

CARTHAGO DELENDA EST

A 10-minute Play in One Act

By

Scott Starkey

Phone: 765-444-2613

Email: Scott.W.Starkey@proton.me

Carthago Delenda Est

Cast of Characters

The Praetorian:

A territorial ruler of the Roman Empire. Starts the scene with a small scroll.

The Servant:

The wise and faithful assistant to the PRAETORIAN. Starts the scene with a bowl of grapes, and a small refuse bag.

The Centurion:

The battle-worn leader of the foreign war. Starts off-stage. Enters the scene later with one or more absurdly huge bags dragging behind them.

The Caesar:

Leader of all Rome. Wears a crown of laurels. Carries a bowl of grapes. Starts off stage.

SCENE

In the PRAETORIAN's salon in ancient Rome. There are at least two places to sit representing thrones. The players are garbed in simple bed-sheet or tablecloth togas.

AT RISE: The scene opens with a seated and relaxed
PRAETORIAN, fed grapes by the SERVANT. PRAETORIAN
carefully inspects them before eating or rejecting.

PRAETORIAN

Today's my day! The Caesar will visit me today, right? I
hope. I know it! A little surprise for me! Finally giving
me what I deserve.

SERVANT

I do hope you get everything you deserve, my liege.

(The sound of a herald of horns.)

PRAETORIAN

Yes! Finally!

(SERVANT starts to leave with the grapes, but a silent
admonition from the PRAETORIAN causes SERVANT to give the
grapes to PRAETORIAN, who continues to eat. SERVANT leaves,
returns with CENTURION. The exact same fanfare is played as
they enter. CENTURION enters dragging one or more absurdly
huge bags, who has labored greatly to present this.)

SERVANT

I present to thee: The Centurion of the Southern campaign!

PRAETORIAN

Yes, I know who he is. Was the Caesar even out there?

SERVANT

No. I'm afraid not.

CENTURION

At your service. (Bows a little shoddily.) Here I am. I did
it. Whew, you're not going to believe how hard it was, but
I did it.

PRAETORIAN (while eating grapes)

Actually, I'm a bit busy at the moment. The Caesar . . .

CENTURION

Won't be long. Just a speedy minute! And you're gonna love this. I mean, absolutely love it. The war treasures I got for you will blow your sandals off, I swear to the gods.

PRAETORIAN

So, my campaign was successful then? The Caesar might fancy . . . war treasures . . .

CENTURION

Yes, very successful! All good news. You're gonna love it.

PRAETORIAN

Well, good. But make haste with it, Centurion.

CENTURION

OK, let me set this up by saying . . .

PRAETORIAN (Interrupting)

Wait! This is terrible!

(Both CENTURION and SERVANT react in shock.)

CENTURION

What is?

PRAETORIAN (almost panicked)

Bad grape! Bad grape! Servant!

(SERVANT dashes over with their bag. PRAETORIAN spits the grape into the bag.)

PRAETORIAN

All right, where were we? Oh, yes. My war treasures!

CENTURION

Oh, yeah. Sure! You're gonna love it. (PRAETORIAN makes "speed up" motions.) OK, I'll just come right out with it. I present to you with . . . the "Pillows of Carthage"!

(CENTURION starts getting many pillows and cushions out of the bag of every type and shape. Caresses them, proud of them. During the following monologue, SERVANT helps empty

the bag, admiring some of the pillows, and carries some to PRAETORIAN, who sits on one.)

Look at these beauties. What we got here are pillows from every corner of the world. You see, I've learned a lot about pillows while I've been on my mission. Just call it on-the-job training.

For example, this-here napping pillow was stuffed with feathers of the fluffiest of African birds, and they stitched it up with gold thread. Look-it, not just gold-colored thread. Real gold! It was a gift from the King of Numidia as a peace offering. You know the guy who gave all those elephants to Carthage? Well, this was part of their alliance. And now, we got it!

And this one right here! Look-it! This is beautiful Ionian silk, the finest fabric ever invented. Just feel the thread count! Its touch is like a summer breeze. No, like a . . . what's the other word for a light summer breeze? Starts with a Z? What's the word? . . .

