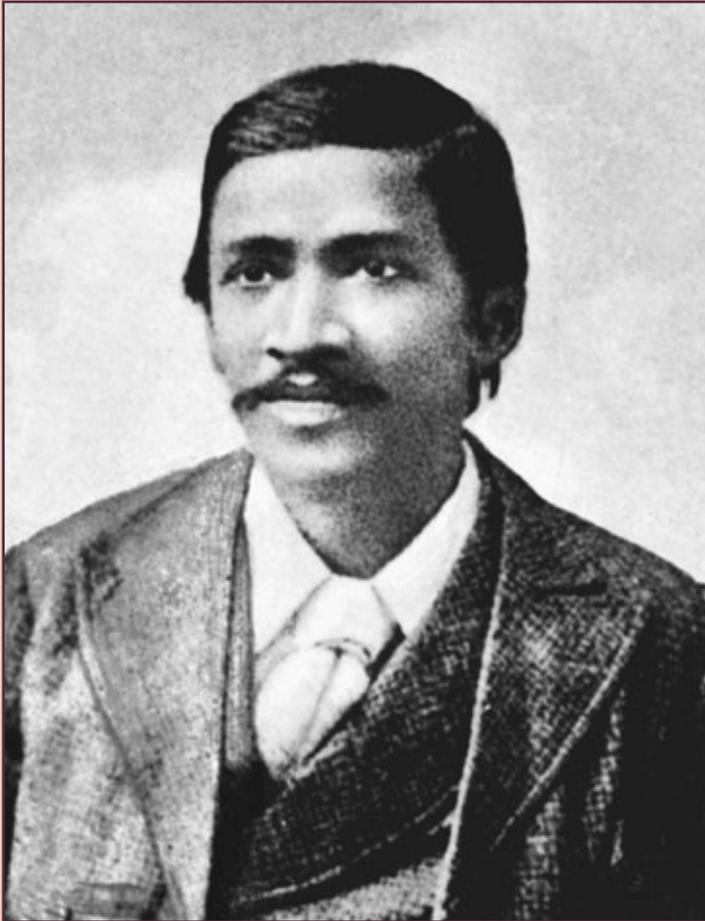


Collected Plays and Stories



Sri Aurobindo

VOLUME 3 and 4
THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO
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Collected Plays and Stories

Publisher's Note

Collected Plays and Stories comprises all Sri Aurobindo's original dramatic works and works of prose fiction. The material, which occupies two volumes, is divided by type into three parts: complete plays, incomplete and fragmentary plays, and stories, complete, incomplete and fragmentary.

The earliest of the pieces collected here was written in 1891, the latest in 1915. Only one of them, *Perseus the Deliverer*, was published during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime. The rest have been reproduced from his manuscripts.

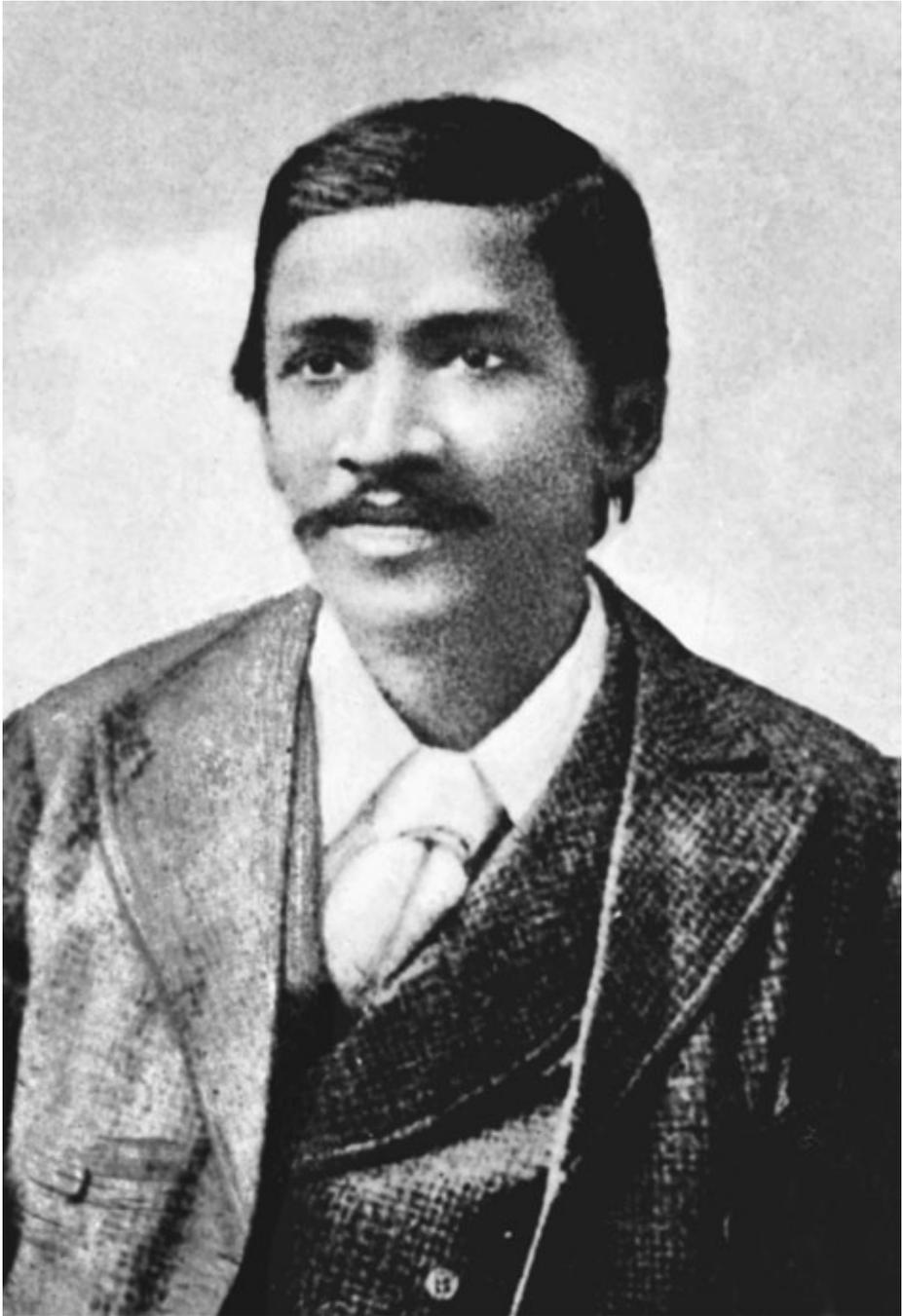
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Sri Aurobindo, c. 1903

The Viziers of Bassora

A Romantic Comedy

Persons of the Drama

HAROUN ALRASHEED, Caliph.

JAAFAR, his Vizier.

SHAIKH IBRAHIM, Superintendent of the Caliph's Gardens.

MESROUR, Haroun's friend and companion.

MOHAMAD BIN SULYMAN ALZAYNI, Haroun's cousin, King of
Bassora.

ALFAZZAL IBN SAWY, his Chief Vizier.

NUREDDENE, son of Alfazzal.

ALMUENE BIN KHAKAN, second Vizier of Bassora.

FAREED, his son.

SALAR, confidant of Alzayni.

MURAD, a Turk, Captain of Police in Bassora.

AJEBE, nephew of Almuene.

SUNJAR, a Chamberlain of the Palace in Bassora.

AZIZ
ABDULLAH } Merchants of Bassora.

MUAZZIM, a broker.

AZEEM, steward of Alfazzal.

HARKOOS, an Ethiopian eunuch in Ibn Sawy's household.

KAREEM, a fisherman of Bagdad.

SLAVES, SOLDIERS, EXECUTIONERS, ETC.

AMEENA, wife of Alfazzal Ibn Sawy.

DOONYA, his niece.

ANICE-ALJALICE, a Persian slavegirl.

KHATOON, wife of Almuene, sister of Ameena.

BALKIS
MYMOONA } sisters, slavegirls of Ajebe.

SLAVEGIRLS.

Act I

Bassora.

Scene 1

An antechamber in the Palace.

Murad, Sunjar.

MURAD

Chamberlain, I tell thee I will not bear it an hour longer than it takes my feet to carry me to the King's audience-room and my voice to number my wrongs. Let him choose between me, a man and one made in God's image, and this brutish amalgam of gorilla and Barbary ape whom he calls his Vizier.

SUNJAR

You are not alone in your wrongs; all Bassora and half the Court complain of his tyrannies.

MURAD

And as if all were too little for his heavy-handed malice, he must saddle us with his son's misdoings too, who is as like him as the young baboon is to the adult ape.

SUNJAR

It is a cub, a monkey of mischief, a rod on the soles would go far to tame. But who shall dare apply that? Murad, be wary. The King, — who is the King and therefore blameless, — will not have his black angel dispraised. Complain rather to Alfazzal Ibn Sawy, the good Vizier.

MURAD

The kind Alfazzal! Bassora is bright only because of his presence.

SUNJAR

I believe you. He has the serenity and brightness of a nature that never willingly did hurt to man or living thing. I think sometimes every good kindly man is like the moon and carries a halo, while a chill cloud moves with dark and malignant natures. When we are near them, we feel it.

Enter Ibn Sawy.

IBN SAWY (*to himself*)

The fairest of all slavegirls! here's a task!
 Why, my wild handsome roisterer, Nureddene,
 My hunter of girls, my snare for hearts of virgins,
 Could do this better. And he would strangely like
 The mission; but I think his pretty purchase
 Would hardly come undamaged through to the owner.
 A perilous transit that would be! the rogue!
 Ten thousand golden pieces hardly buy
 Such wonders, — so much wealth to go so idly!
 But princes must have sweet and pleasant things
 To ease their labours more than common men.
 Their labour is not common who are here
 The Almighty's burdened high vicegerents charged
 With difficult justice and calm-visaged rule.

SUNJAR

The peace of the Prophet with thee, thou best of Viziers.

MURAD

The peace, Alfazzal Ibn Sawy.

IBN SAWY

And to you also peace. You here, my Captain?
 The city's business?

MURAD

Vizier, and my own!
I would impeach the Vizier Almuene
Before our royal master.

IBN SAWY

You'll do unwisely.
A dark and dangerous mind is Almuene's,
Yet are there parts in him that well deserve
The favour he enjoys, although too proudly
He uses it and with much personal malice.
Complain not to the King against him, Murad.
He'll weigh his merits with your grievances,
Find these small jealous trifles, those superlative,
And in the end conceive a mute displeasure
Against you.

MURAD

I will be guided by you, sir.

IBN SAWY

My honest Turk, you will do well.

SUNJAR

He's here.

Enter Almuene.

MURAD

The peace upon you, son of Khakan.

ALMUENE

Captain,
You govern harshly. Change your methods, captain,
Your manners too. You are a Turk; I know you.

MURAD

I govern Bassora more honestly

Than you the kingdom.

ALMUENE

Soldier! rude Turcoman!

IBN SAWY

Nay, brother Almuene! Why are you angry?

ALMUENE

That he misgoverns.

IBN SAWY

In what peculiar instance?

ALMUENE

I'll tell you. A city gang the other day
Battered my little mild Fareed most beastly
With staves and cudgels. This fellow's bribed police,
By him instructed, held a ruffian candle
To the outrage. When the rogues were caught, they lied
And got them off before a fool, a Kazi.

MURAD

The Vizier's son, as all our city knows,
A misformed urchin full of budding evil,
Ranges the city like a ruffian, shielded
Under his father's formidable name;
And those who lay their hands on him, commit
Not outrage, but a rescue.

ALMUENE

Turk, I know you.

IBN SAWY

In all fraternal kindness hear me speak.
What Murad says, is truth. For your Fareed,
However before you he blinks angelically,

Abroad he roars half-devil. Never, Vizier,
Was such a scandal until now allowed
In any Moslem town. Why, it is just
Such barbarous outrage as in Christian cities
May walk unquestioned, not in Bassora
Or any seat of culture. It should be mended.

ALMUENE

Brother, your Nureddene is not all blameless.
He has a name!

IBN SAWY

His are the first wild startings
Of a bold generous nature. Mettled steeds,
When they've been managed, are the best to mount.
So will my son. If your Fareed's brute courses
As easily turn to gold, I shall be glad.

ALMUENE

Let him be anything, he is a Vizier's son.
The Turk forgot that.

IBN SAWY

These are maxims, brother,
Unsuited to our Moslem polity.
They savour of barbarous Europe. But in Islam
All men are equal underneath the King.

ALMUENE

Well, brother. Turk, you are excused.

MURAD

Excused!

Viziers, the peace.

IBN SAWY

I'll follow you.

ALMUENE

Turk, the peace!

IBN SAWY

Peace, brother. See to it, brother.

Exit with Murad.

ALMUENE

Brother, peace.

Would I not gladly tweak your ears and nose
 And catch your brotherly beard to pluck it out
 With sweet fraternal pulls? Faugh, you babbler
 Of virtuous nothings! some day I'll have you preach
 Under the bastinado; you'll howl, you'll howl
 Rare sermons there.

(seeing Sunjar)

You! you! you spy? you eavesdrop?
 And I must be rebuked with this to hear it!
 Well, I'll remember you.

SUNJAR

Sir, I beseech you,
 I had no smallest purpose to offend.

ALMUENE

I know you, dog! When my back's turned, you bark,
 But whine before me. You shall be remembered.

Exit.

SUNJAR

There goest thou, Almuene, the son of Khakan,
 Dog's son, dog's father, and thyself a dog.
 Thy birth was where thy end shall be, a dunghill.

Exit.

Scene 2

*A room in Almuene's house.
Almuene, Khatoon.*

KHATOON

You have indulged the boy till he has lost
The likeness even of manhood. God's great stamp
And heavenly image on his mint's defaced,
Rubbed out, and only the brute metal left
Which never shall find currency again
Among his angels.

ALMUENE

Oh always clamour, clamour!
I had been happier bedded with a slave
Whom I could beat to sense when she was froward.

KHATOON

Oh, you'd have done no less by me, I know,
Although my rank's as far above your birth
As some white star in heaven o'erpeers the muck
Of foulest stables, had I not great kin
And swords in the background to avenge me.

ALMUENE

Termagant,
Some day I'll have you stripped and soundly caned
By your own women, if you grow not gentler.

KHATOON

I shall be glad some day to find your courage.
Enter Fareed, jumping and gyrating.

FAREED

Oh father, father, father, father, father!

KHATOON

What means this idiot clamour? Senseless child,
Can you not walk like some more human thing
Or talk like one at least?

ALMUENE

Dame, check once more
My gallant boy, try once again to break
His fine and natural spirit with your chidings,
I'll drive your teeth in, lady or no lady.

FAREED

Do, father, break her teeth! She's always scolding.
Sometimes she beats me when you're out. Do break them,
I shall so laugh!

ALMUENE

My gamesome goblin!

KHATOON

You prompt him
To hate his mother; but do not lightly think
The devil you strive to raise up from that hell
Which lurks within us all, sealed commonly
By human shame and Allah's supreme grace, —
But you! you scrape away the seal, would take
The full flame of the inferno, not the gusts
Of smoke jet out in ordinary men; —
Think not this imp will limit with his mother
Unnatural revolt! You will repent this.

Exit.

FAREED

Girl, father! such a girl! a girl of girls!

Buy me my girl!

ALMUENE

What girl, you leaping madcap?

FAREED

In the slave-market for ten thousand pieces.
Such hands! such eyes! such hips! such legs! I am
Impatient till my elbows meet around her.

ALMUENE

My amorous wagtail! What, my pretty hunchback,
You have your trophies too among the girls
No less than the straight dainty Nureddene,
Our Vizier's pride? Ay, you have broken seals?
You have picked locks, my burglar?

FAREED

You have given me,
You and my mother, such a wicked hump
To walk about with, the girls jeer at me.
I have only a chance with blind ones. 'Tis a shame.

ALMUENE

How will you make your slavegirl love you, hunch?

FAREED

She'll be my slavegirl and she'll have to love me.

ALMUENE

Whom would you marry, hunchback, for a wager?
Will the King's daughter tempt you?

FAREED

Pooh! I've got
My eye upon my uncle's pretty niece.
I like her.

ALMUENE

The Vizier, my peculiar hatred!
Wagtail, you must not marry there.

FAREED

I hate him too
And partly for that cause will marry her,
To beat her twice a day and let him know it.
He will be grieved to the heart.

ALMUENE

You're my own lad.

FAREED

And then she's such a nice tame pretty thing,
Will sob and tremble, kiss me when she's told,
Not like my mother, frown, scold, nag all day.
But, dad, my girl! buy me my girl!

ALMUENE

Come, wagtail.
Ten thousand pieces! 'tis exorbitant.
Two thousand, not a dirham more. The seller
Does wisely if he takes it, glad to get
A piastre for her. Call the slaves, Fareed.

FAREED

Hooray! hoop! what a time I'll have! Cafoor!

Exit, calling.

ALMUENE

'Tis thus a boy should be trained up, not checked,
Rebuked and punished till the natural man
Is killed in him and a tame virtuous block
Replace the lusty pattern Nature made.
I do not value at a brazen coin
The man who has no vices in his blood,

Never took toll of women's lips in youth
Nor warmed his nights with wine. Your moralists
Teach one thing, Nature quite another; which of these
Is likely to be right? Yes, cultivate,
But on the plan that she has mapped. Give way,
Give way to the inspired blood of youth
And you shall have a man, no scrupulous fool,
No ethical malingerer in the fray;
A man to lord it over other men,
Soldier or Vizier or adventurous merchant,
The breed of Samson. Man with such youth your armies.
Of such is an imperial people made
Who send their colonists and conquerors
Across the world, till the wide earth contains
One language only and a single rule.
Yes, Nature is your grand imperialist,
No moral sermonizer. Rude, hardy stocks
Transplant themselves, expand, outlast the storms
And heat and cold, not slips too gently nurtured
Or lapped in hothouse warmth. Who conquered earth
For Islam? Arabs trained in robbery,
Heroes, robust in body and desire.
I'll get this slavegirl for Fareed to help
His education on. Be lusty, son,
And breed me grandsons like you for my stock.

Exit.

Scene 3

The slave-market.

Muazzim and his man; Balkis and Mymoona; Ajebe; Aziz, Abdullah and other merchants.

MUZZIM

Well, gentlemen, the biddings, the biddings! Will you begin, sir, for an example now?

BALKIS

Who is the handsome youth in that rich dress?

MUZZIM

It is Ajebe, the Vizier's nephew, a good fellow with a bad uncle.

BALKIS

Praise me to them poetically, broker.

MUZZIM

I promise you for the poetry. Biddings, gentlemen.

A MERCHANT

Three thousand for the pretty one.

MUZZIM

Why, sir, I protest! Three thousand pieces! Look at her! Allah be good to me! You shall not find her equal from China to Frangistan. Seven thousand, say I.

AZIZ

The goods are good goods, broker, but the price heavy.

MUAZZIM

Didst thou say heavy? Allah avert the punishment from thee,
merchant Aziz. Heavy!

BALKIS (*to Ajebe*)

Will you not bid for me? My mirror tells me
That I am pretty, and I can tell, who know it,
I have a touch upon the lute will charm
The winds to hear me, and my voice is sweeter
Than any you have heard in Bassora.
Will you not bid?

AJEBE

And wherefore do you choose me
From all these merchants, child?

BALKIS

I cannot say
That I have fallen in love with you. Your mother
Is kind and beautiful, I read her in your face,
And it is she I'd serve.

AJEBE

I bid, Muazzim,
Five thousand for this little lady.

MUAZZIM

Five!
And she who chose you, too! Bid seven or nothing.

AJEBE

Well, well, six thousand, not a dirham more.

MUAZZIM

Does any bid beyond?

MERCHANT

Let me see, let me see.

ABDULLAH

Fie, leave them, man! You'll have no luck with her,
Crossing her wishes.

MERCHANT

Let her go, let her go.

MUAZZIM

To you, sir, she belongs.

BALKIS

But if you'll have me,
Then take my sister too; we make one heart
Inseparably.

AJEBE

She's fair, but not like you.

BALKIS

If we are parted, I shall sicken and die
For want of her, then your six thousand's wasted.

MUAZZIM

They make a single lot.

AJEBE

Two thousand more then.
Give her in that, or else the sale is off.

MUAZZIM

That's giving her away! Well, take her, take her.

AJEBE

I'll send the money.

Exit with Balkis and Mymoona.

ABDULLAH

What, a bargain, broker?

MUAZZIM

Not much, not much; the owner'll have some profit.

AZIZ

The Vizier!

Enter Ibn Sawy.

ABDULLAH

Noble Alfazzal! There will be
Good sales today in the market, since his feet
Have trod here.

MERCHANTS

Welcome, welcome, noble Vizier.

IBN SAWY

The peace be on you all. I thank you, sirs.
What, good Abdullah, all goes well at home?

ABDULLAH

My brother's failed, sir.

IBN SAWY

Make me your treasurer.
I am ashamed to think good men should want
While I indulge in superfluities.
Well, broker, how's the market? Have you slaves
That I can profit by?

MUAZZIM

Admired Vizier,
There's nothing worth the kindness of your gaze.
Yet do but tell me what you need, I'll fit you
With stuff quite sound and at an honest price.
The other brokers are mere pillagers,

But me you know.

IBN SAWY

If there's an honest broker,
You are that marvel, I can swear so much.
Now pick me out your sweetest thing in girls,
Perfect in beauty, wise as Sheban Balkis,
Yet more in charm than Helen of the Greeks,
Then name your price.

MUAZZIM

I have the very marvel.
You shall not see her equal in a century.
She has the Koran and the law by heart;
Song, motion, music and calligraphy
Are natural to her, and she contains
All science in one corner of her mind;
Yet learning less than wit; and either lost
In the mere sweetness of her speech and beauty.
You'll hardly have her within fifteen thousand;
She is a nonpareil.

IBN SAWY

It is a sum.

MUAZZIM

Nay, see her only. Khalid, bring the girl.

Exit Khalid.

I should not ask you, sir, but has your son
Authority from you to buy? He has
The promise of a necklet from me.

IBN SAWY

A necklet!

MUAZZIM

A costly trifle. "Send it to such an house,"

He tells me like a prince, "and dun my father
For the amount. I know you'll clap it on
As high as Elburz, you old swindler. Fleece him!"
He is a merry lad.

IBN SAWY

Fleece me! The rogue!
The handsome naughty rogue! I'll pull his curls for this.
The house? To whom is it given?

MUAZZIM

Well, sir, it is
A girl, a dainty Christian. I fear she has given
Something more precious far than what he pays her with.

IBN SAWY

No doubt, no doubt. The rogue! quite conscienceless.
I'm glad you told me of this. Dun me! Well,
The rascal's frank enough, that is one comfort;
He adds no meaner vices, fear or lying,
To his impetuous faults. The blood is good
And in the end will bear him through. There's hope.
I'll come, Muazzim.

Exit.

MUAZZIM

The son repeats the father,
But with a dash of quicker, wilder blood.
Here's Khalid with the Persian.

Enter Khalid with Anice-aljalice.

Khalid, run

And call the Vizier; he was here just now.

Exit Khalid. Enter Almuene, Fareed and Slaves.

FAREED

There she is, father; there, there, there!

ALMUENE

You deal, sir? I know you well. Today be more honest than is your wont. Is she bid for?

MUAZZIM (*aside*)

Iblis straight out of Hell with his hobgoblin! (*aloud*) Sir, we are waiting for the good Vizier, who is to bid for her.

ALMUENE

Here is the Vizier and he bids for her.
Two thousand for the lass. Who bids against me?

MUAZZIM

Vizier Almuene, you are too great to find any opposers, and you know it; but as you are great, I pray you bid greatly. Her least price is ten thousand.

ALMUENE

Ten thousand, swindler! Do you dare to cheat
In open market? two thousand's her outside.
This spindly common wench! Accept it, broker,
Or call for bids; refuse at your worst risk.

MUAZZIM

It is not the rule of these sales. I appeal to you, gentlemen.
What, do you all steal off from my neighbourhood? Vizier, she
is already bespoken by your elder, Ibn Sawy.

ALMUENE

I know your broking tricks, you shallow rascal.
Call for more bids, you cheater, call for bids.

MUAZZIM

Abuse me not, Almuene bin Khakan! There is justice in Bassora
and the good Ibn Sawy will decide between us.

ALMUENE

Us! between us! Thou dirty broking cheat,
Am I thy equal? Throw him the money, Nubian.
But if he boggle, seize him, have him flat
And powerfully persuade him with your sticks.
You, beauty, come. What, hussy, you draw back?

FAREED

Father, let me get behind her with my horse-tickler. I will trot
her home in a twinkling.

MUAZZIM

This is flat tyranny. I will appeal
To the good Vizier and our gracious King.

ALMUENE

Impudent thief! have first thy punishment
And howl appeal between the blows. Seize him.

Enter Khalid with Ibn Sawy.

MUAZZIM

Protect me, Vizier, from this unjust man,
This tyrant.

IBN SAWY

What is this?

MUAZZIM

He takes by force
The perfect slavegirl I had kept for you,
And at a beggarly, low, niggard's price
I'd not accept for a black kitchen-girl;
Then, when I named you, fell to tyrant rage,
Ordering his slaves to beat me.

IBN SAWY

Is this true,

Vizier?

ALMUENE

Someone beat out my foggy brains!
I took it for a trick, a broker's trick.
What, you bespoke the girl? You know I'd lose
My hand and tongue rather than they should hurt you.
Well, well, begin the bidding.

IBN SAWY

First, a word.

Vizier, this purchase is not for myself;
'Tis for the King. I deem you far too loyal
To bid against your master, needlessly
Taxing his treasuries. But if you will,
You have the right. By justice and the law
The meanest may compete here. Do you bid?

ALMUENE (*to himself*)

He baulks me everywhere. (*aloud*) The perfect slavegirl?
No, I'll not bid. Yet it is most unlucky,
My son has set his heart upon this very girl.
Will you not let him have her, Ibn Sawy?

IBN SAWY

I grieve that he must be so disappointed,
But there's no help. Were it my own dear son
And he should pine to death for her, I would not
Indulge him here. The King comes first.

ALMUENE

Quite first.

Well, shall I see you at your house today?

IBN SAWY

State business, brother?

ALMUENE

Our states and how to join
Their linkèd loves yet closer. I have a thought
Touching Fareed here and your orphaned niece.

IBN SAWY

I understand you. We will talk of it.
Brother, you know my mind about your boy.
He is too wild and rude; I would not trust
My dear soft girl into such dangerous hands,
Unless he showed a quick and strange amendment.

ALMUENE

It is the wildness of his youth. Provide him
A wife and he will soon domesticate.
Pen these wild torrents into quiet dams
And they will fertilize the kingdom, brother.

IBN SAWY

I hope so. Well, we'll talk.

ALMUENE

Fareed, come with me.

FAREED

I'll have my girl! I'll beat them all and have her!

ALMUENE

Wagtail, your uncle takes her.

FAREED

Break his head then,
Whip the proud broker up and down the square
And take her without payment. Why are you
The Vizier, if you cannot do your will?

ALMUENE

Madcap, she's for the King, be quiet.

FAREED

Oh!

ALMUENE

Come, I will buy you prettier girls than this
By hundredweights and tons.

FAREED

She has such hair! such legs!
God damn the Vizier and the King and you!
I'll take her yet.

Exit in a rage, followed by Almuene and Slaves.

MUAZZIM

This is a budding Vizier!
Sir, look at her; were mine mere broker's praises?

IBN SAWY

You, mistress? Does the earth contain such beauty?

MUAZZIM

Did I not tell you so?

IBN SAWY

'Tis marvellous,
And if her mind be equal to her body,
She is an emperor's portion. What's your name,
Sweet wonder?

ANICE

Anice-aljalice they call me.

IBN SAWY

What is your history?

ANICE

My parents sold me
In the great famine.

IBN SAWY

What, is your mould indeed a thing of earth?
Peri, have you not come disguised from heaven
To snare us with your lovely smiles, you marvel?

ANICE

I am a slave and mortal.

IBN SAWY

Prove me that.

ANICE

A Peri, sir, has wings, but I have none.

IBN SAWY

I see that difference only. Well now, her price?

MUAZZIM

She is a gift to thee, O Vizier.

IBN SAWY

Ceremony?

I rate her value at ten thousand clear.

MUAZZIM

It is the price expected at your hands,
Though from a private purse we'd have full value.
Keep her ten days with you; her beauty's worn
With journeying and its harsh fatigues. Give rest,
Give baths, give food, then shade your eyes to gaze at her.

IBN SAWY

You counsel wisely. There's my poaching rascal, —

But I will seal her fast even from his questings.
The peace, Muazzim.

MUZZIM

Peace, thou good Vizier, loaded with our blessings.

Exeunt.

Scene 4

*A room in the women's apartments of Ibn Sawy's house.
Ameena, Doonya.*

AMEENA

Call, Doonya, to the eunuch once again,
And ask if Nureddene has come.

DOONYA

Mother,

What is the use? you know he has not come.
Why do you fret your heart, sweet mother, for him?
Bad coins are never lost.

AMEENA

Fie, Doonya! bad?

He is not bad, but wild, a trifle wild;
And the one little fault's like a stray curl
Among his clustering golden qualities,
That graces more than it disfigures him.
Bad coin! Oh, Doonya, even the purest gold
Has some alloy, so do not call him bad.

DOONYA

Sweet, silly mother! why, I called him that
Just to hear you defend him.

AMEENA

You laugh at me, —

Oh, you all laugh. And yet I will maintain
My Nureddene's the dearest lad in Bassora, —
Let him disprove't who can, — in all this realm

The beautifullest and kindest.

DOONYA

So the girls think
Through all our city. Oh, I laugh at you
And at myself. I'm sure I am as bad
A sister to him as you are a mother.

AMEENA

I a bad mother, Doonya?

DOONYA

The worst possible.
You spoil him; so do I; so does his father;
So does all Bassora, — especially the girls!

AMEENA

Why, who could be unkind to him or see
His merry eyes grow clouded with remorse?

DOONYA

Is it he who comes?

She goes out and returns.

It is my uncle, mother,
And there's a girl with him, — I think she is
A copy of Nureddene in white and red.
Why, as I looked downstairs, she smiled up at me
And took the heart out of my body with the smile.
Are you going to have a rival at your years,
Poor mother? 'Tis late for uncle to go wooing.

AMEENA

A rival, you mad girl!

Enter Ibn Sawy and Anice-aljalice.

IBN SAWY

Come forward, child.

Here is a slavegirl, Ameena, I've bought
For our great Sultan. Keep her from your son,
Your scapegrace son. My life upon it, dame!
If he touches her, I'm gone.

AMEENA

I'll see to it.

IBN SAWY

Let a strong eunuch with a naked sword
Stand at her door. Bathe her and feed her daintily.
Your son! see that he does not wheedle you.
You've spoilt him so, there is no trusting you,
You tender, foolish heart.

AMEENA

I spoil him, husband!

IBN SAWY

Most damnably. Whenever I would turn
Wholesomely harsh to him, you come between
And coax my anger. Therefore he is spoilt.

DOONYA

Oh, uncle mine, when you are harsh, the world
Grows darker with your frown. See, how I tremble!

IBN SAWY

Oh, are you there, my little satirist?
When were you whipped last?

DOONYA

When you last were harsh.

IBN SAWY

You shall be married off. I will not have you
Mocking an old and reverend man like me.

And make your casket ready for you, gem.
Bring her behind me, Doonya.

Exit.

DOONYA (*leaping on Anice*)

What's your name,
You smiling wonder, what's your name? your name?

ANICE

If you will let me a little breathe, I'll tell you.

DOONYA

Tell it me without breathing.

ANICE

It's too long.

DOONYA

Let's hear it.

ANICE

Anice-aljalice.

DOONYA

Anice,
There is a sea of laughter in your body;
I find it billowing there beneath the calm
And rippling sweetly out in smiles. You beauty!
And I love laughers. Wherefore for the King?
Why not for me? Does the King ever laugh,
I wonder?

She runs out.

ANICE

My King is here. But they would give me
To some thick-bearded swart and grizzled Sultan
Who'd see me once a week and keep me penned

For service, not for mirth and love. My prince
Is like our Persian boys, fair-faced and merry,
Fronting the world with glad and open looks
That make the heart rejoice. Ten days! 'tis much.
Kingdoms have toppled in ten days.

Doonya returns.

DOONYA

Come, Anice.

I wish my cousin Nureddene had come
And caught you here. What fun it would have been!

Exeunt.

Act II

Bassora.

Scene 1

Ibn Sawy's house. An upper chamber in the women's apartments.

Doonya, Anice-aljalice.

DOONYA

You living sweet romance, you come from Persia.
'Tis there, I think, they fall in love at sight?

ANICE

But will you help me, Doonya, will you help me?
To him, to him, not to that grizzled King!
I am near Heaven with Hell that's waiting for me.

DOONYA

I know, I know! you feel as I would, child,
If told that in ten days I had to marry
My cruel boisterous cousin. I will help you.
But strange! to see him merely pass and love him!
Did he look back at you?

ANICE

While he could see me.

DOONYA

Yes, that was Nureddene.

ANICE

You'll help me?

DOONYA

Yes,
With all my heart and soul and brains and body.
But how? My uncle's orders are so strict!

ANICE

And do you always heed your uncle's orders,
You dutiful niece?

DOONYA

Rigidly, when they suit me.
It shall be done although my punishment
Were even to wed Fared. But who can say
When he'll come home?

ANICE

Comes he not daily then?

DOONYA

When he's not hawking. Questing, child, for doves,
White doves.

ANICE

I'll stop all that when he is mine.

DOONYA

Will you? and yet I think you will, nor find it
A task at all. You can do it?

ANICE

I will.

DOONYA

You have relieved my conscience of a load.

Who blames me? I do this to reform my cousin,
Gravely, deliberately, with serious thought,
And am quite virtuously disobedient.
I almost feel a long white beard upon my chin,
The thing's so wise and sober. Gravely, gravely!

*She marches out, solemnly stroking
an imaginary beard.*

ANICE

My heart beats reassuringly within.
The destined Prince will come and all bad spells
Be broken; then — You angels up in Heaven
Who guard sweet shame and woman's modesty,
Hide deep your searching eyes with those bright wings.
It is not wantonness, though in a slave
Permitted, spurs me forward. O tonight
Let sleep your pens, in your rebuking volumes
Record not this. I am on such a brink,
A hound of horror baying at my heels,
I cannot pause to think what fire of blushes
I choose to flee through, nor how safe cold eyes
May censure me. I pass though I should burn.
You cannot bid me pick my careful steps!
Oh, no, the danger is too near. I run
By the one road that's left me, to escape,
To escape, into the very arms I love.

Curtain

Scene 2

*Ibn Sawy's house. A room in the women's apartments.
Ameena, Doonya.*

AMEENA
Has he come in?

DOONYA
He has.

AMEENA
For three long days!
I will reprove him. Call him to me, Doonya.
I will be stern.

DOONYA
That's right. Lips closer there!
And just try hard to frown. That's mildly grim
And ought to shake him. Now you spoil all by laughing.

AMEENA
Away, you madcap! Call him here.

DOONYA
The culprit
Presents himself unsummoned.

Enter Nureddene.

NUREDDENE (*at the door*)
Ayoob, Ayoob!
A bowl of sherbet in my chamber.
(*entering*)

Well, mother,
Here I am back, your errant gadabout,
Your vagabond scapegrace, tired of truancy
And very hungry for my mother's arms.
It's good to see you smile!

AMEENA

My dearest son!

NUREDDENE

Why, Doonya, cousin, what wild face is this?

DOONYA

This is a frown, a frown, upon my forehead.
Do you not tremble when you see it? No?
To tell you the plain truth, my wandering brother,
We both were practising a careful grimness
And meant to wither you with darting flames
From basilisk eyes and words more sharp than swords,
Burn you and frizzle into simmering cinders.
Oh, you'd have been a dolorous spectacle
Before we had finished with you! Ask her else.

AMEENA

Heed her not, Nureddene. But tell me, child,
Is this well done to wander vagrant-like
Leaving your mother to anxieties
And such alarms? Oh, we will have to take
Some measure with you!

DOONYA

Oh, now, now, we are stern!

NUREDDENE

Mother, I only range abroad and learn
Of manners and of men to fit myself
For the after-time.

DOONYA

True, true, and of the taste
 Of different wines and qualities of girls;
 What eyes Damascus sends, the Cairene sort,
 Bagdad's red lips and Yemen's willowy figures,
 Who has the smallest waist in Bassora,
 Or who the shapeliest little foot moonbright
 Beneath her anklets. These are sciences
 And should be learned by sober masculine graduates.
 Should they not, cousin?

NUREDDENE

These too are not amiss,
 Doonya, for world-wise men. And do you think,
 Dear mother, I could learn the busy world
 Here, in your lap, within the shadowy calm
 Of women's chambers?

AMEENA

No, child, no. You see,
 Doonya, it is not all so bad, this wandering.
 And I am sure they much o'erstate his faults
 Who tell of them.

DOONYA

Oh, this is very grim!

AMEENA

But, Nureddene, you must not be so wild;
 Or when we are gone, what will you do, if now
 You learn no prudence? All your patrimony
 You'll waste, — and then?

NUREDDENE

Then, mother, life begins.
 I shall go forth, a daring errant-knight,
 To my true country out in faeryland;

Wander among the Moors, see Granada,
The delicate city made of faery stone,
Cairo, Tangier, Aleppo, Trebizond;
Or in the East, where old enchantment dwells,
Find Pekin of the wooden piles, Delhi
Of the idolaters, its brazen pillar
And huge seven-storied temples sculpture-fretted,
And o'er romantic regions quite unknown
Preach Islam, sword in hand; sell bales of spice
From Bassora to Java and Japan;
Then on through undiscovered islands, seas
And Oceans yet unnamed; yes, everywhere
Catch Danger by the throat where I can find him, —

DOONYA

Butcher blood-belching dragons with my blade,
Cut ogres, chop giants, tickle cormorants, —

NUREDDENE

Then in some land, I have not settled which, —

DOONYA

Call it Cumcatchia or Nonsensicum.

NUREDDENE

Marry a Soldan's daughter, sweet of eye
And crowned with gracious hair, deserving her
By deeds impossible; conduct her armies
Against her foemen, enter iron-walled
Cities besieged with the loud clang of war,
Rescue imperilled kingdoms, mid the smoke
Of desperate cities slay victorious kings,
And so extend my lady's empire wide —

DOONYA

From Bassora to the quite distant moon.

NUREDDENE

There I shall reign with beauty and splendour round
 In a great palace built of porphyry,
 Marble and jasper, with strange columns made
 Of coral and fair walls bright-arabesqued
 On which the Koran shall be written out
 In sapphires and in rubies. I will sit
 Drinking from cups of gold delightful wine,
 Watching slow dances, while the immortal strain
 Of music wanders to its silent home.
 And I shall have bright concubines and slaves
 Around me crowding all my glorious house
 With beautiful faces, thick as stars in heaven.
 My wealth shall be so great that I can spend
 Millions each day nor feel the want. I'll give
 Till there shall be no poor in all my realms,
 Nor any grieved; for I shall every night,
 Like Haroun Alrasheed, the mighty Caliph,
 Wander disguised with Jaafar and Mesroul
 Redressing wrongs, repressing Almuenes,
 And set up noble men like my dear father
 In lofty places, giving priceless boons,
 An unseen Providence to all mankind.

DOONYA

And you will marry me, dear Nureddene,
 To Jaafar, your great Vizier, so that we
 Shall never part, but every blessed night
 Drink and be merry in your halls, and live
 Felicitously for ever and for aye,
 So long as full moons shine and brains go wrong
 And wine is drunk. I make my suit to you from now,
 Caliph of Faeryland.

NUREDDENE

Your suit is granted.
 And meanwhile, Doonya, I amuse myself

With nearer kingdoms, Miriam's wavy locks
And Shazarath-al-Durr's sweet voice of song.

DOONYA

And meanwhile, brother, till you get your kingdom,
We shall be grim, quite grim.

AMEENA

Your father's angry.
I have not known him yet so moved. My child,
Do not force us to punish you.

NUREDDENE

With kisses?
Look, Doonya, at these two dear hypocrites,
She with her gentle honey-worded threats,
He with his stormings. Pooh! I care not for you.

AMEENA

Not care!

NUREDDENE

No, not a jot for him or you,
My little mother, or only just so much
As a small kiss is worth.

AMEENA

I told you, Doonya,
He was the dearest boy in all the world,
The best, the kindest.

DOONYA

Oh yes, you told me that.
And was the dearest boy in all the world
Rummaging the regions for the dearest girl,
While the admiring sun danced round the welkin
A triple circuit?

NUREDDENE

I have found her, Doonya.

DOONYA

The backward glance?

AMEENA

Your father!

Enter Ibn Sawy.

IBN SAWY

Ameena,

I'm called to the palace; something is afoot.

Ah, rascal! ah, you villain! you have come?

NUREDDENE

Sir, a long hour.

IBN SAWY

Rogue! scamp! what do you mean?

Knave, is my house a caravanserai

For you to lodge in when it is your pleasure?

NUREDDENE

It is the happiest home in Bassora,

Where the two kindest parents in the world

Excuse their vagabond son.

IBN SAWY

Hum! well! What, fellow,

You will buy trinkets? you will have me dunned?

And fleeced?

NUREDDENE

Did he dun you? I hope he asked

A fitting price; I told him to.

IBN SAWY

Sir, sir,
What game is this to buy your hussies trinkets
And send your father in the bill? Who taught you
This rule of conduct?

NUREDDENE

You, sir.

IBN SAWY

I, rascal?

NUREDDENE

You told me

That debt must be avoided like a sin.
What other way could I avoid it, sir,
Yet give the trinket?

IBN SAWY

Logic of impudence!
Tell me, you curled wine-bibbing Aristotle,
Did I tell you also to have mistresses
And buy them trinkets?

NUREDDENE

Not in so many words.

IBN SAWY

So many devils!

NUREDDENE

But since you did not marry me
Nor buy a beautiful slave for home delight,
I thought you'd have me range outside for pleasures
To get experience of the busy world.
If 'twas an oversight, it may be mended.

IBN SAWY

I'm dumb!

NUREDDENE

There is a Persian Muazzim sells,
Whom buy for me, — her rate's ten thousand pieces —

IBN SAWY

A Persian! Muazzim sells! ten thousand pieces!
(*to himself*)
Where grows this tangle? I become afraid.

NUREDDENE

Whom buy for me, I swear I'll be at home
Quite four days out of seven.

IBN SAWY

Hear me, young villain!
I'm called to the palace, but when I return,
Look to be bastinadoed, look to be curried
In boiling water. (*aside*) I must blind him well.
Ten days I shall be busy with affairs;
Then for your slavegirl. Bid the broker keep her.
Oh, I forgot! I swore to pull your curls
For your offences.

NUREDDENE

I must not let you, sir;
They are no longer my own property.
There's not a lock that has not been bespoken
For a memento.

IBN SAWY

What! what! Impudent rascal!
(*aside*)
You handsome laughing rogue! Hear, Ameena,
Let Doonya sleep with Anice every night.

No, come; hear farther.

Exit with Ameena.

NUREDDENE

O Doonya, Doonya, tall, sweet, laughing Doonya!
I am in love, — drowned, strangled, dead with longing.

DOONYA

For the world's Persian? But she's sold by now.

NUREDDENE

I asked Muazzim.

DOONYA

A quite absolute liar.

NUREDDENE

O if she is, I'll leave all other cares
And only seek her through an empty world.

DOONYA

What, could one backward glance sweep you so forward?

NUREDDENE

Why, Doonya!

DOONYA

Brother, I know a thing I know
You do not know. A sweet bird sang it to me
In an upper chamber.

NUREDDENE

Doonya, you're full of something,
And I must hear it.

DOONYA

What will you give me for it?

None of your nighthawk kisses, cousin mine!
 But a mild loving kind fraternal pledge
 I'll not refuse.

NUREDDENE

You are the wickedest, dearest girl
 In all the world, the maddest sweetest sister
 A sighing lover ever had. Now tell me.

DOONYA

More, more! I must be flattered.

NUREDDENE

No more. Come, mischief,
 You'll keep me in suspense?
(pulls her ears)

DOONYA

Enough, enough!
 The Persian — listen and perpend, O lover!
 Lend ear while I unfold my wondrous tale,
 A tale long, curled and with a tip, — Oh Lord!
 I'll clip my tale. The Persian's bought for you
 And in the upper chambers.

NUREDDENE

Doonya, Doonya!
 But those two loving hypocrites, —

DOONYA

All's meant
 To be surprise.

NUREDDENE

Surprise me no surprises.
 I am on fire, Doonya, I am on fire.
 The upper chambers?

DOONYA

Stop, stop! You do not know;
There is an ogre at her door, a black
White-tusked huge-muscled hideous grinning giant,
Of mood uproarious, horrible of limb,
An Ethiopian fell ycleped Harkoos.

NUREDDENE

The eunuch!

DOONYA

Stop, stop, stop. He has a sword,
A fearful, forceful, formidable blade.

NUREDDENE

Your eunuch and his sword! I mount to heaven
And who shall stop me?

Exit.

DOONYA

Stop, stop! yet stop! He's off
Like bolt from bowstring. Now the game's afoot
And Bassora's Soldan, Mohamad Alzayni,
May whistle for his slavegirl. I am Fate,
For I upset the plans of Viziers and of Kings.

Exit.

Scene 3

Ibn Sawy's house. The upper chambers of the women's apartments.

Doonya, sleeping on a couch. Enter Nureddene and Anice.

NUREDDENE

I told you 'twas the morning.

ANICE

Morning so early?

This moment 'twas the evening star; is that
The matin lustre?

NUREDDENE

There is a star at watch beside the moon
Waiting to see you ere it leave the skies.
Is it your sister Peri?

ANICE

It is our star

And guards us both.

NUREDDENE

It is the star of Anice,
The star of Anice-aljalice who came
From Persia guided by its silver beams
Into these arms of vagrant Nureddene
Which keep her till the end. Sweet, I possess you!
Till now I could not patently believe it.
Strange, strange that I who nothing have deserved,
Should win what all would covet! We are fools
Who reach at baubles taking them for stars.

O wiser woman who come straight to Heaven!
But I have wandered by the way and staled
The freshness of delight with gadding pleasures,
Anticipated Love's perfect fruit with sour
And random berries void of real savour.
Oh fool! had I but known! What can I say
But once more that I have deserved you not,
Who yet must take you, knowing my undesert,
Whatever come hereafter?

ANICE

The house is stirring.

NUREDDENE

Who is this sleeping here? My cousin Doonya!

DOONYA (*waking*)

Is morning come? My blessing on you, children.
Be good and kind, dears; love each other, darlings.

NUREDDENE

Dame Mischief, thanks; thanks, Mother Madcap.

DOONYA

Now, whither?

NUREDDENE

To earth from Paradise.

DOONYA

Wait, wait! You must not
Walk off the stage before your part is done.
The situation now with open eyes
And lifted hands and chidings. You'll be whipped,
Anice, and Nureddene packed off to Mecca
On penitential legs; I shall be married.
(*opening the door*)

Oh, our fell Ethiopian snoozing here?
 Snore, noble ogre, snore louder than nature
 To excuse your gloomy skin from worse than thwacks.
 Wait for me, Nureddene.

Exit.

ANICE

They will be angry.

NUREDDENE

Oh, with two smiles I'll buy an easy pardon.

ANICE

Whatever comes, we are each other's now.

NUREDDENE

Nothing will come to us but happy days,
 You, my surpassing jewel, on my neck
 Closer to me than my own heartbeats.

ANICE

Yes,

Closer than kisses, closer than delight,
 Close only as love whom sorrow and delight
 Cannot diminish, nor long absence change
 Nor daily prodigality of joy
 Expend immortal love.

NUREDDENE

You have the lore.

Doonya returns.

DOONYA

I have told Nuzhath to call mother here.
 There will be such a gentle storm.

Enter Aameena at the door.

AMEENA

Harkoos!

Sleeping?

HARKOOS

Gmn — mmn —

DOONYA

Grunted almost like nature,

Thou excellent giant.

AMEENA

Harkoos, dost thou sleep?

HARKOOS

Sleep! I! I was only pondering a text of Koran with closed eyes, lady. You give us slaves pitiful small time for our devotions; but 'twill all be accounted for hereafter.

AMEENA

And canst thou meditate beneath the lash?
For there thou'lt shortly be.

HARKOOS

Stick or leather, 'tis all one to Harkoos. I will not be cudgelled out of my straight road to Paradise.

AMEENA

My mind misgives me.

(enters the room)

Was this well done, my child?

NUREDDENE

Dear, think the chiding given; do not pain
Your forehead with a frown.

AMEENA

You, Doonya, too

Were part of this?

DOONYA

Part! you shall not abate

My glory; I am its artificer,

The auxiliary and supplement of Fate.

AMEENA

Quite shameless in your disobedience, Doonya?

Your father's anger will embrace us all.

NUREDDENE

And nothing worse than the embrace which ends

A chiding and a smile, our fault deserves.

You had a gift for me in your sweet hands

Concealed behind you; I have but reached round

And taken it ere you knew.

AMEENA

For you, my son?

She was not for you, she was for the King.

This was your worst fault, child; all others venial

Beside it.

NUREDDENE

For the King! You told me, Doonya,

That she was bought for me, a kind surprise

Intended?

DOONYA

I did; exact!

AMEENA

Such falsehood, Doonya!

DOONYA

No falsehood, none. Purchased she was for him,
For he has got her. And surprise! Well, mother,
Are you not quite surprised? And uncle will be
Most woefully. My cousin and Anice too
Are both caught napping, — all except great Doonya.
No falsehood, mere excess of truth, a bold
Anticipation of the future, mother.

NUREDDENE

I did not know of this. Yet blame not Doonya;
For had I known, I would have run with haste
More breathless to demand my own from Fate.

AMEENA

What will your father think? I am afraid.
He was most urgent, grave beyond his wont.
Absent yourself awhile and let me bear
The first keen breathings of his anger.

NUREDDENE

The King!

And if he were the Caliph of the world,
He should not have my love. Come, fellow-culprit.

Exit with Doonya.

AMEENA

Harkoos, go fetch your master here; and stiffen
The muscles of your back. Negligent servant!

HARKOOS

'Tis all one to Harkoos. Stick or leather! leather or stick! 'Tis
the way of this wicked and weary world.

Exit.

AMEENA

Yet, Anice, tell me, is't too late? Alas!

Your cheeks and lowered eyes confess the fault.
 I fear your nature and your nurture, child,
 Are not so beautiful as is your face.
 Could you not have forbidden this?

ANICE

Lady,

Remember my condition. Can a slave
 Forbid or order? We are only trained
 To meek and quick obedience; and what's virtue
 In freemen is in us a deep offence.
 Do you command your passions, not on us
 Impose that service; 'tis not in our part.

AMEENA

You have a clever brain and a quick tongue.
 And yet this speech was hardly like a slave's!
 I will not blame you.

ANICE

I deny not, lady,

My heart consented to this fault.

AMEENA

I know

Who 'twas besieged you, girl, and do not blame
 Your heart for yielding where it had no choice.
 Go in.

Exit Anice. Enter Harkoos and Ibn Sawy.

IBN SAWY

I hope, I hope that has not chanced
 Which I have striven to prevent. This slave
 Grins only and mutters gibberish to my questions.

AMEENA

The worst.

IBN SAWY

Why, so! the folly was my own
And I must bear its heavy consequence.
Sir, you shall have your wage for what has happened.

HARKOOS

The way of the world. Whose peg's loose? Beat Harkoos. Because my young master would climb through the wrong window and mistake a rope-ladder for the staircase, my back must ache. Was the windowsill my post? Have I wings to stand upon air or a Djinn's eye to see through wood? How bitter is injustice!

IBN SAWY

You shall be thrashed for your poor gift of lying.

AMEENA

Blame none; it was unalterable fate.

IBN SAWY

That name by which we put our sins on God,
Yet shall not so escape. 'Twas our indulgence
Moulded the boy and made him fit for sin;
Which now, by our past mildness hampered quite,
We cannot punish without tyranny.
Offences we have winked at, when they knocked
At foreign doors, how shall we look at close
When they come striking home?

AMEENA

What will you do?

IBN SAWY

The offence here merits death, but not the offender.
Easy solution if the sin could die
And leave the sinner living!

AMEENA

Vizier, you are perplexed, to talk like this.
 Because a little's broken, break not more.
 Let Nureddene have Anice-aljalice,
 As Fate intended. Buy another slave
 Fairer than she is for great Alzayni's bed,
 Return his money to the treasury
 And cover up this fault.

IBN SAWY

With lies?

AMEENA

With silence.

IBN SAWY

Will God be silent? will my enemies?
 The son of Khakan silent? Ameena,
 My children have conspired my shame and death.

AMEENA

Face not the thing so mournfully. Vizier, you want
 A woman's wit beside you in the Court.
 Muene may speak; will you be dumb? Whom then
 Will the King trust? Collect your wits, be bold,
 Be subtle; guard yourself, protect your child.

IBN SAWY

You urge me on a road my weaker heart
 Chooses, not reason. But consider, dame,
 If we excuse such gross and violent fault
 Done in our house, what hope to save our boy, —
 Oh, not his body, but the soul within?
 'Twill petrify in vice and grow encrusted
 With evil as with a leprosy.

AMEENA

Do this.

Show a fierce anger, have a gleaming knife
Close at his throat, let him be terrified.
Then I'll come in with tears and seem to save him
On pledge of fairer conduct.

IBN SAWY

This has a promise.

Give me a knife and let me try to frame
My looks to anger.

AMEENA

Harkoos, a dagger here!

Harkoos gives his dagger.

IBN SAWY

But see you come not in too early anxious
And mar the game.

AMEENA

Trust me.

IBN SAWY

Go, call my son,
Harkoos; let him not know that I am here.

Exit Harkoos.

Go, Ameena.

Exit Ameena.

Plays oft have serious fruit,
'Tis seen; then why not this? 'tis worth the trial.
Prosper or fail, I must do something quickly
Before I go upon the Caliph's work
To Roun the mighty. But I hear him come.

Enter Nureddene and Harkoos.

NUREDDENE

You're sure of it? You shall have gold for this
Kind treason.

HARKOOS

Trust Harkoos; and if he beats me,
Why, sticks are sticks and leather is but leather.

NUREDDENE

Father!

IBN SAWY

O rascal, traitor, villain, imp!

*He throws him down on a couch and
holds him under his dagger.*

I'll father you. Prepare, prepare your soul,
Your black and crime-encrusted soul for hell.
I'm death and not your father.

NUREDDENE

Mother, quick!

Help, mother!

Ameena comes hurrying in.

The poor dear old man is mad.

IBN SAWY

Ahh, woman! wherefore do you come so soon?

NUREDDENE

How his eyes roll! Satan, abandon him.
Take him off quickly.

IBN SAWY

Take me off, you villain?

NUREDDENE

Tickle him in the ribs, that's the best way.

IBN SAWY
Tickle me in the ribs! Impudent villain!
I'll cut your throat.

AMEENA (*frightened*)
Husband, what do you? think,
He is your only son.

IBN SAWY
And preferable
I had not him. Better no son than bad ones.

NUREDDENE
Is there no help then?

IBN SAWY
None; prepare!

NUREDDENE
All right.
But let me lie a little easier first.

IBN SAWY
Lie easier! Rogue, your impudence amazes.
You shall lie easier soon on coals of hell.

AMEENA
This goes no farther.

ANICE (*looking in*)
They are in angry talk.
Oh, kill me rather!

NUREDDENE
Waste not your terrors, sweetheart.
We are rehearsing an old comedy,
"The tyrant father and his graceless son".

Foolish old man!

IBN SAWY

What! what!

NUREDDENE

See now the end
Of all your headstrong moods and wicked rages
You would indulge yourself in, though I warned you,
Against your gallant handsome virtuous son.
And now they have turned your brain! Vicious indulgence,
How bitter-dusty is thy fruit! Be warned
And put a rein on anger, curb in wrath,
That enemy of man. Oh, thou art grown
A sad example to all angry fathers!

IBN SAWY

Someone had told you of this. (*to Harkoos*) Grinning villain!

HARKOOS

Oh yes, it is I, of course. Your peg's loose; beat Harkoos.

IBN SAWY

My peg, you rogue! I'll loose your peg for you.

NUREDDENE

No, father, let him be, and hear me out.
I swear it was not out of light contempt
For your high dignity and valued life
More precious to me than my blood, if I
Transgressed your will in this. I knew not of it,
Nor that you meant my Anice for the King.
For me I thought her purchased, so was told,
And still believe religiously that Fate
Brought her to Bassora only for me.

IBN SAWY
It was a fault, my child.

NUREDDENE
Which I cannot repent.

IBN SAWY
You are my son, generous and true and bold,
Though faulty. Take the slavegirl then, but swear
Never hereafter mistress, slave or wife
Lies in your arms but only she; neither,
Until herself desire it, mayst thou sell her.
Swear this and keep thy love.

NUREDDENE
I swear it.

IBN SAWY
Leave us.

Exit Nureddene.

Anice, in care for thee I have required
This oath from him, which he, perhaps, will keep.
Do thou requite it; be to him no less
Than a dear wife.

ANICE
How noble is the nature
That prompts you to enforce on great offenders
Their dearest wishes!

IBN SAWY
Go in, my child; go, Anice.

Exit Anice.

Last night of my departure hence to Roum
To parley with the Greek for great Haroun
I spoke with you, and my long year of absence, —

AMEENA

It is a weary time.

IBN SAWY

Wherein much evil

May chance; and therefore will I leave my children
As safe as God permits. Doonya to nuptials.
The son of Khakan wants her for his cub,
But shall not have her. One shall marry her
Who has the heart and hand to guard her well.

AMEENA

Who, husband?

IBN SAWY

Murad, Captain of the City.

He rises daily in Alzayni's favour.

AMEENA

He is a Turk. Our noble Arab branch
Were ill engrafted on that savage stock.

IBN SAWY

A prejudice. There is no stock in Islam
Except the Prophet. For our Nureddene,
I will divide my riches in two halves,
Leave one to him and one for you with Murad,
While you are with your kin or seem to be.

AMEENA

Oh wherefore this?

IBN SAWY

'Tis likely that the boy,
Left here in sole command, will waste his wealth
And come to evil. If he's sober, well;
If not, when he is bare as any rock,

Abandoned by his friends, spewed out by all,
It may be that in this sharp school and beaten
With savage scourges the wild blood in him
May learn sobriety and noble use:
Then rescue him, assist his better nature.
And we shall see too how the loves endure
Betwixt him and the Persian; whether she
Deserves her monarchy in his wild will,
Or, even deserving, keeps it.

AMEENA

But, dear husband,
Shall I not see my boy for a whole year?

IBN SAWY

No tears! Consider it the punishment
Of our too fond indulgent love, — happy
If that be worst. All will end well, I hope,
And I returning, glad, to Bassora
Embrace a son reformed, a happy niece
Nursing her babe, and you, the gentle mother
Like the sweet kindly earth whose patient love
Embraces even our faults and sins. Grant it,
O Allah, if it be at all Thy will.

Exeunt.

Scene 4

*A room in Ajebe's house.
Ajebe.*

AJEBE
Balkis, do come, my heart.

Enter Balkis.

BALKIS
Your will?

AJEBE
My will!
When had I any will since you came here,
You rigorous tyrant?

BALKIS
Was it for abuse
You called me?

AJEBE
Bring your lute and sing to me.

BALKIS
I am not in the mood.

AJEBE
Sing, I entreat you.
I am hungry for your voice of pure delight.

BALKIS
I am no kabob, nor my voice a curry.

Hungry, forsooth!

Exit.

AJEBE

Oh, Balkis, Balkis! hear me.

Enter Mymoona.

MYMOONA

It's useless calling; she is in her moods.
And there's your Vizier getting down from horse
In the doorway.

AJEBE

I will go and bring him up.
Mymoona, coax her for me, will you, girl?

Exit.

MYMOONA

It is as good to meet a mangy dog
As this same uncle of ours. He seldom comes.

She conceals herself behind a curtain.

Reenter Ajebe with Almuene.

ALMUENE

He goes tomorrow? Well. And Nureddene
The scapegrace holds his wealth in hand? Much better.
I always said he was a fool. *(to himself)* Easily
I might confound him with this flagrant lapse
About the slavegirl. But wait! wait! He gone,
His memory waned, his riches squandered quite,
I'll ruin his son, ruin the insolent Turk
He has preferred to my Fareed. His Doonya
And Anice slavegirls to my lusty boy,
His wife — but she escapes. It is enough.
They come back to a desolate house. Oh, let
Their forlorn wrinkles hug an empty nest
In life's cold leafless winter! Meanwhile I set

My seal on every room in the King's heart;
He finds no chamber open when he comes.

AJEBE

Uncle, you ponder things of weight?

ALMUENE

No, Ajebe;
Trifles, mere trifles. You're a friend, I think,
Of Ibn Sawy's son?

AJEBE

We drink together.

ALMUENE

Right, right! Would you have place, power, honours, gold,
Or is your narrow soul content with ease?

AJEBE

Why, uncle!

ALMUENE

Do you dread death? furious disgrace?
Or beggary that's worse than either? Do you?

AJEBE

All men desire those blessings, fear these ills.

ALMUENE

They shall be yours in overflowing measure,
Good, if you serve me, ill, if you refuse.

AJEBE

What service?

ALMUENE

Ruin wanton Nureddene.

Gorge him with riot and excess; rob him
Under a friendly guise; force him to spend
Till he's a beggar. Most, delude him on
To prone extremity of drunken shame
Which he shall feel, yet have no power to check.
Drench all his senses in vile profligacy,
Not mere light gallantries, but gutter filth,
Though you have to share it. Do this and you're made;
But this undone, you are yourself undone.
Eight months I give you. No, attend me not.

Exit.

AJEBE

Mymoona! girl, where are you?

MYMOONA

Here, here, behind you.

AJEBE

A Satan out of hell has come to me.

MYMOONA

A Satan, truly, and he'd make you one,
Damning you down into the deepest hell of all.

AJEBE

What shall I do?

MYMOONA

Not what he tells you to.

AJEBE

Yet if I do not, I am gone. No man
In Bassora could bear his heavy wrath.
On the other side —

MYMOONA

Leave the other side. 'Tis true,
The dog will keep his word in evil; for good,
'Tis brittle, brittle. But you cannot do it;
Our Balkis loves his Anice so completely.

AJEBE

Girl, girl, my life and goods are on the die.

MYMOONA

Do one thing.

AJEBE

I will do what you shall bid me.

MYMOONA

He has some vile companions, has he not?

AJEBE

Cafoor and Ayoob and the rest; a gang
Of pleasant roisterers without heart or mind.

MYMOONA

Whisper the thing to them; yourself do nothing.
Check him at times. Whatever else you do,
Take not his gifts; they are the price of shame.
If he is ruined, as without their urging
Is likely, Satan's satisfied; if not,
We'll flee from Bassora when there's no help.

AJEBE

You have a brain. Yet if I must be vile,
A bolder vileness best becomes a man.

MYMOONA

And Balkis?

AJEBE
True.

MYMOONA
Be safe, be safe. The rest
Is doubtful, but one truth is sadly sure,
That dead men cannot love.

AJEBE
I'll think of it.
Mymoona, leave me; send your sister here.

Exit Mymoona.

The thing's too vile! and yet — honours and place,
And to set Balkis on a kingdom's crest
Breaking and making men with her small hands
The lute's too large for! But the way is foul.

Enter Balkis.

BALKIS
What's your command?

AJEBE
Bring me your lute and sing.
I'm sad and troubled. Cross me not, my girl;
My temper's wry.

BALKIS
Oh, threats?

AJEBE
Remember still
You are a slave, however by my love
Pampered, and sometimes think upon the scourge.

BALKIS
Do, do! Yes, beat me! Or why beat me only?
Kill me, as you have killed my heart already

With your harsh words. I knew, I knew what all
Your love would end in. Oh! oh! oh! (*weeps*)

AJEBE

Forgive me,
O sweetest heart. I swear I did not mean it.

BALKIS

Because in play I sometimes speak a little —
O scourge me, kill me!

AJEBE

'Twas a jest, a jest!
Tear not my heart with sobs. Look, Balkis, love,
You shall have necklaces worth many thousands,
Pearls, rubies, if you only will not weep.

BALKIS

I am a slave and only fit for scourging,
Not pearls and rubies. Mymoona! oh, Mymoona!
Bring him a scourge and me a cup of poison.

Exit.

AJEBE

She plays upon me as upon her lute.
I'm as inert, as helpless, as completely
Ruled by her moods, as dumbly pleasureless
By her light hands untouched. How to appease her?
Mymoona! oh, Mymoona!

Exit.

Act III

Bassora.

Scene 1

Ibn Sawy's house. A room in the outer apartments decorated for a banquet.

Doonya, Anice, Balkis.

DOONYA

Lord, how they pillage! Even the furniture
Cannot escape these Djinns. Ogre Ghaneem
Picks up that costly chair between his teeth
And off to his castle; devil Ayoob drops
That table of mosaic in his pocket;
Zeb sweeps off rugs and couches in a whirlwind.
What purse will long put up with such ill-treatment?

BALKIS

It must be checked.

DOONYA

'Tis much that he has kept
His promise to my uncle. Oh, he's sound!
These villains spoil him. Anice, you're to blame.
However you complain, yourself are quite
As reckless.

ANICE

I?

DOONYA

Yes, you. Is there a bright
Unnecessary jewel you have seen
And have not bought? a dress that took your fancy
And was not in a moment yours? Or have you lost
A tiny chance of laughter, song and wine,
Since you were with him?

ANICE

A few rings and chains,
Some silks and cottons I have bought at times.

DOONYA

What did these trifles cost?

ANICE

I do not know.

DOONYA

Of course you do not. Come, it's gone too far;
Restrain him, curb yourself.

BALKIS

Next time he calls you
To sing among his wild companions, send
Cold answers, do not go.

ANICE

To break the jest,
The flow of good companionship, drive out
Sweet friendly looks with anger, be a kill-joy
And frowner in this bright and merry world!
Oh, all the sins that human brows grow wrinkled
With frowning at, could never equal this!

DOONYA

But if the skies grew darker?

ANICE

If they should!

It *was* a bright and merry world. To see him
Happy and gay and kind was all I cared for;
There my horizon stopped. But if the skies
Did darken! Doonya, it shall cease today.

Enter Azeem.

Well, Azeem.

AZEEM

Madam, half the creditors,
And that means half the shops in Bassora,
Hold session in the outer hall and swear
It shall be permanent till they get money.

ANICE

Where is your master? Call him here. A moment!
Have you the bills?

AZEEM

All of them, long as pillars
And crammed from head to foot with monstrous sums.

ANICE

Call him.

AZEEM

He's here.

Enter Nureddene.

NUREDDENE

What, cousin Doonya! Balkis!
Did you steal down to see the decorations?
Are they not pretty?

DOONYA

Like a painted tombstone

Sculptured and arabesqued, but death's inside
And bones, my brother, bones.

NUREDDENE

And there are bones
In this fair pleasing outside called dear Doonya,
But let us only think of rosy cheeks,
Sweet eyes and laughing lips and not the bones.

DOONYA

You have boned my metaphor and quite disboned it,
Until there's nothing firm inside; 'tis pulpy.

ANICE

The creditors besiege you, Nureddene;
You'll pay them.

NUREDDENE

Serious, Anice?

ANICE

Till you do,
I will not smile again. Azeem, the bills!

NUREDDENE

Is this your doing, Doonya?

DOONYA

Yours, cousin, yours.

NUREDDENE

Is't so? Anice?

ANICE

I've told you.

NUREDDENE

Show me the bills.

Go in, you three.

ANICE

Ah, he is grieved and angry!

His eyes are clouded; let me speak to him.

BALKIS

Now you'll spoil all; drag her off, Doonya.

DOONYA

Come.

Exit drawing away Anice, Balkis behind.

NUREDDENE

Well, sir, where are these bills?

AZEEM

You will see the bills?

NUREDDENE

The sums, the sums!

AZEEM

To tailor Mardouc twenty-four thousand pieces, namely, for caftans, robes, shawls, turbans, Damascus silks, —

NUREDDENE

Leave the inventory.

AZEEM

To tailor Labkan, another twenty thousand; to the baker, two thousand; to the confectioner, as much; to the Bagdad curio-merchant twenty-four thousand; to the same from Ispahan, sixteen thousand; to the jeweller on account of necklaces, bracelets, waist-ornaments, anklets, rings, pendants and all manner of

trinkets for the slavegirl Anice-aljalice, ninety thousand only;
to the upholsterer —

NUREDDENE

Hold, hold! Why, what are all these monstrous sums?
Hast thou no word but thousands in thy belly,
Exorbitant fellow?

AZEEM

Why, sir, 'tis in the bills; my belly's empty enough.

NUREDDENE

Nothing but thousands!

AZEEM

Here's one for seven hundred, twelve dirhams and some odd
fractions from Husayn cook.

NUREDDENE

The sordid, dingy rogue! Will he dun me so brutally for a base
seven hundred?

AZEEM

The fruiterer —

NUREDDENE

Away! bring bags.

AZEEM

Bags, sir?

NUREDDENE

Of money, fool. Call Harkoos and all the slaves. Bring half my
treasury.

Exit Azeem.

She frown on me! look cold! for sums, for debts!
For money, the poor paltry stuff we dig

By shovels from base mire. Grows love so beggarly
That it must think of piastres? O my heart!

*Enter Azeem, Harkoos and Slaves
with bags of money.*

Heap them about the room. Go, Azeem, call
That hungry pack; they shall be fed.

Exit Azeem.

Harkoos,
Open two bags there. Have you broken the seals?

Enter Azeem ushering in the creditors.

Who asks for money?

COOK

I, sir. Seven hundred denars, twelve dirhams and three fourths
of a dirham, that is my amount.

NUREDDENE

Take thy amount, thou dingy-hearted rogue.

Throws a bag towards him.

You there, take yours.

JEWELLER

Sir, this is not a hundredth part of your debt to me.

NUREDDENE

Give him two hundred bags.

HARKOOS

Bags, sir?

NUREDDENE

Do you grin, rogue, and loiter? Take that! (*strikes him*)

HARKOOS

Exactly. Your peg's loose, beat Harkoos. Old master or young,
'tis all one to Harkoos. Stick or leather! cuff or kick! these are
all the houses of my horoscope.

NUREDDENE

I am sorry I struck thee; there's gold. Give them all the money; all, I say. Porter that home, you rascals, and count your sums. What's over, cram your throats with it; or, if you will, throw it in the gutter.

CREDITORS (*scrambling and quarrelling for the bags*)

That's mine! that's mine! no, mine! Leave go, you robber. Whom do you call robber, thief?

NUREDDENE

Cudgel them from the room.

*Exeunt Creditors snatching bags
and pursued by the slaves.*

AZEEM

'Tis madness, sir.

Nureddene motions him away. Exit Azeem.

NUREDDENE

If she were clothed in rags
And beggary her price, I'd follow her
From here to China. She to frown on me
For money!

Enter Anice.

ANICE

Nureddene, what have you done?

NUREDDENE

You bade me pay the fellows: I have paid them.

ANICE

You are angry with me? I did not think you could
Be angry with me for so slight a cause.

NUREDDENE

Tears, Anice? O my love,
What worst calamity do they portend
For him who caused them?

ANICE

None, none! or only showers
The sunlight soon o'ertakes. Away with grief!
What is it after all but money lost?
Beggars are happier, are they not, my lord?

NUREDDENE

Much happier, Anice.

ANICE

Let us be beggars, then.
Oh, we shall wander blissfully about
In careless rags. And I shall take my lute
And buy you honey-crusts with my sweet voice.
For is not my voice sweet, my master?

NUREDDENE

Sweet
As Gabriel's when he sings before the Lord
And Heaven listens.

ANICE

We shall reach Bagdad
Someday and meet the Caliph in the streets,
The mighty Caliph Haroun Alrasheed,
Disguised, a beggar too, give him our crusts
And find ourselves all suddenly the friends
Of the world's master. Shall we not, my lord?

NUREDDENE

Anice, we shall.

ANICE

Let us be beggars then,
Rich happy paupers singing through the world.
Ah, but you have a father and a mother!
Come, sit down there and I will stand before you
And tell a story.

NUREDDENE

Sit by me and tell it.

ANICE

No, no. I'll stand.

NUREDDENE

Well, wilful. Now, your tale.

ANICE

I have forgotten it. It was about
A man who had a gem earth could not buy.

NUREDDENE

As I have you.

ANICE

Be silent, sir. He kept it
With ordinary jewels which he took
Each day and threw into the street, and said,
"I'll show this earth that all the gems it has,
Together match not this I'll solely keep."

NUREDDENE

As I'll keep you.

ANICE

Ah, but he did not know
What slender thread bound to a common pearl
That wonder. When he threw that out, alas!

His jewel followed, and though he sought earth through,
He never could again get back his gem.

NUREDDENE (*after a pause*)

Tomorrow I will stop this empty life,
Cut down expense and only live for you.
Tonight there is the banquet. It must stand,
My word being given. Azeem!

Enter Azeem.

What money still

Is in the treasury? What debts outstand?

AZEEM

More now than you can meet. But for today's folly, all would
have been well, — your lordly folly! Oh, beat me! I must speak.

NUREDDENE

Realize all the estate, the house only excepted; satisfy the credi-
tors. For what's left, entreat delay.

AZEEM

They will not be entreated. They have smelt the carrion and are
all winging up, beak outstretched and talons ready.

NUREDDENE

Carrion indeed and vile! Wherefore gave God
Reason to his best creatures, if they suffer
The rebel blood to o'ercrow that tranquil wise
And perfect minister? Do what thou canst.
I have good friends to help me in my need.

Exit.

AZEEM

Good friends? good bloodsuckers, good thieves! Much help his
need will have out of them!

ANICE

There's always Ajebe.

AZEEM

Will you trust him? He is the Vizier's nephew.

Exeunt.

Scene 2

The same.

Anice, Nureddene.

ANICE

And they all left?

NUREDDENE

Cafoor crept down and heard
The clamorous creditors; and they all left.
Ghaneem's dear mother's sick; for my sweet love
Only he came, leaving her sad bedside;
Friend Ayooob's uncle leaves today for Mecca:
In Cafoor's house there is a burial toward;
Zeb's father, Omar's brother, Hussan's wife
Are piteously struck down. There never was
So sudden an epidemic witnessed yet
In Bassora, and all with various ailments.

ANICE

This is their friendship!

NUREDDENE

We will not judge so harshly.
It may be that a generous kindly shame
Or half-remorseful delicacy had pricked them.
I've sent Harkoos to each of them in turn
For loans to help me. We shall see. Who's here?

Enter Ajebe.

Ajebe, you have come back, you only? Yes,
You were my friend and checked me always. Man
Is not ignoble, but has angel soarings,

Howe'er the nether devil plucks him down.
Still we have souls nor is the mould quite broken
Of that original and faultless plan
Which Adam spoilt.

AJEBE

I am your ruin's author.
If you have still a sword, use it upon me.

NUREDDENE

What's this?

AJEBE

Incited by the Vizier, promised
Greatness, I in my turn incited these
To hurry you to ruin. Will you slay me?

NUREDDENE (*after a silence*)

Return and tell the Vizier that work's done.
Be great with him.

AJEBE

Are you entirely ruined?

NUREDDENE

Doubt not your work's well done; you can assure
The uncle. Came you back for that?

AJEBE

If all I have, —

NUREDDENE

No more! return alive.

AJEBE

You punish home.

Exit.

NUREDDENE

The eunuch lingers.

Enter Harkoos.

Well, sir, your success?

HARKOOS

I went first to Ayooob. He has had losses, very suddenly, and is dolorous that he cannot help you.

NUREDDENE

Ghaneem?

HARKOOS

Has broken his leg for the present and cannot see anyone for a long fortnight.

NUREDDENE

Cafoor?

HARKOOS

Has gone into the country — upstairs.

NUREDDENE

Zeb?

HARKOOS

Wept sobbingly. Every time I mentioned money, he drowned the subject in tears. I might have reached his purse at last, but I cannot swim.

NUREDDENE

Omar?

HARKOOS

Will burn his books sooner than lend you money.

NUREDDENE

Did all fail me?

HARKOOS

Some had dry eyes and some wet, but none a purse.

NUREDDENE

Go.

Exit Harkoos.

What next? Shall I, like him of Athens, change
And hate my kind? Then should I hate myself,
Who ne'er had known their faults, if my own sins
Pursued me not like most unnatural hounds
Into their screened and evil parts of nature.
God made them; what He made, is doubtless good.

ANICE

You still have me.

NUREDDENE

That's much.

ANICE

No, everything.

NUREDDENE

'Tis true and I shall feel it soon.

ANICE

My jewels
And dresses will fill up quite half the void.

NUREDDENE

Shall I take back my gifts?

ANICE

If they are mine,

I choose to sell them.

NUREDDENE

Do it. I forgot;
Let Cafoor have the vase I promised him.
Come, Anice. I will ask Murad for help.

Exeunt.

Scene 3

*A room in Ajebe's house.
Balkis, Mymoona.*

BALKIS

Did he not ask after me? I'm sick, Mymoona.

MYMOONA

Sick? I think both of you are dying of a galloping consumption. Such colour in the cheeks was never a good symptom.

BALKIS

Tell him I am very, very ill; tell him I am dying. Pray be pathetic.

MYMOONA

Put saffron on your cheeks and look nicely yellow; he will melt.

BALKIS

I think my heart will break.

MYMOONA

Let it do so quickly; it will mend the sooner.

BALKIS (*in tears*)

How can you be so harsh to me, Mymoona?

MYMOONA

You foolish child! Why did you strain your power
To such a breaking tightness? There's a rhythm
Will shatter hardest stone; each thing in nature
Has its own point where it has done with patience
And starts in pieces; below that point play on it,

Nor overpitch the music. Look, he's coming.

BALKIS

I'll go.

MYMOONA (*holding her*)

You shall not.

Enter Ajebe.

AJEBE

I thought you were alone,
Mymoona. I am not cheap to thrust myself
Where I'm not wanted.

BALKIS

I would be gone, Mymoona.
In truth, I thought it was the barber's woman;
Therefore I stayed.

AJEBE

There are such hearts, Mymoona,
As think so little of adoring love,
They make it only a pedestal for pride,
A whipping-stock for their vain tyrannies.

BALKIS

Mymoona, there are men so weak in love,
They cannot bear more than an ass's load;
So high in their conceit, the tenderest
Kindest rebuke turns all their sweetness sour.

AJEBE

Some have strange ways of tenderness, Mymoona.

BALKIS

Mymoona, some think all control a tyranny.

MYMOONA

O you two children! Come, an end of this!
Give me your hand.

AJEBE

My hand? Wherefore my hand?

MYMOONA

Give it. I join two hands that much desire
And would have met ere this but for their owners,
Who have less sense than they.

BALKIS

She's stronger than me,
Or I'd not touch you.

AJEBE

I would not hurt Mymoona;
Therefore I take your hand.

MYMOONA

Oh, is it so?
Then by your foolish necks! Make your arms meet
About her waist.

AJEBE

Only to satisfy you,
Whom only I care for.

MYMOONA

Yours here on his neck.

BALKIS

I was about to yawn, therefore I raised them.

MYMOONA

I go to fetch a cane. Look that I find you

Much better friends. If you will not agree,
Your bones at least shall sympathise and ruefully.

Exit.

AJEBE

How could you be so harsh to my great love?

BALKIS

How could you be so cruel and so wicked?

AJEBE

I kiss you, but 'tis only your red lips
So soft, not you who are more hard than stone.

BALKIS

I kiss you back, but only 'tis because
I hate to be in debt.

AJEBE

Will you be kinder?

BALKIS

Will you be more obedient and renounce
Your hateful uncle?

AJEBE

Him and all his works,
If you will only smile on me.

BALKIS

I'll laugh
Like any horse. No, I surrender. Clasp me,
I am your slave.

AJEBE

My queen of love.

BALKIS

Both, both.

AJEBE

Why were you so long froward?

BALKIS

Do you remember
I had to woo you in the market? how you
Hesitated a moment?

AJEBE

Vindictive shrew!

BALKIS

This time had I not reason to be angry?

AJEBE

Oh, too much reason! I feel so vile until
I find a means to wash this uncle stain from me.

Enter Mymoona.

MYMOONA

That's well. But we must now to Nureddene's.
For hard pressed as he is, he'll sell his Anice.

BALKIS

Never!

MYMOONA

He must.

AJEBE

I'll lend him thrice her value.

MYMOONA

Do not propose it. The wound you gave's too recent.

BALKIS

Then let me keep her as a dear deposit,
The sweet security of Ajebe's loan,
Till he redeems her.

MYMOONA

He will take no favours.
No, let him sell her in the open market;
Ajebe will overtop all bids. Till he
Get means, she's safe with us and waiting for him.

BALKIS

Oh, let us go at once.

MYMOONA

I'll order litters.

Exit.

AJEBE

Will you be like this always?

BALKIS

If you are good,
I will be. If not, I will outshrew Xantippe.

AJEBE

With such a heaven and hell in view, I'll be
An angel.

BALKIS

Of what colour?

AJEBE

Black beside you,
But fair as seraphs to what I have been.

Exeunt.

Scene 4

Ibn Sawy's house.

Anice, alone.

ANICE

If Murad fails him, what is left? He has
No other thing to sell but only me.
A thought of horror! Is my love then strong
Only for joy, only to share his heaven?
Can it not enter Hell for his dear sake?
How shall I follow him then after death,
If Heaven reject him? For the path's so narrow
Footing that judgment blade, to slip's so easy.
Avert the need, O Heaven.

Enter Nureddene.

Has Murad failed him?

NUREDDENE

Murad refuses. This load of debt's a torture!

ANICE

The dresses and the gems you made me keep —

NUREDDENE

Keep them; they are your own.

ANICE

I am your slavegirl.

My body and what it wears, all I am, all I have,
Are only for your use.

ANICE

But there was a condition.

NUREDDENE

If you desired it!

ANICE

Do I not ask you?

NUREDDENE

Speak truth! do you desire it?
Truth, in the name of God who sees your heart!
Ah, you are silent.

ANICE (*weeping*)

How could I desire it?
Ajebe is here. Be friends with him, dear love;
Forgive his fault.

NUREDDENE

Anice, my own sins are
So heavy, not to forgive his lesser vileness
Would leave me without hope of heavenly pardon.

ANICE

I'll call him then.

Exit.

NUREDDENE

Let me absolve these debts,
Then straight with Anice to Bagdad the splendid.
There is the home for hearts and brains and hands,
Not in this petty centre. Core of Islam,
Bagdad, the flood to which all brooks converge.

Anice returns with Ajebe, Balkis, Mymoona.

AJEBE
Am I forgiven?

NUREDDENE
Ajebe, let the past
Have never been.

AJEBE
You are Ibn Sawy's son.

NUREDDENE
Give me your counsel, Ajebe. I have nothing
But the mere house which is not saleable.
My father must not find a homeless Bassora,
Returning.

MYMOONA
Nothing else?

ANICE
Only myself
Whom he'll not sell.

MYMOONA
He must.

NUREDDENE
Never, Mymoona.

MYMOONA
Fear not the sale which shall be in name alone.
'Tis only Balkis borrowing her from you
Who pawns her value. She will stay with me
Serving our Balkis, safe from every storm.
But if you ask, why then the mart and auction?
We must have public evidence of sale
To meet an uncle's questions.

ANICE

O now there's light.

Blessed Mymoona!

NUREDDENE

It must not be. My oath!

ANICE

But I desire it now, yes, I desire it.

NUREDDENE

And is my pride then nothing? Shall I sell her
To be a slavegirl's slavegirl? Pardon, Balkis.

MYMOONA

Too fine, too fine!

ANICE

To serve awhile my sister!

For that she is in heart.

BALKIS

Serve only in name.

MYMOONA

She will be safe while you rebuild your fortunes.

NUREDDENE

I do not like it.

MYMOONA

Nor does anyone

As in itself, but only as a refuge
From greater evils.

NUREDDENE

Oh, you're wrong, Mymoona.

To quibble with an oath! it will not prosper.
Straight dealing's best.

MYMOONA

You look at it too finely.

NUREDDENE

Have it your way, then.

MYMOONA

Call the broker here.

A quiet sale! The uncle must not hear of it.

AJEBE

'Twould be the plague.

NUREDDENE

I fear it will not prosper.

Exeunt.

Scene 5

The slave-market.

Muazzim with Anice exposed for sale; Ajebe, Aziz, Abdullah and Merchants.

MUZZIM

Who bids?

AZIZ

Four thousand.

MUZZIM

She went for ten when she was here first. Will you not raise your bid nearer her value?

AZIZ

She was new then and untouched. 'Tis the way with goods, broker; they lose value by time and purchase, use and soiling.

MUZZIM

Oh, sir, the kissed mouth has always honey. But this is a Peri and immortal lips have an immortal sweetness.

AJEBE

Five hundred to that bid.

Enter Almuene with Slaves.

ALMUENE (*to himself*)

Ah, it is true! All things come round at last
With the full wheel of Fate; it is my hour.
Fareed shall have her. She shall be well handled
To plague her lover's heart before he dies.

(*aloud*)

Broker, who sells the girl and what's her rate?

AJEBE

All's lost.

MUAZZIM

Nureddene bin Alfazzal bin Sawy sells her and your nephew has bid for her four thousand and five hundred.

ALMUENE

My nephew bids for me. Who bids against?

AJEBE

Uncle —

ALMUENE

Go, find out other slavegirls, Ajebe.
Do well until the end.

Exit Ajebe.

Who bids against me?

She's mine then. Come.

ANICE

I'll not be sold to you.

ALMUENE

What, dar'st thou speak, young harlot? Fear the whip.

ANICE

Vizier, I fear you not; there's law in Islam.
My master will deny the sale.

ALMUENE

Thy master
Shall be a kitchen negro, who shall use thee.

ANICE

Had I a whip, you should not say it twice.

MUAZZIM

Vizier, Vizier, by law the owner's acceptance only is final for the sale.

ALMUENE

It is a form, but get it. I am impatient
Until I have this strumpet in my grip.

MUAZZIM

Well, here he comes.

Enter Nureddene and Ajebe.

A MERCHANT

Shall we go, shall we go?

ABDULLAH

Stand by! 'Tis noble Ibn Sawy's son.
We must protect him even at our own peril.

MUAZZIM

She goes for a trifle, sir; and even that little you will not get. You will weary your feet with journeyings, only to be put off by his villains, and when you grow clamorous they will demand your order and tear it before your eyes. That's your payment.

NUREDDENE

That's nothing. The wolf's cub, hunchback Fareed!
The sale is off.

MUAZZIM

Be advised by me. Catch the girl by the hair and cuff her soundly, abusing her with the harshest terms your heart can consent to, then off with her quickly as if you had brought her to market only to execute an oath made in anger. So he loses his hold on her.

NUREDDENE

I'll tell the lie. One fine, pure-seeming falsehood,
Admitted, opens door to all his naked
And leprous family; in, in, they throng
And breed the house quite full.

MUAZZIM

The Vizier wants her.

He bids four thousand pieces and five hundred.

NUREDDENE

'Tis nothing. Girl, I keep my oath. Suffice it
You're bidden for and priced in open market here.
Come home! Be now less dainty, meeker of tongue,
Or you shall have more feeling punishments.
Do I need to sell thee? Home! my oath is kept.

ALMUENE

This is a trick to cheat the law. Thou ruffian!
Cheap profligate! What hast thou left to sell
But thy own sensual filth and drunken body,—
If any out of charity would spend
Some dirhams to reform thee with a scourge?
Vile son of a bland hypocrite!

He draws his scimitar.

ABDULLAH

Pause, Vizier.

AZIZ

Be patient, Nureddene.

ALMUENE

I yet shall kill him.

Hence, harlot, foot before me to my kitchen.

ANICE

He has abused me filthily, my lord,
Before these merchants.

ALMUENE

Abuse thee, rag? Hast thou
An use? To be abused is thy utility.
Thou shalt be used and common.

NUREDDENE

Stand by, you merchants; let none interfere
On peril of his life. Thou foul-mouthed tyrant,
Into the mire and dirt, where thou wert gendered!

ALMUENE

Help, help! Hew him in pieces.

The slaves are rushing forward.

ABDULLAH

What do you, fellows?

This is a Vizier and a Vizier's son.
Shall common men step in? You'll get the blows
For only thanks.

ALMUENE

Oh! oh! Will you then kill me?

NUREDDENE

If thou wouldst live, crave pardon of the star
Thou hast spat on. I would make thee lick her feet
But that thy lips would foul their purity.

ALMUENE

Pardon, oh, pardon!

NUREDDENE (*throwing him away*)

Live then, in thy gutter.

Exit with Anice.

ABDULLAH

Go, slaves, lift up your master, lead him off.

Exeunt Slaves with Almuene.

He is well punished.

AZIZ

What will come of this?

ABDULLAH

No good to Nureddene. Let's go and warn him;
He's bold and proud, may think to face it out,
Which were mere waiting death.

AZIZ

I pray on us

This falls not.

Exeunt Merchants.

MUAZZIM

Here was ill-luck!

AJEBE

Nor ends with this.

I'll have a ship wide-sailed and well-provisioned
For their escape. Bassora will not hold them.

Exeunt.

Scene 6

The Palace at Bassora.
Alzayni, Salar.

ALZAYNI

So it is written here. Hot interchange
And high defiance have already passed
Between our Caliph and the daring Roman.
Europe and Asia are at grips once more.
To inspect the southward armies unawares
Haroun himself is coming.

SALAR

Alfazzal then

Returns to us, unless the European,
After their barbarous fashion, seize on him.

ALZAYNI

'Tis strange, he sends no tidings of the motion
I made to Egypt.

SALAR

'Tis too dangerous

To write of, as indeed 'twas ill-advised
To make the approach.

ALZAYNI

Great dangers justify

The smaller. Caliph Alrasheed conceives
On trifling counts a dumb displeasure towards me
Which any day may speak; 'tis whispered of
In Bagdad. Alkhasib, the Egyptian Vizier,

Is in like plight. It is mere policy,
 Salar, to build out of a common peril
 A common safety.

SALAR

Haroun Alrasheed
 Could break each one of you between two fingers,
 Stretching his left arm out to Bassora,
 His right to Egypt. Sultan, wilt thou strive
 Against the single giant of the world?

ALZAYNI

Giants are mortal, friend, be but our swords
 As bold as sharp. Call Murad here to me.

Exit Salar.

My state is desperate, if Haroun lives;
 He's sudden and deadly, when his anger bursts.
 But let me be more sudden, yet more deadly.

Enter Murad.

Murad, the time draws near. The Caliph comes
 To Bassora; let him not thence return.

MURAD

My blade is sharp and what I do is sudden.

ALZAYNI

My gallant Turk! Thou shalt rise high, believe it.
 For I need men like thee.

MURAD (*to himself*)

But Kings like thee

Earth needs not.

VOICE WITHOUT

Justice! justice! justice, King!
 King of the Age, I am a man much wronged.

ALZAYNI

Who cries beneath my window? Chamberlain!

Enter Sunjar.

SUNJAR

An Arab daubed with mud and dirt, all battered,
Unrecognizable, with broken lips cries out
For justice.

ALZAYNI

Bring him here.

Exit Sunjar.

It is some brawl.

Enter Sunjar with Almuene.

Thou, Vizier! Who has done this thing to thee?

ALMUENE

Mohamad, son of Sulyman! Sultan
Alzayni! Abbasside! how shalt thou long
Have friends, if the King's enemies may slay
In daylight, here, in open Bassora
The King's best friends because they love the King?

ALZAYNI

Name them at once and choose their punishment.

ALMUENE

Alfazzal's son, that brutal profligate,
Has done this.

MURAD

Nureddene!

ALZAYNI

Upon what quarrel?

ALMUENE

A year ago Alfazzal bought a slavegirl
 With the King's money for the King, a gem
 Of beauty, learning, mind, fit for a Caliph.
 But seeing the open flower he thought perhaps
 Your royal nose too base to smell at it,
 So gave her to his royaller darling son
 To soil and rumple. No man with a neck
 Dared tell you of it, such your faith was in him.

ALZAYNI

Is't so? our loved and trusted Ibn Sawy!

ALMUENE

This profligate squandering away his wealth
 Brought her to market; there I saw her and bid
 Her fair full price. Whereat he stormed at me
 With words unholy; yet I answered mild,
 "My son, not for myself, but the King's service
 I need her." He with bold and furious looks,
 "Dog, Vizier of a dog, I void on thee
 And on thy Sultan." With which blasphemy
 He seized me, rolled in the mire, battered with blows,
 Kicks, pullings of the beard, then dragged me back
 And flung me at his slavegirl's feet, who, proud
 Of her bold lover, footed my grey head
 Repeatedly and laughed, "This for thy King,
 Thy dingy stingy King who with so little
 Would buy a slavegirl sole in all the world."

SUNJAR

Great Hasheem's vein cords all the Sultan's forehead.

MURAD

The dog has murdered both of them with lies.

ALZAYNI

Now by the Prophet, my forefather! Out,
Murad! drag here the fellow and his girl;
Trail them with ropes tied to their bleeding heels,
Their faces in the mire, with pinioned hands
Behind their backs, into my presence here.
Sack Sawy's mansion, raze it to the ground.
What, am I grown so bare that by-lane dogs
Like these so loudly bay at me? They die!

