave. *(He bows.)* Madame.

(ANTONY starts to leave just as the imperious, imposing CALPURNIA enters.)

ANTONY. Your most honorable Mistress Calpurnia. I was just taking my leave.

CALPURNIA. Tribune, I trust we shall dine later this evening.

ANTONY. That would give me great pleasure.

(ANTONY bows and exits.)

CALPURNIA. By your lush overripe beauty, I presume you to be Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile.

CLEOPATRA. And by your monumental grandeur, I would presume you to be Caesar's noble wife Calpurnia.

CALPURNIA. I thank you for qualifying my name with that of my husband.

CLEOPATRA. If I had known that you were returning from Pompeii, I would have had my servants plan a feast in your honor.

CALPURNIA. That would be most inappropriate since this is my home.

CLEOPATRA. And lovely it is. I so admire your taste in home furnishings. Everything really works.

CALPURNIA. Perhaps you also admire my taste in husbands.

CLEOPATRA. Hard for me to say. I wouldn't know how he is as a husband.

CALPURNIA. But there is much you do know of Caesar. Rather intimately, I would surmise.

CLEOPATRA. I cannot control the gossiping tongues of the Roman senate.

CALPURNIA. Do not underestimate yourself, my dear. I'm sure you're quite the expert on men's tongues.

CLEOPATRA. Oh, so you wanna roll around in the sawdust, do ya? Well, Egyptian royalty doesn't perform in a circus.

CALPURNIA. You may wear the silken robes of a queen, but they fool no one.

CLEOPATRA. They're beautiful robes but when great Caesar doesn't like what I wear, I take it off.

CALPURNIA. You don't have a streak of decency in you.

CLEOPATRA. I don't show my good points to strangers.

CALPURNIA. This sordid liaison with Caesar must come to an end immediately. You will return to Egypt.

CLEOPATRA. Says who? I forge my own destiny. And it appears in the prophecies of my Soothsayer that Caesar's destiny and mine are one.

CALPURNIA. Your Soothsayer? This is barbaric absurdity.

CLEOPATRA. So far the predictions have been one hundred percent accurate and that's good enough odds for me.

CALPURNIA. You will bring about Caesar's downfall.

CLEOPATRA. I beg to differ. With my help, he shall be crowned Emperor.

CALPURNIA. That goes against his every belief.

CLEOPATRA. A true leader grows and acquires new beliefs.
I shall make of him a divinity.

CALPURNIA. You've succeeded in making him a figure of
ridicule. Don't fool yourself into thinking he loves you.
He just imagines he does.

CLEOPATRA. I will admit the great man has a vivid
imagination.

CALPURNIA. Like most men, he's merely amusing himself
with a harlot.

CLEOPATRA. My ancestors on my mother's side were all big
cats. Don't get me sore.

CALPURNIA. I have discretion and propriety on my side.

CLEOPATRA. A man needs a lot more than discretion and
propriety from a wife.

CALPURNIA. I won't listen to such vulgarity.

CLEOPATRA. You'll listen, Iceberg, and you'll listen good.
With you turning his bed into the frozen tundra, you
made him old before his time. I found out there's
plenty of starch left in him. With me, he can perform
all night, all morning and then surprise me with it in
the afternoon.

CALPURNIA. I must leave this den of perversion at once!

CLEOPATRA. I'm not finished with you.

CALPURNIA. You have taken enough from me and I refuse
to give you anything more, not even one more minute.

(**CALPURNIA** exits. **CLEOPATRA** calls out to
CHARMION.)

CLEOPATRA. Charmion!

(**CHARMION** enters.)

CHARMION. Mistress?

CLEOPATRA. Fetch me a fig.

End of Scene

Scene Three

(The actor playing ACHMED announces "A street in Rome." The lights shift and a bearded and turbaned Arab, ACHMED, is followed by a beautiful young girl named IRAS. She's toting on her back an enormous satchel almost as big as she is.)

ACHMED. Girl, pick up your feet. We still have a ways to go.

IRAS. Please, Achmed, I need rest. We have been walking for three days.

ACHMED. You will rest when we reach the house of your new master.

IRAS. How much further?

ACHMED. His villa is on the seventh hill of Rome.

IRAS. We've already walked up and down six. My feet are one big blister.

ACHMED. Stop that moaning or I'll... *(He raises his hand as if to strike her.)*

IRAS. No, no, please don't strike me. If I'm bruised and battered my intended may not take me.

ACHMED. The Merchant Abatelli has promised me a hundred dinera to provide him with a young bride. He'll pay for whatever I deliver.

IRAS. He won't pay for a dead girl. And I will surely perish unless I have some water.

ACHMED. Stay here. I'll look around and see if I can find a well. And don't you get any fancies of escaping.

IRAS. I won't. I have nowhere to run.

(ACHMED exits. IRAS bursts into tears. CHARMION enters balancing a jug on her shoulder. She sees IRAS sitting on her satchel sobbing.)

CHARMION. Is there something wrong?

