

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA
or the Curse of Cleopatra



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For Shakespeare by the Sea XXVIII
Induction by Kermit Christman

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

CLEOPATRA

CHARMIAN

IRAS

MARDIAN

DR. ANTHONY / MARC ANTONY

DR. BARBER / DOMITIUS ENOBARBUS

PROF. AUGUST / OCTAVIUS CAESAR

LEO DEPP / LEPIDUS

TEAM MEMBER / OCTAVIA

TEAM MEMBER / EROS

INDUCTION An archeological dig site; near Alexandria, Egypt. 1939.

CENTRE STAGE stands a monument, shaped and painted like the royal sarcophagus of a Queen. *STAGE RIGHT* the remains of a mummy standing upright on a work station table. *STAGE LEFT* the remains of another mummy standing upright on a work station table. *DOWN STAGE RIGHT* is an excavation of rocks and rubble. Jutting out of the heap, undiscovered, is an ancient chest. *DOWN STAGE LEFT* is a work station table, laden with books, papers, charts, even a whiskey bottle with glasses. *UPSTAGE* a decaying canvas curtain stretches in ragged panels across the back.

CLEOPATRA, Queen of Egypt, enters the *INNER ABOVE*, with her attendants *CHARMIAN* and *IRAS*. She is a ghostly but radiant vision from centuries past, shimmering in gold.

UP LEFT, *DR. ANTHONY*, an archaeologist, enters through the panels of the canvas. He carries a small clay jar and crosses *DOWN LEFT* to the table. He lays the artifact down and makes a note in a journal, then picks up a magnifying glass and crosses *CENTRE* to the monument. He examines it with the glass.

UP LEFT, *DR. BARBER*, an archaeologist, enters through the panels of the canvas. He carries a *BOOK* and crosses *DOWN LEFT* to the table. He opens the book, finds a page, and pours himself a glass of whiskey.

UP RIGHT, a ragged *SOOTHSAYER* stealthily enters through the canvas and crosses *DOWN RIGHT* to the excavation. Not wishing to be seen, the Soothsayer stacks rocks over the exposed corner of the Chest, hiding it from view.
DR. BARBER looks up from his reading and sees the Soothsayer.

DR. BARBER

EMSI! EMSI! EMSI! (Go Away!)

DR. ANTHONY

HARAMI! HARAMI! (Thief!)

DR. ANTHONY and *DR. BARBER* advance on the *SOOTHSAYER*. The *SOOTHSAYER* holds out its hands like claws and hisses at them, crosses *UPSTAGE* and vanishes. Curious, *DR. ANTHONY* and *DR. BARBER* cross to see what the *SOOTHSAYER* was trying to hide. They see the partially hidden chest. They clear the site and raise the chest, placing it *DOWN CENTRE*. *DR. ANTHONY* uses a crowbar to pry open the chest. Once opened, they extract a tarnished *METAL BOX*.

DR. ANTHONY

Metal. Looks like copper.

DR. BARBER reaches into his pocket and takes out a small *BOTTLE*. He opens the bottle and applies liquid to the box.

DR. BARBER

It's gold.

DR. ANTHONY takes his magnifying glass and examines the seal on the box.

DR. ANTHONY

Look here - the unbroken seal of Egyptian royalty.

DR. BARBER

Perhaps it's some temple treasure.

DR. ANTHONY breaks the seal and opens the box. He lifts out an ornately jeweled CASKET. He gives it to DR. BARBER to hold while examining the lid.

DR. ANTHONY

A cartouche.

DR. BARBER

Can you read it?

DR. ANTHONY (reading)

"Death and eternal punishment for anyone who opens this casket, in the name of Amun Ra, the king of the gods."

(dryly) That sounds rather terrible, wouldn't you say?

DR. BARBER

It is the curse of Thoth, the ancient Egyptian deity, the god of magic and scribe of the underworld.

DR. ANTHONY takes the CASKET from him.

DR. ANTHONY

Let's see what's inside.

DR. BARBER

No! You have read the curse. Leave it alone!

DR. ANTHONY

You are an archaeologist, Dr. Barber, a man of science. You cannot stand in the way of this discovery! Besides, a few thousand years under rock and sand would take the mumbo-jumbo off any curse.