MURAD

Sultan, —

ALZAYNI

He's doomed who speaks a word for them.

Exit.

ALMUENE

Brother-in-law Murad, fetch your handsome brother.
Soon, lest the Sultan hear of it!

MURAD

Vizier,

I know my duty. Know your own and do it.

ALMUENE

I'll wash, then forth in holiday attire
To see that pretty sport.

Exit.

SUNJAR

What will you do?

MURAD

Sunjar, a something swift and desperate.
I will not let them die.

SUNJAR

Run not on danger.
I'll send a runner hotfoot to their house
To warn them.

Exit Sunjar.

MURAD

Do so. What will Doonya say
When she hears this? How will her laughing eyes
Be clouded and brim over! Till Haroun comes!

Exit.

Scene 7

*Ibn Sawy's house.
Nureddene, Anice.*

NUREDDENE
'Tis Sunjar warns us, he who always loved
Our father.

ANICE
Oh, my lord, make haste and flee.

NUREDDENE
Whither and how? But come.

Enter Ajebe.

AJEBE
Quick, Nureddene.
I have a ship all ready for Bagdad,
Sails bellying with fair wind, the pilot's hand
Upon the wheel, the captain on the deck,
You only wanting. Flee then to Bagdad
And at the mighty Haroun's hand require
Justice upon these tyrants. Oh, delay not.

NUREDDENE
O friend! But do me one more service, Ajebe.
Pay the few creditors unsatisfied;
My father will absolve me when he comes.

AJEBE
That's early done. And take my purse. No fumbling,
I will not be denied.

NUREDDENE

Bagdad! (*laughing*) Why, Anice,
Our dream comes true; we hobnob with the Caliph!

Exeunt.

Act IV

Bagdad.

Scene 1

The gardens of the Caliph's Palace outside the Pavilion of Pleasure.

Anice, Nureddene.

ANICE

This is Bagdad!

NUREDDENE

Bagdad the beautiful,
The city of delight. How green these gardens!
What a sweet clamour pipes among the trees.

ANICE

And flowers! the flowers! Look at those violets
Dark-blue like burning sulphur! Oh, rose and myrtle
And gilliflower and lavender; anemones
As red as blood! All Spring walks here in blossoms
And strews the pictured ground.

NUREDDENE

Do you see the fruit,
Anice? camphor and almond-apricots,
Green, white and purple figs and these huge grapes,
Round rubies or quite purple-black, that ramp
O'er wall and terrace; plums almost as smooth
As your own damask cheek. These balls of gold

Are lemons, Anice, do you think? Look, cherries,
And mid these fair pink-budded orange-blossoms
Rare glints of fruit.

ANICE

That was a blackbird whistled.
How the doves moan! It's full of cooing turtles.
Oh see, the tawny bulbuls calling sweetly
And winging! What a flutter of scarlet tails!
If it were dark, a thousand nightingales
Would surely sing together. How glad I am
That we were driven out of Bassora!

NUREDDENE

And this pavilion with its crowd of windows?
Are there not quite a hundred?

ANICE

Do you see
The candelabrum pendent from the ceiling?
A blaze of gold!

NUREDDENE

Each window has a lamp.
Night in these gardens must be bright as day.
To find the master now! Here we could rest
And ask our way to the great Caliph, Anice.

Enter Shaikh Ibrahim from behind.

IBRAHIM

So, so! so, so! Cavalier servente with your bona roba! You do
not know then of the Caliph's order forbidding entry into his
gardens? No? I will proclaim it, then, with a palmstick about
your pretty back quarters. Will I not? Hoh!

*He advances stealthily with stick raised.
Nureddene and Anice turn towards him; he drops
the stick and remains with arm lifted.*

NUREDDENE

Here is a Shaikh of the gardens. Whose garden is this, friend?

ANICE

Is the poor man out of the use of his wits? He stares open-mouthed.

IBRAHIM

Glory to Allah who made you! Glory to the angel who brought you down on earth! Glory to myself who am permitted to look upon you! I give glory to Allah for your beauty, O people of Paradise!

NUREDDENE (*smiling*)

Rather give glory to Him because he has given thee a fine old age and this long silvery beard. But are we permitted in this garden? The gate was not bolted.

IBRAHIM

This garden? My garden? Yes, my son; yes, my daughter. It is the fairer for your feet; never before did such flowers bloom there.

NUREDDENE

What, is it thine? And this pavilion?

IBRAHIM

All mine, my son. By the grace of Allah to a poor sinful old man. 'Tis by His election, my son, and divine ordination and sanctification, and a little by the power of my prostrations and lustrations which I neglect not, neither morning nor noon nor evening nor at any of the intervals by the law commanded.

NUREDDENE

When did you buy or lay it out, old father?

IBRAHIM

A grand-aunt left it to me. Wonder not, for she was indeed aunt's grandmother to a cousin of the sister-in-law of the Caliph.

NUREDDENE

Oh then indeed! she had the right divine to be wealthy. But I trust thou hast good doctrinal justification for inheriting after her?

IBRAHIM

I would not accept the Caliphate by any other. O my son, hanker not unlawfully after perishable earthly goods; for, verily, they are a snare and verily, verily, they entrap the feet of the soul as it toileth over the straight rough road to Heaven.

ANICE

But, old father, are you rich and go so poorly robed? Were I mistress of such a garden, I would float about it in damask and crimson and velvet; silk and satin should be my meanest apparel.

IBRAHIM (*aside*)

She has a voice like a blackbird's! O angel Gabriel, increase this unto me. I will not quarrel with thee though all Houridom break loose on my garden; for their gates thou hast a little opened. (*aloud*) Fie, my daughter! I take refuge with Allah. I am a poor sinful old man on the brink of the grave, what should I do with robes and coloured raiment? But they would hang well on thee. Praise the Lord who has given thee hips like the moon and a waist indeed! a small, seizable waist, Allah forgive me!

ANICE

We are weary, old father; we hunger and thirst.

IBRAHIM

Oh, my son! Oh, my daughter! you put me to shame. Come in, come in; this my pavilion is yours and there is within it plenty of food and drink, — such innocent things now as sherbet and pure kind water. But as for wine, that accursèd thing, it is forbidden by the Prophet, whose name is a benediction. Come in, come in. Allah curse him that giveth not to the guest and the stranger.

NUREDDENE

It is indeed thine? we may enter?

IBRAHIM

Allah! Allah! its floor yearns for thy beauty and for the fair feet of thy sister. If there were youth now instead of poor venerable me, would one not kiss the marble wherever her fair small feet will touch it? But I praise Allah that I am an old man with my thoughts turned to chastity and holiness.

NUREDDENE

Come, Anice.

IBRAHIM (*walking behind them*)

Allah! Allah! she is a gazelle that springeth. Allah! Allah! the swan in my lake waddeth less perfectly. She is as a willow when the wind swayeth it. Allah! Allah!

Exeunt to the pavilion.

Scene 2

The Pavilion of Pleasure.

Anice, Nureddene, Shaikh Ibrahim on couches, by a table set with dishes.

NUREDDENE

These kabobs are indeed good, and the conserves look sweet and the fruit very glossy. But will you sit and eat nothing?

IBRAHIM

Verily, my son, I have eaten at midday. Allah forbid me from gluttony!

ANICE

Old father, you discourage our stomachs. You shall eat a morsel from my fingers or I will say you use me hardly.

IBRAHIM

No, no, no, no. Ah well, from your fingers, from your small slim rosy fingers. Allah! Only a bit, only a morsel; verily, verily! Allah! surely thy fingers are sweeter than honey. I could eat them with kisses.

ANICE

What, old father, you grow young?

IBRAHIM

Oh, now, now, now! 'Twas a foolish jest unworthy of my grey hairs. I take refuge with Allah! A foolish jest.

NUREDDENE

But, my aged host, it is dry eating without wine. Have you never a flagon in all this palace? It is a blot, a blot on its fair perfection.

IBRAHIM

I take refuge with Allah. Wine! for sixteen years I have not touched the evil thing. When I was young indeed! ah well, when I was young. But 'tis forbidden. What saith Ibn Batata? That wine worketh transmogrification. And Ibrahim Alhashhash bin Fuzfuz bin Bierbiloon al Sandilani of Bassora, he rateth wine sorely and averreth that the red glint of it is the shine of the red fires of Hell, its sweetness kisseth damnation and the coolness of it in the throat causeth bifurcation. Ay, verily, the great Alhashhash.

ANICE

Who are these learned doctors you speak of, old father? I have read all the books, but never heard of them.

IBRAHIM

Oh, thou hast read? These are very distant and mystic Sufis, very rare doctors. Their books are known only to the adepts.

ANICE

What a learned old man art thou, Shaikh Ibrahim! Now Allah save the soul of the great Alhashhash!

IBRAHIM

Hm! 'Tis so. Wine! Verily, the Prophet hath cursed grower and presser, buyer and seller, carrier and drinker. I take refuge with Allah from the curse of the Prophet.

NUREDDENE

Hast thou not even one old ass among all thy belongings? And if an old ass is cursed, is it thou who art cursed?

IBRAHIM

Hm! My son, what is thy parable?

NUREDDENE

I will show you a trick to cheat the devil. Give three denars of mine to a neighbour's servant with a dirham or two for his

trouble, let him buy the wine and clap it on an old ass, and let the old ass bring it here. So art thou neither grower nor presser, seller nor buyer, carrier nor drinker, and if any be damned, it is an old ass that is damned. What saith the great Alhashhash?

IBRAHIM

Hm! Well, I will do it. (*aside*) Now I need not let them know that there is wine galore in my cupboards, Allah forgive me!

Exit.

NUREDDENE

He is the very gem of hypocrites.

ANICE

The fitter to laugh at. Dear my lord, be merry
Tonight, if only for tonight. Let care
Expect tomorrow.

NUREDDENE

You are happy, Anice?

ANICE

I feel as if I could do nothing else
But laugh through life's remainder. You're safe, safe
And that grim devil baffled. Oh, you're safe!

NUREDDENE

It was a breathless voyage up the river.
I think a price is on my head. Perhaps
Our helpers suffer.

ANICE

But you are safe, my joy,
My darling.

She goes to him and kisses and clings about him.

NUREDDENE

Anice, your eyes are full of tears!
You are quite overwrought.

ANICE

Let only you be safe
And all the world beside entirely perish.
My love! my master!

*She again embraces and kisses him
repeatedly. Shaikh Ibrahim returns
with the wine and glasses in a tray.*

IBRAHIM

Allah! Allah! Allah!

ANICE

Where's that old sober learning?
I want to dance, to laugh, to outriot riot.
Oh, here he is.

NUREDDENE

What a quick ass was this, Shaikh Ibrahim!

IBRAHIM

No, no, the wineshop is near, very near. Allah forgive us, ours
is an evil city, this Bagdad; it is full of winebibbers and gluttons
and liars.

NUREDDENE

Dost thou ever lie, Shaikh Ibrahim?

IBRAHIM

Allah forbid! Above all sins I abhor lying and liars. O my son,
keep thy young lips from vain babbling and unnecessary lying.
It is of the unpardonable sins, it is the way to Jahannam. But I
pray thee what is this young lady to thee, my son?

NUREDDENE

She is my slavegirl.

IBRAHIM

Ah, ah! thy slavegirl? Ah, ah! a slavegirl! ah!

ANICE

Drink, my lord.

NUREDDENE (*drinking*)

By the Lord, but I am sleepy. I will even rest my head in thy sweet lap for a moment.

He lies down.

IBRAHIM

Allah! Allah! What, he sleeps?

ANICE

Fast. That is the trick he always serves me. After the first cup he dozes off and leaves me quite sad and lonely.

IBRAHIM

Why, why, why, little one! Thou art not alone and why shouldst thou be sad? I am here, — old Shaikh Ibrahim; I am here.

ANICE

I will not be sad, if you will drink with me.

IBRAHIM

Fie, fie, fie!

ANICE

By my head and eyes!

IBRAHIM

Well, well, well! Alas, 'tis a sin, 'tis a sin, 'tis a sin. (*drinks*) Verily, verily.

ANICE

Another.

IBRAHIM

No, no, no.

ANICE

By my head and eyes!

IBRAHIM

Well, well, well, well! 'Tis a grievous sin, Allah forgive me!
(*drinks*)

ANICE

Just one more.

IBRAHIM

Does he sleep? Now if it were the wine of thy lips, little one!

ANICE

Old father, old father! Is this thy sanctity and the chastity of thee and thy averseness to frivolity? To flirt with light-minded young hussies like me! Where is thy sanctification? Where is thy justification? Where is thy predestination? O mystic, thou art bifurked with an evil bifurcation. Woe's me for the great Alhashhash!

IBRAHIM

No, no, no.

ANICE

Art thou such a hypocrite? Shaikh Ibrahim! Shaikh Ibrahim!

IBRAHIM

No, no, no! A fatherly jest! a little little jest! (*drinks*)

NUREDDENE (*starting up*)

Shaikh Ibrahim, thou drinkest?

IBRAHIM

Oh! ah! 'Twas thy slavegirl forced me. Verily, verily!

NUREDDENE

Anice! Anice! Why wilt thou pester him? Wilt thou pluck down his old soul from heaven? Fie! draw the wine this side of the table. I pledge you, my heart.

ANICE

To you, my dear one.

NUREDDENE

You have drunk half your cup only; so, again; to Shaikh Ibrahim and his learned sobriety!

ANICE

To the shade of the great Alhashhash!

IBRAHIM

Fie on you! What cursed unneighbourly manners are these, to drink in my face and never pass the bowl?

ANICE AND NUREDDENE (*together*)

Shaikh Ibrahim! Shaikh Ibrahim! Shaikh Ibrahim!

IBRAHIM

Never cry out at me. You are a Hour and she is a Houri come down from Heaven to ensnare my soul. Let it be ensnared! 'Tis not worth one beam from under your eyelids. Hour, I will embrace thee; I will kiss thee, Houri.

NUREDDENE

Embrace not, Shaikh Ibrahim, neither kiss, for thy mouth smelleth evilly of that accursed thing, wine. I am woeful for the mystic Alhashhash.

ANICE

Art thou transmogrified, O Sufi, O adept, O disciple of Ibn Batata?

IBRAHIM

Laugh, laugh! laughter is on your beauty like the sunlight on the fair minarets of Mazinderan the beautiful. Give me a cup. (*drinks*) You are sinners and I will sin with you. I will sin hard, my beauties. (*drinks*)

ANICE

Come now, I will sing to you, if you will give me a lute. I am a rare singer, Shaikh Ibrahim.

IBRAHIM (*drinks*)

There is a lute in yonder corner. Sing, sing, and it may be I will answer thee. (*drinks*)

ANICE

But wait, wait. To sing in this meagreness of light! Candles, candles!

She lights the eighty candles of the great candelabrum.

IBRAHIM (*drinks*)

Allah! it lights thee up, my slavegirl, my jewel. (*drinks*)

NUREDDENE

Drink not so fast, Shaikh Ibrahim, but get up and light the lamps in the windows.

IBRAHIM (*drinks*)

Sin not thou by troubling the coolness of wine in my throat. Light them, light them but not more than two.

Nureddene goes out lighting the lamps one by one and returns in the same way.

Meanwhile Shaikh Ibrahim drinks.

IBRAHIM

Allah! hast thou lit them all?

ANICE

Shaikh Ibrahim, drunkenness sees but double, and dost thou see eighty-four? Thou art far gone in thy cups, O adept, O Ibn Batatist.

IBRAHIM

I am not yet so drunk as that. You are bold youths to light them all.

NUREDDENE

Whom fearest thou? Is not the pavilion thine?

IBRAHIM

Surely mine; but the Caliph dwells near and he will be angry at the glare of so much light.

NUREDDENE

Truly, he is a great Caliph.

IBRAHIM

Great enough, great enough. There might have been greater, if Fate had willed it. But 'tis the decree of Allah. Some He raiseth to be Caliphs and some He turneth into gardeners. (*drinks*)

ANICE

I have found a lute.

NUREDDENE

Give it me. Hear me improvise, Old Sobriety. (*sings*)

Saw you Shaikh Ibrahim, the grave old man?

Allah! Allah! I saw him drunk and drinking.

What was he doing when the dance began?

He was winking; verily, verily, he was winking.

IBRAHIM

Fie! what cobbler's poetry is this? But thou hast a touch. Let me hear thee rather.

ANICE

I have a song for you. (*sings*)

White as winter is my beard,
All my face with wrinkles weird,
 Yet I drink.
Hell-fire? judgment? who's afraid?
Ibrahim would kiss a maid
 As soon as think.

IBRAHIM

Allah! Allah! Nightingale! nightingale!

Curtain

Scene 3

*The Gardens, outside the Pavilion.
Haroun, Mesrour.*

HAROUN
See, Mesrour, the Pavilion's all alight.
'Tis as I said. Where is the Barmeky?

MESROUR
The Vizier comes, my lord.

Enter Jaafar.

JAAFAR
Peace be with thee,
Commander of the Faithful.

HAROUN
Where is peace,
Thou faithless and usurping Vizier? Hast thou
Filched my Bagdad out of my hands, thou rebel,
And told me nothing?

JAAFAR
What words are these, O Caliph?

HAROUN
What mean these lights then? Does another Caliph
Hold revel in my Palace of all Pleasure,
While Haroun lives and holds the sword?

JAAFAR (*to himself*)

What Djinn

Plays me this antic?

HAROUN

I am waiting, Vizier.

JAAFAR

Shaikh Ibrahim, my lord, petitioned me,
On circumcision of his child, for use
Of the pavilion. Lord, it had escaped
My memory; I now remember it.

HAROUN

Doubly thou erredst, Jaafar; for thou gavest him
No money, which was the significance
Of his request, neither wouldst suffer me
To help my servant. We will enter, Vizier,
And hear the grave Faqeers discoursing there
Of venerable things. The Shaikh's devout
And much affects their reverend company.
We too shall profit by that holy talk
Which arms us against sin and helps to heaven.

JAAFAR (*to himself*)

Helps to the plague! (*aloud*) Commander of the Faithful,
Your mighty presence will disturb their peace
With awe or quell their free unhampered spirits.

HAROUN

At least I'd see them.

MESROUR

From this tower, my lord,
We can look straight into the whole pavilion.

HAROUN

Mesrou, well thought of!

JAAFAR (*aside, to Mesrour*)

A blister spoil thy tongue!

MESROUR (*aside, to Jaafar*)

I'll head you, Jaafar.

HAROUN (*listening*)

Is not that a lute?

A lute at such a grave and reverend meeting!

Shaikh Ibrahim sings within.

Chink-a-chunk-a-chink!

We will kiss and drink,

And be merry, O very very merry.

For your eyes are bright

Even by candle light

And your lips as red as the red round cherry.

HAROUN

Now by the Prophet! by my great forefathers!

He rushes into the tower followed by Mesrour.

JAAFAR

May the devil fly away with Shaikh Ibrahim and drop him upon
a hill of burning brimstone!

*He follows the Caliph, who now appears with
Mesrour on the platform of the tower.*

HAROUN

Ho, Jaafar, see this godly ceremony

Thou gav'st permission for, and these fair Faqeers.

JAAFAR

Shaikh Ibrahim has utterly deceived me.

HAROUN

The aged hypocrite! Who are this pair

Of heavenly faces? Was there then such beauty
In my Bagdad, yet Haroun's eyes defrauded
Of seeing it?

JAAFAR

The girl takes up the lute.

HAROUN

Now if she play and sing divinely, Jaafar,
You shall be hanged alone for your offence,
If badly, all you four shall swing together.

JAAFAR

I hope she will play vilely.

HAROUN

Wherefore, Jaafar?

JAAFAR

I ever loved good company, my lord,
And would not tread my final road alone.

HAROUN

No, when thou goest that road, my faithful servant,
Well do I hope that we shall walk together.

ANICE (*within*)

Song

King of my heart, wilt thou adore me,
Call me goddess, call me thine?
I too will bow myself before thee
As in a shrine.
Till we with mutual adoration
And holy earth-defeating passion
Do really grow divine.

HAROUN

The mighty Artist shows his delicate cunning
Utterly in this fair creature. I will talk
With the rare couple.

JAAFAR

Not in your own dread person,
Or fear will make them dumb.

HAROUN

I'll go disguised.
Are there not voices by the river, Jaafar?
Fishermen, I would wager. My commands
Are well obeyed in my Bagdad, O Vizier!
But I have seen too much beauty and cannot now
Remember to be angry. Come, descend.

As they descend, enter Kareem.

KAREEM

Here's a fine fat haul! O my jumpers! my little beauties! O your
fine white bellies! What a joke, to catch the Caliph's own fish
and sell them to him at thrice their value!

HAROUN

Who art thou?

KAREEM

O Lord, 'tis the Caliph himself! I am a dead fisherman. (*falling
flat*) O Commander of the Faithful! Alas, I am an honest fisher-
man.

HAROUN

Dost thou lament thy honesty?
What fish hast thou?

KAREEM

Only a few whitebait and one or two minnows. Poor thin rogues,
all of them! They are not fit for the Caliph's honourable stomach.

HAROUN

Show me thy basket, man.
Are these thy whitebait and thy two thin minnows?

KAREEM

Alas, sir, 'tis because I am honest.

HAROUN

Give me thy fish.

KAREEM

Here they are, here they are, my lord!

HAROUN

Out! the whole basket, fellow.
Do I eat live fish, you thrust them in my face?
And now exchange thy outer dress with me.

KAREEM

My dress? Well, you may have it; I am liberal as well as honest.
But 'tis a good gaberdine; I pray you, be careful of it.

HAROUN

Woe to thee, fellow! What's this filthiness
Thou callst a garment?

KAREEM

O sir, when you have worn it ten days, the filth will come easy
to you and, as one may say, natural. And 'tis honest filth; it will
keep you warm in winter.

HAROUN

What, shall I wear thy gaberdine so long?

KAREEM

Commander of the Faithful! since you are about to leave
kingcraft and follow an honest living for the good of your soul,

you may wear worse than an honest fisherman's gaberdine. 'Tis a good craft and an honourable.

HAROUN

Off with thee. In my dress thou'lt find a purse
Crammed full of golden pieces. It is thine.

KAREEM

Glory to Allah! This comes of being honest.

Exit.

JAAFAR (*coming up*)

Who's this? Ho, Kareem! wherefore here tonight?
The Caliph's in the garden. You'll be thrashed
And very soundly, fisher.

HAROUN

Jaafar, 'tis I.

JAAFAR

The Caliph!

HAROUN

Now to fry these fish and enter.

JAAFAR

Give them to me. I am a wondrous cook.

HAROUN

No, by the Prophet! My two lovely friends
Shall eat a Caliph's cookery tonight.

Exeunt.

Scene 4

Inside the Pavilion.

Nureddene, Anice, Shaikh Ibrahim.

NUREDDENE

Shaikh Ibrahim, verily, thou art drunk.

IBRAHIM

Alas, alas, my dear son, my own young friend! I am damned, verily, verily, I am damned. Ah, my sweet lovely young father! Ah, my pious learned white-bearded mother! That they could see their son now, their pretty little son! But they are in their graves; they are in their cold, cold, cold graves.

NUREDDENE

Oh, thou art most pathetically drunk. Sing, Anice.

OUTSIDE

Fish! fish! sweet fried fish!

ANICE

Fish! Shaikh Ibrahim, Shaikh Ibrahim! hearest thou? We have a craving for fish.

IBRAHIM

'Tis Satan in thy little stomach who calleth hungrily for sweet fried fish. Silence, thou preposterous devil!

ANICE

Fie, Shaikh, is my stomach outside me, under the window? Call him in.

IBRAHIM

Ho! ho! come in, Satan! come in, thou brimstone fisherman. Let us see thy long tail.

Enter Haroun.

ANICE

What fish have you, good fisherman?

HAROUN

I have very honest good fish, my sweet lady, and I have fried them for you with my own hand. These fish, — why, all I can say of them is, they are fish. But they are well fried.

NUREDDENE

Set them on a plate. What wilt thou have for them?

HAROUN

Why, for such faces as you have, I will honestly ask nothing.

NUREDDENE

Then wilt thou dishonestly ask for a trifle more than they are worth. Swallow me these denars.

HAROUN

Now Allah give thee a beard! for thou art a generous youth.

ANICE

Fie, fisherman, what a losing blessing is this, to kill the thing for which thou blessest him! If Allah give him a beard, he will be no longer a youth, and for the generosity, it will be Allah's.

HAROUN

Art thou as witty as beautiful?

ANICE

By Allah, that am I. I tell thee very modestly that there is not my equal from China to Frangistan.

HAROUN

Thou sayest no more than truth.

NUREDDENE

What is your name, fisherman?

HAROUN

I call myself Kareem and, in all honesty, when I fish, 'tis for the Caliph.

IBRAHIM

Who talks of the Caliph? Dost thou speak of the Caliph Haroun or the Caliph Ibrahim?

HAROUN

I speak of *the* Caliph, Haroun the Just, the great and only Caliph.

IBRAHIM

Oh, Haroun? He is fit only to be a gardener, a poor witless fellow without brains to dress himself with, yet Allah hath made him Caliph. While there are others — but 'tis no use talking. A very profligate tyrant, this Haroun! He has debauched half the women in Bagdad and will debauch the other half, if they let him live. Besides, he cuts off a man's head when the nose on it does not please him. A very pestilence of a tyrant!

HAROUN

Now Allah save him!

IBRAHIM

Nay, let Allah save his soul if He will and if 'tis worth saving; but I fear me 'twill be a tough job for Allah. If it were not for my constant rebukes and admonitions and predications and pestrigiddi — prestigidgidi — what the plague! pestidigitations; and some slaps and cuffs, of which I pray you speak very low, he

would be worse even than he is. Well, well, even Allah blunders; verily, verily!

ANICE

Wilt thou be Caliph, Shaikh Ibrahim?

IBRAHIM

Yes, my jewel, and thou shalt be my Zobeidah. And we will tipple, beauty, we will tipple.

HAROUN

And Haroun?

IBRAHIM

I will be generous and make him my under-kitchen-gardener's second vice-sub-under-assistant. I would gladly give him a higher post, but, verily, he is not fit.

HAROUN (*laughing*)

What an old treasonous rogue art thou, Shaikh Ibrahim!

IBRAHIM

What? who? Thou art not Satan, but Kareem the fisherman? Didst thou say I was drunk, thou supplier of naughty houses? Verily, I will tug thee by the beard, for thou liest. Verily, verily!

NUREDDENE

Shaikh Ibrahim! Shaikh Ibrahim!

IBRAHIM

Nay, if thou art the angel Gabriel and forbiddest me, let be; but I hate lying and liars.

NUREDDENE

Fisherman, is thy need here over?

HAROUN

I pray you, let me hear this young lady sing; for indeed 'twas the sweet voice of her made me fry fish for you.

NUREDDENE

Oblige the good fellow, Anice; he has a royal face for his fishing.

IBRAHIM

Sing! 'tis I will sing: there is no voice like mine in Bagdad. (*sings*)

When I was a young man,
I'd a very good plan;
Every maid that I met,
In my lap I would set,
What mattered her age or her colour?
But now I am old
And the girls, they grow cold
And my heartstrings, they ache
At the faces they make,
And my dancing is turned into dolour.

A very sweet song! a very sad song! Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought. 'Tis just, 'tis just. Ah me! well-a-day! Verily, verily!

ANICE

I pray you, Shaikh Ibrahim, be quiet. I would sing.

IBRAHIM

Sing, my jewel, sing, my gazelle, sing, my lady of kisses. Verily, I would rise up and buss thee, could I but find my legs. I know not why they have taken them from me.

ANICE (*sings*)

Song

Heart of mine, O heart impatient,
Thou must learn to wait and weep.

Wherefore wouldst thou go on beating
 When I bade thee hush and sleep?
 Thou who wert of life so fain,
 Didst thou know not, life was pain?

HAROUN
 O voice of angels! Who art thou, young man,
 And who this sweet-voiced wonder? Let me hear;
 Tell me thy story.

NUREDDENE
 I am a man chastised
 For my own errors, yet unjustly. Justice
 I seek from the great Caliph. Leave us, fisherman.

HAROUN
 Tell me thy story. Walk apart with me.
 It may be I can help thee.

NUREDDENE
 Leave us, I pray thee.
 Thou, a poor fisherman!

HAROUN
 I vow I'll help thee.

NUREDDENE
 Art thou the Caliph?

HAROUN
 If I were, by chance?

NUREDDENE
 If thou art as pressing with the fish as me,
 There's a good angler.

Exit with Haroun.

ANICE

Will you not have some of this fish, Shaikh Ibrahim? 'Tis a sweet fish.

IBRAHIM

Indeed thou art a sweet fish, but somewhat overdone. Thou hast four lovely eyes and two noses wonderfully fine with just the right little curve at the end; 'tis a hook to hang my heart upon. But, verily, there are two of them and I know not what to do with the other; I have only one heart, beauty. O Allah, Thou hast darkened my brain with wine, and wilt Thou damn me afterwards?

ANICE

Nay, if thou wilt misuse my nose for a peg, I have done with thee. My heart misgives me strangely.

Enter Nureddene.

NUREDDENE

He's writing out a letter.

ANICE

Surely, my lord,
This is no ordinary fisherman.
If 'twere the Caliph?

NUREDDENE

The old drunkard knew him
For Kareem and a fisherman. Dear Anice,
Let not our dreams delude us. Life is harsh,
Dull-tinted, not so kindly as our wishes,
Nor half so beautiful.

Enter Haroun.

HAROUN

He is not fit
To be a King.

NUREDDENE

Nor ever was. 'Tis late.

HAROUN

Giv'st thou no gift at parting?

NUREDDENE

You're a fisher! (*opens his purse*)

HAROUN

Nothing more valuable?

ANICE

Wilt take this ring?

HAROUN

No; give me what I ask.

NUREDDENE

Yes, by the Prophet,
Because thou hast a face.

HAROUN

Give me thy slavegirl.

There is a silence.

NUREDDENE

Thou hast entrapped me, fisherman.

ANICE

Is it a jest?

HAROUN

Thou sworeest by the Prophet, youth.

NUREDDENE

Tell me,

Is it for ransom? I have nothing left
In all the world but her and these few pieces.

HAROUN
She pleases me.

ANICE
O wretch!

NUREDDENE
Another time
I would have slain thee. But now I feel 'tis God
Has snared my feet with dire calamities,
And have no courage.

HAROUN
Dost thou give her to me?

NUREDDENE
Take her, if Heaven will let thee. Angel of God,
Avenging angel, wert thou lying in wait for me
In Bagdad?

ANICE
Leave me not, O leave me not.
It is a jest, it must, it shall be a jest.
God will not suffer it.

HAROUN
I mean thee well.

ANICE
Thy doing's damnable. O man, O man,
Art thou a devil straight from Hell, or art thou
A tool of Almuene's to torture us?
Will you leave me, my lord, and never kiss?

NUREDDENE

Thou art his; I cannot touch thee.

HAROUN

Kiss her once.

NUREDDENE

Tempt me not; if my lips grow near to hers,
Thou canst not live. Farewell.

HAROUN

Where art thou bound?

NUREDDENE

To Bassora.

HAROUN

That is, to death?

NUREDDENE

Even so.

HAROUN

Yet take this letter with thee to the Sultan.

NUREDDENE

Man, what have I to do with thee or letters?

HAROUN

Hear me, fair youth. Thy love is sacred to me
And will be safe as in her father's house.
Take thou this letter. Though I seem a fisherman,
I was the Caliph's friend and schoolfellow,
His cousin of Bassora's too, and it may help thee.

NUREDDENE

I know not who thou art, nor if this scrap

Of paper has the power thou babblest of,
 And do not greatly care. Life without her
 Is not to be thought of. Yet thou giv'st me something
 I'd once have dared call hope. She will be safe?

HAROUN

As my own child, or as the Caliph's.

NUREDDENE

I'll go play

At pitch and toss with death in Bassora.

Exit.

IBRAHIM

Kareem, thou evil fisherman, thou unjust seller, thou dishonest
 dicer, thou beastly womanizer! hast thou given me stinking fish
 not worth a dirham and thinkest to take away my slavegirl?
 Verily, I will tug thy beard for her.

He seizes Haroun by the beard.

HAROUN (*throwing him off*)

Out! Hither to me, Vizier Jaafar. (*Enter Jaafar.*) Hast thou my
 robe?

He changes his dress.

JAAFAR

How dost thou, Shaikh Ibrahim? Fie, thou smellest of that evil
 thing, even the accursèd creature, wine.

IBRAHIM

O Satan, Satan, dost thou come to me in the guise of Jaafar,
 the Persian, the Shiah, the accursèd favourer of Gnosticism and
 heresies, the evil and bibulous Vizier? Avaunt, and return not
 save with a less damnable face. O thou inconsiderate fiend!

HAROUN

Damsel, lift up thy head. I am the Caliph.

ANICE

What does it matter who you are? My heart, my heart!

HAROUN

Thou art bewildered. Rise! I am the Caliph
Men call the Just. Thou art as safe with me
As my own daughter. I have sent thy lord
To be a king in Bassora, and thee
I will send after him with precious robes,
Fair slavegirls, noble gifts. Possess thy heart
Once more, be glad.

ANICE

O just and mighty Caliph!

HAROUN

Shaikh Ibrahim.

IBRAHIM

Verily, I think thou art the Caliph, and, verily, I think I am drunk.

HAROUN

Verily, thou hast told the truth twice, and it is a wonder. But verily, verily, thou shalt be punished. Thou hast been kind to the boy and his sweetheart, therefore I will not take from thee thy life or thy post in the gardens, and I will forgive thee for tugging the beard of the Lord's anointed. But thy hypocrisies and blasphemies are too rank to be forgiven. Jaafar, have a man with him constantly and wine before his eyes; but if he drink so much as a thimbleful, let it be poured by gallons into his stomach. Have in beautiful women constantly before him and if he once raise his eyes above their anklets, shave him clean and sell him into the most severe and Puritan house in Bagdad. Nay, I will reform thee, old sinner.

IBRAHIM

Oh, her lips! her sweet lips!

JAAFAR

You speak to a drunken man, my lord.

HAROUN

Tomorrow bring him before me when he's sober.

Exeunt.

Act V

Bassora and Bagdad.

Scene 1

*A room in Almuene's house.
Almuene, Fareed.*

FAREED
You'll give me money, dad?

ALMUENE
You spend too much.
We'll talk of it another time. Now leave me.

FAREED
You'll give me money?

ALMUENE
Go; I'm out of temper.

FAREED (*dancing round him*)
Give money, money, money, give me money.

ALMUENE
You boil, do you too grow upon me? There. (*strikes him*)

FAREED
You have struck me!

ALMUENE
Why, you would have it. Go.
You shall have money.

FAREED
How much?

ALMUENE
Quite half your asking.
Send me a cup of water.

FAREED
Oh yes, I'll send it.
You'll strike me then?

Exit.

ALMUENE
Young Nureddene's evasion
Troubles me at the heart; 'twill not dislodge.
And Murad too walks closely with the King,
Who whispers to him, whispers, whispers. What?
Is't of my ruin? No, he needs me yet.
And Ibn Sawy's coming soon. But there
I've triumphed. He will have a meagre profit
Of his long work in Roum, — the headsman's axe.
Enter a Slave with a cup of water.
Here set it down and wait. 'Tis not so bad.
I'll have their Doonya yet for my Fareed.
Enter Khatoon, dragging in Fareed.

KHATOON
He has not drunk it yet.

FAREED
Why do you drag me,
You naughty woman? I will bite your fingers.

KHATOON

O imp of Hell! Touch not the water, Vizier.

ALMUENE

What's this?

KHATOON

This brat whose soul you've disproportioned
Out of all nature, turns upon you now.
There's poison in that cup.

ALMUENE

Unnatural mother,
What is this hatred that thou hast, to slander
The issue of thy womb?

FAREED

She hates me, dad.
Drink off the cup to show her how you love me.

KHATOON

What, art thou weary of thy life? Give rather
The water to a dog, and see.

ALMUENE

Go, slave,
And make some negro drink it off.

Exit Slave.

Woman,

What I have promised often, thou shalt have,—
The scourge.

KHATOON

That were indeed my right reward
For saving such a life as thine. Oh, God
Will punish me for it.

ALMUENE

Thou tongue! I'll strike thee.
As he lifts his hand, the slave returns.

SLAVE

Oh, sir, almost before it touched his throat,
He fell in fierce convulsions. He is dead.

ALMUENE

Fareed!

FAREED

You'll strike me, will you? You'll give half
My askings, no? I wish you'd drunk it off;
I'd have rare spendings!

He runs out.

ALMUENE

God!

KHATOON

Will you not scourge me?

ALMUENE

Leave me.

Exit Khatoon.

What is this horrible surprise,
Beneath whose shock I stagger? Is my term
Exhausted? But I would have done as much,
Had I been struck. It is his gallant spirit,
His lusty blood that will not bear a blow.
I must appease him. If my own blood should end me!
He shall have money, all that he can ask.

Exit.

Scene 2

The Palace in Bassora.
Alzayni, Murad, Almuene, Ajebe.

ALZAYNI

I like your nephew well and will advance him.
For what's twixt you and Murad, let it sleep.
You are both my trusty counsellors.

ALMUENE

A nothing,
I grieve I pressed; forget it, noble Murad.

MURAD

That's as you please.

ALMUENE

Come, you're my nephew too.

VOICE OUTSIDE

Ho, Mohamad Alzayni, Sultan, ho!

ALZAYNI

Who is that Arab?

ALMUENE (*at the window*)

God! 'tis Nureddene.

MURAD

Impossible!

ALZAYNI

Or he is courage-mad.

ALMUENE

'Tis he.

MURAD

The devil and his unholy joy!

ALZAYNI

Drag him to me! No, bring him quietly,
Ajebe.

Exit Ajebe.

I wonder in what strength he comes.

ALMUENE

The strength of madness.

MURAD

Or of Heaven, whose wrath
Sometimes chastises us with our desires.

Enter Ajebe with Nureddene.

NUREDDENE

Greeting, Alzayni, King in Bassora.
Greeting, sweet uncle. Has your nose got straight?
Ajebe and Murad, greeting. Here am I!

ALZAYNI

How dar'st thou come and with such rude demeanour?
Knowst thou thy sentence?

NUREDDENE

Why, I bring a sentence too,
A fishy writing. Here it is. Be careful of it;
It is my die on which I throw for death
Or more than life.

ALZAYNI

A letter, and to me?

NUREDDENE

Great King, 'tis from thy friend the fisherman,
 He with the dirty gaberdine who lives
 In great Bagdad on stolen fish.

ALZAYNI

Thinkst thou
 That thou canst play thus rudely with the lion?

NUREDDENE

If I could see the mane, I'd clutch at it.
 A lashing tail is not enough. The tiger
 Has that too and many trifling animals.
 But read the letter.

ALZAYNI

Read it, Almuene.

ALMUENE

'Tis from the Caliph, it appears. Thus runs
 The alleged epistle: "Haroun Alrasheed,
 Commander of the Faithful, known by name
 To orient waters and the Atlantic seas,
 Whom three wide continents obey, to Mohamad
 The Abbasside, the son of Sulyman,
 Men call Alzayni, by our gracious will
 Allowed our subject king in Bassora,
 Greeting and peace. As soon as thou hast read
 Our letter, put from thee thy kingly robe,
 Thy jewelled turban and thy sceptred pomp
 And clothe with them the bearer Nureddene,
 Son of thy Vizier, monarch in thy stead
 In Bassora, then come to us in Bagdad
 To answer for thy many and great offences.

This as thou hop'st to live."

NUREDDENE

It was the Caliph.

ALZAYNI

My mighty cousin's will must be obeyed.
Why turnst thou to the light?

ALMUENE

To scan it better.

King, 'tis a forgery! Where is the seal,
Where the imperial scripture? Is it thus
On a torn paper mighty Caliphs write?
Now on my life the fellow here has chanced
Upon some playful scribbling of the Caliph's,
Put in his name and thine and, brazen-faced,
Come here to bluster.

AJEBE

It was quite whole, I saw it.

ALMUENE

Boy, silence!

AJEBE

No, I will not. Thou hast torn it.

ALMUENE

Where are the pieces then? Search, if thou wilt.

ALZAYNI

Ho, there.

Enter Guards.

Take Ajebe to the prison hence.
He shall have judgment afterwards.

Exit Ajebe, guarded.

NUREDDENE
I lose the toss; 'tis tails.

Exit guarded.

ALZAYNI
All leave me. Vizier,
Remain.

Exit Murad.

Now, Almuene?

ALMUENE
Kill him and be at rest.

ALZAYNI
If 'twere indeed the Caliph's very hand?
Vizier, I dare not suddenly.

ALMUENE
Dare not!
Nay, then, put off thy crown at Haroun's bidding,
Who'll make thee his doorkeeper in Bagdad.
The Caliph? How long will this drunken freak
Have lodging in his lordly mind? Or fearest thou
The half-veiled threat of thy own trusty Turk,
Sultan Alzayni?

ALZAYNI
Him I'll silence. Keep
The boy ten days; then, if all's well, behead him.

Exit.

ALMUENE
You boggle, boggle; that is not the way
To keep a crown. Have him and hold's the Vizier,
Catch him and cut's the General. Loose your grip?
Let the hand shake? So monarchs are unkinged.
Ten days are mine at least. I have ten days
To torture him, though Caliphs turn his friend.

Will God befriend him next? My enemies
He gives into my potent hand. Murad is gone,
And I hold Doonya in my grip, Ameena too
Who, I have news, lives secret with her niece.
But where's the girl? God keeps her for me, I doubt not,
A last, sweet morsel. It will please Fareed.
But there's Haroun! Why should he live at all,
When there are swords and poisons?

Exit.

Scene 3

*A cell in Almuene's house.
Nureddene alone.*

NUREDDENE

We sin our pleasant sins and then refrain
And think that God's deceived. He waits His time
And when we walk the clean and polished road
He trips us with the mire our shoes yet keep,
The pleasant mud we walked before. All ill
I will bear patiently. Oh, better here
Than in that world! Who comes? Khatoon, my aunt!

Enter Khatoon and a Slave.

KHATOON

My Nureddene!

NUREDDENE

Good aunt, weep not for me.

KHATOON

You are my sister's child, yet more my own.
I have no other. Ali, mend his food
And treatment. Fear not thou the Vizier's wrath,
For I will shield thee.

SLAVE

I'll do it willingly.

KHATOON

What is this sound of many rushing feet?

Enter Almuene and Slaves.

ALMUENE

Seize him and bind. O villain, fatal villain!
 O my heart's stringlet! Seize him, beat to powder;
 Have burning irons. Dame, what do you here?
 Wilt thou prevent me then?

KHATOON

Let no man touch
 The prisoner of the Sultan. What's this rage?

ALMUENE

My son, my son! He has burned my heart. Shall I
 Not burn his body?

KHATOON

What is it? Tell me quickly.

ALMUENE

Fareed is murdered.

KHATOON

God forbid! By whom?

ALMUENE

This villain's sister.

KHATOON

Doonya? You are mad. Speak, slave.

A SLAVE

Young master went with a great company
 To Murad's house to carry Doonya off
 Who then was seated listening to the lute
 With Balkis and Mymoona, Ajebe's slavegirls.
 We stormed the house, but could not take the lady;
 Mymoona with a sword kept all at bay
 For minutes. Meantime the city fills with rumour,

And Murad riding like a stormy wind
Came on us just too soon, the girl defender
Found wounded, Doonya at last in Fareed's grip
Who made a shield of that fair burden; but Balkis
Ran at and tripped him, and the savage Turk
Fire-eyed and furious lunged him through the body.
He's dead.

KHATOON
My son!

ALMUENE
Will you now give me leave
To torture this vile boy?

KHATOON
What is his fault?
Touch him and I acquaint the King. Vizier,
Thou slewst Fareed. My gracious, laughing babe
Who clung about me with his little hands
And sucked my breasts! Him you have murdered, Vizier,
Both soul and body. I will go and pray
For vengeance on thee for my slaughtered child.

Exit.

ALMUENE
She has balked my fury. No, I'll wait for thee.
Thou shalt hear first what I have done with Doonya
And thy soft mother's body. Murad! Murad!
Thou hast no son. Would God thou hadst a son!

Exit.

NUREDDENE
Not upon others fall Thy heavy scourge
Who are not guilty. O Doonya, O my mother,
In fiercest peril from that maddened tyrant!

Curtain

Scene 4

A house in Bassora.

Doonya, Ameena.

DOONYA

Comfort, dear mother, comfort.

AMEENA

Oh, what comfort?

My Nureddene is doomed, Murad is gaoled,
We in close hiding under the vile doom
This tyrant King decrees.

DOONYA

I did not think

God was so keen-eyed for our petty sins,
When great offences and high criminals
Walk smiling. But there's comfort, mother, yet.
My husband writes from prison. You shall hear.

(reads)

“Doonya, I have written this by secret contrivance. Have comfort, dry thy mother's tears. There is hope. The Caliph comes to Bassora and the King will release me for a need of his own. I have tidings of thy father; he is but two days journey from Bassora and I have sent him urgent and tremulous word to come, but no ill-news to break his heart. We have friends. Doonya, my beloved — ”

That's for me only.

AMEENA

Let me hear it.

DOONYA
It is
Pure nonsense, — what a savage Turk would write.

AMEENA
Therefore you kissed it?

DOONYA
Oh, you're comforted!
You're smiling through your tears.

AMEENA
My husband comes.
He will save all. I never quite believed
God would forget his worth so soon.

DOONYA (*to herself*)
He comes,
But for what fate? (*aloud*) True, mother, he'll save all.

AMEENA
How is Mymoona?

DOONYA
Better now. She suffered
In our wild rapid flight. Balkis is with her.
Let's go to them.

AMEENA
My son will yet be saved.

Exeunt.

Scene 5

*Bagdad. A room in the Caliph's harem.
Anice, with many slavegirls attending on her.*

ANICE
Girls, is he passing?

A SLAVEGIRL
He is passing.

ANICE
Quick, my lute!

Song
The Emperor of Roum is great;
The Caliph has a mighty State;
But One is greater, to Whom all prayers take wing;
And I, a poor and weeping slave,
When the world rises from its grave,
Shall stand up the accuser of my King.

Girls, is he coming up?

A SLAVEGIRL
The Caliph enters.
Enter Haroun and Jaafar.

HAROUN
Thou art the slavegirl, Anice-aljalice?
Why cholest thou that song?

ANICE

Caliph, for thee.

Where is my lord?

HAROUN

A king in Bassora.

ANICE

Who told thee?

HAROUN

So it must be.

ANICE

Is there news?

HAROUN

No, strange! seven days gone by, nor yet a letter!

ANICE

Caliph, high Sovereign, Haroun Alrasheed,
Men call thee Just, great Abbasside! I am
A poor and helpless slavegirl, but my grief
Is greater than a King. Lord, I demand
My soul's dear husband at thy hand, who sent him
Alone, unfollowed, without guard or friend
To a tyrant Sultan and more tyrant Vizier,
His potent enemies. Oh, they have killed him!
Give back my husband to my arms unhurt
Or I will rise upon the judgment day
Against thee, Caliph Haroun Alrasheed,
Demanding him at that eternal throne
Where names are not received, nor earthly pomps
Considered. Then my frail and woman's voice
Shall ring more dreadful in thy mighty hearing
Than doom's own trumpet. Answer my demand.

HAROUN

Anice, I do believe thy lord is well.
And yet — No, by my great forefathers, no!
My seal and signature were on the script
And they are mightier than a thousand armies.
If he has disobeyed, for him 'twere better
He were a beggar's unrespected child
Than Haroun's kin; — the Arabian simoom
Shall be less devastating than my wrath.
Out, Jaafar, out to Bassora, behind thee
Sweeping embattled war; nor night nor tempest
Delay thy march. I follow in thy steps.
Take too this damsel and these fifty slavegirls,
With robes and gifts for Bassora's youthful king.
I give thee power o'er Kings and Emperors
To threaten, smite and seize. Go, friend; I follow
As swift as thunder presses on the lightning.

Exit.

JAAFAR (*to the slavegirls*)

Make ready; for we march within the hour.

Exit.
Curtain

Scene 6

The public square of Bassora.

Alzayni on a dais; in front a scaffold on which stand Nureddene, an Executioner, Murad and others. Almuene moves between the dais and scaffold. The square is crowded with people.

EXECUTIONER

Ho! listen, listen, Moslems. Nureddene,
Son of Alfazzal, son of Sawy, stands
Upon the rug of blood, the man who smote
Great Viziers and came armed with forgeries
To uncrown mighty Kings. Look on his doom,
You enemies of great Alzayni, look and shake.

(low, to Nureddene)

My lord, forgive me who am thus compelled,
Oh much against my will, to ill-requite
Your father's kindly favours.

NUREDDENE

Give me water;

I thirst.

MURAD

Give water. Executioner,
When the King waves the signal, wait; strike not
Too hastily.

EXECUTIONER

Captain, I will await thy nod.
Here's water.

ALMUENE (*coming up*)

Rebellious sworder! giv'st thou drink
To the King's enemies?

A VOICE IN THE CROWD

God waits for thee,
Thou wicked Vizier.

ALMUENE

Who was that?

MURAD

A voice.

Behead it.

ALMUENE

Mighty Sultan, give the word.

ALZAYNI

There is a movement in the crowd and cries.
Wait for one moment.

ALMUENE

It is Ibn Sawy.

Oh, this is sweet!

CRIES

Make way for the Vizier, the good Vizier. He's saved! he's saved.
*Enter Alfazzal; he looks with emotion at
Nureddene, then turns to the King.*

IBN SAWY

Greeting, my King; my work in Roum is over.

ALZAYNI

Virtuous Alfazzal! we will talk with thee
As ever was our dearest pleasure; first,

There is a spotted soul to be dislodged
From the fair body it disgraced; a trifle
Soon ended. There behold the criminal.

IBN SAWY

The criminal! Pardon me, mighty King;
The voice of Nature will not be kept down.
Why wilt thou slay my son?

ALZAYNI

Nay, 'tis himself
Insisted obstinately on his doom;
Abused his King, battered and beat my Vizier,
Forged mighty Haroun's signature to wear
My crown in Bassora. These are the chief
Of his offences.

IBN SAWY

If this thing is true,
As doubtless near inquiry in Bagdad —

ALZAYNI

Nay, take not up thy duties all too soon.
Rest from thy travel, bury thy dear son
And afterwards resume thy faithful works,
My Vizier.

IBN SAWY

I would not see my dear child slain.
Permit me to depart and in my desolate house
Comfort the stricken mother and his kin.

ALZAYNI

Perhaps a stone of all thy house may stand.
The mother and thy niece? It hurts my heart.
They too are criminals and punished.

IBN SAWY

God!

ALZAYNI

Slaves, help my faithful Vizier; he will faint.

IBN SAWY

Let me alone; God made me strong to bear.
They are dead?

ALZAYNI

Nay, a more lenient penalty.
What did I order? To be led through Bassora
Bare in their shifts with halters round their necks
And, stripped before all eyes, whipped into swooning,
Then sold as slaves but preferably for little
To some low Nazarene or Jew. Was that
The order, Almuene?

IBN SAWY

Merciful Allah!

And it is done?

ALZAYNI

I doubt not, it is done.

IBN SAWY

Their crime?

ALZAYNI

Conspiring murder. They have killed
The son of Almuene. Good Ibn Sawy,
God's kind to thee who has relieved thy age
Of human burdens. Thus He turns thy thought
To His ineffable and simple peace.

IBN SAWY

God, Thou art mighty and Thy will is just.
King Mohamad Alzayni, I have come
To a changed world in which I am not needed.
I bid farewell.

ALZAYNI

Nay, Vizier, clasp thy son,
And afterwards await within my hearing
Release.

IBN SAWY

My Nureddene, my child!

NUREDDENE

Justice
Of God, thou spar'st me nothing. Father! father!

IBN SAWY

Bow to the will of God, my son; if thou
Must perish on a false and hateful charge,
A crime in thee impossible, believe
It is His justice still.

NUREDDENE

I well believe it.

IBN SAWY

I doubt not I shall join you, son. We'll hold
Each other's hands upon the narrow way.

ALZAYNI

Hast done, Alfazzal?

IBN SAWY

Do thy will, O King.

ALZAYNI (*waving his hand*)

Strike.

Trumpets outside.

What are these proud notes? this cloud of dust
That rushes towards us from the north? The earth
Trembles with horsehooves.

ALMUENE

Let this wretch be slain;
We shall have leisure then for greater things.

ALZAYNI

Pause, pause! A horseman gallops through the crowd
Which scatters like wild dust. Look, he dismounts.

Enter a Soldier.

SOLDIER

Hail to thee, Mohamad Alzayni! Greeting
From mightier than thyself.

ALZAYNI

Who art thou, Arab?

SOLDIER

Jaafar bin Barmak, Vizier world-renowned
Of Haroun, master of the globe, comes hither.
He's in your streets, Alzayni. Thus he bids thee:
If Nureddene, thy Vizier's son, yet lives,
Preserve him, Sultan, as thy own dear life;
For if he dies, thou shalt not live.

ALZAYNI

My guards!
My soldiers! here to me!

SOLDIER

Beware, Alzayni.

The force he brings could dislocate each stone
In Bassora within the hour and leave
Thy house a ruin. In his mighty wake
A mightier comes, the Caliph's self.

ALZAYNI

'Tis well.

I have but erred. My Murad, here to me!
Murad, thou shalt have gold, a house, estates,
Noble and wealthy women for thy wives.
Murad!

MURAD

Erred, King, indeed who took a soldier
For an assassin. King, my household gem
I have saved and want no others. Were she gone,
Thou wouldst not now be living.

ALZAYNI

Am I betrayed?

MURAD

Call it so, King.

ALZAYNI

My throne is tumbling down.
The crowd quite parts; the horsemen drive towards us.

ALMUENE

Sultan Alzayni, kill thy enemies,
Then die. Wilt thou be footed to Bagdad,
Stumbling in fetters?

ALZAYNI

They are here.

Enter Jaafar and Soldiers.

JAAFAR

This sight

Is thy own sentence. Mohamad Alzayni,
Allah deprived thee of reason to destroy thee,
When thou didst madly disobey thy lord.

ALMUENE

'Twas a mistake, great Vizier. We had thought
The script a forgery.

JAAFAR

Issue of Khakan,

I have seen many Viziers like thyself,
But none that died in peace. Hail, Nureddene!
I greet thee, Sultan, lord in Bassora.

NUREDDENE

It is the second toss that tells; the first
Was a pure foul. I thank Thee, who hast only
Shown me the edge of Thy chastising sword,
Then pardoned. Father, embrace me.

IBN SAWY

Ah, child,

Thy mother and thy sister!

MURAD

They are safe

And in my care.

IBN SAWY

Nay, God is kind; this world

Most leniently ruled.

JAAFAR

Sultan Alzayni, Vizier Almuene,
By delegated power I seize upon you,

The prisoners of the Caliph. Take them, guards.
I've brought a slavegirl for you, Nureddene,
The Caliph's gift.

NUREDDENE

I'll take her, if I like her.
Life is my own again and all I love.
Great are Thy mercies, O Omnipotent!

Curtain

Scene 7

The Palace in Bassora.

Ibn Sawy, Ameena, Nureddene, Anice, Doonya, Ajebe.

IBN SAWY

End, end embraces; they will last our life.
Thou dearest cause at once of all our woes
And their sweet ender! Cherish her, Nureddene,
Who saved thy soul and body.

NUREDDENE

Surely I'll cherish
My heart's queen!

ANICE

Only your slavegirl.

DOONYA

You've got a King,
You lucky child! But I have only a Turk,
A blustering, bold and Caliph-murdering Turk
Who writes me silly letters, stabs my lovers
When they would run away with me, and makes
A general Turkish nuisance of himself.
'Tis hard. Sultan of Bassora, great Sultan,
Grave high and mighty Nureddene! thy sister
And subject —

NUREDDENE

Doonya, it is not Faeryland.

DOONYA

It is, it is, and Anice here its queen.
O faery King of faery Bassora,
Do make a General of my general nuisance.
I long to be my lady Generaless
Of faeryland, and ride about and charge
At thorns and thistles with a churning-stick,
With Balkis and Mymoona for my captains —
They're very martial, King, bold swashing fighters! —

NUREDDENE

Ajebe our Treasurer.

AJEBE

To ruin you again?

NUREDDENE

We'll have Shaikh Ibrahim for Lord High Humbug
Of all our faeryland; shall we not, Anice?

AMEENA

What nonsense, children! You a Sultan, child!

NUREDDENE

Your Sultan, mother, as I ever was.

IBN SAWY

Let happiness flow out in smiles. Our griefs
Are ended and we cluster round our King.
The Caliph!

*Enter Haroun, Jaafar, Murad, Sunjar,
Guards with Alzayni and Almuene.*

The peace, Commander of the Faithful!

HAROUN

Noble Alfazzal, sit. Sit all of you.
This is the thing that does my heart most good,
To watch these kind and happy looks and know

Myself for cause. Therefore I sit enthroned,
 Allah's Vicegerent, to put down all evil
 And pluck the virtuous out of danger's hand.
 Fit work for Kings! not merely the high crown
 And marching armies and superber ease.
 Sunjar, Murad and Ajebe, you your King
 Can best reward. But, Ajebe, in thy house
 Where thou art Sultan, those reward who well
 Deserve it.

AJEBE

They shall be my household queens,
 Enthroned upon my either hand.

HAROUN

'Tis well.

Sultan Alzayni, not within my realm
 Shall Kings like thee bear rule. Great though thy crimes,
 I will not honour thee with imitation,
 To slay unheard. Thou shalt have judgment, King.
 But for thy Vizier here, his crimes are open
 And loudly they proclaim themselves.

ALMUENE

Lord, spare me.

HAROUN

For some offences God has punished thee.
 Shall I, His great Vicegerent, spare? Young King
 Of Bassora, to thee I leave thy enemy.

ALMUENE

I did according to my blood and nurture,
 Do thou as much.

NUREDDENE

He has beguiled me, Caliph.
 I cannot now pronounce his doom.

HAROUN

Then I will.

Death at this moment! And his house and fortune
Are to thy father due. Take him and slay.

Exeunt Guards with Almuene.

Let not his sad and guiltless wife be engulfed
In his swift ruin. Virtuous Alfazzal, —

IBN SAWY

She is my wife's dear sister and my home
Is hers; my children will replace her son.

HAROUN

All then is well. Anice, you're satisfied?
I never was so scared in all my life
As when you rose against me.

ANICE

Pardon me!

HAROUN

Fair children, worthy of each other's love
And beauty! till the Sunderer comes who parts
All wedded hands, take your delights on earth,
And afterwards in heaven. Meanwhile remember
That life is grave and earnest under its smiles,
And we too with a wary gaiety
Should walk its roads, praying that if we stumble,
The All-Merciful may bear our footing up
In His strong hand, showing the Father's face
And not the stern and dreadful Judge. Farewell.
I go to Roman wars. With you the peace!

IBN SAWY

Peace with thee, just and mighty Caliph, peace.

Curtain

Rodogune

A Dramatic Romance

Persons of the Drama

ANTIOCHUS } twin-brothers, Princes of Syria, sons of Nicanor
TIMOCLES } and Cleopatra.

NICANOR, of the royal house, general-in-chief of the Syrian
armies.

THOAS } Greek nobles of the Kingdom of Syria, generals
LEOSTHENES } of its armies.

PHAYLLUS, an official, afterwards Minister of Timocles.

PHILOCTETES, a young Greek noble of Egypt, friend of Anti-
ochus.

MELITUS, a Court official.

CALLICRATES, a young Greek noble of Syria.

THERAS, a gentleman in waiting.

AN EREMITÉ.

CLEOPATRA, an Egyptian princess, sister of the reigning Ptolemy,
Queen of Syria; widow successively of King Nicanor and
his brother Antiochus.

RODOGUNE, a princess of Parthia, prisoner in Antioch.

EUNICE, daughter of Nicanor.

CLEONE, sister of Phayllus, in attendance on the Queen.

MENTHO, an Egyptian woman, nurse of Antiochus.

ZOÿLA, an attendant of Cleopatra.

Act I

Antioch. The Palace; a house by the sea.

Scene 1

*The Palace in Antioch; Cleopatra's antechamber.
Cleone is seated; to her enters Eunice.*

CLEONE
Always he lives!

EUNICE
No, his disease, not he.
For the divinity that sits in man
From that afflicted body has withdrawn, —
Its pride, its greatness, joy, command, the Power
Unnameable that struggles with its world:
The husk, the creature only lives. But that husk
Has a heart, a mind and all accustomed wants,
And having these must be, — O, it is pitiful, —
Stripped of all real homage, forced to see
That none but Death desires him any more.

CLEONE
You pity?

EUNICE
Seems it strange to you? I pity.
I loved him not, — who did? But I am human
And feel the touch of tears. A death desired
Is still a death and man is always man

Although an enemy. If I ever slew,
I think 'twould be with pity in the blow
That it was needed.

CLEONE

That's a foolish thought.

EUNICE

If it were weakness and delayed the stroke.

CLEONE

The Queen waits by him still?

EUNICE

No longer now.

For while officiously she served her lord,
The dying monarch cast a royal look
Of sternness on her. "Cease," he said, "O woman,
To trouble with thy ill-dissembled joy
My passing. Call thy sons! Before they come
I shall have gone into the shadow. Yet
Too much exult not, lest the angry gods
Chastise thee with the coming of thy sons
At which thou now rejoicest."

CLEONE

Where is she then

Or who waits on her?

EUNICE

Rodogune.

CLEONE

That slave!

No nobler attendance?

EUNICE

I think I hear the speech
Of upstarts. Are you, Cleone, of that tribe?

CLEONE

I marvel at your strange attraction, Princess,
You fondle and admire a statue of chalk
In a black towel dismally arranged!

EUNICE

She has roses in her pallor, but they are
The memory of a blush in ivory.
She is all silent, gentle, pale and pure,
Dim-natured with a heart as soft as sleep.

CLEONE

She is a twilight soul, not frank, not Greek,
Some Magian's daughter full of midnight spells.
I think she is a changeling from the dead.
I hate the sorceress!

EUNICE

We shall have a king
Who's young, Cleone; Rodogune is fair.
What think you of it, you small bitter heart?

CLEONE

He will prefer the roses and the day,
I hope!

EUNICE

Yourself, you think? O, see her walk!
A floating lily in moonlight was her sister.

Rodogune enters.

RODOGUNE

His agony ends at last.

CLEONE

Why have you left
Your mistress and your service, Rodogune?

RODOGUNE

She will not have me near her now; she says
I look at her with eyes too wondering and too large.
So she expects alone her husband's end
And her release. Alas, the valiant man,
The king, the trampler of the fields of death!
He called to victory and she ran to him,
He made of conquest his camp-follower. How
He lies forsaken! None regard his end;
His flatterers whisper round him, his no more;
His almost widow smiles. Better would men,
Could they foresee their ending, understand
The need of mercy.

CLEONE

My sandal-string is loose;
Kneel down and tie it, Parthian Rodogune.

EUNICE

You too may feel the need of mercy yet,
Cleone.

*Cleopatra enters swiftly from the
corridors of the Palace.*

CLEOPATRA

Antiochus is dead, is dead, and I
Shall see at last the faces of my sons.
O, I could cry upon the palace-tops
My exultation! Gaze not on me so,
Eunice. I have lived for eighteen years
With silence and my anguished soul within
While all the while a mother's heart in me
Cried for her children's eyelids, wept to touch

The little bodies that with pain I bore.
The long chill dawns came without that joy.
Only my hateful husband and his crown, —
His crown!

EUNICE

To the world he was a man august,
High-thoughted, grandiose, valiant. Leave him to death,
And thou enjoy thy children.

CLEOPATRA

He would not let my children come to me,
Therefore I spit upon his corpse. Eunice,
Have you not thought sometimes how strange it will feel
To see my tall strong sons come striding in
Who were two lispng babes, two pretty babes?
Sometimes I think they are not changed at all
And I shall see my small Antiochus
With those sweet sunlight curls, his father's curls,
And eyes in which an infant royalty
Expressed itself in glances, Timocles
Holding his brother's hand and toiling to me
With eyes like flowers wide-opened by the wind
And rosy lips that laugh towards my breast.
Will it not be strange, so sweet and strange?

EUNICE

And when
Will they arrive from Egypt?

CLEOPATRA

Ah, Eunice,
From Egypt! They are here, Eunice.

EUNICE

Here!

CLEOPATRA

Not in this room, dear fool; in Antioch, hid
 Where never cruel eyes could come at them.
 O, did you think a mother's hungry heart
 Could lose one fluttering moment of delight
 After such empty years? Theramenes, —
 The swift hawk he is, — by that good illness helped
 Darted across and brought them. They're here, Eunice!
 I saw them not even then, not even then
 Could clasp, but now Antiochus is dead,
 Is dead, my lips shall kiss them! Messengers
 Abridge the road with tempest in their hooves
 To bring them to me!

EUNICE

Imperil not with memories of hate
 The hour of thy new-found felicity;
 For souls dislodged are dangerous and the gods
 Have their caprices.

CLEOPATRA

Will the Furies stir
 Because I hated grim Antiochus?
 When I have slain my kin, then let them wake.
 The man who's dead was nothing to my heart:
 My husband was Nicanor, my beautiful
 High-hearted lord with his bright auburn hair
 And open face. When he died miserably
 A captive in the hated Parthian's bonds,
 My heart was broken. Only for my babes
 I knit the pieces strongly to each other,
 My little babes whom I must send away
 To Egypt far from me! But for Antiochus,
 That gloomy, sullen and forbidding soul,
 Harsh-featured, hard of heart, rough mud of camps
 And marches, — he was never lord of me.
 He was a reason of State, an act of policy;

And he exiled my children. You have not been
A mother!

EUNICE

I will love with you, Cleopatra,
Although to hate unwilling.

CLEOPATRA

Love me and with me
As much as your pale quiet Parthian's loved
Whom for your sake I have not slain.

CLEONE

She too,
The Parthian! — blames you. Was it not she who said,
Your joy will bring a curse upon your sons?

CLEOPATRA

Hast thou so little terror?

EUNICE

Never she said it!

CLEOPATRA

Fear yet; be wise! I cannot any more
Feel anger! Never again can grief be born
In this glad world that gives me back my sons.
I can think only of my children's arms.
There is a diphony of music swells
Within me and it cries a double name,
Twin sounds, Antiochus and Timocles,
Timocles and Antiochus, the two
Changing their places sweetly like a pair
Of happy lovers in my brain.

CLEONE

But which

Shall be our king in Syria?

CLEOPATRA

Both shall be kings,
My kings, my little royal faces made
To rule my breast. Upon a meaner throne
What matters who shall reign for both?

Zoÿla enters.

ZOÿLA

Madam,
The banner floats upon that seaward tower.

CLEOPATRA

O my soul, fly to perch there! Shall it not seem
My children's robes as motherwards they run to me
Tired of their distant play?

She leaves the room followed by Zoÿla.

EUNICE

You, you, Cleone! gods are not in the world
If you end happily.

RODOGUNE

Do not reproach her.
I have no complaint against one human creature;
Nature and Fate do all.

EUNICE

Because you were born,
My Rodogune, to suffer and be sweet
As was Cleone to offend. O snake,
For all thy gold and roses!

RODOGUNE

I did not think
Her guiltless sons must pay her debt. Account

Is kept in heaven and our own offences
Too heavy a load for us to bear.

Rodogune and Eunice go out.

CLEONE

The doll,
The Parthian puppet whom she fondles so,
She hardly has a glance for me! I am glad
This gloomy, grand Antiochus is dead.
O now for pastime, dances, youth and flowers!
Youth, youth! for we shall have upon the throne
No grey beard longer, but some glorious boy
Made for delight with whom we shall be young
For ever.

(to Phayllus, as he enters)

Rejoice, brother; he is dead.

PHAYLLUS

It was my desire and fear that killed him then;
For he was nosing into my accounts.
When shall we have these two king-cubs and which
Is the crowned lion?

CLEONE

That is hidden, Phayllus;
You know it.

PHAYLLUS

I know; I wish I also knew
Why it was hidden. Perhaps there is no cause
Save the hiding! Women feign and lie by nature
As the snake coils, no purpose served by it.
Or was it the grim king who'd have it so?

CLEONE

They are in Antioch.

PHAYLLUS

That I knew.

CLEONE

You knew?

PHAYLLUS

Before Queen Cleopatra. They do not sleep
Who govern kingdoms; they have ears and eyes.

CLEONE

Knew and they live!

PHAYLLUS

Why should one slay in vain?
A dying man has nothing left to fear
Or hope for. He belongs to other cares.
Whichever of these Syrian cubs be crowned,
He will be hungry, young and African;
He will need caterers.

CLEONE

Shall they not be found?

PHAYLLUS

In Egypt they have other needs than ours.
There lust's almost as open as feasting is;
Science and poetry and learned tastes
Are not confined to books, but life's an art.
There are faint mysteries, there are lurid pomps;
Strong philtres pass and covert drugs. Desire
Is married to fulfilment, pain's enjoyed
And love sometimes procures his prey for death.
He'll want those strange and vivid colours here,
Not dull diplomacies and hard rough arms.
Then who shall look to statecraft's arid needs
If not Phayllus?

CLEONE

We shall rise?

PHAYLLUS

It is that

I came to learn from you. I have a need for growth;
I feel a ray come nearer to my brow,
The world expands before me. Will you assist, —
For you have courage, falsehood, brains, — my growth?
Your own assisted, — that is understood.

CLEONE

Because I am near the Queen?

PHAYLLUS

That helps, perhaps,

But falls below the mark at which I aim.
If you were nearer to the King, — why, then!

CLEONE

Depend on me.

PHAYLLUS

Cleone, we shall rise.

Scene 2

*The colonnade of a house in Antioch, overlooking the sea.
Antiochus, Philoctetes.*

ANTIOCHUS

The summons comes not and my life still waits.

PHILOCTETES

Patience, beloved Antiochus. Even now
He fronts the darkness.

ANTIOCHUS

Nothing have I spoken
As wishing for his death. His was a mould
That should have been immortal. But since all
Are voyagers to one goal and wishing's vain
To hold one traveller back, I keep my hopes.
O Philoctetes, we who missed his life,
Should have the memory of his end! Unseen
He goes from us into the shades, unknown:
We are denied his solemn hours.

PHILOCTETES

All men
Are not like thee, my monarch, and this king
Was great but dangerous as a lion is
Who lives in deserts mightily alone.
Admire him from that distance.

ANTIOCHUS

O fear and base suspicion, evillest part
Of Nature, how you spoil our grandiose life!

All heights are lowered, our wide embrace restrained,
God's natural sunshine darkened by your fault.
We were not meant for darkness, plots and hatred
Reading our baseness in another's mind,
But like good wrestlers, hearty comrades, hearty foes,
To take and give in life's great lists together
Blows and embraces.

PHILOCTETES

A mother's love, a mother's fears
Earn their excuse.

ANTIOCHUS

I care not for such love.
O Philoctetes, all this happy night
I could not sleep; for proud dreams came to me
In which I sat on Syria's puissant throne,
Or marched through Parthia with the iron pomps
Of war resounding in my train, or swam
My charger through the Indus undulant,
Or up to Ganges and the torrid south
Restored once more the Syrian monarchy.
It is divinity on earth to be a king.

PHILOCTETES

But if the weaker prove the elder born?
If Timocles were Fate's elected king?

ANTIOCHUS

Dear merry Timocles! he would not wish
To wear the iron burden of a crown;
If he has joy, it is enough for him.
Sunshine and laughter and the arms of friends
Guard his fine monarchy of cheerful mind.

PHILOCTETES

If always Fate were careful to fit in

The nature with the lot! But she sometimes
Loves these strange contrasts and crude ironies.

ANTIOCHUS

Has not nurse Mentho often sworn to me
That I, not he, saw earth the first?

PHILOCTETES

And when
Did woman's tongue except in wrath or malice
Deliver truth that's bitter?

ANTIOCHUS

Philoctetes,
Do you not wish me to be king?

PHILOCTETES

Why left I then
Nile in his fields and Egypt slumbering
Couchant upon her sands, but to pursue
Your gallant progress sailing through life's seas
Shattering opponents till your flag flew high,
Sole admiral-ship of all this kingly world?
But since upon this random earth unjust
We travel stumbling to the pyre, not led
By any Power nor any law, and neither
What we desire nor what we deserve
Arrives, but unintelligible dooms
O'ertake us and the travesty of things,
It is better not to hope too much.

ANTIOCHUS

It is better
To lift our hopes heaven-high and to extend them
As wide as earth. Heaven did not give me in vain
This royal nature and this kingly form,
These thoughts that wear a crown. They were not meant

For mockery nor to fret a subject's heart.
Do you not hear the ardour of those hooves?
My kingdom rides to me.

He hastens to the other end of the colonnade.

PHILOCTETES

O glorious youth
Whose young heroic arms would gird the world,
I like a proud and anxious mother follow,
Desiring, fearing, drawn by cords of hope and love,
Admire and doubt, exult and quake and chide.
She is so glad of her brave, beautiful child,
But trembles lest his courage and his beauty
Alarm the fatal jealousy that watches us
From thrones unseen.

Thoas and Melitus enter from the gates.

THOAS

Are these the Syrian twins?

PHILOCTETES

The elder of them only, Antiochus
Of Syria.

THOAS

Son of Nicanor! Antiochus
The high Seleucid travels the dull stream
And Syria's throne is empty for his heir.

ANTIOCHUS

A glorious sun has fallen then from heaven
Saddening the nations, even those he smote.
It is the rule of Nature makes us rise
Despite our hearts replacing what we love,
And I am happy who am called so soon
To rule a nation of such princely men.
Are you not Thoas?

THOAS

Thoas of Macedon.

ANTIOCHUS

Thoas, we shall be friends. Will it be long
Before we march together through the world
To stable our horses in Persepolis?

*He turns to speak to Timocles who has
just entered and goes into the house.*

MELITUS

This is a royal style and kingly brow.

THOAS

The man is royal. What a face looks forth
From under that bright aureole of hair!

TIMOCLES

I greet you, Syrians. Shall I know your names?

MELITUS

Melitus. This is Thoas.

TIMOCLES

Melitus?

Oh yes, of Macedon.

MELITUS

No, Antioch.

TIMOCLES

It is the same.

We talked of you in Alexandria and in Thebes,
All of you famous captains. Your great names
Are known to us, as now yourselves must be
Known and admired and loved.

That burning Egypt, but a warmth, a joy
And a kind brightness. It will be all pleasure
To reign in such a country.

ANTIOCHUS (*returning from the house*)

Let us ride

Into our kingdom.

TIMOCLES

Antioch in sweet Syria,
The realm for gods, and Daphne's golden groves,
And swift Orontes hastening to the sea!
Ride by me, Melitus, tell me everything.

Scene 3

*Cleopatra's antechamber in the Palace.
Cleopatra, seated; Rodogune.*

CLEOPATRA

It is their horsehooves ride into my heart.
It shall be done. What have I any more
To do with hatred? Parthian Rodogune,
Have you forgotten now your former pomps
And princely thoughts in high Persepolis,
Or do your dreams still linger near a throne?

RODOGUNE

I think all fallen beings needs must keep
Some dream out of their happier past, — or else
How hard it would be to live!

CLEOPATRA

O, if some hope survive
In the black midst of care, however small,
We can live, then only, O then only.

RODOGUNE

Hope!
I have forgotten how men hope.

CLEOPATRA

Is your life hard
In Syrian Antioch, Rodogune, a slave
To your most bitter foemen?

RODOGUNE

Not when you speak

So gently. Always I strive to make it sweet
By outward harmony with circumstance
And a calm soul within that is above
My fortunes.

CLEOPATRA

Parthian, you have borne the hate
My husband's murder bred in me towards all
Your nation. When I felt you with my heel,
I trampled Tigris and Euphrates then
And Parthia suffered. Therefore I let you live
Half-loving in your body my revenge.
But these are cruel and unhappy thoughts
I hope to slay and bury with the past
Which gave them birth. Will you assist me, girl?
Will you begin with me another life
And other feelings?

RODOGUNE

If our fates allow

Which are not gentle.

CLEOPATRA

My life begins again,
My life begins again in my dear sons
And my dead husband lives. All's sweetly mended.
I do not wish for hatred any more.
The horrible and perilous hands of war
Appal me. O, let our peoples sit at ease
In Grecian Antioch and Persepolis,
Mothers and children, clasping those golden heads
Deep, deep within our bosoms, never allow
Their going forth again to bonds and death.
Peace, peace, let us have peace for ever more.

RODOGUNE

And will peace take me to my father's arms?

CLEOPATRA

Or else detain you on a kingly throne.
There are happier fetters.

RODOGUNE

If it must be so!

CLEOPATRA

Art thou insensible or fearest to rise?
I cannot think that even in barbarous lands
Any called human are so made that they prefer
Serfhood and scourge to an imperial throne.
Or is there such a soul?

RODOGUNE

Shall I not know
My husband first?

CLEOPATRA

I did not ask your choice,
But gave you a command to be obeyed
Like any other that each day I give.

RODOGUNE

Shall I be given him as a slave, not wife?

CLEOPATRA

You rise, I think, too quickly with your fate.
Or art thou other than I saw or thou
Feignedst to be? Hast thou been wearing all this while
Only a mask of smooth servility,
Thou subtle barbarian?

RODOGUNE

Speak not so harshly to me
Who spoke so gently now. I will obey.

CLEOPATRA

Hop'st thou by reigning to reign over me
Restoring on a throne thy Parthian soul?

RODOGUNE

What shall I be upon the Syrian throne
Except your first of slaves who am now the last,
The least considered? I hope not to reign,
Nor ever have desired ambitious joys,
Only the love that I have lacked so long
Since I left Parthia.

CLEOPATRA

Obey me then. Remember,
The hand that seats thee can again unthroned.

RODOGUNE

I shall remember and I shall obey.

She retires to her station.

CLEOPATRA

Her flashes of quick pride are quickly past.
After so many cruel, black and pitiless years
Shall not the days to come conspire for joy?
The Queen shall be my slave, a mind that's trained
To watch for orders, one without a party
In Syria, with no will to take my son from me
Or steal my sovereign station. O, they come!
Slowly, my heart! break not with too much bliss.

Eunice comes in swiftly.

EUNICE

Am I the first to tell you they have come?

CLEOPATRA

O girl, thy tongue rain joy upon the world,
That speaks to me of heaven!

Cleone enters.

CLEONE (*to Eunice*)

They are more beautiful than heaven and earth.

(*to Cleopatra*)

Thy children's feet are on the palace stairs.

CLEOPATRA

O no! not of the palace but my heart;
I feel their tread ascending. Be still, be still,
Thou flutterer in my breast: I am a queen
And must not hear thee.

*Thoas and Melitus enter bringing
in Antiochus and Timocles.*

THOAS

Queen, we bring her sons

To Cleopatra.

CLEOPATRA

I thank you both. Approach.
Why dost thou beat so hard within to choke me?

*She motions to them to stop and
gazes on them in silence.*

TIMOCLES

This is my mother. She is what I dreamed!

EUNICE

O high inhabitants of Greek Olympus,
Which of you all comes flashing down from heaven
To snare us mortals with this earthly gaze,
These simulations of humanity?

CLEOPATRA

Say to the Syrians they shall know their king
In the gods' time and hour. But these first days
Are for a mother.

THOAS

None shall grudge them to thee,
Remembering the gods' debt to thee, Cleopatra.
Thoas and Melitus leave the chamber.

CLEOPATRA

My children, O my children, my sweet children!
Come to me, come to me, come into my arms.
You beautiful, you bright, you tall heart-snarers,
You are all your father.

TIMOCLES

Mother, my sweet mother!
I have been dreaming of you all these years,
Mother!

CLEOPATRA

And was the dream too fair, my child?
O strange, sweet bitterness that I must ask
My child his name!

TIMOCLES

I am your Timocles.

CLEOPATRA

You first within my arms! O right, 'tis right!
It is your privilege, my sweet one. Kiss me.
O yet again, my young son Timocles.
O bliss, to feel the limbs that I have borne
Within me! O my young radiant Timocles,
You have outgrown to lie upon my lap:
I have not had that mother's happiness.

TIMOCLES

Mother, I am still your little Timocles
Playing at bigness. You shall not refuse me
The sweet dependent state which I have lost
In that far motherless Egypt where I pined.

CLEOPATRA

And like a child too, little one, you'd have
All of your mother to yourself. Must I
Then thrust you from me? Let Antiochus,
My tall Antiochus have now his share.

RODOGUNE

He is all high and beautiful like heaven
From which he came. I have not seen before
A thing so mighty.

ANTIOCHUS

Madam, I seek your blessing; let me kneel
To have it.

CLEOPATRA

Kneel! O, in my bosom, son!
Have you too dreamed of me, Antiochus?

ANTIOCHUS

Of great Nicanor's widow and the Queen
Of Syria and my sacred fount of life.

CLEOPATRA

These are cold haughty names, Antiochus.
Not of your mother, not of your dear mother?

ANTIOCHUS

You were for me the thought of motherhood,
A noble thing and sacred. This I loved.

CLEOPATRA

No more? Are you so cold in speech, my son?
O son Antiochus, you have received
Your father's face; I hope you have his heart.
Do you not love me?

ANTIOCHUS

Surely I hope to love.

CLEOPATRA

You hope!

ANTIOCHUS

O madam, do not press my words.

CLEOPATRA

I do press them. Your words, your lips, your heart,
Your radiant body noble as a god's
I, I made in my womb, to give them light
Bore agony. I have a claim upon them all.
You do not love me?

ANTIOCHUS

The thought of you I have loved,
Honoured and cherished. By your own decree
We have been to each other only thoughts;
But now we meet. I trust I shall not fail
In duty, love and reverence to my mother.

EUNICE

His look is royal, but his speech is cold.

RODOGUNE

Should he debase his godhead with a lie?
She is to blame and her unjust demand.

CLEOPATRA

It is well. My heart half slew me for only this!
O Timocles, my little Timocles,
Let me again embrace you, let me feel
My child who dreamed of me for eighteen years
In Egypt. Sit down here against my knee
And tell me of Egypt, — Egypt where I was born,
Egypt where my sweet sons were kept from me,
Dear Egypt, hateful Egypt!

TIMOCLES

I loved it well because it bore my mother,
But not so well, my mother far from me.

CLEOPATRA

What was your life there? Your mornings and your evenings,
Your dreams at night, I must possess them all,
All the sweet years my arms have lost. Did you
Rising in those clear mornings see the Nile,
Our father Nile, flow through the solemn azure
Past the great temples in the sands of Egypt?
You have seen hundred-gated Thebes, my Thebes,
And my high tower where I would sit at eve
Watching your kindred sun? And Alexandria
With the white multitude of sails! My brother,
The royal Ptolemy, did he not love
To clasp his sister in your little limbs?
There is so much to talk of; but not now!
Eunice, take them from me for a while.
Take Rodogune and call the other slaves.
Let them array my sons like the great kings
They should have been so long. Go, son Antiochus;
Go, Timocles, my little Timocles.

ANTIOCHUS

We are the future's greatness, therefore owe
Some duty to the grandeurs of the past.

The great Antiochus lies hardly cold,
 Garbed for his journey. I would kneel by him
 And draw his mightiness into my soul
 Before the gloomy shades have taken away
 What earth could hardly value.

EUNICE

This was a stab.

Is there some cold ironic god at work?

CLEOPATRA

The great Antiochus! Of him you dreamed?
 You are his nephew! Parthian, take the prince
 To the dead King's death-chamber, then to his own.

ANTIOCHUS

She was the Parthian! Great Antiochus,
 Syria thou leav'st me and her and Persia afterwards
 To be my lovely captive.

He goes out with Rodogune.

TIMOCLES (*as he follows Eunice*)

Tell me, cousin, —

I knew not I had such sweet cousins here, —
 Was this the Parthian princess Rodogune?

EUNICE

Phraates' daughter, Prince, your mother's slave.

TIMOCLES

There are lovelier faces then than Syria owns.

He goes out with Eunice.

CLEOPATRA

You gods, you gods in heaven, you give us hearts
 For life to trample on! I am sick, Cleone.

CLEONE

Why, Madam, what a son you have in him,
The joyous fair-faced Timocles, yet you are sick!

CLEOPATRA

But the other, oh, the other! Antiochus!
He has the face that gives my husband back to me,
But does not love me.

CLEONE

Yet he will be king.
You said he was the elder.

CLEOPATRA

Did I say it?
I was perplexed.

CLEONE

He will be king, a man
With a cold joyless heart and thrust you back
Into some distant corner of your house
And rule instead and fill with clamorous war
Syria and Parthia and the banks of Indus
Taking our lovers and our sons to death!
Our sons! Perhaps he will take Timocles
And offer him, a lovely sacrifice,
To the grim god of battles.

CLEOPATRA

My Timocles! my only joy! Oh, no!
We will have peace henceforth and bloodless dawns.
My envoys ride today.

CLEONE

He will recall them.
This is no man to rest in peaceful ease
While other sceptres sway the neighbouring realms.

War and Ambition from his eyes look forth;
His hand was made to grasp a sword-hilt. Queen,
Prevent it; let our Timocles be king.

CLEOPATRA

What did you say? Have you gone mad, Cleone?
The gods would never bless such vile deceit.
O, if it could have been! but it cannot.

CLEONE

It must.

Timocles dead, you a neglected mother,
A queen dethroned, with one unloving child, —
Childless were better, — and your age as lonely
As these long nineteen years have been. Then you had hope,
You will have none hereafter.

CLEOPATRA

If I thought that,
I would transgress all laws yet known or made
And dare Heaven's utmost anger. Gods who mock me,
I will not suffer to all time your wrongs.
Hush, hush, Cleone! It shall not be so.
I thought my heart would break with joy, but now
What different passion tugs at my heart-strings,
Cleone, O Cleone! O my sweet dreams,
Where have you gone yielding to pangs and fears
Your happy empire? Am I she who left
Laughing the death-bed of Antiochus?

She goes into her chamber.

CLEONE

We must have roses, sunlight, laughter, Prince,
Not cold, harsh light of arms. Your laurels, laurels!
We'll blast them quickly with a good Greek lie.
Where he has gone, admire Antiochus,
Not here repeat him.

Act II

The Palace in Antioch.

Scene 1

*A hall in the Palace.
Cleone, Phayllus.*

PHAYLLUS

Worry the conscience of the Queen to death
Like the good bitch thou art. If this goes well,
I may sit unobserved on Syria's throne.

CLEONE

Do not forget me.

PHAYLLUS

Do not forget thyself,
Then how shall I forget thee?

CLEONE

I shall remember.

PHAYLLUS

If for a game you were the queen, Cleone,
And I your minister, how would you start
Your play of reigning?

CLEONE

I would have many perfect tortures made
To hurt the Parthian with, for every nerve

A torture. I would lie in flowers the while
Drinking sweet Cyprian wine and hear her moan.

PHAYLLUS

I do not like your thought; have better ones.

CLEONE

Shall I not satisfy my love, my hate?
Then just as well I might not reign at all.

PHAYLLUS

O hatred, love and wrath, you instruments
By which we are driven! Cleone, the gods use these
For their own purposes, not we for ours.

CLEONE

I'll do my will, Phayllus; you do yours.

PHAYLLUS

Our kingdom being won! It is not, yet.

(turning away)

She's too violent for my calmer ends;
Lust drives her, not ambition. I wait on you,
You gods who choose. If Fate intends my rise,
She will provide the instruments and cause.

Timocles enters from the inner palace.

TIMOCLES

I think I am afraid to speak to her.
I never felt so with the Egyptian girls
In Thebes or Alexandria. Are you not
Phayllus?

PHAYLLUS

You remember faces well
And have the trick for names, the monarch's trick.

TIMOCLES

Antiochus, all say, will be the king.

PHAYLLUS

But I say otherwise and what I say
Has a strange gift of happening.

TIMOCLES

You're my friend!

PHAYLLUS

My own and therefore yours.

TIMOCLES

This is your sister?

PHAYLLUS

Cleone.

TIMOCLES

A name that in its sound agrees
With Syria's roses. Are you too my friend,
Cleone?

CLEONE

Your subject, prince.

TIMOCLES

And why not both?

CLEONE

To serve is better.

TIMOCLES

Shall I try your will?

(embracing her)

Thou art warm fire against the lips, thou rose
Cleone.

CLEONE
May I test in turn?

TIMOCLES
Oh, do!

CLEONE
A rose examines by her thorns, — as thus.
She strikes him lightly on the cheek and goes out.

TIMOCLES (*looking uncertainly at Phayllus who is
stroking his chin*)
It was a courtesy, — our Egyptian way.

PHAYLLUS
Hers was the Syrian. Do not excuse yourself;
I am her brother.

TIMOCLES (*turns as if to go, hesitates, then comes back*)
Oh, have you met, Phayllus,
A Parthian lady here named Rodogune?

PHAYLLUS
Blows the wind east? But if it brings me good,
Let it blow where it will. I know the child.
She's fair. You'd have her?

TIMOCLES
Fie on you, Phayllus!

PHAYLLUS
Prince, I have a plain tongue which, when I hunger,
Owns that there is a belly. Speak in your language!
I understand men's phrases though I use them not.

TIMOCLES
Think not that evil! She is not like those,
The common flowers which have a fair outside

Of beauty, but the common hand can pluck.
We wear such lightly, smell and throw away.
She is not like them.

PHAYLLUS

No? Yet were they all
Born from one mother Nature. What if she wears
The quick barbarian's robe called modesty?
There is a woman always in the end
Behind that shimmering. Pluck the robe, 'twill fall;
Then is she Nature's still.

TIMOCLES

I have seen her eyes; they are a liquid purity.

PHAYLLUS

And yet a fish swims there which men call love,
But truth names lust or passion. Fear not, prince;
The fish will rise to such an angler's cast.

TIMOCLES

Mistake me not, nor her. These things are done,
But not with such as she; she is heaven-pure
And must like heaven be by worship won.

PHAYLLUS

What is it then that you desire of her
Or ask of me? I can do always much.

TIMOCLES

O nothing else but this, only to kneel,
Look up at her and touch the little hand
That fluttered like a moonlit butterfly
Above my mother's hair. If she consenting smiled
A little, I might even dare so much.

PHAYLLUS

Why, she's your slave-girl!

TIMOCLES

I shall kneel to her
Some day and feel her hand upon my brow.

PHAYLLUS

What animal this is, I hardly know,
But know it is the animal for me:
My genius tells me. Prince, I need a bribe
Before I'll stir in this.

TIMOCLES

What bribe, Phayllus?

PHAYLLUS

A name, — your friend.

TIMOCLES

O more than merely friend!
Bring me into the temple dim and pure
Whence my own hopes and fears now bar me out,
Then I am yours, Phayllus, you myself
For all things.

PHAYLLUS

Remember me when you have any need.

He goes out.

TIMOCLES

I have a friend! He is the very first
Who was not conquered by Antiochus.
How has this love like lightning leaped at me!

Scene 2

The same.

Eunice, Rodogune.

RODOGUNE

Heaven had a purpose in my servitude!
I will believe it.

EUNICE

One sees not now such men.
What a calm royalty his glances wield!
We are their subjects. And he treads the earth
As if it were already his.

RODOGUNE

All must be.
I have lived a slave, yet always held myself
A nobler spirit than my Grecian lords;
But when he spoke, O, when he looked at me,
I felt indeed the touch of servitude
And this time loved it.

EUNICE

O, you too, Rodogune!

RODOGUNE

I too! What do you mean? Are you, Eunice —

EUNICE

I mean, our thorny rose Cleone too
Has fallen in love with pretty Timocles.

RODOGUNE

You slanderer! But I thought a nearer thing
That ran like terror through my heart.

EUNICE

And so

You love him?

RODOGUNE

What have I said, Eunice? what have I said?
I did not say it.

EUNICE

You did not say it, no!
You lovely fool, hide love with blushes then
And lower over your liquid love-filled eyes
Their frightened lashes! Quake, my antelope!
I'll have revenge at least. O sweet, sweet heart,
My delicate Parthian! I shall never have
Another love, but only Rodogune,
My beautiful barbarian Rodogune
With the tall dainty grace and the large eyes
And vague faint pallor just like twilit ivory.

RODOGUNE

My own Eunice!

They embrace. Phayllus enters.

PHAYLLUS (*stroking his chin*)

I always hated waste.

EUNICE

Your steps too steal, Phayllus?

PHAYLLUS

I have a message.

EUNICE

I do not like the envoy. Find another
And I will hear it.

PHAYLLUS

Come, you put me out.

EUNICE

Of your accounts? They say there is too much
You have put out already for your credit.

PHAYLLUS

You're called. The Queen's in haste, Cleone said.

Eunice goes.

Parthian, will you be Syria's queen or no?
I startle you. The royal Timocles
By your beauty strives ensnared. Don not your mask
Of modesty, keep that for Timocles.
I offer you a treaty. By my help
You can advance your foot to Syria's throne:
His bed's the staircase and you shall ascend,
Nor will I rest till you are seated there.
Come, have I helped you? Shall we be allies?

RODOGUNE

You speak a language that I will not hear.

PHAYLLUS

Oh, language! you're for language, all of you.
Are you not Parthia's daughter? do you not wish
To sit upon a throne?