SERVANT

A zephyr?

CENTURION

Right! It's like a zephyr! It's so soft! Feel it! Feel it! Isn't that soft? A zephyr! Feel-feel-feel!

Oh, and this one. Oh, it's so good. Have you heard of the Carthaginian pillow-monger guild? Neither did I! But apparently they are, like, world famous. I was told that the Queen of Carthage herself sat upon this very cushion. You can still smell her perfume, her incense, her ... (Takes a sniff) ... other things.

Oh, you'll love this one! From the lost continent of Atlantis...

PRAETORIAN

(Interrupting.) So, you brought me back all of their ... pillows?

CENTURION

Yes! Absolutely. You demand, I deliver! I thought it was a little weird of you to ask, but once I got into it, I figured out why you wanted them. They're amazing, right?

PRAETORIAN

They are, but...

CENTURION

Now, my Praetorian, it seems like you're not one hundred percent satisfied, and your satisfaction is very important to me. So, I'll answer your question in advance. These are only SOME of their pillows. There's lots more. Like, ships full of them! Our ships, FULL of pillows!

PRAETORIAN

This is all good, and I have to admit these are very nice pillows. But Carthage is ... well, it is destroyed, right? I wanted the Carthaginians crushed to their foundation, to please the Caesar and bring honor to me, me and the empire.

CENTURION

(Sheepishly) Well, not destroyed, per se. Well, not exactly. I mean, maybe emotionally destroyed. We brought back their pillows, just like you ordered.

PRAETORIAN

(Just realizing the error. He enunciates well, this time.)

Centurion. I did not tell you to bring me back the PILLOWS of Carthage. I ordered you to bring me the PILLARS of Carthage.

CENTURION

Oh?

PRAETORIAN

I wanted to show Caesar the devastation that mighty Rome has wrought upon its enemies!

CENTURION

That's a real interesting idea you got there. Are you sure you didn't say "pillows"?

PRAETORIAN

I'm positive! PILL-ARS. I wanted to prove my worth without a doubt in Caesar's eyes. I wanted the history books to remember me and my mighty campaign, and display the pillars in Rome that none can stand to our might.

CENTURION

I hadn't thought of that. That's actually a good idea.

SERVANT (to the audience)

History books will surely remember you, one way or another.

PRAETORIAN

This does explain the message that you sent me by courier. (Retrieves the scroll and reads it.) "Carthage will not sleep well tonight!"

CENTURION

And they didn't. They can't! They don't! They're crying in the streets. Old men with back problems limping through the streets, complaining about sleep. The crafters in the marketplace arguing, with dark circles under their eyes. Babies crying in their mothers' arms. BABIES. CRYING.

PRAETORIAN

I can't believe I sent you on this campaign with my finest armada of 18 ships, and you brought me back eighteen ships full of pillows.

CENTURION

Well, yes and no. We actually only brought you seventeen ships full of pillows.

PRAETORIAN

Centurion, I'm sure I sent you eighteen ships. Our finest!

CENTURION

Well, yes, and... we had one minor problem. We were so successful, our ships were so full, full of pillows, one of the captains couldn't see the reef before it was too late. (A beat.) I can still hear the crew's screams in my head.

PRAETORIAN

That's ... that's horrible!

CENTURION

I know. Those were some of our best pillows, too.

PRAETORIAN

No, I mean - the ship - the crew...

CENTURION

They were all lost with the pillows. . . Yes, that was tragic too! Very sad. Very sad.

PRAETORIAN

So, let me get this straight. I sent you to destroy Carthage. Instead, you brought me back their pillows, and accidentally destroyed one of my ships. Is that it?

CENTURION

When you put it that way, it makes it sound bad. But - we have pillows! For the glory of Rome!

PRAETORIAN

Do you realize what this means? The Caesar will have us all killed! Including me, you, all of us, dead! But especially me. All of us, me, put to death!

CENTURION

Ummm... Oops?

(Pillows are now strewn around the salon. The same herald of horns sounds. SERVANT leaves and returns.)