DR. BARBER

Do not touch that casket, Dr. Anthony!

He takes the CASKET back and places it inside the BOX, then puts the BOX back into the CHEST.

DR. ANTHONY

You need not think you can persuade me against the most extraordinary find we have come across here.

DR. BARBER

If we make a guess about the curse, then this casket may contain the Scroll of Thoth and

would be a powerful spell for raising the dead. The gods of Egypt still live in these desert hills and their ancient magic is potent. We would be making a serious mistake.

DR. ANTHONY

What would you have us do?

DR. BARBER

I must go and get the others. We must share this find with them. Whatever happens, we must all be in agreement. Stay here. Keep watch. *(He makes to exit, then turns)*

Do not touch that casket!

DR. BARBER exits UP LEFT through the canvas. CLEOPATRA, CHARMIAN, and IRAS exit the INNER ABOVE. DR. ANTHONY crosses to the work table DOWN LEFT. He shuffles papers nervously, then pours a whiskey, drinks. Looking back to the chest, he makes his decision and crosses to it.

DR. ANTHONY

Reason by lust is swayed.

He kneels down and takes the BOX out, then extracts the CASKET, putting it aside. He looks again into the confines of the BOX, reaches in, and takes out several SMALL SCROLLS bound with cord, putting them on the ground beside the casket. He opens the casket and lifts out an ancient SCROLL – the Scroll of Thoth! He unrolls the Scroll and reads –

DR. ANTHONY (reading)

“This is the Scroll of Thoth! Herein and set down the magic words by which Isis raised Osiris from the dead! Oh! Amun Ra! Oh! God of gods – Death is but the doorway to new life! We live today – we shall live again! In many forms shall we return – Oh, mighty one! Release me from the bondage of death! Allow me to live again! I, Cleopatra! Queen of the Nile! Pharaoh of Egypt!”

Suddenly – a tremendous SOUND EFFECT! Dr. Anthony recoils, drops the Scroll, and takes his head in hands, stricken. The EFFECT fades and becomes a DESERT WIND whispering with the VOICES OF THE DEAD. CLEOPATRA enters from behind the monolithic sarcophagus. She unfurls the SCROLL into a long garment. She crosses to DR. ANTHONY. He stares, spellbound. CLEOPATRA drapes a serpentine fabric about his neck.

DR. ANTHONY (trance-like)

Egypt, thou knowest too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,
And thou should’st tow me after. O’er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knew’st, and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me.

CLEOPATRA

O, lord of lords!

DR. ANTHONY is no longer himself. He has become MARC ANTONY.

ANTONY

O, thou day of the world,
Chain mine arm'd neck, leap thou attire and all,
Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
Ride on the pants triumphing.

CLEOPATRA

O infinite virtue, comest thou smiling from
The world's great snare uncaught?

ANTONY

My nightingale!

They kiss. She leads him away. The SOOTHSAYER slinks DOWN RIGHT to the excavation and scrambles to put the SMALL SCROLLS and the CASKET back together. DR. BARBER enters from UP LEFT through the canvas. He sees the SOOTHSAYER.

DR. BARBER

HARAMI! HARAMI! HARAMI! (thief!)

He crosses to the SOOTHSAYER. The SOOTHSAYER holds the SCROLL up and hisses at him. DR. BARBER takes the SCROLL from the SOOTHSAYER and pushes the SOOTHSAYER away harshly. The SOOTHSAYER crosses UP STAGE and vanishes again. Dr. Barber kneels down - the CHEST, the BOX, the CASKET, and SMALL SCROLLS are before him. He touches the find with a shaking hand.

DR. BARBER (con't)

No, no... NO! You have done it, haven't you? You have brought the curse down upon us... DOWN UPON US ALL!

Again, the SOUND EFFECT of the curse. Dr. Barber is stricken, then rises slowly. He is spellbound (like Dr. Anthony before). The EFFECT FADES and becomes a DESERT WIND whispering with the VOICES OF THE DEAD. Dr. Barber puts his hands over his ears to block out the EFFECT of the VOICES OF THE DEAD. His fist is now clutching the SCROLL tightly against his will. He stumbles UP RIGHT and exits through the canvas. PROFESSOR CESARE AUGUST, and his assistant LEO DEPP, enter UP LEFT through the Canvas, followed by the TEAM MEMBERS of the site dig. They are stunned by the VOICES OF THE DEAD and are drawn to the scrolls.