RODOGUNE

Not by your help,
Nor as the bride of Syrian Timocles.
What are these things you speak?

I think you parry to be more attacked.

RODOGUNE

Think what you will, but leave me.

PHAYLLUS

If you mean that,
The way to show it is to let him come.
You feign and do not mean this, or else you would
Deny him to his face.

RODOGUNE (*flushing angrily*)

I will; tell him to come.

PHAYLLUS

I thought so. Come he shall. Remember me.

He goes out.

RODOGUNE

I did not well to bid him come to me.
It is some passing fancy of the blood.
I do not hear that he was ever hurt
But danced a radiant and inconstant moth
Above the Egyptian blossoms.

*Timocles enters hastily, hesitates, then rushes and
throws himself at the feet of Rodogune.*

TIMOCLES

Rodogune!

I love thee, princess; thou hast made me mad.
I know not what I do nor what I speak.
What dreadful god has seized upon my heart?
I am not Timocles and not my own,
But am a fire and am a raging wind
To seize on thee and am a driven leaf.
O Rodogune, turn not away from me.
Forgive me, O, forgive me. I cannot help it

RODOGUNE

Was Fate not satisfied
With my captivity? Waits worse behind?
It was a grey and clouded sky before
And bleak enough but quiet. Now I see
Fresh clouds come stored with thunder toiling up
From a black-piled horizon.

EUNICE

Tell me all.
What said Phayllus to you, the dire knave
Who speaks to poison?

RODOGUNE

He spoke of love and thrones and Timocles;
He spoke as selfish cunning men may speak
Who mean some evil they call good.

EUNICE

And how
Came Timocles behind him?

RODOGUNE

Called by him,
With such wild passion burning under his lids
I never thought to see in human eyes.
What are these movements?

EUNICE

We move as we must,
Not as we choose, whatever we may think.
Your beauty is a torch you needs must carry
About the world with you. You cannot help it
If it burns kingdoms.

RODOGUNE

I pray it may not. God who only rulest,

Let not the evil spirit use my love
To bring misfortune on Antiochus.

Mentho enters.

MENTHO
Which is the Parthian?

EUNICE
She.

MENTHO
Antiochus
Desires you in his chamber with a bowl
Of Lesbian vintage.

EUNICE
Does he desire? The gods then choose their hour
For intervention. Move, you Parthian piece.

RODOGUNE
Send someone else. I cannot go.

EUNICE
I think
You have forgotten that you are a slave.
You are my piece and I will have you move.
Move quickly.

RODOGUNE
Surely he did not speak my name?

MENTHO
Why do you fear, my child? He's good and noble
And kind in speech and gentle to his servants.

RODOGUNE (*low, to herself*)
It is not him I fear, it is myself.

EUNICE

Fear me instead. You shall be cruelly whipped
Unless you move this instant.

RODOGUNE

Oh, Eunice!

EUNICE

Whipped savagely! I'll sacrifice so much
For a shy pawn who will not move? Go, go,
And come not back unkissed if you are wise.

*She pushes Rodogune to the door and
she goes, followed by Mentho.*

His heart's not free, nor hers, or else I'd try
My hand at reigning. As the gods choose. Through her
I may rule Syria.

Scene 3

Antiochus' chamber.

Antiochus, with a map before him.

ANTIOCHUS

Ecbatana, Susa and Sogdiana,
The Aryan country which the Indus bounds,
Euphrates' stream and Tigris' golden sands,
The Oxus and Jaxartes and these mountains
Vague and enormous shouldering the moon
With all their dim beyond of nations huge;
This were an empire! What are Syria, Greece
And the blue littoral to Gades? They are
Too narrow to contain my soul, too petty
To satisfy its hunger and its vastness.
O pale, sweet Parthian face with liquid eyes
Mid darkest masses and O gracious limbs
Obscuring this epitome of earth,
You will not let me fix my eyes on Susa.
I never yearned for any woman yet.
While Timocles with the light Theban dames
Amused his careless heart, I walked aside;
Parthia and Greece became my mistresses.
But now my heart is filled with one pale girl.
Exult not, archer. I will quiet thee
With sudden and assured possession first,
Then keep thee beating an eternal strain.
I have loved her through past lives and many ages.
The Parthian princess, lovely Rodogune!
O name of sweetness! Renowned Phraates' daughter,
A bud of kings, — my glorious prisoner
With those beseeching eyes. O high Antiochus,

Who snatched her from among her guardian spears,
Thou hast gone past but left this prophecy
Of beautiful conquered Persia grown my slave
To love me. It is thou, my Rodogune!

Rodogune enters.

RODOGUNE (*with lowered eyes*)
I have brought the wine.

ANTIOCHUS
Thou art the only wine,
O Parthian! Wine to flush Olympian souls
Is in this glorious flask. Set down the bowl.
Lift up instead thy long and liquid eyes;
I grudge them to the marble, Rodogune.
Thou knowest well why I have sent for thee.
Have we not gazed into each other's eyes
And thine confessed their knowledge?

RODOGUNE
Prince, I am
Thy mother's slave.

ANTIOCHUS
Mine, mine, O Rodogune,
For I am Syria.

RODOGUNE
Thine.

ANTIOCHUS
O, thou hast spoken!

RODOGUNE
Touch me not, touch me not, Antiochus!
Son of Nicanor, spare me, spare thyself.
O me! I know the gods prepare some death;

I am a living misfortune.

ANTIOCHUS

Wert thou my fate
Of death itself, delightful Rodogune,
Not, as thou art, heaven's pledge of bliss, I'd not abstain
From thy delight, but have my joy of thee
The short while it is possible on earth.
O, play not with the hours, my Rodogune.
Why should brief man defer his joys and wait
As if life were eternal? Time does not pause,
Death does not tarry.

RODOGUNE

Alas!

ANTIOCHUS

Thou lingerest yet.
Wilt thou deny the beating of our hearts
That call to us to bridge these sundering paces?
O, then I will command thee as a slave.
Thou wouldst not let me draw thee, come thyself
Into my arms, O perfect Rodogune,
My Parthian captive!

RODOGUNE

Antiochus, my king!

ANTIOCHUS

So heave against me like a wave for ever.
Melt warmly into my bosom like the Spring,
O honied breathing tumult!

RODOGUNE

O release me!

ANTIOCHUS

Thou sudden sorceress, die upon my breast!
My arms are cords to bind thee to this stake,
Slowly to burn away in crimson fire.

RODOGUNE

Release me, O release me!

ANTIOCHUS

Not till our lips have joined
Eternal wedlock. With this stamp and this
And many more I'll seal thee to myself.
Eternal Time's too short for all the kisses
I yearn for from thee, O pale loveliness,
Dim mystery! Press thy lips to mine. Obey.
Again! and so again and even for ever
Chant love, O marvel, let thy lips' wild music
Come faltering from thy heart into my bosom.

*Rodogune sinks at his feet and
embraces his knees.*

RODOGUNE

I am thine, thine, thine, thine for ever.
She rises and hides her face in her hands.

ANTIOCHUS (*uncovering her face*)

Beloved,
Hide not thy face from love. The gods in heaven
Look down on us; let us look up at them
With fearless eyes of candid joy and tell them
Not Time nor any of their dooms can move us now.
The passion of oneness two hearts are this moment
Denies the steps of death for ever.

RODOGUNE

My heart
Stops in me. I can bear no more of bliss.

Oh, leave me now that I may live for thee.

ANTIOCHUS

Stay where thou art. Or go, for thou art mine
And I can send thee from me when I will
And call thee when I will. Go, Rodogune
Who yet remain with me.

*Rodogune leaves the chamber with
faltering steps.*

O Love, thou art
Diviner in the enjoying. Can I now
Unblinded scan this map? No, she is there;
It is her eyes I see and not Ecbatana.

Scene 4

*The hall in the Palace.
Timocles, Phayllus.*

TIMOCLES

O, all the sweetness and the glory gathered
Into one smiling life, the other's left
Barren, unbearable, bleak, desolate,
A hell of silence and of emptiness
Impossible for mortal souls to imagine,
Much less to suffer. My mother does this wrong to me!
Why should not we, kind brothers all our lives, —
O, how we loved each other there in Egypt! —
Divide this prize? Let his be Syria's crown, —
Oh, let him take it! I have Rodogune.

PHAYLLUS

He will consent?

TIMOCLES

Oh, yes, and with a smile.
He is all loftiness and warlike thoughts.
My high Antiochus! how could I dream
Of taking from him what he'd wear so well?
Let me have love and joy and Rodogune.
The sunlight is enough for me.

PHAYLLUS

It may be,
Yet not enough for both. Look! there he comes
Carrying himself as if he were the sun
Brilliant alone in heaven. Oh, that to darken!

Antiochus enters.

TIMOCLES

Brother, it is the kind gods send you here.

ANTIOCHUS

Dear Timocles, we meet not all the day.
It was not so in Egypt. Tell me now,
What were you doing all these busy hours?
How many laughing girls of this fair land
Have you lured on to love you?

TIMOCLES

Have you not heard?

ANTIOCHUS

What, Timocles?

TIMOCLES

Our mother gives the crown
And with the crown apportions Rodogune.

ANTIOCHUS

Our royal mother? Are they hers to give?
I do not marry by another's will.

TIMOCLES

O brother, no; our hearts at least are ours.
You have not marked, I think, Antiochus,
This pale sweet Parthian Rodogune?

ANTIOCHUS (*smiling*)

No, brother?

I have not marked, you say?

TIMOCLES

You are so blind
To woman's beauty. You only woo great deeds
And arms imperial. It is well for me
You rather chose to wed the grandiose earth.

I am ashamed to tell you, dear Antiochus,
I grudged the noble crown that soon will rest
So gloriously upon you. Take it, brother,
But leave me my dim goddess Rodogune.

ANTIOCHUS
Thy goddess! thine!

TIMOCLES
It is not possible
That you too love her!

ANTIOCHUS
What is it to thee whom or what I love?
Say that I love her not?

TIMOCLES
Then is my offer
Just, brotherly, not like this causeless wrath.

ANTIOCHUS
Thy wondrous offer! Of two things that are mine
To fling me one with "There! I want it not,
I'll take the other"!

TIMOCLES (*in a suffocated voice*)
Has she made thee king?

ANTIOCHUS
I need no human voice to make me anything
Who am king by birth and nature. Who else should reign
In Syria? Thoughtst thou thy light and shallow head
Was meant to wear a crown?

TIMOCLES
In Egypt you were not like this, Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS

See not the Parthian even in dreams at night!
Remember not her name!

TIMOCLES

She is my mother's slave:
I'll ask for her and have her.

ANTIOCHUS

Thou shalt have
My sword across thy heart-strings first. She is
The kingdom's prize and with the kingdom mine.

TIMOCLES

My dream, my goddess with those wondrous eyes!
My sweet veiled star cloistered in her own charm!
I will not yield her to thee, nor the crown,
Not wert thou twenty times my brother.

PHAYLLUS

Capital!
Delightful! O my fortune! my kind fortune!

TIMOCLES

Thou lov'st her not who dar'st to think of her
As if she were a prize for any arms,
Thy slave, thy chattel.

ANTIOCHUS

Speak not another word.

PHAYLLUS

More! more! My star, thou risest o'er this storm.

ANTIOCHUS

I pardon thee, my brother Timocles;
Thy light passions are thy excuse. Henceforth

PHAYLLUS

Will you be dashed by this? They make her think
Antiochus will reign in Syria.

TIMOCLES

No,
She loves him.

PHAYLLUS

Is love so quickly born? Oh, then,
It will as quickly die. Eunice works here
To thwart you; she is for Antiochus.

TIMOCLES

All, all are for Antiochus, the crown,
And Syria and men's homage, women's hearts
And life and sweetness and my love.

PHAYLLUS

Young prince,
Be more a man. Besiege the girl with gifts
And graces; woo her like a queen or force her
Like what she is, a slave. Be strong, be sudden,
Forestalling this proud brother.

TIMOCLES

I would not wrong her pure and shrouded soul
Though all the gods in heaven should give me leave.

PHAYLLUS

The graceful, handsome fool! Then from your mother
Demand her as a gift.

TIMOCLES (*going*)

My soul once more
Is hunted by the tempest.

Scene 5

*Cleopatra's chamber.
Cleopatra, Cleone.*

CLEOPATRA

I am resolved; but Mentho the Egyptian knows
The true precedence of the twins. Send her to me.

Cleone goes out.

O you, high-seated cold divinities,
You sleep sometimes, they say you sleep. Sleep now!
I only loosen what your careless wills
Have tangled.

Mentho enters.

Mentho, sit by me. Mentho,
You have not breathed our secret? Keep it, Mentho,
Dead in your bosom, buy a queen for slave.

MENTHO

Dead! Can truth die?

CLEOPATRA

Ah, Mentho, truth! But truth
Is often terrible. Justice! but was ever
Justice yet seen upon the earth? Man lives
Because he is not just and real right
Dwells not with law and custom but for him
It grows by whose arriving our brief happiness
Is best assured and grief prohibited
For a while to mortals.

MENTHO

This is the thing I feared.

O wickedness! Well, Queen, I understand.

CLEOPATRA

Not less than you I love Antiochus;
 But Timocles seeks Parthian Rodogune.
 O, if these brother-loves should turn to hate
 And slay us all! Then rather let thy nursling stand, —
 Will he not rule whoever fills the throne? —
 Approved of heaven and earth, indeed a king,
 Protector of the weaker Timocles,
 His right hand in his wars, his pillar, guard
 And sword of action, grand in loyalty,
 Kingly in great subjection, famed for love.
 Then there shall be no grief for anyone
 And everything consent to our desires.

MENTHO

Queen Cleopatra, shall I speak? shall I
 Forget respect? The god demands my voice.
 I tell thee then that thy rash brain has hatched
 A wickedness beyond all parallel,
 A cold, unmotherly and cruel plot
 Thou striv'st in vain to alter with thy words.
 O nature self-deceived! O blinded heart!
 It is the husband of thy boasted love,
 Woman, thou wrongest in thy son.

CLEOPATRA

Alas,

Mentho, my nurse, thou knowest not the cause.

MENTHO

I do not need to know. Art thou Olympian Zeus?
 Has he given thee his sceptre and his charge
 To guide the tangled world? Wilt thou upset
 His rulings? wilt thou improve his providence?
 Are thy light woman's brain and shallow love

A better guide than his all-seeing eye?
O wondrous arrogance of finite men
Who would know better than omniscient God!
Beware his thunders and observe his will.
What he has made, strive not to unmake, but shun
The tragical responsibility
Of such dire error. If from thy act spring death
And horror, are thy human shoulders fit
To bear that heavy load? Observe his will,
Do right and leave the rest to God above.

CLEOPATRA

Thy words have moved me.

MENTHO

Let thy husband move thee.
How wilt thou meet him in the solemn shades?
Will he not turn his royal face from thee
Saying, "Murderess of my children, come not near me!"

CLEOPATRA

O Mentho, curse me not. My husband's eyes
Shall meet me with a smile. Mentho, my nurse,
You will not tell this to Antiochus?

MENTHO

I am not mad nor wicked. Remain fixed
In this resolve. Dream not that happiness
Can spring from wicked roots. God overrules
And Right denied is mighty.

Act III

The Palace in Antioch. Under the hills.

Scene 1

The Audience-Chamber in the Palace.

*Nicanor, Phayllus and others seated; Eunice, Philoctetes, Thoas
apart near the dais.*

THOAS

Is it patent? Is he the elder? do we know?

EUNICE

Should he not rule?

THOAS

If Fate were wise, he should.

EUNICE

Will Timocles sack great Persepolis?
Sooner I think Phraates will couch here,
The mighty, steadfast, patient, subtle man,
And from the loiterer take, the sensualist
Antioch of the Seleucidae.

THOAS

Perhaps.

But shall I rise against the country's laws
That harbours me? The sword I draw, is hers.

EUNICE

Are law and justice always one? Reflect.

THOAS

If justice is offended, I will strike.

He withdraws to another part of the hall.

EUNICE

The man is wise, but when ambition's heaped
In a great bosom, Fate takes quickly fire.
It only needs the spark.

PHILOCTETES

Is it only that
That's needed? there shall be the spark.

He withdraws.

EUNICE

Fate or else Chance
Work out the rest. I have given your powers a lead.
Nicanor, who has drawn near, stops before her.

NICANOR

Your council's finished then?

EUNICE

What council, father?

NICANOR

I have seen, though I have not spoken. Meddle not
In things too great for you. This realm and nation
Are not a skein for weaving fine intrigues
In your shut chambers.

EUNICE

We have other sports.
What do you mean?

NICANOR

See less Antiochus.

Carry not there your daring spirit and free rein
To passion and ambition nor your bright scorn
Of every law that checks your headstrong will.
Or must I find a curb that shall restrain you?

He withdraws.

EUNICE

My prudent father! These men think that wisdom
Is tied up to beards. We too have heads
And finer brains within them, as I think!

*She goes up on the dais. Leosthenes, Callicrates
and others enter together.*

THOAS

Leosthenes from Parthia! Speeds the war?

LEOSTHENES

It waits a captain.

THOAS

It shall have today

A king of captains.

LEOSTHENES

I have seen the boy.

But there's a mystery? Shall he be the king?

THOAS

If Fate agrees with Nature.

LEOSTHENES

Neither can err

So utterly, I think; for, if they could,
Man's will would have a claim to unseat Fate,
Which cannot be.

*Cleopatra enters with Antiochus and
Timocles; Cleone, Rodogune in attendance,
the latter richly robed.*

PHILOCTETES

See where she places him!

THOAS

'Tis on her right!

PHAYLLUS

It is a woman's ruse.
Or must I at disadvantage play the game
With this strong piece against?

CLEOPATRA

The strong Antiochus has gone too early
Down the dim gorges to that silent world
Where we must one day follow him. A younger hand
Takes up his sceptre and controls his sword.
These are the Syrian twins, Nicanor's sons,
These are Antiochus and Timocles.
Why so long buried, why their right oppressed,
Why their precedence tyrannously concealed,
Forget. Forget old griefs, old hatreds; let them rest
Inurned, nor from their night recover them.

NICANOR

We need not raise the curtains that conceal
Things long inurned, but lest by this one doubt
The dead past lay a dark and heavy hand
Upon our fairer future, let us swear
The Queen shall be obeyed as if she spoke
For Heaven. Betwixt the all-seeing gods and her
Confine all cause of quarrel.

PHAYLLUS

Let the princes swear;
For how can subjects jar if they agree?

CLEOPATRA

O not with oaths compel the Syrian blood!
My sons, do you consent?

TIMOCLES

Your sovereign will must rule,
Mother, your children and our fraternal kindness
Will drown the loser's natural chagrin
In joy at the other's joy.

CLEOPATRA

Antiochus, my son!

ANTIOCHUS

Your question, Madam, was for Timocles;
From me it needs no answer.

PHAYLLUS

You accept
Your mother's choice?

ANTIOCHUS

God's choice. My mother speaks
A thing concealed, not one unsettled.

PHAYLLUS

Prince,
Syria demands a plainer answer here.

ANTIOCHUS

Who art thou? Art thou of Seleucus' blood
Who questionest Syria's kings?

CLEOPATRA

Enough. My sons
Will know how to respect their kingly birth.
Today begins another era. Rise,
Princess of Parthia; sit upon this throne,
Phraates' daughter; thou art peace and love
And must today be crowned. Marvel not, Syrians;
For it is peace my envoys bear by now
Upon their saddles to Persepolis.

THOAS

This was a secret haste!

LEOSTHENES

Is it possible?
We had our heel upon the Parthian's throat.

CLEOPATRA

Since Parthia swept through the Iranian East
Wrecking the mighty Macedonian's toil,
War sways for ever like a darkened sea
In turmoil twixt our realms. How many heart-strings
Have broken, what tears of anguish have been wept
And eyes sought eastward unreturning eyes!
Joy has been buried in the blood-drenched sands.
Vain blood, vain weeping! Earth was made so wide
That many might have majesty and joy
Upon one mother's equal breast. But we
Arresting others' portions lose our own.
Nations that conquer widest, perish first,
Sapped by the hate of an uneasy world.
Then they are wisest victors who in time
Knowing the limits of their prosperous fate
Avoid the violence of Heaven. Syrians,
After loud battles I have founded glorious peace.
That fair work I began as Syria's queen;
To seal it Syria's king must not refuse.

ANTIOCHUS

I do refuse it. There shall be no peace.

CLEOPATRA

My son!

ANTIOCHUS

Peace! Are the Parthians at our gates?
Has not alarm besieged Ecbatana?
When was it ever seen or heard till now
That victors sued for peace? And this the reason,
A woman's reason, because many have bled
And more have wept. It is the tears, the blood
Prodigally spent that build a nation's greatness.
I here annul this peace, this woman's peace,
I will proclaim with noise of victories
Its revocation.

PHAYLLUS

Now!

THOAS

Thou speakest, King!

TIMOCLES

You are not crowned as yet, Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS

Syria forbids it, Syria's destiny
Sends forth her lion voices from the hills
Where trumpets blare towards Persepolis,
Forbidding peace.

CLEOPATRA

We do not sue for peace,
My son, but give peace, taking provinces
And taking Rodogune.

TIMOCLES

Who twenty times
Outweighs all hero's actions and exceeds
Earth's widest conquests.

ANTIOCHUS

For her and provinces!
O worse disgrace! The sword had won us these.
We wrong the mighty dead who conquered. Provinces!
Whose soil are they that we must sue for them?
The princess! She's my prisoner, is she not?
Must I entreat the baffled Parthian then
What I shall do with my own slave-girl here
In Antioch, in my palace? Queen of Syria,
This was ignobly done.

CLEOPATRA

I know you do not love me; in your cold heart
Love finds no home; but still I am your mother.
You will respect me thus when you are king?

ANTIOCHUS

I will respect you in your place, enshrined
In your apartments, governing your women,
Not Syria.

CLEOPATRA

Leave it. You will not think of peace?

ANTIOCHUS

Yes, when our armies reach Persepolis.

MELITUS

How desperate looks the Queen! What comes of this?

NICANOR (*who has been watching Eunice*)

End this debate; let Syria know her king.

Cleopatra rises and stands silent for a moment.

TIMOCLES

Mother!

CLEOPATRA

Behold your king!

MENTHO

She has done it, gods!

There is an astonished silence.

NICANOR

Speak once more, daughter of high Ptolemy,
Remembering God. Speak, have we understood?
Is Timocles our king?

CLEOPATRA (*with a mechanical and rigid gesture*)

Behold your king!

*Nicanor makes a motion of assent as
to the accomplished fact.*

NICANOR

Let then the King ascend his throne.

LEOSTHENES (*half-rising*)

Thoas!

PHILOCTETES

Speak, King Antiochus, God's chosen king
Who art, not Cleopatra's.

THOAS

Speak, Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS

Why didst thou give to me alone the name
Of Syria's princes? why upon thy right
Hast seated me? or wherefore mad'st thou terms
For that near time when I should be the king,

Chaffering for my consent with arguments
Unneeded if the younger were preferred?
Wilt thou invoke the gods to seal this lie?

CLEOPATRA

Dost thou insult me thus before my world?
Ascend the throne, my son.

ANTIOCHUS

Stay, Timocles.
Make not such haste, my brother, to supplant
Thy elder.

TIMOCLES

My elder?

He looks at Cleopatra.

CLEOPATRA

I have spoken the truth.

MENTHO

Thou hast not; thou art delivered of a lie,
A monstrous lie.

CLEONE

Silence, thou swarthy slave!

MENTHO

I'll not be silent. She offends the gods.
I am Mentho the Egyptian, she who saw
The royal children born. She lies to you,
O Syrians. Royal young Antiochus
Was first on earth.

THOAS

The truth breaks out at last.

PHAYLLUS

This is a slave the surplus mud of Nile
Engendered. Shall we wrong the Queen by hearing her?

MENTHO

I was a noble Egyptian's wife in Memphis,
No slave, thou Syrian mongrel, and my word
May stand against a perjured queen's.

EUNICE (*leaning forward*)

Is't done?

*Nicanor who has been hesitating, observes
her action and stands forward to speak.*

NICANOR

The royal blood of Egypt cannot lie.
Shall Syria's queen be questioned? Shall common words
Of common men be weighed against the breath of kings?
Let not wild strife arise, O princes, let it not.
Antiochus, renounce unfilial pride;
Wound not thy mother and thy motherland,
Son of Nicanor.

THOAS

Shall a lie prevail?

NICANOR (*looking again at Eunice*)

It was settled then among you! Be it so.
My sword is bare. I stand for Syria's king.

PHILOCTETES (*in the midst of a general hesitation*)

Egyptian Philoctetes takes thy challenge,
Nicanor.

ANTIOCHUS

Who is for me in Syria?

THOAS
I set my sword
Against Nicanor's.

LEOSTHENES
I am Leosthenes.
I draw my victor steel for King Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS
Who else for me?

OTHERS
I! I! and I! and I!

CALLICRATES AND OTHERS
We for King Timocles.

LEOSTHENES
Slay them, cut down
The party of the liars.
*There is a shouting and tumult with
drawing and movement of swords.*

NICANOR
Protect the King.
Let insolent revolt at once be quenched
And sink in its own blood.

LEOSTHENES
I slay all strife
With the usurper.

THOAS
Stay, stay, Leosthenes.

ANTIOCHUS
Forbear! forbear, I say! let all be still!

The great Seleucus' house shall not be made
 A shambles. Not by vulgar riot, not
 By fratricidal murder will I climb
 Into my throne, but up the heroic steps
 Of ordered battle. Brother Timocles,
 That oft-kissed head is sacred from my sword.
 Nicanor, thou hast thrown the challenge down;
 I lift it up.

CLEOPATRA

O, hear me, son Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS

I have renounced thee for my mother.

RODOGUNE

Alas!

CLEOPATRA

O wretched woman!

*She hurries out followed by Rodogune,
 Eunice and Cleone.*

NICANOR

Thou shalt not do this evil,
 Though millions help thee.

*He goes out with Timocles, Phayllus,
 Callicrates and the others of his party.*

PHILOCTETES

Can we hold the house
 And seize the city? We are many here.

THOAS

Nicanor's troops hold Antioch.

LEOSTHENES

Not here, not here.

Out to the army on the marches! There
Is Syria's throne, not here in Antioch.

ANTIOCHUS

Mentho,

Go with us. Gather swiftly all our strength,
Then out to Parthia!

Scene 2

*A hall in the Palace.
Rodogune, Eunice.*

RODOGUNE

God gave my heart and mind; they are not hers
To force into this vile adultery.
I am a Parthian princess, of a race
Who choose one lord and cleave to him for ever
Through death, through fire, through swords, in hell, in heaven.

EUNICE

The Queen's too broken. It was Phayllus said it.
He has leaped into the saddle of affairs
And is already master. What can we hope for
Left captive in such hands? Not Syria's throne
Shall you ascend beside your chosen lord,
But as a slave the bed of Timocles.

RODOGUNE

If we remain! But who remains to die?
In Parthian deserts, in Antiochus' tents!
There we can smile at danger.

EUNICE

Yes, oh, yes!
Deserts for us are safe, not Antioch. Come.
Antiochus and Philoctetes enter from without.

ANTIOCHUS

I sought for you, Eunice, Rodogune.
To saddle! for our bridal pomp and torches

Are other than we looked for.

Phayllus enters from within with Theras.

PHAYLLUS

Today, no later.

The Egyptian rebel ravishes our queen!

Help! help!

ANTIOCHUS

Off, Syrian weasel!

He flings off Phayllus and goes out with Eunice, Rodogune, Philoctetes.

PHAYLLUS

Theras, pursue them!

Theras hastens out; Phayllus rushes to the window.

Antiochus escapes! Oppose him, sentinels.

A thousand pieces for his head! He's through.

O for a speedy arrow!

Timocles enters with Cleone.

TIMOCLES

Who escapes?

PHAYLLUS

Thy brother, forcing with him Rodogune,

And with them fled Eunice.

TIMOCLES

Rodogune!

PHAYLLUS

By force he carried her.

TIMOCLES

O no, she went
Smiling and glad. O thou unwise Phayllus,

Why dost thou stay with me, a man that's doomed?
 He will come back and mount his father's throne
 And rule the nations. Why wouldst thou be slain?
 All, all's for him and ever was. I have had
 Light loves, light friends, but no one ever loved me
 Whom I desired. So was it in our boyhood's days,
 So it persists. He is preferred in heaven
 And earth is his and his humanity.
 Even my own mother is a Niobe
 Because he has renounced her.

PHAYLLUS

I understand,

Seeing this, the reason.

TIMOCLES

Why should he always have the things I prize?
 What is his friendship but a selfish need
 Of souls to unbosom himself to, who will share,
 Mirror and serve his greatness? Yet it was he
 The clear discerning Philoctetes chose;
 Upon his shoulder leaned my royal uncle
 Preferring him to admonish and to love;
 On me he only smiled as one too light
 For praise or censure. What's his kingliness
 But a lust of grandiose slaughter, an ambition
 Almost inhuman and a haughty mind
 That lifts itself above the highest heads
 As if his mortal body held a god
 And all were mean to him? Yet proudest men,
 Thoas, Theramenes, Leosthenes,
 Become unasked his servants. What's his love?
 A despot's sensual longing for a slave,
 Carnal, imperious, harsh, without respect,
 The hunger of the vital self, not raised,
 Refined, uplifted to the yearning heart.
 Yet Rodogune, my Rodogune to him

Has offered up her moonlit purity,
Her secret need of sweetness. O she has
Unveiled to him her sweet proud heart of love.
She would not look at me who worshipped her.
You too, Phayllus, go, Cleone, go
And serve him in his tents: the future's there,
Not on this brittle throne with which the gods
In idle sport have mocked me.

PHAYLLUS

There must be a man

Somewhere within this!

CLEONE

You shall not speak so to him.

Look round, King Timocles, and see how many
Prefer you to your brother. I am yours,
Phayllus works for you, princely Nicanor
Protects you, famed Callicrates supports.
Your mother only weeps in fear for you,
Not passion for your brother.

TIMOCLES

Rodogune

Has left me.

PHAYLLUS

We will have her back. Today
Began, today shall end this rash revolt.
Rise up, King Timocles, and be thyself,
Possess thy throne, recover Rodogune.

TIMOCLES

I cannot live unless you bring her back.

PHAYLLUS

That is already seen to. My couriers ride

Before them to Thrasyllus on the hills.
Their flight will founder there.

TIMOCLES

O subtle, quick
And provident Phayllus! Thou, thou, deviser,
Art the sole minister for me. Cleone,
The gods have made thee wholly beautiful
That thou mightst love me.

He goes out with Cleone.

PHAYLLUS

Minister! That's something,
Not all I work for.
(*to Theras who enters*)
Well?

THERAS

He has escaped.
Your throw this time was bungled, Chancellor.

PHAYLLUS

I saw his rapid flight; but afterwards?

THERAS

The band of Syrian Phliaps kept the gates.
We shouted loud, but he more quick, more high,
Like some clear-voiced Tyrrhenian trumpet cried,
"Syrians, I am your king," and they at once,
"Hail, glorious King!" and followed at his word,
Gallop[ing], till on the Orient road they seemed
Like specks on a white ribbon.

PHAYLLUS

Let them go.
There's yet Thrasyllus. Or if he returns,
Though gods should help, though victory march his friend,
I am here to meet him.

Scene 3

Under the Syrian hills.

Antiochus, his generals, soldiers; Eunice, Rodogune, Mentho.

ANTIOCHUS

What god has moved them from their passes sheer
Where they were safe from me?

THOAS

They have had word,
No doubt, to take us living.

LEOSTHENES

On!

THOAS

They are
Three thousand, we six hundred armèd men.
Shall we go forward?

LEOSTHENES

Onward, still, I say!

ANTIOCHUS

Yes, on! I turn not back lest my proud Fate
Avert her eyes from me. A hundred guard
The princesses.

*He goes, followed by Thoas,
Leosthenes, Philoctetes.*

EUNICE

He'll break them like sea-spray;

They shall not stand before him.

RODOGUNE

You missioned angels, guard Antiochus.

*As she speaks, the Eremite
enters and regards her.*

EUNICE

He is through them, he is through them! How they scatter
Before his sword! My warrior!

RODOGUNE

Who is this man,
Eunice? He is terrible to me.

EREMITE

Who art thou rather, born to be a torch
To kingdoms? Is not thy beauty, rightly seen,
More terrible to men than monstrous forms
Which only frighten?

EUNICE

What if kingdoms burn,
So they burn grandly?

EREMITE

Spirits like thine think so.
Princess of Antioch, hast thou left thy father
To follow younger eyes? Alas, thou knowst not
Where they shall lead thee! It is to gates accursed
And by a dolorous journey.

EUNICE

Beyond all portals
I'd follow! I am a woman of the Greeks
Who fear not death nor hell.

Antiochus returns.

ANTIOCHUS

Our swords have hewn
A road for us. Who is this flamen?

EREMITE

Hail!
“Rejoice” I cannot say, but greet Antiochus
Who never shall be king.

ANTIOCHUS

Who art thou, speak,
Who barst with such ill-omened words my way
Discouraging new-born victory? What thou knowest,
Declare! Curb not thy speech. I have a mind
Stronger than omens.

EREMITE

I am the appointed voice
Who come to tell thee thou shalt not be king,
But at thy end shall yield to destiny
For all thy greatness, genius, pride and force
Even as the tree that falls. March then no farther,
For in thy path Fate hostile stands.

ANTIOCHUS

If Fate
Would have me yield, let her first break me. On!

EREMITE

The guardians of the path then wait for thee
Vigilant lest the world’s destiny be foiled
By human greatness. March on to thy doom.

ANTIOCHUS

I will. Straight on, whatever doom it be!

EREMITE

Farewell, thou mighty Syrian, soul misled,
Strength born untimely! We shall meet again
When death shall lead thee into Antioch.

He goes.

ANTIOCHUS

March.

Act IV

The Palace in Antioch. Before the hills.

Scene 1

*Cleopatra's chamber.
Cleopatra, Zoÿla.*

CLEOPATRA

Will he not come this morning? How my head aches!
Zoÿla, smooth the pain out of it, my girl,
With your deft fingers. Oh, he lingers, lingers!
Cleone keeps him still, the rosy harlot
Who rules him now. She is grown a queen and reigns
Insulting me in my own palace. Yes,
He's happy in her arms; why should he care for me
Who am only his mother?

ZOÿLA

Is the pain less at all?

CLEOPATRA

O, it goes deeper, deeper. Ever new revels,
While still the clang of fratricidal war
Treads nearer to his palace. Zoÿla,
You saw him with Cleone in the groves
That night of revel?

ZOÿLA

So I told you, madam.
It is long since Daphne's groves have gleamed so bright

Or trembled to such music.

CLEOPATRA

They were together?

ZOÏLA

Oh, constantly. One does not see such lovers.

CLEOPATRA (*shaking her off*)

Go!

ZOÏLA

Madam?

CLEOPATRA

Thy touch is not like Rodogune's
Nor did her gentle voice offend me. Eunice,

Zoÿla retires.

Why hast thou left me, cruel cold Eunice?

She walks to the window and returns swiftly.

God's spaces frighten me. I am so lonely
In this great crowded palace.

Timocles enters the room reading a despatch.

TIMOCLES

He rushes onward like a god of war.
Mountains and streams and deserts waterless
Are grown our foes, his helpers. The gods give ground
Before his horse-hooves.
Millions of men arrayed in complete steel
Cannot restrain him. Almost we hear in Antioch
His trumpets now. Only Nicanor and the hills
Hardly protect my crown, my brittle crown!

CLEOPATRA

Antiochus comes!

TIMOCLES

The Macedonian legions
Linger somewhere upon the wide Aegean. Sea
And land contend against my monarchy.
Your brother sends no certain word.

CLEOPATRA

It will come.
Could not the Armenian helpers stay his course?
They came like locusts.

TIMOCLES

But are swept away
As with a wind. O mother, fatal mother,
Why did you keep me from the battle then?
My presence might have spurred men's courage on
And turned this swallowing fate. It is alone
Your fault if I lose crown and life.

CLEOPATRA

My son!

TIMOCLES

There, mother, I have made you weep. I love you,
Dear mother, though I make you often weep.

CLEOPATRA

I have not blamed you, my sweet Timocles.
I did the wrong. Go to the field, dear son,
And show yourself to Syria. Timocles,
I mean no hurt, but now, only just now,
Would not a worthier presence at your side
Assist you? My royal brother of Macedon
Would give his child to you at my desire,
Or you might have your fair Egyptian cousin
Berenice. Syria would honour you, my son.

TIMOCLES

I know your meaning. You are so jealous, mother.
 Why do you hate Cleone, grudging me
 The solace of her love? I shall lose Syria
 And I have lost already Rodogune:
 Cleone clings to me. Nor is her heart
 Like yours, selfish and jealous.

CLEOPATRA

Timocles!

TIMOCLES (*walking to the window*)

O Rodogune, where hast thou taken those eyes,
 My moonlit midnight, where that wondrous hair
 In which I thought to live as in a cloud
 Of secret sweetness? Under the Syrian stars
 Somewhere thou liest in my brother's arms,
 Thy pale sweet happy face upon his breast
 Smiling up to be kissed. O, it is hell,
 The thought is hell! At midnight in the silence
 I wake in warm Cleone's rosy clasp
 To think of thee embraced; then in my blood
 A fratricidal horror works. Let it not be,
 You gods! Let me die first, let him be king.
 O mother, do not let us quarrel any more:
 Forgive me and forget.

CLEOPATRA

You go from me?

TIMOCLES

My heart is heavy. I will drink awhile
 And hear sweet harmonies.

CLEOPATRA

There in the hall

And with Cleone?

TIMOCLES

Let it not anger you.

Yes, with Cleone.

He goes.

CLEOPATRA

I am alone, so terribly alone!

Scene 2

*A hall in the Palace.
Phayllus, Theras.*

THERAS
His fortune holds.

PHAYLLUS
He has won great victories
And stridden exultant like a god of death
Over Grecian, Syrian and Armenian slain;
But being mortal at each step has lost
A little blood. His veins are empty now.
Where will he get new armies? His small force
May beat Nicanor's large one, even reach Antioch,
To find the Macedonian there. They have landed.
He is ours, Theras, this great god of tempest,
Our captive whom he threatens, doomed to death
While he yet conquers.

*Timocles enters with Cleone, then the
musicians and dancing-girls.*

TIMOCLES
Bring in the wine and flowers; sit down, sit down.
Call in the dancers. Through the Coan robes
Let their bright flashing limbs assault my eyes
Capturing the hours, imprisoning my heart
In a white whirl of movement. Sit, Cleone.
Here on my breast, against my shoulder! You rose
Petalled and armed, you burden of white limbs
Made to be kissed and handled, you Cleone!
Yes, let the world be flowers and flowers our crown

With rosy linkings red as our own hearts
Of passion. O wasp soft-settling, poignant, sting,
Sting me with bliss until I die of it.

PHAYLLUS

I do not like this violence. Theras, go.

Theras leaves the hall.

TIMOCLES

Drink, brother Phayllus. Your webs will glitter more brightly,
You male Arachne.
More wine! I'll float my heart out in the wine
And pour all on the ground to naked Eros
As a libation. I will hide my heart
In roses, I will smother thought with jonquils.
Sing, someone to me! sing of flowers, sing mere
Delight to me far from this troubled world.

Song

Will you bring cold gems to crown me,
Child of light?
Rather quick from breathing closes
Bring me sunlight, myrtles, roses,
Robe me in delight.
Give me rapture for my dress,
For its girdle happiness.

TIMOCLES

Closer, Cleone; pack honey into a kiss.
Another song! you dark-browed Syrian there!

Song

Wilt thou snare Love with rosy brightness
To make him stay with thee?
The petulant child of a fair, cruel mother,
He flees from me to crown another.
O misery!
Love cannot be snared, love cannot be shared;
Light love ends wretchedly.

TIMOCLES

Remove these wine-cups! tear these roses down!
Who snared me with these bonds? Take hence, thou harlot,
Thy rose-faced beauty! Thou art not Rodogune.

CLEONE

What is this madness?

TIMOCLES

Hence! leave me! I am sick
Of thy gold and roses.

PHAYLLUS

Go, women, from the room;
The King is ill. Go, girl, leave him to me.
*All go, Cleone reluctantly, leaving
Phayllus with Timocles.*

TIMOCLES

I will not bear it any more. Give me my love
Or let me die.

PHAYLLUS

In a few nights from this
Thou shalt embrace her.

TIMOCLES

Silence! It was not I.
What have I said? It was the wine that spoke.
Look not upon me with those eyes of thine.

PHAYLLUS

The wine or some more deep insurgent spirit
Burns in thy blood. Thou shalt clasp Rodogune.

TIMOCLES

Thy words, thy looks appal me. She's my brother's wife
Sacred to me.

PHAYLLUS

His wife? Who wedded them?
For not in camps and deserts Syria's kings
Accomplish wedlock. She's his concubine.
Slave-girl she is and bed-mate of thy brother
And may be thine. Or if she were his soul-close wife,
Death rends all ties.

TIMOCLES

I will not shed his blood.
Silence, thou tempter! he is sacred to me.

PHAYLLUS

Thou needst not stain thy hands, King Timocles.
Be he live flesh or carrion, she is thine.

TIMOCLES

Yet has she lain between my brother's arms.

PHAYLLUS

What if she were thy sister, should that bar thee
From satisfaction of thy heart and body?

TIMOCLES

Do you not tremble when you say such things?

PHAYLLUS

We have outgrown these thoughts of children, king:
Nor gods nor ghosts can frighten us. You shake
At phantoms of opinion or you feign
To start at such, forgetting what you are.
The royal house of Egypt heeds them not,
Where you were nursed. Your mother sprang from incest.
If in this life you lose your Rodogune,
Are others left where you may have her bliss?
Your brother thought not so, but took her here.

Scene 3

*Before the Syrian hills. Antiochus' tent.
Antiochus, Thoas, Leosthenes, Philoctetes.*

PHILOCTETES

This is Phayllus' work, the Syrian mongrel.
Who could have thought he'd raise against us Greece
And half this Asia?

ANTIOCHUS

He has a brain.

THOAS

We feel it.

This fight's our latest and one desperate chance
Still smiles upon our fate.

ANTIOCHUS

Nicanor yields it us

Scattering his armies; for if we can seize
Before he gathers in his distant strengths
This middle pass, Antioch comes with it. So
I find it best and think the gods do well
Who put before us one decisive choice
Not lingering out their vote in balanced urns,
Not tediously delaying strenuous fate, —
Either to conquer with one lion leap
Or end in glorious battle.

THOAS

We ask no better;

With you to triumph or die beside you taking

The din of joyous battle in our ears,
Following your steps into whatever world.

PHILOCTETES

Have we not strength enough to enforce retreat
Like our forefathers through the Asian vasts
To Susa or the desert or the sea
Or Ptolemy in Egypt, — thence returning
With force of foreign levies, if Phayllus
Draw even the distant Roman over here,
Dispute with him the world?

ANTIOCHUS

No, Philoctetes.

With native swords I sought my native crown,
Which if I win not upon Syria's hills
A hero's death is mine. Make battle ready.
Our bodies are the dice we throw again
On the gods' table.

Scene 4

The same.

Antiochus, Eunice, Rodogune.

ANTIOCHUS

I put my hand on Antioch. Thou hast done well,
O admirable quick Theramenes.
This fight was lionlike.

EUNICE

And like the lion
Thou art, my warrior, thou canst now descend
Upon Seleucus' city. How new 'twill seem
After the mountains and the starlit skies
To sleep once more in Antioch!

RODOGUNE

I trust the stars
And mountains better. They were kind to me.
My blood within me chills when I look forward
And think of Antioch.

ANTIOCHUS

These are the shadows from a clouded past
Which shall not be repeated, Rodogune.
This is not Antioch that thou knewst, the prison
Of thy captivity, thou enterest now,
Not Antioch of thy foes, but a new city
And thy own kingdom.

RODOGUNE

Are the gods so good?

ANTIOCHUS

The gods are strong; they love to test our strength
 Like armourers hammering steel. Therefore 'twas said
 That they are jealous. No, but high and stern
 Demanding greatness from the great; they strike
 At every fault they see, perfect themselves
 Labour at our perfection. What rumour increases
 Approaching from the mountains? Thoas, thou?

Thoas enters.

Thy brow is dark. Is it Theramenes?
 Returns our fortune broken?

THOAS

Broken and fallen.

We who are left bring back Theramenes
 Upon whose body twenty glorious wounds
 Smile at defeat.

ANTIOCHUS

Theramenes before me!

How have you kept me lying in my tent!
 I thought our road was clear of foemen.

THOAS

The gods

Had other resources that we knew not of.
 Within the passes, on the summit couch
 The spears of Macedon. They have arrived
 From the sea, from Antioch.

ANTIOCHUS

The Macedonians! Then

Our day is ended; we must think of night.
 We reach our limit, Thoas.

THOAS

That's if we choose;

For there are other tidings.

ANTIOCHUS

They should be welcome.

THOAS

Phraates, thy imperial father, comes
With myriad hosts behind him thunder-hooved,
Not for invasion armed as Syria's foe,
But for the husband of his Rodogune.
Shall we recoil upon these helpers? Death
Can always wait.

ANTIOCHUS

Perhaps. Leave me awhile,
Thoas; for we must sit alone tonight,
My soul and I together. Rodogune,

Thoas goes.

Wouldst thou go back to Parthia, to thy country?

RODOGUNE

I have no country, I have only thee.
I shall be where thou art; it is all I know
And all I wish for.

ANTIOCHUS

Eunice, wilt thou go
To Antioch safe? My mother loves thee well.

EUNICE

I follow her and thee. What talk is this?
I shall grow angry.

ANTIOCHUS

Am I other, Eunice,
Than once I was? Is there a change in me
Since first I came into your lives from Egypt?

EUNICE

You are my god, my warrior and the same
You ever were.

ANTIOCHUS

To her and thee I am.
Sleep well, my Rodogune, for thou and I,
Not sure of Fate, are of each other sure.
To thee what else can matter?

RODOGUNE

Nothing else.
*Rodogune and Eunice enter the
interior of the tent.*

ANTIOCHUS

A god! Yes, I have godlike stirrings in me.
Shall they be bounded by this petty world
The sea can span? If Rome, Greece, Africa,
Asia and all the undiscovered globe
Were given me for my garden, all glory mine,
All men my friends, all women's hearts my own,
Would there not still be bounds, still continents
Unvanquished? O thou glorious Macedonian,
Thou too must seek at last more worlds to conquer.
Hast thou discovered them?
This earth is but a hillock when all's said,
The sea an azure puddle. All tonight
Seems strange to me; my wars, ambition, fate
And what I am and what I might have been,
Float round me vaguely and withdraw from me
Like grandiose phantoms in a mist. Who am I?
Whence come I? Whither go, or wherefore now?
Who gave me these gigantic appetites
That make a banquet of the world? who set
These narrow, scornful and exiguous bounds
To my achievement? O, to die, to pass,

Nothing achieved but this, "He tried great things,
Accomplished small ones." If this life alone
Be given us to fail or to succeed,
Then 'tis worth keeping.

The Parthian treads our land!

Phraates' hooves dig Grecian soil once more!
The subtle Parthian! He has smiled and waited
Till we were weak with mutual wounds and now
Stretches his foot towards Syria. Have I then
Achieved this only, my country's servitude?
Shall that be said of me? It galls, it stabs.
My fame! "Destroyer of Syria, he undid
The great Seleucus' work." Whatever else
O'er take me, in this the strong gods shall not win.
I will give up my body and sword to Timocles,
Repel the Parthian, save from this new death,
These dangerous allies from Macedon
Syria, then die.
But wherefore die? Should I not rather go
With my sole sword into the changeful world,
Create an empire, not inherit one?
Are there not other realms? has not the East
Great spaces? In huge torrid Africa
Beyond the mystic sources of the Nile
There must be empires. Or if with a ship
One sailed for ever through the infinite West,
Through Ocean and still Ocean for three years,
Might not one find the old Atlantic realms
No fable? Thy narrow lovely littoral,
O blue Mediterranean, India, Parthia,
Is this the world? I thirst for mightier things
Than earth has.

But for what I dreamed, to bound
Upon Nicanor through the deep-bellied passes
Or fall upon the Macedonian spears,
It were glorious, yet a glorious cowardice,
Too like self-slaughter. Is it not more heroic

To battle with than to accept calamity?
 Unless indeed all thinking-out is vain
 And Fate our only mover. Seek it out, my soul,
 And make no error here; for on this hour
 The future of the man Antiochus,
 What future he may have upon the earth
 In name or body lies. Reveal it to me, Zeus!
 In Antioch or upon the Grecian spears,
 Where lies my fate?

While he is speaking, the Eremite enters.

EREMITE

Before thee always.

ANTIOCHUS

How

Cam'st thou or whence? I know thy ominous look.

EREMITE

The how inquire not nor the whence, but learn
 The end is near which I then promised thee.

ANTIOCHUS

So then, defeat and death were from the first
 My portion! Wherefore were these thoughts gigantical
 With which I came into my mother ready-shaped
 If they must end in the inglorious tomb?

EREMITE

Despise not proud defeat, scorn not high death.
 The gods accept them sternly.

ANTIOCHUS

Yes, as I shall,

But not submissively.

EREMITE

Break then, thou hill
Unsatisfied with thy own height. The gods
Care not if thou resist or if thou yield;
They do their work with mortals. To the Vast
Whence thou, O ravening, strong and hungry lion,
Overleaping cam'st the iron bars of Time,
Return! thou hast thy tamers. God of battles!
Son of Nicanor! strong Antiochus!
Depart and be as if thou wert not born.
The gods await thee in Antioch.

He departs.

ANTIOCHUS

I will meet them there.
Break me. I see you can, O gods. But you break
A body, not this soul; for that belongs, I feel,
To other masters. It is settled then.
Tomorrow sets in Antioch.

Scene 5

The same.

Philoctetes, Thoas, Leosthenes, Eunice.

LEOSTHENES

Surely this is the change that comes on men
Who are to die.

PHILOCTETES

O me! it is, it is.

THOAS

Princess Eunice, what think you of it?

EUNICE

Thoas, what matters what we think? We follow
Our king; it is his to choose our paths for us.
Lead they to death? Then we can die with him.

THOAS

That's nobly spoken.

PHILOCTETES

But too like a woman.

Antiochus enters with Rodogune.

ANTIOCHUS

To Antioch! Is all ready for our march?

PHILOCTETES

Antiochus, my king, I think in Egypt
We loved each other.

ANTIOCHUS

Less here, my Philoctetes?

PHILOCTETES

Then by that love, dear friend, go not to Antioch.
Let us await the Parthian in his march.
What do you seek at Antioch? A mother angry?
A jealous brother at whose ear a fatal knave
Sits always whispering? lords inimical?
What can you hope from these? Go not to Antioch.
I see Death smiling, waving you to go,
But do not.

ANTIOCHUS

Dearest comrade, Philoctetes,
Fate calls to me and shall I shrink from her?
I know my little brother Timocles,
I feel his clasp already, see his smile.
But there's Phayllus! Shall I fall so low
As to fear him? Forgive me, friend; I go to Antioch.

PHILOCTETES

It was decreed!

ANTIOCHUS

But you, my friends, who have no love
To shield you and perhaps great enemies,
Will you fall back until I make your peace,
To Egypt or Phraates?

THOAS

Not a man
Will leave your side who followed your victorious sword.
We follow always.

ANTIOCHUS

Beat then the drums and march.

But let an envoy ride in front to Timocles
And tell him that Antiochus comes to lay
His victor sword between a brother's knees
And fight for him with Parthia. Let us march.

All go except Philoctetes.

PHILOCTETES (*looking after him*)

O sun, thou goest rushing to the night
Which shall engulf thee!

Act V

The Palace in Antioch.

Scene 1

*A hall in the Palace.
Phayllus, alone.*

PHAYLLUS

My brain has loosened harder knots than this.
Timocles gets by this his Rodogune;
That's one thing gained. Tonight or else tomorrow
I'll have her in his bed though I have to hale her
Stumbling to it through her own husband's blood.
For he must die. He is too great a man
To be a subject: nor is that his intention
Who hides some subtler purpose. Exile would free him
For more stupendous mischief. Death! But how?
There is this Syrian people, there is Timocles
Whose light unstable mind like a pale leaf
Trembles, desires, resolves, renounces.

Timocles enters.

TIMOCLES

Phayllus,

It is the high gods bring about this good.
My great high brother, strong Antiochus
To come and kneel to me! No hatred more!
He is the brother whom I loved in Egypt.

PHAYLLUS

Oh, wilt thou always be, thou shapeless soul,
Clay for each passing circumstance to alter?

TIMOCLES

Do you not think I have only now to ask
And he will give me Rodogune? She's not his wife!
Cast always together in the lonely desert,
Long nearness must have wearied him of her;
For he was never a lover. O Phayllus,
When so much has been brought about, will you tell me
This will not happen too? I am sure the gods
Intend this.

PHAYLLUS

So you think Antiochus comes
To lay his lofty head below your foot?
You can believe it! Truly, if you think that,
There's nothing left that cannot be believed.
This soul that dreamed of conquests at its birth,
This strong overweening swift ambitious man
Whom victory disappoints, to whom continents
Seem narrow, will submit, you say, — to you?
You'll keep him for your servant?

TIMOCLES

What is it you hint?
Stroke not your chin! Speak plainly. Do you know,
I sometimes hate you!

PHAYLLUS

I care not, if you hear me
And let me guard you from your enemies.

TIMOCLES

I know you love me, but your thoughts are evil
To every other and your ways are worse.

Yet speak; what is it you fear?

PHAYLLUS

How should I know?

Yet this seems probable that having failed
By violent battle he is creeping in
To slay you silently. You smile at that?
It is the commonest rule of statesmanship
And History's strewn with instances. Believe it not;
Believe your wishes, not mankind's record;
Slumber till with the sword in you you wake
And he assumes your purple.

TIMOCLES (*indifferently*)

I hear, Phayllus. Let him give me Rodogune
And all's excused he has ever done to me.

PHAYLLUS

He will keep her and take all hearts besides
That ever loved you.

TIMOCLES (*still indifferently*)

I will see that first.

Cleopatra enters quickly.

CLEOPATRA

It is true, Timocles? It is even true!
Antiochus my son is coming to me,
Is coming to me!

TIMOCLES

Thus you love him still!

CLEOPATRA

He is my child, he has his father's face.
And I shall have my Parthian Rodogune
With her sweet voice and gentle touch, and her,

My darling, my clear-eyed delight, Eunice,
And I shall not be lonely any more.
I have not been so happy since you came
From Egypt. But, O heaven! what followed that?
Will now no stark calamity arise
With Gorgon head to turn us into stone
Venging this glimpse of joy? Torn by your scourges
I fear you, gods, too much to trust your smile.

Nicanor enters.

NICANOR
Antiochus comes.

TIMOCLES
Hail, thou victorious captain,
Syria's strong rescuer!

NICANOR
Syria's rescuer comes,
Thy brother Antiochus who makes himself
A sword to smite thy dangerous enemies.

PHAYLLUS
You used not once to praise him so, Nicanor.

NICANOR
Because I knew not then his nobleness
Who had only seen his might.

PHAYLLUS
Yet had you promised
That if he entered Antioch, it would be chained
And naked, travelling to the pit or sword,
Nicanor.

NICANOR
He comes not as a prisoner,

But royally disdaining to enslave
For private ends his country to the Parthian.

TIMOCLES
Comes my dear brother soon?

NICANOR
Even at this moment
He enters.

TIMOCLES
Summon our court. Let all men's eyes behold
This reconciliation. I shall see
Next moment Rodogune!

*There enter from one side Callicrates, Melitus,
Cleone, courtiers; from the other Antiochus, Eunice,
Rodogune, Thoas, Leosthenes, Philoctetes.*

O brother, in my arms! Let this firm clasp
Be sign of the recovered amity
That binds once more for joy Nicanor's sons.

ANTIOCHUS
This is like thee, my brother Timocles.
Let all vain strife be banished from our souls.
My sword is thine, and I am thine and all
I have and love is thine, O Syrian Timocles,
Devoted to thy throne for Syria.

TIMOCLES
All?
Brother! O clasp me once again, Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS
The Syrian land once cleansed of foemen, rescued
From these fierce perils, I shall have thy leave,
Brother, to voyage into distant lands;
But not till I have seen your Antioch joys

Of which they told us, I and my dear wife,
The Parthian princess Rodogune. See, brother,
How all things work out by a higher will.
Thou hast the Syrian kingdom, I have her
And my own soul for monarchy.

TIMOCLES

His wife!

MELITUS

The King is pale and gnaws his nether lip.

ANTIOCHUS

Mother, I kneel to you; raise me this time
And I will not be froward.

CLEOPATRA

My child! my child!

TIMOCLES

He will not give me Rodogune! And now he'll steal
My mother's heart. Captains, I welcome you:
You are my soldiers now.

LEOSTHENES

We thank thee, King.
We are thy brother's soldiers, therefore thine.

TIMOCLES

Yes! Philoctetes, old Egyptian friend,
You go not yet to Egypt?

PHILOCTETES

I know not where.
I have forgotten why I came from thence.
I hope that you will love your brother.

TIMOCLES

Him!

Oh yes, I'll love him.

ANTIOCHUS

Brother Timocles,
We have come far today; will you appoint us
Our chambers here?

TIMOCLES

I'll take you to them, brother.
All leave the hall except Cleone and Phayllus.

CLEONE

Is this their peace? But he'll have Rodogune
And I shall like a common flower be thrown
Into the dust-heap.

PHAYLLUS

Pooh!

CLEONE

I have eyes; I see.
Even then I knew I would be nothing to you
Once you were seated. I'll not be flung away!
Beware, Phayllus; for Antiochus lives.

PHAYLLUS

Make change of lovers then with Rodogune
While yet he lives.

CLEONE

I might do even that.
He has a beautiful body like a god's.
I will not have him slain.

PHAYLLUS

You may be his widow
If you make haste in marrying him; for soon
He will be carrion.

Timocles returns.

TIMOCLES

I'd have a word with you,
Phayllus.

Cleone withdraws out of hearing.

Where will they put the Parthian Rodogune?

PHAYLLUS

Put her?

TIMOCLES

To sleep, dull ruffian! Her chamber! Where?

PHAYLLUS

Why, in one bed with Prince Antiochus.

TIMOCLES

Thou bitter traitor, dar'st thou say it too?
Art thou too leagued to slay me? Shall I bear it?
In my own palace! In one bed! O God!
I will go now and stab him through the heart
And drag her, drag her —

CLEONE (*running to him*)

The foam is on his lips!

PHAYLLUS

Restrain thy passions, King! He is transformed.
This is that curious devil, jealousy.
As if it mattered! He will have her soon.

TIMOCLES

Cleone, I thank you. When I think of this,
Something revolts within to strangle me
And tears my life out of my bosom. Phayllus,
You spoke of plots; where are they? Let me see them.

PHAYLLUS

That's hard. Are they not hidden in his breast?

TIMOCLES

Can you not tear them out?

PHAYLLUS

Torture your brother!

TIMOCLES

Torture his generals; let them howl their love for him!
Torture Eunice. Let truth come out twixt shrieks!
Number her words with gouts of blood!

PHAYLLUS

You'll hurt yourself.

Be calmer. Torture! To what purpose that?
It is not profitable.

TIMOCLES

I will have proofs.
Wilt thou thwart me, thou traitor, even thou?
Arrange his trial instantly, arrange
His exile.

PHAYLLUS

Exile! You might as well arrange
At once your ruin.

TIMOCLES

There shall be justice, justice.

Thou shalt be fairly judged, Antiochus.
I will not slay him. Exile! And Rodogune
With me in Antioch.

PHAYLLUS

Listen! the passing people sing his name.
They'll rise to rescue him and slay us all
As dogs are killed in summer. Command his death:
No man will rise for a dead carcass. Death,
Not exile! He'll return with Ptolemy
Or great Phraates, take your Syria from you,
Take Rodogune.

TIMOCLES

I give my power to you.
Try him and sentence him. But execution,
Let it be execution. I will have
No murder done. Arrange it.

He goes out followed by Cleone.

PHAYLLUS

While he's in the mood,
It must be quickly done. But that's to venture
With no support in Syria when it's done
Except this brittle king. It matters not.
Fortune will bear me out; she's grown my slave-girl.
What liberties have I not taken with her
Which she has suffered amorously, kinder grown
After each handling. Watch me, my only lover!
Sudden and swift shall be Phayllus' stroke.

Scene 2

Antiochus' chamber.

Cleopatra, Antiochus, Eunice, Rodogune.

CLEOPATRA

Eunice, cruel, heartless, sweet Eunice,
How could you leave me?

EUNICE

Pardon me, dear lady.

ANTIOCHUS

Mine was the error, mother.

CLEOPATRA

O my son,
If you had said that "mother" to me then,
All this had never happened.

ANTIOCHUS

I have been hard
To you, my mother, you to me your son.
We have both erred and it may be the gods
Will punish our offences even yet.

CLEOPATRA

O, say not that, my child. We must be happy;
I will have just a little happiness.

RODOGUNE

O, answer her with kisses, dear Antiochus.

CLEOPATRA

Do you too plead for me, sweet Parthian?

EUNICE

Cousin

Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS

My heart is chastened and I love,
 Mother, though even now I will not lie
 And say I love you as a child might love
 Who from his infancy had felt your clasp.
 But, mother, give me time and if the gods
 Will give it too, who knows? we may be happy.

Philoctetes enters.

PHILOCTETES

Pardon me, Madam, but my soul is harried
 With fierce anxieties. You do not well
 To linger with your son Antiochus.
 A jealous anger works in Timocles
 When he hears of it.

CLEOPATRA

Is't possible?

PHILOCTETES

Fear it!

Believe it!

CLEOPATRA (*shuddering*)

I will not give the gods a handle.
 But I may take Eunice and your wife
 To comfort me a little?

ANTIOCHUS

Go with her,

Eunice. Leave me for an hour, my Rodogune.

All go from the chamber except Antiochus.

When, when will the gods strike? I feel the steps
Of Doom about me. Open thy barriers, Death;
I would not linger underneath the stroke.

Phayllus enters with soldiers.

PHAYLLUS

Seize him! This is the prince Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS

So soon! I said not farewell to my love.
Well, Syrian, dost thou carry only warrants
Or keeps the death-doom pace with thy arrest?

PHAYLLUS

Thy plots have been discovered, plotter.

ANTIOCHUS

Plots!

Vain subtle fool, I will not answer thee.
What matters the poor pretext? Guards, conduct me.

He goes out, guarded.

PHAYLLUS

Must thou be royal even in thy fall?

Scene 3

The same.

Eunice, Rodogune.

RODOGUNE

Will they not let me go and see him even?

EUNICE

We'll make our way to him and out for him
To Egypt, Egypt.

RODOGUNE

There's only one joy left,
To be with him whether we live or die.

EUNICE

You are too meek. Cleone helps us here
Whatever be the spring of her strange pity.
When we come back, Phayllus, we shall find out
Whether the ingenuity of men
Holds tortures huge enough for your deserts.

RODOGUNE

Why do you pace about with flaming eyes?
Be still and sit and put your hand in mine.

EUNICE

My Parthian sweetness! O, the gods are cruel
Who torture such a heart as thine.

RODOGUNE

Where is

My mother?

EUNICE

She is lying in her room
Dry-eyed and voiceless, gazing upon Fate
With eyes I dare not look at. Till tomorrow.
At dawn we'll have him out. Cleone bribes
The sentries; Thoas has horses and a ship
Wide-winged for Egypt, Egypt.

RODOGUNE

O yes, let us leave
Syria and cruel Antioch.

EUNICE

For a while.
I would have had him out tonight, my king,
But ruffian Theras keeps the watch till dawn.
How long will walls immure so huge a prisoner?
Trial! When he returns in arms from Egypt,
Try him, Phayllus. We must wait till dawn.

RODOGUNE

I shall behold him once again at dawn.

Scene 4

*A guard-room in the Palace.
Antiochus, alone.*

ANTIOCHUS

What were Death then but wider life than earth
Can give us in her clayey limits bound?
Darkness perhaps! There must be light behind.

As he speaks, Phayllus enters.

Who is it?

PHAYLLUS

Phayllus and thy conqueror.

ANTIOCHUS

In some strange warfare then!

PHAYLLUS

I came to see
Before thy end the greatness that thou wast;
For thou wert great as mortals measure. Thou hast
An hour to live.

ANTIOCHUS

Shorter were better.

PHAYLLUS

An hour!

It is strange. The beautiful strong Antiochus
In one brief hour and by a little stroke
Shall be mere rotten carrion for the flies
To buzz about.

ANTIOCHUS

Thinkest thou so, Phayllus?

PHAYLLUS

I know it, and in thy fall, because thou wert great,
I feel my greatness who am thy o'erthrower.
I long to probe the mightiness thou art
And know the thoughts that fill thee at this hour;
For it must come to me some day. The things
We are, do and are done to! Let it be.
Dost thou not ask to kiss thy wife? She'd come,
Though she must leave thy brother's bed for it.

ANTIOCHUS

What a poor lie, Phayllus, for the great man
Thou thinkst thyself!

PHAYLLUS

Thou knowst not then for her
Thou diest, that his hungry arms may clasp
Her warm sweet body thou hast loved to kiss?

ANTIOCHUS

So didst thou work it? Thou art a rare study,
Thou Graeco-Syrian.

PHAYLLUS

I am what my clay
Has made me. It does not hurt thee then to know
That while thou art dying, they are hard at work
Even now before thy kingly corpse is cold?

ANTIOCHUS

What a blind owl thou art that seest the sun
And thinkst it darkness! Hence! I weary of thee.
Thou art too shallow after all. Outside
Is it the dawn?

PHAYLLUS

The dawn. Thou wak'st too early
For one who shall not sleep again.

ANTIOCHUS

Yes, sleep
I have done with; now for an immortal waking.

PHAYLLUS

That dream of fools! Thou art another man
Than any I have seen and to my eyes
Thou seemst a grandiose lack-wit. Yet in defeat
I could not move thee. I have limits then?

ANTIOCHUS

Yes, didst thou think thyself a god in evil
And souls of men thy subjects? Leave me, send
Thy executioner. Let him be quick.
I wait!

Phayllus goes.

I fear he still will loiter. Waiting
Was ever tedious to me: I will sleep.
(he lies down; after a pause)
Is this that other country? Theramenes
Before me smiling with his twenty wounds
And Mentho with the breasts that suckled me!
Who are these crowding after me so fast?
My mother follows me and cousin Eunice
Treads in her footsteps. Thou too, Timocles?
Thoas, Leosthenes and Philoctetes,
Good friends, will you stay long? The world grows empty.
Why, all that's great in Syria staggers after me
Into blind Hades; I am royally
Attended.

Theras enters.

THERAS

Phayllus' will compels me to it,
Or else I do not like the thing I do.

ANTIOCHUS

Who is it? Thou art the instrument. Strike in.
Keep me not waiting. I ever loved proud swiftmess
And thorough spirits.

THERAS

I must strike suddenly or never strike.

He strikes.

ANTIOCHUS

I pass the barrier.

THERAS

Will not this blood stop flowing?

ANTIOCHUS

The blood? Let the gods have it; 'tis their portion.

THERAS

A red libation, O thou royal sacrifice!
I have done evil. Will sly Phayllus help me?
He was a trickster ever. I have done evil.

ANTIOCHUS

Tell Parthian Rodogune I wait for her
Behind Death's barrier.

THERAS

The world's too still. Will he not speak again
Upon this other side of nothingness?
O sounds, sounds, sounds! The sentries change, I think.
I'll draw thy curtains, O thou mighty sleeper.

He draws the curtains, extinguishes the light and goes out. All is still for a while, then the door opens again and Eunice and Rodogune enter.

EUNICE

Tread lightly, for he sleeps. The curtain's drawn.

RODOGUNE

O my Antiochus, on thy hard bed
 In the rude camp with horses neighing round
 Thou well mightst slumber nor the undistant trumpet
 Startling unseal thy war-accustomed ears
 From the sweet lethargy of earned repose.
 But in the horrible silence of this prison
 How canst thou sleep? It clamours in my brain
 More than could any sound, with terror laden
 And voices.

EUNICE

I'll wake him.

RODOGUNE

Do not. He is tired
 And you will spoil his rest.

EUNICE

He moves no more
 Than the dead might.

RODOGUNE

Speak not of death, Eunice;
 We are too near to death to speak of him.

EUNICE

He must be waked. Cousin Antiochus,
 You sleep too soundly for a prisoner. Wake!

RODOGUNE

There is some awful presence in this room.

EUNICE

I partly feel it. Wake, wake, Antiochus.

*She draws apart the curtain and puts in
her arm, then hastily withdraws it.*

O God, what is this dabbles so my hand,
That feels almost like blood?

(tearing down the curtain)

Antiochus!

*She falls half-swooned against the wall. There is a
silence, then noise is heard in the corridors
and the voice of Nicanor at the door.*

NICANOR

Guard carefully the doors; let no evasion
Deceive you.

RODOGUNE

Antiochus! Antiochus!

Antiochus!

EUNICE

Call him not; he will wake
And Heaven be angry. O my Rodogune,
Let us too sleep.

RODOGUNE

Antiochus! Antiochus!

Nicanor enters armed with soldiers and lights.

NICANOR

Am I in time? Thou? thou? How cam'st thou here?
Who is this woman with the dreadful face?
Can this be Rodogune? Eunice, speak.
What is this blood upon thy hands and dress?

Thou dost not speak! Oh, speak!

EUNICE

I am going, I am going to my chamber
To sleep.

NICANOR

Arrest her, guards.

He approaches the bed and recoils.

Awake the house!

Sound the alarm! O palace of Nicanor,
Thou canst stand yet upon thy stony base
Untroubled! The warlike prince Antiochus
Lies on this bed most treacherously murdered.

Cries and commotion outside.

Speak, wretched girl. What villain's secret hand
Profaned with death this royal sanctuary?
How cam'st thou here or hast this blood on thee?

*There enter in haste Callicrates, Melitus,
Cleone; afterwards Phayllus and others.*

CLEONE (*to Nicanor*)

Thou couldst not save him then for all my warning?
In vain didst thou mistrust me!

PHAYLLUS (*entering*)

It is done. Yet Theras came not! Do I fail?
Fortune, my kindly goddess, help me still
In the storm I have yet to weather.

NICANOR

Thou hast come!

This is thy work, thou ominous counsellor.

PHAYLLUS

In all the land who dare impugn me, if it be?

NICANOR

Thou art a villain! Thou shalt die for this.

PHAYLLUS

One day I shall, for this or something else.
But here's the King.

NICANOR

No more a king for me
Or Syria.

Timocles enters, followed by Cleopatra.

MELITUS

The Queen comes cold and white and shuddering.

CLEOPATRA (*speaking with an unnatural calmness*)

Why do these cries of terror shake the house
Repeating *Murder* and *Antiochus*?
Nicanor, lives my son?

NICANOR

Behold, O woman,
The frame you fashioned for Antiochus,
Cast from your love before, now cast from life,
By whose unnatural contrivance, let them say
Who did it.

CLEOPATRA

It is not true, it is not true!
There can be no such horror. O, for this,
For this you gave him back!

TIMOCLES

O gods! Phayllus,
I did not think that he would look like this.

MELITUS

Cover this death. It troubles the good King.

TIMOCLES (*recovering himself*)

This is a piteous sight, beloved mother;
Would that he lived and wore the Syrian crown
Unquestioned.

CLEOPATRA

Timocles, I will not credit
What yet a horror in my blood believes.
The eyes of all men charge you with this act;
Deny it!

TIMOCLES

Mother!

CLEOPATRA

Deny it!

TIMOCLES

Alas, mother!

CLEOPATRA

Deny it!

TIMOCLES

O mother, what shall I deny?
It had to be. Blame only the dire gods
And bronze Necessity.

CLEOPATRA

Call me not mother!
I have no children. I am punished, gods,
Who dared outlive my great unhappy husband
For this!

She rushes out.

NICANOR

Is this thy end, O great Seleucus?
What Fury rules thy house? The Queen is gone
With desperate eyes. Who next?

*There enter in haste Philoctetes, Thoas, Leosthenes
and others of Antiochus' party.*

PHILOCTETES

It is true then,
It is most true! O high Antiochus,
How are thy royal vast imaginations
All spilt into a meagre stream of blood!
And yet thy eyes seem to gaze royally
Into death's vaster realms as if they viewed
More conquests there and mightier monarchies.
When we were boys and slumber came with noon,
Often you'd lay your head upon my knee
Even thus. O little friend Antiochus,
We are again in hundred-gated Thebes
And life is all before us.

THOAS

O insupportable!
Thou styled by men a king, no king of mine,
Acquit thyself of this too kindred blood.
No murderer sits in great Seleucus' chair
Longer than takes the movement of my sword
Out of its scabbard. I live to ask this question.

LEOSTHENES

Nor think thy royal title nor thy guards
Shall fence thy life, thou crownèd fratricide,
Nor many ranks of triple-plated iron
Shut out swift vengeance.

PHILOCTETES

His eyes look up and seem to smile at me.

NICANOR

Thoas, thy anger ranges far too wide.
Respect the blood of kings, Leosthenes.

THOAS

See dabbled on this couch the blood of kings
Thus by a kindred blood respected.

TIMOCLES

The hearts

Of kings are not their own, nor yet their acts.
This was an execution, not a murder.
In better time and place you shall have proofs:
Phayllus knows it all. Be satisfied.
Lift up this royal dead. All hatred now
Forgotten, I will royally inter
His ashes guarding still his diadem
And sword and armour. All that most he loved
Shall go with him into the silent world.

RODOGUNE

I come.

TIMOCLES

The voice of Rodogune! That woman's form
The shadowy anguished robe concealed! She here
Beside my brother!

NICANOR

We had forgotten how piteous was this scene.
O you who loved the dead, forbear a while;
All shall be sternly judged.

TIMOCLES

O Rodogune,

The dead demands thy grief, since he too loved thee,
But not in this red chamber pay thy debt,

Not in this square of horror. In thy calm room
Gently bedew his memory with tears
And I will help them with my own. Me too
He loved once.

LEOSTHENES

Shall our swords yet sleep? He woos
His brother's wife beside his brother's corpse
Whom he has murdered.

THOAS

Yet, Leosthenes.
For Heaven has borne enough from him. At last
The gods lift up their secret thunderbolts
Above us.

NICANOR

She totters and can hardly move.
Assist her or she falls.

PHILOCTETES (*raising his head*)

O Rodogune,
What wilt thou with my dead?

PHAYLLUS

Shall it be allowed?

TIMOCLES

I do not grudge this corpse her sad farewell.
O Rodogune, embrace the unresponsive dead;
But afterwards remember life and love
Are still on earth.

THOAS

Afterwards, Timocles.
Give death a moment.

*There is a silence while Rodogune bends
swaying over the dead Antiochus.*

TIMOCLES

O my Rodogune,
Leave now the dead man's side whose debt is paid.
Return to life, to love.

RODOGUNE (*stretching out her arms*)

My king! my king!
Leave me not, leave me not! I am behind thee.
She falls dead at the feet of Antiochus.

EUNICE

O, take me also!

*She rushes to Rodogune and throws
herself on the dead bodies.*

NICANOR

Raise the princess up;
She has swooned.

THOAS

Her heart has failed her: she is dead.

TIMOCLES

Rise up, my Rodogune.

THOAS

She is dead, Timocles;
She's safe from thee. Thou goest not alone,
My king, into the darkness.

CLEONE

Look to the King!

TIMOCLES (*speaking with difficulty*)

Lives she?

MELITUS

No, she is dead, King Timocles.

CLEONE

Brother, the King!

Timocles has been tearing at the robe round his neck. Phayllus, Melitus and others crowd round to support him as he falls.

NICANOR

It is a fit at worst
Which anger and despair have forced him to.

PHAYLLUS

It is not death? I live then.

NICANOR

Death, thou intriguer!
Art thou not Death who with thy wicked promptings
And poisonous whispers worked to dangerous rage
The kindly moods of Timocles? Seize him,
He shall atone this murder.

PHAYLLUS

You build too soon
Your throne upon these prostrate bodies. Your king
Lives still, Nicanor.

NICANOR

Not to save thee from death,
Nor any murderer. Drag him hence.

CLEONE

The King revives.
Save thyself, brother.

LEOSTHENES

Ten kings should not avail
To save him.

NICANOR

Drag hence that subtle Satan.

TIMOCLES

I live

And I remember!

CLEONE

Sleepest thou, Phayllus?

PHAYLLUS

My king, they drag me hence to murder me.

TIMOCLES (*vaguely at first*)

Who art thou? Thou abhorred and crooked devil,
 Thou art the cause that she is lost to me.
 Slay him! And that shrewd-lipped, rose-tinted harlot,
 Let her be banished somewhere from men's sight
 Where she can be forgotten. O brother, brother,
 I have sent thee into the darkling shades,
 Myself am barred the way.

PHAYLLUS

What I have done,
 I did for this poor king and thankless man.
 But there's no use in talking. I am ready.

TIMOCLES (*half-rising, furiously*)

Slay him with tortures! let him feel his death
 As he has made me feel my living.

NICANOR

Take him

And see this sentence ruthlessly performed
 Upon this frame of evil. May the gods
 In their just wrath with this be satisfied.

PHAYLLUS
And yet I loved thee, Timocles.

He is taken out, guarded.

NICANOR
Daughter,
Eunice, rise.

EUNICE
I did not know till now
Life was so difficult a thing to leave.
Her going was so easy!

NICANOR
Ah, girl, this tragic drama owns in part
Thy authorship! Henceforth be wise and humble.
To her chamber lead her.

EUNICE
Do with me what you will.
My heart has gone to journey with my dead.
O father, for a few days bear with me;
I do not think that I shall long displease you
Hereafter.

She goes, attended by Melitus.

NICANOR
Follow her, Callicrates,
And let no dangerous edge or lethal drink
Be near to her despair.

Callicrates follows.

THOAS
This cannot keep us
From those we loved.

NICANOR

Syrians, what yet remains
Of this storm-visited, bolt-shattered house
Let us rebuild, joining our strength to save
The threatened kingdom. For when this deed is known,
The Parthian lion leaps raging for blood
And Ptolemy's dangerous grief for the boy he cherished
Darkens on us from Egypt. Syria beset
And we all broken!

TIMOCLES

Something has snapped in me
Physicians cannot bind. Thou, Prince Nicanor,
Art from the royal blood of Syria sprung
And in thy line Seleucus may descend
Untainted from his source. Brother, brother,
We did not dream that all would end like this,
When in the dawn or set we roamed at will
Playing together in Egyptian gardens,
Or in the orchards of great Ptolemy
Walked with our arms around each other's necks
Twin-hearted. But now unto eternity
We are divided. I must live for ever
Unfriended, solitary in the shades;
But thou and she will lie at ease inarmed
Deep in the quiet happy asphodel
And hear the murmur of Elysian winds
While I walk lonely.

PHILOCTETES

We too without thee now
Breath-haunted corpses move, Antiochus.
Thou goest attended to a quiet air;
Doomed still to live we for a while remain
Expecting what the gods have yet in store.

Perseus the Deliverer

A Drama

The Legend of Perseus

Acrisius, the Argive king, warned by an oracle that his daughter's son would be the agent of his death, hoped to escape his doom by shutting her up in a brazen tower. But Zeus, the King of the Gods, descended into her prison in a shower of gold and Danaë bore to him a son named Perseus. Danaë and her child were exposed in a boat without sail or oar on the sea, but here too fate and the gods intervened and, guided by a divine protection, the boat bore her safely to the Island of Seriphos. There Danaë was received and honoured by the King. When Perseus had grown to manhood the King, wishing to marry Danaë, decided to send him to his death and to that end ordered him to slay the Gorgon Medusa in the wild, unknown and snowy North and bring to him her head the sight of which turned men to stone. Perseus, aided by Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom, who gave him the divine sword Herpe, winged shoes to bear him through the air, her shield or aegis and the cap of invisibility, succeeded in his quest after many adventures. In his returning he came to Syria and found Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopea, King and Queen of Syria, chained to the rocks by the people to be devoured by a sea-monster as an atonement for her mother's impiety against the sea-god, Poseidon. Perseus slew the monster and rescued and wedded Andromeda.

In this piece the ancient legend has been divested of its original character of a heroic myth; it is made the nucleus round which there could grow the scenes of a romantic story of human temperament and life-impulses on the Elizabethan model. The country in which the action is located is a Syria of romance, not of history. Indeed a Hellenic legend could not at all be set in the environments of the life of a Semitic people and its early Aramaean civilisation: the town of Cepheus must be looked at as a Greek colony with a blonde Achaean dynasty ruling

a Hellenised people who worship an old Mediterranean deity under a Greek name. In a romantic work of imagination of this type these outrages on history do not matter. Time there is more than Einsteinian in its relativity, the creative imagination is its sole disposer and arranger; fantasy reigns sovereign; the names of ancient countries and peoples are brought in only as fringes of a decorative background; anachronisms romp in wherever they can get an easy admittance, ideas and associations from all climes and epochs mingle; myth, romance and realism make up a single whole. For here the stage is the human mind of all times: the subject is an incident in its passage from a semi-primitive temperament surviving in a fairly advanced outward civilisation to a brighter intellectualism and humanism — never quite safe against the resurgence of the dark or violent life-forces which are always there subdued or subordinated or somnolent in the make-up of civilised man — and the first promptings of the deeper and higher psychic and spiritual being which it is his ultimate destiny to become.

Persons of the Drama

PALLAS ATHENE.

POSEIDON.

PERSEUS, son of Zeus and Danaë.

CEPHEUS, King of Syria.

IOLAUS, son of Cepheus and Cassiopea.

POLYDAON, priest of Poseidon.

PHINEUS, King of Tyre.

TYRNAUS } merchants of Babylonia, wrecked on the coast
SMERDAS } of Syria.

THEROPS, a popular leader.

PERISSUS, a citizen butcher.

DERCETES, a Syrian captain.

NEBASSAR, captain of the Chaldean Guard.

CHABRIAS }
DAMOETES } townsmen and villagers.
MEGAS }
GARDAS }
MORUS }
SYRAX }

CIREAS, a servant in the temple of Poseidon.

MEDES, an usher in the palace.

CASSIOPEA, princess of Chaldea, Queen of Syria.

ANDROMEDA, daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopea.

CYDONE, mistress of Iolaus.

PRAXILLA, head of the palace household in the women's apartments.

DIOMEDE, a slave-girl, servant and playmate of Andromeda.

BALTIS }
PASITHEA } Syrian women.

SCENE. — *The city of Cepheus, the seashore, the temple of Poseidon on the headland and the surrounding country.*

Prologue

The Ocean in tumult, and the sky in storm: Pallas Athene appears in the heavens with lightnings playing over her head and under her feet.

ATHENE

Error of waters rustling through the world,
Vast Ocean, call thy ravenous waves that march
With blue fierce nostrils quivering for prey,
Back to thy feet. Hush thy impatient surges
At my divine command and do my will.

VOICES OF THE SEA

Who art thou layest thy serene command
Upon the untamed waters?

ATHENE

I am Pallas,
Daughter of the Omnipotent.

VOICES

What wouldst thou?
For we cannot resist thee; our clamorous hearts
Are hushed in terror at thy marble feet.

ATHENE

Awake your dread Poseidon. Bid him rise
And come before me.

VOICES

Let thy compelling voice
Awake him: for the sea is hushed.

ATHENE

Arise,

Illimitable Poseidon! let thy blue
And streaming tresses mingle with the foam
Emerging into light.

Poseidon appears upon the waters.

POSEIDON

What quiet voice

Compels me from my rocky pillow piled
Upon the floor of the enormous deep?

VOICES

A whiteness and a strength is in the skies.

POSEIDON

How art thou white and beautiful and calm,
Yet clothed in tumult! Heaven above thee shakes
Wounded with lightnings, goddess, and the sea
Flees from thy dreadful tranquil feet. Thy calm
Troubles me: who art thou, dweller in the light?

ATHENE

I am Athene.

POSEIDON

Virgin formidable

In beauty, disturber of the ancient world!
Ever thou seekest to enslave to man
The eternal Universe, and our huge motions
That shake the mountains and upheave the seas
Wouldst with the glancing visions of thy brain
Coerce and bridle.

ATHENE

Me the Omnipotent
Made from His being to lead and discipline

The immortal spirit of man, till it attain
To order and magnificent mastery
Of all his outward world.

POSEIDON

What wouldst thou of me?

ATHENE

The powers of the earth have kissed my feet
In deep submission, and they yield me tribute,
Olives and corn and all fruit-bearing trees,
And silver from the bowels of the hills,
Marble and iron ore. Fire is my servant.
But thou, Poseidon, with thy kindred gods
And the wild wings of air resist me. I come
To set my feet upon thy azure locks,
O shaker of the cliffs. Adore thy sovereign.

POSEIDON

The anarchy of the enormous seas
Is mine, O terrible Athene: I sway
Their billows with my nod. Man's feeble feet
Leave there no traces, nor his destiny
Has any hold upon the shifting waves.

ATHENE

Thou severest him with thy unmeasured wastes
Whom I would weld in one. But I will lead him
Over thy waters, thou wild thunderer,
Spurning thy tops in hollowed fragile trees.
He shall be confident in me and dare
The immeasurable oceans till the West
Mingles with India, and reach the northern isles
That dwell beneath my dancing aegis bright,
Snow-weary. He shall, armed with clamorous fire,
Rush o'er the angry waters when the whale
Is stunned between two waves and slay his foe

Betwixt the thunders. Therefore I bid thee not,
 O azure strong Poseidon, to abate
 Thy savage tumults: rather his march oppose.
 For through the shocks of difficulty and death
 Man shall attain his godhead.

POSEIDON

Athene? What then desir'st thou,

ATHENE

On yonder inhospitable coast
 Far-venturing merchants from the East, or those
 Who put from Tyre towards Atlantic gains,
 Are by thy trident fiercely shaken forth
 Upon the jaggèd rocks, and who escape,
 The gay and savage Syrians on their altars
 Massacre hideously, thee to propitiate,
 Moloch-Poseidon of the Syrian coasts,
 Dagon of Gaza, lord of many names
 And many natures, many forms of power
 Who rulest from Philistia to the north,
 A terror and a woe. O iron King,
 Desist from blood, be glad of kindlier gifts
 And suffer men to live.

POSEIDON

Behold, Athene,
 My waters! see them lift their foam-white tops
 Charging from sky to sky in rapid tumult:
 Admire their force, admire their thunderous speed.
 With green hooves and white manes they trample onwards.
 My mighty voices fill the world, Athene.
 Shall I permit the grand anarchic seas
 To be a road and the imperious Ocean
 A means of merchandise? Shall the frail keels
 Of thy ephemeral mortals score its back

With servile furrows and petty souls of men
Triumphing tame the illimitable sea?
I am not of the mild and later gods,
But of that elder world; Lemuria
And old Atlantis raised me crimson altars,
And my huge nostrils keep that scent of blood
For which they quiver. Return into thy heavens,
Pallas Athene, I into my deep.

ATHENE

Dash then thy billows up against my aegis
In battle! think not to hide in thy deep oceans;
For I will drive thy waters from the world
And leave thee naked to the light.

POSEIDON

Dread virgin!

I will not war with thee, armipotent.

ATHENE

Then send thy champion forth to meet my champion,
And let their conflict govern ours, Poseidon.

POSEIDON

Who is thy champion?

ATHENE

Perseus, the Olympian's son,
Whom Danaë in her strong brazen tower,
Acrisius' daughter, bore, by heavenly gold
Lapped into slumber: for of that shining rain
He is the beautiful offspring.

POSEIDON

The parricide

That is to be? But my sea-monster's fangs
And fiery breathings shall prevent that murder.

Farewell, Athene!

ATHENE

Farewell, until I press
My feet upon thy blue enormous mane
And add thy Ocean to my growing empire.

Poseidon disappears into the sea.

He dives into the deep and with a din
The thunderous divided waters meet
Above his grisly head. Thou wingest, Perseus,
From northern snows to this fair sunny land,
Not knowing in the night what way thou wendest;
But the dawn comes and over earth's far rim
The round sun rises, as thyself shalt rise
On Syria and thy rosy Andromeda,
A thing of light. Rejoice, thou famous hero!
Be glad of love, be glad of life, whose bosom
Harbours the quiet strength of pure Athene.

She disappears into light.

Act I

Scene 1

A rocky and surf-beat margin of land walled in with great frowning cliffs.

Cireas, Diomedes.

CIREAS

Diomedes? You here so early and in this wild wanton weather!

DIOMEDES

I can find no fault in the weather, Cireas; it is brilliant and frolicsome.

CIREAS

The rain has wept itself out and the sun has ventured into the open; but the wind is shouting like mad and the sea is still in a mighty passion. Has your mistress Andromeda sent you then with matin-offerings to Poseidon, or are you walking here to whip the red roses in your cheeks redder with the sea-wind?

DIOMEDES

My mistress cares as much for your Poseidon as I for your glum beetle-browed priest Polydaon. But you, Cireas? are you walking here to whip the red nose of you redder with the sea-wind or to soothe with it the marks of his holiness's cudgel?

CIREAS

I must carry up these buckets of sea-water to swab down the blue-haired old fellow in the temple. Hang the robustious storm-shaken curmudgeon! I have rubbed him and scrubbed him and

bathed him and swathed him for these eighteen years, yet he never sent me one profitable piece of wreckage out of his sea yet. A gold bracelet, now, crusted with jewels, dropped from the arm of some drowned princess, or a sealed casket velvet-lined with a priceless vase carried by the Rhodian merchants: that would not have beggared him! And I with so little could have bought my liberty.

DIOMEDE

Maybe 'twas that he feared. For who would wish to lose such an expert body-servant as you, my Cireas?

CIREAS

Zeus! if I thought that, I would leave his unwashed back to itch for a fortnight. But these Gods are kittle cattle to joke with. They have too many spare monsters about in their stables trained to snap up offenders for a light breakfast.

DIOMEDE

And how prosper the sacrifices, Cireas? I hope you keep your god soothingly and daintily fed in this hot summer season?

CIREAS

Alack, poor old Poseidon! He has had nothing but goats and sea-urchins lately, and that is poor food for a palate inured to *homme à la Phénicienne*, Diomedes. It is his own fault, he should provide wreckage more freely. But black Polydaon's forehead grows blacker every day: he will soon be as mad as Cybele's bull on the headland. I am every moment in terror of finding myself tumbled on the altar for a shipwrecked Phoenician and old Blackbrows hacking about in search of my heart with his holy carving-tools.

DIOMEDE

You should warn him beforehand that your heart is in your paunch hidden under twenty pounds of fat: so shall he have less cutting-exercise and you an easier exit.

CIREAS

Out! would you have me slit for a water-god's dinner? Is this your tenderness for me?

DIOMEDE

Heaven forbid, dear Cireas. Syria would lose half her scampishness if you departed untimely to a worse world.

CIREAS

Away from here, you long sauciness, you thin edge of naughty satire. But, no! First tell me, what news of the palace? They say King Phineus will wed the Princess Andromeda.

DIOMEDE

Yes, but not till the Princess Andromeda weds King Phineus. What noise is that?

CIREAS

It was the cry of many men in anguish.

He climbs up a rock.

DIOMEDE

Zeus, what a wail was there! surely a royal
Huge ship from Sidon or the Nile has kissed
Our ragged beaches.

CIREAS

A Phoenician galley
Is caught and spinning in the surf, the men
Urge desperate oars in vain. Hark, with a crash
She rushes on the boulders' iron fangs
That rip her tender sides. How the white ship
Battered against them by the growling surf
Screams like a woman tortured! From all sides
The men are shaken out, as rattling peas
Leap from a long and bursting sheath: these sink
Gurgling into the billows, those are pressed

And mangled on the jagged rocks.

DIOMEDE

O it must be

A memorable sight! help me up, Cereas.

CEREAS

No, no, for I must run and tell old Blackbrows
That here's fresh meat for hungry grim Poseidon.

He climbs down and out running.

DIOMEDE

You disobliging dog! This is the first wreck in eighteen months
and I not to see it! I will try and climb round the rock even if
my neck and legs pay the forfeit.

She goes out in the opposite direction.

Scene 2

The same.

Perseus descends on winged sandals from the clouds.

PERSEUS

Rocks of the outland jagged with the sea,
You slumbering promontories whose huge backs
Jut into azure, and thou, O many-thundered
Enormous Ocean, hail! Whatever lands
Are ramparted with these forbidding shores,
Yet if you hold felicitous roofs of men,
Homes of delightful laughter, if you have streams
Where chattering girls dip in their pitchers cool
And dabble their white feet in the chill lapse
Of waters, trees and a green-mantled earth,
Cicalas noisy in a million boughs
Or happy cheep of common birds, I greet you,
Syria or Egypt or Ionian shores,
Perseus the son of Danaë, who long
Have sojourned only with the hail-thrashed isles
Wet with cold mists and by the boreal winds
Snow-swathed. The angry voices of the surf
Are welcome to me whose ears have long been sealed
By rigorous silence in the snows. O even
The wail of mortal misery I choose
Rather than that intolerable hush;
For this at least is human. Thee I praise,
O mother Earth and thy guardian Sea, O Sun
Of the warm south nursing fair life of men.
I will go down into bee-murmuring fields
And mix with men and women in the corn
And eat again accustomed food. But first

This galley shattered on the sharp-toothed rocks
 I fly to succour. You are grown dear to me,
 You smiling weeping human faces, brightly
 Who move, who live, not like those stony masks
 And Gorgon visions of that monstrous world
 Beyond the snows. I would not lose you now
 In the dead surges of the inhuman flood.