IRAS. No. Yes. No. I'll be all right.

CHARMION. I can't imagine any sight more pitiful than you there, alone, sittin' on your satchel. Would you like something to drink on this sultry morning?

IRAS. Bless you, kind soul. I desperately need something to wet my parched lips.

CHARMION. Here. Partake of this refreshing water. And I can give you some lip balm as well.

IRAS. I cannot thank you enough.

(CHARMION gives IRAS the jug and IRAS drinks from it.)

CHARMION. Have you been traveling a long distance?

IRAS. Yes, all the way from Cypress. I have been sold to a Roman merchant. I am to be his bride. I have never met him. I am told he is a cruel and brutal man. So is the flesh monger who arranged the purchase. He will be back soon. You had better go before he returns. He will flog us both.

CHARMION. Let him try. I am the handmaiden of the Queen of Egypt.

IRAS. Cleopatra? The poisonous serpent of the Nile?

CHARMION. She is a much maligned lady and a more decent employer you never will find.

IRAS. I have heard tales that she is an evil sorceress and has drunk the semen of a thousand seamen.

CHARMION. Don't believe a word of that malarkey. Look, we're understaffed here in Rome. She could use a new girl. Have you any skills?

IRAS. I'm a manicurist by trade.

CHARMION. That she could use. Do you do hair?

IRAS. Not really. But I'm a fast learner. I'm something of a perfectionist.

CHARMION. I think we can make this work. You'll be the second assistant.

IRAS. Then we should leave immediately. The brute might return at any moment.

CHARMION. Don't you need anything in that bag?

IRAS. Eh. It's all crap. I can never thank you enough for coming to my aid. Generous friend, I don't even know your name.

CHARMION. Charmion. And yours?

IRAS. Iras. I can't remember when I last spoke my name. I have been beaten into silent submission.

CHARMION. You have nothing to fear in the household of Queen Cleopatra as long as you always speak the truth to her.

IRAS. I'm so shy. I doubt I'll ever utter a word in her presence.

CHARMION. We had best not tarry. Let's make a run for it.

(The two girls run offstage.)

End of Scene

Scene Four

(The actor playing CHARMION announces "CLEOPATRA's boudoir in Rome." The lights shift. CLEOPATRA is lounging on her divan. APOLLODORUS is standing behind her cooling her off with a large fan. CHARMION is furiously brushing out a long "switch" of hair, belonging to the Queen. IRAS is filing the Queen's nails and regaling her with bawdy gossip. Both CLEOPATRA and APOLLODORUS are laughing and greatly enjoying her company. CHARMION is not amused.)

IRAS. The way I heard it the prostitute's pussy was stretched to the limit. It's that Mark Antony. His cock is so huge. They say it's like a python. And he couldn't get it out. He was literally stuck inside the whore. He tried pushing her away, "Get offa me. Get offa me!"

CLEOPATRA. *(Laughing.)* Stop! Stop! I can't take anymore.

IRAS. That's what the whore said. So the brothel keeper got the ugliest scraggiest old woman in the house, a toothless hag who scrubs the floors, to sit on his face so he he'd lose his hard on. And it didn't work. Mark Antony loves pussy any way he can get it. Queen, it took them almost two days to get his big gorgonzola out of that whore's twat.

CLEOPATRA. This one makes me laugh. I like her. Before I forget, Charmion, didja send that papyrus scroll over to the pyramid architect? Those things take ninety years to build. I wanna get him started.

CHARMION. Your Majesty, please forgive me. I intended to but I spent much of the day mending your...

IRAS. Charmion was so busy, I delivered the scroll. I should have told you, Charmion.

CHARMION. Yes, you should have.

CLEOPATRA. What does it matter? Thank you, Iras. Charmion, be careful brushing that thing. It's a hundred percent human hair. I'm under a lot of

pressure today. Caesar's making an important speech at the Forum. He's going to announce that he's decided to give himself a new title; God. My idea.

APOLLODORUS. I didn't think he was gonna announce it so soon.

CLEOPATRA. Word got out. Nowadays you can't keep anything a secret.

APOLLODORUS. You think there'll be trouble?

CLEOPATRA. You never know with these Romans. They'll stick a knife in you over a plate of ziti.

CHARMION. When Caesar returns from the Forum, I'm sure your highness will want to look her best.

CLEOPATRA. That's the general idea.

CHARMION. I took the precaution of cleaning your ruby necklace.

IRAS. The Queen is not going to want to wear her rubies tonight.

CLEOPATRA. No?

IRAS. Tonight is for emeralds to bring out the green in Her Majesty's eyes.

CLEOPATRA. He is crazy about my eyes.

CHARMION. Iras, you have not been granted permission to touch the Queen's jewels.

IRAS. That is true. Forgive me but I saw how busy you were mending the ceremonial robe.

CHARMION. I wasn't that busy. I can do several things at once.

IRAS. We've all been worried that you've been working too hard.

CHARMION. You've been gossiping about me as well? Who's "we?"