SERVANT

All hail, emperor of the Roman Empire, the Caesar!
(The same herald of horns plays, again. CAESAR enters, eating grapes. PRAETORIAN stands. CENTURION sits, confused. Then immediately stands.)

PRAETORIAN

Hail Caesar!

CENTURION (Responding late)

Hail Caesar.

CAESAR (sitting, rather gingerly)
Praetorian, Centurion. Nice salon you have here. You have excellent taste... in decorations.

PRAETORIAN (still standing)
Welcome, Caesar. I was not expecting you!

CENTURION
A good story about the pillows, actually ...

CAESAR
Give me your report on the southern campaign. How are you faring against Carthage?

PRAETORIAN
Um. . . You could say my unorthodox tactics surprised them!

CENTURION
Yes, they. Um. They are not sleeping well tonight!

CAESAR
Yes, but the Carthaginians. Are they finally vanquished? Finally dead? Have you crushed their bones for my tea?

(Awkward pause; CENTURION and PRAETORIAN nervous.)

CENTURION (cracking under pressure)
Pillows! Not dead! Pillows! Crush their pillows for tea!

CAESAR
That can't be right! It's terrible!

(CENTURION and PRAETORIAN recoil in horror.)

Bad grape! Bad grape! Servant! (SERVANT brings a bag for CAESAR to spit the grape into.) OK, what is all this about pillows?

PRAETORIAN & CENTURION (pointing)
It's their fault! [Use "their", "his", or "her", as you like]

CAESAR
What?

(Simultaneously... making the first and last beat match.)

PRAETORIAN

I was really quite clear when I told the Centurion to bring me the PILLOWS of Carthage - oh great, now I'm saying it. I'm sure I said PILLARS. Imagine what it's like dealing with this incompetence? Imagine MY suffering?

CENTURION

Even though we didn't kill any Carthaginians, seventeen ships full of pillows are quite nice! And besides, the Carthaginians are having the worst nights of their life right now - No sleep and much suffering!

CAESAR (rising)

Shut up! That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard! Report to the execute-orium for execution! But first, gather up these pillows!

(PRAETORIAN and CENTURION sob and blubber incoherently, starting to put away the pillows.)

SERVANT

Wait!

CAESAR

What is it?

SERVANT

If I may speak for my masters. Yes, Carthage must be destroyed, and will be soon. But these two, they were also thinking of your comfort and the glory of Rome, bringing you . . . pillows. They should be honored, not killed. Consider this: You, going to the palace bedroom, preparing for sleep. Imagine the feel of this on your cheek, like a summer breeze. Like ... (SERVANT and CENTURION exchange a look.) ... like a zephyr.

Also, it's a known secret that the Caesar has a royal pain in the ass, from sitting on an uncomfortably mighty throne. Imagine the delight when your gloriously round buttocks are cradled by this perfect exemplar of a cushion. Pure delight.

And, imagine for a second, the Senate having the most restful slumber of their lives. The finest thinkers ever

assembled, with the clearest, most rested minds they've ever had. Imagine the glory of Rome, spreading and ruling forever. All because of a decent night's sleep!

These pillows . . . they could change the world. . . .

CENTURION (sotto voce)

That . . . that was beautiful.

PRAETORIAN (sotto voce)

That . . . was just what I was going to say.

CAESAR

Nnnnnnnno! That's the second dumbest thing I've ever heard. (Standing) Report to the execute-orium! Now! (Gestures to SERVANT.) You, bring the pillows.

(All exit except for SERVANT.)

SERVANT (to the audience)

These truly are wonderful. Yes, they're just pillows - but it's worth taking in the moment of joy they bring.

(SERVANT lovingly brings out one pillow, caressing it.)

Even though they have brought us untold death and doom - this is nice. This one final moment of joy. When my head is separated from my shoulders, if my cheek lands on this perfect cushion, then I think it would have been worth it. You know? Enjoy the little things when you can.

CAESAR

(calling from off-stage)

Servant, are you coming?!

SERVANT (cheerily sing-song)

On my way, Caesar!

(SERVANT stuffs the pillow back into the bag, and drags the bag(s) off-stage to exit.)

(END OF SCENE.)