He descends out of sight.

Iolaus enters with Ciraes, Dercetes and soldiers.

IOLAUS

Prepare your ambush, men, amid these boulders,
 But at the signal, leave your rocky lairs
 With level bristling points and gyre them in.

CIREAS

O Poseidon Ennosigaios, man-swallower, earth-shaker, I have
 swabbed thee for eighteen years. I pray thee tot up the price
 of those swabbings and be not dishonest with me nor miserly.
 Eighteen by three hundred and sixty-five by two, that is the sum
 of them: and forget not the leap years either, O great Poseidon.

IOLAUS

Into our ambush, for I hear them come.

They conceal themselves.

Perseus returns with Tyrnaus and Smerdas.

PERSEUS

Chaldean merchants, would my speed to save
 Had matched the hawk's when he swoops down for slaughter.
 So many beautiful bodies of strong men
 Lost in the surge, so many eager hopes
 Of happiness now quenched would still have gladdened
 The sunlight. Yet for two delightful lives
 Saved to the stir and motion of the world
 I praise the Gods that help us.

TYRNAUS

Thou radiant youth
Whose face is like a joyous god's for beauty,
Whatever worth the body's life may have,
I thank thee that 'tis saved. Smerdas, discharge
That hapless humour from thy lids! If riches
Are lost, the body, thy strong instrument
To gather riches, is not lost, nor mind,
The provident director of its labours.

SMERDAS

Three thousand pieces of that wealthy stuff,
Full forty chests all crammed with noble gems,
All lost, all in a moment lost! We are beggars.

TYRNAUS

Smerdas, not beggared yet of arm or brain.

SMERDAS

The toil-marred peasant has as much.

PERSEUS

Merchant,
I sorrow for thy loss: all beautiful things
Were meant to shine in the bright day, and grievous
It is to know the senseless billows play with them.
Yet life, most beautiful of all, is left thee.
Is not mere sunlight something, and to breathe
A joy? Be patient with the gods; they love not
Rebellion and o'ertake it with fresh scourgings.

SMERDAS

O that the sea had swallowed me and rolled
In my dear treasure! Tell me, Syrian youth,
Are there not divers in these parts, could pluck
My wealth from the abyss?

PERSEUS

Chaldean merchant,
I am not of this country, but like thyself
Hear first today the surf roar on its beaches.

SMERDAS

Cursed be the moment when we neared its shores!
O harsh sea-god, if thou wilt have my wealth,
My soul, it was a cruel mercy then to leave
This beggared empty body bared of all
That made life sweet. Take this too, and everything.

IOLAUS (*stepping forward*)

Thy prayer is granted thee, O Babylonian.
*The soldiers appear and surround
Perseus and the merchants.*

CIREAS

All the good stuff drowned! O unlucky Cireas! O greedy Poseidon!

SMERDAS

Shield us! what are these threatening spear-points?

TYRNAUS

Fate's.

This is that strange inhospitable coast
Where the wrecked traveller in his own warm blood
Is given guest-bath. (*draws*) Death's dice are yet to throw.

IOLAUS

Draw not in vain, strive not against the gods.
This is the shore near the temple where Poseidon
Sits ivory-limbed in his dim rock-hewn house
And nods above the bleeding mariner
His sapphire locks in gloom. You three are come,
A welcome offering to that long dry altar,

O happy voyagers. Your road is straight
To Elysium.

PERSEUS

An evil and harsh religion
You practise in your land, stripling of Syria,
Yet since it is religion, do thy will,
If thou have power no less than will. And yet
I deem that ere I visit death's calm country,
I have far longer ways to tread.

TYRNAUS (*flinging away his sword*)

Take me.

I will not please the gods with impotent writhing
Under the harrow of my fate.

They seize Tyrnaus.

SMERDAS

O wicked fool!

You might have saved me with that sword. Ah youth!
Ah radiant stranger! help me! thou art mighty.

PERSEUS

Still, merchant, thou wouldst live?

SMERDAS

I am dead with terror

Of these bright thirsty spears. O they will carve
My frantic heart out of my living bosom
To throw it bleeding on that hideous altar.
Save me, hero!

PERSEUS

I war not with the gods for thee.
From belching fire or the deep-mouthed abyss
Of waters to have saved the meanest thing
That wears man's kindly semblance, is a joy.

But he is mad who for another's ease
 Incurs the implacable pursuit of heaven.
 Yet since each man on earth has privilege
 To battle even against the gods for life,
 Sweet life, lift up from earth thy fellow's sword;
 I will protect meanwhile thy head from onset.

SMERDAS

Alas, you mock me! I have no skill with weapons
 Nor am a fighter. Save me!

The Syrians seize Smerdas.

Help! I will give thee

The wealth of Babylon when I am safe.

PERSEUS

My sword is heaven's; it is not to be purchased.

Smerdas and Tyrnaus are led away.

IOLAUS

Take too this radiance.

PERSEUS (*drawing his sword*)

Asian stripling, pause.

I am not weak of hand nor feeble of heart.

Thou art too young, too blithe, too beautiful;

I would not disarrange thy sunny curls

By any harsher touch than an embrace.

IOLAUS

I too could wish to spare thy joyous body

From the black knife, whoe'er thou art, O stranger.

But grim compulsion drives and angry will

Of the sea's lord, chafing that mortal men

Insult with their frail keels his rude strong oceans.

Therefore he built his grisly temple here,

And all who are broken in the unequal war

With surge and tempest, though they evade his rocks,

Must belch out anguished blood upon that altar
Miserably.

PERSEUS

I come not from the Ocean.

IOLAUS

There is no other way that men could come;
For this is ground forbidden to unknown feet.

(smiling)

Unless these gaudy pinions on thy shoes
Were wings indeed to bear thee through the void!

PERSEUS

Are there not those who ask nor solid land
For footing nor the salt flood to buoy their motions?
Perhaps I am of these.

IOLAUS

Of these thou art not.

The gods are sombre, terrible to gaze at,
Or, even if bright, remote, grand, formidable.
But thou art open and fair like our blue heavens
In Syria and thy radiant masculine body
Allures the eye. Yield! it may be the God
Will spare thee.

PERSEUS

Set on thy war-dogs. Me alive
If they alive can take, I am content
To bleed a victim.

IOLAUS

Art thou a demigod
To beat back with one blade a hundred spears?

PERSEUS

My sword is in my hand and that shall answer.
I am tired of words.

IOLAUS

Dercetes, wait. His face
Is beautiful as Heaven. O dark Poseidon,
What wilt thou do with him in thy dank caves
Under the grey abysms of the salt flood?
Spare him to me and sunlight.

Polydaon and Phineus enter from behind.

DERCETES

Prince, give the order.

IOLAUS

Let this young sungod live.

DERCETES

It is forbidden.

IOLAUS

But I allow it.

POLYDAON (*coming forward*)

And when did lenient Heaven
Make thee a godhead, Syrian Iolaus,
To set thy proud decree against Poseidon's?
Wilt thou rescind what Ocean's Zeus has ordered?

IOLAUS

Polydaon —

POLYDAON

Does a royal name on earth
Inflate so foolishly thy mortal pride,
Thou evenest thyself with the Olympians?

Beware, the blood of kings has dropped ere now
From the grey sacrificial knife.

IOLAUS

Our blood!

Thou dardest threaten me, presumptuous priest?
Back to thy blood-stained kennel! I absolve
This stranger.

POLYDAON

Captain, take them both. You flinch?
Are you so fearful of the name of prince
He plays with? Fear rather dark Poseidon's anger.

PHINEUS

Be wise, young Iolaus. Polydaon,
Thy zeal outstrips the reverence due to kings.

IOLAUS

I need not thy protection, Tyrian Phineus:
This is my country.

He draws.

PHINEUS (*aside to Polydaon*)

It were well done to kill him now, his sword
Being out against the people's gods; for then
Who blames the god's avenger?

POLYDAON

Will you accept,
Syrians, the burden of his sacrilege?
Upon them for Poseidon!

DERCETES

Seize them but slay not!
Let none dare shed the blood of Syria's kings.

SOLDIERS

Poseidon! great Poseidon!

PERSEUS

Iolaus,

Rein in thy sword: I am enough for these.

*He shakes his uncovered shield in the
faces of the soldiers: they stagger
back covering their eyes.*

IOLAUS

Gods, what a glory lights up Syria!

POLYDAON

Amazement!

Is this a god opposes us? Back, back!

CIREAS

Master, master, skedaddle: run, run, good King of Tyre, it is scuttle or be scuttled. Zeus has come down to earth with feathered shoes and a shield made out of phosphorus.

*He runs off, followed more slowly by
Dercetes and the soldiers.*

PHINEUS

Whate'er thou art, yet thou shalt not outface me.

He advances with sword drawn.

Hast thou Heaven's thunders with thee too?

POLYDAON (*pulling him back*)

Back, Phineus!

The fiery-tasselled aegis of Athene
Shakes forth these lightnings, and an earthly sword
Were madness here.

He goes out with Phineus.

IOLAUS

O radiant strong immortal,
Iolaus kneels to thee.

PERSEUS

No, Iolaus.
Though great Athene breathes Olympian strength
Into my arm sometimes, I am no more
Than a brief mortal.

IOLAUS

Art thou only man?
O then be Iolaus' friend and lover,
Who com'st to me like something all my own
Destined from other shores.

PERSEUS

Give me thy hands,
O fair young child of the warm Syrian sun.
Embrace me! Thou art like a springing laurel
Fed upon sunlight by the murmuring waters.

IOLAUS

Tell me thy name. What memorable earth
Gave thee to the azure?

PERSEUS

I am from Argolis,
Perseus my name, the son of Danaë.

IOLAUS

Come, Perseus, friend, with me: fierce entertainment
We have given, unworthy the fair joyousness
Thou carriest like a flag, but thou shalt meet
A kinder Syria. My royal father Cepheus
Shall welcome, my mother give thee a mother's greeting
And our Andromeda's delightful smile

Persuade thee of a world more full of beauty
Than thou hadst dreamed of.

PERSEUS

I shall yet be glad with thee,
O Iolaus, in thy father's halls,
But I would not as yet be known in Syria.
Is there no pleasant hamlet near, hedged in
With orchard walls and green with unripe corn
And washed with bright and flitting waves, where I
Can harbour with the kindly village folk
And wake to cock-crow in the morning hours,
As in my dear Seriphos?

IOLAUS

Such a village
Lurks near our hills, — there with my kind Cydone
Thou mayst abide at ease, until thou choose,
O Perseus, to reveal thyself to Syria.
I too can visit thee unquestioned.

PERSEUS

Thither
Then lead me. I have a thirst for calm obscurity
And cottages and happy unambitious talk
And simple people. With these I would have rest,
Not in the laboured pomp of princely towns
Amid pent noise and purple masks of hate.
I will drink deep of pure humanity
And take the innocent smell of rain-drenched earth,
So shall I with a noble untainted mind
Rise from the strengthening soil to great adventure.

They go out.

Scene 3

*The Palace of Cepheus. A room in the women's apartments.
Praxilla, to her enters Diomedes.*

DIOMEDE

O Praxilla, Praxilla!

PRAXILLA

So, thou art back, thou tall inutility? Where wert thou lingering all this hour? I am tired of always whipping thee. I will hire thee out to a timber-merchant to carry logs from dawn to nightfall. Thou shalt learn what labour is.

DIOMEDE

Praxilla, O Praxilla! I am full to the throat with news. I pray you, rip me open.

PRAXILLA

Willingly.

She advances towards her with an uplifted knife.

DIOMEDE (*escaping*)

A plague! can you not appreciate a fine metaphor when you hear it? I never saw so prosaic a mortal. The soul in you was born of a marriage between a saucepan and a broomstick.

PRAXILLA

Tell me your news. If it is good, I will excuse you your whipping.

DIOMEDE

I was out on the beach thinking to watch the seagulls flying and crying in the wind amidst the surf dashing and the black cliff-heads —

PRAXILLA

And could not Poseidon turn thee into a gull there among thy natural kindred? Thou wert better fitted with that shape than in a reasonable human body.

DIOMEDE

Oh then you shall hear the news tell itself, mistress, when the whole town has chewed it and rechewed it.

She is going.

PRAXILLA

Stop, you long-limbed impertinence. The news!

DIOMEDE

I'll be hanged if I tell you.

PRAXILLA

You shall be whipped, if you do not.

DIOMEDE

Well, your goddess Switch is a potent divinity. A ship with men from the East has broken on the headland below the temple and two Chaldeans are saved alive for the altar.

PRAXILLA

This is glorious news indeed.

DIOMEDE

It will be a great day when they are sacrificed!

PRAXILLA

We have not had such since the long galley from Cnossus grounded upon our shores and the temple was washed richly with blood and the altar blushed as thickly with hearts of victims as the King's throne with rubies. Poseidon was pleased that year and the harvest was so plentiful, men were brought in from beyond the hills to reap it.

DIOMEDE

There would have been a third victim, but Prince Iolaus drew sword on the priest Polydaon to defend him.

PRAXILLA

I hope this is not true.

DIOMEDE

I saw it.

PRAXILLA

Is the wild boy
In love with ruin? Not the King himself
Can help him if the grim sacrificant
Demand his fair young head: only a god
Could save him. And he was already in peril
From Polydaon's gloomy hate!

DIOMEDE

And Phineus'.

PRAXILLA

Hush, silly madcap, hush; or speak much lower.

DIOMEDE

Here comes my little queen of love, stepping
As daintily as a young bird in spring
When he would take the hearts of all the forest.

Andromeda enters.

PRAXILLA

You have slept late, Andromeda.

ANDROMEDA

Have I?
The sun had risen in my dreams: perhaps
I feared to wake lest I should find all dark

Once more, Praxilla.

DIOMEDE

He has risen in your eyes,
For they are full of sunshine, little princess.

ANDROMEDA

I have dreamed, Diomedes, I have dreamed.

DIOMEDE

What did you dream?

ANDROMEDA

I dreamed my sun had risen.
He had a face like the Olympian Zeus
And wings upon his feet. He smiled upon me,
Diomedes.

PRAXILLA

Dreams are full of stranger fancies.
Why, I myself have seen hooved bears, winged lions,
And many other monsters in my dreams.

ANDROMEDA

My sun was a bright god and bore a flaming sword
To kill all monsters.

DIOMEDE

I think I've seen today
Your sun, my little playmate.

ANDROMEDA

No, you have not.
I'll not have any eyes see him but mine:
He is my own, my very own.

With fierce triumphant voices. The whole scene
Was like a wild stupendous sacrifice
Offered by the grey-filleted grim surges
On the gigantic altar of the rocks
To the calm cliffs seated like gods above.

ANDROMEDA

Alas, the unhappy men, the poor drowned men
Who had young children somewhere whom they loved!
How could you watch them die? Had I been a god,
I would not let this cruel thing have happened.

DIOMEDE

Why do you weep for them? they were not Syrians.

PRAXILLA

Not they, but barbarous jabbering foreigners
From Indus or Arabia. Fie, my child,
You sit upon the floor and weep for these?

ANDROMEDA

When Iolaus fell upon the rocks
And hurt himself, you did not then forbid me
To weep!

PRAXILLA

He is your brother. That was loving,
Tender and right.

ANDROMEDA

And these men were not brothers?
They too had sisters who will feel as I should
If my dear brother were to die so wretchedly.

PRAXILLA

Let their own sisters weep for them: we have
Enough of our own sorrows. You are young

And softly made: because you have yourself
No griefs, but only childhood's soon-dried tears,
You make a luxury of others' woes.
So when we watch a piteous tragedy,
We grace with real tears its painted sorrows.
When you are older and have true things to weep for,
Then you will understand.

ANDROMEDA

I'll not be older!

I will not understand! I only know
That men are heartless and your gods most cruel.
I hate them!

PRAXILLA

Hush, hush! You know not what you say.
You must not speak such things. Come, Diomedes,
Tell her the rest.

ANDROMEDA (*covering her ears with her hands*)

I will not hear you.

DIOMEDE (*kneeling by her and drawing her hands away*)

But I

Will tell you of your bright sungod.

ANDROMEDA

He is not

My sungod or he would have saved them.

DIOMEDE

He did.

ANDROMEDA (*leaping to her feet*)

Then tell me of him.

DIOMEDE

Suddenly there dawned
A man, a vision, a brightness, who descended
From where I know not, but to me it seemed
That the blue heavens just then created him
Out of the sunlight. His face and radiant body
Aspired to copy the Olympian Zeus
And wings were on his feet.

ANDROMEDA

He was my sungod!

DIOMEDE

He caught two drowning wretches by the robe
And drew them safe to land.

ANDROMEDA

He was my sungod.
Diomedes, I have seen him in my dream.

PRAXILLA

I think it was Poseidon come to take
His tithe of all that death for the ancient altar,
Lest all be engulfed by his grey billows, he
Go quite unhonoured.

DIOMEDE

Hang up your grim Poseidon!
This was a sweet and noble face all bright
With manly kindness.

ANDROMEDA

O I know, I know.
Where went he with those rescued?

DIOMEDE

Why, just then

Prince Iolaus and his band leaped forth
And took them.

ANDROMEDA (*angrily*)

Wherefore took them? By what right?

DIOMEDE

To die according to our Syrian law
On dark Poseidon's altar.

ANDROMEDA

They shall not die.

It is a shame, a cruel cold injustice.
I wonder that my brother had any part in it!
My sungod saved them, they belong to him,
Not to your hateful gods. They are his and mine,
I will not let you kill them.

PRAXILLA

Why, they must die

And you will see it done, my little princess.
You shall! Where are you going?

ANDROMEDA

Let me go.

I do not love you when you talk like this.

PRAXILLA

But you are Syria's lady and must appear
At these high ceremonies.

ANDROMEDA

I had rather be

A beggar's daughter who devours the remnants
Rejected from your table, than reign a queen
Doing such cruelty.

PRAXILLA

Little passionate scold!
You mean not what you say. A beggar's daughter!
You? You who toss about if only a rose-leaf
Crinkle the creamy smoothness of your sheets,
And one harsh word flings weeping broken-hearted
As if the world had no more joy in store.
You are a little posturer, you make
A theatre of your own mind to act in,
Take parts, declaim such childish rhetoric
As that you speak now. You a beggar's daughter!
Come, listen what became of your bright sungod.

DIOMEDE

Him too they would have seized, but he with steel
Opposed and tranquil smiling eyes appalled them.
Then Polydaon came and Phineus came
And bade arrest the brilliant god. Our Prince,
Seized by his glory, with his virgin point
Resisted their assault.

ANDROMEDA

My Iolaus!

DIOMEDE

All suddenly the stranger's lifted shield
Became a storm of lightnings. Dawn was blinded:
Far promontories leaped out in the blaze,
The surges were illumined and the horizon
Answered with light.

ANDROMEDA (*clapping her hands*)

O glorious! O my dream!

PRAXILLA

You tell the actions of a mighty god,
Diomede.

DIOMEDE

A god he seemed to us, Praxilla.
The soldiers ran in terror, Polydaon
Went snorting off like a black whale harpooned,
And even Phineus fled.

ANDROMEDA

Was he not killed?
I wish he had been killed.

PRAXILLA

This is your pity!

ANDROMEDA (*angrily*)

I do not pity tigers, wolves and scorpions.
I pity men who are weak and beasts that suffer.

PRAXILLA

I thought you loved all men and living things.

ANDROMEDA

Perhaps I could have loved him like my hound
Or the lion in the park who lets me pat his mane.
But since he would have me even without my will
To foul with his beast touch, my body abhors him.

PRAXILLA

Fie, fie! you speak too violently. How long
Will you be such a child?

DIOMEDE

Our Iolaus
And that bright stranger then embraced. Together
They left the beach.

ANDROMEDA

Where, where is Iolaus?

Why is he long in coming? I must see him.
I have a thousand things to ask.

She runs out.

DIOMEDE

She is
A strange unusual child, my little playmate.

PRAXILLA

None can help loving her, she is in charm
Compelling: but her mind is wry and warped.
She is not natural, not sound in fancy,
But made of wild uncurbed imaginations,
With feelings as unruly as winds and waves
And morbid sympathies. At times she talks
Strange childish blasphemies that make me tremble.
She would impose her fancies on the world
As better than the eternal laws that rule us!
I wish her mother had brought her up more strictly,
For she will come to harm.

DIOMEDE

Oh, do not say it!
I have seen no child in all our Syria like her,
None her bright equal in beauty. She pleases me
Like days of sunlight rain when spring caresses
Warmly the air. Oh, here is Iolaus.

PRAXILLA

Is it he?

DIOMEDE

I know him by the noble strut
He has put on ever since they made him captain.

Andromeda comes running.

ANDROMEDA

My brother comes! I saw him from the terrace.

Enters Iolaus. Andromeda runs and embraces him.

Oh, Iolaus, have you brought him to me?

Where is my sungod?

IOLAUS

In heaven, little sister.

ANDROMEDA

Oh, do not laugh at me. I want my sungod
Whose face is like the grand Olympian Zeus'
And wings are on his feet. Where did you leave him
After you took him from our rough sea-beaches?

IOLAUS

What do you mean, Andromeda?

DIOMEDE

Some power
Divine sent her a dream of that bright strength
Which shone by you on the sea-beach today,
And him she calls her sungod.

IOLAUS

Is it so?

My little wind-tossed rose Andromeda!
I shall be glad indeed if Heaven intends this.

ANDROMEDA

Where is he?

IOLAUS

Do you not know, little rose-sister,
The great gods visit earth by splendid moments
And then are lost to sight? Come, do not weep;
He is not lost to Syria.

ANDROMEDA

Iolaus,

Why did you take the two poor foreign men
And give them to the priest? My sungod saved them,
Brother, — what right had you to kill?

IOLAUS

My child,

I only did my duty as a soldier,
Yet grieve I was compelled.

ANDROMEDA

Now will you save them?

IOLAUS

But they belong to dread Poseidon now!

ANDROMEDA

What will be done to them?

IOLAUS

They must be bound

On the god's altar and their living hearts
Ripped from their blood-choked breasts to feed his hunger.

Andromeda covers her face with her robe.

Grieve not for them: they but fulfil their fate.

These things are in the order of the world
Like plagues and slaughters, famines, fires and earthquakes,
Which when they pass us by killing their thousands,
We should not weep for, but be grateful only
That other souls than the dear heads we loved
Have perished.

ANDROMEDA

You will not save them?

PRAXILLA

Unhappy girl!

It is impiety to think of it.

Fie! Would you have your brother killed for your whimsies?

ANDROMEDA

Will you not save them, brother?

IOLAUS

I cannot, child.

ANDROMEDA

Then I will.

She goes out.

IOLAUS

Does she mean it?

PRAXILLA

Such wild caprices

Are always darting through her brain.

IOLAUS

I could not take

Poseidon's wrath upon my head!

PRAXILLA

Forget it

As she will too. Her strange imaginations
Flutter awhile among her golden curls,
But soon wing off with careless flight to Lethe.

Medes enters.

IOLAUS

What is it, Medes?

MEDES

The King, Prince Iolaus,
Requires your presence in his audience-chamber.

IOLAUS

So? Tell me, Medes, is Poseidon's priest
In presence there?

MEDES

He is and full of wrath.

IOLAUS

Go, tell them I am coming.

Medes goes out.

PRAXILLA

Alas!

IOLAUS

Fear not.

I have a strength the grim intriguers dream not of.
Let not my sister hear this, Diomedes.

He goes.

PRAXILLA

What may not happen! The priest is dangerous,
Poseidon may be angry. Let us go
And guard our child from peril of this shock.

They go.

CEPHEUS

I had already thought of it. Medes!

Medes enters.

Waits Polydaon yet?

MEDES

He does, my lord.

CEPHEUS

Call him, and Tyrian Phineus.

Medes goes out again.

CASSIOPEA

Bid Tyre save
Andromeda's loved brother from this doom;
He shall not have our daughter otherwise.

CEPHEUS

This too was in my mind already, queen.

Polydaon and Phineus enter.

Be seated, King of Tyre: priest Polydaon,
Possess thy usual chair.

POLYDAON

Well, King of Syria,
Shall I have justice? Wilt thou be the King
Over a peopled country? or must I loose
The snake-haired Gorgon-eyed Erinnyes
To hunt thee with the clamorous whips of Hell
Blood-dripping?

CEPHEUS

Be content. Cepheus gives nought
But justice from his mighty seat. Thou shalt
Have justice.

POLYDAON

I am not used to cool my heels
About the doors of princes like some beggarly
And negligible suitor whose poor plaint
Is valued by some paltry drachmas. I am
Poseidon's priest.

CEPHEUS

The prince is called to answer here
Thy charges.

POLYDAON

Answer! Will he deny a crime
Done impudently in Syria's face? 'Tis well;
The Tyrian stands here who can meet that lie.

CASSIOPEA

My children's lips were never stained with lies,
Insulting priest, nor will be now; from him
We shall have truth.

CEPHEUS

And grant the charge admitted,
The ransom shall be measured with the crime.

POLYDAON

What talk is this of ransom? Thinkst thou, King,
That dire Poseidon's grim offended godhead
Can be o'erplastered with a smudge of silver?
Shall money blunt his vengeance? Shall his majesty
Be estimated in a usurer's balance?
Blood is the ransom of this sacrilege.

CASSIOPEA

Ah God!

CEPHEUS (*in agitation*)

Take all my treasury includes
Of gold and silver, gems and porphyry
Unvalued.

POLYDAON

The Gods are not to be bribed,
King Cepheus.

CASSIOPEA (*apart*)

Give him honours, state, precedence,
All he can ask. O husband, let me keep
My child's head on my bosom safe.

CEPHEUS

Listen!

What wouldst thou have? Precedence, pomp and state?
Hundreds of spears to ring thee where thou walkest?
Swart slaves and beautiful women in thy temple
To serve thee and thy god? They are thine. In feasts
And high processions and proud regal meetings
Poseidon's followers shall precede the King.

POLYDAON

Me wilt thou bribe? I take these for Poseidon,
Nor waive my chief demand.

CEPHEUS

What will content thee?

POLYDAON

A victim has been snatched from holy altar:
To fill that want a victim is demanded.

CEPHEUS

I will make war on Egypt and Assyria
And throw thee kings for victims.

POLYDAON

Thy vaunt is empty.
Poseidon being offended, who shall give thee
Victory o'er Egypt and o'er strong Assyria?

CEPHEUS

Take thou the noblest head in all the kingdom
Below the Prince. Take many heads for one.

POLYDAON

Shall then the innocent perish for the guilty?
Is this thy justice? How shall thy kingdom last?

CEPHEUS

You hear him, Cassiopea? he will not yield,
He is inexorable.

POLYDAON

Must I wait longer?

CEPHEUS

Ho Medes!

Medes enters.

Iolaus comes not yet.

Medes goes out.

CASSIOPEA (*rising fiercely*)

Priest, thou wilt have my child's blood then, it seems!
Nought less will satisfy thee than thy prince
For victim?

POLYDAON

Poseidon knows not prince or beggar.
Whoever honours him, he heaps with state
And fortune. Whoever wakes his dreadful wrath,
He thrusts down into Erebus for ever.

CASSIOPEA

Beware! Thou shalt not have my child. Take heed
 Ere thou drive monarchs to extremity.
 Thou hopest in thy sacerdotal pride
 To make the Kings of Syria childless, end
 A line that started from the gods. Thinkst thou
 It will be tamely suffered? What have we
 To lose, if we lose this? I bid thee again
 Take heed: drive not a queen to strong despair.
 I am no tame-souled peasant, but a princess
 And great Chaldea's child.

POLYDAON (*after a pause*)

Wilt thou confirm

Thy treasury and all the promised honours,
 If I excuse the deed?

CEPHEUS

They shall be thine.
He turns to whisper with Cassiopea.

PHINEUS (*apart to Polydaon*)

Dost thou prefer me for thy foeman?

POLYDAON

See

In the queen's eyes her rage. We must discover
 New means; this way's not safe.

PHINEUS

Thou art a coward, priest, for all thy violence.
 But fear me first and then blench from a woman.

POLYDAON

Well, as you choose.

Iolaus enters.

IOLAUS

Father, you sent for me?

CEPHEUS

There is a charge upon thee, Iolaus,
I do not yet believe. But answer truth
Like Cepheus' son, whatever the result.

IOLAUS

Whatever I have done, my father, good
Or ill, I dare support against the world.
What is this accusation?

CEPHEUS

Didst thou rescue
At dawn a victim from Poseidon's altar?

IOLAUS

I did not.

POLYDAON

Dar'st thou deny it, wretched boy?
Monarch, his coward lips have uttered falsehood.
Speak, King of Tyre.

IOLAUS

Hear me speak first. Thou ruffian,
Intriguer masking in a priest's disguise, —

POLYDAON

Hear him, O King!

CEPHEUS

Speak calmly. I forbid
All violence. Thou deniest then the charge?

IOLAUS

As it was worded to me, I deny it.

PHINEUS

Syria, I have not spoken till this moment,
And would not now, but sacred truth compels
My tongue howe'er reluctant. I was there,
And saw him rescue a wrecked mariner
With his rash steel. Would that I had not seen it!

IOLAUS

Thou liest, Phineus, King of Tyre.

CASSIOPEA

Alas!

If thou hast any pity for thy mother,
Run not upon thy death in this fierce spirit,
My child. Calmly repel the charge against thee,
Nor thus offend thy brother.

PHINEUS

I am not angry.

IOLAUS

It was no shipwrecked weeping mariner,
Condemned by the wild seas, whom they attempted,
But a calm god or glorious hero who came
By other way than man's to Syria's margin.
Nor did rash steel or battle rescue him.
With the mere dreadful waving of his shield
He shook from him a hundred threatening lances,
This hero hot from Tyre and this proud priest
Now bold to bluster in his monarch's chamber,
But then a pallid coward, — so he trusts
In his Poseidon!

POLYDAON

Hast thou done?

IOLAUS

Not yet.

That I drew forth my sword, is true, and true
I would have rescued him from god or devil
Had it been needed.

POLYDAON

Enough! He has confessed!

Give verdict, King, and sentence. Let me watch
Thy justice.

CEPHEUS

But this fault was not so deadly!

POLYDAON

I see thy drift, O King. Thou wouldst prefer
Thy son to him who rules the earth and waters:
Thou wouldst exalt thy throne above the temple,
Setting the gods beneath thy feet. Fool, fool,
Knowst thou not that the terrible Poseidon
Can end thy house in one tremendous hour?
Yield him one impious head which cannot live
And he will give thee other and better children.
Give sentence or be mad and perish.

IOLAUS

Father,

Not for thy son's, but for thy honour's sake
Resist him. 'Tis better to lose crown and life,
Than rule the world because a priest allows it.

POLYDAON

Give sentence, King. I can no longer wait,
Give sentence.

CEPHEUS (*helplessly to Cassiopea*)
What shall I do?

CASSIOPEA

Monarch of Tyre,
Thou choolest silence then, a pleased spectator?
Thou hast bethought thee of other nuptials?

PHINEUS

Lady,
You wrong my silence which was but your servant
To find an issue from this dire impasse,
Rescuing your child from wrath, justice not wounded.

CASSIOPEA

The issue lies in the accuser's will,
If putting malice by he'd only seek
Poseidon's glory.

PHINEUS

The deed's by all admitted,
The law and bearing of it are in doubt.
(*to Polydaon*)
You urge a place is void and must be filled
On great Poseidon's altar, and demand
Justly the guilty head of Iolaus.
He did the fault, his head must ransom it.
Let him fill up the void, who made the void.
Nor will high heaven accept a guiltless head,
To let the impious free.

CASSIOPEA

Phineus, —

PHINEUS

But if
The victim lost return, you cannot then

Claim Iolaus; then there is no void
For substitution.

POLYDAON
King, —

PHINEUS
The simpler fault
With ransom can be easily excused
And covered up in gold. Let him produce
The fugitive.

IOLAUS
Tyrian, —

PHINEUS
I have not forgotten.
Patience! You plead that your mysterious guest
Being neither shipwrecked nor a mariner
Comes not within the doom of law. Why then,
Let Law decide that issue, not the sword
Nor swift evasion! Dost thou fear the event
Of thy great father's sentence from that throne
Where Justice sits with bright unsullied robe
Judging the peoples? Calmly expect his doom
Which errs not.

CASSIOPEA
Thou art a man noble indeed in counsel
And fit to rule the nations.

CEPHEUS
I approve.
You laugh, my son?

IOLAUS
I laugh to see wise men

Catching their feet in their own subtleties.
 King Phineus, wilt thou seize Olympian Zeus
 And call thy Tyrian smiths to forge his fetters?
 Or wilt thou claim the archer bright Apollo
 To meet thy human doom, priest Polydaon?
 'Tis well; the danger's yours. Give me three days
 And I'll produce him.

CEPHEUS

Priest, art thou content?

POLYDAON

Exceed not thou the period by one day,
 Or tremble.

CEPHEUS (*rising*)

Happily decided. Rise
 My Cassiopea: now our hearts can rest
 From these alarms.

Cepheus and Cassiopea leave the chamber.

IOLAUS

Keep thy knife sharp, sacrificant.
 King Phineus, I am grateful and advise
 Thy swift departure back to Tyre unmarried.

He goes out.

POLYDAON

What hast thou done, King Phineus? All is ruined.

PHINEUS

What, have the stripling's threats appalled thee, priest?

POLYDAON

Thou hast demanded a bright dreadful god
 For victim. We might have slain young Iolaus:
 Wilt thou slay him whose tasselled aegis smote

Terror into a hundred warriors?

PHINEUS

Priest,

Thou art a superstitious fool. Believe not
The gods come down to earth with swords and wings,
Or transitory raiment made on looms,
Or bodies visible to mortal eyes.
Far otherwise they come, with unseen steps
And stroke invisible, — if gods indeed
There are. I doubt it, who can find no room
For powers unseen: the world's alive and moves
By natural law without their intervention.

POLYDAON

King Phineus, doubt not the immortal gods.
They love not doubters. If thou hadst lived as I,
Daily devoted to the temple dimness,
And seen the awful shapes that live in night,
And heard the awful sounds that move at will
When Ocean with the midnight is alone,
Thou wouldst not doubt. Remember the dread portents
High gods have sent on earth a hundred times
When kings offended.

PHINEUS

Well, let them reign unquestioned

Far from the earth in their too bright Olympus,
So that they come not down to meddle here
In what I purpose. For your aegis-bearer,
Your winged and two-legged lion, he's no god.
You hurried me away or I'd have probed
His godlike guts with a good yard of steel
To test the composition of his ichor.

POLYDAON

What of his flaming aegis lightning-tasselled?

What of his wingèd sandals, King?

PHINEUS

The aegis?

Some mechanism of refracted light.
The wings? Some new aerial contrivance
A luckier Daedalus may have invented.
The Greeks are scientists unequalled, bold
Experimenters, happy in invention.
Nothing's incredible that they devise,
And this man, Polydaon, is a Greek.

POLYDAON

Have it your way. Say he was merely man!
How do we profit by his blood?

PHINEUS

O marvellous!

Thou hesitate to kill! thou seek for reasons!
Is not blood always blood? I could not forfeit
My right to marry young Andromeda;
She is my claim to Syria. Leave something, priest,
To Fortune, but be ready for her coming
And grasp ere she escape. The old way's best;
Excite the commons, woo their thunderer,
That plausible republican. Iolaus
Once ended, by right of fair Andromeda
I'll save and wear the crown. Priest, over Syria
And all my Tyrians thou shalt be the one prelate,
Should all go well.

POLYDAON

All shall go well, King Phineus.

They go.

Scene 2

*A room in the women's apartments of the Palace.
Andromeda, Diomedes, Praxilla.*

ANDROMEDA
My brother lives then?

PRAXILLA
Thanks to Tyre, it seems.

DIOMEDES
Thanks to the wolf who means to eat him later.

PRAXILLA
You'll lose your tongue some morning; rule it, girl.

DIOMEDES
These kings, these politicians, these high masters!
These wise blind men! We slaves have eyes at least
To look beyond transparency.

PRAXILLA
Because
We stand outside the heated game unmoved
By interests, fears and passions.

ANDROMEDA
He *is* a wolf, for I have seen his teeth.

PRAXILLA
Yet must you marry him, my little princess.

ANDROMEDA

What, to be torn in pieces by the teeth?

DIOMEDE

I think the gods will not allow this marriage.

ANDROMEDA

I know not what the gods may do: be sure,
I'll not allow it.

PRAXILLA

Fie, Andromeda!

You must obey your parents: 'tis not right,
This wilfulness. Why, you're a child! you think
You can oppose the will of mighty monarchs?
Be good; obey your father.

ANDROMEDA

Yes, Praxilla?

And if my father bade me take a knife
And cut my face and limbs and stab my eyes,
Must I do that?

PRAXILLA

Where are you with your wild fancies?

Your father would not bid you do such things.

ANDROMEDA

Because they'd hurt me?

PRAXILLA

Yes.

ANDROMEDA

It hurts me more

To marry Phineus.

PRAXILLA

O you sly logic-splitter!
You dialectician, you sunny-curled small sophist,
Chop logic with your father. I'm tired of you.

Cepheus enters.

ANDROMEDA

Father, I have been waiting for you.

CEPHEUS

What! you?
I'll not believe it. You? (*caressing her*) My rosy Syrian!
My five-foot lady! My small queen of Tyre!
Yes, you are tired of playing with the ball.
You wait for me!

ANDROMEDA

I *was* waiting. Here are
Two kisses for you.

CEPHEUS

Oh, now I understand.
You dancing rogue, you're not so free with kisses:
I have to pay for them, small cormorant.
What is it now? a talking Tyrian doll?
Or a strong wooden horse with silken wings
To fly up to the gold rims of the moon?

ANDROMEDA

I will not kiss you if you talk like that.
I am a woman now. As if I wanted
Such nonsense, father!

CEPHEUS

Oh, you're a woman now?
Then 'tis a robe from Cos, sandals fur-lined
Or belt all silver. Young diplomatist,

I know you. You keep these rippling showers of gold
Upon your head to buy your wishes with.
Therefore you packed your small red lips with honey.
Well, usurer, what's the price you want?

ANDROMEDA

I want, —
But father, will you give me what I want?

CEPHEUS

I'd give you the bright sun from heaven for plaything
To make you happy, girl Andromeda.

ANDROMEDA

I want the Babylonians who were wrecked
In the great ship today, to be my slaves,
Father.

CEPHEUS

Was ever such a perverse witch?
To ask the only thing I cannot give!

ANDROMEDA

Can I not have them, father?

CEPHEUS

They are Poseidon's.

ANDROMEDA

Oh then you love Poseidon more than me!
Why should he have them?

CEPHEUS

Fie, child! the mighty gods
Are masters of the earth and sea and heavens,
And all that is, is theirs. We are their stewards.
But what is once restored into their hands

Is thenceforth holy: he who even gazes
With greedy eye upon divine possessions,
Is guilty in Heaven's sight and may awake
A dreadful wrath. These men, Andromeda,
Must bleed upon the altar of the God.
Speak not of them again: they are devoted.

ANDROMEDA

Is he a god who eats the flesh of men?

PRAXILLA

O hush, blasphemer!

ANDROMEDA

Father, give command,
To have Praxilla here boiled for my breakfast.
I'll be a goddess too.

CEPHEUS

Praxilla!

PRAXILLA

'Tis thus
She talks. Oh but it gives me a shivering fever
Sometimes to hear her.

CEPHEUS

What mean you, dread gods?
Purpose you then the ruin of my house
Preparing in my children the offences
That must excuse your wrath? Andromeda,
My little daughter, speak not like this again,
I charge you, no, nor think it. The mighty gods
Dwell far above the laws that govern men
And are not to be mapped by mortal judgments.
It is Poseidon's will these men should die
Upon his altar. 'Tis not to be questioned.

ANDROMEDA

It shall be questioned. Let your God go hungry.

CEPHEUS

I am amazed! Did you not hear me, child?
On the third day from now these men shall die.
The same high evening ties you fast with nuptials
To Phineus, who shall take you home to Tyre.

(aside)

On Tyre let the wrath fall, if it must come.

ANDROMEDA

Father, you'll understand this once for all, —
I will not let the Babylonians die,
I will not marry Phineus.

CEPHEUS

Oh, you will not?

Here is a queen, of Tyre and all the world;
How mutinous-majestically this smallness
Divulges her decrees, making the most
Of her five feet of gold and cream and roses!
And why will you not marry Phineus, rebel?

ANDROMEDA

He does not please me.

CEPHEUS

School your likings, rebel.

It is most needful Syria mate with Tyre.
And you are Syria.

ANDROMEDA

Why, father, if you gave me a toy, you'd ask
What toy I like! If you gave me a robe
Or vase, you would consult my taste in these!
Must I marry any cold-eyed crafty husband

I do not like?

CEPHEUS

You do not like! You do not like!
Thou silly child, must the high policy
Of Princes then be governed by thy likings?
'Tis policy, 'tis kingly policy
That made this needful marriage, and it shall not
For your spoilt childish likings be unmade.
What, you look sullen? what, you frown, virago?
Look, if you mutiny, I'll have you whipped.

ANDROMEDA

You would not dare.

CEPHEUS

Not dare!

ANDROMEDA

Of course you would not.

As if I were afraid of you!

CEPHEUS

You are spoiled,
You are spoiled! Your mother spoils you, you wilful sunbeam.
Come, you provoking minx, you'll marry Phineus?

ANDROMEDA

I will not, father. If I must marry, then
I'll marry my bright sungod! and none else
In the wide world.

CEPHEUS

Your sungod! Is that all?
Shall I not send an envoy to Olympus
And call the Thunderer here to marry you?
You're not ambitious?

PRAXILLA

It is not that she means;
 She speaks of the bright youth her brother rescued.
 Since she has heard of him, no meaner talk
 Is on her lips.

CEPHEUS

Who is this radiant coxcomb?
 Whence did he come to set my Syria in a whirl?
 For him my son's in peril of his life,
 For him my daughter will not marry Tyre.
 Oh, Polydaon's right. He must be killed
 Before he does more mischief. Andromeda,
 On the third day you marry Tyrian Phineus.

He goes out hurriedly.

DIOMEDE

That was a valiant shot timed to a most discreet departure.
 Parthian tactics are best when we deal with mutinous daughters.

PRAXILLA

Andromeda, you will obey your father?

ANDROMEDA

You are not in my counsels. You're too faithful,
 Virtuous and wise, and virtuously you would
 Betray me. There is a thing full-grown in me
 That you shall only know by the result.
 Diomedé, come; for I need help, not counsel.

She goes.

PRAXILLA

What means she now? Her whims are as endless as the tossing
 of leaves in a wind. But you will find out and tell me, Diomedé.

DIOMEDE

I will find out certainly, but as to telling, that is as it shall please
 me — and my little mistress.

PRAXILLA

You shall be whipped.

DIOMEDE

Pish!

She runs out.

PRAXILLA

The child is spoiled herself and she spoils her servants. There is no managing any of them.

She goes out.

Scene 3

*An orchard garden in Syria by a river-bank:
the corner of a cottage in the background.
Perseus, Cydone.*

CYDONE (*sings*)

O the sun in the reeds and willows!
O the sun with the leaves at play!
Who would waste the warm sunlight?
And for weeping there's the night.
But now 'tis day.

PERSEUS

Yes, willows and the reeds! and the bright sun
Stays with the ripples talking quietly.
And there, Cydone, look! how the fish leap
To catch at sunbeams. Sing yet again, Cydone.

CYDONE (*sings*)

O what use have your foolish tears?
What will you do with your hopes and fears?
They but waste the sweet sunlight.
Look! morn opens: look how bright
The world appears!

PERSEUS

O you Cydone in the sweet sunlight!
But you are lovelier.

CYDONE

You talk like Iolaus.

Come, here's your crown. I'll set it where 'tis due.

PERSEUS

Crowns are too heavy, dear. Sunlight was better.

CYDONE

'Tis a light crown of love I put upon you,
My brother Perseus.

PERSEUS

Love! but love is heavy.

CYDONE

No, love is light. I put light love upon you,
Because I love you and you love Iolaus.
I love you because you love Iolaus,
And love the world that loves my Iolaus,
Iolaus my world and all the world
Only for Iolaus.

PERSEUS

Happy Cydone,
Who can lie here and babble to the river
All day of love and light and Iolaus.
If it could last! But tears are in the world
And must some day be wept.

CYDONE

Why must they, Perseus?

PERSEUS

When Iolaus becomes King in Syria
And comes no more, what will you do, Cydone?

CYDONE

Why, I will go to him.

And these smooth locks grown rigid and stiffened, O Cydone,
Thy happy heart would never more have throbb'd
To Iolaus' kiss.

CYDONE

What monster's there?

PERSEUS

It is the Gorgon's head who lived in night.
Snake-tresses frame its horror of deadly beauty
That turns the gazer into marble.

CYDONE

Ugh!

Why do you keep such dreadful things about you?

PERSEUS

Why, are there none who are better turned to stone
Than living?

CYDONE

O yes, the priest of the dark shrine
Who hates my love. Fix him to frowning grimness
In innocent marble. (*listening*) It is Iolaus!
I know his footfall, muffled in the green.

Iolaus enters.

IOLAUS

Perseus, my friend, —

PERSEUS

Thou art my human sun.
Come, shine upon me; let thy face of beauty
Become a near delight, my arm, fair youth, possess thee.

IOLAUS

I am a warrant-bearer to you, friend.

PERSEUS

On what arrest?

IOLAUS

For running from the knife.
A debt that must be paid. They'll not be balked
Their dues of blood, their strict account of hearts.
Or mine or thine they'll have to crown their altars.

PERSEUS

Why, do but make thy tender breast the altar
And I'll not grudge my heart, sweet Iolaus.
Who's this accountant?

IOLAUS

Poseidon's dark-browed priest,
As gloomy as the den in which he lairs,
Who hopes to gather Syria in his hands
Upon a priestly pretext.

CYDONE

Change him, Perseus,
Into black stone!

PERSEUS

Oh, hard and black as his own mood!
He has a stony heart much better housed
In limbs of stone than a kind human body
Who would hurt thee, my Iolaus.

IOLAUS

He'd hurt
And find a curious pleasure. If it were even
My sister sunbeam, my Andromeda,
He'd carve her soft white breast as readily
As any slave's or murderer's.

PERSEUS

Andromeda!

It is a name that murmurs to the heart
Of strength and sweetness.

IOLAUS

Three days you are given to prove yourself a god!
You failing, 'tis my bosom pays the debt.
That's their decree.

CYDONE

Turn them to stone, to stone!

All, all to heartless marble!

PERSEUS

Thy father bids this?

IOLAUS

He dare not baulk this dangerous priest.

PERSEUS

Ah, dare not!

Yes, there are fathers too who love their lives
And not their children: earth has known of such.
There was a father like this once in Argos!

IOLAUS

Blame not the King too much.

CYDONE

Turn him to stone,

To stone!

IOLAUS

Hush, hush, Cydone!

CYDONE

Stone, hard stone!

IOLAUS

I'll whip thee, shrew, with rose-briars.

CYDONE

Will you promise

To kiss the blood away? Then I'll offend
Daily, on purpose.

IOLAUS

Love's rose-briars, sweet Cydone,
Inflict no wounds.

CYDONE

Oh yes, they bleed within.

IOLAUS

The brow of Perseus grows darkness!

PERSEUS

Rise,

And be my guide. Where is this temple and priest?

IOLAUS

The temple now?

PERSEUS

Soonest is always best

When noble deeds are to be done.

IOLAUS

What deed?

PERSEUS

I will release the men of Babylon

From their grim blood-feast. Let them howl for victims.

IOLAUS

It will incense them more.

PERSEUS

Me they have incensed
With their fierce crafty fury. If they must give
To their dire god, let them at least fulfil
With solemn decency their fearful rites.
But since they bring in politic rage and turn
Their barbarous rite into a trade of murder,
Nor rite nor temple be respected more.
Must they have victims? Let them take and slay
Perseus alone. I shall rejoice to know
That so much strength and boldness dwells in men
Who are mortal.

IOLAUS

Men thou needst not fear; but, Perseus,
Poseidon's wrath will wake, whose lightest motion
Is deadly.

PERSEUS

Mine is not harmless.

IOLAUS

Against gods
What can a mortal's anger do?

PERSEUS

We'll talk
With those pale merchants. Wait for me; I bring
Herpe my sword.

CYDONE

The wallet, Perseus! leave not the dear wallet!

Perseus goes out towards the cottage.

IOLAUS
My queen, have I your leave?

CYDONE
Give me a kiss
That I may spend the hours remembering it
Till you return.

IOLAUS (*kissing her*)
Will one fill hours, Cydone?

CYDONE
I fear to ask for more. You're such a miser.

IOLAUS
You rose-lipped slanderer! there! Had I the time
I would disprove you, smothering you with what
You pray for.

CYDONE
Come soon.

IOLAUS
I'll watch the sun go down.
In your dark night of tresses.

Perseus returns.

PERSEUS
Come.

IOLAUS
I am ready.

CYDONE
Stone, brother Perseus, make them stone for ever.
Perseus and Iolaus go out.

(sings)

“Marble body, heart of bliss
Or a stony heart and this,
Which of these two wilt thou crave?
One or other thou shalt have.”
“By my kisses shall be known
Which is flesh and which is stone.
Love, thy heart of stone! it quakes.
Sweet, thy fair cold limbs! love takes
With this warm and rosy trembling.
Where is now thy coy dissembling?
Heart and limbs I here escheat
For that fraudulent deceit.”
“And will not marble even grow soft,
Kissed so warmly and so oft?”

Curtain

Act III

Scene 1

*The women's apartments of the Palace.
Andromeda, Diomedes.*

ANDROMEDA

All's ready, let us go.

DIOMEDE

Andromeda,
My little mistress whom I love, let me
Beseech you by that love, do not attempt it.
Oh, this is no such pretty wilfulness
As all men love to smile at and to punish
With tenderness and chidings. It is a crime
Full of impiety, a deed of danger
That venturous and iron spirits would be aghast
To dream of. You think because you are a child,
You will be pardoned, because you are a princess
No hand will dare to punish you. You do not know
Men's hearts. They will not pause to pity you,
They will not spare. The people in its rage
Will tear us both to pieces, limb from limb,
With blows and fury, roaring round like tigers.
Will you expose yourself to that grim handling
Who cry out at the smallest touch of pain?

ANDROMEDA

Do not delay me on the brink of action.
You have said these things before.

DIOMEDE

You shall not do it.

I will not go with you.

ANDROMEDA

So you expose me
To danger merely and break the oath you swore;
For I must do it then unhelped.

DIOMEDE

I'll tell

Your mother, child, and then you cannot go.

ANDROMEDA

I shall die then on the third day from this.

DIOMEDE

What! you will kill yourself, and for two strangers
You never saw? You are no human maiden
But something far outside mortality,
Princess, if you do this.

ANDROMEDA

I shall not need.

You threaten me with the fierce people's tearings,
And shall I not be torn when I behold
My fellows' piteous hearts plucked from their bosoms
Between their anguished shrieks? I shall fall dead
With horror and with pity at your feet:
Then you'll repent this cruelty.

She weeps.

DIOMEDE

Child, child!

Hush, I will go with you. If I must die,
I'll die.

ANDROMEDA

Have I not loved you, Diomede?
 Have I not taken your stripes upon myself,
 Claiming your dear offences? Have I not lain
 Upon your breast, stealing from my own bed
 At night, and kissed your bosom and your hands
 For very love of you? And I had thought
 You loved me: but you do not care at last
 Whether I live or die.

DIOMEDE

Oh hush! I love you,
 I'll go with you. You shall not die alone,
 If you are bent on dying. I'll put on
 My sandals and be with you in a moment.
 Go, little princess. I am with you; go.

She goes.

ANDROMEDA

O you poor shuddering men, my human fellows,
 Horribly bound beneath the grisly knife
 You feel already groping for your hearts,
 Pardon me each long moment that you wrestle
 With grim anticipation. O, and you,
 If there is any god in the deaf skies
 That pities men or helps them, O protect me!
 But if you are inexorably unmoved
 And punish pity, I, Andromeda,
 Who am a woman on this earth, will help
 My brothers. Then, if you must punish me,
 Strike home. You should have given me no heart;
 It is too late now to forbid it feeling.

She is going out. Athene appears.

What is this light, this glory? who art thou,
 O beautiful marble face amid the lightnings?
 My heart faints with delight, my body trembles,
 Intolerable ecstasy beats in my veins;

I am oppressed and tortured with thy beauty.

ATHENE

I am Athene.

ANDROMEDA

Art thou a goddess? Thy name
We hear far off in Syria.

ATHENE

I am she
Who helps and has compassion on struggling mortals.

ANDROMEDA (*falling prostrate*)

Do not deceive me! I will kiss thy feet.
O joy! thou art! thou art!

ATHENE

Lift up thy head,
My servant.

ANDROMEDA

Thou art! there are not only void
Azure and cold inexorable laws.

ATHENE

Stand up, O daughter of Cassiope.
Wilt thou then help these men of Babylonia,
My mortals whom I love?

ANDROMEDA

I help myself,
When I help these.

ATHENE

To thee alone I gave
This knowledge. O virgin, O Andromeda,

It reached thee through that large and noble heart
 Of woman beating in a little child.
 But dost thou know that thy reward shall be
 Betrayal and fierce hatred? God and man
 Shall league in wrath to kill and torture thee
 Mid dire revilings.

ANDROMEDA

My reward shall be
 To cool this anguish of pity in my heart
 And be at peace: if dead, O still at peace!

ATHENE

Thou fearest not then? They will expose thee, child,
 To slaughter by the monsters of the deep
 Who shall come forth to tear thy limbs.

ANDROMEDA

Beyond too
 Shall I be hated, in that other world?

ATHENE

Perhaps.

ANDROMEDA

Wilt thou love me?

ATHENE

Thou art my child.

ANDROMEDA

O mother, O Athene, let me go.
 They linger in anticipated pangs.

ATHENE

Go, child. I shall be near invisibly.

She disappears. Andromeda stands with clasped hands straining her eyes as if into infinity.

Diomedes returns.

DIOMEDES

You are not gone as yet? what is this, princess?
What is this light around you! How you are altered,
Andromeda!

ANDROMEDA

Diomedes, let us go.

They go out.

Scene 2

In the Temple of Poseidon.

Cireas.

CIREAS

I am done with thee, Poseidon Ennosigaios, man-slayer, ship-breaker, earth-shaker, lord of the waters! Never was faithful service so dirtily rewarded. In all these years not a drachma, not an obolus, not even a false coin for solace. And when thou hadst mocked me with hope, when a Prince had promised me all my findings, putttest thou me off with two pauperized merchants of Babylon? What, thou takest thy loud ravenous glut of the treasures that should have been mine and roarest derision at me with thy hundred-voiced laughters? Am I a sponge to suck up these insults? No! I am only moderately porous. I will break thy treasury, Poseidon, and I will run. Think not either to send thy sea-griffins after me. For I will live on the top of Lebanon, and thy monsters, when they come for me, shall snort and grin and gasp for breath and return to thee baffled and asthmatic.

As he talks Iolaus and Perseus enter.

IOLAUS

What, Cireas, wilt thou run? I'll give thee gold
To wing thy shoes, if thou wilt do my bidding.

CIREAS

I am overheard! I am undone! I am crucified! I am disembowelled!

IOLAUS

Be tranquil, Cireas, fool, I come to help thee.

CIREAS

Do you indeed! I see, they have made you a god, for you know men's minds. But could old father Zeus find your newborn god-head no better work than to help thieves and give wings to runaways? Will you indeed help me, god Iolaus? I can steal then under thy welcome protection? I can borrow Poseidon's savings and run?

IOLAUS

Steal not: thou shalt have gold enough to buy
Thy liberty and farms and slaves and cattle.

CIREAS

Prince, art thou under a vow of liberality? or being about to die, wilt thou distribute thy goods and chattels to deserving dishonesty? Do not mock me, for if thou raise hopes again in me and break them, I can only hang myself.

IOLAUS

I mock thee not, thou shalt have glut of riches.

CIREAS

What must I do? I'd give thee nose and ears
For farms and freedom.

PERSEUS

Wherefore dost thou bribe
This slave to undo a bond my sword unties?

IOLAUS

I shrink from violence in the grim god's temple.

CIREAS

Zeus, art thou there with thy feathers and phosphorus? I pray thee, my good bright darling Zeus, do not come in the way of my earnings. Do not be so cantankerously virtuous, do not

be so damnably economical. Good Zeus, I adjure thee by thy foot-plumes.

IOLAUS

Cireas, wilt thou bring forth the wretched captives
Who wait the butcher Polydaon's knife
With groanings? we would talk with them. Wilt thou?

CIREAS

Will I? Will I? I would do any bad turn to that scanty-hearted
rampageous old ship-swallower there. I would do it for nothing,
and for so much gold will I not?

IOLAUS

And thou must shut thine eyes.

CIREAS

Eyes! I will shut mouth and nose and ears too, nor ask for one
penny extra.

IOLAUS

Dost thou not fear?

CIREAS

Oh, the blue-haired old bogy there? I have lived eighteen years
in this temple and seen nothing of him but ivory and sapphires.
I begin to think he cannot breathe out of water; no doubt, he is
some kind of fish and walks on the point of his tail.

PERSEUS

Enough, bring forth the Babylonian captives.

CIREAS

I run, Zeus, I run: but keep thy phosphorus lit and handy against
Polydaon's return unasked for and untrumpeted.

He runs out.

PERSEUS

O thou grim calmness imaged like a man
That frownst above the altar! dire Poseidon!
Art thou that god indeed who smooths the sea
With one finger, and when it is thy will,
Rufflest the oceans with thy casual breathing?
Art thou not rather, lord, some murderous
And red imagination of this people,
The shadow of a soul that dreamed of blood
And took this dimness? If thou art Poseidon,
The son of Cronos, I am Cronos' grandchild,
Perseus, and in my soul Athene moves
With lightnings.

IOLAUS

I hear the sound of dragging chains.
Cireas returns with Tyrnaus and Smerdas.

PERSEUS

Smerdas and thou, Tyrnaus, once again
We meet.

SMERDAS

Save me, yet save me.

PERSEUS

If thou art worth it,
I may.

SMERDAS

Thou shalt have gold. I am well worth it.
I'll empty Babylonia of its riches
Into thy wallet.

PERSEUS

Has terror made thee mad?
Refrain from speech! Thine eyes are calm, Tyrnaus.

TYRNAUS

I have composed my soul to my sad fortunes.
 Yet wherefore sad? Fate has dealt largely with me.
 I have been thrice shipwrecked, twice misled in deserts,
 Wounded six times in battle with wild men
 For life and treasure. I have outspent kings:
 I have lost fortunes and amassed them: princes
 Have been my debtors, kingdoms lost and won
 By lack or having of a petty fraction
 Of my rich incomings: and now Fate gives me
 This tragic, not inglorious death: I am
 The banquet of a god. It fits, it fits,
 And I repine not.

PERSEUS

But will these help, Tyrnaus,
 To pass the chill eternity of Hades?
 This memory of glorious breathing life,
 Will it alleviate the endless silence?

TYRNAUS

But there are lives beyond, and we meanwhile
 Move delicately amid aerial things
 Until the green earth wants us.

PERSEUS (*shearing his chains with a touch of his sword*)

Yet awhile
 Of the green earth take all thy frank desire,
 Merchant: the sunlight would be loth to lose thee.

SMERDAS

O radiant helpful youth! O son of splendour!
 I live again.

PERSEUS

Thou livest, but in chains,
 Smerdas.

Venture for such small gain as the poor soul
Thou holdest, nor drive with danger losing bargains.

SMERDAS

Oh, do not jest! it is not good to jest
With death and horror.

PERSEUS

I jest not.

SMERDAS

Oh God! thou dost.

DIOMEDE (*without*)

Cireas!

CIREAS (*jumping*)

Who? who? who?

IOLAUS

Is't not a woman's voice?

Withdraw into the shadow: let our swords
Be out against surprise. Hither, Tyrnaus.

DIOMEDE

Cireas! where are you, Cireas? It is I.

CIREAS

It is the little palace scamp, Diomedé.
Plague take her! How she fluttered the heart in me!

IOLAUS

Say nothing of us, merchant, or thou diest.

*Iolaus, Perseus and Tyrnaus withdraw into the dimness
of the Temple. Andromeda and Diomedé enter.*

CIREAS
Princess Andromeda!

PERSEUS (*apart*)
Andromeda!
Iolaus' rosy sister! O child goddess
Dropped recently from heaven! Its light is still
Upon thy face, thou marvel!

IOLAUS
My little sister
In these grim precincts, who so feared their shadows!

ANDROMEDA
Cireas, my servant Diomedes means
To tell you of some bargain. Will you walk yonder?
Cireas and Diomedes walk apart talking.
Art thou, as these chains say, the mournful victim
Our savage billows spared and men would murder?
But was there not another? Have they brought thee
From thy sad prison to the shrine alone?

SMERDAS
He, — he, —

ANDROMEDA
Has terror so possessed thy tongue,
It cannot do its office? Oh, be comforted.
Although red horror has its grasp on thee,
I dare to tell thee there is hope.

SMERDAS
What hope?
Ah heaven! what hope! I feel the knife even now
Hacking my bosom. If thou bringst me hope,
I'll know thee for a goddess and adore thee.

ANDROMEDA

Be comforted: I bring thee more than hope.
Cireas!

CIREAS

You'll give me chains? you'll give me jewels?

ANDROMEDA

All of my own that I can steal for you.

CIREAS

Steal boldly, O honey-sweet image of a thief, steal and fear not.
I rose for good luck after all this excellent morning! O Poseidon,
had I known there was more to be pocketed in thy disservice
than in thy service, would I have misspent these eighteen barren
years?

ANDROMEDA

Undo this miserable captive's bonds.

SMERDAS

What! I shall be allowed to live! Is't true?

ANDROMEDA

No, I'll undo them, Cireas; I shall feel
I freed him. Is there so much then to unlink?
O ingenuity of men to hurt
And bind and slay their brothers!

SMERDAS

'Tis not a dream,
The horror was the dream. She smiles on me
A wonderful glad smile of joy and kindness,
Making a sunshine. Oh, be quicker, quicker.
Let me escape this hell where I have eaten
And drunk of terror and have slept with death.

ANDROMEDA

Are you so careless of the friend who shared
The tears and danger? Where is he? Ciraes!

TYRNAUS (*coming forward*)

O thou young goddess with the smile! Behold him,
Tyrnaus the Chaldean.

ANDROMEDA (*dropping the chain which binds Smerdas*)
Already free!

Who has forestalled me?

TYRNAUS

Maiden, art thou vexed
To see me unbound?

ANDROMEDA

I grudge your rescuer the happy task
Heaven meant for me of loosening your chains.
It would have been such joy to feel the cold
Hard irons drop apart between my fingers!
Who freed you?

TYRNAUS

A god as radiant as thyself,
Thou merciful sweetness.

ANDROMEDA

Had he not a look
Like the Olympian's? Was he not bright like Hermes
Or Phoebus?

TYRNAUS

He was indeed. Thou knowst him then?

ANDROMEDA

In dreams I have met him. He was here but now?

TYRNAUS

He has withdrawn into the shadow, virgin.

SMERDAS

Why do you leave me bound, and talk, and talk,
As if Death had not still his fingers on me?

ANDROMEDA (*resuming her task*)

Forgive me! Tyrnaus, did that radiant helper
Who clove thy chains, forget to help this poor
Pale trembling man?

TYRNAUS

Because he showed too much
The sordid fear that pities only itself,
He left him to his fate.

ANDROMEDA

Alas, poor human man!
Why, we have all so many sins to answer,
It would be hard to have cold justice dealt us.
We should be kindly to each other's faults
Remembering our own. Is't not enough
To see a face in tears and heal the sorrow,
Or must we weigh whether the face is fair
Or ugly? I think that even a snake in pain
Would tempt me to its succour, though I knew
That afterwards 'twould bite me! But he is a god
Perhaps who did this and his spotless radiance
Abhors the tarnish of our frailer natures.

SMERDAS

Oh, I am free! I fall and kiss thy robe,
O goddess, O deliverer.

ANDROMEDA

You must

Go quickly from this place. There is a cave
Near to those unkind rocks where you were shipwrecked,
A stone-throw up the cliff. We found it there
Climbing and playing, reckless of our limbs
In the sweet joy of sunshine, breeze and movement,
When we were children, I and Diomedé.
None else will dream of it. There have I stored
Enough of food and water. Closely lurk
Behind its curtains of fantastic stone:
Venture not forth, though your hearts pine for sunlight,
Or Death may take you back into his grip.
When hot pursuit and search have been tired out,
I'll find you golden wings will carry you
To your Chaldea.

SMERDAS

Can you not find out divers
Who'll rescue our merchandise from the sunk rocks
Where it is prisoned?

TYRNAUS

You have escaped grim murder,
Yet dream of nothing but your paltry gems!
You will call back Heaven's anger on our heads.

SMERDAS

We cannot beg our way to far Chaldea.

ANDROMEDA

Diving is dangerous there: I will not risk
Men's lives for money. I promised Círeas what I have,
And yet you shall not go unfurnished home.
I'll beg a sum from my brother Iolaus
Will help you to Chaldea.

SMERDAS

O my dear riches!

Must you lie whelmed beneath the Syrian surge
 Uncared for?

ANDROMEDA (*to Diomedes*)

Take them to the cave. Show Circeas
 The hidden mouth. I'll loiter and expect you
 Under the hill-side, where sweet water splashes
 From the grey fountain's head, our fountain. Merchants, go;
 Athene guard you!

TYRNAUS

Not before I kneel
 And touch thy feet with reverent humble hands,
 O human merciful divinity,
 Who by thy own sweet spirit moved, unasked,
 Not knowing us, cam'st from thy safe warm chamber
 Here where Death broods grim-visaged in his home,
 To save two unseen, unloved, alien strangers,
 And being a woman feared not urgent death,
 And being a child shook not before God's darkness
 And that insistent horror of a world
 O'ershadowing ours. O surely in these regions
 Where thou wert born, pure-eyed Andromeda,
 There shall be some divine epiphany
 Of calm sweet-hearted pity for the world,
 And harsher gods shall fade into their Hades.

SMERDAS

You prattle, and at any moment, comes
 The dreadful priest with clutch upon my shoulder.
 Come! come! you, slave-girl, lead the way, accursèd!
 You loiter?

ANDROMEDA

Chide not my servant, Babylonian.
 Go, Diomedes; darkness like a lid
 Will soon shut down upon the rugged beach

And they may stumble as they walk. Go, Cireas.

*Diomedes and Cireas go out,
followed by the merchants.*

Alone I stand before thee, grim Poseidon,
Here in thy darkness, with thy altar near
That keeps fierce memory of tortured groans
And human shrieks of victims, and, unforced,
I yet pollute my soul with thy bloody nearness
To tell thee that I hate, condemn, defy thee.
I am no more than a brief-living woman,
Yet am I more divine than thou, for I
Can pity. I have torn thy destined prey
From thy red jaws. They say thou dost avenge
Fearfully insult. Avenge thyself, Poseidon.

She goes out: Perseus and Iolaus come forward.

PERSEUS

Thou art the mate for me, Andromeda!
Now, now I know wherefore my eager sandals
Bore me resistlessly to thee and Syria.

IOLAUS

This was Andromeda and not Andromeda.
I never saw her woman till this hour.

PERSEUS

Knew you so ill the child you loved so well,
Iolaus?

IOLAUS

Sometimes we know them least
Whom most we love and constantly consort with.

PERSEUS

How daintily she moved as if a hand
She loved were on her curls and she afraid
Of startling the sweet guest!

IOLAUS

O Perseus, Perseus!

She has defied a strong and dreadful god,
And dreadfully he will avenge himself.

PERSEUS

Iolaus, friend, I think not quite at random
Athene led me to these happy shores
That bore such beautiful twin heads for me
Sun-curled, Andromeda and Iolaus,
That I might see their beauty marred with death
By cunning priests and blood-stained gods. Fear not
The event. I bear Athene's sword of sharpness.

They go out.

Scene 3

Darkness. The Temple of Poseidon.

Polydaon enters.

POLYDAON

Cireas! Why, Cireas! Cireas! Knave, I call you!
Is the rogue drunk or sleeps? Cireas! you, Cireas!
My voice comes echoing from the hollow shrine
To tell me of solitude. Where is this drunkard?
A dreadful thing it is to stand alone
In this weird temple. Forty years of use
Have not accustomed me to its mute threatening.
It seems to me as if dead victims moved
With awful faces all about this stone
Invisibly here palpable. And Ocean
Groans ever like a wounded god aloud
Against our rocky base, his voice at night
Weirdly insistent. I will go and talk
With the Chaldeans in their chains: better
Their pleasing groans and curses than the hush.

*He goes out and after a while
comes back, disordered.*

Wake, sleeping Syria, wake! Thou art violated,
Thy heart cut out: thou art outraged, Syria, outraged,
Thy harvests and thy safety and thy sons
Already murdered! O hideous sacrilege!
Who can have dared this crime? Could the slave Cireas
Have ventured thus? O no, it is the proud
God-hating son of Cepheus, Iolaus,
And that swift stranger borne through impious air
To upheave the bases of our old religion.
They have rescued the Chaldeans. Cireas lies

Murdered perhaps on the sound-haunted cliffs
 Who would have checked their crime. I'll strike the gong
 That only tolls when dread calamity
 Strides upon Syria. Wake, doomed people, wake!

*He rushes out. A gong sounds for some
 moments. It is silent and he returns,
 still more disordered.*

Wake! Wake! Do you not hear Poseidon raging
 Beneath the cliffs with tiger-throated menace?
 Do you not hear his feet upon the boulders
 Sounding, a thunderous report of peril,
 As he comes roaring up his stony ramparts
 To slay you? Ah, the city wakes. I hear
 A surge confused of hurrying, cries and tumult.
 What is this darkness moving on me? Gods!
 Where is the image? Whose is this awful godhead?

*The Shadow of Poseidon appears, vague
 and alarming at first, then distinct and
 terrible in the darkness.*

POSEIDON

My victims, Polydaon, give me my victims.

POLYDAON (*falling prostrate*)

It was not I, it was not I, but others.

POSEIDON

My victims, Polydaon, give me my victims.

POLYDAON

O dire offended god, not upon me
 Fall thy loud scourges! I am innocent.

POSEIDON

How art thou innocent, when the Chaldeans
 Escape? Give me my victims, Polydaon.

POLYDAON

I know not how they fled nor who released them.
Gnash not thy blood-stained teeth on me, O Lord,
Nor slay me with those glaring eyes. Thy voice
Thunders, a hollow terror, through my soul.

POSEIDON

Hear me, unworthy priest. While thou art scheming
For thy own petty mortal aims abroad,
I am insulted in my temple, laughed at
By slaves, by children done injurious wrong,
My victims snatched from underneath my roof
By any casual hand, my dreadful image
Looking deserted on: for none avenges.

POLYDAON

Declare thy will, O Lord, it shall be done.

POSEIDON

Therefore I will awake, I will arise,
And you shall know me for a god. This day
The loud Assyrians shall break shouting in
With angry hooves like a huge-riding flood
Upon this country. The pleasant land of Syria
Shall be dispeopled. Wolves shall howl in Damascus,
And Gaza and Euphrates bound a desert.
My resonant and cliff-o'ervaulting seas,
Black-cowled, with foaming tops thundering shall climb
Into your lofty seats of ease and wash them
Strangled into the valleys. From the deep
My ravening herds pastured by Amphitrite
Shall walk upon your roads, devour your maidens
And infants, tear your strong and armèd men
Helplessly shrieking like weak-wristed women,
Till all are dead. And thou, neglectful priest,
Shalt go down living into Tartarus
Where knives fire-pointed shall disclose thy breast

And pluck thy still-renewing heart from thee
 For ever: till the world cease shall be thy torments.

POLYDAON

O dreadful Lord!

POSEIDON

If thou wouldst shun the doom,
 And keep my Syria safe, discover then
 The rescuer of the Babylonian captives
 And to the monsters of my deep expose
 For a delicious banquet. Offer the heart
 Of Iolaus here still warmly alive
 And sobbing blood to leave his beautiful body;
 Slaughter on his yet not inanimate bosom
 The hero for whose love he braved my rage,
 And let the sacrilegious house of Cepheus
 Be blotted from the light. Thy sordid aims
 Put from thy heart: remember to be fearless.
 I will inhabit thee, if thou deserve it.

He disappears thundering.

POLYDAON

Yes, Lord! shall not thy dreadful will be done?

Phineus enters and his Tyrians with torches.

PHINEUS

Wherefore has the gong's ominous voice tonight
 Affrighted Syria? Are you Polydaon
 Who crouch here?

POLYDAON (*rising*)

Welcome, King Phineus.

PHINEUS

Who art thou?

Thine eyes roll round in a bright glaring horror

And rising up thou shak'st thy gloomy locks
As if they were a hungry lion's mane
Preparing for the leap. Speak, Polydaon.

POLYDAON

Yes, I shall speak, of sacrilege and blood,
Its terrible forfeit, and the wrath of Heaven.

*Cepheus enters with Dercetes and Syrian
soldiers, Therops, Perissus and a throng
of Syrians; scores of torches.*

CEPHEUS

What swift calamity, O Polydaon,
Has waked to clamorousness the fatal gong
At which all Syria trembles? What is this face
Thou showest like some grim accusing phantom's
In the torches' light? Wherefore rangst thou the bell?

POLYDAON

It rang the doom of thee and all thy house,
Cepheus.

CEPHEUS

My doom!

PHINEUS (*aside*)

I glimpse a striking plot
And 'tis well-staged too.

POLYDAON

The victims are released,
The victims bound for terrible Poseidon.
Thou and thy blood are guilty.

CEPHEUS

Thou art mad!

POLYDAON

'Tis thou and thy doomed race are seized with madness,
Who with light hearts offend against Poseidon.
But they shall perish. Thou and thy blood shall perish.

CEPHEUS

O, thou appalst me. Wherefore rings out thy voice
Against me like a clamorous bell of doom
In the huge darkness?

POLYDAON

Poseidon's self arose
In the dim night before me with a voice
As angry as the loud importunate surge
Denouncing thee. Thou and thy blood shall perish.

PHINEUS

Cepheus, let search be made. Perhaps the victims
Have not fled far, and all may yet be saved.

CEPHEUS

Scour, captains, scour all Syria for the fugitives.
Dercetes and thy troop, down to the coast,
Scan every boulder: out, out, Meriones,
Callias, Oridamas and Pericarpus,
Ring in the countryside with cordons armed,
Enter each house, ransack most private chambers,
But find them.

*Dercetes and the captains go out
with their soldiers, the people
making way for them.*

POLYDAON

People of Syria, hearken, hearken!
Poseidon for this sacrilege arouses
The Assyrian from the land and from the sea
His waves and all their sharp-toothed monsters: your men

Shall be rent and disembowelled, your women ravished,
Butchered by foemen or by Ocean's dogs
Horribly eaten: what's left, the flood shall swallow.

Cries and groans.

VOICES

Spare us, Poseidon, spare us, dread deity!

POLYDAON

Would you be spared? Obey Poseidon, people.

THEROPS

Thou art our King, command us.

POLYDAON

Bring the woman,
Chaldean Cassiopea, and her daughter.
Tell them that Syria's King commands them here.

Therops and others go out to do his bidding.

PHINEUS

What mean you, priest?

CEPHEUS

Wherefore my queen and princess?

POLYDAON

I do the will of terrible Poseidon.
Thou and thy blood shall perish.

PHINEUS

Thou then art mad!
I thought this was a skilful play. Thinkst thou
I will permit the young Andromeda,
My bride, to be mishandled or exposed
To the bloody chances of wild popular fury
In such a moment?

POLYDAON

Phineus, I know not what thou wilt permit:
I know what terrible Poseidon wills.

PHINEUS

Poseidon! thou gross superstitious fool,
Hast thou seen shadows in the night and tookst them
For angry gods?

POLYDAON

Refrain from impious words,
Or else the doom shall take thee in its net.

PHINEUS

Refrain thyself from impious deeds, or else
A hundred Tyrian blades shall search thy brain
To look for thy lost reason.

POLYDAON (*recoiling*)

Patience, King Phineus!
It may be, thou shalt have thy whole desire
By other means.

Dercetes returns.

DERCETES

One of the fugitives is seized.

POLYDAON

Where, where?

DERCETES

Creeping about the sea-kissed rocks we found him
Where the ship foundered, babbling greedily
Of his lost wealth, in cover of the darkness.

POLYDAON

Now we shall know the impious hand. Tremble,

Tremble, King Cepheus.

CEPHEUS (*aside*)

I am besieged, undone.

No doubt it is my rash-brained Iolaus
Ruins us all.

Soldiers enter, driving in Smerdas.

SMERDAS (*groaning*)

I am dragged back to hell.

I am lost and nothing now can save me.

POLYDAON

Chaldean,

The choice is thine. Say, wilt thou save thy life
And see the green fields of thy land once more
And kiss thy wife and children?

SMERDAS

You mock me, mock me!

POLYDAON

No, man! thou shalt have freedom at a price
Or torture gratis.

SMERDAS

Price? price? I'll give the price!

POLYDAON

The names of those whose impious hands released thee:
Which if thou speak not, thou shalt die, not given
To the dire god, for he asks other victims,
But crushed with fearful tortures.

SMERDAS

O kind Heaven!

Have mercy! Must I give her up, — that smile

Of sweetness and those kindly eyes, to death?
It is a dreadful choice! I cannot do it.

POLYDAON

It was a woman did this!

SMERDAS

I'll say no more.

CEPHEUS

I breathe again: it was not Iolaus.

POLYDAON

Seize him and twist him into anguished knots!
Let every bone be crushed and every sinew
Wrenched and distorted, till each inch of flesh
Gives out its separate shriek.

SMERDAS

O spare me, spare me:

I will tell all.

POLYDAON

Speak truth and I will give thee
Bushels of gold and shipment to Chaldea.

SMERDAS

Gold? Gold? Shall I have gold?

POLYDAON

Thou shalt.

SMERDAS (*after a pause*)

The youth
You would have taken on the beach, arrived,
And his the sword bit through my iron fetters.

POLYDAON

Palter not! Who was with him? Thou shalt have gold.

SMERDAS

Young Iolaus.

CEPHEUS

Alas!

PHINEUS

Thus far is well.

POLYDAON

Thou hast a shifty look about the eyes.
Thou spokest of a woman. Was't the Queen?
Hast thou told all? His face grows pale. To torment!

SMERDAS (*groaning*)

I will tell all. Swear then I shall have gold
And safety.

POLYDAON

By grim Poseidon's head I swear.

SMERDAS

O hard necessity! The fair child princess,
Andromeda, with her young slave-girl came,
She was my rescuer.

There is a deep silence of amazement.

PHINEUS

I'll not believe this! could that gentle child
Devise and execute so huge a daring?
Thou liest: thou art part of some foul plot.

POLYDAON

He has the accent of unwilling truth.

Phineus, she is death's bride, not thine. Wilt thou
 Be best man in that dolorous wedding? Forbear
 And wait Poseidon's will.

PHINEUS (*low*)

Shall I have Syria?

POLYDAON

When it is mine to give thee.

Therops returns.

THEROPS

The Queen arrives.

POLYDAON

Remove the merchant.

*The soldiers take Smerdas into the background.
 Cassiopea enters with Andromeda and Diomedea,
 Nebassar and the Chaldean Guard.*

CASSIOPEA

Keep ready hands upon your swords, Chaldeans.
 What is this tumult? Wherefore are we called
 At this dim hour and to this solemn place?

POLYDAON

Com'st thou with foreign falchions, Cassiopea,
 To brave the Syrian gods? Abandon her,
 Chaldeans. 'Tis a doomed head your swords encompass.

CASSIOPEA

Since when dost thou give thy commands in Syria
 And sentence queens? My husband and thy King
 Stands near thee; let him speak.

POLYDAON

Let him. There stands he.

CASSIOPEA

Why hidest thou thine eyes, monarch of Syria,
Sinking thy forehead like a common man
Unkingly? What grief o'ertakes thee?

POLYDAON

You see he speaks not.

'Tis I command in Syria. Is't not so,
My people?

THEROPS

'Tis so.

POLYDAON

Stand forth, Andromeda.

CASSIOPEA

What would you with my child? I stand here for her.

POLYDAON

She is accused of impious sacrilege,
And she must die.

CASSIOPEA (*shuddering*)

Die! Who accuses her?

POLYDAON

Bring the Chaldean.

DIOMEDE

Oh, the merchant's seized
And all is known. Deny it, my sweet lady,
And we may yet be saved.

ANDROMEDA

Oh poor, poor merchant!
Did I unloose thy bonds in vain?

DIOMEDE

Say nothing.

ANDROMEDA

And why should I conceal it, Diomedes?
What I had courage in my heart to do,
Surely I can have courage to avow.

DIOMEDE

But they will kill us both.

ANDROMEDA

I am a princess.
Why should I lie? From fear? But I am not afraid.
Meanwhile the soldiers have brought Smerdas to the front.

POLYDAON

Look, merchant. Say before all, who rescued thee?
She was it?

SMERDAS

It is she. Oh, do not look
With that sad smile upon me. I am compelled.

POLYDAON

Is this the slave-girl?

SMERDAS

It is she.

CASSIOPEA

This wretch
Lies at thy bidding. Put him to the question.
He said he was compelled.

POLYDAON

I'll not permit it.

PERISSUS

Why, man, it is the law. We'll not believe
Our little princess did the crime.

CASSIOPEA

Syrians,
Look at this paltering priest. Do you not see
It is a plot, this man his instrument
Who lies so wildly? He'll not have him questioned.
No doubt 'twas he himself released the man, —
Who else could do it in this solemn temple
Where human footsteps fear to tread? He uses
The name of great Poseidon to conceal
His plottings. He would end the line of Cepheus
And reign in Syria.

PERISSUS

This sounds probable.

VOICES

Does he misuse Poseidon's name? unbind
Victims? Kill him!

CASSIOPEA

Look how he pales, O people!
Is't thus that great Poseidon's herald looks
When charged with the god's fearful menaces?
He diets you with forgeries and fictions.

CRIES

Let him be strangled!

PHINEUS

This is a royal woman!

POLYDAON

Well, let the merchant then be put to question.

PERISSUS

Come and be tickled, merchant. I am the butcher.
Do you see my cleaver? I will torture you kindly.

SMERDAS

O help me, save me, lady Andromeda.

ANDROMEDA

Oh, do not lay your cruel hands upon him.
I did release him.

CASSIOPEA

Ah, child Andromeda.

PERISSUS

You, little princess! Wherefore did you this?

ANDROMEDA

Because I would not have their human hearts
Mercilessly uprooted for the bloody
Monster you worship as a god! because
I am capable of pain and so can feel
The pain of others! For which if you I love
Must kill me, do it. I alone am guilty.

POLYDAON

Now, Cassiopea! You are silent, Queen.
Lo, Syrians, lo, my forgeries and fictions!
Lo, my vile plottings! Enough. Poseidon wills
That on the beach this criminal be bound
For monsters of the sea to rend in fragments,
And all the royal ancient blood of Syria
Must be poured richly forth to appease and cleanse.

CASSIOPEA

Swords from the scabbard! gyre in your King from harm,
Chaldeans! Hew your way through all opposers!

Thou in my arms, my child Andromeda!
I'll keep my daughter safe upon my bosom
Against the world.

POLYDAON
What dost thou, Babylonian?

CASSIOPEA
To the palace,
My trusty countrymen!

POLYDAON
Oppose them, soldiers!
They cheat the god of the crime-burdened heads
Doomed by his just resentment.

DERCETES
We are few:
And how shall we lay hands on royalty?

POLYDAON
Nebassar, darest thou oppose the gods?

NEBASSAR
Out of my sword's way, priest! I do my duty.

POLYDAON
Draw, King of Tyre!

PHINEUS
'Tis not my quarrel, priest.
*Nebassar and the Chaldeans with drawn swords
go out from the Temple, taking the King and
Queen, Andromeda and Diomed.*

POLYDAON
People of Syria, you have let them pass!

You fear not then the anger of Poseidon?

PERISSUS

Would you have us spitted upon the Chaldean swords? Mad priest, must we be broached like joints and tossed like pancakes? We have no weapons. Tomorrow we will go to the Palace and what must be done shall be done. But 'tis not just that many should be slain for the crime of one and the house of Syria out-rooted. Follow me and observe my commands, brave aristocracy of the shop, gallant commoners of the lathe and anvil, follow Perissus. I will lead you tonight to your soft downy beds and tomorrow to the Palace.

All the Syrians go out, led by Therops and Perissus.

PHINEUS

Thou hast done foolishly in this, O priest.
Hadst thou demanded the one needful head
Of Iolaus, it was easy: but now
The tender beauty of Andromeda
Compels remorse and the astonished people
Recoil from the bold waste of royal blood
Thou appointest them to spill. I see that zeal
And frantic superstition are bad plotters.
Henceforth I work for my sole hand, to pluck
My own good from the storms of civic trouble
This night prepares.

He goes out with his Tyrians.

POLYDAON

O terrible Poseidon,
Thyself avenge thyself! hurl on this people
The sea and the Assyrian. Where is the power
Thou saidst should tarry with me? I have failed.

*He remains sunk in thought for a
while, then raises his head.*

Tomorrow, Syrian? tomorrow is Poseidon's.

Curtain

Act IV

Scene 1

*The countryside, high ground near the city of Cepheus.
A crowd of Syrians, men and women, running in terror, among
them Chabrias, Megas, Baltis, Pasithea, Morus, Gardas, Syrax.*

BALTIS (*stopping and sinking down on her knees*)
Ah, whither can we run where the offended
Poseidon shall not reach us?

CHABRIAS
Stop, countrymen;
Let's all die here together.

OTHERS
Let's stop and die.

MEGAS
Run, run! Poseidon's monsters howl behind.

PASITHEA
O day of horror and of punishment!

SYRAX
Let us stay here; it is high ground, perhaps
The monster will not reach us.

Damoetes enters.

DAMOETES
I have seen the terror near, and yet I live.

It vomits fire for half a league.

SYRAX

It is

As long as a sea-jutting promontory.

DAMOETES

It has six monstrous legs.

SYRAX

Eight, eight; I saw it.

MEGAS

Chabrias, it caught thy strong son by the foot,
And dashed his head against a stone, that all
The brains were scattered.

CHABRIAS

Alas, my son! I will

Go back and join you in the monster's jaws.

He is stopped by the others.

DAMOETES

It seized thy daughter, O Pasithea,
And tore her limbs apart, which it devoured
While yet the trunk lay screaming under its foot.

PASITHEA

Oh God!

She swoons.

ALL

Lift her up, lift her up. Alas!

MEGAS

These sorrows may be ours.

BALTIS

Ah Heaven, my son!
I did not wake him when this news of horror
Plucked me from sleep.

GARDAS

My wife and little daughter
Are in my cottage where perhaps the monster
Vomits his fiery breath against the door.
I will go back.

MORUS

Let us go back, Damoetes.

DAMOETES

I'll not go back for twenty thousand wives
And children. Life is sweet.

MANY VOICES

Let us not go.

They stop Gardas.

MEGAS

What noise is that?

BALTIS

Run, run, 'tis some new horror.
All are beginning to run. Therops enters.

THEROPS

Where will you run? Poseidon's wrath is near you
And over you and behind you and before you.
His monsters from the ooze ravage howling
Along our shores, and the indignant sea
Swelled to unnatural tumultuous mountains
Is climbing up the cliffs with spume and turmoil.

DAMOETES

O let us run a hundred leagues and live.

THEROPS

Before you is another death. Last night
The Assyrians at three points came breaking in
Across the border and the frontier forces
Are slain. They torture, burn and violate:
Young girls and matrons, men and boys are butchered.
Salvation is not in your front and flight
Casts you from angry gods to men more ruthless.
I wonder not that you are silent, stunned
With fear: but will you listen, countrymen,
And I will show you a cure for these fierce evils.

VOICES

Oh tell us, tell us, you shall be our king.

MEGAS

We'll set thy image by the great Poseidon's
And worship it.

THEROPS

What is the unexampled cause of wrath
Which whelms you with these horrors? Is't not the bold
Presumptuous line of Cepheus? Is't not your kings
Whose pride, swollen by your love and homage, Syrians,
Insults the gods, rescues Poseidon's victims
And with a sacrilegious levity
Exposes all your lives to death and woe?
There is the fount of all your misery, Syrians,
For this the horror eats you up, — your kings.

CRIES

Away with them! throw them into the sea — let Poseidon swallow them!

THEROPS

But most I blame the fell Chaldean woman
Who rules you. What is this Cepheus but a puppet
Dressed up in royal seemings, pushed forth and danced
At her caprice? Unhappy is the land
That women rule, that country more unhappy
That is to heartless foreigners a prey.
But thou, O ill-starred Syria, two worst evils
Hast harboured in a single wickedness.
What cares the light Chaldean for your gods,
Your lives, your sons, your daughters? She lives at ease
Upon the revenues of your hard toil,
Depending on favourites, yes, on paramours, —
For why have women favourites but to ease
Their sensual longings? — and insults your deities.
Do you not think she rescued the Chaldeans
Because they were her countrymen, and used
Her daughter, young Andromeda, for tool
That her fair childish beauty might disarm
Wrath and suspicion? then, the crime unearthed,
Braved all and set her fierce Chaldeans' swords
Against the good priest Polydaon's heart, —
You did not hear that? — the good Polydaon
Who serves Poseidon with such zeal! Therefore
The god is angry: your wives, sisters, daughters
Must suffer for Chaldean Cassiopea.

CRIS

Let us seize her and kill, kill, kill, kill her!

DAMOETES

Burn her!

MORUS

Roast her!

MEGAS

Tear her into a million fragments.

CHABRIAS

But are they not our kings? We must obey them.

THEROPS

Wherefore must we obey them? Kings are men,
And they are set above their fellow-mortals
To serve us, friends, — not, surely, for our hurt!
Why should our sons and daughters bleed for them,
Syrians? Is not our blood as dear, as precious,
As human? Why should these kings, these men, go clad
In purple and in velvet while you toil
For little and are hungry and are naked?

CRIS

True, true, true!

GARDAS

This is a wonderful man, this Therops. He has a brain, country-
men.

DAMOETES

A brain! He is no cleverer than you or I, Morus.

MORUS

I should think not, Damoetes!

DAMOETES

We knew these things long ago and did not need wind-bag
Therops to tell us!

MORUS

We have talked them over often, Damoetes.

MEGAS

We'll have no more kings, countrymen.

CRIS

No kings, no kings!

GARDAS

Or Therops shall be king.

CRIS

Yes, Therops king! Therops king!

DAMOETES

Good king Lungs! Oh, let us make him king, Morus, — he will not pass wind in the market-place so often.

THEROPS

Poseidon is our king; we are his people.
Gods we must worship; why should we worship men
And set a heavenly crown on mortal weakness?
They have offended against great Poseidon,
They are guilty of a fearful sacrilege.
Let them perish.

CRIS

Kill them! let us appease Poseidon.

CHABRIAS

Worship Heaven's power but bow before the king.

THEROPS

What need have we of kings? What are these kings?

CHABRIAS

They are the seed of gods.

THEROPS

Then, let them settle
 Themselves their quarrel with their Olympian kindred.
 Why should we suffer? Let Andromeda
 Be exposed and Iolaus sacrificed:
 Then shall Poseidon's wrath retire again
 Into the continent of his vast billows.

CHABRIAS

If it must be so, let it come by award
 Of quiet justice.

THEROPS

Justice! They are the judges
 Who did the crime. Wherefore dost thou defend them?
 Thou favourest then Poseidon's enemies?

CRIES

Kill him too, kill Chabrias. Poseidon, great Poseidon! we are
 Poseidon's people.

DAMOETES

Let him join his son and by the same road.

MORUS

Beat his brains out — to see if he has any. Ho! ho! ho!

THEROPS

Let him alone: he is a fool. Here comes
 Our zealous good kind priest, our Polydaon.

Polydaon enters.

CRIES

Polydaon! Polydaon! the good Polydaon! Save us, Polydaon!

POLYDAON

Ah, do you call me now to save you? Last night

You did not save me when the foreign swords
Were near my heart.

MEGAS

Forgive us and protect.

DAMOETES

You, lead us to the palace, be our chief.

MORUS

We'll have no kings: lead, you: on to the palace!

MEGAS

Poseidon shall be king, thou his vicegerent.

GARDAS

Therops at thy right hand!

CRIS

Yes, Therops! Therops!

POLYDAON

Oh, you are sane now, being let blood by scourgings!
Unhurt had been much better. But Poseidon
Pardons and I will save.

CRIS

Polydaon for ever, the good Polydaon, Poseidon's Viceroy!

POLYDAON

Swear then to do Poseidon's will.

CRIS

We swear!

DAMOETES

Command and watch the effect!

POLYDAON

Will not the tongue
Of Cassiopea once more change you, people?