IRAS. You nearly bit off Doris's head when she tried to help you.

CHARMION. Hey, hey, hey. And where do you get off calling him "Doris?"

APOLLODORUS. I told her it was all right if said with love.

CHARMION. Oh, so now you two love each other? She's been here less than a week.

IRAS. I appreciated his kindness.

CHARMION. That's a dig at me, I suppose.

IRAS. Well, maybe it is.

CLEOPATRA. That's enough, girls.

CHARMION. I've never seen such ingratitude. I picked you up off the street. I got you cleaned up, picked the bugs out of your coozie, gave you makeup tips so you'd look human, introduced you to the Queen, got you on the payroll. And the minute you arrived, you started plotting to take my place.

IRAS. You're out of your mind. You never picked anything out of my coozie.

CHARMION. What did you think I was doing with that tweezers? Mining for silver?

IRAS. Getting your kicks. You've been licking your lips over my titties ever since you saw me on the Appian Way.

CLEOPATRA. All right, you two.

CHARMION. I felt sorry for you, sister, but not anymore. And give me back those earrings you "borrowed" off of me.

(She tries to rip them off her ears. IRAS pushes her away.)

IRAS. These are my earrings, Leprosy fingers. Maybe if you weren't blind as a fucking bat, you'd see the difference.

CHARMION. I'll show you they're mine! And I'll rip your ugly elephant ears off to get 'em!

(She tries again to grab IRAS' ear. The two girls begin to cat fight. CLEOPATRA claps her hands. APOLLODORUS puts down his fan and tries to separate the two girls.)

CLEOPATRA. Girls! Girls! I will have none of this! Not in my divine presence.

(APOLLODORUS separates them. The two girls bow deeply in supplication.)

CHARMION. Do forgive us, Your Majesty.

IRAS. We bow our heads in the deepest of shame.

CLEOPATRA. We're guests of the Romans. We must always show them our best. I suppose with Caesar speaking at the Forum, all of our nerves are ragged.

(The SOOTHSAYER enters.)

SOOTHSAYER. Your Majesty, if I may take a moment of your time.

CLEOPATRA. This is all I need. Now what?

SOOTHSAYER. *(Greatly agitated.)* My eyes are burning with a prophecy. It consumes me with a fever.

CLEOPATRA. All right. Calm down. Everyone's in a lather today.

SOOTHSAYER. May we speak in private?

CLEOPATRA. If we must. Girls, you may withdraw. Go outside and cool yourselves off. Doris, watch 'em.

(APOLLODORUS, CHARMION and IRAS bow deeply and exit.)

CLEOPATRA. What's on your mind?

SOOTHSAYER. My gift of prophecy is a curse. I've been called a liar, a sham, a fake. And when I'm proven correct, my prophecies are dismissed as mere coincidence. Coincidence. That word! That evil word!

CLEOPATRA. All right. Your life is miserable. I'm running late. Make it fast.

SOOTHSAYER. Let me touch your belly.

CLEOPATRA. No!

SOOTHSAYER. There is life within you. A child to be born of you and Caesar.

CLEOPATRA. Life? I am carrying great Caesar's child?

SOOTHSAYER. You will be bearing him a son.

CLEOPATRA. A son. An heir. You're sure you got this right?

SOOTHSAYER. You doubting me? Why do I even bother?

CLEOPATRA. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. So this is what you wanted to tell me?

SOOTHSAYER. No. This thing about the baby just came to me in a flash. I have other news to impart.

CLEOPATRA. More good news, I hope?

SOOTHSAYER. No, terrible news. The worst news possible. Beware of the Ides of March.

CLEOPATRA. Why? What happens then?

SOOTHSAYER. I see a vision. Caesar at the Forum. He has come to address the Senate. *(Takes a dramatic pause.)* Caesar is to be assassinated! He must be warned!

CLEOPATRA. When are the Ides of March?

SOOTHSAYER. March 15th.

CLEOPATRA. March 15th? Today is March 15th, you nitwit! And Caesar's at the Forum right now!! I see it all before me. Like the colors in a flame. My love. My great love.

(Behind her, a pair of doors opens and bathed in red light we see CAESAR being stabbed by three robed figures. He cries out "Et tu Brute?" The doors close.)

CHARMION, IRAS and APOLLODORUS rush on stage. **IRAS** is holding the switch of hair.)

CHARMION. Royal Egypt! A terrible tragedy has occurred.

APOLLODORUS. Caesar has been murdered!

IRAS. He was stabbed twenty-three times by his own senators.

CLEOPATRA. Where is he? Where is Caesar?

CHARMION. He lies at the foot of Pompey's statue. No one will touch the body.

CLEOPATRA. I will. Take me to him.

APOLLODORUS. Majesty, the mob is on its way. They cry for Egypt's blood. We must escape. They will kill you.

CLEOPATRA. I don't care.

CHARMION. Think of Egypt.

CLEOPATRA. Always Egypt. Caesar is dead. My lover is dead.

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