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Her Mausoleum Near the Sea

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Her Mausoleum Near the Sea

I

Mighty Egypt lost the naval battle
Of Actium, and hence a war to Rome,
Forever. Ancient victors turned to chattel
Defeated enemies. They brought them home
To serve as slaves. This, Cleopatra knew.
To serve her honor, Amon's daughter flew
And sought her mausoleum near the sea.

II

Her Marcus lay defeated, dead. She'd lost
Him. Yet, she'd borne her Caesar's death. I feel
She could have borne his, too. The war had cost
Her son and heir, her child. The Roman's steel
Had killed her son, her throne, her love, all three.
She, sonless (unlike Troy's Andromache),
Had sought her mausoleum near the sea.

III

I think our protagonist perhaps would
Have chosen life to save her son, but... We
Are taught in school to notice how she could
Seduce. She spoke in seven tongues, and she
Had staved off Rome for thirty years! I find
Her noble, gentle... Picture with your mind
Her, in her mausoleum near the sea.

IV

Amidst the carved alabaster, white
And ornamental, 'pon her jackal throne,
Our lady wears her crown, the red and white
Her dress, with finest, woven linen sewn,
Like only Egypt's weavers e'er achieved,
Does drape about her shoulders... She's relieved
She sought her mausoleum near the sea.

V

She calls "A snack! The Romans come to take
Me homeward. Strength I need!" Her servants bring
Her figs to taste. The basket's coils, they make
Her tremble... Oh, the black foreshadowing!
She knows... She knows... She chose... She reaches in...
A sting! Ah... 'tis complete and she will win,
In this, her mausoleum near the sea.

VI

She wins, for Isis, Watz, and Sehkmēt,
The funerary gods, now guard her soul.
The mighty refuge, built with captives' sweat,
Allowed our queen the chance to reach her goal,
A death with dignity alone, removed
From Rome's rapacious talons. Thus she moved
On, in her mausoleum near the sea...

Steve Scarbrough, '94