DAMOETES

We'll cut it out and feed her dogs with it.

POLYDAON

Shall Iolaus bleed? Andromeda
Be trailed through the city and upon the rocks,
As the god wills, flung naked to his monsters?
Cepheus and Cassiopea die?

CRIES

They shall!

MEGAS

Not one of them shall live.

POLYDAON

Then come, my children.

DAMOETES

But the beast! Will it not tear us on the road?

POLYDAON

It will not hurt you who do Poseidon's will.
I am your safeguard; I will march in front.

CRIES

To the palace, to the palace! We'll kill the Chaldeans, strangle
Cepheus, tear the Queen to pieces.

POLYDAON

In order, in good order, my sweet children.

*The mob surges out following Polydaon
and Therops: only Damoetes, Chabrias,
Baltis and Pasithea are left.*

DAMOETES

Come, Chabrias, we'll have sport.

CHABRIAS

My dead son calls me.

He goes out in another direction.

BALTIS

Pasithea, rise and come: you'll see her killed
Who is the murderess of your daughter.

PASITHEA

Let me

Stay here and die.

DAMOETES

Lift her up. Come, fool.

They go out, leading Pasithea.

Scene 2

Cydone's Garden.
Cydone, Iolaus, Perseus.

CYDONE
Perseus, you did not turn him into stone?

IOLAUS
You cruelty! must one go petrifying
One's fellows through the world? 'Twould not be decent.

CYDONE
He would have been so harmless as a statue!

PERSEUS
The morning has broken over Syria and the sun
Mounts royally into his azure kingdom.
I feel a stir within me as if great things
Were now in motion and clear-eyed Athene
Urging me on to high and helpful deeds.
There is a grandiose tumult in the air,
A voice of gods and Titans locked in wrestle.

Diomedé enters.

DIOMEDE
Ah, prince!

She bursts into tears.

IOLAUS
Diomedé, what calamity?

DIOMEDE

Flee, flee from Syria, save thyself.

IOLAUS

From Syria!

Am I alone in peril? Then I'll sit
And wait.

DIOMEDE

Poseidon's monsters from the deep
Arise to tear us for our sin. The people
In fury, led by Polydaon, march
Upon the palace, crying, "Slay the King,
Butcher the Queen, and let Andromeda
And Iolaus die." O my sweet playmate,
They swear they'll bind her naked to the rocks
Of the sea-beach for the grim monster's jaws
To tear and swallow.

IOLAUS

My sword, my sword, Cydone!

DIOMEDE

Oh, go not to the fierce and bloody people!
Praxilla stole me out, hiding my face
In her grey mantle: I have outrun the wind
To warn you. Had the wild mob recognised me,
They would have torn me into countless pieces,
And will you venture near whose name they join
With death and cursings? Polydaon leads them.

CYDONE

Had he been only stone!

IOLAUS

My sword!

*Cydone gives him the sword.
Perseus goes out to the cottage.*

IOLAUS

You shall not give
To the rude mob's ferocious violence
The beautiful body I have kissed so often.
You'll not obey me?

CYDONE

No.

IOLAUS

Leave this you shall not.

CYDONE

I do not know how you will stop me.

IOLAUS

Shrew!
You shall be stopped by bonds. Here you'll remain
Tied to a tree-trunk by your wilful wrists
Till all is over.

Perseus returns, armed.

CYDONE

I'll bring the tree and all and follow you.

IOLAUS

Oh, will you, Hercules?

PERSEUS

Forbid her not,
My Iolaus; no tress of her shall fall.
I have arisen and all your turbulent Syria
Shall know me for the son of Zeus.

IOLAUS

Perseus,
Art thou indeed a god? What wilt thou do,

One against a whole people? What way hast thou?

PERSEUS

This is no hour to speak or plan, but to act.
A presence sits within my heart that sees
Each moment's need and finds the road to meet it.
Dread nothing; I am here to help and save.

IOLAUS

I had almost forgotten; the might thou hast shown
Is a sufficient warrant.

CYDONE

I shall come back,
Diomedes.

PERSEUS

My grip is firm on Herpe,
Athene's aegis guards my wrist; herself
The strong, omnipotent and tranquil goddess
Governs my motions with her awful will.
Have trust in me. Borne on my bright-winged sandals
Invisibly I will attend your course
On the light breezes.

He goes out followed by Iolaus and Cydone.

DIOMEDE

I am too tired to follow,
Too daunted with their mad-beast howls. Here let me hide
Awaiting what event this war of gods
May bring to me and my sweet-hearted lady.
O my Andromeda! my little playmate!

She goes out towards the cottage weeping.

Scene 3

*A room commanding the outer Court of the Palace.
Nebassar, Praxilla.*

PRAXILLA

I have seen them from the roof; at least ten thousand
March through the streets. Do you not hear their rumour,
A horrid hum as of unnumbered hornets
That slowly nears us?

NEBASSAR

If they are so many,
It will be hard to save the princess.

PRAXILLA

Save her!

It is too late now to save anyone.

NEBASSAR

I fear so.

PRAXILLA

But never is too late to die
As loyal servants for the lords whose bread
We have eaten. At least we women of the household
Will show the way to you Chaldeans.

NEBASSAR

We are soldiers,
Praxilla, and need no guidance on a road
We daily tread in prospect. I'll bring my guards.

He goes out saluting Cassiopea who enters.

CASSIOPEA

Swift Diomede must have reached by now,
Praxilla.

PRAXILLA

I hope so, madam.

She goes out to the inner apartments.

CASSIOPEA

Then Iolaus

Is safe. My sad heart has at least that comfort.

O my Andromeda, my child Andromeda,

Thou wouldst not let me save thee. Hadst thou too gone,

I would have smiled when their fierce fingers rent me.

Cepheus enters.

CEPHEUS

The mob is nearing; all my Syrian guards
Have fled; we cannot hope for safety now.

CASSIOPEA

Then what is left but to set rapid fire

To the rafters and prevent on friendly swords

The rabble's outrage?

CEPHEUS

Was it for such a fate

Thou camest smiling from an emperor's palace,

O Cassiopea, Cassiopea!

CASSIOPEA

For me

Grieve not.

CEPHEUS

O Lady, princess of Chaldea,

Pardon me who have brought thee to this doom.

Yet I meant well and thought that I did wisely:
But the gods wrest our careful policies
To their own ends until we stand appalled
Remembering what we meant to do and seeing
What has been done.

CASSIOPEA

With no half soul I came
To share thy kingdom and thy joys; entirely
I came, to take the evil also with thee.

CEPHEUS

Is there no truth in our high-winged ideals?
My rule was mild as spring, kind as the zephyr:
It tempered justice with benevolence
And offered pardon to the rebel and sinner;
I showed mercy, the rare sign of gods and kings.
In this too difficult world, this too brief life
To serve the gods with virtue seemed the best.
A nation's happiness was my only care:
I made the people's love my throne's sure base
And dreamed the way I chose true, great, divine.
But the heavenly gods have other thoughts than man's;
Their awful aims transcend our human sight.
Another doom than I had hoped they gave.

CASSIOPEA

A screened Necessity drives even the gods.
Over human lives it strides to unseen ends;
Our tragic failures are its stepping-stones.

CEPHEUS

My father lived calm, just, pitiless, austere,
As a stern god might sway a prostrate world:
Admired and feared, he died a mighty king.
My end is this abominable fate.

CASSIOPEA

Another law than mercy's rules the earth.

CEPHEUS

If I had listened to thee, O Cassiopea,
Chance might have taken a fairer happier course.
Always thou saidst to me, "The people's love
Is a glimmer on quicksands in a gliding sea:
Today they are with thee, tomorrow turn elsewhere.
Wisdom, strength, policy alone are sure."
I thought I better knew my Syrian folk.
Is this not my well-loved people at my door,
This tiger-hearted mob with bestial growl,
This cry for blood to drink, this roar of hate?
Always thou spok'st to me of the temple's power,
A growing danger menacing the State,
Its ambition's panther crouch and serpent pride
And cruel craft in a priest's sombre face:
I only saw the god and sacred priest.
To priest and god I am thrown a sacrifice.
The golden-mouthed orator of the market-place,
Therops, thou bad'st me fear and quell or win
Gaining his influence to my side. To me
He seemed a voice and nothing but a voice.
Too late I learn that human speech has power
To change men's hearts and turn the stream of Time.
Thy eyes could read in Phineus' scheming brain.
I only thought to buy the strength of Tyre
Offering my daughter as unwilling price.
He has planned my fall and watches my agony.
At every step I have been blind, have failed:
All was my error; all's lost and mine the fault.

CASSIOPEA

Blame not thyself; what thou hadst to be, thou wert,
And never yet came help from vain remorse.
It is too late, too late. To die is left;

Fate and the gods concede us nothing more.

CEPHEUS

But strength to meet the doom is always ours.
In royal robes and crowned we will show ourselves
To our people and look in the eyes of death and fate.
What is this armoured tramp?

*The Chaldean guards enter with
Nebassar at their head.*

CAPTAINS

O King, we come
To die with thee, the soldiers of Chaldea;
For all in Syria have abandoned thee.

CEPHEUS

I thank you, soldiers.

CRIS OUTSIDE

Poseidon, great Poseidon! we are Poseidon's people. In, in, in!
Kill the cuckold Cepheus, tear the harlot Cassiopea.

CEPHEUS

Voices of insolent outrage
Proclaim the heartless rabble. On the steps
Of our own palace we'll receive our subjects.

CASSIOPEA

This, this becomes thee, monarch.

NEBASSAR

Soldiers, form
With serried points before these mighty sovereigns.

*The mob surges in, Therops and Perissus at their
head, Polydaon a little behind, Damoetes, Morus
and the rest. Praxilla and others of the household
come running in.*

MOB

On them! on them! Cut the Chaldeans to pieces!

THEROPS

Halt, people, halt: let there be no vain bloodshed.

CASSIOPEA

Here is a tender-hearted demagogue!

THEROPS

Cepheus and Cassiopea, 'tis vain and heinous
To dally with your fate; it will only make you
More criminal before the majesty
Of the offended people.

CEPHEUS

Majesty!

CASSIOPEA

An unwashed majesty and a wolf-throated!

THEROPS

Insolent woman, to thee I speak not. Cepheus, —

CEPHEUS

Use humbler terms. I am thy King as yet.

THEROPS

The last in Syria. Tell me, wilt thou give up
Thy children to the altar, and thyself
Surrender here with this Chaldean woman
For mercy or judgment to the assembled will
Of Syria?

CASSIOPEA

A tearing mercy, a howling judgment!

POLYDAON

Therops, why do you treat with these? Chaldeans!
 And you, Praxilla! women of the household!
 Bring out the abominable Andromeda
 Who brought the woe on Syria. Why should you vainly
 Be ripped and mangled?

CRIES OF WOMEN

Bring out Andromeda!
 Bring out the harlot's daughter, bring her out!

CRIES OF MEN

Andromeda! Andromeda! Andromeda!
 Bring out this vile Andromeda to die!

*Andromeda enters from the inner Palace, followed
 by slave-girls entreating and detaining her.*

PRAXILLA (*sorrowfully*)

Wilt thou be wilful even to the end?

CASSIOPEA

Alas, my child!

ANDROMEDA

Mother, weep not for me. Perhaps my death
 May save you; and 'tis good that I should die,
 Not these poor innocent people. Against me
 Their unjust god is wroth.

CEPHEUS

O my poor sunbeam!

ANDROMEDA (*advancing and showing herself to the
 people*)

O people who have loved me, you have called me
 And I am here.

A fierce roar from the mob.

THEROPS

How she shrinks back appalled!

PRAXILLA

God! What a many-throated howl of demons!
 Their eyes glare death. These are not men and Syrians.
 The fierce Poseidon has possessed their breasts
 And breathed his awful blood-lust into all hearts
 Deafening the voice of reason, slaying pity:
 Poseidon's rage glares at us through these eyes,
 It is his ocean roar that fills our streets.

Cries from the mob.

BALTIS

Seize her! seize her! the child of wickedness!

VOICES OF WOMEN

Throw her to us! throw her to us! We will pick
 The veins out of her body one by one.

DAMOETES

Throw her to us! We will burn her bit by bit.

MORUS

Yes, cook her alive; no, Damoetes? Ho, ho, ho!

VOICES OF MEN

She has killed our sons and daughters: kill her, kill her!

VOICES OF WOMEN

She is the child of her wicked mother: kill her!

MOB

Throw her to us! throw her to us!

MEGAS

We'll tear her here, and the furies shall tear her afterwards for
 ever in Hell.

THEROPS

Peace, people! she is not yours, she is Poseidon's.

ANDROMEDA

Alas, why do you curse me? I am willing
To die for you. If I had known this morn
The monster's advent, I would have gone and met him
While you yet slept, and saved your poor fair children
Whose pangs have been my own. Had I died first,
I should not then have suffered. O my loved people,
You loved me too: when I went past your homes,
You blessed me always; often your girls and mothers
Would seize and bind me to their eager breasts
With close imprisonment, kiss on their doorways
And with a smiling soft reluctance leave.
O do not curse me now! I can bear all,
But not your curses.

PERISSUS

Alack, my pretty lady!
What madness made you do it?

POLYDAON

She has rewarded
Your love by bringing death upon you, Syrians,
And now she tries to melt you by her tears.

MOB

Kill her, kill her! Cut the Chaldeans to pieces! We will have her!

PASITHEA

O do not hurt her! She is like my child
Whom the fierce monster tore.

MEGAS

Unnatural mother!
Would you protect her who's cause your child was eaten?

PASITHEA

Will killing her give back my child to me?

MEGAS

No, it will save the children of more mothers.

DAMOETES

Gag up her puling mouth, the white-faced fool!

VOICES

Tear, tear Andromeda! Seize her and tear her!

WOMEN

Let us only get at her with our teeth and fingers!

NEBASSAR

Use swords, Chaldeans.

POLYDAON

Order, my children, order!

Chaldean, give us up Andromeda,
And save your King and Queen.

NEBASSAR

What, wilt thou spare them?

CASSIOPEA

Thou wilt not give my child to him, Nebassar?
Thou dar'st not!

NEBASSAR

Queen, 'tis better one should die
For all.

POLYDAON

I swear to thee, I will protect them.

CASSIOPEA

Trust not his oaths, his false and murderous oaths.

NEBASSAR

He is a priest: if we believe him, nothing
We lose, something may gain.

MEGAS

What wilt thou do?

The people do not like it. See, they mutter.

POLYDAON

Let me have first their daughter in my grip,
Be sure of the god's dearest victim. People,
I am Poseidon's priest and your true friend.
Leave all to me.

CRIS

Leave all to Polydaon! the good priest knows what he is doing.

POLYDAON

Soldier, give up the Princess.

NEBASSAR

Shall she be only given to Poseidon?
Will you protect her from worse outrage?

POLYDAON

I will.

PRAXILLA

Look! what a hideous triumph lights the eyes
Of that fierce man. He glares at her with greed
Like a wild beast of prey, and on his mouth
There is a cruel unclean foam. Nebassar,
O do not give her.

CASSIOPEA

I will not go. Let them tear her
Before me: then surely Heaven will avenge me.

CEPHEUS

Come, Cassiopea, come: our death's delayed
By a few minutes. I will not see her slain.

*Cepheus and Praxilla go in, forcibly leading Cassiopea;
they are followed by the slave-girls and then by Nebassar
and the Chaldeans: Andromeda is left alone on the steps.*

CRIES OF THE MOB SURGING FORWARD

Drag her, kill her, she is ours.

POLYDAON

Therops and thou, Perissus, stand in front
And keep the people off, or they will tear her,
Defraud Poseidon.

PERISSUS

Cheer up, my princess, come!
You shall be cleanly killed.

THEROPS

People of Syria,
Rob not Poseidon of his own! 'tis not the way
To turn his anger.

VOICES

Right, right! leave her to Poseidon: out with her to the sea-
monster.

GARDAS

Therops is always right.

DAMOETES

We will have her first: we will dress his banquet for him: none
shall say us nay.

MORUS

Good; we will show Poseidon some excellent cookery. Ho, ho, ho!

MEGAS

No, no, no! To the rocks with her! Strip her, the fine dainty princess, and hang her up in chains on the cliff-face.

A WOMAN

Strip her! Off with her broidered robe and her silken tunic! Why should she wear such, when my daughter carries only coarse woollen?

A WOMAN (*shaking her fist*)

Curse the white child's face of thee: it has ruined Syria. Die, dog's daughter.

DAMOETES

Is she to die only once who has killed so many of us? I say, tie her to one of these pillars and flog her till she drops.

MORUS

That's right, skin her with whips: peel her for the monster, ho, ho, ho!

BALTIS

Leave her: Hell's tortures shall make the account even.

POLYDAON

In order, children: let all be done in order.

THEROPS

She droops like a bruised flower beneath their curses,
And the tears lace her poor pale cheeks like frost
Glittering on snowdrops. I am sorry now
I had a hand in this.

ANDROMEDA

You two have faces
Less cruel than the others. I am willing
To die, — oh, who would live to be so hated?
But do not let them shame or torture me.

PERISSUS

Off! off! thick-brained dogs, loud-lunged asses! What do you do, yelping and braying here? Will you give a maimed meal to Poseidon's manhound? Do you know me not? Have you never heard of Perissus, never seen Perissus the butcher? I guard Poseidon's meat, and whoever touches a morsel of it, I will make meat of him with my cleaver. I am Perissus, I am the butcher.

VOICES

It is Perissus, the good and wealthy butcher. He is right. To the rocks with her!

VOICES OF WOMEN

Bind her first: we will see her bound!

PERISSUS

In all that is rational, I will indulge you.
Where is a cord?

CRIES

A cord, who has a cord?

DAMOETES

Here is one, Perissus. 'Tis rough and strong and sure.

PERISSUS

Come, wear your bracelets.

ANDROMEDA

O bind me not so hard!
You cut my wrists.

She weeps.

PERISSUS

You are too soft and tender.
There, dry your eyes, — but that, poor slip, you cannot.
See, I have tied you very lightly: say not
That this too hurts.

ANDROMEDA

I thank you; you are kind.

PERISSUS

Kind! Why should I not be kind? Because I am a butcher must
I have no bowels? Courage, little Princess: none shall hurt thee
but thy sea-monster and he, I am sure, will crunch thy little
bones very tenderly. Never had man-eater such sweet bones to
crunch. Alack! but where is the remedy?

POLYDAON

Now take her to the beach and chain her there
Upon the rocks to bear her punishment.
Perissus, lead her forth! We'll follow you.

CRIES

Not I! not I!

DAMOETES

You'd kill us, Polydaon?
Poseidon's anger walks by the sea-beaches.

POLYDAON

The fierce sea-dragon will not hurt you, friends,
Who bring a victim to Poseidon's altar
Of the rude solemn beaches. I'll protect you.

CRIES

We'll go with Polydaon! with the good Polydaon!

POLYDAON

Perissus, go before. We'll quickly come.

PERISSUS

Make way there or I'll make it with my cleaver.

Heart, little Princess! None shall touch thee. Heart!

*Perissus and others make their way
out with Andromeda.*

POLYDAON

Hem, people, hem the Palace in with myriads:

We'll pluck out Cepheus and proud Cassiopea.

CRIS

Kill Cepheus the cuckold, the tyrant! Tear the harlot Cassiopea.

THEROPS

Is this thy sacred oath? Had not Nebassar

Thy compact, priest?

POLYDAON

I swore not by Poseidon.

Wilt thou oppose me?

THEROPS

Thy perjury too much

Favours my private wishes. Yet would I not

Be thou with such a falsehood on my conscience.

POLYDAON

Why, Therops, be thyself and thou shalt yet

Be something great in Syria.

DAMOETES

Where's Iolaus?

Shall he not also die?

POLYDAON

Too long forgotten!

O that I should forget my dearest hatred!

By this he has concealed himself or fled
And I am baulked of what I chiefly cherished.

THEROPS

Oh, do them justice! the great house of Syria
Were never cowards. The prince has been o'erwhelmed
On his way hither with rash sword to rescue:
So Aligattas tells, who came behind us.
He's taken to the temple.

POLYDAON

Heard you?

MOB

Hurrah!

BALTIS

But what's the matter now with our good priest?
His veins are all out and his face is blood-red!

DAMOETES

This joy is too great for him.

POLYDAON

I am a god,
A god of blood and roaring victory.
Oh, blood in rivers! His heart out of his breast,
And his mother there to see it! and I to laugh
At her, to laugh!

THEROPS

This is not sanity.

POLYDAON (*controlling himself with a great effort*)
The sacrilegious house is blotted out
Of Cepheus. Let not one head outlive their ending!
Andromeda appoints the way to Hades

Who was in crime the boldest, then her brother
Yells on the altar: last Cepheus and his Queen —

CRIES

Tear her! let the Chaldean harlot die.

POLYDAON

She shall be torn! but not till she has seen
The remnants of the thing that was her daughter:
Not till her sweet boy's heart has been plucked out
Under her staring eyes from his red bosom.
Till then she shall not die. But afterwards
Strew with her fragments every street of the city.

CRIES

Hear, hear Poseidon's Viceroy, good Polydaon!

MEGAS

In! in! cut off their few and foreign swordsmen.

CRIES

In! in! let not a single Chaldean live.

*The mob rushes into the Palace; only
Therops and Polydaon remain.*

POLYDAON

Go, Therops, take good care of Cassiopea,
Or she will die too mercifully soon.

THEROPS (*aside*)

How shall we bear this grim and cruel beast
For monarch, when all's done? He is not human.

He goes into the Palace.

POLYDAON

I have set Poseidon's rage in human hearts;
His black and awful Influence flows from me.

Thou art a mighty god, Poseidon, yet
 And mightily thou hast avenged thyself.
 The drama's nearly over. Now to ring out
 The royal characters amid fierce howlings
 And splendid, pitiless, crimson massacre, —
 A great finale! Then, then I shall be King.

*(As he speaks, he gesticulates more wildly
 and his madness gains upon him.)*

Thou luckless Phineus, wherefore didst thou leave
 So fortunate a man for thy ally?
 The world shall long recall King Polydaon.
 I will paint Syria gloriously with blood.
 Hundreds shall daily die to incarnadine
 The streets of my city and my palace floors,
 For I would walk in redness. I'll plant my gardens
 With heads instead of lilacs. Hecatombs
 Of men shall groan their hearts out for my pleasure
 In crimson rivers. I'll not wait for shipwrecks.
 Assyrian captives and my Syrian subjects,
 Nobles and slaves, men, matrons, boys and virgins
 At matins and at vespers shall be slain
 To me in my magnificent high temple
 Beside my thunderous Ocean. I will possess
 Women each night, who the next day shall die,
 Encrimsoned richly for the eyes' delight.
 My heart throngs out in words! What moves within me?
 I am athirst, magnificently athirst,
 And for a red and godlike wine. Whence came
 The thirst on me? It was not here before.
 'Tis thou, 'tis thou, O grand and grim Poseidon,
 Hast made thy scarlet session in my soul
 And growest myself. I am not Polydaon,
 I am a god, a mighty dreadful god,
 The multitudinous mover in the sea,
 The shaker of the earth: I am Poseidon
 And I will walk in three tremendous paces
 Climbing the mountains with my clamorous waters

And see my dogs eat up Andromeda,
My enemy, and laugh in my loud billows.
The clamour of battle roars within the Palace!
I have created it, I am Poseidon.
Sits thou, my elder brother, charioted
In clouds? Look down, O brother Zeus, and see
My actions! they merit thy immortal gaze.

He goes into the Palace.

Scene 4

*On the road to the sea-shore.
Phineus and his Tyrians.*

PHINEUS

A mightier power confounds our policies.
Is't Heaven? is't Fate? What's left me, I will take.
'Tis best to rescue young Andromeda
From the wild mob and bear her home to Tyre.
She, when the roar is over, will be left
My claim to Syria's prostrate throne, which force,
If not diplomacy shall re-erect
And Tyre become the Syrian capital.
I hear the trampling of the rascal mob.

CRIS OUTSIDE

Drag her more quickly! To the rocks! to the rocks!
Glory to great Poseidon!

PHINEUS

Tyrians, be ready.

*Perissus and a number of Syrians
enter leading Andromeda bound.*

SYRIANS

To the rocks with her, to the rocks! bind her on the rocks.

PHINEUS

Pause, rabble! Yield your prey to Tyrian Phineus.
Lift up thy lovely head, Andromeda!
For thou art saved.

PERISSUS

Who art thou with thy nose and thy fellows and thy spits?

PHINEUS

Knowst thou me not? I am the royal Phineus.
Yield up the Princess, fair Andromeda.

PERISSUS

Art thou the royal Phineus and is this long nose thy sceptre? I
am Perissus, the butcher. Stand aside, royal Phineus, or I will
chop thee royally with my cleaver.

ANDROMEDA

What wilt thou with me, King of Tyre?

PHINEUS

Sweet rose,

I come to save thee. I will carry thee,
My bride, far from these savage Syrian tumults
To reign in loyal Tyre. Thou art safe.

ANDROMEDA (*sorrowfully*)

Safe!

My father and my mother are not safe
Nor Iolaus: nor is Syria safe.
Will you protect my people, when the god,
Not finding me, his preferable victim,
Works his fierce will on these?

PHINEUS

Thou car'st for them?

They have o'erwhelmed thee with foul insult, bound thee,
Threatened thy lovely limbs with rascal outrage
And dragged to murder!

ANDROMEDA

But they are my people.

Perissus, lead me on. I will not go with him.

PHINEUS

Thou strange and beautiful and marvellous child,
Wilt thou or wilt thou not, by force I'll have thee.
Golden enchantment! thou art too rare a thing
For others to possess. Run, rascal rabble!
On, Tyrians!

PERISSUS

Cleavers and axes to their spits!

ANDROMEDA

King Phineus, pause! I swear I will prefer
Death's grim embrace rather than be thy wife
Abandoning my people. 'Tis a dead body
Thou wilt rescue.

PHINEUS

Is thy resolve unshakable?

ANDROMEDA

It is.

PHINEUS

Die then! To Death alone I yield thee.

He goes out with his Tyrians.

PERISSUS

So then thou art off, royal Phineus! so thou hast evaporated,
bold god of the Hittites! Thou hast saved thy royal nose from
my cleaver.

SYRIANS

On to the rocks! Glory to great Poseidon.

They go leading Andromeda.

Scene 5

The sea-shore.

Andromeda, dishevelled, bare-armed and unsandalled, stripped of all but a single light robe, stands on a wide low ledge under a rock jutting out from the cliff with the sea washing below her feet. She is chained to the rock behind her by her wrists and ankles, her arms stretched at full length against its side. Polydaon, Perissus, Damoetes and a number of Syrians stand near on the great rocky platform projecting from the cliff of which the ledge is the extremity.

POLYDAON

There meditate affronts to dire Poseidon.
Rescue thyself, thou rescuer of victims!
I am sorry that thy marriage, sweet Andromeda,
So poorly is attended. I could have wished
To have all Syria gazing at thy nuptials
With thy rare Ocean bridegroom! Thy mother most
Should have been here to see her lovely princess
So meetly robed for bridal, with these ornaments
Upon her pretty hands and feet. She has
Affairs too pressing. We do some surgery
Upon thy brother Iolaus' heart
To draw the bad blood out and make it holy,
And she must watch the skilful operation.
Do not weep, fair one. Soon, be confident,
They'll meet thee in that wide house where all are going.
Think of these things until thy lover comes.
Farewell.

PERISSUS

Art thou mad, priest Polydaon? How thou grinnest and drawest

back thy black lips from thy white teeth in thy rapture! Hast thou gone clean mad, my skilful carver of hearts! art thou beside thyself, my ancient schoolmate and crony?

SYRIANS

To the temple! To the temple!

POLYDAON

Let one remain above the cliff
And watch the monster's advent and his going.
Till I have news of dead Andromeda
The sacrifice cannot begin. Who stays?

DAMOETES

Not I!

ALL

Nor I! nor I! nor I!

DAMOETES

As well stay here with the girl and be torn with her!

PERISSUS

Do you quake, my brave shouters? must you curl your tails in between your manly legs? I will stay, priest, who fear neither dog nor dragon. I am Perissus, I am the butcher.

POLYDAON

I'll not forget thy service, good Perissus.

PERISSUS

Will you then make me butcher-in-chief to your viceroy in Damascus and shall I cut my joints under the patronage of King Polydaon? To the temple, Syrian heroes! I will go and cross my legs on the cliff-top.

*They go. Andromeda is left alone.
Curtain*

Act V

Scene 1

The sea-shore.

Andromeda chained to the cliff.

ANDROMEDA

O iron-throated vast unpitying sea,
Whose borders touch my feet with their cold kisses
As if they loved me! yet from thee my death
Will soon arise, and in some monstrous form
To tear my heart with horror before my body.
I am alone with thee on this wild beach
Filled with the echo of thy roaring waters.
My fellowmen have cast me out: they have bound me
Upon thy rocks to die. These cruel chains
Wear the arms they keep held stiffly out
Against the rough cold jagged stones. My bosom
Hardly contains its thronging sobs; my heart
Is torn with misery: for by my act
My father and my mother are doomed to death,
My dear kind brother, my sweet Iolaus,
Will cruelly be slaughtered; by my act
A kingdom ends in miserable ruin.
I thought to save two fellowmen: I have slain
A hundred by their rescue. I have failed
In all I did and die accursed and hated.
I die alone and miserably, no heart
To pity me: only your hostile waves
Are listening to my sobs and laughing hoarsely
With cruel pleasure. Heaven looks coldly on.

Yet I repent not. O thou dreadful god!
 Yes, thou art dreadful and most mighty; perhaps
 This world will always be a world of blood
 And smiling cruelty, thou its fit sovereign.
 But I have done what my own heart required of me,
 And I repent not. Even if after death
 Eternal pain and punishment await me
 And gods and men pursue me with their hate,
 I have been true to myself and to my heart,
 I have been true to the love it bore for men,
 And I repent not.

She is silent for a while.

Alas! is there no pity for me? Is there
 No kind bright sword to save me in all this world?
 Heaven with its cold unpitying azure roofs me,
 And the hard savage rocks surround: the deaf
 And violent Ocean roars about my feet,
 And all is stony, all is cold and cruel.
 Yet I had dreamed of other powers. Where art thou,
 O beautiful still face amid the lightnings,
 Athene? Does a mother leave her child?
 And thou, bright stranger, wert thou only a dream?
 Wilt thou not come down glorious from thy sun,
 And cleave my chains, and lift me in thy arms
 To safety? I will not die! I am too young,
 And life was recently so beautiful.
 It is too hard, too hard a fate to bear.

*She is silent, weeping. Cydone enters: she comes
 and sits down at Andromeda's feet.*

CYDONE

How beautiful she is, how beautiful!
 Her tears bathe all her bosom. O cruel Syrians!

ANDROMEDA

What gentle touch is on my feet? Who art thou?

CYDONE

I am Cydone. Iolaus loves me.

ANDROMEDA

My brother! lives he yet?

CYDONE

He lives, dear sweetness,
And sent me to you.

ANDROMEDA (*joyfully*)

It was a cruel lie!
He's free?

CYDONE

No, bound and in the temple. Weep not.

ANDROMEDA

Alas! And you have left him there alone?

CYDONE

The gods are with him, sister. In a few hours
We shall be all together and released
From these swift perils.

ANDROMEDA

Together and released!
Oh yes, in death.

CYDONE

I bid you hope. O child,
How beautiful you are, how beautiful,
Iolaus' sister! This one white slight garment
Fluttering about you in the ocean winds,
You look like some wind-goddess chained in play
By frolic sisters on the wild sea-beaches.
I think all this has happened, little sister,

Just that the gods might have for one brief hour
 You for a radiant vision of childish beauty
 Exposed against this wild stupendous background.

ANDROMEDA

You make me smile in spite of all my grief.
 Did you not bid me hope, Cydone?

CYDONE

And now

I bid you trust: for you are saved.

ANDROMEDA

I am.

I feel it now.

CYDONE

Your name's Andromeda?

ANDROMEDA

Iolaus calls me so.

CYDONE

I think he cheats me.

You are Iolaus changed into a girl.
 Come, I will kiss you dumb for cheating me
 With changes of yourself.

Kisses her.

If I could have

My Iolaus always chained like this
 To do my pleasure with, I would so plague him!
 For he abuses me and calls me shrew,
 Monster and vixen and names unbearable,
 Because he's strong and knows I cannot beat him.

ANDROMEDA

The world is changed about me.

CYDONE

Heaven's above.

Look up and see it.

ANDROMEDA

There is a golden cloud
Moving towards me.

CYDONE

It is Perseus. Sweetheart,
I go to Iolaus in the temple, —
I mean your other fair boy-self. Kiss me,
O sweet girl-Iolaus, and fear nothing.

She goes out over the rocks.

ANDROMEDA

I shall be saved! What is this sudden trouble
That lifts the bosom of the tossing deep,
Hurling the waves against my knees? Save me!
Where art thou gone, Cydone? What huge head
Raises itself on the affrighted seas?
Where art thou, O my saviour? Come! His eyes
Glare up at me from the grey Ocean trough
Hideous with brutish longing. Like great sharp rocks
His teeth are in a bottomless dim chasm.

She closes her eyes in terror. Perseus enters.

PERSEUS

Look up, O sunny-curled Andromeda!
Perseus, the son of Danaë, is with thee
To whom thou now belongest. Fear no more
Sea-monsters nor the iron-souled Poseidon,
Nor the more monstrous flinty-hearted rabble
Who bound thee here. This huge and grisly enemy
That rises from the flood, need not affright thee.
Thou art as safe as if thy mother's arms
Contained thee in thy brilliant guarded palace

When all was calm, O white Andromeda!
Lift up thy eyes' long curtains: aid the azure
With thy regards, O sunshine. Look at me
And see thy safety.

ANDROMEDA

O thou hast come to me!
It was not only a radiant face I dreamed of.

PERSEUS

In time to save thee, my Andromeda,
Sole jewel of the world. I go to meet
Thy enemy, confronting grim Poseidon.

ANDROMEDA

O touch me ere you go that I may feel
You are real.

PERSEUS

Let my kiss, sweet doubting dreamer,
Convince thee. Now I dart like a swift hawk
Upon my prey and smite betwixt the billows.
Watch how I fight for thee. I will come soon
To gather thee into my grasp, my prize
Of great adventure.

He goes out.

ANDROMEDA

The music of his name
Was in my brain just now. What must I call thee?
Perseus, the son of Danaë! Perseus!
Perseus, Athene's sword! Perseus, my sungod!
O human god of glad Andromeda!
Forgive, Athene, my lack of faith. Thou art!
How like a sudden eagle he has swooped
Upon the terror, that lifts itself alarmed,
Swings its huge length along the far-ridged billows

And upwards yawns its rage. O great Athene!
It belches fiery breath against my Perseus
And lashes Ocean in his face. The sea
Is tossed upon itself and its huge bottoms
Catch chinks of unaccustomed day. But the aegis
Of Perseus hurls the flame-commingled flood
Back in the dragon's eyes: it shoots its lightnings
Into the horizon like fire-trailing arrows.
The world surprised with light gazes dismayed
Upon the sea-surrounded war, ringed in
With foam and flying tumult. O glorious sight,
Too swift and terrible for human eyes!
I will pray rather. Virgin, beautiful
Athene, virgin-mother of my soul!
I cannot lift my hands to thee, they are chained
To the wild cliff, but lift my heart instead,
Virgin, assist thy hero in the fight.
Descend, omnipotent maiden, child of Zeus,
Shoot from his godlike brain the strength of will
That conquers evil: in one victorious stroke
Collecting hurl it on the grisly foe.
Thou, thou art sword and shield, and thou the force
That uses shield and sword, virgin Athene.
The tumult ceases and the floods subside.
I dare not look. And yet I will. O death,
Thou tосsest there inertly on the flood,
A floating mountain. Perseus comes to me
Touching the waves with airy-sandalled feet,
Bright and victorious.

Perseus returns.

PERSEUS

The grisly beast is slain that was thy terror,
And thou mayst sun the world with smiles again,
Andromeda.

ANDROMEDA

Thou hast delivered me, O Perseus, Perseus,
My sovereign!

PERSEUS

Girl, I take into my arms
My own that I have won and with these kisses
Seal to me happy head and smiling eyes,
Bright lips and all of thee, thou sunny Syrian.
All thy white body is a hero's guerdon.

ANDROMEDA

Perseus!

PERSEUS

Sweetly thou tak'st my eager kisses
With lovely smiles and glorious blushing cheeks
Rejoicing in their shame.

ANDROMEDA

I am chained, Perseus,
And cannot help myself.

PERSEUS

O smile of sweetness!
I will unravel these unworthy bonds
And rid thee of the cold excuse.

ANDROMEDA

My chains?
They do not hurt me now, and I would wear them
A hundred times for such a happy rescue.

PERSEUS

Thou tremblest yet!

ANDROMEDA

Some sweet and sudden fear
O'ertakes me! O what is it? I dare not look
Into thy radiant eyes.

PERSEUS

Sweet tremors, grow
Upon her. Never shall harsher fears again
O'ertake you, rosy limbs, in Perseus' keeping.
How fair thou art, my prize Andromeda!
O sweet chained body, chained to love not death,
That with a happy passiveness endures
My touch, once more, once more. And now fall down
Clashing into the deep, you senseless irons,
That took a place my kisses only merit.
Princess of Syria, child of imperial Cepheus,
Step forward free.

ANDROMEDA (*falling at his feet and embracing them*)

O Perseus, O my saviour!
Wilt thou not also save those dear to me
And make this life thou givest worth the giving?
My father, mother, brother, all I love,
Lie for my fault shuddering beneath the knife.

PERSEUS

It was a glorious fault, Andromeda.
Tremble not for thy loved ones. Wilt thou trust
Thy cherished body in my arms to bear
Upward, surprising Heaven with thy beauty?
Or wilt thou fear to see the blue wide Ocean
Between thy unpropped feet, fathoms below?

ANDROMEDA

With you I fear not.

PERSEUS

Cling to me then, sweet burden,
And we will meet our enemies together.

*He puts his arms round her to lift
her and the curtain falls.*

Scene 2

The Temple of Poseidon.

Polydaon, Therops, Dercetes, Cydone, Damoetes and a great number of Syrians, men and women. Iolaus stands bound, a little to the side: Cepheus and Cassiopea, surrounded by armed men.

POLYDAON

Cepheus and Cassiopea, man and woman,
Not sovereigns now, you see what end they have
Who war upon the gods.

CASSIOPEA

To see thy end
My eyes wait only.

POLYDAON

Let them see something likelier.
Is't not thy son who wears those cords, and that
An altar? What! the eyes are drowned in tears
Where fire was once so ready? Where is thy pride,
O Cassiopea?

CASSIOPEA

There are other gods
Than thy Poseidon. They shall punish thee.

POLYDAON

If thou knewst who I am, which is most secret,
Thou wouldst not utter vain and foolish wishes.
When thou art slain, I will reveal myself.

CASSIOPEA

Thou hast revealed thyself for what thou art
Already, a madman and inhuman monster.

CEPHEUS

My queen, refrain from words.

DAMOETES

Perissus comes.

CASSIOPEA

Ah God!

THEROPS

Look, the Queen swoons! Oh, look to her!

Perissus enters.

POLYDAON

Yes, raise her up, bring back her senses: now
I would not have them clouded. News, Perissus!
Thy face is troubled and thy eyes stare wildly.

PERISSUS

Stare, do they? They may stare, for they have cause.
You too will stare soon, Viceroy Polydaon.

THEROPS

What rare thing happened? The heavens were troubled strangely,
Although their rifts were blue. What hast thou seen?

PERISSUS

I have seen hell and heaven at grips together.

POLYDAON

What do I care for hell or heaven? Your news!
Did the sea-monster come and eat and go?

PERISSUS

He came but went not.

POLYDAON

Was not the maiden seized?

PERISSUS

Ay, was she, in a close and mighty grasp.

POLYDAON

By the sea-beast?

PERISSUS

'Tis said we all are animals;
Then so was he: but 'twas a glorious beast.

POLYDAON

And was she quite devoured?

PERISSUS

Why, in a manner, —
If kisses eat.

POLYDAON

Ha! ha! such soft caresses
May all my enemies have. She was not torn?
What, was she taken whole and quite engulfed?

PERISSUS

Something like that.

POLYDAON

You speak with difficult slowness
And strangely. Where's your blithe robustness gone,
Perissus?

PERISSUS

Coming, with the beast. He lifted her
Mightily from the cliff to heaven.

POLYDAON

So, Queen,
Nothing is left thee of Andromeda.

PERISSUS

Why, something yet, a sweet and handsome piece.

POLYDAON

You should have brought it here, my merry butcher,
That remnant of her daughter.

PERISSUS

It is coming.

POLYDAON

Ho, ho! then you shall see your daughter, Queen.

DERCETES

This is a horrid and inhuman laughter.
Restrain thy humour, priest! My sword's uneasy.

THEROPS

It is a scandal in Poseidon's temple.

POLYDAON

Do you oppose me?
(*to Therops*)

Wilt thou resist Poseidon,
Misguided mortal?

DERCETES

He glares and his mouth works.
This is a maniac. Does a madman rule us?

THEROPS

There has been much of violence and mad fierceness,
Such as in tumults may be pardoned. Now
It is the tranquil hour of victory
When decency should reign and mercy too.
What do we gain by torturing this poor Queen
And most unhappy King?

POLYDAON

Hear him, O people!
He favours great Poseidon's enemies.
Therops turns traitor.

DAMOETES

He rails at the good priest.

CRIS

Therops a traitor!

MEGAS

Therops, thou favour kings?
Thou traitor to Poseidon and his people?

GARDAS

I say, hear Therops. He is always right,
Our Therops; he has brains.

CRIS

Hear Therops, Therops!

THEROPS

Let them be punished, but with exile only.
I am no traitor. I worked for you, O people,
When this false priest was with the King of Tyre
Plotting to lay on you a foreign chain.

CRIES

Is it so? Is it the truth? Speak, Polydaon.

POLYDAON

Must I defend myself? Was it not I
Who led you on to victory and turned
The wrath of dire Poseidon? If you doubt me,
Be then the sacrifice forbidden; let Cepheus
And Cassiopea reign; but when the dogs
Of grim Poseidon howl again behind you,
Call not to me for help. I will not always pardon.

CRIES

Polydaon, Polydaon, Poseidon's mighty Viceroy! Kill Therops!
Iolaus upon the altar!

POLYDAON

Now you are wise again. Leave this Therops.
Bring Iolaus to the altar here.
Lay bare his bosom for the knife.

THEROPS

Dercetes,

Shall this be allowed?

DERCETES

We must not dare offend
Poseidon. But when it's over, I'll break in
With all my faithful spears and save the King
And Cassiopea. Therops, 'twould be a nightmare,
The rule of that fierce priest and fiercer rabble.

THEROPS

With all the better sort I will support thee.

PERISSUS

Therops, my crowd-compeller, my eloquent Zeus of the market-
place, I know thy heart is big with the sweet passion of

repentance, but let it not burst into action yet. Keep thy fleet sharp spears at rest, Dercetes. There are times, my little captain, and there is a season. Watch and wait. The gods are at work and Iolaus shall not die.

POLYDAON

We only wait until our mighty wrath
Is shown you in the mangled worst offender
Against our godhead. Then, O Cassiopea,
I'll watch thy eyes.

PERISSUS

Behold her, Polydaon.
Perseus and Andromeda enter the temple.

CRIES

Andromeda! Andromeda! who has unchained her? It is Andromeda!

CEPHEUS

It is the spirit of Andromeda.

THEROPS

Shadows were ne'er so bright, had never smile
So sunny! she is given back to earth:
It is the radiant wingèd Hermes brings her.

DERCETES

'Tis he who baffled us upon the beach.
I see the gods are busy in our Syria.

*Andromeda runs to Cassiopea and clasps and kisses
her knees, the soldiers making way for her.*

CASSIOPEA (*taking Andromeda's face between her hands*)

O my sweet child, thou livest!

ANDROMEDA

Mother, mother!

I live and see the light and grief is ended.

CASSIOPEA (*lifting Andromeda into her arms*)I hold thee living on my bosom. What grief
Can happen now?

CEPHEUS

Andromeda, my daughter!

POLYDAON (*awaking from his amazement*)Confusion! Butcher, thou hast betrayed me. Seize them!
They shall all die upon my mighty altar.
Seize them!PERSEUS (*confronting him*)Priest of Poseidon and of death,
Three days thou gav'st me: it is but the second.
I am here. Dost thou require the sacrifice?

POLYDAON

Art thou a god? I am a greater, dreadfuller.
Tremble and go from me: I need thee not.

PERSEUS

Expect thy punishment. Syrians, behold me,
The victim snatched from grim Poseidon's altar.
My sword has rescued sweet Andromeda
And slain the monster of the deep. You asked
For victims? I am here. Whose knife is ready?
Let him approach.

THEROPS

Who art thou, mighty hero?
Declare unto this people thy renown
And thy unequalled actions. What high godhead

Befriends thee in battle?

PERSEUS

Syrians, I am Perseus,
The mighty son of Zeus and Danaë.
The blood of gods is in my veins, the strength
Of gods is in my arm: Athene helps me.
Behold her aegis, which if I uncover
Will blind you with its lightnings; and this sword
Is Herpe, which can pierce the earth and Hades.
What I have done, is by Athene's strength.
Borne from Seriphos through pellucid air
Upon these wingèd shoes, in the far west
I have traversed unknown lands and nameless continents
And seas where never came the splash of human oars.
On torrid coasts burned by the desert wind
I have seen great Atlas buttressing the sky,
His giant head companion of the stars,
And changed him into a hill; the northern snows
Illimitable I have trod, where Nature
Is awed to silence, chilled to rigid whiteness;
I have entered caverns dim where death was born:
And I have taken from the dim-dwelling Graiae
Their wondrous eye that sees the past and future:
And I have slain the Gorgon, dire Medusa,
Her head that turns the living man to stone
Locking into my wallet: last, today,
In Syria by the loud Aegean surges
I have done this deed that men shall ever speak of.
Ascending with winged feet the clamorous air
I have cloven Poseidon's monster whose rock-teeth
And fiery mouth swallowed your sons and daughters.
Where now has gone the sea-god's giant stride
That filled with heads of foam your fruitful fields?
I have dashed back the leaping angry waters;
His Ocean-force has yielded to a mortal.
Even while I speak, the world has changed around you.

Syrians, the earth is calm, the heavens smile;
 A mighty silence listens on the sea.
 All this I have done, and yet not I, but one greater.
 Such is Athene's might and theirs who serve her.
 You know me now, O Syrians, and my strength
 I have concealed not. Let no man hereafter
 Complain that I deceived him to his doom.
 Speak now. Which of you all demands a victim?

He pauses: there is silence.

What, you have howled and maddened, bound sweet women
 For slaughter, roared to have the hearts of princes,
 And are you silent now? Who is for victims?
 Who sacrifices Perseus?

THEROPS

Speak! is there
 A fool so death-devoted?

PERSEUS

Claims any man victims?

CRIS

There's none, great Perseus.

PERSEUS

Then, I here release
 Andromeda and Iolaus, Syrians,
 From the death-doom: to Cepheus give his crown
 Once more. Does any man gainsay my action?
 Would any rule in Syria?

CRIS

None, mighty Perseus.

PERSEUS

Iolaus, sweet friend, my work is finished.

He severs his bonds.

IOLAUS

O mighty father, suffer me for thee
To take thy crown from the unworthy soil
Where rude hands tumbled it. 'Twill now sit steady.
Dercetes, art thou loyal once again?

DERCETES

For ever.

IOLAUS

Therops?

THEROPS

I have abjured rebellion.

IOLAUS

Lead then my royal parents to their home
With martial pomp and music. And let the people
Cover their foul revolt with meek obedience.
One guiltiest head shall pay your forfeit: the rest,
Since terror and religious frenzy moved
To mutiny, not their sober wills, shall all
Be pardoned.

CRIES

Iolaus! Iolaus!

Long live the Syrian, noble Iolaus!

IOLAUS

Andromeda, and thou, my sweet Cydone,
Go with them.

CEPHEUS

I approve thy sentence, son.

*Dercetes and his soldiers, Therops and the
Syrians leave the temple conducting Cepheus
and Cassiopea, Andromeda and Cydone.*

IOLAUS

Now, Polydaon, —

POLYDAON

I have seen all and laughed.

Iolaus, and thou, O Argive Perseus,
You know not who I am. I have endured
Your foolish transient triumph that you might feel
My punishments more bitter-terrible.
'Tis time, 'tis time. I will reveal myself.
Your horror-starting eyes shall know me, princes,
When I hurl death and Ocean on your heads.

PERSEUS

The man is frantic.

IOLAUS

Defeat has turned him mad.

PERISSUS

I have seen this coming on him for a season and a half. He was a fox at first, but this tumult gave him claws and muscles and he turned tiger. This is the end. What, Polydaon! Good cheer, priest! Roll not thy eyes: I am thy friend Perissus, I am thy old loving schoolmate; are we not now fellow-craftsmen, priest and butcher?

POLYDAON

Do you not see? I wave my sapphire locks
And earth is quaking. Quake, earth! rise, my great Ocean!
Earth, shake my foemen from thy back! clasp, sea,
And kiss them dead, thou huge voluptuary.
Come barking from your stables, my sweet monsters:
With blood-stained fangs and fiery mouths avenge me
Mocking their victory. Thou, brother Zeus,
Rain curses from thy skies. What, is all silent?
I'll tear thee, Ocean, into watery bits

And strip thy oozy basal rocks quite naked
If thou obey me not.

IOLAUS (*advancing*)

He must be seized

And bound.

PERSEUS

Pause. See, he foams and clutches!

Polydaon falls to the ground.

He

Is sentenced.

PERISSUS

Polydaon, old crony, grows thy soul too great within thee? dost thou kick the unworthy earth and hit out with thy noble fists at Heaven?

IOLAUS

It was a fit; it is over. He lies back white
And shaking.

POLYDAON (*As he speaks, his utterance is hacked by pauses of silence. He seems unconscious of those around him, his being is withdrawing from the body and he lives only in an inner consciousness and its vision.*)

I was Poseidon but this moment.

Now he departs from me and leaves me feeble:
I have become a dull and puny mortal.

(*half rising*)

It was not I but thou who fearedst, god.
I would have spoken, but thou wert chilled and stone.
What fearedst thou or whom? Wast thou alarmed
By the godhead lurking in man's secret soul
Or deity greater than thy own appalled thee?...
Forgive, forgive! pass not away from me.
Thy power is now my breath and I shall perish

If thou withdraw... He stands beside me still
 Shaking his gloomy locks and glares at me
 Saying it was my sin and false ambition
 Undid him. Was I not fearless as thou bad'st me?
 Ah, he has gone into invisible
 Vast silences!... Whose, whose is this bright glory?
 One stands now in his place and looks at me.
 Imperious is his calm Olympian brow,
 The sea's blue unfathomed depths gaze from his eyes,
 Wide sea-blue locks crown his majestic shape:
 A mystic trident arms his tranquil might.
 As one new-born to himself and to the world
 He turns from me with the surges in his stride
 To seek his Ocean empire. Earth bows down
 Trembling with awe of his unbearable steps,
 Heaven is the mirror of his purple greatness....
 But whose was that dimmer and tremendous image?...
 A horror of darkness is around me still,
 But the joy and might have gone out of my breast
 And left me mortal, a poor human thing
 With whom death and the fates can do their will....
 But his presence yet is with me, near to me....
 Was I not something more than earthly man?...

(with a cry)

It was myself, the shadow, the hostile god!
 I am abandoned to my evil self.
 That was the darkness!... But there was something more
 Insistent, dreadful, other than myself!
 Whoever thou art, spare me!... I am gone, I am taken.
 In his tremendous clutch he bears me off
 Into thick cloud; I see black Hell, the knives
 Fire-pointed touch my breast. Spare me, Poseidon....
 Save me, O brilliant God, forgive and save.

He falls back dead.

PERSEUS

Who then can save a man from his own self?

IOLAUS

He is ended, his own evil has destroyed him.

PERSEUS

This man for a few hours became the vessel
Of an occult and formidable Force
And through his form it did fierce terrible things
Unhuman: but his small and gloomy mind
And impure dark heart could not contain the Force.
It turned in him to madness and demoniac
Huge longings. Then the Power withdrew from him
Leaving the broken incapable instrument,
And all its might was spilt from his body. Better
To be a common man mid common men
And live an unaspiring mortal life
Than call into oneself a Titan strength
Too dire and mighty for its human frame,
That only afflicts the oppressed astonished world,
Then breaks its user.

IOLAUS

But best to be Heaven's child.
Only the sons of gods can harbour gods.

PERISSUS

Art thou then gone, Polydaon? My monarch of breast-hackers,
this was an evil ending. My heart is full of woe for thee, my
fellow-butcher.

IOLAUS

The gods have punished him for his offences,
Ambition and a hideous cruelty
Ingenious in mere horror.

PERSEUS

Burn him with rites,
If that may help his soul by dark Cocytus.

But let us go and end these strange upheavals:
Call Cireas from his hiding for reward,
Tyrnaus too, and Smerdas from his prison,
Fair Diomedé from Cydone's house.
Humble or high, let all have their deserts
Who partners were or causes of our troubles.

IOLAUS

There's Phineus will ask reasons.

PERSEUS

He shall be satisfied.

PERISSUS

He cannot be satisfied, his nose is too long; it will not listen to reason, for it thinks all the reason and policy in the world are shut up in the small brain to which it is a long hooked outlet.

PERSEUS

Perissus, come with me: for thou wert kind
To my fair sweetness; it shall be remembered.

PERISSUS

There was nothing astonishing in that: I am as chock-full with natural kindness as a rabbit is with guts; I have bowels, great Perseus. For am I not Perissus? am I not the butcher?

They go out: the curtain falls.

Scene 3

The audience-chamber of the Palace.

Cepheus, Cassiopea, Andromeda, Cydone, Praxilla, Medes.

CEPHEUS

A sudden ending to our sudden evils
Propitious gods have given us, Cassiopea.
Pursued by panic the Assyrian flees
Abandoning our borders.

CASSIOPEA

And I have got
My children's faces back upon my bosom.
What gratitude can ever recompense
That godlike youth whose swift and glorious rescue
Lifted us out of Hell so radiantly?

CYDONE

He has taken his payment in one small white coin
Mounted with gold; and more he will not ask for.

CASSIOPEA

Your name's Cydone, child? your face is strange.
You are not of the slave-girls.

CYDONE

O I am!
Iolaus' slave-girl, though he calls me sometimes
His queen: but that is only to beguile me.

ANDROMEDA

Oh, mother, you must know my sweet Cydone.

I shall think you love me little if you do not
 Take her into your bosom: for she alone,
 When I was lonely with my breaking heart,
 Came to me with sweet haste and comforted
 My soul with kisses, — yes, even when the terror
 Was rising from the sea, surrounded me
 With her light lovely babble, till I felt
 Sorrow was not in the same world as she.
 And but for her I might have died of grief
 Ere rescue came.

CASSIOPEA

What wilt thou ask of me,
 Even to a crown, Cydone? thou shalt have it.

CYDONE

Nothing, unless 'tis leave to stand before you
 And be for ever Iolaus' slave-girl
 Unchidden.

CASSIOPEA

Thou shalt be more than that, my daughter.

CYDONE

I have two mothers: a double Iolaus
 I had already. O you girl-Iolaus,
 You shall not marry Perseus: you are mine now.
 Oh, if you have learned to blush!

ANDROMEDA (*stopping her mouth*)

Hush, you mad babbler!

Or I will smother your wild mouth with mine.

Perseus and Iolaus enter.

CEPHEUS

O welcome, brilliant victor, mighty Perseus!
 Saviour of Syria, angel of the gods,

Kind was the fate that led thee to our shores.

CASSIOPEA (*embracing Iolaus*)

Iolaus, Iolaus, my son!

My golden-haired delight they would have murdered!

Perseus, hast thou a mother?

PERSEUS

One like thee

In love, O Queen, though less in royalty.

CASSIOPEA

What can I give thee then who hast the world

To move in, thy courage and thy radiant beauty,

And a tender mother? Yet take my blessing, Perseus,

To help thee: for the mightiest strengths are broken

And divine favour lasts not long, but blessings

Of those thou helpst with thy kindly strength

Upon life's rugged way, can never fail thee.

CEPHEUS

And what shall I give, seed of bright Olympus?

Wilt thou have half my kingdom, Argive Perseus?

PERSEUS

Thy kingdom falls by right to Iolaus

In whom I shall enjoy it. One gift thou hadst

I might have coveted, but she is mine,

O monarch: I have taken her from death

For my possession.

CEPHEUS

My sunny Andromeda!

But there's the Tyrian: yet he gave her up

To death and cannot now reclaim her.

IOLAUS

Father,

The Babylonian merchants wait, and Cireas:
The people's leaders and thy army's captains
Are eager to renew an interrupted
Obedience.

CEPHEUS

Admit them all to me: go, Medes.

As Medes goes out, Diomedes enters.

ANDROMEDA

Diomedes! playmate! you too have come quite safe
Out of the storm. I thought we both must founder.

DIOMEDE

Oh, yes, and now you'll marry Perseus, leave me
No other playmate than Praxilla's whippings
To keep me lively!

ANDROMEDA

Therefore 'tis you look

So discontent and sullen? Clear your face,
I'll drag you to the world's far end with me,
And take in my own hands Praxilla's duty.
Will that please you?

DIOMEDE

As if your little hand could hurt!

I'm off, Praxilla, to pick scarlet berries
In Argolis and hear the seabirds' cries
And Ocean singing to the Cyclades.
I'll buy you brand new leather for a relic
To whip the memory of me with sometimes,
Praxilla.

PRAXILLA

You shall taste it then before you go.
You'll make a fine fair couple of wilfulnesses.
I pity Perseus.

ANDROMEDA

You are well rid of us,
My poor Praxilla.

PRAXILLA

Princess, little Princess,
My hands will be lighter, but my heart too heavy.
*Therops and Dercetes enter with the Captains of
the army, Cireas, Tyrnaus and Smerdas.*

ALL

Hail, you restored high royalties of Syria.

THEROPS

O King, accept us, be the past forgotten.

CEPHEUS

It is forgotten, Therops. Welcome, Dercetes.
Thy friend Nebassar is asleep. He has done
His service for the day and taken payment.

CASSIOPEA

His blood is a deep stain on Syria's bosom.

DERCETES

On us the stain lies, Queen: but we will drown it
In native streams, when we go forth to scourge
The Assyrian in his home.

THEROPS

Death for one's King
Only less noble is than for one's country.

This foreign soldier taught us that home lesson.

CASSIOPEA

Therops, there are kings still in Syria?

THEROPS

Great Queen,

Remember not my sins.

CASSIOPEA

They are buried deep,
Thy bold rebellion, — even thy cruel slanders,
If only thou wilt serve me as my friend
True to thy people in me. Will this be hard for thee?

THEROPS

O noble lady, you pay wrongs with favours!
I am yours for ever, I and all this people.

CIREAS (*to Diomedes*)

This it is to be an orator! We shall hear him haranguing the people next market-day on fidelity to princes and the divine right of queens to have favourites.

IOLAUS

Cireas, old bribe-taker, art thou living? Did Poseidon forget thee?

CIREAS

I pray you, Prince, remind me not of past foolishness. I have grown pious. I will never speak ill again of authorities and divinities.

IOLAUS

Thou art grown ascetic? thou carest no longer then for gold? I am glad, for my purse will be spared a very heavy lightening.

CIREAS

Prince, I will not suffer my young piety to make you break old promises; for if it is perilous to sin, it is worse to be the cause of sin in others.

IOLAUS

Thou shalt have gold and farms. I will absolve Andromeda's promise and my own.

CIREAS

Great Plutus!

O happy Cireas!

IOLAUS

Merchant Tyrnaus, art thou for Chaldea?

TYRNAUS

When I have seen these troubles' joyous end
And your sweet princess, my young rescuer,
Happily wedded.

IOLAUS

I will give thee a ship
And merchandise enough to fill thy losses.

PERSEUS

And prayers with them, O excellent Chaldean.
The world has need of men like thee.

SMERDAS (*aside*)

I quake.

What will they say to me? I shall be tortured
And crucified. But she with her smile will save me.

IOLAUS

Smerdas, thou unclean treacherous coward soul!

SMERDAS

Alas, I was compelled by threats of torture.

IOLAUS

And tempted too with gold. Thy punishment
Shall hit thee in thy nature. Farmer Cireas!

CIREAS

Prince Plutus!

IOLAUS

Take thou this man for slave. He's strong.
Work him upon thy fields and thy plantations.

SMERDAS

O this is worst of all.

IOLAUS

Not worse than thy desert.
For gold thou lustest? earn it for another.
Thou'lt save thy life? it is a freedman's chattel.

SMERDAS

O speak for me, lady Andromeda!

ANDROMEDA

Dear Iolaus, —

CEPHEUS

My child, thou art all pity;
But justice has her seat, and her fine balance
Disturbed too often spoils an unripe world
With ill-timed mercy. Thy brother speaks my will.

IOLAUS

Thou hast increased thy crime by pleading to her
Whom thou betrayedst to her death. Art thou

Quite shameless? Hold thy peace!

ANDROMEDA

Grieve not too much.

Cireas will be kind to thee; wilt thou not, Cireas?

CIREAS

At thy command I will be even that
And even to him.

Noise outside.

CEPHEUS

What other dangerous clamour

Is at our gates?

Perissus enters, brandishing his cleaver.

PERISSUS

Pull out that sharp skewer of thine, comrade Perseus, or let me
handle my cleaver.

CEPHEUS

Thou art angry, butcher? Who has disturbed thy noble serenity?

PERISSUS

King Cepheus, shall I not be angry? Art thou not again our
majesty of Syria? And shall our majesty be insulted with noses?
Shall it be prodded by a proboscis? Perseus, thou hast slaugh-
tered yonder palaeozoic ichthyosaurus; wilt thou suffer me to
chop this neozoan?

PERSEUS

Calmly, precisely and not so polysyllabically, my good Perissus.
Tell the King what is this clamour.

PERISSUS

My monarch, Phineus of Tyre has brought his long-nosed roy-
alty to thy gates and poke it he will into thy kingly presence.

His blusterings, King, have flustered my calm great heart within me.

CEPHEUS

Comes he alone?

PERISSUS

Damoetes and some scores more hang on to his long tail of hook-nosed Tyrians; but they are all rabble and proletariat, not a citizen butcher in the whole picking. They brandish skewers; they threaten to poke me with their dainty iron spits, — me, Perissus, me, the butcher!

CEPHEUS

Phineus in arms! This is the after-swell
Of tempest.

PERSEUS

Let the Phoenician enter, comrade.

Perissus goes out.

Look not so blank. This man with all his crew
Shall be my easy care.

*Phineus enters the hall with a great company,
Tyrians with drawn swords, Damoetes, Morus
and others; after them Perissus.*

CEPHEUS

Welcome, Tyre.

CASSIOPEA

Thou breakest armed into our presence, Phineus.
Had they been earlier there, these naked swords
Would have been welcome.

PHINEUS

I am not here for welcome,
Lady. King Cepheus, wilt thou yield me right,

Or shall I take it with my sword?

CEPHEUS

Phineus,
I never have withheld even from the meanest
The least thing he could call his right.

PHINEUS

Thou hast not?
Who gives then to a wandering Greek my bride,
Thy perfect daughter?

CASSIOPEA

She was in some peril,
When thou wert absent, Tyre.

PHINEUS

A vain young man,
A brilliant sworder wandering for a name,
Who calls himself the son of Danaë,
And who his father was, the midnight knows.
This is the lord thou giv'st Andromeda,
Scorning the mighty King of ancient Tyre.

CEPHEUS

He saved her from the death to which we left her,
And she was his, — his wife, if so he chose,
Or, conquered by the sword from grim Poseidon,
His then to take her as he would from that moment.

PHINEUS

Do his deeds or thy neglect annul thy promise?

IOLAUS

King Phineus, wilt thou take up and lay down
At pleasure? Who leaves a jewel in the mud,
Shall he complain because another took it?

PRAXILLA

And she was never his; she hated him.

PHINEUS

I'll hear no reasons, but with strong force have her,
Though it be to lift her o'er the dearest blood
Of all her kin. Tyrians!

Andromeda takes refuge with Perseus.

Abandon, princess,

The stripling bosom where thou tak'st thy refuge.
Thou hast mistook thy home, Andromeda.

IOLAUS

'Tis thou mistakest, Phineus, thinking her
A bride who, touched, shall be thy doom. Get hence
Unhurt.

PHINEUS

Prince Iolaus, the sword that cut
Thy contract to Poseidon, cuts not mine, —
Which if you void, thou and thy father pay for it.

PERSEUS

Phineus of Tyre, it may be thou art wronged,
But 'tis not at his hands whom thou impugnest.
Her father gave her not to me.

PHINEUS

Her mother then?

She is the man, I think, in Syria's household.

PERSEUS

Her too I asked not.

PHINEUS

Thou wooedst then the maid?

It shall not help thee though a thousand times

She kissed thee yes. Pretty Andromeda,
Wilt thou have for thy lord this vagabond,
Wander with him as beggars land and sea?
Despite thyself I'll save thee from that fate
Unworthy of thy beauty and thy sweetness,
And make thee Queen in Tyre. Minion of Argos,
Learn, ere thou grasp at other's goods, to ask
The owner, not the owned.

PERSEUS

I did not ask her.

PHINEUS

Then by what right, presumptuous, hast thou her?
Or wherefore lies she thus within thy arm?

PERSEUS

Say, by what right, King Phineus, thou wouldst take her,
Herself and all refusing?

PHINEUS

By my precontract.

PERSEUS

Thou gavest her to Death, that contract's broken.
Or if thou seekest to revoke thy gift,
Foregather then with Death and ask him for her.
The way to him is easy.

PHINEUS

Then by my sword,
Not asking her or any, because I am a king,
I'll take her.

PERSEUS

If the sword is the sole judge,
Then by my own sword I have taken her, Tyrian,

Not asking her or any, who am king
 O'er her, her sovereign. This soft gold is mine
 And mine these banks of silver; this rich country
 Is my possession and owes to my strong taking
 All her sweet revenues in honey. Phineus,
 I wonder not that thou dost covet her
 Whom the whole world might want. Wrest her from me,
 Phoenician; to her father she belongs not.

(opening his wallet)

King Phineus, art thou ready? Yet look once more
 On the blue sky and this green earth of Syria.

PHINEUS

Young man, thou hast done deeds I'll not belittle.
 Yet was it only a sea-beast and a rabble
 Whom thou hast tamed; I am a prince and warrior.
 Wilt thou fright me with thy aegis?

PERSEUS

Not fright, but end thee;

For thou hast spoken words deserving death.
 Come forth into the open, this is no place
 For battle. Marshal thy warlike crew against me,
 And let thy Syrian mob-men help with shouts:
 Stand in their front to lead them; I alone
 Will meet their serried charge, Dercetes merely
 Watching us.

PHINEUS

Thou art frantic with past triumphs:
 Argive, desist. I would not rob thy mother
 Of her sole joy, howe'er she came by thee.
 The gods may punish her sweet midnight fault,
 To whom her dainty trickery imputes it.

PERSEUS

Come now, lest here I slay thee.

The voice of Phineus.

IOLAUS

He cries some confident order.

CEPHEUS

The Tyrians shout for onset; he is doomed.

There is a moment's pause, all listening, painfully.

IOLAUS

The shouts are stilled; there is a sudden hush.

CEPHEUS

What can it mean? This silence is appalling.

Dercetes returns.

What news? Thou treadest like one sleeping, captain.

DERCETES

O King, thy royal court is full of monuments.

CEPHEUS

What meanest thou? What happened? Where is Perseus?

DERCETES

King Phineus called to his men to take alive
 The Greek; but as they charged, great Perseus cried,
 "Close eyes, Dercetes, if thou car'st to live,"
 And I obeyed, yet saw that he had taken
 A snaky something from the wallet's mouth
 He carries on his baldric. Blind I waited
 And heard the loud approaching charge. Then suddenly
 The rapid footsteps ceased, the cries fell dumb
 And a great silence reigned. Astonishment
 For two brief moments only held me close;
 But when I lifted my sealed lids, the court
 Was full of those swift charging warriors stiffened
 To stone or stiffening, in the very posture

Of onset, sword uplifted, shield advanced,
Knee crooked, foot carried forward to the pace,
An animated silence, life in stone.
Only the godlike victor lived, a smile
Upon his lips, closing his wallet's mouth.
Then I, appalled, came from that place in silence.

CEPHEUS

Soldier, he is a god, or else the gods
Walk close to him. I hear his footsteps coming.

Perseus returns, followed by Cereas.

Hail, Perseus!

PERSEUS

King, the Tyrians all are dead,
Nor needst thou build them pyres nor dig them graves.
If any hereafter ask what perfect sculptor
Chiselled these forms in Syria's royal court,
Say then, "Athene, child omnipotent
Of the Olympian, hewed by Perseus' hand
In one divine and careless stroke these statues
To her give glory."

CEPHEUS

O thou dreadful victor!
I know not what to say nor how to praise thee.

PERSEUS

Say nothing, King; in silence praise the Gods.
Let this not trouble you, my friends. Proceed
As if no interruption had disturbed you.

CEREAS

O Zeus, I thought thou couldst juggle only with feathers and phosphorus, but I see thou canst give wrinkles in magic to Babylon and the Medes. (*shaking himself*) Ugh! this was a stony conjuring. I cannot feel sure yet that I am not myself a statue.

PERISSUS (*who has gone out and returned*)

What hast thou done, comrade Perseus? Thou hast immortalised his long nose to all time in stone! This is a woeful thing for posterity; thou hadst no right to leave behind thee for its dismay such a fossil.

CEPHEUS

What now is left but to prepare the nuptials
Of sweet young sunny-eyed Andromeda
With mighty Perseus?

PERSEUS

King, let it be soon
That I may go to my blue-ringed Seriphos,
Where my mother waits and more deeds call to me.

CASSIOPEA

Yet if thy heart consents, then three months give us,
O Perseus, of thyself and our sweet child,
And then abandon.

PERSEUS

They are given.

ANDROMEDA

Perseus,
You give and never ask; let me for you
Ask something.

PERSEUS

Ask, Andromeda, and have.

ANDROMEDA

Then this I ask that thy great deeds may leave
Their golden trace on Syria. Let the dire cult
For ever cease and victims bleed no more
On its dark altar. Instead, Athene's name

Spread over all the land and in men's hearts.
Then shall a calm and mighty Will prevail
And broader minds and kindlier manners reign
And men grow human, mild and merciful.

PERSEUS

King Cepheus, thou hast heard; shall this be done?

CEPHEUS

Hero, thou cam'st to change our world for us.
Pronounce; I give assent.

PERSEUS

Then let the shrine
That looked out from earth's breast into the sunlight,
Be cleansed of its red memory of blood,
And the dread Form that lived within its precincts
Transfigure into a bright compassionate God
Whose strength shall aid men tossed upon the seas,
Give succour to the shipwrecked mariner.
A noble centre of a people's worship,
To Zeus and great Athene build a temple
Between your sky-topped hills and Ocean's vasts:
Her might shall guard your lives and save your land.
In your human image of her deity
A light of reason and calm celestial force
And a wise tranquil government of life,
Order and beauty and harmonious thoughts
And, ruling the waves of impulse, high-throned will
Incorporate in marble, the carved and white
Ideal of a young uplifted race.
For these are her gifts to those who worship her.
Adore and what you adore attempt to be.

CEPHEUS

Will the fiercer Grandeur that was here permit?

PERSEUS

Fear not Poseidon; the strong god is free.
He has withdrawn from his own darkness and is now
His new great self at an Olympian height.

CASSIOPEA

How can the immortal gods and Nature change?

PERSEUS

All alters in a world that is the same.
Man most must change who is a soul of Time;
His gods too change and live in larger light.

CEPHEUS

Then man too may arise to greater heights,
His being draw nearer to the gods?

PERSEUS

Perhaps.

But the blind nether forces still have power
And the ascent is slow and long is Time.
Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase:
The day shall come when men feel close and one.
Meanwhile one forward step is something gained,
Since little by little earth must open to heaven
Till her dim soul awakes into the Light.

Captain

99

Let not my words
Offend my king, 'Twas Prince Vicrama's car
Bore forth his sister and Vicrama's self
Rode as her guard.

~~Plahasca~~
(after an astonished pause)

Do all my house, my blood
Revolt against me?

Captain

The prince's Bandhumahee,
Thy daughter's serving-maiden, at Vikra's side
Controlled his courses.

Mahasca

For I do not blame,
Yet will most fiercely punish. Captain, go;
Gather my chariots; let them gallop fast
Crushing these fugitives' new-made tracks.
To the captain depart, Gopāla

enters

Gopāla
Hear ye, my armies, hear thy sister back
Before irrevocable shame is done,
Nor with thy father's greatness unavenged return.

Gopāla

My father, hear me. Though quite contrary
To all our planned design this thing has fallen,
Yet no dishonour tarnishes the death,
But as a hero with a hero's child
Has Vikra seized the girl. We planned a share,
He by a noble violence answers us.
We sought to drive him to a vernal's state
Dangling the jewel of our house in front;
He keeps his freedom and enjoys the gem.
Then since we chose the throw of dice and lost,
Let us be noble gamblers, like a friend
Receive God's hostile chance, nor house-blind
As common natures might. ^{wounded thoughts} Sanction this shift;
Let there be love 'twixt Vikra's house and us.

Eric

A Dramatic Romance

Characters

ERIC

SWEGN

GUNTHAR

HARDICNUT

RAGNAR

HARALD

ASLAUG

HERTHA

Act I

Eric's Palace at Yara.

Scene 1

ERIC

Eric of Norway, first whom these cold fiords,
Deep havens of disunion, from their jagged
And fissured crevices at last obey,
The monarch of a thousand Vikings! Yes,
But how long shall that monarchy endure
Which only on the swiftness of a sword
Has taken its restless seat? Strength's iron hound
Pitilessly bright behind his panting prey
Can guard for life's short splendour what it won.
But when the sword is broken or when death
Proves swifter? All this realm with labour built
Dissolving like a transitory cloud
Becomes the thing it was, cleft, parcelled out
By discord. I have found the way to join,
The warrior's sword, builder of unity,
But where's the way to solder? where? O Thor
And Odin, masters of the northern world,
Wisdom and force I have; some strength is hidden
I have not; I would find it out. Help me,
Whatever power thou art who mov'st the world,
To Eric unrevealed. Some sign I ask.

ASLAUG (*singing, outside*)

Love is the hoop of the gods
Hearts to combine.

Iron is broken, the sword
 Sleeps in the grave of its lord.
 Love is divine.
 Love is the hoop of the gods
 Hearts to combine.

ERIC

Is that your answer? Freya, mother of heaven,
 Thou wast forgotten. The heart! the seat is there.
 For unity is sweet substance of the heart
 And not a chain that binds, not iron, gold,
 Nor any helpless thought the reason knows.
 How shall I seize it? where? give me a net
 By which the fugitive can be snared. It is
 Too unsubstantial for my iron mind.

ASLAUG (*singing, outside*)

When Love desires Love,
 Then Love is born.
 Nor golden gifts compel,
 Nor even beauty's spell
 Escapes his scorn.
 When Love desires Love,
 Then Love is born.

ERIC (*calling*)

Who sings outside? Harald! who sings outside?

HARALD (*entering*)

Two dancing-girls from Gothberg. Shall they come?

ERIC

Admit them.

Harald goes out.

From light lips and casual thoughts
 The gods speak best as if by chance, nor knows

The speaker that he is an instrument
But thinks his mind the mover of his words.

Harald returns with Aslaug and Hertha.

HARALD

King Eric, these are they who sang.

ERIC

Who are you? or what god directed you?
Women,

ASLAUG

The god who rules all men, Necessity.

ERIC

It was thou who sangst!

ASLAUG

My lips at least were used.

ERIC

Thou sayest. Dost thou know by whom?

ASLAUG

By Fate.

For she alone is prompter on our stage,
And all things move by an established doom,
Not freely. Eric's sword and Aslaug's song,
Music and thunder are the rhythmic chords
Of one majestic harp. With equal mind
She breaks the tops that she has built; her thrones
Are ruins. She treads her way foreseen; our steps
Are hers, our wills are blinded by her gaze.

ERIC

I think the soul is master. Who art thou?

HERTHA

Expelled from Gothberg with displeasure fierce,
Norwegians by the wrathful Swede constrained,
To Norway we return.

ERIC

Why went you forth?

HERTHA

From a bleak country rich by spoil alone
Of kinder populations, far too cold,
Too rough to love the sweetness of a song,
The rhythm of a dance, with need for spur,
We fled to an entire and cultured race,
Whose hearts come apt and liberal from the gods
Are steel to steel, but flowers to a flower.

ERIC

And wherefore war they upon women now?

ASLAUG

By thy aggressions moved.

ERIC

A nobler choice
Of vengeance I will give them, though more hard.
(to Gunthar who enters)
Gunthar, thou comest from the front. What news?

GUNTHAR

Swegn, earl of Trondhjem, lifts his outlawed head.
By desperate churls and broken nobles joined
He moves towards the Swede.

ERIC

Let Sigurd's force
Cut off from Sweden and his lair the rude

Revolted lord. He only now resists,
Champion of discord, remnant like our seas,
The partisan and pattern of the past.
They waste their surge of strength in sterile foam,
Hungry for movement, careless what they break,
Splendid, disastrous, active for no fruit.
Such men are better with the gods than here
To trouble earth. Taken, let him not live.

ASLAUG

Taken! Our words are only an arrogant breath,
Who all are here, the doomer and the doomed,
As captives of a greater doom than ours,
To live or die.

HERTHA

Be silent.

ASLAUG

I silence my heart
Which has remembered what all men forget,
That Olaf of the seas was Norway's head
And Swegn his son.

ERIC

Will you remain with me?
Though from my act there flowed on you distress,
Make me be fountain of your better days;
Your loss shall turn a fall to splendid gains.

HERTHA

Thy royal bounty shall atone for much.

ASLAUG (*low, to herself*)

Nobler atonement's needed.

ERIC

It is yours.

Harald, make room for them within my house.

Gunthar, we will converse some other hour.

(alone)

Love! If it were this girl with antelope eyes

And the high head so proudly lifted up

Upon a neck as white as any swan's!

But how to sway men's hearts rugged and hard

As Norway's mountains, as her glaciers cold,

The houses of their violent desires,

Whose guests are interest and power and pride?

Perhaps this stag-eyed woman comes for that,

To teach me.

Scene 2

Hertha, Aslaug.

ASLAUG

Hertha, we dance before the man tonight.
Why not tonight?

HERTHA

Because I will not act
Lifting in vain a rash frustrated hand.
When all is certain, I will strike.

ASLAUG

To near,
To strike while all posterity applauds!
For Norway's poets to the end of time
Shall sing in phrases noble as the theme
Of Aslaug's dance and Aslaug's dagger.

HERTHA

Yes,
If we succeed, but who will sing the praise
Of foiled assassins? Shall we risk defeat?
While we sleep flung in a dishonoured tomb,
And Swegn of Norway roams until the end
The desperate snows and forest silences
Hopeless, proscribed, alone?

ASLAUG

No more defeat!
Too often, too deeply have we drunk that cup!

HERTHA

The man we come to slay, —

ASLAUG

A mighty man!

He has the face and figure of a god,
A marble emperor with brilliant eyes.
How came the usurper by a face like that?

HERTHA

His father was a son of Odin's stock.

ASLAUG

His fable since he rose! A pauper house
Of one poor vessel and a narrow fiord
And some bare pine-trees possessor, — this was he,
The root he sprang from.

HERTHA

But from this to tower

In three swift summers undisputed lord
Of Norway, before years had put their growth
Upon his chin! If not of Odin's race,
Odin is for him. Are you not afraid,
You who see Fate even in a sparrow's flight,
When Odin is for him?

ASLAUG

Aslaug is against.

He has a strength, an iron strength, and Thor
Strikes hammerlike in his uplifted sword.
But Fate alone decides when all is said,
Not Thor, nor Odin. I will try my fate.

HERTHA

He is a pure usurper, is he not?
Norway's election made him king, men say.

ASLAUG

Left Olaf Sigualdson no heirs behind?
Was his chair vacant?

HERTHA

Of Trondhjem; but they cried,
The inland and the north were free to choose.

ASLAUG

As rebels are.

HERTHA

Discord was seated there.
To the South rejoicing in her golden gains,
Crying, "I am Norway", all the rude-lipped North
Blew bronze refusal and its free stark head
To breathe cold heaven was lifted like its hills.
We sought the arbitration of the sword,
That sharp blind last appeal. The sword has judged
Against our claim.

ASLAUG

The dagger overrides.

HERTHA

When it is keen and swift enough! O yet,
If kindly peace even now were possible!
The suzerainty? it is his. We fought for it,
We have lost it. Let it rest where it has fallen.

ASLAUG

Better our barren empire of the snows!
Better with reindeer herding to survive,
Or else a free and miserable death
Together!

HERTHA

It is well to be resolved.
Therefore I flung the doubt before your mind,
To strike more surely. Aslaug, did you see
The eyes of Eric on you?

ASLAUG (*indifferently*)

I am fair.
Men look upon me.

HERTHA

You see nothing more?

ASLAUG (*disdainfully*)

What is it to me how he looks? He is
My human obstacle and that is all.

HERTHA

No, Aslaug, there's much more. Alone with you,
Absorbed, — you see it, — suddenly you strike
And strike again, swift great exultant blows.

ASLAUG

It is too base!

HERTHA

Unlulled, he could not perish.
Have you not seen his large and wakeful gaze?
This is our chance. Must not Swegn mount his throne?

ASLAUG

So that I have not to degrade myself,
Arrange it as you will. You own a swift,
Contriving, careful brain I cannot match.
To dare, to act was always Aslaug's part.

HERTHA
You will not shrink?

ASLAUG
I sprang not from the earth
To bound my actions by the common rule.
I claim my kin with those whom Heaven's gaze
Moulded supreme, Swegn's sister, Olaf's child,
Aslaug of Norway.

HERTHA
Then it must be done.

ASLAUG
Hertha, I will not know the plots you weave:
But when I see your signal, I will strike.

HERTHA (*alone*)
Pride violent! loftiness intolerable!
The grandiose kingdom-breaking blow is hers,
The baseness, the deception are for me.
It was this, the assumption, the magnificence,
Made Swegn her tool. To me his lover, counsellor,
Wife, worshipper, his ears were coldly deaf.
But, lioness of Norway, thy loud bruit
And leap gigantic are ensnared at last
In my compelling toils. She must be trapped!
She is the fuel for my husband's soul
To burn itself on a disastrous pyre.
Remove its cause, the flame will sink to rest, —
And we in Trondhjem shall live peacefully
Till Eric dies, as some day die he must,
In battle or by a revolting sword,
And leaves the spacious world unoccupied.
Then other men may feel the sun once more.
Always she talks of Fate: does she not see,
This man was born beneath exultant stars,

Had gods to rock his cradle? He must possess
His date, his strong and unresisted time
When Fate herself runs on his feet. Then comes, —
All things too great end soon, — death, overthrow,
The slow revenges of the jealous gods.
Submitting we shall save ourselves alive
For a late summer when cold spring is past.

Scene 3

Eric, Aslaug.

ERIC
Come hither.

ASLAUG
Thou hast sent for me?

ERIC
Come hither.
What art thou?

ASLAUG
What thou knowest.

ERIC
Do I know?

ASLAUG (*to herself*)
Does he suspect? (*aloud*) I am a dancing-girl.
My name is Aslaug. That thou knowest.

ERIC
Where
Did Odin forge thy sweet imperious eyes,
Thy noble stature and thy lofty look?
Thou dancest, — yes, thou hast that motion; song,
The natural expression of thy soul,
Comes from thy lips, floats, hovers and returns
Like a wild bird which wings around its nest.
This art the princesses of Sweden use,

And those Norwegian girls who frame themselves
On Sweden.

ASLAUG

It may be, my birth and past
Were nobler than my present fortunes are.

ERIC

Why cam'st thou to me?

ASLAUG (*to herself*)

Does Death admonish him
Of danger? does he feel the impending stroke?
Hertha could turn the question.

ERIC

Why soughtst thou out
Eric of Norway? Wherefore broughtst thou here
This beauty as compelling as thy song
No man can gaze on and possess his soul?

ASLAUG

I am a dancing-girl; my song, my face
Are my best stock. I carried them for gain
Here to the richest market.

ERIC

Hast thou so?
I buy them for a price. Aslaug, thy body too.

ASLAUG

Release me! Wilt thou lay thy hands on death?
(*wrenching herself free*)
All Norway has not sold itself thy slave.

ERIC

This was not spoken like a dancing-girl!

ASLAUG (*to herself*)

What is this siege? I have no dagger with me.
Will he discover me? will he compel?

ERIC

Though Norway has not sold itself my slave,
Thou hast. Remember what thou art, or else
Thou feignst to be.

ASLAUG (*to herself*)

I am caught in his snare.
He is subtle, terrible. I see the thing
He drives at and admire unwillingly
The marble tyrant.

ERIC

Better play thy part
Or leave it.
If thou wert fashioned nobler than thou feignst,
Confess that mightier name and lay thyself
Between my hands. But if a dancing-girl,
I have bought thee for a hire, thy face, thy song,
Thy body. I turn not, girl, from any way
I can possess thee, more than the sea hesitates
To engulf what it embraces.

ASLAUG

Thou speakest words
I scorn to answer.

ERIC

Or to understand?
Thou art an enemy who in disguise
Invad'st my house to spy upon my fate.

ASLAUG

What if I were?

ERIC

Thou hast too lightly then
Devised thy chains and close imprisonment,
Too thoughtlessly adventured a divine
And glorious stake, this body, heaven's hold,
This face, the earth's desire.

ASLAUG

What canst thou do?
I do not think I am afraid of death.

ERIC

Far be death from thee who, if heaven were just,
Wouldst walk immortal! Thou seest no nearer peril?

ASLAUG

None that I tremble at or wish to flee.

ERIC

Let this shake thee that thou art by thy choice
Caged with the danger of the lion's mood,
Helpless hast seen the hunger of his eyes
And feelst on thee the breath of his desire.

ASLAUG (*alarmed*)

I came not here to spy.

ERIC

Why can'st thou then?

ASLAUG

To sing, to dance, to earn.

ERIC

Richly then earn.
Thou hast a brain, and knowest why I looked
On thee, why I have kept thee in my house.

My house! what fate has brought thy steps within?
Thou, thou hast found the way to my desire!
Thinkst thou thy feet have entered to escape
As lightly as a wild bee from a flower,
The lair and antre of thy enemy?
Disguise? Canst thou disguise thy splendid soul?
Then if thy face and speech more nobly express
The truth of thee than this vocation can,
Reveal it and deserve my clemency.

ASLAUG (*violently*)

Thy clemency!

(*restraining herself*)

I am a dancing-girl;

I came to earn.

ERIC

Thou art obstinate in pride!

Choose yet.

ASLAUG

I have not any choice to make.

ERIC

Wilt thou still struggle vainly in the net?
Because thou hast the lioness in thy mood,
Thou thoughtst to play with Eric! It is I
Who play with thee; thou liest in my grasp,
As surely as if I held thee on my knees.
I am enamoured of thy golden hair,
Thy body like the snow, thy antelope eyes,
This neck that seems to know it carries heaven
Upon it easily. Thy song, thy speech,
This gracious rhythmic motion of thy limbs
Walking or dancing, all the careless pride
That undulates in every gesture and tone,
Have seized upon me smiling to possess.

But I have only learned from Fate and strength
 To seize by force, master, enjoy, compel,
 As I will thee. Enemy and prisoner,
 Or dancing-girl and purchased chattel, choose!
 Thou wilt not speak? thou findest no reply?

ASLAUG

Because I am troubled by thy violent words.
 I cannot answer thee, or will not yet.

(turning away)

How could he see this death? Is he a god
 And knows men's hearts? This is a terrible
 And iron pressure!

ERIC

What was thy design?
 To spy? to slay? For thou art capable
 Even of such daring.

ASLAUG *(to herself)*

Swiftly, swiftly done
 It might be still! To put him off an hour,
 Some minutes, — O, to strike!

ERIC

What hast thou chosen?

ASLAUG *(turning to him)*

King, mend thy words and end this comedy.
 I have laughed till now and dallied with thy thoughts,
 A little amazed. Unfearing I stand here,
 Who come with open heart to seek a king,
 Pure of all hostile purpose, innocent
 Of all the guileful thoughts and blood-stained plans
 Thou burdenest thy fierce suspicions with.
 This is the Nemesis of men who rise
 Too suddenly by fraud or violence

That they suspect all hearts, yes, every word
Of sheltering some direr violence,
Some subtler fraud, and they expect their fall
Sudden and savage as their rise has been.

ERIC

Thou art my dancing-girl and nothing more?
Assume this chain, this necklace, for thy life.
Nor think it even thy price.

She dashes the necklace to the ground.

Thou art not subtle!

ASLAUG (*agitated*)

It is not so that women's hearts are wooed.

ERIC

Yet so I woo thee, so do all men woo
Enamoured of what thou hast claimed to be.
Art thou the dancing-girl of Norway still
Or some disguised high-reaching nobler soul?

ASLAUG (*suddenly*)

I am thy dancing-girl, King Eric. Look,
I lift thy necklace.

ERIC

Take it, yet be free.

Thou canst not slip out from my hands by this.
No feigned decision will I let thee make,
But one which binds us both. I give thee time,
In hope thy saner mind will yet prevail,
Not courage most perverse, though ardent, rule.
Only one way thou hast to save thyself:
Reveal thy treason, Aslaug, trust thy king.

*Aslaug, alone, lifts the chain, admires
it and throws it on a chair.*

ASLAUG

You are too much like drops of royal blood.

She lifts it again.

A necklace? No, my chain! Or wilt thou prove
A god's death-warrant?

She puts it round her neck.

Hertha, Hertha, here!

(to Hertha, as she enters)

O counsellor, art thou come?

HERTHA

I heard thee call.

ASLAUG

I called. Why did I call? See, Hertha, see
How richly Norway's Eric buys his doom!

HERTHA

He gave thee this? It is a kingdom's price.

ASLAUG

A kingdom's price! the kingdom of the slain!
A price to rid the nations of a god.
O Hertha, what has earth to do with gods,
Who suffers only human weight? Will she
Not go too swiftly downward from her base
If Eric treads her long?

HERTHA

Sister of Swegn,
There are new lustres in thy face and eyes.
What said he to thee?

ASLAUG

What did Eric say,
Eric to Aslaug, sister of King Swegn?
A kingdom's price! Swegn's kingdom! And for him,

My marble emperor, my god who loves,
This mortal Odin? What for him? By force
Shall he return to his effulgent throne?

HERTHA

You were not used to a divided mind.

ASLAUG

Nor am I altered now, nor heart-perplexed.
But these are thoughts which naturally arise.

HERTHA

He loves you then?

ASLAUG

He loves and he suspects.

HERTHA

What, Aslaug?

ASLAUG

What we are and we intend.

HERTHA

If he suspects!

ASLAUG

It cannot matter much,
If we are rapid.

HERTHA

If we spoil it all!
I will not torture Swegn with useless tears
Perishing vainly. I will slay and die.
He shall remember that he wears his crown
By our great sacrifice and soothe his grief
With the strong magnificent circle, or else bear it

A noble duty to the nobly dead.

(after a moment's reflection)

Child, you must humour him, you must consent.

ASLAUG

To what?

HERTHA

To all.

ASLAUG

Hast thou at all perused
The infamy which thou advisest?

HERTHA

Yes.

I do not bid you yield, but seem to yield.
Even I who am Swegn's wife, would do as much.
But though you talk, you still are less in love,
Valuing an empty outward purity
Before your brother's life, your brother's crown.

ASLAUG

You know the way to bend me to your will!

HERTHA

Give freedom, but no licence to his love,
For when he thinks to embrace, we shall have struck.

ASLAUG

And, Hertha, if a swift and violent heart
Betrayed my will and overturned your plans?
Is there no danger, Hertha, there?

HERTHA

Till now

I feared not that from Aslaug, sister of Swegn.

But if you fear it!

ASLAUG

No, since I consent.
You shall not blame again my selfishness,
Nor my defect of love.

HERTHA (*alone*)

Swegn then might rule!
(*with a laugh*)
I had almost forgotten Fate between
Smiling, alert, and his too partial gods.

Scene 4

ERIC

They say the anarchy of love disturbs
Gods even: shaken are the marble natures,
The deathless hearts are melted to the pang
And rapture. I would be, O Odin, still
Monarch of my calm royalty within,
My thoughts my subjects. Do I hear her come?

(to Aslaug who enters)

Thou com'st? thou art resolved? thou hast made thy choice?

ASLAUG

I choose, if there is anything to choose,
The truth.

ERIC

Who art thou?

ASLAUG

Aslaug, who am now
A dancing-woman.

ERIC

And afterwards? Hast thou then
Understood nothing?

ASLAUG

What should I understand?

ERIC

What I shall do with thee. This earthly heaven
In which thou liv'st shall not be thine at all.

It was not fashioned for thy joy but mine
And only made for my immense desire.
This hast thou understood?

