

Cleopatra Goes Shopping

by John Olson

Cleopatra enters Miller's Food Market and all eyes gaze upon her. She glides down the aisles of beans and cereal and Totino's Party Pizza with the grace of the Nile. She is a universe unto herself, her trinkets of gold and silver diffusing luxury and sensuality wherever she goes. The men drop whatever they're doing and follow her, as if mesmerized. The women look upon her with awe and jealousy, envious of her power, but inspired by her example. All feel exhilarated. Even the children are silenced by her sublime and voluptuous presence. The world has been expanded. There are no maps for this dimension. It cannot be surveyed or assessed. Cleopatra fills her cart with food and cosmetics until it is overflowing. She proceeds out of the store. The clerks stop running products over their scanners and gaze in incredulity, and confusion. Should they say something? Should they stop her? Should they call the manager? Why, there's the manager herself, Sheila Ornsby, on her knees, weeping. Cleopatra orders her general to give the store one hundred of their finest camels, a dolphin trained to do somersaults in mid-air, and a fabulous peacock from a remote region in India. Sheila Ornsby comes to her senses and phones the police. Two squad cars arrive, weaving their way in the parking lot through bare-chested Egyptians with kohl-rimmed eyes and calm dispositions. One of the officers gets out of his car and cautiously approaches Cleopatra, his hand on the grip of his revolver. "M'am," he says, "I will need to detain you for suspicion of shoplifting." Cleopatra turns to regard this man, pitying his attempt at authority, and speaks with a voice at once soft and heavy with command. "I am sorry, but I cannot stay. The valiant Mark Antony awaits my arrival." The great queen enters her barge with its poop of beaten gold and purple sails and silver oars and floats away, the very air supporting the weightless play of the barge, the oarsmen keeping time to the tune of flutes. Officer Dick Holberg returns to his car to call headquarters. He opens his mouth, but cannot form any words. He

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cannot say a thing. He puts his forehead on the wheel of his car, and sighs.