PROFESSOR AUGUST

What is that sound, Mr. Depp?

LEO DEPP

Here, Professor August! Look at this!

PROFESSOR AUGUST

This is what Dr. Barber was talking about.

LEO DEPP

Where are they? Where have they gone?

Professor August kneels and picks up one of the SMALL SCROLLS and unrolls it.

PROFESSOR AUGUST

The Scroll of Thoth.

The EFFECT of the VOICES OF THE DEAD rise in pitch and volume. PROFESSOR AUGUST reads the SCROLL. LEO DEPP and the TEAM MEMBERS sort through the SCROLLS, each taking a copy for themselves to study.

PROFESSOR AUGUST (con't)

(putting the scroll down)

“I, Cleopatra! Queen of the Nile! Pharaoh of Egypt!”

The EFFECT of the VOICES OF THE DEAD ceases abruptly. Now there is only the EFFECT of a haunting DESERT WIND. Spellbound, PROFESSOR AUGUST looks to LEO DEPP and the TEAM MEMBERS. He is no longer himself. He has become OCTAVIUS CAESAR.

OCTAVIUS

It is not Caesar's natural vice to hate
Our great competitor. From Alexandria
This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes
The lamp of night in revel: is not more manlike
Than Cleopatra; you shall find there
A man who is the abstract of all faults
That all men follow.

LEO DEPP

I must not think there are
Evils e'now to darkness all his goodness...
(he transforms mid-speech by draping fabric)

LEPIDUS

His faults in him seem as the spots of heaven,
More fiery by night's blackness; hereditary
Rather than purchased; what he cannot change
Than what he chooses.

Exeunt.

PART I

SCENE I. A feverish vision of ancient Alexandria.

The spell has been cast. The hieroglyphic figures of CHARMIAN, IRAS, and MARDIAN come to life in an undulatory dance, not unlike voguing. The music of Beats Antique and the seductive dance charm the audience and invite them into the sultry and alluring world of ancient Egypt. The three form an Isis-shaped tableau up-centre and dissolve to reveal CLEOPATRA. She flashes the audience a sinister smile and pulls ANTONY onstage by a length of silk. ANTONY's trance has fully taken hold.

CLEOPATRA

If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

MARK ANTONY

There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.

CLEOPATRA

I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.

MARK ANTONY

Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

Enter EROS.

EROS

News, my good lord, from Rome.

MARK ANTONY

Grates me: the sum.

CLEOPATRA

Nay, hear them, Antony:

Fulvia perchance is angry; or, who knows

If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent

His powerful mandate to you, 'Do this, or this;

Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that;

Perform't, or else we damn thee.'

MARK ANTONY

How, my love!

CLEOPATRA

Perchance! nay, and most like:

You must not stay here longer, your dismissal

Is come from Caesar; therefore hear it, Antony.

Where's Fulvia's process? Caesar's I would say? both?

Call in the messengers. As I am Egypt's queen,

Thou blushest, Antony; and that blood of thine

Is Caesar's homager: else so thy cheek pays shame

When shrill-tongued Fulvia scolds. The messengers!

MARK ANTONY

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch

Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.

Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair

Embracing

And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.

CLEOPATRA

Excellent falsehood!
Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?
I'll seem the fool I am not; Antony
Will be himself.

MARK ANTONY

But stirr'd by Cleopatra.
Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours,
Let's not confound the time with conference harsh:
There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight?

CLEOPATRA

Hear the ambassadors.

MARK ANTONY

Fie, wrangling queen!
Whom every thing becomes, to chide, to laugh,
To weep; whose every passion fully strives
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired!
No messenger, but thine; and all alone
To-night we'll wander through the streets and note
The qualities of people. Come, my queen;
Last night you did desire it: speak not to us.

*Exeunt MARK ANTONY and CLEOPATRA. Exit EROS separately. CHARMIAN, IRAS,
and MARDIAN remain.*