ASLAUG (*pale and troubled*)
Thou triest me still.

ERIC
I saw thee shake.

ASLAUG
It is not easily
A woman's heart sinks prostrate in such absolute
Surrender.

ERIC
Thy heart? Is it thy heart that yields?
O thou unparalleled enchanting frame
For housing of a strong immortal guest,
If man could seize the heart as palpably,
The form, the limbs, the substance of this soul!
That, that we ask for; all else can be seized
So vainly! Walled from ours are other hearts:
For if life's barriers twixt our souls were broken,
Men would be free and one, earth paradise
And the gods live neglected.

ASLAUG
This heart of mine?
Purchase it richly, for it is for sale.

ERIC
Yes, speak.

ASLAUG
With love; I meant no more.

ERIC

With love?

Thou namest lightly a tremendous word.
 If thou hadst known this mightiest thing on earth
 And named it, should it not have upon thy lips
 So moving an impulsion for a man
 That he would barter worlds to hear it once?
 Words are but ghosts unless they speak the heart.

ASLAUG

I have yielded.

ERIC

Then tonight. Thou shak'st?

ASLAUG

There is

A trouble in my blood. I do not shake.

ERIC

Thou heardst me?

ASLAUG

Not tonight. Thou art too swift,

Too sudden.

ERIC

Thou hast had leisure to consult
 Thy comrade smaller, subtler than thyself?
 Better hadst thou chosen candour and thy frank soul
 Consulted, not a guile by others breathed.

ASLAUG

What guile, who give all for an equal price?
 Thou giv'st thy blood of rubies; I my life.

ERIC

Thou hast not chosen then to understand.

ASLAUG

Because I sell myself, yet keep my pride?

ERIC

Thou shalt keep nothing that I choose to take.
I see a tyranny I will delight in
And force a oneness; I will violently
Compel the goddess that thou art. But I know
What soul is lodged within thee, thou as yet
Ignorest mine. I still hold in my strength,
Though it hungers like a lion for the leap,
And give thee time once more; misuse it not.
Beware, provoke not the fierce god too much;
Have dread of his flame round thee.

ASLAUG (*alone*)

Odin and Freya, you have snares! But see,
I have not thrown the dagger from my heart,
But clutch it still. How strange that look and tone,
That things of a corporeal potency
Not only travel coursing through the nerves
But seem to touch the seated soul within!
It was a moment's wave, for it has passed
And the high purpose in my soul lives on
Unconquerably intending to fulfil.

Act II

A room in Eric's house.

Scene 1

Hertha, Aslaug.

HERTHA

See what a keen and fatal glint it has,
Aslaug.

ASLAUG

Hast thou been haunted by a look,
O Hertha, has a touch bewildered thee,
Compelling memory?

HERTHA

Then the gods too work?

ASLAUG

A marble statue gloriously designed
Without that breath our cunning maker gives,
One feels it pain to break. This statue breathes!
Out of these eyes there looks an intellect
That claims us all; this marble holds a heart,
The heart holds love. To break it all, to lay
This glory of God's making in the dust!
Why do these thoughts besiege me? Have I then —
No, it is nothing; it is pity works,
It is an admiration physical.
O he is far too great, too beautiful

For a dagger's penetration. It would turn,
The point would turn; it would deny itself
To such a murder.

HERTHA

Aslaug, it is love.

ASLAUG (*angrily*)

What saidst thou?

HERTHA

When he lays a lingering hand
Upon thy tresses, — Aslaug, for he loves, —
Canst thou then strike?

ASLAUG

What shakes me? Have I learned
To pity, to tremble? That were new indeed
In Olaf's race. Give me self-knowledge, Gods.
What are these unaccustomed moods you send
Into my bosom? They are foreign here.

*Eric enters and regards them. Hertha,
seeing him, rises to depart.*

ERIC

Thou art the other dancing-woman come
From Sweden to King Eric!

HERTHA

He has eyes
That look into the soul. What mean his words?
But they are common. Let me leave you, Aslaug.

She goes out.

ASLAUG

I would have freedom here from thy pursuit.

ERIC

Why shouldst thou anywhere be free from me?
I am full of wrath against thee and myself.
Come near me.

ASLAUG (*to herself*)

It is too strange — I am afraid!
Of what? Of what? Am I not Aslaug still?

ERIC

Art thou a sorceress or conspirator?
But thou art both to seize my throne and heart,
And I will deal with thee, thou dreadful charm,
As with my enemy.

ASLAUG

Let him never touch!

ERIC

I give thee grace no longer; bear thy doom.

ASLAUG

My doom is in my hands, not thine.

ERIC (*with a sudden fierceness*)

Thou errst,
And thou hast always erred. Dar'st thou imagine
That I who have enveloped in three years
All Norway more rebellious than its storms,
Can be resisted by a woman's strength,
However fierce, however swift and bold?

ASLAUG

I have seen thy strength. I cherish mine unseen.

ERIC

And I thy weakness. Something yet thou fearst.

ASLAUG
Nothing at all.

ERIC
Yes! though thy eyes defy me,
Thy colour changes and thy limbs betray thee.
All is not lionlike and masculine there
Within.

He advances towards her.

ASLAUG
Touch me not!

ERIC
It is that thou fearest?
Why dost thou fear it? Is it thine own heart
Thou tremblest at? Aslaug, is it thy heart?
*He takes her suddenly into his arms
and kisses her. Aslaug remains like
one stricken and bewildered.*
Lift up thine eyes; let me behold thy strength!

ASLAUG
O gods! I love! O loose me!

ERIC
Thou art taken.
Whatever was thy purpose, thou art mine,
Aslaug, thou sweet and violent soul surprised,
Intended for me when the stars were planned!
Sweetly, O Aslaug, to thy doom consent,
The doom to love, the death of hatred. Draw
No useless curtaining of shamed refusal
Betwixt our yearnings, passionately take
The leap of love across the abyss of hate.
Force not thy soul to anger. Leave veils and falterings
For meaner hearts. Between us let there be

A noble daylight.

ASLAUG

Let me think awhile!

Thy arms, thy lips prevent me.

ERIC

Think not! Only feel,

Love only!

ASLAUG

O Eric, king, usurper, conqueror!

O robber of men's hearts and kingdoms! O

Thou only monarch!

ERIC

Art thou won at last,

O woman who disturbst the musing stars

With passion? Soul of Aslaug, art thou mine?

ASLAUG

Thine, Eric? Eric! Whose am I, by whom am held?

(sinking on a seat)

I cannot think. I have lost myself! My heart

Desires eternity in an embrace.

ERIC

Wilt thou deny me anything I claim

Ever, O Aslaug? Art thou mine indeed?

ASLAUG

What have I done? What have I spoken? I love!

(after a silence, feeling in her bosom)

But what was there concealed within my breast?

ERIC *(observing her action)*

I take not a divided realm, a crown

That's shared. Thou hadst a purpose in thy heart
I know not, but divine. Thou lov'st at length;
But I have knowledge of the human heart,
What opposite passions wrestle there with gusts
And treacherous surprises. I trust not then
Too sudden a change, but if thou canst be calm,
Yet passionately submit, I will embrace thee
For ever. Think and speak. Art thou all mine?

ASLAUG

I know no longer if I am my own.
The world swims round me and heaven's points are changed.
A purpose! I had one. I had besides
A brother! Had! What have I now? You Gods,
How have you rushed upon me! Leave me, King.
It is not good to trust a sudden heart.
The blood being quiet, we will speak again
Like souls that meet in heaven, without disguise.

ERIC

I do not leave thee, for thou art ominous
Of an abysm uncrossed.

ASLAUG

Yet that were best.
For there has been too much between us once
And now too little. Leave me, King, awhile
To wrestle with myself and calmly know
In this strange strife the gods have brought me to,
Which thing of these in me must live and which
Be dumb for ever.

ERIC

Something yet resists.
I will not leave thee till I know it and tame,
For, Aslaug, thou wast won.

ASLAUG

King, thou art wise
 In war and counsel, not in women's hearts.
 Thou hast surprised a secret that my soul
 Kept tremblingly from my own knowledge. Yet,
 If thou art really wise, thou wilt avoid
 To touch with a too rude and sudden hand
 The direr god who made my spirit fear
 To own its weakness.

ERIC

Art thou wise thyself?
 I take thee not for counsellor.

ASLAUG

Yet beware.
 There was a gulf between my will and heart
 Which is not bridged yet.

ERIC

Break thy will, unless
 Thou wouldst have me break it for thee.
 The older Aslaug rises now against the new.

ASLAUG

It rises, rises. Let it rise. Leave me
 My freedom.

ERIC

Aslaug, no, for free thou roamst
 A lioness midst thy passions.

ASLAUG (*with a gesture*)

Do then, O King,
 Whatever Fate commands.

ERIC

I am master of my Fate.

ASLAUG

Too little, who are not masters of ourselves!

ERIC

Art thou that dancing-woman, Aslaug, yet?

ASLAUG

I am the dancing-girl who sought thee, yet,
Eric.

ERIC

It may be still the swiftest way.
Let then my dancing-woman dance for me
Tonight in my chambers. I will see the thing
Her dancing means and tear its mystery out.

ASLAUG

If thou demandest it, then Fate demands.

ERIC

Thy god grows sombre and he menaces,
It seems! For afterwards I can demand
Whatever soul and body can desire
Twixt man and woman?

ASLAUG

If thy Fate permits.
Thy love, it seems, communes not with respect.

ERIC

The word exists not between thee and me.
It is burned up in too immense a fire.
Wilt thou persist even after thou hast lain
Upon my bosom? Thou claimest my respect?

Yet art a dancing-woman, so thou sayst?
 Aslaug, let not the darker gods prevail.
 Put off thy pride and take up truth and love.

ASLAUG (*sombre*)

I am a dancing-woman, nothing more.

ERIC

The hate love struck down rises in thy heart.
 But I will have it out, by violence,
 Unmercifully.

*He strides upon her, and she half
 cowers from him, half defies.*

(taking her violently into his arms)

Thus blotted into me
 Thou shalt survive the end of Time. Tonight!

He goes out.

ASLAUG

How did it come? What was it leaped on me
 And overpowered? O torn distracted heart,
 Wilt thou not pause a moment and give leave
 To the more godlike brain to do its work?
 Can the world change within a moment? Can
 Hate suddenly be love? Love is not here.
 I have the dagger still within my heart.
 O he is terrible and fair and swift!
 He is not mortal. Yet be silent, yet
 Give the brain leave. O marble brilliant face!
 O thou art Odin, thou art Thor on earth!
 What is there in a kiss, the touch of lips,
 That it can change creation? There's a wine
 That turns men mad; have I not drunk of it?
 To be his slave, know nothing but his will!
 Aslaug and Eric! Aslaug, sister of Swegn,
 Who makes his bed on the inclement snow
 And with the reindeer herds, that was a king.

Who takes his place? Eric and Aslaug rule.
Eric who doomed him to the death, if seized,
Aslaug, the tyrant, the usurper's wife,
Who by her brother's murder is secured
In her possession. Wife! The concubine,
The slave of Eric, — that his pride intends.
What was it seized on me, O heavenly powers?
I have given myself, my brother's throne and life,
My pride, ambition, hope, and grasp, and keep
Shame only. Tonight! What happens then tonight?
I dance before him, — royal Olaf's child
Becomes the upstart Eric's dancing-girl!
What happens else tonight? One preys upon
Aslaug of Norway! O, I thank thee, Heaven,
That thou restorest me to sanity.
It was his fraudulent and furious siege,
And something in me proved a traitor. Fraud?
O beauty of the godlike brilliant eyes!
O face expressing heaven's supremacy!
No, I will put it down, I put it down.
Help me, you gods, help me against my heart.
I will strike suddenly, I will not wait.
'Tis a deceit, his majesty and might,
His dreadful beauty, his resistless brain.
It will be very difficult to strike!
But I will strike. Swegn strikes, and Norway strikes,
My honour strikes, the Gods, and all his life
Offends each moment.

(to Hertha, who enters)

Hertha, I strike tonight.

HERTHA

Why, what has happened?

ASLAUG

That thou shalt not know.

I strike tonight.

She goes out.

HERTHA

It is not difficult
To know what drives her. I must act at once,
Or this may have too suddenly a tragic close.
Not blood, but peace, not death, you Gods, but life,
But tranquil sweetness!

Scene 2

Eric, Hertha.

ERIC

I sent for thee to know thy name and birth.

HERTHA

My name is Hertha and my birth too mean
To utter before Norway's lord.

ERIC

Yet speak.

HERTHA

A Trondhjem peasant and a serving-girl
Were parents to me.

ERIC

And from such a stock
Thy beauty and thy wit and grace were born?

HERTHA

The Gods prodigiously sometimes reverse
The common rule of Nature and compel
Matter with soul. How else should it be guessed
That Gods exist at all?

ERIC

Who nurtured thee?

HERTHA

A dancing-girl of Gothberg by a lord

HERTHA

Thou art mistaken, King.
He cannot conquer and he will not yield,
But weakens Norway. This in him I blame.

ERIC

Thou hast seen that? Thy peasant father got
A wondrous politician for his child!
Do I abash thee?

HERTHA

I am what the Gods
Have made me. But I understand at last;
Thou thinkst me other than I seem.

ERIC

Some thought
Like that I had.

HERTHA

King Eric, wilt thou hear?

ERIC

I much desire it, if I hear the truth.

HERTHA

Betray me not to Aslaug then.

ERIC

That's just.
She shall not know.

HERTHA

What if I came, O King,
For other purpose, not to sing and dance,
And yet thy friend, the well-wisher, at least,
Of Norway and her peace?

ERIC

Speak plainly now.

HERTHA

If I can show thee how to conquer Swegn
Without one stroke of battle, wilt thou grant
My bitter need?

ERIC

I would give much.

HERTHA

Wilt thou?

ERIC

If so I conquer him and thy desire
Is something I can grant without a hurt
To Norway or myself.

HERTHA

It is.

ERIC

Speak then,
Demand.

HERTHA

I have not finished yet. Meantime
If I avert a danger from thy head
Now threatening it, do I not earn rewards
More ample?

ERIC

More? On like conditions, then.

HERTHA

If I yield up great enemies to thy hands

Thou knowst not of, wilt thou reject my price,
Confusing different debts in one account?

ERIC

Hast thou yet more to ask? Thou art too shrewd
A bargainer.

HERTHA

Giving Norway needed peace,
Thyself friends, safety, empire, is my claim
Excessive then?

ERIC

I grant thee three demands.

HERTHA

They are all. He asks not more who has enough.
Thrice shall I ask and thrice shall Eric give
And never have an enemy again
In Norway.

ERIC

Speak.

HERTHA

Thy enemies are here,
No dancing-girls, but Hertha, wife of Swegn,
And Aslaug, child of Olaf Sigualdson,
His sister.

ERIC

It is well.

HERTHA

The danger lies
In Aslaug's hand and dagger which she means
To strike into thy heart. Tonight she strikes.

ERIC
And Swegn?

HERTHA
Send me to him with perilous word
Of Aslaug in thy hands; so with her life
Buy his surrender, afterwards his love
With kingly generosity and trust.

ERIC
Freely and frankly hast thou spoken, Queen
Who wast in Trondhjem: now as freely ask.

HERTHA
The life of Swegn; his liberty as well,
Submitting.

ERIC
They are thine.

HERTHA
And Aslaug's life
And pardon, not her liberty.

ERIC
They are given.

HERTHA
And, last, forgiveness for myself, O King,
My treason and my plots.

ERIC
This too I grant.

HERTHA
I have nothing left to ask for.

ERIC

Thou hast done?

Let me consign thee to thy prison then.

HERTHA

My prison! Wilt thou send me not to Swegn?

ERIC

I will not. Why, thou subtle, dangerous head,
Restored to liberty, what perilous schemes
Might leap into thy thoughts! Shall I give Swegn,
That fierce and splendid fighter, such a brain
Of cunning to complete and guide his sword?
What if he did not yield, rejected peace?
Wilt thou not tell him Aslaug's life is safe?
To prison!

HERTHA

Thou hast promised, King.

ERIC

I keep

My promise to thee, Hertha, wife of Swegn.
For Swegn thou askest life and liberty,
For Aslaug life and pardon, for thyself
Forgiveness only. I can be cunning too.
Hertha, thou art my prisoner and thrall.

HERTHA (*after a pause, smiling*)

I see. I am content. Thou showest thyself
Norway's chief brain as her victorious sword.
Free or a prisoner, let me do homage
To Eric, my King and Swegn's.

ERIC

Thou art content?

HERTHA

This face and noble bearing cannot lie.
I am content and feel as safe with thee
As in my husband's keeping.

ERIC (*smiling*)

So thou art,
Thou subtle voice, thou close and daring brain.
I would I felt myself as safe with thee.

HERTHA

King Eric, think me not thy enemy.
What thou desirest, I desire yet more.

ERIC

Keep to that well; let Aslaug not suspect.
My way I'll take with her and thee and Swegn.
Fear nothing, Hertha; go.

Hertha goes out.

O Freya Queen,
Thou helpst me even as Thor and Odin did.
I make my Norway one.

Act III

Eric's Chamber.

Scene 1

Eric, Harald.

ERIC

At dawn have all things ready for my march.
Let none be near tonight. Send here to me
Aslaug the dancing-girl.

Harald goes out.

I have resumed
The empire and the knowledge of myself.
For this strong angel Love, this violent
And glorious guest, let it possess my heart
Without a rival, not invade the brain,
Not with imperious discord cleave my soul
Jangling its ordered harmonies, nor turn
The manifold music of humanity
Into a single and a maddening note.
Strength in the spirit, wisdom in the mind,
Love in the heart complete the trinity
Of glorious manhood. There was the wide flaw, —
The coldness of the radiance that I was.
This was the vacant space I could not fill.
It left my soul the torso of a god,
A great design unfinished, and my works
Mighty but crude like things admired that pass
Bare of the immortality which keeps
The ages. O, the word they spoke was true!

'Tis Love, 'tis Love fills up the gulfs of Time!
 By Love we find our kinship with the stars,
 The spacious uses of the sky. God's image
 Lives nobly perfect in the soul he made,
 When Love completes the godhead in a man.

Aslaug enters.

Thou com'st to me! I give thee grace no more.
 What hast thou in thy bosom?

ASLAUG

Only a heart.

ERIC

A noble heart, though wayward. Give it me,
 Aslaug, to be the secret of the dawns,
 The heart of sweetness housed in Aslaug's breast
 Delivered from revolt and ruled by love.

ASLAUG

Why hast thou sent for me and forced to come?
 Wilt thou have pity on me even yet
 And on thyself?

ERIC

I am a warrior, one
 Who have known not mercy. Wilt thou teach it me?
 I have learned, Aslaug, from my soul and Life
 The great wise pitiless calmness of the gods,
 Found for my strength the proud swift blows they deal
 At all resistance to their absolute walk,
 Thor's hammer-stroke upon the unshaped world.
 Its will is beaten on a dreadful forge,
 Its roads are hewn by violence divine.
 Is there a greater and a sweeter way?
 Knowst thou it? Wilt thou lead me there? Thy step
 Swift and exultant, canst thou tread its flowers?

ASLAUG

I know not who inspires thy speech; it probes.

ERIC

My mind tonight is full of Norway's needs.
Aslaug, she takes thy image.

ASLAUG

Mine! O if

Tonight I were not Norway!

ERIC

Thou knowest Swegn?

ASLAUG

I knew and I remember.

ERIC

Yes, Swegn, — a soul
Brilliant and furious, violent and great,
A storm, a wind-swept ocean, not a man.
That would seize Norway? that will make it one?
But Odin gave the work to me. I came
Into this mortal frame for Odin's work.

ASLAUG

So deify ambition and desire.

ERIC

If one could snap this mortal body, then
Swegn even might rule, — not govern himself, yet govern
All Norway! Aslaug, canst thou rule thyself?
'Tis difficult for great and passionate hearts.

ASLAUG

Then Swegn must die that Eric still may rule!
Was there no other way the gods could find?

ERIC

A deadly duel are the feuds of kings.

ASLAUG

They are so.

She feels for her dagger.

ERIC

Aslaug, thou feelest for thy heart?
 Unruled it follows violent impulses
 This way, that way, working calamity
 Dreams that it helps the world. What shall I do,
 Aslaug, with an unruly noble heart?
 Shall I not load it with the chains of love
 And rob it of its treasured pain and wrath
 And bind it to its own supreme desire?
 Richly 'twould beat beneath an absolute rule
 And sweetly liberated from itself
 By a golden bondage.

ASLAUG

And what of other impulses it holds?
 Shall they not once rebel?

ERIC

They shall keep still;
 They shall not cry nor question; they shall trust.

ASLAUG

It cannot be that he reads all my heart!
 The gods play with me in his speech.

ERIC

Why thou art called?
 Thou knowest

ASLAUG

I know why I am here.

ERIC

Few know that, Aslaug, why they have come here,
For that is heaven's secret. Sit down beside me
Nearer my heart. No hesitating! come.
I do not seize thy hands.

ASLAUG

They yet are free.
Is it the gods who bid me to strike soon?
My heart reels down into a flaming gulf.
If thou wouldst rule with love, must thou not spare
Thy enemies?

ERIC

When they have yielded. Is thy choice made?
Whatever defence thou hast against me yet
Use quickly, before I seize these restless hands
And thy more restless heart that flees from bliss.

Aslaug rises trembling.

ASLAUG

Desiredst thou me not to dance tonight,
O King, before thee?

ERIC

It was my will. Is it thine
Now? Dance, while yet thy limbs are thine.

ASLAUG

I dance
The dance of Thiordis with the dagger, taught
To Hertha in Trondhjem and by her to me.

ERIC (*smiling*)

Aslaug, my dancing-girl, thou and thy dance
Have daring, but too little subtlety.

ASLAUG (*moving to a distance*)

What use to struggle longer in the net?
Vain agony! he watches and he knows!
I'll strike him suddenly. It cannot be
The senses will so overtake the will
As to forbid its godlike motion. If
I feared not my wild heart, I could lean down
And lull suspicion with a fatal gift.
My blood would cleanse what shame was in the touch.
So would one act who knew her tranquil will
But none thus in the burning heart sunk down.

ERIC

Wilt thou play vainly with that fatal toy?
Dance now.

ASLAUG

My limbs refuse.

ERIC

They have no right.

ASLAUG

O Gods, I did not know myself till now,
Thrown in this furnace. Odin's irony
Shaped me from Olaf's seed! I am in love
With chains and servitude and my heart desires
Fluttering like a wild bird within its cage
A tyrant's harshness.

ERIC

Wilt thou dance? or wait
Till the enamoured motion of thy limbs

Remember joy of me? So would I have
Thy perfect motion grow a dream of love.
Tomorrow at the dawning will I march
To violent battle and the sword of Swegn
Bring back to be thy plaything, a support
Appropriate to thy action in the dance.
Aslaug, it shall replace thy dagger.

ASLAUG

Fate

Still drives me with his speech and Eric calls
My weakness on to slaughter Eric. Yes,
But he suspects, he knows! Yet will I strike,
Yet will I tread down my rebellious heart,
And then I too can die and end remorse.

ERIC

Where is thy chain

I gave thee, Aslaug? I would watch it rise,
Rubies of passion on a bosom of snow,
And climb for ever on thy breast aheave
With the sea's rhythm as thou dancest. Dance
Weaving my life a measure with thy feet
And of thy dancing I will weave the stroke
That conquers Swegn.

ASLAUG

The necklace? I will bring it.

Rubies of passion! Blood-drops still of death!

She goes out.

ERIC

The power to strike has gone out of her arm
And only in her stubborn thought survives.
She thinks that she will strike. Let it be tried!

*He lies back and feigns to
sleep. Aslaug returns.*

ASLAUG

Now I could slay him. But he will open his eyes
Appalling with the beauty of his gaze.
He did not know of peril! All he has said
Was only at a venture thought and spoken, —
Or spoken by Fate? Sleeps he his latest sleep?
Might I not touch him only once in love
And no one know of it but death and I,
Whom I must slay like one who hates? Not hate,
O Eric, but the hard necessity
The gods have sent upon our lives, — two flames
That meet to quench each other. Once, Eric! then
The cruel rest. Why did I touch him? I am faint!
My strength ebbs from me. O thou glorious god,
Why wast thou Swegn's and Aslaug's enemy?
We might so utterly have loved. But death
Now intervenes and claims thee at my hands —
And this alone he leaves to me, to slay thee
And die with thee, our only wedlock. Death!
Whose death? Eric's or Swegn's? For one I kill.
Dreadful necessity of choice! His breath
Comes quietly and with a happy rhythm,
His eyes are closed like Odin's in heaven's sleep.
I must strike blindly out or not at all
Screening out with my lashes love, — as now — or now!
For Time is like a sapper mining still
The little resolution that I keep.
Swegn's death or life upon that little stands.
Swegn's death or life and such an easy stroke,
Yet so impossible to lift my hand!
To wait? To watch more moments these closed lids,
This quiet face and try to dream that all
Is different! But the moments are Fate's thoughts
Watching me. While I pause, my brother's slain,
Myself am doomed his concubine and slave.
I must not think of him! Close, mind, close, eyes.
Free the unthinking hand to its harsh work.

*She lifts twice the dagger, lowers it twice,
then flings it on the ground.*

Eric of Norway, live and do thy will
With Aslaug, sister of Swegn and Olaf's child,
Aslaug of Trondhjem. For her thought is now
A harlot and her heart a concubine,
Her hand her brother's murderess.

ERIC

Thou hast broken

At last.

ASLAUG

Ah, I am broken by my weak
And evil nature. Spare me not, O King,
One vileness, one humiliation known
To tyranny. Be not unjustly merciful!
For I deserve and I consent to all.

ERIC

Aslaug!

ASLAUG

No, I deny my name and parentage.
I am not she who lived in Trondhjem: she
Would not have failed, but slain even though she loved.
Let no voice call me Aslaug any more.

ERIC

Sister of Swegn, thou knowest that I love.
Daughter of Olaf, shouldst thou not aspire
To sit by me on Norway's throne?

ASLAUG

Desist!

Thou shalt not utterly pollute the seat
Where Olaf sat. If I had struck and slain,

I would deserve a more than regal chair.
 But not on such must Norway's diadem rest,
 A weakling with a hand as impotent
 And faltering as her heart, a sensual slave
 Whose passionate body overcomes her high
 Intention. Rather do thy tyrant will.
 King, if thou spare me, I will slay thee yet.

ERIC

Recoil not from thy heart, but strongly see
 And let its choice be absolute over thy soul.
 Its way once taken thou shalt find thy heart
 Rapid; for absolute and extreme in all,
 In yielding as in slaying thou must be,
 Sweet violent spirit whom thy gods surprise.
 Submit thyself without ashamed reserve.

ASLAUG

What more canst thou demand than I have given?
 I am prone to thee, prostrate, yielded.

ERIC

Throw from thee
 The bitterness of thy self-abasement. Find
 That thou hast only joy in being mine.
 Thou tremblest?

ASLAUG

Yes, with shame and grief and love.
 Thou art my Fate and I am in thy grasp.

ERIC

And shall it spare thee?

ASLAUG

Spare Swegn. I am in thy hands.

ERIC

Norway

Thou hast given, casting it for ever away
From Olaf's line.

ASLAUG

What thou hast taken, I give.

ERIC

And last thyself without one covering left
Against my passionate, strong, devouring love.
Thou seest I leave thee nothing.

ASLAUG

I am thine.

Do what thou wilt with me.

ERIC

Because thou hast no help?

ASLAUG

I have no help. My gods have brought me here
And given me into thy dreadful hands.

ERIC

Thou art content at last that they have breathed
Thy plot into thy mind to snare thy soul
In its own violence, bring to me a slave,
A bright-limbed prisoner and thee to thy lord?
See Odin's sign to thee.

ASLAUG

I know it now.

I recognise with prostrate heart my fate
And I will quietly put on my chains
Nor ever strive nor wish to break them more.

ERIC

Yield up to me the burden of thy fate
And treasure of thy limbs and priceless life.
I will be careful of the golden trust.
It was unsafe with thee. And now submit
Gladly at last. Surrender body and soul,
O Aslaug, to thy lover and thy lord.

ASLAUG

Compel me, they cannot resist thy will.

ERIC

I will have thy heart's heart's surrender, not
Its body only. Give me up thy heart.
Open its secret chambers, yield their keys.

ASLAUG

O Eric, is not my heart already thine,
My body thine, my soul into thy grasp
Delivered? I rejoice that God has played
The grand comedian with my tragedy
And trapped me in the snare of thy delight.

ERIC

Aslaug, the world's sole woman! thou cam'st here
To save for us our hidden hope of joy
Parted by old confusion. Some day surely
The world too shall be saved from death by love.
Thou hast saved Swegn, helped Norway. Aslaug, see,
Freya within her niche commands this room
And incense burns to her. Not Thor for thee,
But Freya.

ASLAUG

Thou for me! not other gods.

ERIC

Aslaug, thou hast a ring upon thy hand.
Before Freya give it me and wear instead
This ancient circle of Norwegian rites.
The thing this means shall bind thee to our joy,
Beloved, while the upbuilded worlds endure.
Then if thy spirit wander from its home,
Freya shall find her thrall and lead her back
A million years from now.

ASLAUG

A million lives!

Scene 2

ASLAUG

The world has changed for me within one night.
O surely, surely all shall yet go well,
Since Love is crowned.

ERIC (*entering*)

Aslaug, the hour arrives
When I must leave thee. For the dawn looks pale
Into our chamber and these first rare sounds
Expect the arising sun, the daylight world.

ASLAUG

Eric, thou goest hence to war with Swegn,
My brother?

ERIC

What knows thy heart?

ASLAUG

That Swegn shall live.

ERIC

Thou knowst his safety from deliberate swords.
None shall dare touch the head that Aslaug loves.
But if some evil chance came edged with doom,
Which Odin and my will shall not allow,
Thou wouldst not hold me guilty of his death,
Aslaug?

ASLAUG

Fate orders all and Fate I now

Have recognised as the world's mystic Will
That loves and labours.

ERIC

Because it knows and loves,
Our hearts, our wills are counted, are indulged.
Aslaug, for a few days in love and trust
Anchor thy mind. I shall bring back thy joy.
For now I go with mercy and from love.

He embraces her and goes.

ASLAUG

Swegn lives. A Mind, not iron gods with laws
Deaf and inevitable, overrules.

Act IV

Swegn's fastness in the hills.

Scene 1

Swegn, Hardicnut, with soldiers.

SWEGN

Fight on, fight always, till the Gods are tired.
In all this dwindling remnant of the past
Desires one man to rest from virtue, cease
From desperate freedom?

HARDICNUT

No man wavers here.

SWEGN

Let him depart unhurt who so desires.

HARDICNUT

Why should he go and whither? To Eric's sword
That never pardoned? If our hearts were vile,
Unworthily impatient of defeat,
Serving not harassed right but chance and gain,
Eric himself would keep them true.

SWEGN

Not thine,
My second soul. Yet could I pardon him
Who faltered, for the blow transcends! And were
King Eric not in Yara where he dwells,

I would have seen his hand in this defeat,
Whose stroke is like the lightning's, silent, straight,
Not to be parried.

HARDICNUT

Sigurd smote, perhaps,
But Eric's brain was master of his stroke.

SWEGN

The traitor Sigurd! For young Eric's part
In Olaf's death, he did a warrior's act
Avenging Yarislaf and Hacon slain,
And Fate, not Eric slew. But he who, trusted, lured
Into death's ambush, when the rebel seas
Rejoicing trampled down the royal head
They once obeyed, him I will some day have
At my sword's mercy.

(to Ragnar who enters)

Ragnar, does it come,
The last assault, death's trumpets?

RAGNAR

Rather peace,
If thou prefer it, Swegn. An envoy comes
From Eric's army.

SWEGN

Ragnar, bring him in.

Ragnar goes out.

He treats victorious? When his kingdom shook,
His party faltered, then he did not treat
Nor used another envoy than his sword.

(to Gunthar who enters, escorted by Ragnar)

Earl Gunthar, welcome, — welcome more wert thou
When loyal.

GUNT HAR

Ragnar, Swegn and Hardicnut,
Revolting Earls, I come from Norway's King
With peace, not menace.

SWEGN

Where then all these days
Behind you lurked the Northerner?

GUNT HAR

Thou art
In his dread shadow and in your mountain lair
Eric surrounds you.

SWEGN (*contemptuously*)

I will hear his words.

GUNT HAR

Eric, the King, the son of Yarislaf,
To Swegn, the Earl of Trondhjem. "I have known
The causes and the griefs that raise thee still
Against my monarchy. Thou knowest mine
That raised me against thy father, — Hacon's death,
My mother's brother, butchered shamefully
And Yarislaf by secret sentence slain.
Elected by our peers I seized his throne.
But thou, against thy country's ancient laws
Rebelling, hast preferred for judge the sword.
Respect then the tribunal of thy choice
And its decision. Why electest thou
In thy drear fastness on the wintry hills
To perish? Trondhjem's earldom shall be thine,
And honours and wealth and state, if thou accept
The offer of thy lenient gods. Consider,
O Swegn, thy country's wounds, perceive at last
Thy good and ours, prolong thy father's house."
I expect thy answer.

SWEGN

I return to him
His proffered mercy. Let him keep it safe
For his own later use.

GUNT HAR

Thou speakest high.
What help hast thou? what hope? what god concealed?

SWEGN

I have the snow for friend and, if it fails,
The arms of death are broad enough for Swegn,
But not subjection.

GUNT HAR

For their sake thou lov'st,
Thy wife's and sister's, yield.

RAGNAR

Thou art not wise.
This was much better left unsaid.

SWEGN

It seems
Your pastime to insult the seed of Kings. Yet why
Am I astonished if triumphant mud
Conceives that the pure heavens are of its stuff
And nature? To the upstart I shall yield,
The fortune-fed adventurer, the boy
Favoured by the ironic Gods? Since fell
By Sigurd's treachery and Eric's fate
In resonant battle on the narrow seas
Olaf, his children had convinced the world,
I thought, of their great origin. Men have said,
"Their very women have souls too great to cry
For mercy even from the Gods." His Fates
Are strong indeed when they compel our race

To hear such terms from his! Go, tell thy King,
Swegn of the ancient house rejects his boons.
Not terms between us stand, but wrath, but blood.
I would have flayed him on a golden cross
And kept his women for my household thralls,
Had I prevailed. Can he not do as much
That he must chaffer and market Norway's crown?
These are the ways of Kings, strong, terrible
And arrogant, full of sovereignty and might.
Force in a King's his warrant from the Gods.
By force and not by bribes and managements
Empires are founded! But your chief was born
Of huckstering earls who lived by prudent gains.
How should he imitate a royal flight
Or learn the leap of Kings upon their prey?

GUNT HAR

Swegn Olafson, thou speakest fatal words.
Where lodge thy wife and sister? Dost thou know?

HARDICNUT

Too far for Eric's reach.

GUNT HAR

Earl, art thou sure?

SWEGN

What means this question?

GUNT HAR

That the Gods are strong
Whom thou in vain despisest, that they have dragged
From Sweden into Eric's dangerous hands
Hertha and Aslaug, that the evil thou speakst
Was fatally by hostile Powers inspired.

SWEGN

Thou liest! They are safe and with the Swede.

GUNT HAR

I pardon thy alarm the violent word.
 Earl Swegn, canst thou not see the dreadful Gods
 Have chosen earth's mightiest man to do their will?
 What is that will but Norway's unity
 And Norway's greatness? Canst thou do the work?
 Look round on Norway by a boy subdued,
 The steed that even Olaf could not tame
 See turn obedient to an unripe hand.
 Behold him with a single petty pace
 Possessing Sweden. Sweden once subdued,
 Thinkst thou the ships that crowd the Northern seas
 Will stay there? Shall not Britain shake, Erin
 Pray loudly that the tempest rather choose
 The fields of Gaul? Scythia shall own our yoke,
 The Volga's frozen waves endure our march,
 Unless the young god's fancy rose-ensnared
 To Italian joys attracted amorously
 Should long for sunnier realms or lead his high
 Exultant mind to lord in eastern Rome.
 What art thou but a pebble in his march?
 Consider, then, and change thy fierce response.

HARDICNUT

Deceives the lie they tell, thy reason, Swegn?
 Earl Gunthar may believe, who even can think
 That Yarislaf begot a god!

SWEGN

Gunthar,

I have my fortune, thou thy answer. Go.

GUNT HAR

I pity, Swegn, thy rash and obstinate soul.

He goes out.

SWEGN

Aslaug would scorn me yielding, even now
And even for her. He has unnerved my will,
The subtle tyrant! O, if this be true,
My Fate has wandered into Eric's camp,
My soul is made his prisoner. Friends, prepare
Resistance; he's the thunderbolt that strikes
And threatens only afterwards. It is
Our ultimate battle.

HARDICNUT

On the difficult rocks
We will oppose King Eric and his gods.

Scene 2

Swegn with his earls and followers in flight.

SWEGN

Swift, swift into the higher snows, where Winter
Eternal can alone of universal things
Take courage against Eric to defend
His enemies. O you little remnant left
Of many heroes, save yourselves for Fate.
She yet may need you when she finds the man
She lifts perpetually, too great at last
Even for her handling.

HARDICNUT

Ragnar, go with him,
While I stand here to hinder the pursuit
Or warn in time. Fear not for me, assailed.
Leave, Ragnar, leave me; I am tired at last.

All go out upward except Hardicnut.

Here then you reach me on these snows. O if my death
Could yet persuade indignant Heaven to change

[Scene incomplete]

Act V

Eric's Palace.

Scene 1

ERIC

Not by love only, but by force and love.
This man must lower his fierceness to the fierce,
He must be beggared of the thing left, his pride,
And know himself for clay, before he will consent
To value my gift. He would not honour nor revere
This unfamiliar movement of my soul
But would contemn and think my seated strength
Had changed to trembling. Strike the audience-bell,
Harald. The master of my stars is he
Who owns no master. Odin, what is this play,
Thou playest with thy world, of fall and rise,
Of death, birth, greatness, ruin? The time may come
When Eric shall not be remembered! Yes,
But there's a script, there are archives that endure.
Before a throne in some superior world
Bards with undying lips and eyes still young
After the ages sing of all the past
And the immortal Children hear. Somewhere
In this gigantic world of which one grain of dust
Is all our field, Eternal Memory keeps
Our great things and our trivial equally
To whom the peasant's moans above his dead
Are tragic as a prince's fall. Some say
Atomic Chance put Eric here, Swegn there,
Aslaug between. O you revealing Gods,

ERIC

Shall I?

Thou hast forgotten, Swegn, thy desperate words.
Or were they meant only for the free snows,
And here retracted?

SWEGN

Son of Yarislaf, they stand.
I claim the cross I would have nailed thee on,
I claim the flayer's knife.

ERIC

These for thyself.
And for thy wife and sister, Swegn?

SWEGN

Alas!

ERIC

I think thy father taught thee not that word,
But I have taught thee. Since thou lovest yet, —
No man who says that he will stand alone,
Swegn, can afford to love, — thou then art mine
Inevitably. He must be half a god
Who can oppose Thor's anger, Odin's will
Nor dream of breaking. Such the gods delight in,
Raising or smiting; such in the gods delight,
Raised up or smitten. But thou wast always man
And canst not now be more. Thou vauntst thy blood,
Thy strength? Thou art much stronger, so thou sayst,
Than thy misfortunes. Art thou stronger, Swegn,
Than theirs? Can all thy haughty pride of race
Or thy heart's mightiness undo my will
In whose strong hands they lie? Swegn Olafson,
The gods are mightier than thy race and blood,
The gods are mightier than thy arrogant heart.
They will not have one violent man oppose

His egoism, his pride and his desire
 Against a country's fate. Use then thy eyes
 And learn thy strength.

*At a sign of his hand Aslaug and
 Hertha are brought in.*

Thou hast no strength,
 For thou and these are only Eric's slaves
 Who have been his stubborn hinderers. Therefore Fate,
 Whose favourite and brother I have grown,
 Turned wroth with you and dragged you all into my grasp.
 I will that you should live and yield. These yield,
 But thou withstandest wisdom, Fate and love
 Allied against thee. Swegn Olafson, submit,
 Stand by my side and share thy father's throne.

SWEGN (*after a silence*)

Yes, thou art fierce and subtle! Let them pronounce
 My duty's preference if not my heart's,
 To them or Right.

ERIC

O narrow obstinate heart!
 Had this been for thy country or a cause
 Men worship, then it would indeed have been
 A noble blindness, but thou serv'st thy pride,
 Swegn, son of Olaf, not the noble cause
 Of God or man or country. Look now on these.
 I give thee the selection of their fate.
 If these remain my slaves, an upstart's, Swegn,
 Who yet are Olaf's blood and Norway's pride,
 I swear 'tis thou that mak'st them so. Now choose.

(Swegn is silent)

How sayst thou,

Swegn Olafson, shall these be Eric's thralls?
 Wilt thou abide by their pronouncement, Swegn?
 Aslaug and Hertha, see your brother and lord,
 This mighty captive, royal once, now fallen

And helpless in my hands. I wish to spare
His mightiness, his race, his royal heart;
But he prefers the cross instead, prefers
Your shame — thy brother, Aslaug, — Hertha, he.
Thy spouse consents to utmost shame for both
If from the ages he can buy this word,
“Swegn still was stubborn.” That to him is all.
He who forgot to value Norway’s will,
Forgets to value now your pride, your love.
This was not royal, nor like Olaf’s son!
Come, will you speak to him, will you persuade?
Walk there aside awhile; aim at his heart.
Hertha, my subject, Aslaug, thou my thrall,
Save, if he will, this life.

SWEGN

’Tis thus we meet, —
Were not the snows of Norway preferable,
Daughter of Olaf?

ASLAUG

They were high, but cold.

HERTHA

Wilt thou not speak to Hertha, Swegn, my lord?

SWEGN

Hertha, alas, thy crooked scheming brain
That brought us here.

HERTHA

The gods use instruments,
Not ask their counsel. O Swegn, accept the gods
And their decision.

ASLAUG

Must we live always cold?

O brother, cast the snows out of thy heart.
Let there be summer.

HERTHA

Yield, husband, to the sun.
There is no shame in yielding to the gods.

ASLAUG

Nor to a god, although his room be earth
And his body mortal.

SWEGN

There was an Aslaug once
Whose speech had other grandeurs. Can it find
In all its sweet and lofty harmonies
The word or argument that can excuse thy fall,
O not to me, but to that worshipped self
Thou wast, my sister?

ASLAUG

I have no argument except my heart
Nor need excuse for what I glory in.
Brother, were we not always one? 'Tis strange
That I must reason with thee.

SWEGN

O, thou knewest.
Therefore I fell, therefore my strength is gone,
And where a god's magnificence lived once,
Here, here 'tis empty. O inconstant heart,
Thou wast my Fate, my courage, and at last
Thou hast gone over to my enemy,
Taking my Fate, my courage. I will hear
No words from such. Thou wouldst betray what's left,
Until not even Swegn is left to Swegn,
But only a coward's shadow.

HERTHA

Hear me, Swegn.

SWEGN

Ah, Hertha! what hast thou to say to me?

HERTHA

Save me, my lord, from my own punishment,
Forgetting my deserts.

SWEGN

Alas! thy love,
Though great, was never wise, and must it ask
So huge a recompense? Thou hadst myself.
Thou askst my honour.

ASLAUG

Will this persuade thee? I have nothing else.

SWEGN

Thou only and so only couldst prevail.
O thou hast overcome my strength at last.
King, thou hast conquered. Not to thee I yield,
But those I loved are thy allies. From these
Recall thy wrath and on my head pronounce
What doom thou wilt, though yielding is doom enough
For Swegn of Norway.

ERIC

Abjure rebellion then; receive my boons,
Receive my mercy.

SWEGN

Mercy. It is received.
Let all the world hear Olaf's son abjure
His birth and greatness. I accept — accept!
King Eric's boons, King Eric's mercy. O torture!

The spirit of Olaf will no more sit still
 Within me. O though thou slaughter these with pangs,
 I will not yield. Take, take thy mercy back.

ERIC

I take it back. What wouldst thou in its stead?

SWEGN

Do what thou wilt with these and me. I have done!

ERIC

Thou castst thy die, thou weak and violent man, I will cast mine
 And conquer.

SWEGN

I have endured the worst.

ERIC

Not so.

Thou thinkest I will help thee to thy death,
 Allowing the blind grave to seal thy eyes
 To all that I shall do to these. Learn, Swegn,
 I am more cruel! Thou shalt live and see
 On these my vengeance. Go, Aslaug, and return
 Robed as thou wast upon the night thou knowest
 Wearing thy dagger, wearing too thy ring.

SWEGN

What wilt thou do with her? God! what wilt thou do?
 O wherefore have I seen and taken back love
 Into a heart had shut itself to all
 But death and greatness?

ERIC

I will inflict on them

What thou canst not endure to gaze upon —
 Or if thou canst, then with that hardness live

For die thou shalt not. I have ways for that.
Thou thoughtst to take thy refuge in a grave
And let these bear thy punishment for thee,
Thy heart being spared. It was no valiant thought,
No worthy escape for Swegn. Aslaug and Hertha,
Remove your outer robes.

SWEGN

What must I see?

ERIC

As dancing-girls these women came to me.
As dancing-girls I keep them. Thou shalt see
Aslaug of Norway at her trade — to dance
Before me and my courtiers. That begins,
There's more behind, unless thou change thy mood.

SWEGN

Thou knowest how to torture.

ERIC

And to break.

Aslaug reenters.

Thou seest, Swegn. Shall I command the dance?
Shall this be the result of Olaf's house?

SWEGN

Daughter of Olaf, wilt thou then obey?

ASLAUG

Yes, since thou lov'st me not, my brother Swegn,
Whom else should I obey, save him I love?
If thou hadst loved me still, I should not need.

ERIC

Dance.

SWEGN

No. Stay, Aslaug. Since thou bad'st me love
Thee, not my glory, as indeed I must
To save the house of Olaf from this shame, —
Whose treacherous weakness works for him and thee, —

ERIC

Pause not again — for pause is fatal now.

SWEGN

King, I have yielded, I accept thy boons.
Heir of a starveling Earl, I bow my head
Even to thy mercies. I am Olaf's son,
Yet yield — that name remember, speak this word —
I shall be faithful to my own disgrace.
O fear not, King, I can be great again.

ERIC

Without conditions hast thou yielded?

SWEGN

No.

Let these be spared all shame — for that I yield.
My honour has a price — and O 'tis small.

ERIC

That's given. Without terms besides?

SWEGN

One prayer.

Give me a dungeon deep enough, O King,
To hide my face from all these eyes.

ERIC

Swear then,

Whatever prison I assign thee, be it wide
Or narrow, to observe its state, its bounds

And do even there my will.

SWEGN (*with a gesture*)

That too is sworn!

Let Thor and Odin witness to my oath.

ERIC

Four prisons I assign to Olaf's son.
Thy palace first in Trondhjem, Olaf's roof —
This house in Yara, Eric's court — thy country
To whom thou yieldest, Norway — and at last
My army's head when I invade the world.

SWEGN (*amazed and doubtful*)

Thou hast surprised me, Eric, with an oath
And circumvented.

ERIC

Hertha, to thy lord
Return unharmed — thou seest thou wast safe
As in his dearest keeping. Take, Hertha,
Trondhjem with thee and Olaf's treasures; sit
The second in the land, beneath our throne.

SWEGN

Eric, enough. Have I not yielded? Here
Let thy boons rest.

ERIC

'Tis truth. For my next boon
Is to myself. Look not upon this hand
I clasp in mine, although the fairest hand
That God has made. Observe this ring instead
And recognise it.

GUNT HAR

It is Freya's ring

On Aslaug's hand; she who once wears it sits
Thenceforth on Norway's throne.

ERIC

Possess thy father's chair

Intended for thee always from the first,
Nor be amazed that in these dancing robes
I seat her here, for they increase its pomp
More than imperial purple. Think not, Swegn,
Thy sister shamed or false who came to me,
Spilling my blood and hers to give thee back thy crown,
A violent and mighty purpose such
As only noble hearts conceive; and only
She yielded to that noble heart at last
Because of Odin's pressure.

SWEGN

So they came.

Aslaug, thou soughtst my throne, but findest it thine.
I grudge it not to thee — for thy great heart
Deserved it. Eric, thou hast won at last,
Now only.

ERIC

I could not shame thy sister, Swegn,
Save by my wife's disgrace, and this was none
But only a deceit to prove thy heart
And now thou seest thou couldst not have rebelled
Except by violence to Olaf's seed
That must again rule Norway.

SWEGN

Eric, for thy boons,

They hurt not now, take what return thou wilt,
For I am thine. Thou hast found out the way
To save from me thy future. It is secured
Even with my heart's strings.

ERIC
Swegn, I too have boons
To ask of thee.

SWEGN
Let them be difficult then,
If thou wouldst have me grant them.

ERIC
Swegn, excuse and love
Thy comrade Hardicnut, for he intended
A kind betrayal.

SWEGN
This is nothing, King.
His act my heart had come to understand
And it has pardoned.

ERIC
Forgive then Swegn, dearest,
Sigurd, thy foe, as I have pardoned first
My father's slaughterer. This thing is hard.

SWEGN
He's pardoned, not forgiven. Let him not come
Too often in my sight.

ERIC
The gods have won.
Let this embrace engulf our ended strife,
Brother of Aslaug.

SWEGN
Husband of my sister,
Thou assum'st our blood and it ennobles thee
To the height of thy great victories — this thy last
And greatest. Thou hast dealt with me as a King,

Then as a brother. Thou adornst thy throne.

ERIC

Rest, brother, from thy hardships, toils and wars
Until I need the sword that matched with mine,
To smite my foemen.

Aslaug, what thinkst thou?
If thou art satisfied, all was well done.

ASLAUG

Thou hast the tyrant in thy nature still,
And so I love thee best, for then I recognise
My conqueror. O what canst thou do but well?
For in thy every act and word I see
The gods compel thee.

ERIC

O thou hast changed me with thy starry eyes,
Daughter of Olaf, and hast made me a man
Where was but height and iron; all my roots
Of action, mercy, greatness, enterprise,
Sit now transplanted to thy breast, O charm,
O noble marvel! From thy bosom my strength
Comes out to me. Mighty indeed is love,
Thou sangst of, Aslaug, once, the golden hoop
Mightier, swifter than the warrior's sword.
Dost thou remember what thou cam'st to do,
Aslaug, from Gothberg?

ASLAUG (*wondering*)

Only ten days ago

I came from Gothberg!

*She turns with a laugh
and embraces Eric.*

ERIC

The gods have spoken since and shown their hand.

They seal our eyes and drive us, but at last
Our souls remember when the act is done,
That it was fated. Aslaug, now for us
The world begins again, — our world, beloved,
Since once more we — who since the stars were formed
Playing the game of games by Odin's will
Have met and parted — parted, meet again
For ever.

Vasavadutta

A Dramatic Romance

Characters

VUTHSA UDAIAN, King of Cowsamby.

YOUNGUNDHARÂYAN, his Minister, until recently Regent of Cowsamby.

ROOMUNWATH, Captain of his armies.

ALURCA } young men of Vuthsa's age, his friends and com-
VASUNTHA } panions.

PARENACA, the King's door-keeper.

CHUNDA MAHASEGN, King of Avunthy.

GOPÂLACA } his sons.
VICURNA }

RÉBHA, Governor of Ujjayiny, the capital of Avunthy.

A CAPTAIN of Avunthy.

UNGÂRICÂ, Queen of Avunthy.

VÂSAVADUTTÂ, daughter of Chunda Mahasegn and Ungarica.

UMBÂ, her handmaiden.

MUNJOLICÂ, the servile name of Bundhumathie, the captive Princess of Sourashtra, serving Vasavadutta.

A KIRÂTHA WOMAN.

The action of the romance takes place a century after the war of the Mahabharata; the capital has been changed to Cowsamby; the empire has been temporarily broken and the kingdoms of India are overshadowed by three powers, Magadha in the East ruled by Pradyotha, Avunthy in the West ruled by Chunda Mahasegn who has subdued also the Southern kings, and Cowsamby in the Centre where Yougundharayan strives by arms and policy to maintain the house of Parikshith against the dominating power of Avunthy. Recently since the young Vuthsa has been invested with the regal power and appeared at [], Chunda Mahasegn, till then invincible, has suffered rude but not decisive reverses. For the moment there is an armed peace between the two empires.

The fable is taken from Somadeva's Kathasaritsagara (the Ocean of the Rivers of Many Tales) and was always a favourite subject of Indian romance and drama; but some of the circumstances, a great many of the incidents and a few of the names have been altered or omitted and others introduced in their place. Vuthsa, the name of the nation in the tale, is in the play used as a personal name of the King Udaian.

Act I

Scene 1

*A room in the palace in Ujjayiny.
Chunda Mahasegn, seated; Gopalaca.*

MAHASEGN

Vuthsa Udaian drives my fortunes back.
Our strengths retire from one luxurious boy,
Defeated!

GOPALACA

I have seen him in the fight
And I have lived to wonder. O, he ranges
As lightly through the passages of war
As moonbeam feet of some bright laughing girl,
Her skill concealing in her reckless grace,
The measures of a rapid dance.

MAHASEGN

If this portentous morning reach our gates,
My star is fallen. Yet I had great dreams.
Oudh and Cowsamby were my high-carved doors,
Ganges, Godavary and Nurmada
In lion race besprayed with sacred dew
My moonlit jasmynes in my pleasure-grounds.
All this great sunlit continent lay sleeping
At peace beneath the shadow of my brows.
But they were dreams.

GOPALACA

Art thou not great enough

To live them?

MAHASEGN

O my son, many high hearts
Must first have striven, many must have failed
Before a great thing can be done on earth,
And who shall say then that he is the man?
One age has seen the dreams another lives.

GOPALACA

Look up towards the hills where Rudra stands,
His dreadful war-lance pointing to the east.
Is not thy spirit that uplifted spear?

MAHASEGN

It has been turned by Vishnu's careless hand!

GOPALACA

Fear not the obstacles the gods have strewn.
Why should the mighty man restrain his soul?
Stretch out thy hand to seize, thy foot to trample,
A Titan's motion.

MAHASEGN

Thou soarst the eagle's height,
But with eyes closed to the tempest.

GOPALACA

Wilt thou sue
To foemen for the end of haughty strife?

MAHASEGN

That never shall be seen. The boy must fall.

GOPALACA

He is young, radiant, beautiful and bold.
But let him fall. We will not bear defeat.

MAHASEGN

Yet many gods stood smiling at his birth.
Luxmie came breathing fortunate days; Vishnu
Poured down a radiant sanction from the skies
And promised his far stride across the earth;
Magic Saruswathie between his hands
Laid down her lotus arts.

GOPALACA

The austere gods
Help best and not indulgent deities.
The greatness in him cannot grow to man.
His hero hours are rare forgetful flights.
Excused from effort and difficult ascent
Birds that are brilliant-winged, fly near to earth.
Wine, song and dance winging his peaceful days
Throng round his careless soul. It cannot find
The noble leisure to grow great.

MAHASEGN

There lives
Our hope. Spy out, my son, thy enemy's spirit,
Even as his wealth and armies! Let thy eyes
Find out its weakness and thy hand there strike.

GOPALACA

Thou hast a way to strike?

MAHASEGN

I have a way,
Not noble like the sounding paths of war.

GOPALACA

Take it; let us stride straight towards our goal.

MAHASEGN

Thy arm is asked for.

GOPALACA

It is thine to use.

MAHASEGN

Invent some strong device and bring him to us
 A captive in Ujjayiny's golden groves.
 Shall he not find a jailor for his heart
 To take the miracle of its keys and wear them
 Swung on her raiment's border? Then he lives
 Shut up by her close in a prison of joy,
 Her and our vassal.

GOPALACA

Brought to the eagle's nest
 For the eagle's child thou giv'st him her heart's prey
 To Vasavadutta! King, thy way is good.
 Garooda on a young and sleeping Python
 Rushing from heaven I'll lift him helpless up
 Into the skiey distance of our peaks.
 Though it is strange and new and subtle, it is good.
 Think the blow struck, thy foeman seized and bound.

MAHASEGN

I know thy swiftness and thy gathered leap.
 Once here! his senses are enamoured slaves
 To the touch of every beautiful thing. O, there
 No hero, but a tender soul at play,
 A soft-eyed, mirthful and luxurious youth
 Whom all sweet sounds and all sweet sights compel
 To careless ecstasy. Wine, music, flowers
 And a girl's dawning smile can weave him chains
 Of vernal softness stronger than can give
 The unyielding iron. Two lips shall seal his strength,
 Two eyes of all his acts be tyrant stars.

GOPALACA

One aid I ask of thee and only one.

My banishment, O King, from thy domains.

MAHASEGN

Gopalaca, I banish thee, my child.
Return not with my violent will undone.

Scene 2

*A hall in the palace at Cowsamby.
Youngundharayan, Roomunwath.*

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

I see his strength lie covered sleeping in flowers;
Yet is a greatness hidden in his years.

ROOMUNWATH

Nourish not such large hopes.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

I know too well
The gliding bane that these young fertile soils
Cherish in their green darkness; and my cares
Watch to prohibit the nether snake who writhes
Sweet-poisoned, perilous in the rich grass,
Lust with the jewel love upon his hood,
Who by his own crown must be charmed, seized, change
Into a warm great god. I seek a bride
For Vuthsa.

ROOMUNWATH

Wisely; but whom?

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

One only lives
So absolute in her charm that she can keep
His senses from all straying, the child far-famed
For gifts and beauty, flower born by magic fate
On a fierce iron stock.

ROOMUNWATH

Vasavadutta,
Avunthy's golden princess! Hope not to mate
These opposite godheads. Follow Nature's prompting,
Nor with thy human policy pervert
Her simple ends.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Nature must flower into art
And science, or else wherefore are we men?
Man out of Nature wakes to God's complexities,
Takes her crude simple stuff and by his skill
Turns things impossible into daily miracles.

ROOMUNWATH

This thing is difficult, and what the gain?

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

It gives us a long sunlit time for growth;
For we shall raise in her a tender shield
Against that iron victor in the west,
The father's heart taking our hard defence
Forbid the king-brain in that dangerous man.
Then when he's gone, we are his greatness' heirs
In spite of his bold Titan sons.

ROOMUNWATH

He must
Have fallen from his proud spirit to consent.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Another strong defeat and she is ours.

ROOMUNWATH

Blow then the conchs for battle.

YOUNGDHARAYAN

I await
 Occasion and to feel the gods inclined.
(to Vuthsa entering)
 My son, thou comest early from thy breezes.

VUTHSA

The dawn has spent her glories and I seek
 Alurca and Vasuntha for the harp
 With chanted verse and lyric ease until
 The golden silences of noon arrive.
 See this strange flower I plucked below the stream!
 Each petal is a thought.

YOUNGDHARAYAN

And the State's cares,
 King of Cowsamby?

VUTHSA

Are they not for thee,
 My mind's wise father? Chide me not. See now,
 It is thy fault for being great and wise.
 What thou canst fashion sovereignly and well,
 Why should I do much worse?

YOUNGDHARAYAN

And when I pass?

VUTHSA

Thy passing I forbid.

YOUNGDHARAYAN

Vuthsa, thou art
 Cowsamby's king, not Time's, nor death's.

VUTHSA

O, then,

The gods shall keep thee at my strong demand
To be the aged minister of my sons.
This they must hear. Of what use are the gods
If they crown not our just desires on earth?

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

Well, play thy time. Thou art a royal child,
And though young Nature in thee dallies long,
I trust her dumb and wiser brain that sees
What our loud thoughts can never reason out,
Not thinking life. She has her secret calls
And works divinely behind play and sleep,
Shaping her infant powers.

VUTHSA

I may then go
And listen to Alurca with his harp?

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

Thy will
In small things train, Udaian, in the great
Make it a wrestler with the dangerous earth.

VUTHSA

My will is for delight. They are not beautiful,
This State, these schemings. War is beautiful
And the bright ranks of armoured men and steel
That singing kisses steel and the white flocking
Of arrows that are homing birds of war.
When shall we fight again?

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

When battle ripens.
And what of marriage? Is it not desired?

VUTHSA

O no, not yet! At least I think, not yet.

I'll tell thee a strange thing, my father. I shudder,
 I know it is with rapture, at the thought
 Of women's arms, and yet I dare not pluck
 The joy. I think, because desire's so sweet
 That the mere joy might seem quite crude and poor
 And spoil the sweetness. My father, is it so?

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Perhaps. Thou hast desire for women then?

VUTHSA

It is for every woman and for none.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

One day perhaps thou shalt join war with wedlock
 And pluck out from her guarded nest by force
 The wonder of Avunthy, Vasavadutta.

VUTHSA

A name of leaping sweetness I have heard!
 One day I shall behold a marvellous face
 And hear heaven's harps defeated by a voice.
 Do the gods whisper it? Dreams are best awhile.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

These things we shall consider.

PARENACA (*entering*)

Hail, Majesty!

A high-browed wanderer at the portals seeks
 Admittance. Tarnished is he with the road,
 Alone, yet seems a mighty prince's son.

VUTHSA

Bring him with honour in. Such guests I love.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

We should know first what soul is this abroad
And why he comes.

VUTHSA

We'll learn that from his lips.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Hope not to hear truth often in royal courts.
Truth! Seldom with her bright and burning wand
She touches the unwilling lips of men
Who lust and hope and fear. The gods alone
Possess her. Even our profoundest thoughts
Are crooked to avoid her and from her touch
Crawl hurt into their twilight, often hating her
Too bright for them as for our eyes the sun.
If she dwells here, it is with souls apart.

VUTHSA

All men were not created from the mud.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

See not a son of heaven in every worm.
Look round and thou wilt see a world on guard.
All life here armoured walks, shut in. Thou too
Keep, Vuthsa, a defence before thy heart.

Parenaca brings in Gopalaca.

GOPALACA

Which is Udaian, great Cowsamby's king?

VUTHSA

He stands here. What's thy need from Vuthsa? Speak.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Roomunwath, look with care upon this face.

GOPALACA

Hail, then, Cowsamby's majesty, well borne
Though in a young and lovely vessel! Hail!

VUTHSA

Thou art some great one surely of this earth
Who com'st to me to live guest, comrade, friend,
Perhaps much more.

GOPALACA

I have fought against thee, king.

VUTHSA

The better! I am sure thou hast fought well.
Com'st thou in peace or strife?

GOPALACA

In peace, O king,
And as thy suppliant.

VUTHSA

Ask; I long to give.

GOPALACA

Know first my name.

VUTHSA

Thy eyes, thy face I know.

GOPALACA

I am Gopalaca, Avunthy's son,
Once thy most dangerous enemy held on earth.

VUTHSA

A mighty name thou speakest, prince, nor one
To supplications tuned. Yet ask and have.

GOPALACA

Thou heardst me well? I am thy foeman's son.

VUTHSA

And therefore welcome more to Vuthsa's heart.
Foemen! they are our playmates in the fight
And should be dear as friends who share our hours
Of closeness and desire. Why should they keep
Themselves so distant? Thou the noblest of them all,
The bravest. I have played with thee, O prince,
In the great pastime.

GOPALACA

This was Vuthsa, then!

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

And wherefore seeks the son of Mahasegn
Hostile Cowsamby? or why suppliant comes
To his chief enemy?

GOPALACA

I should know that brow.
This is thy great wise minister? That is well.
I seek a refuge.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

And thou sayst thou art
Avunthy's son?

GOPALACA

Because I am his son.
My father casts me from him and no spot
Once thought my own will suffer now my tread.
Therefore I come. Vuthsa Udaian, king,
Grant me some hut, some cave upon thy soil,
Some meanest refuge for my wandering head.
But if thy heart can dwell with fear, as do

The natures of this age, or feed the snake
 Suspicion, over gloomier borders send
 My broken life.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Vuthsa, beware. His words
 Strive to conceal their naked cunning.

VUTHSA

Prince,
 What thou demandst and more than thou demandst,
 Is without question thine. Now, if thou wilt,
 Reveal the cause of thy great father's wrath,
 But only if thou wilt.

GOPALACA

Because his bidding
 Remained undone, my exile was embraced.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

More plainly.

GOPALACA

Ask me not. I am ashamed.
 Nor should a son unveil his father's fault.
 They, even when they tyrannise, remain
 Most dear and reverend still, who gave us birth.
 This, Vuthsa, know; against thee I was aimed,
 A secret arrow.

VUTHSA

Keep thy father's counsel.
 If he shoot arrows and thou art that shaft,
 I'll welcome thee into my throbbing breast.
 What thou hast asked, I sue to thee to take.
 Thou seekst a refuge, thou shalt find a home:
 Thou fleest a father, here a brother waits

To clasp thee in his arms.

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

Too frank, too noble!

VUTHSA

Come closer. Child of Mahasegn, wilt thou
Be king Udaian's brother and his friend?
This proud grace wilt thou fling on the bare boon
That I have given thee? Is it much to ask?

GOPALACA

To be thy brother was my heart's desire.
Shod with that hope I came.

VUTHSA

Clasp then our hands.
Gopalaca, my play, my couch, my board,
My serious labour and my trifling hours
Share henceforth, govern. All I have is thine.

GOPALACA

Thine is the noblest soul on all the earth.

VUTHSA

Frown not, my father. I obey my heart
Which leaped up in me when I saw his face.
Be sure my heart is wise. Gopalaca,
The sentinel love in man ever imagines
Strange perils for its object. So my minister
Expects from thee some harm. Wilt thou not then
Assure his love and pardon it the doubt?

GOPALACA

He is a wise deep-seeing statesman, king,
And shows that wisdom now. But I will swear,
But I will prove to thee, thou noble man,

That dearest friendship is my will to him
 Thou serv'st and to work on him proudest love.
 Is it enough?

VUTHSA

My father, hast thou heard?
 A son of kings swears not to lying oaths.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

It is enough.

VUTHSA

Then come, Gopalaca,
 Into my palace and my heart.

He goes into the palace with Gopalaca.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

O life

Besieged of kings! What snare is this? what charm?
 There was a falsehood in the Avunthian's eyes.

ROOMUNWATH

He has given himself into his foemen's hands
 And he has sworn. He is a prince's son.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Yes, by his sire; but the pale queen Ungarica
 Was to a strange inhuman father born
 And from dim shades her victor dragged her forth.

ROOMUNWATH

There's here no remedy. Vuthsa is ensnared
 As with a sudden charm.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

I'll watch his steps.
 Keep thou such bows wherever these two walk

As never yet have missed their fleeing mark.

ROOMUNWATH

Yet was this nobly done on Vuthsa's part.

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

O, such nobility in godlike times
Was wisdom, but not to our fall belongs.
Sweet virtue now is mother of defeat
And baser, fiercer souls inherit earth.

Chid and prescribed the postures it must keep,
Moves like a rhythmic picture of delight
And with his sunny smile he does it all.
Now in our little kingdom with its law
Of beauty and music this high silence comes
And seizes on him. All our acts he rules
And Vuthsa has desired one master more.

VASUNTHA

There is a wanton in this royal heart
Who gives herself to all and all are hers.
Perhaps that too is wisdom. For, Alurca,
This world is other than our standards are
And it obeys a vaster thought than ours,
Our narrow thoughts! The fathomless desire
Of some huge spirit is its secret law.
It keeps its own tremendous forces penned
And bears us where it wills, not where we would.
Even his petty world man cannot rule.
We fear, we blame; life wantons her own way,
A little ashamed, but obstinate still, because
We check but cannot her. O, Vuthsa's wise!
Because he seeks each thing in its own way,
He enjoys. And wherefore are we at all
If not to enjoy and with some costliness
Get dear things done, till rude death interferes,
God's valet moves away these living dolls
To quite another room and better play, —
Perhaps a better!

ALURCA

Yet consider this.
Look back upon the endless godlike line.
Think of Parikshith, Janaméjaya, think
Of Suthaneke, then on our Vuthsa gaze.
Glacier and rock and all Himaloy piled!
What eagle peaks! Now this soft valley blooms;

The cuckoo cries from branches of delight,
The bee sails murmuring its low-winged desires.

VASUNTHA

It was to amuse himself God made the world.
For He was dull alone! Therefore all things
Vary to keep the secret witness pleased.
How Nature knows and does her office well.
What poignant oppositions she combines!
Death fosters life that life may suckle death.
Her certainties are snares, her dreams prevail.
What little seeds she grows into huge fates,
Proves with a smile her great things to be small!
All things here secretly are right; all's wrong
In God's appearances. World, thou art wisely led
In a divine confusion.

ALURCA

The Minister

Watches this man so closely, he must think
There is some dangerous purpose in his mind.

VASUNTHA

He is the wariest of all ministers
And would suspect two pigeons on a roof
Of plots because they coo.

ALURCA

All's possible.

Vuthsa enters with Gopalaca.

VUTHSA

Yes, I would love to see the ocean's vasts.
Are they as grand as are the mountains dumb
Where I was born and grew? Or is its voice
Like the huge murmur of our forests swayed
In the immense embrace of giant winds?

We have that in Cowsamby.

GOPALACA

Wilt thou show
Them to me, Vindhya's crags where forests dimly
Climb down towards my Avunthy?

VUTHSA

We will go
And hunt together the swift fleeing game
Or with our shafts unking the beast of prey.

GOPALACA

If we could range alone wide solitudes,
Not soil them with our din, not with our tread
Disturb great Nature in her animal trance,
Her life of mighty instincts where no stir
Of the hedged restless mind has spoiled her vasts.

VUTHSA

It is a thing I have dreamed of. Alurca, tell
The Minister that we go to hunt the deer
In Vindhya's forests on Avunthy's verge.
That's if my will's allowed.

Alurca goes out to the outer palace.

VASUNTHA

He will, Vuthsa,
Allow thy will. Where does it lead thee, king?

VUTHSA

A scourge for thee or a close gag might help.

VASUNTHA

A bandage for my eyes would serve as well.

VUTHSA

Shall we awaken in Alurca's hands
 The living voices of the harp? Or willst thou
 That I should play the heaven-taught airs thou lov'st
 On the Gundhurva's magical guitar
 Which lures even woodland beasts? For the elephant
 Comes trumpeting to the enchanted sound,
 A coloured blaze of beauty on the sward
 The peacocks dance and the snake's brilliant hood
 Lifts rhythmic yearning from the emerald herb.

GOPALACA

Vuthsa Udaian, suffer me awhile
 To walk alone, for I am full of thoughts.

VUTHSA

Thou shouldst not be. Cannot my love atone
 For lost Avunthy?

GOPALACA

Always; but a voice
 Comes to me often from the haunts of old.

VASUNTHA

Returns no dim cloud-messenger to whisper
 To thy great father's longing waiting heart
 Far from his banished son?

GOPALACA

Thy satire's forced.

VASUNTHA

Thy earnest less?

VUTHSA

One hour, a long pale loss,
 I sacrifice to thy thoughts. When it has dragged past,

Where shall I find thee?

GOPALACA

Where the flowers rain
Beneath the red boughs on the river's bank.
There will I walk while thou hearst harp or verse.

VUTHSA

Without thee neither harp nor verse can charm.

Gopalaca goes.

The harmony of kindred souls that seek
Each other on the strings of body and mind,
Is all the music for which life was born.
Vasuntha, let me hear thy happy crackling,
Thou fire of thorns that leapest all the day.
Spring, call thy cuckoo.

VASUNTHA

Give me fuel then,
Your green young boughs of folly for my fire.

VUTHSA

I give enough I think for all the world.

VASUNTHA

It is your trade to occupy the world.
Men have made kings that folly might have food;
For the court gossips over them while they live
And the world gossips over them when they are dead.
That they call history. But our man returns.

ALURCA

Do here and in all things, says the Minister,
Thy pleasure. But since upon a dangerous verge
This hunt will tread, thy cohorts armed shall keep
The hilly intervals, himself be close
To guard with vigilance his monarch's life

Against the wild beasts and what else means harm.

VUTHSA

That is his care; what he shall do, is good.

ALURCA

To lavish upon all men love and trust
Shows the heart's royalty, not the brain's craft.

VUTHSA

I have found my elder brother. Grudge me not,
Alurca, that delight. Thou lov'st me well?

ALURCA

Is it now questioned?

VUTHSA

Then rejoice with me
That I have found my brother. Joy in my joy,
Love with my love, think with my thoughts; the rest
Leave to much older wiser men whose schemings
Have made God's world an office and a mart.
We who are young, let us indulge our hearts.

ALURCA

Thou tak'st all hearts and givest thine to none,
Udaian. Yet is this prince Gopalaca,
This breed from Titans and from Mahasegn,
Hard, stern, reserved. Does he repay thy friendship
As we do?

VUTHSA

Love itself is sweet enough
Though unreturned; and there are silent hearts.

VASUNTHA

Suffer this flower to climb its wayside rock.

Oppose not Nature's cunning who will not
Be easily refused her artist joys.
Fierce deserts round the green oasis yearn
And the chill lake desires the lily's pomp.

VUTHSA

He is the rock, I am the flower. What part
Playst thou in the woodland?

VASUNTHA

A thorn beneath the rose
That from the heavens of desire was born
And men call Vuthsa.

VUTHSA

Poet, satirist, sage,
What other gifts keepst thou concealed within
More than the many that thy outsides show?

VASUNTHA

I squander all and keep none, not like thee
Who trad'st in honey to deceive the world.

VUTHSA

O, earth is honey; let me taste her all.
Our rapture here is short before we go
To other sweetness on some rarer height
Of the upclimbing tiers that are the world.

Scene 2

*A forest-glade in the Vindhya hills.
Vicurna, a Captain.*

VICURNA

The hunt rings distant still; but all the ways
Troops and more troops besiege. Where is Gopalaca?

CAPTAIN

Our work may yet be rude before we reach
Our armies on the frontier.

VICURNA

That I desire.
O whistling of the arrows! I have yet
To hear that battle music.

CAPTAIN

Someone comes,
For wild things scurry forth.
They take cover. Gopalaca enters.

VICURNA

Whither so swiftly?
You are near the frontier for a banished man,
Gopalaca.

GOPALACA

Why has my father sent
Thy rash hot boyhood here, imperilling
Both of his sons? I find not here his wisdom.

VICURNA

There will be danger? I am glad. None sent me;
I came unasked.

GOPALACA

And also unasking?

VICURNA

Right.

GOPALACA

Trust me to have thee whipped. But since thou art here!
Where stand the chariots?

CAPTAIN

On our left they wait
Screened by the secret tunnel which the Boar
Tusked through the hill to Avunthy. Torches ready
And men in arms stand in the cavern ranked
They call the cavern of the Elephant
By giants carved. But all the forest passages
The enemy guards.

GOPALACA

There are some he cannot guard.
I know the forest better than their scouts.
When I shall speak of you and clap my hands,
Surround us in a silence armed.

CAPTAIN

His men
Resisting?

GOPALACA

No; we two shall be alone.

VICURNA

Fie! there will be no fighting?

GOPALACA

Goblin, off!

*They take cover again. Gopalaca goes;
then arrive from another side Vuthsa
with Vasuntha and Alurca.*

ALURCA

We lose our escort!

VASUNTHA

They lose us, I think.

ALURCA

What fate conspires with what hid treachery?
Our chariot broken, we in woods alone
And the night close.

VASUNTHA

Roomunwath guards the paths.

ALURCA

The night is close.

VUTHSA

Here I will rest, my friends,
Where all is green and silent; only the birds
And the wind's whisperings! Go, Alurca, meet
Our comrades of the hunt; guide their vague steps
To this green-roofed refuge.

ALURCA

It is the best, though bad.
I leave thee with unwarlike hands to guard.

VASUNTHA

I am no fighter; it is known. Run, haste.

Alurca hastens out.

And yet for all your speed, someone will worship
Great Shiva in Avunthy. I hear a tread.

Gopalaca returns.

VUTHSA

Where wert thou all this time, Gopalaca?

GOPALACA

Far wandering in the woods since a white deer
Like magic beauty drew my ardent steps
Into a green entanglement.

VASUNTHA

Simple!

You found there what you sought?

GOPALACA

No deer, but hunters,

Not of our troop. We spoke of this green glade
Where many wandering paths might lead the king.
In haste I came.

VASUNTHA

Greater the haste to go!

VUTHSA

Follow Alurca and come back with him.

VASUNTHA

What, cast myself into the forest's hands
To wander and be eaten by the night?
Come here and bid me then a long farewell.
Are thy eyes open at least? Is it thou in this
Who movest? I should know that at least from thee,

If nothing more.

VUTHSA

Why ask when thou hast eyes?
Thou seest that mine are open and I walk;
For no man drives me.

VASUNTHA

Walk! but far away
From thy safe capital.

VUTHSA

What harm?

VASUNTHA

And with
This prince Gopalaca?

VUTHSA

Suspicious then?
Why not suspect at once it is my will
To visit Avunthy?

VASUNTHA

So?

VUTHSA

Not so, but if?

VASUNTHA

Oh, if! And if return were much less easy
Than the going?

VUTHSA

Who has talked of easy things?
With difficulty then I will return.

VASUNTHA
I go, King Vuthsa.

VUTHSA
But tell Yougundharayan
And all who harbour blind uneasy thoughts,
“Whatever seeks me from Fate, man or god,
Leave all between me and the strength that seeks.
War shall not sound without thy prince’s leave.
Vuthsa will rescue Vuthsa.”

VASUNTHA
I will tell,
But know not if he’ll hear.

VUTHSA
He knows who is
His sovereign.

VASUNTHA
King, farewell.

VUTHSA
I shall. Farewell.
Vasuntha disappears in the forest.
We two have kept our tryst, Gopalaca.
Hang there, my bow; lie down, my arrows. Now
Of you I have no need. O this, O this
Is what I often dreamed, to be alone
With one I love far from the pomp of courts,
Not ringed with guards and anxious friendships round,
Free like a common man to walk alone
Among the endless forest silences,
By gliding rivers and over deciduous hills,
In every haunt where earth our mother smiles
Whispering to her children. Let me rest awhile
My head upon thy lap, Gopalaca,

Before we plunge into this emerald world.
 Shall we not wander in her green-roofed house
 Where mighty Nature hides herself from men,
 And be the friends of the great skyward peaks
 That call us by their silence, bathe in tarns,
 Dream where the cascades leap, and often spend
 Slow moonless nights inarmed in leafy huts
 Happier than palaces, or in our mood
 Wrestle with the fierce tiger in his den
 Or chase the deer with wind-swift feet, and share
 With the rough forest-dwellers natural food
 Plucked from the laden bounty of the trees,
 Before we seek the citted haunts of men?
 Shall we not do these things, Gopalaca?

GOPALACA

Some day we shall.

VUTHSA

Why some day? why not now?
 Have I escaped my guards in vain?

GOPALACA

Not vainly.

VUTHSA

This sword encumbers; take it from me, friend,
 And fling it there upon the bank.

GOPALACA

It is far.

I keep my arms lest some wild thing invade
 These green recesses.

VUTHSA

Keep thy arms and me.
 O, this is good to be among the trees

With thee to guard me and no soul besides.

GOPALACA

Thyself thou hast given wholly into my hands.

VUTHSA

Yes, take me, brother.

GOPALACA

I shall use the trust
And yet deserve it.

VUTHSA

I love thee well, Gopalaca.
How dost thou love me?

GOPALACA

It was hard to speak,
Now I can tell it. As a brother might
Elder and jealous, as a mother loves
Her beautiful flower-limbed boy or grown man yearns
Over some tender girl, his sister, comrade, child,
In all these ways, but many more besides,
But always jealously.

VUTHSA

Why?

GOPALACA

Because, Vuthsa,
I'd have thee for my own and not as in
Thy city where a thousand shared thy rays
Who were strangers to me. In my own domain,
Part of a world that's old and dear to me,
Where thou shalt be no king, but Vuthsa only
And I can bind with many dearest ties
Heaped on thee at my will. This, Vuthsa, I desired

And therefore I have brought thee to this glade.

VUTHSA

And therefore I have come to thee alone.

GOPALACA

Thou must go farther.

VUTHSA

Yes? Then haste. Was that
A clank of arms amid the silent trees?

*He makes as if to rise, but
Gopalaca restrains him.*

GOPALACA

Thy escort.

VUTHSA

Mine?

GOPALACA

My father sends for thee.
I seize upon thee, Vuthsa, thou art mine,
My captive and my prize. I'll bear thee far
As Heaven's great eagle bore thy mother once
Rapt to his unattainable high hills.

As he speaks the armed men appear.

Swift, captain, swift! I hold the royal boy.
On to the tunnel of the Boar.

CAPTAIN

Haste, haste!

There is a growing rumour all around.

GOPALACA

Care not for that, but follow me and guard.

*They disappear among the trees.
Vasuntha enters.*

VASUNTHA

The forest lives with sound; but here all's empty.
The stake is thrown; it cannot be called in
Whatever happens.

*Armed men break in from all sides;
Yougundharayan, Roomunwath, Alurca.*

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Where is King Vuthsa? where?
His bow hangs lonely! sword and arrows lie.

VASUNTHA (*indifferently*)

I cannot tell.

ALURCA

Not tell! but you were here,
Were with him!

VASUNTHA

I was sent away like that.
But for a guess he's travelling far and fast
To Shiva in Avunthy.

ALURCA

And thou laughst,
Untimely jester!

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Impetuously pursue!
The forest ways and mountain openings flood
That flee to Avunthy. Over her treasonous borders
Drive in your angry search.

VASUNTHA

Thy king commands thee
To leave all twixt him and the strength that seeks
Their quarrel; throw not armies in the balance.
War shall not sound her conch; but Vuthsa only

Scene 3

*Avunthy. A road on a wooded hill-side overlooking the plain.
Gopalaca, Vuthsa in a chariot, surrounded by armed men.*

GOPALACA

Arrest our wheels. Those are our army's lights
That climb to us like fire-flies from the plain.

VUTHSA (*awakened from sleep*)

Is this Avunthy?

GOPALACA

We have passed her bounds.

VUTHSA

So, thou dear traitor, this thou from the first
Cam'st planning.

GOPALACA

This with more that follows it.

VUTHSA

Thou bearest me to thy father's town?

GOPALACA

Where thou

Shalt lie, a jewel guarded carefully,
Beside the dearest treasure of our house.

VUTHSA

I must be cooped up in a golden cage
As I was guarded in Cowsamby's walls.

You foes and friends think me your wealth inert,
 And all men hope to do their will with me.
 But now I warn you all that I will have
 My freedom and will do my own dear will
 By fraud or violence greater than your own.

GOPALACA

Thou canst not. If thou hadst thy bow indeed!

VUTHSA

Thou hadst me for the taking. I will break forth
 Almost as easily.

GOPALACA

Thou shalt find it hard,
 Such keepers shall enring thy steps.

VUTHSA

But I will
 And carry with me something costlier far
 Than what thou stealest from Cowsamby's realm.
 For I will have revenge.

GOPALACA

No wealth we have
 More precious than the thing I seize today.
 Therefore thy boast is vain.

VUTHSA

That I will see.
 Was it not thy brother rode behind our car?
 He passes now; call him.

GOPALACA

Vicurna, here!

VUTHSA

Come near, embrace me, brother of Gopalaca,
Loved for his sake and for thy own desired
Since I beheld thee, son of Mahasegn.

VICURNA

Vuthsa Udaian, in the battle's front
I had hoped to meet thee and compel thy praise
As half thy equal in the fight. But this
Is nearer, this is better.

VUTHSA

Thou art fair to see.
Thy father has two noble sons. Are there
No others of your great upspringing stock?

GOPALACA

Only a sister.

VUTHSA

The world has heard of her.

GOPALACA

Thou shalt behold.

VUTHSA

Oh then, it is pure gain
I go to in Avunthy. O the night
With all her glorious stars and from the trees
Millions of shrill cigalas peal one note,
A thunderous melody! Shall we be soon
In the golden city? But it will be night
And I shall hardly see her famous fanes.

GOPALACA

Dawn will have overtaken us in her skies
Passing our chariots long before Ujjayiny's seen.

Our vanguard nears; unite with them; descend.
Roomunwath's cohorts should tread close behind.

VUTHSA

They will not come. My fate must ride with me
Unhindered to Avunthy.

GOPALACA

Hasten in front
Towards my father fire-hooved messengers
To cry aloud to him the prize we bring
Richer than booty of his twenty wars.
Shiva has smiled on us.

VUTHSA

Vishnu on me.
Godheads, it is by strife that you grow one.

Act III

Avunthy. In the palace.

Scene 1

*A room in the royal apartments.
Mahasegn, Ungarica.*

MAHASEGN

I conquer still though not with glorious arms.
He's seized! the young victorious Vuthsa's mine,
A prisoner in my grasp.

UNGARICA (*laughing*)

Thou holdst the sun
Under thy arm-pit as the tailed god did.
What wilt thou do with it?

MAHASEGN

Make him my moon
And shine by him upon the eastern night.

UNGARICA

Thou canst?

MAHASEGN

Loved sceptic of my house, I can.
What thing desired has long escaped my hands
Since out of thy dim world I dragged thee conquered
Into our sun and breeze and azure skies
By force, my fortune?

UNGARICA

Yes, by force, but this
By force thou hast not done. Wilt thou depart
From thy own nature, Chunda Mahasegn,
And hop'st for victory?

MAHASEGN

Thou wert my strength, my fortune,
But never my counsellor! My own mind's my seer.

UNGARICA

I do not counsel, but obey and watch.
That is enough for me in your strange world,
For in your light I cannot guide myself.
Man is a creature blinded by the sun
Who errs by seeing; but the world that to you
Is darkness, — they who walk there, they have sight.
Such am I, for the shades have reared my soul.

MAHASEGN

What dost thou see?

UNGARICA

That Vuthsa is too great
For thy greatness, too cunning for thy cunning. He
Will bend not to thy pressure.

MAHASEGN

Thou hast bent,
The Titaness. This is a delicate boy
Softer than summer dews or like the lily
That yields to every gentle, insistent wave.
A hero? yes: all Aryan boys are that.

UNGARICA

Thou thinkst thy daughter thy proud fortune's wave,
He its bright flower — a nursling reared by gods

Only to be thy servant?

MAHASEGN

Thou hast seen?

I kept my counsel hidden in my soul.

UNGARICA

It is good; it is the thing my heart desires.
My daughter shall have empire.

MAHASEGN

No, thy son.

UNGARICA

No matter which. The first man of the age
Will occupy her heart; the pride and love
That are her faults will both be satisfied.
She will be happy.

MAHASEGN

Call thy child, my queen.

For I will teach her what her charm must weave.

UNGARICA

Her heart's her teacher. Call here, Vullabha,
The princess.

MAHASEGN

O, the heart, it is a danger,

A madness! Let the thinking mind prevail.

UNGARICA

We are women, king.

MAHASEGN

Be princesses! My daughter
Has dignity, pride, wisdom, noble hopes;

MAHASEGN

A greater part which makes thee my ally
And golden instrument; for thou, my child,
Must be, who only canst, my living sceptre,
Thou my ambassador to win his mind
And thou my viceroy over his subject will.

VASAVADUTTA

Will he submit to this?

MAHASEGN

Yes, if thou choose.

VASAVADUTTA

I choose, my father, since it is thy will.
That thou shouldst rule the world, is my desire;
My nation's greatness is my dearest good.

MAHASEGN

Thou hast kept my proudest lessons; lose them not.
O, thou art not as feebler natures are!
Thou wilt not put thy own ambitions first,
Nor justify a blind and clamorous heart.

VASAVADUTTA

My duty to my country and my sire
Shall lead me.

MAHASEGN

I will not teach thy woman's brain
How thou shalt mould this youth, nor warn thy will
Against the passions of the blood. The heart
And senses over common women rule;
Thou hast a mind.

VASAVADUTTA

Father, this is my pride,

That thou ennoblest me to be the engine
Of thy great fortunes; that alone I am.

MAHASEGN

Thou wilt not yield then to the heart's desire?

VASAVADUTTA

Let him desire, but I will nothing yield.
I am thy daughter; greatest kings should sue
And take my grace as an unhoped-for joy.

MAHASEGN

Thou art my pupil; statecraft was not wasted
Upon thy listening brain. Thou seest, my queen?

UNGARICA

As if this babe could understand! Go, go
And leave me with my child. I will speak to her
Another language.

MAHASEGN

Breathe no breath against
My purpose!

UNGARICA

Fearst thou that?

MAHASEGN

No; speak to her.
He goes out from the chamber.

UNGARICA (*taking Vasavadutta into her arms*)

Rest here, my child, to whom another bosom
Will soon be refuge. Thou hast heard the King;
Hear now thy mother. Thou wilt know, my bliss,
The fiercest sweet ordeal that can seize
A woman's heart and body. O my child,

Thou wilt house fire, thou wilt see living gods,
And all thou hast thought and known will melt away
Into a flame and be reborn. What now
I speak, thou dost not understand, but wilt
Before many nights have kept thy sleepless eyes.
My child, the flower blooms for its flowerhood only,
To fill the air with fragrance and with bloom,
And not to make its parent bed more high.
Not for thy sire thy mother brought thee forth
But thy own nature's growth and heart's delight
And for a husband and for children born.
My child, let him who clasps thee be thy god
That thou mayst be his goddess; make your wedded arms
Heaven's fences; let his will be thine and thine
Be his, his happiness thy regal throne.
O Vasavadutta, when thy heart awakes
Thou shalt obey thy sovereign heart, nor yield
Allegiance to the clear-eyed selfish gods.
Do now thy father's will, the god awake
Shall do his own. Fear not, whatever threatens.
Thy mother watches over thee, my child.

She goes out.

VASAVADUTTA

I love her best, but do not understand;
My mind can always grasp my father's thoughts.
If I must wed, it shall be one I rule.
Vuthsa! Vuthsa Udaian! I have heard
Only a far-flung name. What is the man?
A flame? a flower? High like Gopalaca
Or else some golden-fair and soft-eyed youth?
I have a fluttering in my heart to know.

Scene 2

The same.

Mahasegn, Ungarica, Gopalaca, Vuthsa.

GOPALACA

King of Avunthy, see thy will performed.
The boy who rivalled thy ripe victor years,
I bring a captive to thy house.

MAHASEGN

Gopalaca,
Thou hast done well, thou art indeed my son.
Vuthsa, —

VUTHSA

Hail, monarch of the West. We have met
In equal battle; it has pleased me to approach
Thy greatness otherwise.

MAHASEGN

Pleased thee, vain boy!
No, but thy fate indignant that thou strov'st
Against heaven-chosen fortunes.

VUTHSA

Think it so.
I am here. What is thy will with me or wherefore
Hast thou by violence brought me to thy house?

MAHASEGN

To serve me as earth's sovereign and thy own
Assuming my great yoke as all have done

From Indus to the South.

VUTHSA

This is thy error.

Thou hast not great Cowsamby's monarch here,
But Vuthsa only, Suthaneka's son
Who sprang from sires divine.

MAHASEGN

And where then dwells

Cowsamby's youthful majesty, if not
In thee its golden vessel?

VUTHSA

Where my vacant throne

In high Cowsamby stands. Thou shouldst know that.
There is a kingship which exceeds the king.
For Vuthsa unworthy, Vuthsa captive, slain,
This is not captive, this cannot be slain.
It far transcends our petty human forms,
It is a nation's greatness. This, O King,
Was once Parikshith, this Urjoona's seed,
Janaméjoya, this was Suthaneke,
This Vuthsa; and when Vuthsa is no more,
This shall live deathless in a hundred kings.

MAHASEGN

Thou speakest like the unripe boy thou seemst,
With thoughts high-winging. Grown minds keep to earth's
More humble sureness and prefer her touches.
I am content to have thy gracious body here,
This earth of kingship; with things sensible
I deal, for they are pertinent to our days,
And not with any high and unseen thought.

VUTHSA

My body? deal with it. It is thy slave

And captive by thy choice and by my own.
 What thou canst do with Vuthsa, do, O King;
 In nothing will I pledge Cowsamby's majesty,
 But Vuthsa is a prisoner in thy hands.
 Him I defend not from thy iron will.

MAHASEGN

My prisoner, thou shalt not so escape
 My purpose.

VUTHSA

I embrace it. If escape
 Were my desire, I should not now be here.
 It is not bars and gates can keep me.

MAHASEGN

But I will give thee other jailors, boy,
 Surer than my armed sentries, against whom
 Thou dar'st not lift thy helpless hands.

VUTHSA

Find such;

I am satisfied.

MAHASEGN

Grow humbler in thy bearing.
 Be Vuthsa or be great Cowsamby's king,
 Know thyself only for a captive and a slave.

VUTHSA

I accept thy stern rebuke, as I accept
 Whatever state the wiser gods provide
 And bend my action to their mood and thought.

MAHASEGN

Thou knowst the law of the high sacrifice,
 Where many kings as menials serve the one,

And this compelled have many proud lords done
 Whose high beginnings disappear in time.
 Now I will make my throned triumphant days
 A high continual solemn sacrifice
 Of kingship. There shalt thou, great Bharuth's heir,
 Dwell in my house a royal servitor,
 And as most fitting thy yet tender years,
 My daughter's serf. She with her handmaidens
 Shall be thy jailors whose firm gracious cordon
 Thy strength disarmed stands helpless to transgress. To this
 Thy pride must, forced, consent.

VUTHSA

Not only consent,
 But welcome with a proud aspiring mind
 Since to be Vasavadutta's servitor
 Is honour, happiness and fortune's grace.
 My greatness this shall raise, not cast it down,
 King Mahasegn.

MAHASEGN

Lead now, Gopalaca,
 Thy gift, her servant, to thy sister's feet.
 He has a music that the gods desire,
 His brush leaves Nature wondering and his song
 The luminous choristers of heaven have taught.
 All this is hers to please her. Boy, thou smilest?

VUTHSA

What thou hast said, is merely truth. And yet
 I smiled to see how strong and arrogant minds
 Think themselves masters of the things they do.

*Gopalaca goes out with Vuthsa
 towards Vasavadutta's apartments.*

MAHASEGN

This is a charming boy, Ungarica,

Scene 3

*A room in Vasavadutta's apartments.
Vasavadutta, Munjoolica, Umba.*

VASAVADUTTA
But hast thou seen him?

MUNJOOLICA
Yes!

VASAVADUTTA
Speak, perverse silence.
Thou canst chatter when thou wilt.

MUNJOOLICA
What shall I say
Except that thou art always fortunate.
Since first thy soft feet moved upon our earth,
O living Luxmie, beauty, wealth and joy
Run overpacked into thy days, and grandeurs
Unmeasured. Now the greatest king on earth
Becomes thy servant.

VASAVADUTTA
That's the greatest king's
Proud fortune and not mine; for nothing now
Can raise me higher than I am whose father
Is sovereign over greatest kings. Nothing are these
And what I long to know thou dost not tell.
What is he like?

MUNJOOLICA

I have seen the lord of love
Wearing a golden human body.

VASAVADUTTA (*with a pleased smile*)

So fair!

MUNJOOLICA

As thou art; yes, and more.

VASAVADUTTA

More!

MUNJOOLICA

Cry not out.
His eyes are proud and smiling like the god's;
His voice is like the sudden call of Spring.

VASAVADUTTA

O dear to me even as myself, wear this!
She puts her own chain round her neck.

MUNJOOLICA

That is my happiness; keep thy gifts.

VASAVADUTTA

Think them
My love around thy neck. Thou hast spoken truly,
Not woven fictions to beguile my heart?
Then tell me more, tell tell, thou dearest one.
Not that I care for these things, but would know.

MUNJOOLICA

Let thy eyes care not then, but gaze.
Gopalaca comes, bringing in Vuthsa.

VASAVADUTTA

My brother!

Long thou wast far from me.

GOPALACA

For thy sake far.

Much have I flung, my sister, at thy feet
Nor thought my gifts were worthy of thy smile,
Not even Sourashtra's captive daughter here,
The living flower and jewel of her race.
But now I give indeed. This is that famous boy,
Vuthsa Udaian, great Cowsamby's king,
Brought by my hands to serve thee in our house.
Look on him; tell me if I have deserved.

VASAVADUTTA (*looking covertly at Vuthsa*)

Much love, dear brother; not that any prize
I value as of worth for such as we,
But thy love gives it price.

GOPALACA

My love for both.

My gift is precious to me, for my heart
Possessed him long before my hands have seized.
Then love him well, for so thou lov'st me twice.

VASAVADUTTA

Dear then and prized although a slave.

GOPALACA

Are we not all

Thy servants? The wide costly world is less,
My sister, than thy noble charm and grace
And beauty and the sweetness of thy soul
Deserve, O Vasavadutta.

VASAVADUTTA (*smiling, pleased*)
Is it so?

GOPALACA
My sister, thou wast born from Luxmie's heart,
And we, thy brothers, feel in thee, not us,
Our father's fate inherited; our warrings
Seek for thy girdle all the conquered earth.

VASAVADUTTA
I know it, brother.

GOPALACA
From thy childhood, yes,
Thou seem'st to know, ruling with queenly eyes.
But since thou knowest, queen, assume thy fiefs
Cowsamby and Ayodhya for our house!

VASAVADUTTA (*glancing at Vuthsa, then avoiding his eyes*)
Since he's my slave, they are already mine.

GOPALACA
No; understand me, sister; make them thine.
Thou, Vuthsa, serve thy mistress and obey.

He goes out.

VASAVADUTTA
He is a boy, a marvellous golden boy.
I am surely older! I can play with him.
There is no fear, no difficulty at all.
(*to Vuthsa*)
What is thy name? I'll hear it from thy lips.

VUTHSA
Vuthsa.

VASAVADUTTA

Thou tremblest, Vuthsa; dost thou fear?

VUTHSA

Perhaps. There is a fear in too much joy.

VASAVADUTTA (*smiling*)

I did not hear. My brother loves thee well.
Take comfort. If thou serve me faithfully,
Thou hast no cause for any grief at all.
Thou art Cowsamby's king —

VUTHSA

Men call me so.

VASAVADUTTA

And now my servant.

VUTHSA

That my heart repeats.

VASAVADUTTA (*smiling*)

I did not hear. Cowsamby's king, my slave,
What canst thou do to please me?

VUTHSA

Dost thou choose

To know the songs that shake the tranquil gods
Or hear on earth the harps of heaven? dost thou
Desire such lines and hues of living truth
As make earth's shadows pale? or wilt thou have
The infinite abysmal silences
Made vocal, clothed with form? These things at birth
The Kinnarie, Vidyadhur and Gundhurva
Around me crowding on Himaloy dumb
Gave to the silent god that lived in me
Before my outer mind held thought. All these

I can make thine.

VASAVADUTTA

Vuthsa, I take all these,
All thy life's ornaments that thou wearst, for mine
And am not satisfied.

VUTHSA

Dost thou desire
The earth made thine by my victorious bow?
Send me then forth to battle; earth is thine.

VASAVADUTTA

I take the earth and am not satisfied.

VUTHSA

Say then what thing shall please thee in thy slave,
What thou desir'st from Vuthsa.

VASAVADUTTA

Do I know?
Not less than all thou canst and all thou hast, —
(hesitating a little)
And all thou art.

VUTHSA

All's thine.

VASAVADUTTA

I speak and hear
And know not what I say, nor what thou meanst.

VUTHSA

The deepest things are those thought seizes not;
Our spirits live their hidden meaning out.

VASAVADUTTA (*after a troubled silence in which she
tries to recover herself*)

I know not how we passed into this strain.
Such words are troubling to the mind and heart;
Leave them.

VUTHSA
They have been spoken.

VASAVADUTTA
Let them rest.

Vuthsa, my slave who promisest me much,
Great things thou offerest, small things I'll demand
From thee, yet hard. Since he's my prisoner,
Munjoolica and Umba, guard this boy;
You are his jailors. When I need him near me
Bring him to me. Go, Vuthsa, to thy room.
Vuthsa falls at her feet which he touches.
What dost thou? It is not permitted thee.

VUTHSA
Not this? That's hard.

VASAVADUTTA (*troubled and feigning anger*)
Thou art too bold a slave.

VUTHSA
Let me be earth beneath thy tread at least.

VASAVADUTTA
O, take him from me; I have enough of him.
Thou, Umba, see he bribes thee not or worse.

UMBA
I will be bribed to make thee smart for that.
Where shall we put him? In the turret rooms
Beside the terrace where thou walkst when moonlight

Sleeps on the sword?

VASAVADUTTA

There; it is nearest.

UMBA (*taking Vuthsa's hand*)

Come.

They go out, leaving Vasavadutta alone.

VASAVADUTTA

Will he charm me from my purpose with a smile?

How beautiful he is, how beautiful!

There is a fear, there is a happy fear.

But he is mine, his eyes confessed my yoke.

Surely I shall do all my will with him.

I sent him from me, his words troubled me

And yet delighted. They have a witchery, —

No, not his words, but voice. 'Tis not his voice,

Nor yet his face, his smile, his flower-soft eyes,

And yet it is all these and something more.

(shaking her head)

I fear it will be difficult after all.

Scene 4

*The tower-room beside the terrace.
Vuthsa on a couch.*

VUTHSA

All that I dreamed or heard of her, her charm
Exceeds. She's mine! she has shuddered at my touch;
Thrice her eyes faltered as they gazed in mine.

*He lies back with closed eyes;
Munjoolica enters and contemplates him.*

MUNJOOLICA

O golden Love! thou art not of this earth.
He too is Vasavadutta's! All is hers,
As I am now and one day all the earth.
Vuthsa, thou sleepest not, then.

VUTHSA

Sleep jealous waits
Finding another image in my eyes.

MUNJOOLICA

Thou art disobedient. Wast thou not commanded
To sleep at once?

VUTHSA

Sleep disobeys, not I.
But thou too wakest, yet no thoughts should have
To keep thy lids apart.

MUNJOOLICA

How knowst thou that?

I am thy jailor and I walk my rounds.

VUTHSA

Bright jailor, thou art jealous without cause.
Who would escape from heaven's golden bars?
Thy name's Munjoolica? So is thy form
A bower of the graceful things of earth.

MUNJOOLICA

I had another name but it has ceased,
Forgotten.

VUTHSA

Thou wast then Sourashtra's child?

MUNJOOLICA

I am still that royalty clouded, even as thou
Captive Cowsamby. Me Gopalaca
In battle seized, brought a disdainful gift
To Vasavadutta.

VUTHSA

Since our fates are one,
Should we not be allies?

MUNJOOLICA

For what bold purpose?

VUTHSA

How knowest thou I have one?

MUNJOOLICA

Were I a man!

VUTHSA

Wouldst thou have freedom? wilt thou give me help?

MUNJOOLICA

In nothing against her I love and serve.

VUTHSA

No, but conspire to serve and love her best
And make her queen of all the Aryan earth.

MUNJOOLICA

My payment?

VUTHSA

Name it thyself, when all is ours.

MUNJOOLICA

Content; it will be large.

VUTHSA

However large.

MUNJOOLICA

Now shall I be avenged upon my fate!
What thy heart asks I know; too openly
Thou carriest the yearning in thy eyes.
Vuthsa, she loves thee as the half-closed bud
Thrills to the advent of a wonderful dawn
And like a dreamer half-awake perceives
The faint beginnings of a sunlit world.
Doubt not success more than that dawn must break;
For she is thine.

VUTHSA

Take my heart's gratitude
For the sweet assurance.

MUNJOOLICA

I am greedy. Only
Thy gratitude?

VUTHSA

What wouldst thou have?

MUNJOOLICA

The ring

Upon thy finger, Vuthsa, for my own.

VUTHSA (*putting it on her finger*)

It shall live happier on a fairer hand.

MUNJOOLICA

Since thou hast paid me instantly and well,
I will be zealous, Vuthsa, in thy cause.
But my great bribe is in the future still.

VUTHSA

Claim it in our Cowsamby.

MUNJOOLICA

There indeed.

Sleep now.

VUTHSA

By thy good help I now shall sleep.

Munjoolica goes out.

Music is sweet; to rule the heart's rich chords
Of human lyres much sweeter. Art's sublime
But to combine great ends more sovereign still,
Accepting danger and difficulty to break
Through proud and violent opposites to our will.
Song is divine, but more divine is love.

Scene 5

A room in Vasavadutta's apartments.

VASAVADUTTA

I govern no longer what I speak and do.
Is this the fire my mother spoke of? Oh,
It is sweet, is sweet. But I will not be mastered
By any equal creature. Let him serve
Obediently and I will load his lovely head
With costliest favours. He's my own, my own,
My slave, my toy to play with as I choose,
And shall not dare to play with me. I think he dares;
I do not know, I think he would presume.
He's gentle, brilliant, bold and beautiful.
I'll send for him and chide and put him down;
I'll chide him harshly; he must not presume.
O, I have forgotten almost my father's will;
Yet it was mine. Before I lose it quite,
I will compel a promise from the boy.
Will it be hard when he is all my own?

(she calls)

Umba! Bring Vuthsa to me from his tower.
His music is a voice that cries to me,
His songs are chains he hangs around my heart.
I must not hear them often; I forget
That I am Vasavadutta, that he is
My house's foe and only Vuthsa feel,
Think Vuthsa only, while my captive heart
Beats in world-Vuthsa and on Vuthsa throbs.
This must not be.

Umba brings in Vuthsa and retires.

Go, Umba. Vuthsa, stand

Before me.

VUTHSA

It is my sovereign's voice that speaks.

VASAVADUTTA

Be silent! Lower thy eyes; they are too bold
To gaze on me, my slave.

VUTHSA

Blame not my eyes;
They follow the dumb motion of a heart
Uplifted to adore thee.

VASAVADUTTA (*with a shaken voice*)

Dost thou really
Adore me, Vuthsa?

VUTHSA

Earth's one goddess, yes.

VASAVADUTTA (*mildly*)

But, Vuthsa, men adore with humble eyes
Upon their deity's feet.

VUTHSA

Oh, let me so
Adore thee then, thus humble at thy feet,
Their sleeping moonbeams in my eyes, and place
My hands in Paradise beneath these flowers
That bless too oft the chill unheeding earth.
Let this not be forbidden to thy slave.
So let me worship and the carolling of thy speech
So listen.

VASAVADUTTA

Vuthsa, thou must not presume.

VUTHSA

O even when faint thy voice, thy every word
Reaches my soul.

VASAVADUTTA

Wilt thou not let me free?

VUTHSA

Yes, if thou bid; but do not.

VASAVADUTTA (*bending down to caress his hair*)

If really

And as my slave thou adorest, nothing more,
I will not bid.

VUTHSA

What more, when this means all?

VASAVADUTTA

But if thou art such, is not all thou hast
Mine, mine? Why dost thou, Vuthsa, keep from me
My own?

VUTHSA

Take all; claim all.

VASAVADUTTA (*collecting herself*)

Cowsamby first.

VUTHSA

It shall be thine, a jewel for thy feet.

VASAVADUTTA

Thy kingdom, Vuthsa, for my will to rule.

VUTHSA

It shall be thine, the garden of thy pomp.

VASAVADUTTA

Shall?

VUTHSA

Is it not far? We must go there, my queen,
Thou to receive and I to give.

VASAVADUTTA

I wish

To be there. But, Udaian, thou must vow,
And the word bind thee, that none else shall be
Cowsamby's queen and thou my servant live
Vowed to obedience underneath my throne.

VUTHSA

Thou only shalt be over my heart a queen,
Yes, if thou wilt, the despot of my thoughts,
My hopes, my aims, but I will not obey
If thou command disloyalty to thee,
My sweet, sole sovereign.

VASAVADUTTA (*smiling*)

This reserve I yield.

(*hesitatingly*)

But Vuthsa, if as subject of my sire,
High Chunda Mahasegn, I bid thee rule?

VUTHSA

My queen, it will be void.

VASAVADUTTA

Void? And thy vow?

VUTHSA

Would it not be disloyalty in me,
To serve another sovereign?

VASAVADUTTA (*vexed, yet pleased*)
O, thou playst with me.

VUTHSA
No, queen. What's wholly mine, that wholly take.
But this belongs to many other souls.

VASAVADUTTA
To whom?

VUTHSA
Their names are endless. Bharuth first,
Who ruled the Aryan earth that bears his name,
And great Dushyanta and Pururavus'
Famed warlike son and all their peerless line,
Urjoona and Parikshith and his sons
Whom God descended to enthrone, and all
Who shall come after us, my heirs and thine
Who chooseth me, and a great nation's multitudes,
And the Kuru ancestors and long posterity
Who all must give consent.

VASAVADUTTA
Thy thoughts are high.
But if thy life must fade a prisoner here?
My father is inflexible and stern.

VUTHSA
Dost thou desire this really in thy heart?
Vuthsa degraded, art thou not degraded too?

VASAVADUTTA
My rule thou hast vowed?

VUTHSA
To obey thee in all things
Throned in Cowsamby, not as here I must,

Thy father's captive. There I shall be thine.

VASAVADUTTA

Leave, Vuthsa, leave me. Take him, Umba, from me.

UMBA (*entering, in Vasavadutta's ear*)

Who now is bribed? We are all traitors now.

She goes out with Vuthsa.

VASAVADUTTA

O joy, if he and all were only mine.

O greatness, to be queen of him and earth.

I grow a rebel to my father's house.

Act IV

Scene 1

A room in the royal apartments.

Ungarica, Vasavadutta.

UNGARICA

Thou singest well; a cry of Vuthsa's art
Has stolen into thy song.

She takes Vasavadutta on her lap.

Look up at me,

My daughter, let me gaze into thy eyes
And from their silence learn thy treasured thoughts.
Thou knowest I can read twixt human lids
The secrets of the throbbing heart? I search
In Vasavadutta's eyes by what strange skill
Vuthsa has crept into my daughter's voice.
Thou keepst thy lashes lowered? thou wilt not let me look?
But that too I can read.

VASAVADUTTA

O mother, mother mine,
Plague me not; thou knowst all things; comfort me.

UNGARICA

Thou needest comfort?

VASAVADUTTA

Yes, against myself
Who trouble my own heart.

UNGARICA

Why? though I know.
 Thou wilt not speak? I'll speak then for thee.
*Vasavadutta alarmed puts her hand
 over Ungarica's mouth.*
 Off!

It is because thou canst not here control
 What thy immortal part with rapture wills
 And the mortal longingly desires; for yet
 Thy proud heart cannot find the way to yield.

VASAVADUTTA

If thou knewst, mother.

UNGARICA

No, thou hast the will
 But not the art, Love's learner. O my proud
 Sweet ignorance, 'tis he shall find the way
 And thou shalt know the joy of being forced
 To what thy heart desires.

VASAVADUTTA

O mother!

She hides her face in Ungarica's bosom.

UNGARICA

Thou hast done thy father's will?
 Thy husband shall be vassal to thy sire?

VASAVADUTTA

Have I a father or a house? O none,
 O none, O none exists but only he.

UNGARICA

Let none exist for thee but the dear all thou lov'st.
 I charge thee, Vasavadutta, when thou rul'st
 In far Cowsamby, let this be thy reign

To heap on him delight and seek his good.
Raise his high fortunes, shelter from grief his heart,
Even with thy own tears buy his joy and peace,
Nor let one clamorous thought of self revolt
Against him.

VASAVADUTTA

Mother, thou canst see my heart;
Is this not there? Can it do otherwise,
Being thus conquered, even if it willed?

UNGARICA

Child, 'tis my care to give thy heart a voice
And bind it to its nobler loving self.
Let this be now thy pride.

VASAVADUTTA

It is, it is.
But, mother, it is very sweet to rule,
And if I rule him for his good, not mine?

UNGARICA

Thou canst not be corrected! Queenling, rule.
Go now; thy brother comes.

Vasavadutta escapes towards her own apartments;

Vicurna enters from the outer door.

Why is thy brow

A darkness?

VICURNA

Wherefore was King Vuthsa brought
Into Ujjayiny? why is captive kept?

UNGARICA

Thy father's will, who knows.

VICURNA

But I would know.

UNGARICA

Him ask.

VICURNA (*taking her face between his hands*)

I ask thee; thou must answer.

UNGARICA

To wed

Thy sister.

VICURNA

Let him wed and be released.

Our fame is smirched; the city murmurs. War
Threatens from Vuthsa's nation and our cause
Is evil.

UNGARICA

Wedding her he must consent

To be our vassal.

VICURNA

Thus are vassals made?

Thus empires built? This is a shameful thing.
Release him first, then with proud war subdue.

UNGARICA

Thou knowest thy father's stern, unbending will
Whom we must all obey.

VICURNA

Not I, or not

In evil things.

UNGARICA

Respect thy father! He
Will not, unsatisfied, release his foe.
Demand not this.

VICURNA

I will release him then.

UNGARICA

Him by what right who is thy house's peril?

VICURNA

He is a hero and he is my friend.

UNGARICA

Didst thou not help to bring him captive here?

VICURNA

For Vasavadutta. I will bear them both
Out from the city in my chariot far
Into the freedom of the hills. I will hew down
All who oppose me.

UNGARICA

Rash and violent boy,
So wilt thou make bad worse. Await the hour
When Vuthsa shall himself demand thy aid.

VICURNA

The hour will come?

UNGARICA

He will be free.

VICURNA

Or I myself will act. Then soon,

He goes out.

UNGARICA

This too is well
And most that the proud chivalries of old
Are not yet dead in all men's hearts. O God
Shiva, thou mak'st me fortunate in my sons.

Scene 2

Vasavadutta's chamber.

Vuthsa, Vasavadutta.

VUTHSA

Thy hands have yet no cunning with the strings.
'Tis not the touch alone but manner of the touch
That calls the murmuring spirit forth, — as thus.

VASAVADUTTA

I cannot manage it; my hand rebels.

VUTHSA

I will compel it then.

He takes her hand in his.

Thou dost not chide.

VASAVADUTTA

I am weary of chiding; and how rule a boy
Who takes delight in being chidden? And then
'Twas only my hand. What dost thou?

*Vuthsa takes her by the arms and
draws her towards him.*

VUTHSA

What thy eyes

Commanded me and what for many days
My heart has clamoured for in hungry pain.

VASAVADUTTA

Presumptuous! wilt thou not immediately
Release me?

VUTHSA

Not till thy heart's will is done.

He draws her down on his knees, resisting.

VASAVADUTTA

What will? I did not bid. What will? Vuthsa!

Vuthsa! I did not bid. This is not well.

He masters her and holds her on his bosom.

Her head falls on his shoulder.

VUTHSA

O my desire, why should we still deny
Delight that calls to us? Strive not with joy,
But yield me the sweet mortal privilege
That makes me equal with the happiest god
In all the heavens of fulfilled desire.

O on thy sweet averted cheek! My queen,
My wilful empress, all in vain thou striv'st
To keep from me the treasure of thy lips
I have deserved so long.

VASAVADUTTA

Vuthsa! Vuthsa!

He forces her lips up to his and kisses her.

VUTHSA

O honey of thy mouth! The joy, the joy
Was sweeter. I have drunk in heaven at last,
Let what will happen.

*Vasavadutta escapes and stands
quivering at a distance.*

VASAVADUTTA

Stand there! approach me not.

VUTHSA

I thought 'twould be enough for many ages;

But 'tis not so.

VASAVADUTTA

Go from me, seek thy room.

VUTHSA

Have I so much offended? I will go.

He pretends to go.

VASAVADUTTA

Vuthsa, I am not angry; do not go.
Sit; I must chide thee. Was this well to abuse
My kindness, to mistake indulgence? — No,
I am not angry; thou art only a boy.
I have permitted thee to love because
Thou saidst thou couldst not help it. This again
Thou must not do, — not thus.

VUTHSA

Then teach me how.

VASAVADUTTA (*with a troubled smile*)

I never had so importunate a slave.

I must think out some punishment for thee.

*She comes to him suddenly, takes him to her
bosom and kisses him with passion.*

VUTHSA

O if 'tis this, I will again offend.

*She clings to him, kisses him again,
then puts him away from her.*

VASAVADUTTA

Go from me, go. Wilt thou not go? Munjoolica!

VUTHSA

She is not here to help thee against thy heart.

But I will go; thou wilt it.

VASAVADUTTA

Wilt thou leave me?

VUTHSA

Never! thus, thus into my bosom grow,
O Vasavadutta.

VASAVADUTTA

O my happiness!

O Vuthsa, only name that's sweet on earth
I have murmured to the silence of the hours,
Give me delight, let me endure thy clasp
For ever. O loveliest head on all the earth!

VUTHSA

If we could thus remain through many ages,
Nor Time grow weary ever of such bliss,
O Vasavadutta!

VASAVADUTTA

I have loved thee always

Even when I knew it not. Was't not the love
Secret between us, drew thee here by force,
Vuthsa?

VUTHSA

Thou wilt not now refuse thy lips?

VASAVADUTTA

Nothing to thee.

VUTHSA

Yes, thou shalt be my queen
Surrendered henceforth, I thy slave enthroned.
Give me the largess of thyself that I may be

The constant vassal of thy tyrant eyes
And captive of thy beauty all my days
And homage pay to thy sweet sovereign soul.
Thus, thus accept me.

VASAVADUTTA

I accept, my king,
Thy service and thy homage and thy love.
If in return the bounty of myself
I lavish on thee, will it be enough?
Can it hold thy life as thou wilt fill all mine?

VUTHSA

Weave thyself into morn and noon and eve.
We will not be as man and woman are
Who are with partial oneness satisfied,
Divided in our works, but one large soul
Parted in two dear bodies for more bliss.
For all my occupations thou shalt rule,
And those that take me from thy blissful shadow
Still with thy sweet remembrance shall inspired
Be done by thee.

VASAVADUTTA

If thy heart strays from me, —

VUTHSA

Never my heart.

VASAVADUTTA

If thy eyes stray from me,
O Vuthsa, —

VUTHSA

If I view all beautiful things
With natural delight, thou wilt pardon that
Because thou wilt share the joy.

VASAVADUTTA

Then must I find
Thy beauty there.

VUTHSA

Tonight, my love, my love,
Shall we not linger heart on heart tonight?

VASAVADUTTA

Ah, Vuthsa, no.

VUTHSA

Does not thy heart cry, yes?
Are we not wedded? Shall we dally, love,
Upon heaven's outskirts, nor all Paradise
This hour compel?

VASAVADUTTA (*faintly*)

Munjoolica!

VUTHSA

Beloved, thy eyes
Beseech me to overcome thee with my will.
Munjoolica entering, Vuthsa releases Vasavadutta.

MUNJOOLICA

Princess!

VASAVADUTTA

Munjoolica! Why camest thou?

MUNJOOLICA

Call'dst thou not?

VASAVADUTTA

'Tis forgotten. Oh, I remember.
'Twas to lead Vuthsa to his prison. (*low*) Smile,

And I will beat thee! It was all thy fault.

MUNJOLICA

Oh, very little. Come, the hour is late;
The Princess' maidens will come trooping in.
Turn not reluctant eyes behind but come.

*She takes Vuthsa by both wrists
and leads him out.*

VASAVADUTTA

There is a fire within me and a cry.
My longings have all broken in a flood
And I am the tossed spray! O my desire
That criest for the beauty of his limbs
And to feel all his body with thyself
And lose thy soul in his sweet answering soul,
Wilt thou not all this night be silent? I
Will walk upon the terrace in moonlight;
Perhaps the large, silent night will give me peace.
For now 'twere vain to sleep. O in his arms!
His arms about me and the world expunged!

Scene 3

*The tower-room by the terrace.
Vuthsa asleep on a couch; Munjoolica.*

MUNJOOLICA

He sleeps and now to lure my victim here.
You! princess! Vasavadutta!

VASAVADUTTA (*appearing at the doorway*)
Didst thou call?

MUNJOOLICA

Yes, to come in from moonlight to the moon.
Thou hast never seen him yet asleep.

VASAVADUTTA

He sleeps!

MUNJOOLICA

His curls are pillowed on one golden arm
Like clouds upon the moon. Wilt thou not see?

VASAVADUTTA

I dare not. I will stand here and will see.

MUNJOOLICA

Thou shalt not. Either pass or enter in.

VASAVADUTTA

Thou playst the tyrant? I will stand and see.

MUNJOOLICA (*pushing her suddenly in*)
In with thee!

VASAVADUTTA
Munjoolica!

MUNJOOLICA
Hush, wake him not!
She drags her to the couch-side.

Is he not beautiful?
She draws back and after a moment goes quietly out and closes the door.

VASAVADUTTA
Oh, now I feel
My mother's heart when over me she bowed
Wakeful at midnight! He has never had
Since his strange birth a mother's, sister's love.
O sleeping soul of my beloved, hear
My vow, that while thy Vasavadutta lives,
Thou shalt not lack again one heart's desire,
One tender bodily want. All things at once,
Wife, mother, sister, lover, playmate, friend,
Queen, comrade, counsellor I will be to thee.
Self shall not chill my heart with wedded strife,
Nor age nor custom pale my fire of love.
I have that strength in me, the strength to love of gods.
A tress of her hair falls on his face and awakes him.

VUTHSA
O Vasavadutta, thou hast come to me!

VASAVADUTTA
It was not I! Munjoolica dragged me in.
O where is she? The door!
She hastens to the door and finds it bolted from outside.

Munjoolica!

What is this jest? I shall be angry. Open.

MUNJOOOLICA (*outside, solemnly*)

Bolted.

VASAVADUTTA

For pity, sweet Munjoolica!

MUNJOOOLICA

I settle my accounts. Be happy. I
Am gone.

VASAVADUTTA

Go not, go not, Munjoolica.

VUTHSA (*coming to her*)

She's gone, the thrice-blessed mischief, and tonight
This happy prison thou gav'st me is thine too.
Goddess! thou art shut in with thy delight.
Why wouldst thou flee then through the doors of heaven?

VASAVADUTTA

O not tonight! Be patient! I will ask
My father; he will give me as thy wife.

VUTHSA

Thou thinkst I'll take thee from thy father's hands
Like a poor Brahmin begging for a dole?
Not so do heroes' children wed, nor they
Who from the loins of puissant princes sprang.
With the free interchange of looks and hearts
Nobly self-given, heaven for the priest
And the heart's answers for the holy verse,
They are wedded or by wished-for violence torn
Consenting, yet resisting from the midst
Of many armed men. So will I wed thee,
O Vasavadutta, so will bear by force

Out of the house and city of my foes
Breaking through hostile gates. By a long kiss
I'll seal thy lips that vainly would forbid.
Let thy heart speak instead the word of joy,
O Vasavadutta.

VASAVADUTTA

Do with me what thou wilt, for I am thine.

Act V

Scene 1

*A room in Vasavadutta's apartments.
Vasavadutta, Munjoolica.*

VASAVADUTTA
So thou hast dared to come.

MUNJOOLICA
I have. Thou, dare
To look me in the eyes. Thou canst not. Then?

VASAVADUTTA
Hast thou no fear of punishment at all?

MUNJOOLICA
For shutting thee in with heaven? none, none at all.

VASAVADUTTA
How didst thou dare?

MUNJOOLICA
How didst thou dare, proud girl,
To make of kings and princesses thy slaves?
How dare to drag Sourashtra's daughter here,
To keep her as thy servant and to load
With gifts, caresses, chidings and commands,
The puppet of thy sweet imperious will?
Thinkst thou my heart within me was not hot?
But now I am avenged on thee and all.

VASAVADUTTA

Vindictive traitress, I will beat thee.

MUNJOLICA

Do

And I will laugh and ask thee of the night.

VASAVADUTTA

Then take thy chastisement.

She seizes and beats her with the tassels of her girdle.

MUNJOLICA

Stop! I'll bear no more.

Art not ashamed to spend thy heart in play
Knowing what thou hast done and what may come?
Think rather of what thou wilt do against
Thy dangerous morrow.

VASAVADUTTA

See what thou hast done!

How shall I look my father in the eyes?
What speak? what do? my Vuthsa how protect?

MUNJOLICA

Thy father must not know of this.

VASAVADUTTA

Thou thinkst

My joy can be shut in from every eye?
Besides thee I have other serving-girls.

MUNJOLICA

None who'd betray thee. This thing known, his wrath
Would strike thy husband.

VASAVADUTTA

Me rather. I will throw
My heart and body, twice his shield, between.

MUNJOOLICA

You will be torn apart and Vuthsa penned
In some deep pit or fiercer vengeance taken
To soothe the stern man's outraged heart.

VASAVADUTTA

Alas!
Thou hast a brain; give me thy counsel. The ill
Thyself hast done, must thou not remedy?

MUNJOOLICA

If thou entreat me much, I will and can.

VASAVADUTTA

I shall entreat thee!

MUNJOOLICA

Help thyself, proud child.

VASAVADUTTA

O, if I have thee at advantage ever!
Stay! I beseech thee, my Munjoolica, —

MUNJOOLICA

More humbly!

VASAVADUTTA

Oh!

She kneels.

I clasp thy feet. O friend,
In painful earnest I beseech thee now
To think, plan, spend for my sake all thy thought.
Remember how I soothed thy fallen life

Which might have been so hard. O thou my playmate,
Joy, servant, sister who hast always been,
Help me, save him, deceive my father's wrath,
Then ask from me what huge reward thou wilt.

MUNJOOLICA

Nothing at all. Vengeance is sweet enough
Upon thy father and Gopalaca.
I'm satisfied now. First give me a promise;
Obey me absolutely in all things
Till Vuthsa's free.

VASAVADUTTA

I promise. Thou art my guide
And I will walk religiously thy path.

MUNJOOLICA

Then think it done.

VASAVADUTTA (*smiling on Vuthsa who enters*)

Vuthsa, I asked not for thee.

VUTHSA

Thou didst. I heard thy heart demand me.

MUNJOOLICA

Hark!

What is this noise and laughter in the court?
See, see, the hunchbacked laughable old man!
What antics!

VUTHSA

Surely I know well those eyes.
Munjoolica, this is a friend. He must
Be brought here to me.

MUNJOOLICA

Princess, let us call him.

It is an admirable buffoon.

VASAVADUTTA

Fie on thee!

Is this an hour for jests and antics?

MUNJOOLICA (*looking significantly at her*)

Yes.

VASAVADUTTA

Call him.

MUNJOOLICA

And thou go in.

VASAVADUTTA

How, in!

MUNJOOLICA

This girl!

Hast thou not promised to obey me?

VASAVADUTTA

Yes.

She goes in. Munjoolica descends.

VUTHSA

Youngundharayan sends him. O, he strikes
 The hour as if a god had planned all out.
 This world's the puppet of a silent Will
 Which moves unguessed behind our acts and thoughts;
 Events bewildered follow its dim guidance
 And flock where they are needed. Is't not thus,
 O Thou, our divine Master, that Thou rulest,
 Nor car'st at all because Thy joy and power

Are seated in Thyself beyond the ages?

*Munjoolica returns bringing in
Vasuntha disguised.*

Who is this ancient shape thou bringest?

MUNJOOLICA

I'd know

If he has a tongue as famous as his hump
And as preposterous; that to learn I bring him.

VASUNTHA

Where is the only lady of the age?
Princes or else domestics, —

MUNJOOLICA

Something, sir, of both.

VASUNTHA

O masters then of princes, think not that I scorn
Your prouder royalty; but now if any
Will introduce my hungry old hunchback
To Avunthy's far-famed paragon of girls,
He shall have tithe of all my golden gains.

MUNJOOLICA

Why not to Avunthy's governor and a prison,
Yougundharayan's spy?

VASUNTHA (*looking at Vuthsa*)

What's this? what's this?

MUNJOOLICA

Strong tonic for a young old man.

VUTHSA

Speak freely

Thy message; there are only friends who hear.

VASUNTHA (*to Vuthsa, with a humorous glance at
Munjoolica*)

Thy hours were not ill-spent. But thou hast nearly
Frighted these poor young hairs to real grey,
My sportive lady. Hear now why I crouch
Beneath the hoary burden of this beard
And the insignia of a royal hump, —
And an end to jesting. Vuthsa, in thy city
The people clamour; they besiege thy ministers
Railing at treason and demanding thee;
Nor can their rage be stilled. Do swiftly then
Whatever thou must do yet, swiftly break forth
Or war will seek thee clamouring round these doors.
To bear thy message back to him I come,
Upon Avunthy's mountain verge who lurks,
Or else to aid thee if our help thou needest.

VUTHSA

Let him restrain my army forest-screened
Where the thick woodlands weave a border large
To the ochre garment round Avunthy's loins
Nearest Ujjayiny. Under the cavern-hill
Of Lokanatha let him lie, but never
Transgress that margin till my chariot comes.

VASUNTHA

'Tis all?

VUTHSA

In my own strength all else I'll do.

VASUNTHA

Good; then I go?

VUTHSA

Yes, but with gold, thy fee,
To colour thy going. Bring him gold, dear friend,

Or take from Vasavadutta gem or trinket
That shall bear out his mask to jealous eyes.

Munjoolica goes into the inner chamber.

VASUNTHA

Leave that to me.

VUTHSA

Thou hast adventured much
For my sake.

VASUNTHA

Poor Alurca cried to come,
But this thing asked for brains and he had only
Blunt courage and a harp. The danger's nothing,
But oh, this hump! I shall not soon walk straight,
Nor rid myself of all the loyal aches
I bear for thee.

VUTHSA

Pangs fiercer would have chased them,
Hadst thou been caught, my friend. I shall remember.

Munjoolica returns with gold and a trinket.

Take now these gauds; haste, make thy swiftest way,
For I come close behind thee.

Vasuntha goes.

MUNJOOLICA

Tell me thy plan.

VUTHSA

These chambers are too strongly kept.

MUNJOOLICA

But there's
The pleasure-ground.

VUTHSA

Let Vasavadutta call
Her brothers on an evening to the park
And wine flow fast. The nights are moonlit now.
How many gates?

MUNJOLICA

Three, but the southern portal
Nearest the ramparts.

VUTHSA

There, how many guard?

MUNJOLICA

Three armed Kiratha women keep the gate.

VUTHSA

I cannot hurt them. Thou must find a way.

MUNJOLICA

They shall be drowned in wine. The streets outside?

VUTHSA

A chariot, — find one for me. I cannot fight
With Vasavadutta on my breast.

MUNJOLICA

I think
That I shall find one.

VUTHSA

Do it. The rest is easy,
To break the keepers of the city-gate
In one fierce moment and be out and far.
There are arms enough in the palace?

MUNJOOLICA

The armoury

I use sometimes.

VUTHSA

Conceal them in the grounds.

No, in the chariot let them wait for me.

MUNJOOLICA

Thou wilt need both thy hands in such a fight.

Vuthsa, I'll be thy charioteer.

VUTHSA

Thou canst?

MUNJOOLICA

Hope not to find a better in thy realms.

VUTHSA

My battle-comrade then! Words are not needed

Between us.

He goes out.

MUNJOOLICA

More than that before all's done
I will be to thee. Good fortune makes hard things
Most easy; for the god comes with laden hands.
If the strange word the queen half spoke to me
Means anything, Vicurna's car shall bear
His sister to her joy and sovereign throne.

Scene 2

*The pleasure-groves of the palace in Ujjayiny.
Gopalaca, Vuthsa, Vicurna; at a distance under the trees
Ungarica, Vasavadutta and Umba.*

GOPALACA

Vuthsa, the wine is singing in my brain,
The moonlight floods my soul. These are the hours
When the veil for eye and ear is almost rent
And we can hear wind-haired Gundhurvas sing
In a strange luminous ether. Thou art one,
Vuthsa, who has escaped the bars and walks
Smiling and harping to enchanted men.

VUTHSA

It was your earthly moonlight drew me here
And thou, Gopalaca, and Vindhya's hills
And Vasavadutta. Thou shalt drink with me
In moonlight in Cowsamby.

GOPALACA

Vuthsa, when?
What wild and restless spirit keeps thy feet
Tonight, Vicurna?

VICURNA

'Tis the wine. I wait.

GOPALACA

For what?

VICURNA (*with a harsh laugh*)
Why, for the wine to do its work.

GOPALACA
Where's Vasavadutta? Call her to us here.
We are not happy if she walks apart.

VICURNA
There with the mother underneath the trees.

GOPALACA
Call them. Thou, Vuthsa, she and I will drink
One cup of love and pledge our hearts in wine
Never to be parted. Thou deceiv'st the days,
O lax and laggard lover.

VUTHSA
'Tis the last.
Tomorrow lights another scene.

GOPALACA
'Tis good
That thou inclin'st thy heart. My father grows
Stern and impatient. This done, all is well.

VUTHSA
All in this poor world cannot have their will;
Its joys are bounded. I submit, it seems.
Wilt thou incline thy heart, Gopalaca?

GOPALACA
To what?

VUTHSA
To this fair moonlit night's result
And all that follows after.

GOPALACA

Easily

I promise that.

VUTHSA

All surely will be well.

*Munjoolica arrives from the gates; Vicurna
returning from the trees with Ungarica, Vasavadutta
and Umba, goes forward to meet her.*

VICURNA

Is't done?

MUNJOOLICA

They sprawl half-senseless near the gate.

VICURNA

Whole bound and gagged were best. Give Vuthsa word.

He goes towards the gates.

UNGARICA

Munjoolica, is it tonight?

MUNJOOLICA

What, madam?

UNGARICA (*striking her lightly on the cheek*)

Vicurna rides tonight?

MUNJOOLICA

He rides tonight.

UNGARICA

Let him not learn, nor any, that I knew.

She returns to the others.

GOPALACA

Come, all you wanderers. Mother, here's a cup
That thou must bless with thy fair magic hands
Before we drink it.

UNGARICA

May those who drink be one
In heart and great and loving all their days
Favoured by Shiva and by Luxmie blest
Until the end and far beyond.

GOPALACA

Drink, Vuthsa.
Three hearts meet in this cup.

UNGARICA

Who drinks this first,
He shall be first and he shall be the bond.

GOPALACA

Drink, sister Vasavadutta, queen of all.

UNGARICA

Queen thou shalt be, my daughter, as in thy heart,
So in thy love and fortunes.

GOPALACA

Mine the last.

UNGARICA

Thou sayest, my son, yet first mid many men.

GOPALACA

Whatever place, so in this knot 'tis found.

UNGARICA (*embracing Vasavadutta closely*)

Forget not thy dear mother in thy bliss.

Gopalaca, attend me to the house,
I have a word for thee, my son.

GOPALACA

I come.

They go towards the palace.

VUTHSA

Is it the moment?

MUNJOLICA

Yonder lies the gate.

VUTHSA

Love! Vasavadutta.

VASAVADUTTA

Vuthsa! Vuthsa! speak.

What has been quivering in the air this night?

He takes her in his arms.

VUTHSA

Thy rapt and rapture far away, O love.
Look farewell to thy father's halls.

VASAVADUTTA

Alas!

What is this rashness? Thou art unarmed; the guards
Will slay thee.

VUTHSA

Fear not! Thou in my arms,
Our fates a double shield, thou hast no fear,
Nor anything this night to think or do
Save in the chariot lie between my knees
And listen to the breezes in thy locks
Whistling to thee of far Cowsamby's groves.

*He bears her towards the gate, Vicurna
crossing him in his return.*

VICURNA
Haste, haste! all's ready.

MUNJOOLICA
Umbo! Umbo! here!

UMBA (*who comes running up*)
Oh, what is this?

VICURNA
Should not this girl be bound?

UMBA
Give rather thy commands.

MUNJOOLICA
Thou'lt face the wrath?

UMBA
O, all for my dear mistress. If the King
Slays me, I shall have lived and died for her
For whom I was born.

MUNJOOLICA
Hide in the groves until
Thou hearest a rumour growing from the walls,
Then seek the house and save thyself. Till then
Let no man find thee.

UMBA
I will lose myself
In the far bushes. O come safely through.
Could you not have trusted me in this?

MUNJOLICA

Weep not!

I'll have thee to Cowsamby if thou live.

VICURNA

Come, follow, follow. He is near the gates.

MUNJOLICA

I to my freedom, she her royal crown!

Scene 3

Vasavadutta's apartments.

Mahasegn, Ungarica, Umba bound, armed women.

MAHASEGN

She is not here. O treachery! If thou
Wert privy to this, thou shalt die impaled
Or cloven in many pieces.

UMBA

I am resigned.

UNGARICA

Thou'lt stain thy soul with a woman's murder, King?

MAHASEGN

'Tis truth; she is too slight a thing to crush.
Are not the gardens searched? Who are these slaves
Who dare to loiter? If he's seized, he dies.

UNGARICA

Wilt thou make ill much worse, — if this be ill?

MAHASEGN

How sayst thou? 'Tis not ill? My house is shamed,
My pride downtrodden; all the country laughs
Already at the baffled Mahasegn
Whose daughter was plucked out by one frail boy
From midst his golden city and his hosts
Unnumbered. Who shall honour me henceforth?
Who worship? who obey? who fear my sword?

UNGARICA

Cowsamby's king has kept the Aryan law,
Nor is thy daughter shamed at all in this,
But taken with noblest honour.

MAHASEGN

'Tis a law
I spurn. My will is trodden underfoot,
My pride which to preserve or to avenge
Is the warrior's righteousness. Udaian dies.
Or if he reach his capital, my hosts
Shall thunder on and blot it into flame,
A pyre for his torn dishonoured corpse.

UNGARICA

Hast thou forgotten thy daughter's heart? Her good,
Her happiness are nothing then to thee?

MAHASEGN

Is she my daughter? She'll not wish to live
Her sire's dishonour.

UNGARICA

Thinkest thou he seized her,
Her heart consenting not?

MAHASEGN

If it be so
And she thus rebel to my will and blood,
Let her eyes gaze upon their sensuous cause
Of treason mocked with many marring spears.

UNGARICA

Art thou an Aryan king and threatenest thus?
Thy daughter only for thyself was loved?

MAHASEGN

Silence, my queen! Chafe not the lion wroth.

UNGARICA

The tiger rather, if this mood thou nurse.

A Kiratha woman enters.

MAHASEGN

Thou com'st, slow slave!

KIRATHIE

King, all the grounds are searched.

The guards lie gagged below the southern gate;
All's empty.

MAHASEGN

Where's Gopalaca? He too
Has leisures!

KIRATHIE

There's a captain from the walls.

MAHASEGN

Ha! bring him.

The Kirathie brings in the Avunthian captain.
Well!

CAPTAIN

Vuthsa has broken forth.
The wardens of the gate are maimed or dead;
Triumphant, bearing Vasavadutta, far
Exults his chariot o'er the moonlit plains.

MAHASEGN

O bitter messenger! Pursue, pursue!

CAPTAIN

Rebha with his armed men and stern-lipped speed
Is hot behind.

MAHASEGN

Let all my force that keeps
Ujjayiny, be hurled after them, one speed.
Call, call Vicurna; let the boy bring back
First fame of arms today in Vuthsa slain,
His sister's ravisher.

CAPTAIN

Let not my words
Offend my king. 'Twas Prince Vicurna's car
Bore forth his sister and Vicurna's self
Rode as her guard.

MAHASEGN (*after an astonished pause*)

Do all my house, my blood
Revolt against me?

CAPTAIN

The princess Bundhumathie,
Thy daughter's serving-maiden, at Vuthsa's side
Controlled his coursers.

MAHASEGN

Her I do not blame,
Yet will most fiercely punish. Captain, go;
Gather my chariots; let them gallop fast
Crushing these fugitives' new-made tracks.

As the captain departs, Gopalaca enters.

Gopalaca,

Head, son, my armies; bear thy sister back
Before irrevocable shame is done,
Nor with thy father's greatness unavenged return.

GOPALACA

My father, hear me. Though quite contrary
To all our planned design this thing has fallen,
Yet no dishonour tarnishes the deed,
But as a hero with a hero's child
Has Vuthsa seized the girl. We planned a snare,
He by a noble violence answers us.
We sought to bribe him to a vassal's state
Dangling the jewel of our house in front;
He keeps his freedom and enjoys the gem.
Then since we chose the throw of dice and lost,
Let us be noble gamblers, like a friend
Receive God's hostile chance, nor house blind wounded thoughts
As common natures might. Sanction this rapt;
Let there be love twixt Vuthsa's house and us.

MAHASEGN

I see that in their hearts all have conspired
Against my greatness. Thou art Avunthy's prince,
My second in my cares. Hear then! if twixt
Ujjayiny and my frontiers they are seized,
My fiercer will shall strike; but if they reach
Free Vindhya, thou thyself shalt make the peace.
Take Vasavadutta's household and this girl,
Take all her wealth and gauds; lead her thyself
Or follow to Cowsamby, but leave not
Till she is solemnised as Vuthsa's queen.
Sole let her reign throned by Udaian's side;
Then only shall peace live betwixt our realms.

GOPALACA

And I will fetch Vicurna back.

MAHASEGN

Son, never.

I exile the rebel to his name and house.
Let him with Vuthsa whom he chooses dwell,

My foeman's servant.

*He goes out, followed by the guards.
Gopalaca unbinds Umba.*

UNGARICA

If we give his rage its hour,
'Twill sink. His pride will call Vicurna back,
If not the father's heart.

GOPALACA

Haste, gather quickly
Her wealth and household. I would make earliest speed,
Lest Vuthsa by ill hap be seized for ill.

UNGARICA

Fear not, my son. The hosts are not on earth
That shall prevail against these two in arms.

Scene 4

*The Avunthian forests; moonlight.
Vuthsa, Vasavadutta, Munjoolica.*

VUTHSA

Thou hast held the reins divinely. We approach
Our kingdom's border.

MUNJOOLICA

But the foe surround.

VUTHSA

We will break through as twice now we have done.
Vicurna comes.

Vicurna arrives ascending.

VICURNA

Vuthsa, yon Rebha asks
For parley; is it given? I'd hold him here
While by a long masked woodland breach I know
Silent we pass their cordon.

VUTHSA

Force is best.

VICURNA

Vuthsa, to my mind more; but I would spare
Our Vasavadutta's heart these fierce alarms.
Though she breathe nothing, yet she suffers.

VUTHSA

Good!

We'll choose thy peaceful breach.

Vicurna descends.

VASAVADUTTA

Vuthsa, if I

Stood forth and bade their leader cease pursuit
Since of my will I go, he must desist.

VUTHSA

It would diminish, love, my victory
And triumph which are thine.

VASAVADUTTA

Then let it go.

I would not stain thy fame in arms, though over
My house's head its wheels go trampling.

MUNJOLICA (*yawning*)

Ough!

If we could parley a truce for sleep. This fighting
Makes very drowsy.

Vicurna returns with Rebha.

VUTHSA

Well, captain, thy demand!

REBHA

Vuthsa, thou art environed. Dost thou yield?

VUTHSA

Thou mockst! Return; we'll break the third last time
Thy fragile chain. Are thy dead counted?

REBHA

The living

Outnumber their first strength; more force comes on
Fast from Ujjayiny. Therefore yield the princess.

Thyself depart a freeman to thy realms.

VUTHSA

Knowst thou thy offer is an insolence?

REBHA

Then, Prince, await the worst. Living and bound
Or else a corpse we'll bring thee back to our city.
Three times around thee is my cordon passed,
Thy steeds are spent, nor hast thou Urjoon's quiver.
The dawn prepares; think it thy last.

VUTHSA

At noon

I give thee tryst within my borders.

Rebha goes.

VICURNA

Swift!

Before he reach his men and back ascend,
We must be far. Munjoolica, mount my horse,
Ride to Yougundharayan, bid him bring on
His numbers; for I see armies thundering towards us
With angry speed o'er the Avunthian plains.
I'll guide the car.

MUNJOOLICA

The horse?

VICURNA

Bound in yon grove.

Rein lightly; he's high-mettled.

MUNJOOLICA

Teach me not.

There is no horse yet foaled I cannot ride.
Which is my way through all this leafy tangle?

VICURNA

Thou canst not miss it; for yon path leads only
To Lokanatha's hill beyond our borders.
Now on!

VUTHSA

The moonlight and the glad night-winds
Have rustled luminously among the leaves
And sung me wordless paeans while I fought.
Now let them fall into a rapturous strain
Of silence, while I ride with thee safe-clasped
Upon my bosom.

VASAVADUTTA

If I could hold thee safe at last!

Scene 5

*On the Avunthian border.
Roomunwath, Yougundharayan, Alurca, soldiers.*

ROOMUNWATH

The dawn with rose and crimson crowned the hills,
There was no sign of Vuthsa's promised wheels.
Another noon approaches.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Two days only
Vasuntha's here. Yet is Udaian swift
With the stroke he in a secret sloth prepares.

ROOMUNWATH

We learned that though too late. A secret rashness,
A boy's wild venture with his life for stake
And a kingdom! Dangerously dawns this reign.

ALURCA

See, see, a horseman over Avunthy's edge
Rides to us. He quests forward with his eyes.

ROOMUNWATH

Who'er he be, he has travelled far. His beast
Labours and stumbles on.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

This is no horseman;
It is a woman rides though swift and armed.

ALURCA

She has seen us and dismounts.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

A woman rides!

My mind misgives me. Is't some evil chance?

Comes she a broken messenger of grief?

She runs as if pursued.

ALURCA

She's young and fair.

Munjoolica arrives.

MUNJOOOLICA

Art thou King Vuthsa's captain?

ROOMUNWATH

I am he.

MUNJOOOLICA

Gather thy force; for Vuthsa drives here fast,

But hostile armies surge behind his wheels.

Fast, fast, into the woods your succour bring,

Lest over his wearied coursers and spent quiver

Numbers and speed prevail.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Roomunwath, swift.

Roomunwath goes.

But who art thou or where shall be my surety

That thou art no Avunthian sent to lure

Our force into an ambush?

MUNJOOOLICA

This is surely

Yougundharayan of the prudent brain.

Thy question I reply; the rest resolve

But swiftly, lest Fate mock thy wary thoughts.
My name is Bundhumathie and my father
Sourashtra held; but I, his daughter, taken
Served in Avunthy Vasavadutta. Knowest thou
This ring?

YOUNGDHARAYAN

'Tis Vuthsa's.

MUNJOLICA

Young Vicurna's bay
I rode, who guards his sister's ravisher
Against the angry rescuers. Will these riddles,
Wisest of statesmen, solve thy cautious doubt?

YOUNGDHARAYAN

Thy tale is strange; but thou at least art true.

MUNJOLICA

Thou art not prudent only!

YOUNGDHARAYAN

Forward then.
Roomunwath's camp already is astir.

Scene 6

*Near the edge of the forest in Avunthy.
Roomunwath, Yougundharayan, Alurca, Munjoolica, forces.*

ROOMUNWATH

Stay, stay our march; 'tis Vuthsa's car arrives.
The tired horses stumble as they pause.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

There is a noise of armies close behind
And out of woods the Avunthian wheels emerge.
There arrive Vuthsa, Vicurna, Vasavadutta.

VUTHSA

My father, all things to their hour are true
And I bring back my venture. Am I pardoned
Its secrecy?

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

My pupil and son no more,
But hero and monarch! Thou hast set thy foot
Upon Avunthy's head.

VUTHSA

Yet still thy son.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Hail, Vasavadutta, great Cowsamby's queen.

VASAVADUTTA (*smiling happily on Vuthsa*)

My crown was won by desperate alarms.

VUTHSA

It was a perilous race and in the end
Fate won by a head. Were it not the difficult paths
Baffled their numbers, we were hardly here,
So oft we had to pause and rest our steeds.
But in less strength they dared not venture on.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

They range their battle now.

VUTHSA

Speak thou to them.

War must not break.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Demand a parley there.

VUTHSA

If we must fight, it shall be for defence
Retreating while we war unless they urge
Too far their violent trespass.

VICURNA

Rebha comes.

Rebha arrives.

REBHA

Ye are suitors for a parley?

VICURNA

Rebha, with beaten men?

REBHA

Because you had your sister in the car
Our shafts were hampered.

VICURNA

Nor could with swords prevail
Against two boys so many hundred men.

REBHA

O Prince Vicurna, what thou hast done today
Against thy name and nation, I forbear
To value. 'Tis thy first essay of arms.

VICURNA

Well dost thou not to weigh thy better's deeds.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Rebha, wilt thou urge vainly yet this strife?
What hitherto was done, was private act
And duel; now if thou insist on fight,
Two nations are embroiled; and to what end?

REBHA

I will take Vuthsa and the Princess back.
It is my king's command.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

The impossible
No man is bound to endeavour. While we fight,
King Vuthsa with the captive princess bounds
Unhindered to his high-walled capital.

REBHA

It is my king's command. I am his arm
And not his counsellor; nor to use my brain
Have any right, save for the swift way to fulfil
His proud and absolute mandate.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

If there came
Word from Ujjayiny, then pursuit must cease?

REBHA

Then truly.

YOUNGDHARAYAN

Send a horseman, Rebha, ask.
All meanwhile shall remain as now it stands.

REBHA

I'll send no horseman; I will fight.

YOUNGDHARAYAN

Then war!

REBHA

We fear it not. This is strange insolence
To stand in arms upon Avunthian ground
And issue mandates to the country's lords.

He is going.

ROOMUNWATH

Rebha, yet pause! No messenger thou needst.
Look where yon chariot furious-bounding comes
And over it streams Avunthy's royal flag.

REBHA

It is the prince Gopalaca. Of this I am glad.

VASAVADUTTA

O if my brother comes, then all is well.

VUTHSA

For thou art Luxmie. Thou beside me, Fate
And Fortune, peace and battle must obey
The vagrant lightest-winged of my desires.

Gopalaca arrives; with him Umba.

GOPALACA

Hail, Vuthsa! peace and love between our lands!

VUTHSA

I hold them here incarnate. Welcome thou,
Their strong achiever.

GOPALACA

As earnest and as proof
Receive this fair accomplice of thy flight
Unpunished. Sister, take her to thy arms.

VASAVADUTTA

O Uмба, thou com'st safe to me!

GOPALACA

And all
My sister's household and her wealth comes fast
Behind me. Only one claim Avunthy keeps;
My sister shall sit throned thy only queen, —
Which, pardon me, my eyes must witness done
With honour to our name.

VUTHSA

Cowsamby's majesty
Will brook not even in this, Gopalaca,
A foreign summons. Surely my will and love
Shall throne most high, not strong Avunthy's child,
But Vasavadutta; whether alone, her will
And mine, the nation and the kingdom's good
Consenting shall decide. Therefore this claim
Urge not, my brother.

GOPALACA

Let not this divide us.
The present's gladness is enough: the future's hers
And thine, Udaian, nor shall any man

Compel thee. Boy, thy revolt was rash and fierce
Wronging thy house and thy high father's will.
Exiled must thou in far Cowsamby dwell
Until his wrath is dead.

VICURNA

I care not, brother.
I have done my will, I have observed the right.
Near Vuthsa and my sister's home enough
And I shall see new countries.

VUTHSA

Follow behind,
Gopalaca; thy sister's household bring
And all the force thou wilt. We speed in front.
Ride thou, Alurca, near us; let thy harp
Speak of love's anthems and her golden life
To Vasavadutta. Love, the storm is past,
The peril o'er. Now we shall glide, my queen,
Through green-gold woods and between golden fields
To float for ever in a golden dream,
O earth's gold Luxmie, till the shining gates
Eternal open to us thy heavenly home.

Incomplete and Fragmentary Plays

1891–1915

The Witch of Ilni

A dream of the woodlands

Characters

CORILLO, prince of Ilni.

VALENTINE, a courtier.

IAMBlichus }
PALLEAS } foresters.
MARCION }

MELANDER, a sylvan poet.

FORESTERS, COURTIERs.

ALACIEL, the witch of Ilni.

GUENDOLEN, her sister.

MYRTIL }
DORIS } forest damsels.
ERMENILD }

GIRLS OF THE FOREST.

Act I

Scene 1

*The woodlands of Ilni.
Girls and youths dancing.*

Song

Under the darkling tree
Who danceth with thee,
 Sister say?
His hair is the sweet sunlight,
His eyes a starry night
 In May.

Under the leaf-wrought screen
Who crowns thee his queen
 Kissing thee?
His lips are a ruby bright,
His cheek the May-bloom's light
 On the tree.

Under the grass-green bough
Whom pillowest thou
 On thy breast?
His voice is a swallow's flight,
His limbs are jonquils white
 Dewy-drest.

IAMBlichus
Unwind the linkèd rapture of the dance!

For in the purple verge and slope of morn
 Fast-flowering blooms, fire-robed and honey-haired,
 In stainless wastes the daffodil of heaven.
 Here till the golden-handed sun upbuilds
 The morning's cenotaph blue-domed and vast,
 On daisy-dotted bank where sunlight nods
 We'll spin a curious weft of lyric tales.

MYRTIL

Be it so. But what occupation stays
 Our deftest in the jewelry of rhymes,
 Our liberal dispenser of sweet words,
 Our laureate with the throstle in his throat?
 Sleeps he so long? who saw Melander last,
 Melander ashbud-browed with April hair?

ERMENILD

Before the russet-hooded morn gave birth
 In Day's embraces to the fire-eyed sun
 I spied him nigh a mossy-mantled cave
 Which rosy trailers draped, and at his side
 The silver-seeming witch Alaciel.

MYRTIL

Pray God, the black-haired witch may do no harm!
 She is most potent and her science plucks
 The ruby nightshade, Hecate's deadly plum,
 Soul-killing meadow-sweet, the hemlock starred
 And berries brown crushed in the vats of death,
 Her mother's hell-brewed legacy of arts.

MARCION

Were it not wisely done to call him hither?

IAMBlichus

'Tis wisely urged, good Marcion. Make good haste

And drench thy words in Hybla's golden milk
To lure him thence.

Exit Marcion.

But you with dance and song
Beguile the laggard moments into joy.

Scene 2

A glade in the woodlands.

ALACIEL

Why wilt thou go? Noon has not budded, sweet.
Freshfallen dew stars yet the silvered grass,
The leaves are lyrical with lisp of birds
And piping voices flutter thro' the grove.
Repose thyself where blue-eyed violet
Is married to that bugle of pale gold
We call the cowslip, and I'll chain thee here
With flowery bands of rosebud-linkèd tales
Or murmur Orphic falls to draw thy soul
Upon the smoother wings of measured song.
Noon has not budded, sweet. Why wilt thou go?

MELANDER

The sylvan youths expect my lyric touch
To gild their leisure: nor am I so bold
To linger by thy snowy side too long
Whom men call perilous. Oh thou art fair!
Dawn reddens in thy vermil-tinted cheeks
And on thy tresses pansy-purple night
Hangs balsam-drenched with dewdrops for her stars.
Thou art a flower with candid petals wide,
Moonflushed, most innocent-seeming to the eye;
But in thy cup, they say, lurks venomèd wine
Which whoso sucks, pale Hades on him lays
Ensnaring arms to drag from the sweet sun.

ALACIEL

Whom will not Envy's livid tooth assail?

'Tis true my wisdom dwarfs their ignorance;
That is most true: for in my fledgeling days
When callow childhood loved the rushy nest,
My mother drew my steps thro' fretted walks,
Rose-rubied gardens, acorn-pelted glades,
Green seas of pasture, rural sweeps of bloom,
And taught the florid sensuous dialect
Of simple plants. This way I learned to love
The shining sisterhood of rhythmic names,
Roses and lilies, honey-hiding thyme,
Pied gilliflowers, painted wind-blossoms,
Gold crocus, milky bell, sweet marjoram,
Fire-coloured furze and wayside honey-suckle.
Nor these alone, but all the helpful plants
Gave me the liquid essence of their souls
Potent to help or hurt, to cure or kill.
Indeed the milky juice of pungent roots
I poured you in that curious walnut cup
With moderation just, were in excess
More deadly than the hemlock's dooming wine.

MELANDER

It fused new blood into my pulsing veins
Raising me twice the stature of a soul.

ALACIEL

'Tis margarite, the rare and pungent root,
That brewed this foamy vintage in his wand.
For twixt the bulb and pithy texture wrapt
You find a pod nut-form with misty skin,
In size no bigger than the early grape
But full and sweet with honey-tempered wine.
Such are my potions, philtres, poisons, drugs,
Distempered brews, and all the juggling arts
Your ignorance rebukes my wisdom with.

MELANDER

From such sweet lips when popped utterance falls,
The carping spirit of disdain must sleep;
For subtler logic drops in simple words
From woman's tongue, than phraseful orator
Or fine scholastic wit may offer up.

ALACIEL

Sweet youth, why should I net you with deceit?
Ah yet, in truth you are too beautiful!
Come, you are skilled in phrases, are you not?
You dice with women's hearts — they tell me 'tis
A pastime much in vogue with idle youths.
(The philtre works: his eyelids brim with dew.)
You throw coggled dice with women for their souls,
You barter with them and deny the price,
Is it not so? (O rare, fine margarite!)
Oh you are deft at such deceits: you make
Your beauty lime to cozen linnets with
And bid them sing, if they'd have sustenance.
Oh you will not deceive me, think it not:
You are just such a fowler to my guess.

MELANDER

Dear linnet, did I lime you in my nets,
One fine, sweet Hamadryad note would lift
The tangle from your wild-rose-petal wings.

ALACIEL

Ah but when lurking faces flower the bush
Wild birds mock expectation with wild wings.

MELANDER

Nay, dear, you shall not go: I have you fast.
Come, where's your ransom? the sweet, single note
I bargained for, ere you may climb the winds?
Prune not your fluttering wings: I have you fast.

ALACIEL

I pray you, make not earnest of my jest.
You are too quick: you shall not have a stiver,
No, not a coin to bless repentance with.

MELANDER

Then I will pay myself, sweet: from that warm
And flowering bed of kisses, I will pluck
Fresh with the dews of youth one red sweet rose.

(kisses her)

Oh I have sucked out poison from your lips!
Physicians say that certain maladies
Are by their generating causes killed.
Sweet poison, one more drop to cure the last.

(kisses her)

ALACIEL

You shall pluck no more roses from my tree.
Unclasp me now or you will anger me.

MELANDER

Dear, be not angry. I did but accept
The written challenge peeping thro' the lids
Of those delicious eyes: O shy soft eyes,
Hiding with jetty fringes such a world
Of swimming beauty, virgin-sweet desire,
You shine like stars upon the rim of night,
Like dewdrops thro' green leaves, mute orators
Instinct with dropping eloquence to sway
The burning heart of boyhood to your will.
If I look on you long, you will seduce
My acts from virtue; which to anticipate
I'll kill you both with kisses, thus, and thus.
Sweet, do not blush. I claim what is my own,
And with my lips I seal your whole self mine
From dear, dark head to dainty wild-rose feet.
Or, if you will, in sanguine tumult show

The throbbing conscience of a lover's touch,
That I may watch a sea of springing rose
Diffuse its gorgeous triumph in your cheeks.

ALACIEL

Oh you have golden pieces on your tongue
To buy your pleasure: yet this single once
I'll be your fool. Come, throw me clinking coin,
The thin flute-music of your flatteries.
You shall have favours if you pay for them.

MELANDER

His lips should dribble honey, who'd make out
The style and inventory of your graces.
His voice should be the fiving of mild winds
To happy song of bees in rose-red June,
His every word a crimson-tasselled rose,
His lightest phrase a strip of cedar-wood,
Each clause a nutmeg-peppered jug of cream;
The very stops should argue aloes fetched
By spicèd winds upon the rocking brine.
What, have I earned my wage? I am athirst
With praising you. Give me your lips to drink.

ALACIEL

You trifle, sweet. Yours is no mint of coin
But scribbled paper-specie large as wind
Which I'll not take. Here comes your paedagogue
To school you into more sobriety.

Alaciel retires. Enter Marcion.

MARCION

Well met, Melander. Long thro' mossy paths
Have I with patient footing peered thee out,
Thro' shadow-sundered slopes of racing light,
In ferny pales with blots of colour pricked
And by the rushy marge of spuming streams

Till lucky hazard made the Venus throw.
Why art thou here? On leafy-sheltered sward
Where daubs of sunlight intersperse the shade,
The rubious posies thrill to mazy feet
Like stars danced over by an angel's tread
And strive with glimmering corollaries
To make a twinkling heaven of the green.
Moist blow the breezes with the myrrhy tears
Of pining night, and ruffle every blade
That keeps his pearls from clutch of dewy thieves
Until their indignation murmur past.
From airy flute, from seraph-stringèd harp,
A daedal rain of music drop on drop
Wells fast to rule the waft of dove-like feet.
The clustered edges of close-heapèd thyme,
A murmurous haven sailed by merchant bees,
Are crumbling into fragrance and young flowers
Make fat by their decay the greedy earth,
While golden youths and silver feet of girls
Pass fluttering as with glimpse of gorgeous hues
A fleet of moths on emigrating winds.
There you shall see upon the pearlèd grass
The forest antelope, brown Ermenild,
Iamblichus the honey-hearted boy,
Rose-cheeked Iamblichus with roses wreathed,
And Myrtil honey-haired, our woodland moon,
Myrtil the white, a silver loveliness,
But tipped with gold. Thou only lingerest;
Only thy voice, the pilot of our moods,
Only thy thrushlips welling facile rhymes
Mar the sweet harmonies of holiday
With one chord missing from the clamorous harp.

MELANDER

I thank you, Marcion, for your careful pain
But cannot guerdon you with more than thanks.
I am not well: the fumes of midnight thought

Unfit me for a holiday attire.

MARCION

Fie, fie, Melander! When have you before
 Denied the riches of your tongue to eke
 Our poorness with? The forest waits for you
 Dew-drenched with tears because you will not come.

MELANDER

Well, I will go with you, but not for long.
 I'll join you where deep-cushioned in soft grass
 The stream turns inward like a scimitar.
 Go on before, I pray you. I will come.

Exit Marcion.

ALACIEL

There, there, I said so! you are docile, sir.
 Indeed I did not spy the leading-strings,
 But they must be there. 'Twas your paedagogue,
 Was it not, come to fetch the truant back?

MELANDER

Dear, be not vexed with me. I will return
 Ere noon has dotted with her golden ball
 The eminence of heaven. It seems not well,
 When judgment has decreed the award of merit,
 To disappoint Persuasion of her prize.
 In sweetly-cultured minds civility
 Breathes music to the touch of wooing words.

ALACIEL

Oh words and words enough! but what's the gist,
 The run, the purport? Tush, a chattering pie,
 A pie that steals and chatters, would not deign
 To jeer this flaunting daw. What, did he deem
 His gaudy colony of phrases roofed
 The meaning from my eyes? The prosing fool

Fibs very vilely: why, he has not conned
The rudiments and letters of his craft.

MELANDER

You do miscall sincerest courtesy,
Sweet courtesy that solders our conditions
Into the builded structure of a state.

ALACIEL

Yes, till the winds unbuild it for worse ruin.
But go your way. I'll know you as a man
That honeys leisure with a lovely face
And coins sweet perjuries to make the hearts
Of women bankrupt. No defence, I pray you.
I'll have no slices of your company.

MELANDER

Leave wrangling, sweet, and tell me soft and kind,
Where shall I see you next? I may not tarry.

ALACIEL

Why nowhere: for I'll not receive you, sir.
But if you love a door shut in your face
Come to my cottage on the forest's hem
Where rarer thickets melt into the plain.

MELANDER

Thither I will outstrip the climbing noon.
For this one tedious hour, dear love, farewell.

ALACIEL

I pray you, sweet, do not break promise with me,
For that will kill me. I will think of you
And comfort solitude with sighs and tears
Until you dawn afresh, a noontide star.

Exeunt.

Act II

Scene 1

The woodlands as at first.

Foresters and girls.

*Melander leans against a tree absorbed in thought: in one group
Marcion and Ermenild are talking: in another Iamblichus and
Myrtil: Myrtil comes forward.*

MYRTIL

What passion, dear Melander, numbs thy voice?
Why wilt thou cherish humorous peevishness,
The nursling of a moment and a mood?
Now kernelled in the golden husk of day
Pale night with all her pomp of sorrow sleeps,
And stinted of softclinging melancholy
The elegiac nightingale is hushed.

MELANDER

Sweet friend, my spirit is too deeply hued
With sombre-sweet Imagination's brush
To dress the nimble spirit of the dance
In lilt of phrase and honey-packing rhyme.
I pray you, urge it not. I am not well.

IAMBlichus

Urge him no more. The rash and humorous spirit
That governs him at times, will not be schooled.
But since the sweetest tongue of all is mute,
Some harsher voice prick on the creeping hour.

MYRTIL

Ah no, Iamblichus! when winds are hushed
Fall then the clapping cymbals of the sea,
And every green-haired dancing-girl down-drop
Her foam-tipped sinuous wand to kiss her feet!
The loss of sweetest palls what is but sweet,
For should the honey-throated mavis die,
Who in the laughing linnet takes delight
Or lends ear to the rhyming hedge-priest wren?
Let us not challenge passion-pale regret,
But hand-in-hand down ruby-tinted walks
Gather the poppies of sweet speech, to press
For opiates when dank autumn looms and Life
Is empty of her rose. Were not this well?

IAMBlichus

Thy words are sweet as joy, more wise than sorrow.
Come, friends, let us steal honey from the hours
For memory to suck when winter comes.

Exeunt all but Melander.

MELANDER

Ah me, what drug Circean wakes in me?
My blood steals from my heart like pulsing fire
And the fresh sap exudes upon my brow.
O faster, faster urge thy golden wheels,
Thou sun that like a fiery lizard creepst
Glib-footed to the parapet of heaven!
Oh that my hand might clutch thy saffron curls
And thrust thee in the loud Atlantic! So
The violet mares of Evening may drink up
The sweet, damp wind, so dawn the ivory moon
And lurk shy-peeping in my darling's eyes.
For my desire is like the passionate sea
That calls unto her paramour the wind
And only hears a strangled murmur pant,
Mute, muffled by the hollow-breasted hills.

Enter Iamblichus with Myrtil in his arms.

MYRTIL

No farther drag my steps, Iamblichus!
 I am not fond to bow my doating neck
 Under your feet, like other woodland girls
 Who image beauty's model in your shape,
 Heaven in your eyes and nectar in your kiss.
 Fie, fie, be modest, sir. Let go your grasp.

[Here a page of the notebook was torn out.]

[MELANDER]

Ah me, again a sea of subtle fire
 Clamours about the ruby gates of Life!
 My soul expanding like a Pythian seer
 Thrives upon torture, and the insurgent blood,
 Swollen as with wine, menaces mutiny.
 How slowly buildst thou up the spacious noon
 To dome thy house, O architect of day!
 Not from the bubbling smithy where Love works
 Smooth Hebe fetched thy world-revealing fires;
 Nor to the foam-bound bride-bed of the sea
 Thou sailest, but like one with doom foreseen
 Whose bourne and culmination lapses down
 To sunless hell. Hope thou not to set out
 My seasons in the golden ink of day:
 My heart anticipates the pilot moon
 Who steers the cloudy-wimpled night. Pale orb,
 Thou art no symbol for my burning soul:
 Lag thou behind or lag not, I will lead.

He is going out.

Reenter foresters with Palleas.

MARCION

What's this, Melander? Noon not yet has sealed
 His titles with the signet of the sun.
 'Tis early yet to leave. Why will you go?

MELANDER

I am bound down by iron promises,
The hour named. Would I not linger else?
Even now the promise has outstript the act.

MYRTIL

Melander, do not go.

MELANDER

Dear child, I must.

IAMBlichus

Come, come, you shall not go. 'Tis most unkind,
Let me not say uncourteous, to withdraw
The sunshine of your presence from this day,
Our little day of unmixed joy. Be ruled.

PALLEAS

Boy, let me counsel you. This eager fit
And hot eruption does much detriment
To youth and bodes no good to waning years.
When I was young, I ruled my dancing blood,
Abstained from brabbles, women, verses, wine,
And now you see me bask in hale old age,
Mid Autumn's gilded ruin one green leaf.
Life's palate dulls with much intemperance,
And whoso breaks the law, the law shall break.
Love is a specious angler —

MELANDER

Dotard, off!

Confide thy heavy rumours to the grave
Where thou shouldst now be rotting.

Exit.

Act III

Scene 1

Before Alaciel's house.

GUENDOLEN

But what you tell me is not credible.
Could Love at the prime vision slip your fence
And his red bees wing humming to your heart?
What, at the premier interchange of eyes
Seed bulged into the bud, the bud to flower,
Bloom waxing into fruit? can passion sink
Thus deep embedded in a maiden soil?
Masks not your love in an unwonted guise?

ALACIEL

Sweet girl, you are a casket yet unused,
A fair, unprinted page. These mysteries
Are alien to your grasp, until Love pen
His novel lithograph and write in you
Songs bubbling with the music of a name.
Oh, I am faster tangled in his eyes
Than, in the net smoke-blasted Vulcan threw,
Foam-bosomed Cytherea to her Mars.

GUENDOLEN

But will he push his fancy to your bent?

ALACIEL

How else? for in the coy glance of a girl
A subtle sorcery lies that draws men on

As with a thread, nor snaps not ere it should.
Love's palate is with acid flavours edged
When what the lips repel, the eyes invite.

GUENDOLEN

Have you forgotten then, my sister, how
Since war's ensanguined dice have thrown a cast
So fatal to our peace, the sweet confines
Of Ilni and her primitive content
Are hedged and meted by the savage Law?

ALACIEL

Child, I have not forgotten; but first love
Poseidon-like submerges with his sea
All barriers, and the checks that men oppose
But make him fret and spume against the sky.
Who shall withstand him? not the gnawing flame
Nor toothèd rocks nor gorgon-fronted piles
Nor metal bars; thro' all he walks unharmed.
But lo where on the forest's lip there dawns
My noonstar in the garish paths of day.
He should not see you, sweet. Prithee, go in.

Enter Melander.

How now? was this your compact? Lift your glance
Where yet the primrose-pale Hyperion clings
Upon the purple arches of the air
Nor on the cornice prints his golden seal.
You are too soon. Why with this fire-eyed haste
Have you o'ershot the target of your vows?

MELANDER

Ah, cruel child! what hast thou done to me?
What expiation in the balance pends
Against thy fault? Not the low sweets of sound
Fetched by thy piping tongue from ruby stops,
Nor fluttering glances under velvet lids,
Nor the rich tell-tale blush that sweetly steals

As if a scarlet pencil would indite
 A love-song in thy cheeks. These candid brows,
 The hushed seraglio to thy veiled thoughts,
 These light wind-kissing feet, these milky paps
 That peep twixt edge and loosely-married edge,
 Thy slumber-swollen purple-fringed orbs,
 Thy hands, cinque-petalled rose-buds just apart
 Beneath the wheedling kiss of spring, thy sides,
 Those continents of warm, unmelting snow,
 All in the balance are but precious air.
 Nay, with thy whole dear sum of beauties fill
 The scale, it will not tremble to the dust
 Save hooped upon thy breast my weight helps thine.
 If you deny me my just claim, I'll snatch
 You from yourself and torture with the whips
 Of Love, till you disclose your hoardings. Oh
 To seize this loaded honeycomb of bliss
 And make a rich repast! Oh turn from me
 The serious wonder of those orbèd fires!
 Their lustre stabs my heart with agony.
 Hide in thy hair those passion-moulded lips!
 Veil up those milky glimpses from my sight!
 Oh I will drag thy soul out in a kiss!
 Wilt thou add fire to fire? Torture not
 My longing with reluctance; forge not now
 The pouted simulation of disdain.
 Leap quick into my arms! there lose thyself.

She embraces him.

Pardon me, sweet: thy beauties in my soul
 Blow high the leaping billows of desire
 And temperance is a wreck merged in his sea.

ALACIEL

Loveliest Melander, if I have offended,
 Here like a Roman debtor yield I up
 My body to thy mercy or thy doom.
 Take my soul too! and in thy princely pomp

Let this rebellious heart that needs will fret
To be thy slave, be dragged to thralldom. See,
I hang, a lustrous jewel, on thy neck:
Break me or keep me! I am thine to keep
Or break: fear not to do thy utmost will.

MELANDER

Hang there till thou hast grown a part of me!
Ah yet, if passion be Love's natural priest
Let not his fire-lipped homage scare thy soul.
Thy ripe, unspotted girlhood give to me,
For which the whole world yearns. A gift is sweet,
And thou, O subtle thief, hast stolen my calm
Who was before not indigent of bliss.
Oh closer yet! Let's glue our lips together,
That all eternity may be a kiss.

ALACIEL

What, will you bury me with kisses? Dear,
Be modest. Tell me why by a full hour
You outran expectation's reaching eye?

MELANDER

Inquire the glowing moon why she has dared
Forestal the set nor wait the ushering star;
Inquire the amorous wind, why he has plucked,
Ere Autumn's breath have tampered with her hair,
Petal on crimson petal the red rose:
Nay, catechise the loud rebombing sea
Who in a thundrous summer dim with rain
Conspired with hoarse rebellious winds to merge
The lonely life of ocean-wading ships;
Then ask fire-footed passion why his rage
Has shipwrecked me upon thy silver breasts.
Ah love, thyself the culprit, thine the fault.
Alaciel, thou, — O sweet unconscious sin! —
Hast in my members kindled such a fire

As only sorcery knows: which to atone
 Thy virgin hours must sweetly swoon to death
 While in the snowy summer of thy lap
 Kind Night shall cool these passion-melted limbs.
 When thou dost imitate the blushing rose,
 I swear thy tint is truer than the life,
 Than loveliness more lovely. Dearest one,
 Let naked Love abash the curtained prude.
 Shame was not made to burn thy field of roses
 Nor in this married excellence of hues
 Unfurl disorder's ruby-tinted flag.

ALACIEL

Dear, if I blush, 'tis modesty, not shame.
 I can refuse you nothing. When 'tis night
 And like a smile upon a virgin's lips
 Young moonlight dallies with a sleepy rose,
 Then come and call me gently twice and thrice,
 And I will answer you. Observe this well
 In that the harsh and beldam Law excludes
 Nature's sweet rites and Paphian marriage
 Unless her blearèd eyes be privy too.

MELANDER

O love, have you forgot the long elapse
 And weary pomp of hours ere the sun
 That follows now a path sincere of foam
 Make sanguine shipwreck in the lurid west?
 Scarce now his golden eye drops vertical
 Upon the belt and midline of our scope.
 Shorten your sentence by a term of hours
 When I shall ease my pain. Turn caution out
 To graze in nunneries: his sober feint
 Of prudence suits not with a lover's tryst.

ALACIEL

Content you, sweet: let patience feed on hope

Until night's purple awning bar from view
The hidden thefts of love. Nay, go not yet.
Sit here awhile until yon sloping disk
Swings prone above the poplar. Sweet, come in.

Exeunt.

Scene 2

Before Alaciel's house.

Melander alone.

MELANDER

Now, for her widowed state is wooed by night,
The sable-vested air puts on her stars
And in her bosom pins for brooch the moon.
She from her diamond chalice soon will pour
Her flowing glories on a rose's hair,
In pity of my love. Sweet crimson rose,
Alaciel's lamp, the beacon of my bliss,
O kindle quickly at the moon thy rays.
How happy art thou being near my love!
For thou who hast the perfume of her breath,
Why shouldst thou the spice-lipped Zephyr want?
Her dove's-feet whispering in the happy grass
Are surely lovelier to thee than the dawn;
Or wilt thou woo the world-embracing orb,
Who hast the splendour of her eyes to soothe
Thy slumber into waking? O red rose,
Might I but merge in thee, how would her touch
Thrill all my petals with delicious pain!
O could I pawn my beauty for a kiss,
How happy were I to waste all myself
In shreds of scarlet ruin at her feet!
It is my hour! for see, the cowslip-curved
Night-wandering patroness of lovers throws
Her lantern's orange-coloured beams, where sleeps
A bright, blown rose. Hail, empress of the stars!
Be thou tonight my hymeneal torch.
Alaciel! Echo, hush thy babbling tongue!

'Tis not Narcissus calls. I am a thief
Who steal from beauty's garden one sweet bud
Nor need like visitants thy tinkling bell.
Alaciel! O with thy opiate wand,
Thought-killing Mercury, seal every eye
On whom the drowsy Morpheus has not breathed.
Yet once again the charm. Alaciel!
Now at thy window dawn, thou lovelier moon
Than sojourns in the sky! look out on me,
An ivory face thro' rippling clouds of hair.

*Enter Alaciel above.
Marcion and Doris behind.*

ALACIEL
Who calls?

[*The next sixteen pages of the notebook were torn out.*]

The House of Brut

A Play

Dramatis Personae

BRUTUS, Prince of Britain.

CORINEUS }
ASSARAC } his brothers.

DEVON, son of Corineus.

CAMBRE, Prince of Cambria }
ALBANACT, Prince of Albany } sons of Brutus.
LOCRINE, Prince of Leogrys }

HUMBER, King of Norway.

OFFA }
SIGFRID } Norwegian leaders.

GUENDOLEN, daughter of Corineus.

ESTRILD, a Pictish princess, concubine of Humber.

Act II

Scene 1

*The camp of Humber.
Humber, Offa, Norwegians.*

HUMBER

Drinkhael, dragons and stormwinds of the sea!

(drinks)

Spare not to drain this sweetened force of earth,

You Vikings! How it bubbles to the lips

Vigorous as newspilt blood. Drink deep, and shout

“Glory to Thor and Humber!” With the sun

Upon the force of Albanact we march.

Shout, Norsemen! Let the heavens hear your menace.

Drinkhael!

(drinks)

ALL

Washael! Glory to ancient Thor
And Humber.

HUMBER

I am the hammer old of Thor
When he would crush the nations. He is merry
With wine and smites the world with me.

(drinks)

Or wherefore

Should I derive my glory? Have I not
Rushed through the angry waters when the whale
Was stunned between two waves and slain my foe

Betwixt the thunders? Have not the burning hamlets
Of Gaul lighted me homeward for a league?
Erin has felt me, Norsemen.

ALL

Glory to Humber.

HUMBER

Have I not slain the Alban hosts and bound
The necks of princes? Yea, their glorious star
And wonder for whom three kingdoms strove, Estrild,
Led to my ships? The queens of the Orcades
Are slaves and concubines to private Norsemen.

ALL

Glory to Humber, Thor's hammer! Humber! Humber!

HUMBER

Have I not harried Ireland, Denmark, Orkney?
Shattered the Pictish wheels, broken their scythes,
Unpeopled living tracts? Why then prefer you
Thor's self to me? Has he filled up your ships
With gold and wines of France, rich rings and jewels,
Metals untold and beautiful sharp steel?
Who has enriched and aggrandized you all
Till you are gods, to each hand a country's wealth,
To each sword a century's glory? Who has given
The commonest man beauty divine to sleep with,
Made queens your slaves and kings your thralls, you Norsemen?

ALL

Humber, Humber! Not Thor, but mightier Humber.

HUMBER

Drink, Norsemen. Ye shall all be kings. Scotia
And Albany and Ireland shall be mine.
I'll have as many kingdoms as the year

Has moons. Do you doubt me, Vikings? Do you mutter?
But you shall see my glory. Call Estrild,
You thralls of Humber.

ALL

Glory to great Humber!
Humber shall now be Thor. He shall new-make
The bones of Heimir in his hands. Cry "Humber!"

HUMBER

This river we ascend, shall now no more
Bear its old name but mine; and all this region
Be Albany no more but Humberland.
The world's name changed shall be my monument.

Enter thralls with Estrild.

ESTRILD

Gods, if you be, protect me!

ALL

Glory to Humber.

HUMBER

Lo she whose starlike eyes enthral the nations,
Comes to do reverence to Humber, glad
To be his glory's meanest satellite.
Kneel down, daughter of princes, favoured more
Than Freya or Gudrun; for these were wives
Of gods or demigods, but thou the slave
Of Humber. Lo whose pleasure kingdoms strove
To do, is made my footstool. I have slain
Nations to win her and have ravished her
Before her father's eyes, not yet made blood
And faces of a hundred warlike lovers.
Yet all these could not help her cries.

ALL

Humber!

OFFA

The strong, the noble Humber!

HUMBER

Girl, arise

And serve me. Thou shalt do it royally.

This is thy father's skull [*incomplete*]

The Maid in the Mill
or
Love Shuffles the Cards

A Comedy

Dramatis Personae

CUPID.

ATE.

KING PHILIP OF SPAIN.

COUNT BELTRAN, a nobleman.

ANTONIO, his son.

BASIL, his nephew.

COUNT CONRAD, a young nobleman.

RONCEDAS }
GUZMAN } courtiers.

THE FARMER.

JACINTO, his son.

JERONIMO, a student.

CARLOS, a student.

FRIAR BALTASAR, a pedagogue.

EUPHROSYNE, the maid of the farm.

ISMENIA, sister of Conrad.

BRIGIDA, her cousin.

Act I

Scene 1

The King's Court at Salamanca.

King Philip, Conrad, Beltran, Roncedas, Guzman, Antonio, Basil, Ismenia, Brigida; Grandees.

CONRAD

Till when do we wait here?

RONCEDAS

The Court is dull.

This melancholy gains upon the King.

CONRAD

I should be riding homeward. How long it is
To lose the noble hours so empty.

RONCEDAS

This is a daily weariness. But look:
The King has left his toying with the tassels
Of the great chair and turns slow eyes to us.

KING PHILIP

Count Beltran.

BELTRAN

Your Highness?

KING PHILIP

What is your masque's device

For which I still must thank your loyal pains
 To cheer our stay in this so famous city?
 Shall we hear it?

BELTRAN

Nothing from me, Your Highness.
 Castilians, forgèd iron of old time,
 And hearts that beat to tread of empires, cannot
 Keep pace with dances, entertainments, masques.
 But here's my son, a piece of modern colour,
 For now our forward children overstep
 Their rough begetters — ask him, Sire; I doubt not
 His answers shall reveal the grace men lend him
 In attribution, — would 'twere used more nobly.

KING PHILIP

Your son, Lord Beltran? Surely you fatigued
 The holy saints in heaven and perfect martyrs
 In your yet hopeful youth, till they consented
 To your best wish. What masque, Antonio?

ANTONIO

One little worthy, yet in a spirit framed
 That may excuse much error; 'tis the Judgment
 Of Paris and the Rape of Spartan Helen.

GUZMAN

Is that not very old?

ISMENIA

Antonio? He
 Antonio? O my poor eyes misled,
 Whither have you wandered?

BRIGIDA

Hush.

KING PHILIP

It has I think
Been staged a little often and though, Antonio,
I doubt not that fine pen and curious staging
Will raise it beyond new things rough conceived,
Yet is fresh subject something.

ANTONIO

For a play
It were so; this is none. Pardon me, Sir,
I err in boldness, urge too far my answer.

KING PHILIP

Your boldness, youth, is others' modesty.
Speak freely.

ANTONIO

Thus I say then. A masque is heard
Once only and in that once must all be grasped at
But the swift action of the stage speeds on,
While slow conception labouring after it
Roughens its subtleties, blurs over shades,
Sees masses only. If the plot is new,
The mind is like a traveller pressed for time,
And quite engrossed with incident, omits
To take the breath of flowers and lingering shade
From haste to reach a goal. But the plot old
Leaves it at leisure and it culls at ease
Those delicate, scarcely-heeded strokes, which art
Throws in, to justify genius. These being lost
Perfection's disappointed. Then if old
The subject amplifies creative labour,
For what's creation but to make old things
Admirably new; the other's mere invention,
A small gift, though a gracious. He's creator
Who greatly handles great material,
Calls order out of the abundant deep,

Not who invents sweet shadows out of air.

KING PHILIP

You are blessed, Lord Beltran, in your son. His voice
Performs the promise of his eyes; he is
A taking speaker.

ISMENIA

True, O true! He has taken
My heart out of my bosom.

BRIGIDA

Will you hush?

KING PHILIP

You have, Lord Beltran, lands of which the fame
Gives much to Nature. I have not yet beheld them.
Indeed I grudge each rood of Spanish earth
My eyes have not perused, my heart stored up.
But what with foreign boyhood, strange extraction,
And hardly reaching with turmoil to power
I am a stranger merely. I have swept
Through beautiful Spain more like a wind than man,
Now fugitive, now blown into my right
On a great whirlwind of success. So tell me,
Have you not many lovely things to live with?

BELTRAN

My son would answer better, Sire. I care not
Whether this tree be like a tower or that
A dragon: and I never saw myself
Difference twixt field and field, save the main one
Of size, boundary and revenue; and those
Were great once, — why now lessened and by whom
I will not move you by repeating, Sire,
Although my heart speaks of it feelingly.

KING PHILIP

I have not time for hatred or revenge.
Speak then, Antonio, but tell me not
Of formal French demesnes and careful parks,
Life dressed like a stone lady, statuesque.
They please the judging eye, but not the heart.
When Nature is disnatured, all her glowing
Great outlines chillingly disharmonised
Into stiff lines, the heart's dissatisfied,
Asks freedom, wideness; it compares the sweep
Of the large heavens above and feels a discord.
Your architects plan beauty by the yard,
Weigh sand with sand, parallel line with line
But miss the greatest, since uncultured force
Though rude, yet striking home by far exceeds
Artisan's work, mechanically good.

ANTONIO

Our fields, Sir, are a rural holiday,
Not Nature carved.

KING PHILIP

Has she a voice to you?
Silent, she's not so fair.

ANTONIO

Yes, we have brooks
Muttering through sedge and stone, and willows by them
Leaning dishevelled and forget-me-nots,
Wonders of lurking azure, rue and mallow,
Honeysuckle and painful meadowsweet,
And when we're tired of watching the rich bee
Murmur absorbed about one lonely flower,
Then we can turn and hear a noon of birds.
Each on his own heart's quite intent, yet all
Join sweetness at melodious intervals.

KING PHILIP

You have many trees?

ANTONIO

Glades, Sire, and green assemblies
And separate giants bending to each other
As if they longed to meet. Some are pranked out;
Others wear merely green like foresters.

ISMENIA

Can hatred sound so sweet? Are enemies' voices
Like hail of angels to the ear, Brigida?

BRIGIDA

Hush, fool. We are too near. Someone will mark you.

ISMENIA

Why, cousin, if they do, what harm? Sure all
Unblamed may praise sweet music when they hear it.

BRIGIDA

Rule your tongue, madam. Or must I leave you?

KING PHILIP

You have made me sorrowful. How different
Is this pale picture of a Court, these walls
Shut out from honest breathing; God kept not
His quarries in the wild and distant hills
For such perversion. It was sin when first
Hands serried stone with stone. Guzman, you are
A patient reasoner, — is it not better
To live in the great air God made for us,
A peasant in the open glory of earth,
Feeling it, yet not knowing it, like him
To drink the cool life-giving brook nor crave
The sour fermented madness of the grape
Nor the dull exquisiteness of far-fetched viands

For the tired palate, but black bread or maize,
Mere wholesome ordinary corn. Think you not
A life so in the glorious sunlight bathed,
Straight nursed and suckled from the vigorous Earth
With shaping labour and the homely touch
Of the great hearty mother, edifies
A nobler kind than nourished is in courts?
For we are even as children, when removed
From those her streaming breasts, we of the sun
Defrauded and the lusty salutation
Of wind and rain, grow up amphibious nothing,
Not man, who are too sickly wise for earth
Nor angel, too corrupt for heirs of heaven.

GUZMAN

I think not so, Your Highness.

KING PHILIP

Not so, Guzman?

Is not a peasant happier than a king?
For he has useful physical toil and sleep
Unbroken as a child's. He is not hedged
By swathing ceremony which forbids
A king to feel himself a man. He has friends,
For he has equals. And in youth he marries
The comrade of his boyhood whom he loved
And gets on that sweet helper stalwart children.
Then vigorously his days endure till age
Sees his grandchildren climbing on his knees,
A happy calm old man; because he lived
Man's genuine life and goes with task accomplished
Thro' death as thro' a gate, not questioning.

GUZMAN

Each creature labouring in his own vocation
Desires another's and deems the heavy burden
Of his own fate the world's sole heaviness.

Each thing's to its perceptions limited,
Another's are to it intangible,
A shadow far away, quite bodiless,
Lost in conjecture's wide impalpable.
On its unceasing errand through the void
The earth rolls on, a blind and moaning sphere;
It knows not Venus' sorrows, but it looks
With envy crying, "These have light and beauty,
I only am all dark and comfortless."
The land yearning for life, endeavours seaward,
The sea, weary of motion, pines to turn
Into reposeful earth: yet were this done
Each would repine again and hate the doer,
The land would miss its flowers and grass and birds,
The sea long for the coral and the cave.
For he who made expenditure of life
Condition of that life prolonged, made also
Each mortal gift dependent on defect
And truth to one's own self the only virtue.
The labourer physically is divine,
Inward a void; yet in his limits blest.
But were the city's cultured son, who turns
Watching and envious, crying "Were I simple,
Primeval in my life as he, how happy!",
Into such environs confined, how then
His temperament would beat against the bars
Of circumstance and rage for wider field.
Uninterchangeable their natures stand
And self-confined; for so Earth made them, Earth,
The brute and kindly mother groping for mind.
She of her vigorous nature bore her sons,
Made lusty with her milk and strengthening motion
Abundant in her veins; her dumb attraction
Is as their mother's arms, else like the lark
Aiming from her to heaven. And Souls are there
Who rooted in her puissant animalism
Are greatly earthy, yet widen to the bound

And heighten towards the sun. But these are rare
And of no privileged country citizens
Nor to the city bounded nor the field.
They are wise and royal in the furrow, keep
In schools their chastened vigour from the soil
Full-tempered. Man Antaeuslike is strong
While he is natural and feels the soil
From which being lifted great communities
Die in their intellectual grandeur. Let then
The city's many-minded son preserve
And the clear-natured peasant unabridged
Their just, great uses, heighten or refresh
By breath and force of each a different spirit
If may be; one not admit untutored envy,
The other vain imagination making
Return to nature a misleading name
For a reversion most unnatural.

KING PHILIP

You reason well, Guzman; nor must we pine
At stations where God and his saints have set us.
And yet because I'd feel the rural air,
Of greatness unreminded, I will go
Tomorrow as a private noble, you,
My lords, forget for one day I'm the king,
Nor watch my moods, nor with your eyes wait on me
Nor disillusionize by close observance
But keep as to an equal courtesy.

MAJORDOMO

Your Majesty —

KING PHILIP

Well, sir, Your Ancient Wisdom —

MAJORDOMO

The Kings of Spain —

KING PHILIP

Are absolute, you'd say,
Over men only? Custom masters kings.
I'll not be ruled by your stale ceremonies
As kings are by an arrogating Senate,
But will control them, wear them when I will,
Walk disencumbered when I will. Enough.
You have done your part in protest. I have heard you.
And now, my lords.

LORDS

Your Highness is obeyed.

KING PHILIP

Tell on, Antonio. Who perform the masque?

BELTRAN

That can I tell Your Highness; rural girls,
The daughters of the soil, whom country air
Has given the red-blooded health to bloom.
Full of our Spanish sunlight are they, voiced
Like Junos and will make our ladies pale
Before them. And there's a Farmer's lovely daughter,
A marvel. Robed in excellent apparel,
As she will be, there's not a maid in Spain
Can stand beside her and stay happy. My sons
Have spared nor words nor music nor array
Nor beauty, to express their loyal duty.

KING PHILIP

I am much graced by this their gentle trouble
And yet, Lord Beltran, there are nobler things
Than these brocaded masques; not that I scorn these, —
Do not believe I would be so ungracious, —
Nor anything belittle in which true hearts
Interpret their rich silence. Yet there's one
Desire, I would exchange for many masques.

'Tis little: an easy word bestows it wholly,
And yet, I fear, for you too difficult.

BELTRAN

My lord, you know my service and should not
Doubt my compliance. Name and take it. Else judge me.

KING PHILIP

Why, noble reconciliation, Conde Beltran,
Sweet friendship between mighty jarring houses
And by great intercession war renounced
Betwixt magnificent hearts: these are the masques
Most sumptuous, these the glorious theatres
That subjects should present to princes. Conrad
And noble Beltran, I respect the wrath
Sunders your pride: yet mildness has the blessing
Of God and is religion's perfect mood.
Admit that better weakness. Throw your hearts
Wide to the low knock of entering peace: let not
The ashes of a rage the world renounces
Smoulder between you nor outdated griefs
Keep living. What, quite silent? Will you, Conrad,
Refuse to me your anger, who so often
Have for my sake your very life renounced?

CONRAD

My lord, the hate that I have never cherished,
I know not how to abandon. Not in the sway
Of other men's affections I have lived
But walked in the straight road my fortunes build me.
Let any love who will or any hate who will,
I take both with a calm, unburdened spirit,
Inarm my lover as a friend, embrace
My enemy as a wrestler: do my will,
Because it is my will, go where I go
Because my path lies there. If any cross me,
That is his choice, not mine. And if he suffer,

Again it is his choice, not mine. If I,
That is my star: I curse him not for it:
My fate's beyond his making as my spirit's
Above affection by him. I hate no man
And if Lord Beltran give to me his hand,
Gladly I'll clasp it, easily forget
Outdated injuries and wounds long healed.

BELTRAN

You are most noble, Conrad, most benign.
Who now can say the ill-doer ne'er forgives?
Conrad has dispossessed my kinsmen, slain
My vassals, me of ancient lands relieved,
Thinned my great house; but Beltran is forgiven.
Will you not now enlarge your generous nature,
Wrong me still more, have new and ampler room
For exercise to your forgiving heart?
I do embrace misfortune and fresh loss
Before your friendship, lord.

KING PHILIP

No more of this.

BELTRAN

Pardon, Your Highness; this was little praise
For so much Christianity. Lord Conrad,
I will not trouble you further. And perhaps
With help of the good saints and holy Virgin
I too shall make me some room to pardon in.

CONRAD

I fear you not, Lord Count. Our swords have clashed:
Mine was the stronger. When I was but a boy
I carved your lands out. So had you won mine
If you had simply grappled fortune to you
And kept her faithful with your sword. 'Tis not
Crooked dexterity that has the secret

To win her. Briefly I hold your lands and satire
Has no sharp edge, till it cut that from me.

KING PHILIP

This is unprofitable. No more of it.
Lord Conrad, you go homeward with the dawn?

CONRAD

Winning your gracious leave to have with me
My sisters, Sir.

KING PHILIP

The Queen is very loth
To lose her favourites, but to disappoint you
Much more unwilling.

Exeunt King, Beltran, Guzman and Grandees.

RONCEDAS

A word with you, Lord Conrad.

CONRAD

As many as you will, Roncedas.

RONCEDAS

This. (*whispers*)

My lord, your good friend always.

CONRAD

So you have been.

Exit Roncedas.

Cousin, and sweetest sister, I am bound
Homeward upon a task that needs my presence.
Don Mario and his wife will bring you there.
Are you content or shall I stay for you?

ISMENIA

With all you do, dear brother, yet would have

Your blessing by me.

CONRAD

May your happiness
Greatly exceed my widest wishes.

Exit Conrad.

ISMENIA

So
It must do, brother, or I am unhappy.
What task?

BRIGIDA

Some girl-lifting. What other task
Will he have now? Shall we go, cousin?

ISMENIA

Stay.
Let us not press so closely after them.

BRIGIDA

Good manners? Oh, your pardon. I was blind.

BASIL

Are you a lover or a fish, Antonio?
Speak. She yet lingers.

ANTONIO

Speak?

BASIL

The devil remove you
Where you can never more have sight of her.
I lose all patience.

BRIGIDA

Cousin, I know you're tired

With standing. Sit, and if you tire with that,
As perseverance is a powerful virtue,
For your reward the dumb may speak to you.

ISMENIA

What shall I do, dear girl?

BRIGIDA

Why, speak the first,
Count Conrad's sister! Be the Mahomet
To your poor mountain. Hang me if I think not
The prophet's hill more moveable of the two;
An earthquake stirs not this. What ails the man?
He has made a wager with some lamp-post surely.

ISMENIA

Brigida, are you mad? Be so immodest?
A stranger and my house's enemy!

BRIGIDA

No, never speak to him. It would be indeed
Horribly forward.

ISMENIA

Why, you jest, Brigida.
I'm no such light thing that I must be dumb
Lest men mistake my speaking. Let hidden frailness
Or men suspect to their own purity
Guard every issue of speech and gesture. Wherefore
Should I be hedged so meanly in? To greet
With few words, cold and grave, as is befitting
This gentle youth, why do you call immodest?

BRIGIDA

You must not.

ISMENIA

Must not? Why, I will.

BRIGIDA

I say,

You must not, child.

ISMENIA

I will then, not because
I wish (why should I?), but because you always
Provoke me with your idle prudities.

BRIGIDA

Good! you've been wishing it the last half hour
And now you are provoked to't. Charge him, charge him.
I stand here as reserve.

ISMENIA

Impossible creature!
But no! You shall not turn me.

BRIGIDA

'Twas not my meaning.

ISMENIA

Sir —

BASIL

Rouse yourself, Antonio. Gather back
Your manhood, or you're shamed without retrieval.

ISMENIA

Help me, Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Not I, cousin.

ISMENIA

Sir,

You spoke divinely well. I say this, Sir,
Not to recall to you that we have met —
Since you will not remember — but because
I would not have you — anyone think this of me
That since you are Antonio and my enemy
And much have hurt me — to the heart, therefore
When one speaks or does worthily, I can
Admire not, nor love merit, whosoe'er
Be its receptacle. This was my meaning.
I could not bear one should not know this of me.
Therefore I spoke.

BASIL

Speak or be dumb for ever.

ISMENIA

I see, you have mistook me why I spoke
And scorn me. Sir, you may be right to think
You have so sweet a tongue would snare the birds
From off the branches, ravish an enemy, —
Some such poor wretch there may be — witch her heart out,
If you could care for anything so cheap,
And hold it in your hand, lost, — lost — Oh me!
Brigida!

BASIL

O base silence! Speak! She is
Confounded. Speak, you sheep, you!

ISMENIA

Though this *is* so,

You do me wrong to think me such an one,
Most flagrant wrong, Antonio. To think that I
Wait one word of your lips to woo you, yearn
To be your loving servant at a word

From you, — one only word and I am yours.

BASIL

Admirable lady! Saints, can you be dumb
Who hear this?

ISMENIA

Still you scorn me. For all this
You shall not make me angry. Do you imagine
Because you know I am Lord Conrad's sister
And lodge with Donna Clara Santa Cruz
In the street Velasquez, and you have seen it
With marble front and the quaint mullioned windows,
That you need only after vespers, when
The streets are empty, stand there, and I will
Send one to you? Indeed, indeed I merit not
You should think poorly of me. If you're noble
And do not scorn me, you will carefully
Observe the tenour of my prohibition.
Brigida!

BRIGIDA

Come away with your few words,
Your cold grave words. You've frozen his speech with them.

Exeunt.

ANTONIO

Heavens! it was she — her words were not a dream,
Yet I was dumb. There was a majesty
Even in her tremulous playfulness, a thrill
When she smiled most, made my heart beat too quickly
For speech. O that I should be dumb and shamefast,
When with one step I might grasp Paradise.

BASIL

Antonio!

ANTONIO

I was not deceived. She blushed,
And the magnificent scarlet to her cheeks
Welled from her heart an ocean inexhaustible.
Rose but outcrimsoned rose. Yes, every word
Royally marred the whiteness of her cheeks
With new impossibilities of beauty.
She blushed, and yet as with an angry shame
Of that delicious weakness, gallantly
Her small imperious head she held erect
And strove in vain to encourage those sweet lids
That fluttered lower and lower. O that but once
My tongue had been as bold as were mine eyes!
But these were fastened to her as with cords,
Courage in them naked necessity.

BASIL

Ah poor Antonio. You're bewitched, you're maimed,
Antonio. You must make her groan who did this.
One sense will always now be absent from him.
Lately he had no tongue. Now that's returned
His ears are gone on leave. Hark you, Antonio!
Why do we stay here?

ANTONIO

I am in a dream.
Lead where you will, since there is no place now
In all the world, but only she or silence.

Scene 2

*A garden at the town-house of Count Beltran.
Antonio, Basil.*

BASIL

I am abashed for you. What, make a lady
Woo you, and she a face so excellent,
Of an address so admirably lovely
It shows a goddess in her — at each sentence
Let pause to give you opportunity,
Then shame with the dead silence of the hall
For her continual answer. Fie, you're not
Antonio, you're not Beltran's issue. Seek
Your kindred in the snowdrifts of the Alps,
Or call a post your father.

ANTONIO

I deserve

Your censure, Basil. Yet were it done again,
I know I should again be dumb. My tongue
Teems in imagination but is barren
In actuality. When I am from her,
I woo her with the accent of a god,
My mind o'erflows with words as the wide Nile
With waters. Let her but appear and I
Am her poor mute. She may do her will with me
And O remember but her words. When she,
Ah she, my white divinity with that kindness
Celestial in the smiling of her eyes
And in her voice the world's great music, rose
Of blushing frankness, half woman and half angel,
Crowned me unwooed, lavished on me her heart

In her prodigious liberality,
Could I then speak? O to have language then
Had been the index to a shallow love.

BASIL

Away! you modest lovers are the blot
Of manhood, traitors to our sovereignty.
I'd have you banished, all of you, and kept
In desert islands, where no petticoat
Should enter, so the breed of you might perish.

ANTONIO

You speak against the very sense of Love
Which lives by service.

BASIL

Flat treason! Was not man made
Woman's superior that he might control her,
In strength to exact obedience and in wisdom
To guide her will, in wit to keep her silent,
Three Herculean labours. O were women
Once loose, they would new-deluge earth with words,
Sapiently base creation on its apex,
Logic would be new-modelled, arithmetic
Grow drunk and reason despairing abdicate.
No thunderbolt could stop a woman's will,
Once it is started.

ANTONIO

O you speak at ease.
Loved you, you would recant this and without small
Torture to quicken you.

BASIL

I? I recant?
I wish, Antonio, I had known your case
Earlier. I would have taught you how to love.

ANTONIO

Come, will you woo a woman? Teach me at least
By diagram upon a blackboard.

BASIL

Well,
I will so, if it should hearten your weak spirits.
And now I think of it, I am resolved
I'll publish a new Art of Love, shall be
The only Ovid memorable.

ANTONIO

Well, quickly teach
Your diagram. Suppose your maid and win her.

BASIL

First, I would kiss her.

ANTONIO

What, without leave asked?

BASIL

Leave? Ask a woman leave to kiss her! Why,
What was she made for else?

ANTONIO

If she is angry?

BASIL

So much the better. Then you by repetition
Convince her of your manly strength, which is
A great point gained at the outset and moreover
Your duty, comfortable to yourself.
Besides she likes it. On the same occasion
When she will scold, I'll silence her with wit.
Laughter breaks down impregnable battlements.
Let me but make her smile and there is conquest

Won by the triple strength, horse, foot, artillery,
Of eloquence, wit and muscle. Then but remains
Pacification, with or else without
The Church's help; that's a mere form and makes
No difference to the principle.

ANTONIO

There should be
Inquisitions for such as you. What after?

BASIL

Nothing unless you wish to assure the conquest,
Not plunder it merely like a Tamerlane.
I'll teach that also. 'Tis but making her
Realise her inferiority.
Unanswerably and o'erwhelmingly
Show her how fortunate she is to get you
And all her life too short for gratitude;
That you have robbed her merely for her good,
To civilize her or to train her up:
Punish each word that shows want of affection.
Plague her to death and make her thank you for it.
Accustom her to sing hosannas to you
When you beat her. All this is ordinary,
And every wise benevolent conqueror
Has learnt the trick of it. Then she'll love for ever.

ANTONIO

You are a Pagan and would burn for this
If Love still kept his Holy Office.

BASIL

I

Am safe from him.

ANTONIO

And therefore boast securely

Conducting in imagination wars
 That others have the burden of. I've seen
 The critical civilian in his chair
 Win famous victories with wordy carnage,
 Guide his strategic finger o'er a map,
 Cry "Eugene's fault! Here Marlborough was to blame;
 And look, a child might see it, Villars' plain error
 That lost him Malplaquet!" I think you are
 Just such a pen-and-paper strategist.
 A wooer!

BASIL

Death! I will have pity on you,
 Antonio. You shall see my great example
 And learn by me.

ANTONIO

Good! I'm your pupil. But hear,
 A pretty face or I'll not enter for her,
 Wellborn or I shall much discount your prowess.

BASIL

Agreed. And yet they say, Experimentum
 In corpore vili. But I take your terms
 Lest you substract me for advantages.

ANTONIO

Look where the enemy comes. You are well off
 If you can win her.

BASIL

A rare face, by Heaven.
 Almost too costly a piece of goods for this
 Mad trial.

ANTONIO

You sound retreat?

BASIL

Not I an inch.

Watch how I'll overcrowd her.

ANTONIO

Hush, she's here.

Enter Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Señor, I was bidden to deliver this letter to you.

BASIL

To me, sweetheart?

BRIGIDA

I have the inventory of you in my pocket, if you be he truly. I will study it. Hair of the ordinary poetic length — no; dress indefinable — no; a modest address — I think not you, Señor; a noble manner — Pooh, no! that fits not in; a handsome face — I am sure not you, Señor.

BASIL

Humph.

ANTONIO

Well, cousin. All silent? Open your batteries, open your batteries.

BASIL

Wait, wait. Ought a conqueror to be hurried? Caesar himself must study his ground before he attempts it. You will hear my trumpets instanter.

BRIGIDA

Will you take your letter, Sir?

ANTONIO

To me then, maiden? A dainty-looking note, and I marvel much from whom it can be. I do not know the handwriting. A lady's, seemingly, yet it has a touch of the masculine too — there is rapidity and initiative in its flow. Fair one, from whom comes this?

BRIGIDA

Why, sir, I am not her signature; which if you will look within, I think you will find unforgotten.

BASIL

Here is a clever woman, Antonio, to think of that, and she but eighteen or a miracle.

ANTONIO

Well, cousin?

BRIGIDA

This Don Witty-pate eyes me strangely. I fear he will recognise me.

ANTONIO

Ismenia Ostrocadiz. O my joy!

BRIGIDA

You're ill, sir, you change colour.

ANTONIO

Now, by heaven,

Were death within my heart's door or his blast
Upon my eyelids, this would exile him.
The writing swims before me.

BRIGIDA

Sir, you pale

Extremely. Is there no poison in the letter?

ANTONIO

O might I so be poisoned hourly. Let me
No longer dally with my happiness,
Lest it take wings or turn a dream. Hail, letter,
For thou hast come from that white hand I worship.
“To Lord Antonio.
Señor, how you may deem of my bold wooing,
How cruelly I suffer in your thoughts,
I dread to think. Take the plain truth, Antonio.
I cannot live without your love. If you
From this misdoubt my nobleness or infer
A wanton haste or instability, —
As men pretend quick love is quickly spent —
Tear up this letter, and with it my heart.
And yet I hope you will not tear it. I love you
And since I saw our family variance
And your too noble fearfulness withhold me
From my heart’s lord, I have thrown from me shame
And the admirèd dalliance of women
To bridge it. Come to me, Antonio! Come,
But come in honour. I am not nor can be
So far degenerate from my house’s greatness
Or my pure self to love ignobly. Dear,
I have thrown from me modesty’s coy pretences
But the reality I’ll grapple to me
Close as your image. I am loth to end,
Yet must, and therefore will I end with this,
Beloved, love me, respect me or forget me.”
Writing more sweet than any yet that came
From heaven to earth, O thou dear revelation,
Make my lips holy. Ah, could I imagine
Thee the white hand that wrote thee, I were blest
Utterly. Thou hast made me twice myself.
I think I am another than Antonio:
The sky seems nearer to me or the earth
Environed with a sacred light. O come!
I’ll study to imprint this on my heart,

That when death comes he'll find it there and leave it,
A monument and an immortal writing.

BASIL

Damsel, you are of the Lady Ismenia's household?

BRIGIDA

A poor relative of hers, Señor.

BASIL

Your face seems strangely familiar to me. Have I not seen you
in some place where I constantly resort?

BRIGIDA

O Sir, I hope you do not think so meanly of me. I am a poor girl
but an honest.

BASIL

How, how?

BRIGIDA

I know not how. I spoke only as the spirit moved me.

BASIL

You have a marvellously nimble tongue. Two words with you.

BRIGIDA

Willingly, Señor, if you exceed not measure.

BASIL

Fair one —

BRIGIDA

Oh, sir, I am glad I listened. I like your two words extremely.
God be with you.

BASIL

Why, I have not begun yet.

BRIGIDA

The more shame to your arithmetic. If your teacher had reckoned as loosely with his cane-cuts, he would have made the carefuller scholar.

BASIL

God's wounds, will you listen to me?

BRIGIDA

Well, Sir, I will not insist upon numbers. But pray, for your own sake, swear no more. No eloquence will long stand such drafts upon it.

BASIL

If you would listen, I would tell you a piece of news that might please you.

BRIGIDA

Let it be good news, new news and repeatable news and I will thank you for it.

BASIL

Sure, maiden, you are wondrous beautiful.

BRIGIDA

Señor, Queen Anne is dead. Tell me the next.

BASIL

The next is, I will kiss you.

BRIGIDA

Oh, Sir, that's a prophecy. Well, death and kissing come to all of us, and by what disease the one or by whom the other, wise men care not to forecast. It profits little to study calamities

beforehand. When it comes, I pray God I may learn to take it with resignation, if I cannot do better.

BASIL

By my life, I will kiss you and without farther respite.

BRIGIDA

On what ground?

BASIL

Have I not told you, you are beautiful?

BRIGIDA

So has my mirror, not once but a hundred times, and never yet offered to kiss me. When it does, I'll allow your logic. No, we are already near enough to each other. Pray keep your distance.

BASIL

I will establish my argument with my lips.

BRIGIDA

I will defend mine with my hand. I promise you 'twill prove the abler dialectician of the two.

BASIL

Well.

BRIGIDA

I am glad you think so, Señor. My lord, I cannot stay. What shall I tell my lady?

ANTONIO

Tell her my heart is at her feet, and I
Am hers, hers only until heaven ceases
And after. Tell her that I am more blest
In her sweet condescension to my humbleness
Than Ilian Anchises when Love's mother

Stooped from her golden heavens into his lap.
Tell her that as a goddess I revere her
And as a saint adore; that she and life
Are one to me, for I've no heart but her,
No atmosphere beyond her pleasure, light
But what her eyes allow me. Tell, O tell her —

BRIGIDA

Hold, hold, Señor. You may tell her all this yourself. I would not remember the half of it and could not understand the other half. Shall I tell her, you will come surely?

ANTONIO

As sure as is the sun to its fixed hour
Or midnight to its duty. I will come.

BRIGIDA

Good! there are at last three words a poor girl can understand. Mark then, you will wait a while after nightfall, less than half a bowshot from the place you know towards the Square Velasquez, within sight of the Donna's windows. There I will come to you. Sir, if your sword be half as ready and irresistible as your tongue, I would gladly have you there with him, though Saint Iago grant that neither prove necessary. You look sad, Sir. God save you for a witty and eloquent gentleman.

Exit.

ANTONIO

O cousin, I am bewitched with happiness.
Pardon me that I leave you. Solitude
Demands a god and godlike I am grown
Unto myself. This letter deifies me.
I will be sole with my felicity.

Exit.

BASIL

God grant that I am not bewitched also! Saints and angels! How

is it? How did it happen? Is the sun still in heaven? Is that the song of a bird or a barrel-organ? I am not drunk either. I can still distinguish between a tree and the squirrel upon it. What, am I not Basil? whom men call the witty and eloquent Basil? Did I not laugh from the womb? Was not my first cry a jest upon the world I came into? Did I not invent a conceit upon my mother's milk ere I had sucked of it? Death! and have I been bashed and beaten by the tongue of a girl? silenced by a common purveyor of impertinences? It is so and yet it cannot be. I begin to believe in the dogmas of the materialist. The gastric juice rises in my estimation. Genius is after all only a form of indigestion, a line of Shakespeare the apotheosis of a leg of mutton and the speculations of Plato an escape of diseased tissue arrested in the permanency of ink. What did I break my fast with this morning? Kippered herring? bread? marmalade? tea? O kippered herring, art thou the material form of stupidity and is marmalade an enemy of wit? It must be so. O mighty gastric juice! Mother and Saviour! I bow down before thee. Be propitious, fair goddess, to thy adorer.

Arise, Basil. Today thou shalt retrieve thy tarnished laurels or be expunged for ever from the book of the witty. Arm thyself in full panoply of allusion and irony, gird on raillery like a sword and repartee like a buckler. I will meet this girl tonight. I will tunc her with conceits, torture her with ironies, tickle her with jests, prick her all over with epigrams. My wit shall smother her, tear her, burst her sides, press her to death, hang her, draw her, quarter her, and if all this fails, Death! as a last revenge, I'll — I'll beat her. Saints!

Scene 3

Ismenia's chamber.

ISMENIA

Brigida lingers. O, he has denied me
And therefore she is loth to come, for she
Knows she will bring me death. It is not so.
He has detained her to return an answer.
Yet I asked none. I am full of fear. O heart,
I have staked thee upon a desperate cast,
Which if I win not, I am miserable.
'Tis she. O that my hope could give her wings
Or lift her through the window bodily
To shorten this age of waiting. I could not
Discern her look. Her steps sound hopefully.

Enter Brigida.

Dearest Brigida! at last! What says Antonio? Tell me quickly.
Heavens! you look melancholy.

BRIGIDA

Santa Catarina! How weary I am! My ears too! I think they
have listened to more nonsense in these twenty minutes than
in all their natural eighteen years before. Sure, child, thou hast
committed some unpardonable sin to have such a moonstruck
lover as this Antonio.

ISMENIA

But, Brigida!

BRIGIDA

And his shadow too, his Cerberus of wit who guards this poetical
treasure. He would have eaten me, I think, if I had not given him

the wherewithal to stop the three mouths of him.

ISMENIA

Why, Brigida, Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Saints! to think how men lie! I have heard this Basil reputed loudly for the Caesar of wits, the tongue and laughter of the time; but never credit me, child, if I did not silence him with a few stale pertnesses a market-girl might have devised for her customers. A wit, truly! and not a word in his mouth bullet-head Pedro could not better.

ISMENIA

Distraction! What is this to Antonio? Sure, your wits are bewildered, Brigida. What said Antonio? Girl, I am on thorns.

BRIGIDA

I am coming to that as fast as possible. Jesus! What a burning hurry you are in, Ismenia! You have not your colour, child. I will bring you sal volatile from my chamber. 'Tis in a marvellous cut bottle with a different hue to each facet! I filched it from Donna Clara's room when she was at matins yesterday.

ISMENIA

Tell me, you magpie, tell me.

BRIGIDA

What am I doing else? You must know I found Antonio was in his garden. Oh, did I tell you, Ismenia? Donna Clara chooses the seeds for me this season and I think she has as rare a notion of nasturtiums as any woman living. I was speaking to Pedro in the summer house yesterday; for you remember it thundered terrifically before one had time to know light from darkness; and there I stood miles from the garden door —

ISMENIA

In the name of pity, Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Saints! how you hurry me. Well, when I went to Antonio in his garden — There's an excellent garden, Ismenia. I wonder where Don Beltran's gardener had his bignonias.

ISMENIA

Oh-h-h!

BRIGIDA

Well, where was I? Oh, giving the letter to Antonio. Why, would you believe it, in thrust Don Wit, Don Cerberus, Don Subtle-three-mouths.

ISMENIA

Will you tell me, you ogress, you paragon of tyrannesses, you she-Nero, you compound of impossible cruelties?

BRIGIDA

Saints, what have I done to be abused so? I was coming to it faster than a mail-coach and four. You would not be so unconscionable as to ask me for the appendage of a story, all tail and nothing to hang it on? Well, Antonio took the letter.

ISMENIA

Yes, yes and what answer gave he?

BRIGIDA

He looked all over the envelope to see whence it came, dissertated learnedly on this knotty question, abused me your handwriting foully.

ISMENIA

Dear cousin, sweet cousin, excellent Brigida! On my knees, I entreat you, do not tease me longer. Though I know you would

not do it, if all were not well, yet consider what a weak tremulous thing is the heart of woman when she loves and have pity on me. On my knees, sweetest.

BRIGIDA

Why, Ismenia, I never knew you so humble in my life, — save indeed to your brother; but him indeed I do not reckon. He would rule even me if I let him. On your knees, too! This is excellent. May I be lost, if I am not tempted to try how long I can keep you so. But I will be merciful. Well, he scanned your handwriting and reviled it for the script of a virago, an Amazon.

ISMENIA

Brigida, if you will not tell me directly, without phrase and plainly, just what I want to know and nothing else, by heaven, I will beat you.

BRIGIDA

Now, this is foul. Can you not keep your better mood for fifty seconds by the clock? O temper, temper. Ah well, where was I? Oh yes, your handwriting. Oh! Oh! Oh! What mean you, cousin? Lord deliver me. Cousin! Cousin! He will come! He will come! He will come!

ISMENIA

Does he love me?

BRIGIDA

Madly! distractedly! like a moonstruck natural! Saints!

ISMENIA

Dearest, dearest Brigida! You are an angel. How can I thank you?

BRIGIDA

Child, you have thanked me out of breath already. If you have not dislocated my shoulder and torn half my hair out.

ISMENIA

Hear her, the Pagan! A gentle physical agitation and some rearrangement of tresses, 'twas less punishment than you deserved. But there! that is salve for you. And now be sober, sweet. What said Antonio? Come, tell me. I am greedy to know.

BRIGIDA

I'll be hanged if I do. Besides I could not if I would. He talked poetry.

ISMENIA

But did he not despise me for my forwardness?

BRIGIDA

Tut, you are childish. But to speak the bare fact, Ismenia, I think he is most poetically in love with you. He made preparations to swoon when he no more than saw your name; but I build nothing on that; there are some faint when they smell a pinch of garlic or spy a cockchafer. But he wasted ten minutes copying your letter into his heart or some such note-book of love affairs; yet that was nothing either; I doubt if he found room for you, unless on the margin. Then he began drawing cheques on Olympus for comparisons, left that presently as antique and out of date, confounded Ovid and his breviary in the same quest; left that too for mediaeval, and diverged into Light and Heat, but came not to the very modernness of electricity. But Lord! Cousin, what a career he ran! He had imagined himself blind and breathless when I stopped him. I tremble to think what calamities might have ensued, had I not thrown myself under the wheels of his metaphor. The upshot is, he loves you, worships you and will come to you.

ISMENIA

O Brigida, Brigida, be you as happy as you have made me.

BRIGIDA

Truly, the happiness of lovers, children with a new plaything and

mad to handle it. But when they are tired of the game — No, I'll be the type and patroness of all spinsters and the noble army of old maids shall gather about my tomb to do homage to me.

ISMENIA

And he will come tonight?

BRIGIDA

Yes, if his love lasts so long.

ISMENIA

For a thousand years. Come with me, Brigida, and help me to bear my happiness. Till tonight!

Scene 4

A street in Madrid.
Antonio, Basil.

ANTONIO
This is the place.

BASIL
'Tis farther.

ANTONIO
This, I know it.
Here's the square Velasquez. There in his saddle
Imperial Charles watches the silent city
His progeny could not keep. Where the one light
Stands beckoning to us, is Don Mario's dwelling.
O thou celestial lustre, wast thou kindled
To be her light who is my sun? If so,
Thou art most happy. For thou dost inherit
The sanctuary of her dear sleep and art
The confidant of those sweet secrecies.
Though thou live for a night, yet is thy short
And noble ministry more rich and costly
Than ages of the sun. For thou hast seen,
O blessed, her unveiled and gleaming shoulder
Make her thick-treasured hair more precious. Thou
Hast watched that face upon her heavenly pillow
Slumbering amid its peaceful curls. O more!
For thou perhaps hast laid one brilliant finger
On her white breast mastered with sacred sleep,
And there known Paradise. Therefore thou'rt famous
Above all lights that human hands have kindled.

BASIL

Here's a whole epic on an ounce of oil,
A poor, drowned wick bought from the nearest chandler
And a fly sodden in it.

ANTONIO

Listen! one comes.

BASIL

Stand back, abide not question.

ANTONIO

They'll not doubt us.

We are far from the building.

BASIL

Am I mad?

Do you think I'll trust a lover? Why, you could not
Even ask the time but you would say, "Good sir,
How many minutes to Ismenia?"

ANTONIO

Well,

Stand back.

BASIL

No need. I see it. 'Tis the she-guide,
The feminine Mercury, the tongue, the woman.

Enter Brigida.

Hark to the bell now.

BRIGIDA

You, my lord Antonio?

This way, my lord.

ANTONIO

Which way you will. I know

You are my guide to heaven.

BRIGIDA

O you have come?

I take this kindly of you, Señor. Tell me,
Were you not hiding when I came up to you?
What was it, Sir? A constable or perhaps
A creditor? For to be dashed by a weak girl
I know you are too bold. What did you say?
I did not hear you. We are there, my lord.
Now quietly, if you love her, your sweet lady.

(to Basil)

Can you be silent, Señor? We are lost else.

Scene 5

*Ismenia's antechamber.
Ismenia waiting.*

ISMENIA

It is too dark. I can see nothing. Hark!
Surely it was the door that fastened then.
My heart, control thyself! Thou beatst too quickly
And wilt break in the arms of happiness.
Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Here. Enter, my lord, and take her.

ANTONIO

Ismenia!

ISMENIA

Antonio, O Antonio!

ANTONIO

My heart's dearest.

BRIGIDA

Bring your wit this way, Sir.

It is not needed.

Exit with Basil.

ISMENIA

O not thus! You shame me.
This is my place, dear, at your feet; and then
Higher than is my right.

ANTONIO

I cannot suffer
Blasphemy to touch my heaven, though your lips
Have hallowed it. Highest were low for you.
You are a goddess and adorable.

ISMENIA

Alas, Antonio, this is not the way.
I fear you do not love me, you despise me.
Come, do you not despise me?

ANTONIO

The leaf might then
Despise the moonbeam that has come to kiss it.
I love and reverence.

ISMENIA

Then you must take me,
As I have given myself to you, your servant,
Yours wholly, not to be prayed to and hymned
As a divinity but to be commanded
As a dear handmaid. You must rule me, sweet,
Or I shall spoil with liberty and lose you.

ANTONIO

Must I? I will then. Yet you are so queenly,
I needs must smile when I attempt it. Come,
Shall I command you?

ISMENIA

Do, sweet.

ANTONIO

Lay your head
Upon my shoulder so and do not dare
To lift it till I give you leave.

ISMENIA

Alas,
I fear you'll be a tyrant. And I meant
To bear at most a limited monarchy.

ANTONIO

No murmuring. Answer my questions.

ISMENIA

Well,
That's easy and I will.

ANTONIO

And truly.

ISMENIA

Oh,
But that's almost impossible. I'll try.

ANTONIO

Come, when did you first love me?

ISMENIA

Dear, today.

ANTONIO

When will you marry me?

ISMENIA

Tomorrow, dear.

ANTONIO

Here is a mutinous kingdom to my hands.
Now truly.

ISMENIA

Truly then, seven days ago,

No more than seven, at the court I saw you,
And with the sight my life was troubled, heard you
And your voice tore my heart out. O Antonio,
I was an empty thing until today.
I saw you daily, but because I feared
What now I know, you were Lord Beltran's son,
I dared not ask your name, nay shut my ears
To knowledge. O my love, I am afraid.
Your father seems a hard vindictive man.
What will you do with me, Antonio?

ANTONIO

Fasten

My jewel safe from separating hands
Holily on my bosom. My father? He
Shall know not of our love, till we are sure
From rude disunion. Though he will be angry
I am his eldest and beloved son,
And when he feels your sweetness and your charm
He will repent and thank me for a daughter.

ISMENIA

When 'tis your voice that tells me, I believe
Impossibilities. Well, let me know —
You've made me blush, Antonio, and I wish
I could retaliate — were you not amazed
At my mad forwardness, to woo you first,
A youth unknown?

ANTONIO

Yes, even as Adam was

When he first saw the sunrise over Eden.
It was unsunlike to uplift the glory
Of those life-giving rays, unwooed, uncourted.

ISMENIA

Alas, you flatter. Did you love me, Antonio?

ANTONIO

Three days before I had the bliss to win
The wonder of your eyes.

ISMENIA

Three days! Oh me,
Three days, Antonio? Three whole days before
I loved you?

ANTONIO

Three days, dearest.

ISMENIA

Oh,
You've made me jealous. I am angry. Three
Whole days! How could it happen?

ANTONIO

I will make
You compensation, dear; for in revenge
I'll love you three whole days, when you have ceased
To love me.

ISMENIA

O not even in jest, Antonio,
Speak of such separation. Sooner shall
The sun divorce his light than we two sunder.
But you have given me a spur. I must
Love you too much, I must, Antonio, more
Than you love me, or the account's not even.
A noise?

ANTONIO

One passes in the street.

ISMENIA

We are

Too near the window and too heedless, love.
Come this way; here 'tis safe; I fear your danger.

Exeunt. After a while enter Brigida.

BRIGIDA

No sound? Señor! Ismenia! Surely they cannot have embraced each other into invisibility. No, Cupid has flown away with them. It cannot have been the devil, for I smell no brimstone. Well, if they are so tedious I will not mortify myself with solitude either. I have set Don Cerberus on the stairs out of respect for the mythology. There he stands with his sword at point like the picture of a sentinel and protects us against a surprise of rats from the cellar; for what other wild beasts there may be to menace us, I know not. Don Mario snores hard and Donna Clara plays the violin to his bassoon. I have heard them three rooms off. These men! these men! and yet they call themselves our masters. I would I could find a man fit to measure tongues with me. I begin to feel lonely in the Alpine elevation of my own wit. The meditations of Matterhorn come home to me and I feel a sister to Monte Rosa. Certainly this woman's fever is catching, a most calamitous infection. I have overheard myself sighing; it is a symptom incubatory. Heigh-ho! When turtles pair, I never heard that the magpie lives lonely. I have at this moment a kindly thought for all suffering animals. I begin to pity Cerberus even. I will relieve him from guard. Hist! Señor! Don Basil!

Enter Basil.

Is all quiet?

BASIL

Not a mouse stirring.

BRIGIDA

Put up your sword, pray you; I think there is no danger, and if one comes, you may draw again in time to cut its tail off.

BASIL

At your service, Señorita. If it were not treason to my wit, I

begin to feel this strip of a girl is making an ass of me. I am transformed; I feel it. I shall hear myself bray presently. But I will defy enchantment, I will handle her. A plague! Must I continually be stalemated by a will-o'-the-wisp, all sparkle and nowhere? Courage, Basil.

BRIGIDA

You meditate, Señor? If it be to allay the warmth you have brought from the stairs with the coolness of reflection, I would not hinder you.

BASIL

In bare truth, Señorita, I am so chilled that I was even about to beg of you a most sweet and warming cordial.

BRIGIDA

For a small matter like that, I would be loth to deny you. You shall have it immediately.

BASIL

With your permission, then.

BRIGIDA

Ah Señor, beware. Living coals are dangerous; they burn, Señor.

BASIL

I am proof.

BRIGIDA

As the man said when he was bitten by the dog they thought mad; but 'twas the dog that died. Pray, sir, have a care. You will put the fire out.

BASIL

Come, I have you. I will take ten kisses for the one you refused me this forenoon.

BRIGIDA

That is too compound an interest. I do entreat you, Sir, have a care. This usury is punishable by the law.

BASIL

I have the rich man's trick for that. With the very coin I have unlawfully gathered, I will stop her mouth.

BRIGIDA

O sir, you are as wasteful an accountant of kisses as of words. I foresee you will go bankrupt. No more. Señor, what noise was that on the stair? Good, now you have your distance. I will ev'n trouble you to keep it. No nearer, I tell you. You do not observe the laws of the duello. You take advantages.

BASIL

With me? Pooh, you grow ambitious. Because I knew that to stop your mouth was to stop your life, therefore in pity I have refused your encounter, in pure pity.

BRIGIDA

Was it truly? Alas, I could weep to think of the violence you have done yourself for my sake. Pray, sir, do not torture yourself so. To see how goodness is misunderstood in this world! Out of pity? And made me take you for a fool!

BASIL

Well.

BRIGIDA

O no, Señor, it is not well; indeed it is not well. You shall not do this again. If I must die, I must die. You are scatheless. Pray now, disburden your intellect of all the brilliant things it has so painfully kept to itself. Plethora is unwholesome and I would not have you perish of an apoplexy of wit. Pour it out on me, conceit, epigram, irony, satire, vituperation; flout and invective, tu quoque and double-entendre, pun and quibble, rhyme and

unreason, catcall and onomatopoeia; all, all, though it be an avalanche. It will be terrible, but I will stand the charge of it.

BASIL

St Iago! I think she has the whole dictionary in her stomach. I grow desperate.

BRIGIDA

Pray, do not be afraid. I do not indeed press you to throw yourself at my head, but for a small matter like your wit, I will bear up against it.

BASIL

This girl has a devil.

BRIGIDA

Why are you silent, Señor? Are you angry with me? I have given you no cause. This is cruel. Don Basil, I have heard you cited everywhere for absolutely the most free and witty speaker of the age. They told me that if none other offer, you will jest with the statues in the Plaza Mayor and so wittily they cannot answer a word to you. What have I done that with me alone you are dumb?

BASIL

I am bewitched certainly.

BRIGIDA

Señor, is it still pity? But why on me alone? O sir, have pity on the whole world and be always silent. Well, I see your benevolence is unconquerable. With your leave, we will pass from unprofitable talk; I would be glad to recall the sound of your voice. You may come nearer, since you decline the duello.

BASIL

I thank you, Señorita. Whose sheep baaed then?

BRIGIDA

Don Basil, shall we talk soberly?

BASIL

At your pleasure, Madam.

BRIGIDA

No Madam, Señor, but a poor companion. You go to Count Beltran's house tomorrow?

BASIL

It is so intended.

BRIGIDA

O the masque, who play it?

BASIL

Masquers, Señorita.

BRIGIDA

O sir, is this your pity? I told you, you would burst if you kept in your wit too long. But who are they by condition? Goddesses are the characters and by rule modern they should be live goddesses who play them.

BASIL

They are so.

BRIGIDA

Are they indeed so lovely?

BASIL

Euphrosyne, Christofir's daughter, is simply the most exquisite beauty of the kingdom.

BRIGIDA

You speak very absolutely, Señor. Fairer than Ismenia?

BASIL

I speak it with unwillingness, but honestly the Lady Ismenia, rarely lovely as she is, could not stand beside this farmer's daughter.

BRIGIDA

I think I have seen her and I do not remember so outshining a beauty.

BASIL

Then cannot you have seen her, for the wonders she eclipses, themselves speak to their disgrace, even when they are women.

BRIGIDA

Pardon me if I take you to speak in the pitch of a lover's eulogy.

BASIL

Were it so, her beauty and gentleness deserve it; I have seen none worthier.

BRIGIDA

I wish you joy of her. I pray you for permission to leave you, Señor.

BASIL

Save one indeed.

BRIGIDA

Ah! and who was she?

BASIL

You will pardon me.

BRIGIDA

I will not press you, Sir. I do not know her, do I?

BASIL

O 'tis not so much as that either. 'Twas only an orange-girl I saw once at Cadiz.

BRIGIDA

Oh.

BASIL

Ha! she is galled, positively. This is as sweet to me as honey.

BRIGIDA

Well, Señor, your taste is as undeniable as your wit. Flour is the staff of life and oranges are good for a season. What does this paragon play?

BASIL

Venus; and in the after-scene, Helen.

BRIGIDA

So? May I know the others? You may find one of them to be a poor cousin of mine.

BASIL

Catriona, the bailly's daughter to Count Conrad, and Sofronia, the student Jeronimo's sister; she too is of the Count's household.

BRIGIDA

It is not then difficult to act in a masque?

BASIL

A masque demands little, Señorita. A taking figure, a flowing step, a good voice, a quick memory — but for that a speaking memory hard by in a box will do much at an emergency.

BRIGIDA

True, for such long parts must be a heavy tax on the quickest.

BASIL

There are but two such, Venus-Helen and Paris. The rest are only a Zephyr's dance in, a speech and a song to help the situation and out again with a scurry.

BRIGIDA

God be with you. You have a learned conversation and a sober, and for such I will always report you. But here comes a colon to it. We will keep the full stop for tomorrow.

Enter Antonio and Ismenia.

ISMENIA

I think the dawn moves in the east, Brigida.
Pray you, unlock the door, but noiselessly.

BRIGIDA

Teach me not. Though the wild torrent of this gentleman's conversation have swept away half my wit, I have at a desperate peril, saved the other half for your service. Come, Sir, I have need of you to frighten the mice away.

BASIL

St Iago!

Exit Brigida with Basil.

ISMENIA

Dear, we must part. I would have you my necklace,
That I might feel you round my neck for ever;
Or life be night and all men sleep, then we
Need never part: but we must part, Antonio.
Will you forget me?

ANTONIO

When I cease to feel.

ISMENIA

I know you cannot, but I am so happy,

I love to play with my own happiness
And ask it questions. Dear, we shall meet soon.
I'll make a compact with you, sweet. You shall
Do all my will and make no question, till
We're married; then you know, I am your servant.
Will you, till then?

ANTONIO

Till then and after.

ISMENIA

Go now,
Love, I must drive you out or you'll not go.

ANTONIO

One kiss.

ISMENIA

You've had one thousand. Well, one more,
One only or I shall never let you part.

Enter Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Are you both distracted? Is this, I pray you, a time for lingering
and near dawn over the east? Out with you, Señor, or I will set
your own Cerberus upon you, and I wager he bites well, though
I think poorly of his bark.

Exit with Antonio.

ISMENIA

O I have given all myself and kept
Nothing to live with when he's gone from me.
My life's his moon and I'm all dark and sad
Without him. Yesterday I was Ismenia,
Strong in myself, an individual woman.
Today I'm but the body of another,
No longer separate reality.

Well, if I gain him, let me lose myself
And I'm still happy. The door shuts. He is gone.

Reenter Brigida.

Ah, Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Come, get in, get in. Snatch a little sleep, for I promise you, you shall have none tomorrow.

ISMENIA

How do you mean by that? Or is it jest merely?

BRIGIDA

Leave me alone. I have a whole drama in my head, a play in a play and yet no play. I have only to rearrange the parts a little and tomorrow's sunlight shall see it staged, scened, enacted and concluded. To bed with you.

Exeunt.

Act II

Scene 1

*A room in Conrad's house.
Conrad, a servant.*

CONRAD
Where is Flaminio?

SERVANT
He's in waiting, Sir.

CONRAD
Call him.

Exit servant.

I never loved before. Fortune,
I ask one day of thee and one great night,
Then do thy will. I shall have reached my summit.

Enter Flaminio.

FLAMINIO
My lord?

*[Work on the play was broken off here. What follows is a sketch
by Sri Aurobindo of the plot of three scenes of Acts II and III.]*

Act II

Scene 1. Conrad and Flaminio arrange to surprise the Alcalde's house and carry off Euphrosyne; Brigida converses with Conrad.

Scene 2. Jacinto monologues; Jacinto and his father; Jacinto and Euphrosyne; students, friends of Jacinto. Conrad and Euphrosyne.

Act III

Scene 1. Beltran and his sons. Ismenia, Brigida.

The Prince of Edur

Persons of the Drama

RANA CURRAN, Prince of Edur, of the Rahtore clan.

VISALDEO, a Brahmin, his minister; formerly in the service of the Gehlote Prince of Edur.

HARIPAL, a Rajpoot noble, General of Edur; formerly in the service of the Gehlote Prince.

BAPPA, son of the late Gehlote Prince of Edur, in refuge among the Bheels.

SUNGRAM }
PRITHURAJ } young Rajpoot refugees, companions of Bappa.

KODAL, a young Bheel, foster-brother and lieutenant of Bappa.

TORAMAN, Prince of Cashmere.

CANACA, the King's jester of Cashmere.

HOOSHKA, Scythian captain.

PRATAP, Rao of Ichalpurh, a Chouhan noble.

RUTTAN, his brother.

A CAPTAIN of Rajpoot lances.

MÉNADEVI, wife of Curran; a Chouhan princess, sister of the King of Ajmere.

COMOL CUMARY, daughter of Rana Curran and Menadevi.

COOMOOD CUMARY, daughter of Rana Curran by a concubine.

NIRMOL CUMARY, daughter of Haripal, friend of Comol Cumary.

ISHANY, a Rajpoot maiden, in attendance on Comol Cumary.

Act I

The Palace in Edur. The forests about Dongurh.

Scene 1

*The Palace in Edur.
Rana Curran, Visaldeo.*

CURRAN
He is at Deesa then?

VISALDEO
So he has written.

CURRAN
Send out a troop for escort, yielding him
Such honours as his mighty birth demands.
Let him be lodged for what he is, a Prince
Among the mightiest.

VISALDEO
You have chosen then?
You'll give your daughter, King, to this Cashmerian?

CURRAN
My brother from Ajmere writes to forbid me,
Because he's Scythian, therefore barbarous.
A Scythian! He is Cashmere's mighty lord
Who stretches out from those proud Himalayan hills
His giant arms to embrace the North.

VISALDEO

But still

A Scythian.

CURRAN

Whom many Aryan monarchs crouch to appease
 When he but shakes his warlike lance. A soldier
 And conqueror, — what has the earth more noble?
 And he is of the great Cushanian stock
 That for these centuries bestride the hills
 Against all comers. World-renowned Asoca
 Who dominated half our kingly East,
 Sprang from a mongrel root.

VISALDEO

Rana, you'll wed
 Your daughter to Prince Toraman?

CURRAN

I'm troubled
 By Ajmere's strong persistence. He controls
 Our Rajpoot world and it were madly done
 To offend him.

VISALDEO

That's soon avoided. Send your daughter out
 To your strong fort among the wooded hills,
 Dongurh; there while she walks among the trees,
 Let the Cashmerian snatch her to his saddle
 In the old princely way. You have your will
 And the rash Chouhan has his answer.

CURRAN

Visaldeo,
 You are a counsellor! Call the queen hither;
 I'll speak to her.

Exit Visaldeo.

O excellently counselled!
What is it but a daughter? One mere girl
And in exchange an emperor for my ally.
It must be done.

Enter Menadevi and Visaldeo.

MENADEVI

You sent for me, my lord?

CURRAN

How many summers might our daughter count,
Mena?

MENADEVI

Sixteen, my lord.

CURRAN

She flowers apace
And like a rose in bloom expects the breeze
With blushing petals. We can delay no longer
Her nuptial rites.

MENADEVI

The Rao of Ichalgurh
Desires her. He's a warrior and a Chouhan.

CURRAN

A petty baron! O my dearest lady,
Rate not your child so low. Her rumoured charm
Has brought an emperor posting from the north
To woo her.

MENADEVI

Give me the noble Rajpoot blood,
I ask no more.

CURRAN

The son of great Cashmere
 Journeys to Edur for her.

MENADEVI

Your royal will
 Rules her and me. And yet, my lord, a child
 Of Rajpoot princes might be better mated;
 So much I'll say.

CURRAN

You are your brother's sister.
 He says he will not have a Scythian wed her.

MENADEVI

He cherishes the lofty Chouhan pride.
 You know, my lord, we hold a Rajpoot soldier
 Without estate or purse deserves a queen
 More than a crowned barbarian.

CURRAN

You are all
 As narrow as the glens where you were born
 And live immured. No arrogance can match
 The penniless pride of mountaineers who never
 Have seen the various world beyond their hills.
 Your petty baron who controls three rocks
 For all his heritage, exalts himself
 O'er monarchs in whose wide domains his holding's
 An ant-hill, and prefers his petty line
 To their high dynasties; — as if a mountain tarn
 Should think itself more noble than the sea
 To which so many giant floods converge.

MENADEVI

Our tarns are pure at least, if small, they hold
 Sweet water only; but your seas are brackish.

CURRAN

Well, well; tomorrow send your little princess
To Dongurh, there to dwell till we decide
If great Cashmere shall have her. Visaldeo,
Give ten good lances for her escort.

MENADEVI

Only ten!

It is not safe.

VISALDEO

Rana, the queen is right.
The Bheels are out among the hills; they have
A new and daring leader and beset
All wayside wealth with swarms of humming arrows.

CURRAN

The lord of Edur should not fear such rude
And paltry caterans. When they see our banner
Advancing o'er the rocks, they will avoid
Its peril. Or if there's danger, take the road
That skirts the hills. Ten lances, Visaldeo!

Exit.

MENADEVI

My blood shall never mingle with the Scythian.
I am a Chouhan first and next your wife,
Edur. What means this move to Dongurh, Visaldeo?

VISALDEO (*as if to himself*)

Ten lances at her side! It were quite easy
To take her from them, even for a Cashmerian.

MENADEVI

I understand. The whole of Rajasthan
Would cry out upon Edur, were this marriage
Planned openly to soil their ancient purity.

The means to check this shame?

VISALDEO

Lady, I am

The Rana's faithful servant.

MENADEVI

So remain.

I'll send a horse to Ichalgurh this hour.

There may be swifter snatchers than the Scythian.

Exit.

VISALDEO

Or swifter even than any in Ichalgurh.

I too have tidings to send hastily.

Exit.

Scene 2

*The women's apartments in the Palace at Edur.
Comol Cumary, Coomood Cumary.*

COMOL

Tomorrow, Coomood, is the feast of May.

COOMOOD

Sweetheart, I wish it were the feast of Will.
I know what I would will for you.

COMOL

What, Coomood?

COOMOOD

A better husband than your father'll give you.

COMOL

You mean the Scythian? I will not believe
That it can happen. My father's heart is royal;
The blood that throbs through it he drew from veins
Of Rajpoot mothers.

COOMOOD

But the brain's too politic.
A merchant's mind into his princely skull
Slipped in by some mischance, and it will sell you
In spite of all the royal heart can say.

COMOL

He is our father, therefore blame him not.

Weaving my life into one piece with yours
For ever.

Enter Nirmol Cumary.

NIRMOL

News, princesses, news! What will you give me for a sackful of news?

COMOL

Two switches and a birchrod. A backful for your sackful!

NIRMOL

I will empty my sack first, if only to shame you for your base ingratitude. To begin with what will please you best, Prince Toraman is arrived. I hear he is coming to see and approve of you before he makes the venture; it is the Scythian custom.

COMOL

He shall not have his Scythian custom. In India it is we girls who have the right of choice.

NIRMOL

He will not listen. These Scythians stick to their customs as if it were their skin; they will even wear their sheepskins in midsummer in Agra.

COMOL

Then, Nirmol, we will show you to him for the Princess Comol Cumary and marry you off into the mountains. Would you not love to be the Queen of Cashmere?

NIRMOL

I would not greatly mind. They say he is big as a Polar bear and has the sweetest little pugnose and cheeks like two fat pouches. They say too he carries a knout in his hand with which he will touch up the bride during the ceremony as a promise of what

she may expect hereafter; it is the Scythian custom. Oh, I envy you, Princess.

COMOL

Nirmol, in sober earnest I will beat you.

NIRMOL

Strike but hear! For I have still news in my sack. You must gather your traps; we are to start for Dongurh in an hour. What, have I made your eyes smile at last?

COMOL

To Dongurh! Truth, Nirmol.

NIRMOL

Beat me in earnest, if it is not. Visaldeo himself told me.

COMOL

To Dongurh! To the woods! It is three years
 Since I was there. I wonder whether now
 The woodland flowers into a sudden blush
 Crimsoning at the sweet approach of Spring
 As once it did against that moonèd white
 Of myriad blossoms. We shall feel again,
 Coomood, the mountain breezes kiss our cheeks
 Standing on treeless ridges and behold
 The valleys wind unnoticeably below
 In threads of green.

COOMOOD

It is the feast of May.
 Shall we not dance upon the wind-blown peaks
 And put the peacock's feather in our hair
 And think we are in Brindavon the green?

NIRMOL

With a snubnosed Scythian Krishna to lead the dance. But they say Krishna was neither Scythian nor Rajpoot but a Bheel. Well,

there is another Krishna of that breed out who will make eighth-century Rookminnies of you if you dance too far into the forest, sweethearts.

COOMOOD

You mean this boy-captain of robbers who makes such a noise in our little world? Bappa they call him, do they not?

NIRMOL

'Tis some such congregation of consonants. Now which sort of husband would the most modern taste approve? — a coal-black sturdy young Bheel, his face as rugged as Rajpootana, or a red and white snubnosed Scythian with two prosperous purses for his cheeks. There's a problem in aesthetics for you, Coomood.

COMOL

A barbarous emperor or a hillside thief
Are equals in a Rajpoot maiden's eyes.
Yon mountain-peak or some base valley clod,
'Tis one to the heaven-sailing star above
That scorns their lowness.

NIRMOL

Yes, but housed with the emperor the dishonour is lapped in cloth of gold; on the thief's hillside it is black, naked and rough, its primitive and savage reality. To most women the difference would be great.

COMOL

Not to me. I wonder they suffer this mountain springald to presume so long.

NIRMOL

Why, they sent out a captain lately to catch him, but he came back a head shorter than he went. But how do you fancy my news, sweethearts?

COMOL

What, is your sack empty?

NIRMOL

Your kingly father was the last to stalk out of it. I expect him here to finish my story.

Enter Rana Curran, Menadevi and Visaldeo.

CURRAN

Maid Comol, are you ready yet for Dongurh?

COMOL

I heard of it this moment, sir.

CURRAN

Make ready.

Prince Toraman arrives. You blush, my lily?

MENADEVI

There is a maiden's blush of bashfulness,
But there's her blush of shame too when her cheeks
Offended scorn a suitor far too base
Should bring such noble blood to flush their whiteness.

CURRAN

Maid Comol, which was yours?

COMOL

I would learn that,

Father, from your high sovereign will. I am not
The mistress of my blushes.

CURRAN

Keep them for him,

Comol, for whom their sweetness was created.
Hearken, my little one, you are marked out
To reign an empress; 'tis the stars decree it

That in their calm irrevocable round
Weave all our fates. Then shrink not if thou hearest
The noise of battle round thy palanquin
Filling the hills, nor fear its rude event,
But veil thy cheeks in scarlet to receive
Thy warlike husband.

COMOL

Father!

CURRAN

It is so.

Thou journeyest not to Dongurh but thy nuptials.

COMOL

With Toraman?

CURRAN

With one whose lofty doom
Is empire. Keep this in thy joyous bosom
Throbbing in a sweet secrecy. Farewell.
When we foregather next, I hope to greet
My little empress.

Exit.

MENADEVI

Comol, what said he to thee?

COMOL

What I unwillingly have heard. Mother,
Must I be mated to a barbarous stock?

MENADEVI

No, child. When you shall hear the trumpet's din
Or clash of blades, think not 'tis Toraman,
But your dear mother's care to save her child
From shameful mating. Little sweetheart, go.

When I shall meet you next, you'll shine a flower
 Upon the proudest crest in Rajasthan,
 No Scythian's portion. Visaldeo, prepare
 Her going quickly.

Exit.

COMOL

What plots surround me? Nirmol,
 Give me my sword with me. I'll have a friend
 To help me, should the world go wrong.

VISALDEO

Our self,
 Lady, is our best helper.

COMOL

I believe it.
 Which path's resolved on?

VISALDEO

'Tis the valley road
 That clings to the deep bases of the hills.

COMOL

'Tis not the shortest.

VISALDEO

The easiest, — to Cashmere.

COMOL

The other's safer then for Dongurh.

VISALDEO

At least
 'Tis green and beautiful, and love may walk there
 Unhindered.

Exit.

COMOL

Thou seemst to be my friend,
But I'll believe myself and no one else
Except my sword whose sharpness I can trust
Not to betray me. Come, girls, make we ready
For this planned fateful journey.

COOMOOD

Let them keep
Our palanquins together. One fate for both,
Sweetheart.

COMOL

If we must marry Toraman,
Coomood, it shall be in that shadowy country.

NIRMOL

Where, I hope, justice will have set right the balance between
his nose and his cheeks. Girls, we are the prizes of this handicap
and I am impatient to know which jockey wins.

Exeunt.

Scene 3

*The forest near Dongurh.
Bappa, Sungram, Prithuraj.*

BAPPA

It is the secret friend from whom in childhood
I learned to wing my mounting thoughts aloft
High as an eagle's flight. I know the hand,
Though yet his name is hid from me.

SUNGRAM

Let's hear

The very wording.

BAPPA

“To the Sun's child, from Edur.

Comol Cumary, Edur's princess, goes
With her fair sister and a knot of lances
To Dongurh. Bappa, young lion of the hills,
Be as the lion in thy ranging; prey
Upon earth's mightiest, think her princesses
Meant only for thy spoil and serving-girls,
Her kings thy subjects and her lands thy prey.
Dare greatly and thou shalt be great; despise
Apparent death and from his lifted hand
Of menace pluck thy royal destinies
By warlike violence. Thus thy fathers did
From whose great blood thou springest, child of Kings.
Thy friend in Edur.”

SUNGRAM

Writes he that? The child of Kings!

He never spoke so plainly of your birth
Till now.

PRITHURAJ

A kindling hint to fire our blood!
Two princesses and only a knot of swords
For escort? The gods themselves arrange this for us.

SUNGRAM

Bappa, you are resolved to court this peril?

PRITHURAJ

Doubt you? Think how 'twill help our treasury.
The palanquins alone must be a mint
Of money and the girls' rich ornaments
Purchase half Rajasthan.

SUNGRAM

The immediate gain's
Princely, nor the mere capture perilous.
But afterwards the armed wrath of Edur
Descends upon us in a thunder and whirlwind.
Are we yet strong enough to bear the shock?

PRITHURAJ

Why, let it come. I shall rejoice to feel
The true and dangerous bite of war at last,
Not always play the mountain cateran's part,
To skulk among the hills and only assail
The weak and timid, or butcher distant force
With arrows. I long for open shocks of fight
And glorious odds and all the world for audience.

BAPPA

Sungram, I do not rashly take this step,
But with fixed policy. Unless we break
Edur's supreme contempt for our annoyance,

How can we bring him to the difficult hills?
 So must we take the open where our Bheels
 Will scatter from the massèd Rajpoot swords
 Nor face their charging horsemen. But if we capture
 Their princess, inconsiderate rage will hurl them
 Into our very fastnesses to wear
 Their strength out under our shafts. Then will I seize
 At the right moment, they being few and weary,
 Edur by force or guile and hold it fast
 Though all the warlike world come up against me.

SUNGRAM

With Bheels?

BAPPA

I will invite all Rajpoot swords
 That now are masterless and men exiled,
 And desperate fortunes. So the iron hands
 Join us and the adventurous hearts, to build
 A modern seat of empire; — minds like Sungram,
 Wise to forecast and bold to execute,
 Heroes like Prithuraj, who know not fear
 Nor put a limit to their vaulting thoughts
 Save death or unforgettable renown,
 The Rajpoot's choice. Are we not strong enough?
 We have a thousand hardy Bheels, expert
 In mountain warfare, swift unerring bowmen;
 We have ourselves to lead them, each worth thousands,
 Sheva Ekling above us and in our hands
 Our destiny and our swords.

SUNGRAM

They are enough.

Enter Kodal.

KODAL

Bappa, our scouts have come in. The prey is in the toils.

BAPPA

How many are they, Kodal?

KODAL

Merely ten lances. The servants and women they have sent round by the lower road; the escort with four palanquins come up through the hills. They have run their heads into the noose. We will draw it tight, Bappa, and choke them.

BAPPA

Is their escape

Impossible?

SUNGRAM

Bappa, a hundred Bheels surround the pass
By which alone they can return. Myself
Have posted them.

BAPPA

Beside the waterfall

Surround them, Sungram. Kodal, let there be
No random shafts to imperil by mischance
Our lovely booty.

KODAL

Trust me for that, Bappa. We'll shoot through the twenty eye-
balls of them and never even touch the white. Ten lances they are
and ten arrows will stretch them flat; there shall be nothing left
to be done but the burning. If I cannot do this, I am no Bheel,
no Kodal and no foster-brother of Bappa.

BAPPA

Economise our strength. I will not lose
A single man over this easy capture.
You're captain, Sungram.

Exeunt Sungram and Kodal.

Prithuraj, my friend.

Today begins our steep ascent to greatness.

Exeunt.

Scene 4

*The forest near Dongurh. By the waterfall.
Enter Captain and soldiers escorting Comol Cumary, Coomood,
Nirmol and Ishany in palanquins.*

ISHANY (*from her palanquin*)

Set down the palanquins. Captain, make void
This region; here the princess would repose
Beside the murmuring waterfall awhile
And breathe into her heart the winds of Dongurh.

*Exit Captain with soldiers and palanquin-
bearers. The girls leave their palanquins.*

COMOL

Coomood, this is the waterfall we loved
To lean by, singing to the lyre the deeds
Our fathers wrought or listening silently
Its soft continuous roar. Beyond that bend
We shall see Dongurh, — Dongurh, our delight
Where we were children, Coomood.

COOMOOD

Comol, our tree's

All scarlet, as if splashed with crimson fire,
Just as of old.

COMOL

O it is Spring, and this
Is Dongurh.

ISHANY

Girls, we must not linger long.

Our Scythian, missing us, may take the hills.

NIRMOL

Purse-cheeks? Oh, he has lifted Mera the servant-girl to his saddle-bow by now and is garlanding her Queen of Cashmere. I wish I were there to be bridesmaid.

COMOL

That was a sweet touch of thine, Nirmol. But the child deserves her promotion; she has served me willingly. A Scythian throne is no great wages for service to a Rajpoot princess.

COOMOOD

How the hill gives you back your laughter, repeating
Its sweetness with delight, as if it had a soul
To love you.

COMOL

We have shaken them off prettily by turning away through the hills. Alas! my royal father will not greet his little empress this journey, nor my lady mother scent her blossom on a Rajpoot crest. They must even put up with their poor simple Comol Cumary just as she was, — (*aside*) and as she will be until her heart finds its mate.

NIRMOL

It is a sin, I tell you, Comol; I am mad when I think of it. Why, I came out to be abducted; I did not come for a quiet stroll through the woodlands. But I have still hopes of our Bheel cateran, our tangle-locked Krishna of the hill-sides; surely he will not be so ungallant as to let such sweet booty pass through his kingdom ungathered.

COMOL

I would gladly see this same stripling and talk to him face to face who sets his Bheel arrows against our Rajpoot swords. He should be a man at least, no Scythian Toraman.

ISHANY

The presumptuous savage! it will earn him a stake yet for his last session. Were I a man, I would burn these wasps from their nest and catch and crush them in my mailed gauntlet as they buzzed out into the open.

SHOUTS OUTSIDE

Bappa! Bappa! Ho Sheva Ekling!

CAPTAIN (*shouting within*)

Lances, lances, Rajpoots! Bearers, to the palanquins!

COMOL

Bappa!

NIRMOL (*laughing*)

You'll have that talk with Bappa yet,
Comol.

COOMOOD

Oh, let us flee! They swarm towards us.

ISHANY

Stand firm! Our gallant lances soon will prick
These bold hill-foxes to their lairs. Stand firm!
We should but fly into the mouth of danger.

COMOL (*climbing on to a rock*)

You Gods! our Rajpoots all are overwhelmed
Before they used their weapons. What next, Ishany?
Shall we sit still to be made prisoners?

ISHANY

Get swiftly to your palanquin. The bearers
Run hither. Flee towards the valley road!
It may be that the swords of Ichalgurh
Range there already.

COMOL

Shall I escape alone?

ISHANY

Ah, save the glory of Edur from disgrace
Of savage handling!

Enter the palanquin-bearers fleeing.

Halt! Take your princess, men,
And flee with her into the valley road.

FIRST BEARER

The funeral fire in the mouth of your princess! Every man save
himself.

Exit with most of the bearers.

SECOND BEARER

Halt, halt! We have eaten and shall we not pay for the salt? Yes,
even with our blood. We four will take her, if we are not cut into
pieces first. Into the palanquin, lady.

NIRMOL

Quick, Comol! or are you longing for your palaver with Tangle-
locks?

Comol enters the palanquin.

COOMOOD

What will become of us?

NIRMOL

We shall become
Bheel housewives. After all, a Scythian throne
Was better.

ISHANY

We have our weapons to befriend us yet.
Coomood, look not so pale.

NIRMOL

See, see, Ishany!

The Bheels are leaping down upon our rear.

ISHANY

Quick, bearers, bearers.

NIRMOL

It is too late. She's taken.

Enter Kodal and Bheels.

KODAL

Whoever wants an arrow through his skull, let him move his shanks. Women, you are my brother Bappa's prisoners; we have need of some Rajpoot slavegirls for his kitchen. Take them, my children, and tie them.

ISHANY

Stab any who comes; let not these lumps of dirt
Insult your Rajpoot bodies with their fingers.

KODAL

Shut your mouth, Rajpootny, or I will skewer your tongue to
your palate with an arrow. Knock their daggers out of their
hands.

He lays his hand on Nirmol's wrist.

Enter Sungram.

NIRMOL

Off, savage! I will have no tongue-skewerer for my husband.

SUNGRAM

Release her, Kodal. Lay not thy Bheel hand
Upon a Rajpoot virgin. Maiden of Edur,
Expect no outrage. We are men who keep
Some tincture of manners yet, though savage hills
Harbour us and our looks and deeds are rugged

As the wild land we dwell in.

NIRMOL

I grant you that. If you are the master-jockey, the winners of this handicap are no such rank outsiders after all.

KODAL

Because thou art a Rajpoot, must thou command me? To me, Bheels! Tie up these Rajpootnies hand and leg like so many chickens. Heed not Sungram.

SUNGRAM

Mutineer! (*draws his sword*)

ISHANY (*rapidly approaching the bearers*)

Slip off unnoticed while they brawl; run, run!
O save the princess!

SECOND BEARER

We will do our man's best. Silently, men, and swiftly.

KODAL

I boggle not for your sword, Rajpoot. Taste my arrows.
Exeunt bearers with Comol in the palanquin.
Bappa and Prithuraj enter from the other side.

BAPPA

Now, what's the matter, Kodal?

KODAL

Why, Bappa, these new servant-girls of yours will not come to heel; they talk proudly. Yet Sungram will not let me teach them manners, because, I think, they are his aunt's cousins.

BAPPA

They shall be obedient, Kodal. Leave them to me.
Remember Sungram's your commander, brother.

BAPPA

Ay, so? these maidens are but three. Kodal,
Four palanquins were on the road, thou toldst me.

KODAL

Sungram, give thy sword a twist in my guts. While I wrangled
with thee, the best shikar of all has skedaddled.

BAPPA

Nay, mend it, — intercept the fugitive.

Exit Kodal with Bheels.

The other too has fled? but she's on foot.
Sungram and Prithuraj, lead these fair captives
Into their prison. I will go and seize
The runaways.

ISHANY

They are not for thee yet,
Hill-cateran, while I stand between.

PRITHURAJ

Oh, here's

A Rajpoot spirit.

BAPPA

Foolish girl, canst thou
Oppose the stormblast with a dove's white wings?
*As he goes out, she strikes at him with a dagger; he
seizes her wrist and puts her by. Exit Bappa.*

PRITHURAJ

Thou hast a brave but headstrong spirit, maiden.
It is no savages to whom your Fates
Are kind, but men of Rajpoot blood and nurture.
Have I your leave?

He lays his hand on her wrist.

ISHANY (*sullenly*)

 You take it in these hills
Before the asking, as it seems.
 (*throwing away her dagger*)
 Away,
Thou useless helper.

PRITHURAJ

 Very useless, maiden.
When help is needed, ask it of my sword.

ISHANY

You play the courteous brigand. I shall need
No help to cast myself out of the reach
Of villains' courtesies.

PRITHURAJ (*lifting her in his arms*)

 'Tis not so easy.
Must I then teach you you're a prisoner?
Come, be more patient. You shall yet be glad
Of the sweet violence today we do you.

He carries her out.

SUNGRAM

Must we follow in the same order?

NIRMOL

By your leave, no. I turn eleven stone or thereabouts.

SUNGRAM

I will not easily believe it. Will you suffer me to test the measure?

NIRMOL

I fear you would prove an unjust balance; so I will even walk, if
you will help me over the rough places. It seems you were not
Krishna after all?

SUNGRAM

Why, take me for brother Balaram then. Is not your name Revaty?

NIRMOL

It is too early in the day for a proposal; positively, I will not say either yes or no till the evening. On, Balaram! I follow.

Exeunt.

Scene 5

The forest near Dongurb.

Enter Bearers with Comol Cumary in the palanquin.

SECOND BEARER

Courage, brothers, courage! We are almost out of the wood.

Enter Kodal, leaping down from a thicket in front.

KODAL

But it is too soon to hollo. Stop, you plain-frogs, or you shall gutturalize your last croak.

SECOND BEARER

Put down the palanquin; we are taken. Great emperor of Bheels, be merciful.

KODAL

Stand still, rogues. I must first haul the runaway Rajpootny out of her dogbox.

As he approaches the palanquin, the Bearer strikes him down suddenly and throws his bow and arrows down the hillside.

SECOND BEARER

Quick! Let us be off while he's stunned.

Enter Bappa and Coomood, followed by Bheels.

BAPPA

Your sister cannot overstep the pass,
Which is beset and ambushed. Ho, there, halt!
Put down the palanquin. Insensate fools,

Invite not death.

The Bheels crowd in and surround the bearers.
Is't Kodal? is he hurt?

KODAL (*rising*)

Only stunned, Bappa. The hillside was a trifle harder than my head. Plain-frog, thou didst that trick handsomely. Give me thy paw, fellow.

BAPPA

Take these men prisoners and keep them safely.
Remove your men; and, Kodal, guard the road
Barring all rescue.

Exit Kodal and Bheels with the bearers.

Princess, take your sister

Out of the palanquin.

COOMOOD

Comol, Comol,

Dear fugitive from fate's arrest, you're taken.
Come out.

COMOL

How was it?

COOMOOD

I told him of your flight.

You'll leave me all alone to wed a Bheel?
You'll break our compact? I have dragged you back
To servitude.

COMOL

Nay, let me see my captor then.

For if you smile, my Coomood, I must be
Out of misfortune's reach.

(leaving the palanquin)

Stand back, sweet. Come,

Where is this mountain thief who wars with Kings
 And lays his hands on Edur's princesses
 As if his trunk were an immortal piece
 And he unhangable?

BAPPA (*advancing*)

I am the man,
 Bappa, the outlaw.

COMOL

This Bappa! this the Bheel?

They gaze at one another.

(*smiling*)

Why, Coomood, it was Krishna after all.
 Monarch of caterans, I am Edur's princess,
 Comol Cumary. Why didst thou desire me?

BAPPA

O who would not desire thee, glorious virgin?
 Thou art the rose of Rajasthan and I
 Will wear thee on my crest.

COMOL

'Twas prophesied me.
 But roses, King of thieves, have thorns, and see!
 I have a sword.

BAPPA (*smiling*)

Thinkst thou that pretty toy
 Will save thee from me?

COMOL

It will do its best.
 And if you take me still, 'tis at your peril.
 I am a dangerous creature to possess.

BAPPA

I will embrace the peril as a bride
If in thy shape it dwell.

COMOL

I swear I pity you.
You rush upon you know not what. Come now,
If 'tis a gentle serving-girl you need,
Here is my sister, Coomood, who can cook
Divinely. Take her. Let me walk on to Dongurh.
You will regret it, youth.

COOMOOD

Believe her not,
'Tis she's a Droupadie; and who possesses her
Is fated to be Emperor of the West.

BAPPA

Nay, you are twin sweet roses on one stalk
And I will pluck you both, O flowers of Edur.

COMOL

Why did thy men beset me, mountaineer?
What was thy hope?

BAPPA

At first 'twas policy
And some desire of thy imperial ransom.
But now I've seen thee, I will hold thee fast.
Thou art not ransomable.

COMOL

You shall not have me, sir, till you have fought
And beaten me. You shall not get me cheaply.
I am a swashbuckler. Bheel, I can fight.

BAPPA

Marvel, thou mayst and with great ease be victor
If thou but use thy soft and shining eyes
To dazzle me out of all possibility
Of sound defence.

COMOL

Come, measure swords, on guard!

BAPPA

Thou wilt persist then in this pretty folly?

COMOL

Halt, halt! I will not fight except on terms.
You'll yield yourself my prisoner, Bheel, and free
My maidens, when I've drubbed you handsomely?

BAPPA

If when I've conquered, you will utterly
Surrender your sweet self into my arms,
Princess of Edur.

COMOL

Take me if you can.

BAPPA

Thus then I take you.

(disarms her)

Rose, where is thy thorn?

Now thou must yield indeed.

COMOL

Foul play! foul play!

It was not fair to rob me of my sword.

Call you this fighting? I'll not yield myself.

BAPPA
Thou hast no choice.

He seizes her.

COMOL
I was not fairly won.
Avaunt! this is mere highway robbery.
I will not bear it.

BAPPA
Virgin, this is the moment
For which thy loveliness was born.

COMOL (*faintly*)
Alas,
What will you do with me?

BAPPA
I'll carry thee,
A hungry lion, to my secret lair
Among the mighty hills, where none shall come
To save thee from me, O my glorious prey,
Bright antelope of Edur!

COOMOOD
Will you play
With the young lion, Comol, and chafe his mood?
Now you are borne down by his heavy mane
And lie beneath his huge and tawny chest,
Trembling and silent.

BAPPA
Princess, —

COOMOOD
May I walk on
To Dongurh?

BAPPA

No, thou mayst not. Follow me.
Hold fast my arm, nor, princess, fear to hang
Thy whole slight weight on me up these abrupt
And breathless places, for the high ascent
Is steep and rough to our uncouth abodes.
Descent's for your small feet impossible,
Coomood, from your green prison on the heights.
There Spring shall wall you in with flowers and make
Her blossoming creepers chains for your bright limbs
Softly forbidding you, when you'd escape.

COOMOOD

Comol, tomorrow is the feast of May.

Exeunt.

Act II

The forest near Dongurh.

Scene 1

In the forest near Dongurh.

Bappa, Sungram. The Captain and Rajpoot soldiers, guarded by Bheels.

BAPPA

Ponder it, captain. Sungram, see the bearers
Released, but let those cowards first be scourged
Who put their lives above their lady's honour.
Give golden largess to the faithful four
And send them with a script. Let Edur know
That Bappa holds his cherished daughter fast
And frees her not save for a lakh of mohurs,
Her insufficient ransom. If it displease him,
Let him come here with all his fighting-men
And take her from my grip. Word it to wound him
So that he shall come thundering up the hills
Incensed inexorably.

Exit Sungram.

Soldier, again,
'Tis not my wont to slay my prisoners,
Who am a Rajpoot, and to pen you here
Eating your hearts away like prisoned lions
Were the world's loss and to myself no profit.
Take then your choice and either follow me
Or to your Edur back return unharmed.

CAPTAIN

Thou art a noble enemy, young chieftain;
 But change thy boon; for I have lost my charge
 Ingloriously and now can only entreat
 The use of my own sword to avenge my honour
 On its betrayer. Living I go not back
 To Edur.

BAPPA

Soldier, thou art too scrupulous.
 The wariest captain need not think it shame
 To be surprised among these mountains. If Edur
 Receive you not, follow my fortunes, Rajpoot.
 I am as noble as the prince you serve,
 And he who waits on Bappa's fateful star,
 May be more fortunate than kings.

CAPTAIN

Chieftain,

Save my old master's blood I serve no other
 Than noble Edur.

(suddenly with excitement)

What is that jewel, boy,
 Upon thy sword-hilt? Where hadst thou that weapon?

BAPPA

What moves thee thus? It is my father's sword,
 Though who my father was, Fate hides from me.

CAPTAIN *(with emotion)*

I take thy offer, prince. I am thy soldier,
 And all these men shall live and die for thee.

A SOLDIER

What dost thou, captain?

CAPTAIN

I have never swerved
From the high path of Rajpoot honour. Trust me,
Rajpoots.

SOLDIER

Thou wast our chief in war and always
We found thee valiant, proud and honourable.
Convince us that we may transfer unshamed
Our falchions only stained with foemen's blood,
And still we'll follow thee.

CAPTAIN

I will convince you
At a fit season.

BAPPA

Knowst thou something, soldier,
That's hid from me?

CAPTAIN

Pardon my silence, chieftain.
All things have their own time to come to light.

BAPPA

I will expect my hour then and meanwhile
Think myself twice as great as yesterday
Whom your strong hands now serve. Come, friends, with me;
Resume your swords for yet more glorious use
In Bappa's service.

Exeunt.

Scene 2

*The road through the valley to Dongurh.
Toraman, Canaca, Hooshka and Scythians.*

TORAMAN

I know not what impelled these mountain-boars
To worry Death with their blunt tusks. This insult
I will revenge in kind at first, then take
A bloody reckoning.

CANACA

Fegh! it was a trick even beyond my wits. To put a servant-girl
on the throne of Cashmere! All Asia would have been one grin
had the jest prospered.

TORAMAN

They take us for barbarians
And thought such gross imposture good enough
To puzzle Scythian brains. But I'll so shame
The witty clowns, they shall hang down their waggish heads
While they are still allowed to live. You'll wed
A princess of the Rajpoots, Canaca?

CANACA

I would prefer a haunch of Rajpoot venison any day; they have
fat juicy stags in their mountains.

TORAMAN

I give thee Edur's daughter. While I ride
With half my lances to our mountains, thou
Shalt ruffle round as Scythian Toraman
And wed the princess.

CANACA

Shall I indeed? Do you take me for a lettuce that you would have me sliced for a Rajpoot salad? Oh, I'd love to be a prince if only to comfort myself with one full meal in a lifetime; but an empty plebeian paunch is a more comfortable possession than a princely belly full of Rajpoot lances.

TORAMAN

Why should they at all
Discover thee, dull fool? None know me here.
The Rana and his men have not received me.
No doubt the arrogant princeling scorned to eat
As host and guest with me in Edur; even to dine
With us is thought a soil! Therefore 'twas fixed
In this rare plot that I should ride from Deesa
On a fool's errand. Well, it helps me now,
Though I'll avenge it fearfully. 'Tis feasible.
None know us, you are richer-robed than I,
And what's uncouth in you, they will put down
To Scythia's utter barbarousness, whose princes
Are boors and boors unhuman. Oh, 'twill work.

CANACA

Will it? Well, so long as I keep my belly unprodded, 'tis a jest after my own heart.

TORAMAN

And mine. These haughty Rajpoots think themselves
The only purity on earth; their girls
So excellent in Aryan chastity,
That without Rajpoot birth an emperor's wooing
Is held for insult. This they hoped to avenge
By foisting a baseborn light serving-wench
On the prince of all the North. How will they stare,
How gnash their teeth and go stark-mad with shame
When they discover their sweet cherished lily,
The pride of Rajasthan, they thought too noble

To lower herself to Cashmere's lofty throne,
 Bedded with the court-jester of Cashmere,
 Soiled by the embraces of a low buffoon
 Who patters for a wage, her pride a jest,
 Her purity a puddle and herself
 The world's sole laughing-stock.

CANACA

Hem! 'Twill be a jest for the centuries.

TORAMAN

About it, then.

Feign to laugh off the insult put on you
 And urge your suit. Bound by their trick that failed,
 They must, though with great sullenness, consent;
 And that's desirable: the shame will taste
 A thousand times more bitter afterwards.
 Have her by force, if they are obstinate;
 But have her. Soon, be sure, I will be back
 With an avenging host and ring in Edur
 With loud assaults till I have crucified
 King, queen and princess on her smoking ruins.

Exit with a number of Scythians.

CANACA

Well then, I am Prince Toraman of Cashmere; remember that, villains. Or why not Prince Toraman-Canaca or Prince Canaca-Toraman? it is rounder and more satisfying to the mouth. Yet simple Prince Toraman has a chastity of its own and all the magnificence of Cashmere marches after it. Ho, slave! What sounds are those approaching my majesty? Send scouts and reconnoitre. Prince Toraman, the imperial son of Cashmere! It is a part I shall play with credit; Nature made me for it of sufficient proportions and gave me a paunch imperial.

HOOSHKA (*approaching*)

Prince Canaca-Toraman or Prince Toraman-Canaca or very simple Toraman, I hear tramp of men and the clang of armour. No doubt, the princess of Edur, thinking all safe by now, rides to Dongurh. Will you charge them and seize her?

CANACA

To cover, thou incompetent captain, to cover. Hast thou learned war and knowest not the uses of ambush? We will hide, slave. See thou pokest not out that overlong nose of thine! Find thyself a branch big enough to cover it.

HOOSHKA

Humph! What signal shall we expect from your Majesty for the charge?

CANACA

Prate not to me of signals! How lacking are thy dull soldier-wits in contrivance! If I jump down into the road and howl, you will all come jumping and howling after me; but if I run, you will catch hold of my tail and run too like the very devil. Nay, I have a rare notion of tactics. To cover, to cover!

*They conceal themselves. Enter the Rao of
Ichalgurh, Ruttan and Rajpoots.*

ICHALGURH

She has escaped me, or the Scythian has her.
The last were my dishonour.

RUTTAN

We've held the road
Since dawn. The Scythian had the serving-women.
The princess has escaped.

ICHALGURH

I'm glad of it.

RUTTAN

Will you pursue it farther?

ICHALGURH

Ambition only

Engaged me once to woo her; now my honour
Is deeply pledged. The spur of chivalry
Suffers me not to yield a Rajpoot flower
To Scythian handling; nor could I refuse
A challenge to adventurous emprise
So fairly given. About, to Dongurh!

RUTTAN

Brother,

The place is strong, nor we equipped for sieges.

ICHALGURH

I'll have her out even from that fortress'd keeping
And set her in my crest at Ichalgurh
For gods to gaze at.

*Canaca leaps down into the road brandishing a sword,
followed by Hooshka and his Scythians.*

CANACA

Ho Amitabha! Buddha for Cashmere!

ICHALGURH

The Scythians on us! Swords!

CANACA

Put up your skewers! Quiver not, ye wretches; steady, steady
your quaking kneecaps. Though I have cause for anger, yet am I
merciful. Ye would have robbed me of some very pretty property,
but ye are mountain-thieves by nature and nurture and know
no better. Therefore peace. Sleep in thy scabbard, thou dreadful
servant of the wrath of Toraman; await a fitter subject than these
carcasses. Courage, Rajpoots, you shall not die.

ICHALGURH (*smiling*)
Who is Your Mightiness?

CANACA
I am the very formidable and valiant hero and Scythian, Toraman, prince of Cashmere. Nevertheless, tremble not. I am terrible to look at, but I have bowels; — ay, a whole paunchful of them.

ICHALGURH
You sought the Princess?
What, she has slipped through your most valiant fingers?

CANACA
As if she had greased herself with butter. But I am going to Dongurh straight away to demand her and dinner.

ICHALGURH
Together then. We're comrades in her loss;
Why not allies to win her?

CANACA
Am I to be so easily bamboozled? wilt thou insult my cranium?
Thou wouldst use my valiant and invincible sword to win her,
thinking to steal her from me afterwards when I am not looking.

ICHALGURH
Who would dare
Defraud the formidable Toraman,
The valiant and heroic Scythian?

CANACA
Well!
I am content; fall in behind me, mountaineers.

ICHALGURH
Ruttan, we'll keep an eye upon this Scythian.

His show of braggart folly hides, I fear,
A deal of knavishness.

CANACA

Trumpets! To Dongurh! March!

Exeunt.

Scene 3

Bappa's cot on the hillside.

Bappa; the Captain; Coomood, decorating the cot with flowers.

BAPPA

Where was she when you had the script from her?

CAPTAIN

Singing of battle on the rocks alone
With wrestling winds in her wild hair and raiment,
A joyous Oread.

BAPPA

Said she anything?

CAPTAIN

She gave it me with glad and smiling eyes
And laughed: "This for my noble Bheel, my sovereign
Of caterans, my royal beast of prey.
These to their mighty owners."

COOMOOD

Will you read it?

BAPPA (*reads*)

"Cateran, I have given thy captain letters which when thou hast read them, fail not to despatch. I have sent for teachers for thee to beat thee into modesty and lesson thee in better behaviour to a lady and princess. — "

What letters has she given thee, captain? These?

CAPTAIN

To Pratap, Rao of Ichalgurh; — and one
To Toraman the Scythian.

BAPPA

Deliver them.

Thou'lt find at Dongurh both these warlike princes.
No, I'll not read them.

Exit Captain.

COOMOOD

Let me hear the rest.

BAPPA

“Cateran, I will show thee the sum of thy bold and flagitious offences, though I dare not to hope that it will make thee ashamed. Thou hast laid injurious hands on a royal maiden, being thyself a mere Bheel and outlaw and of no parentage; thou hast carried me most violently to this thy inconsiderable and incommodious hut, treating the body of a princess as if it were a sack of potatoes; thou hast unmercifully and feloniously stripped my body with thy own rude Bheel hands of more ornaments than thou hast seen in thy lifetime and didst hurt me most cruelly in the deed, though thou vainly deniest it; thou hast compelled and dost yet compel me, the princess of Edur, by the infamous lack of women-servants in thy hut, to minister to thee, a common Bheel, menially with my own royal hands, so that my fingers are sore with scrubbing thy rusty sword which thou hast never used yet on anything braver than a hill-jackal, and my face is still red with leaning over the fire cooking thy most unroyal meals for thee; and to top these crimes, thou hast in thy robustious robber fashion taken a kiss from my lips without troubling thyself to ask for it, and thou yet keepest it with thee. All which are high misdoings and mortal offences; yet would I have pardoned them knowing thee to be no more than a boy and a savage. But now thou darest to tell me that I, a Rajpoot maiden, am in love with thee, a Bheel, and that even if I deny it, thou carest not; for I am

thine already whether I will or no, thy captive and thy slavegirl. This is not to be borne. So I have written to my noble suitors of Ichalгурh and Scythia to avenge me upon thy Bheel body; I doubt not, they will soon carry thy head to Edur in a basket, if thou hast the manners to permit them. Yet since thy followers call thee Smiter of the Forest and Lion of the Hills, let me see thee smite more than jackals and rend braver than flesh of mountain-deer. Cateran, when thou trundlest the Scythian down-hill like a ball, thou mayst marry me in spite of thy misdeeds, if thou darest; and when thou showest thyself a better man than the Chouhan of Ichalгурh, which is impossible, thou mayst even keep me for thy slavegirl and I will not deny thee. Meanwhile, thou shalt give me a respite till the seventh morn of the May. Till then presume not to touch me. Thy captive, Comol Cumary.”

Why, here’s a warlike and most hectoring letter,
Coomood.

COOMOOD

She pours her happy heart out so
In fantasies; I never knew her half so wayward.
The more her soul is snared between your hands,
The more her lips will chide you.

BAPPA

Can you tell
Why she has set these doughty warriors on me,
Coomood?

COOMOOD

You cannot read a woman’s mind.
It’s to herself a maze inextricable
Of vagrant impulses with half-guessed tangles
Of feeling her own secret thoughts are blind to.

BAPPA

But yet?

COOMOOD

Her sudden eager headstrong passion
Would justify its own extravagance
By proving you unparalleled. Therefore she picks
Earth's brace of warriors out for your opponents.

BAPPA

Pratap the Chouhan, Rao of Ichalgurh!
To meet him merely were a lifetime's boast;
But to cross swords with him! Oh, she has looked
Into my heart.

COOMOOD

You'll give her seven days?

BAPPA

Not hours, — the dainty rebel! Great Ichalgurh
Will wing here like an eagle; soon I'll meet him
And overthrow, who feel a giant's strength,
Coomood, since yesterday. My fate mounts sunward.

COOMOOD

Ours, Bappa, has already arrived. Our sun
Rose yesterday upon the way to Dongurh.

Curtain

Scene 4

Outside Dongurh.

Ichalgurh, a letter in his hand; Ruttan, the Captain.

ICHALGURH

Who art thou, soldier?

CAPTAIN

The leader of the lances
That guarded Edur's princess and with her
Were captured by the Bheels. Their chief I serve.

ICHALGURH

Thou hast dishonoured then the Rajpoot name
Deserting from thy lord to serve a ruffian
Under the eyes of death, thou paltry trembler.

CAPTAIN

My honour, Rao of Ichalgurh, is mine
To answer for, and at a fitting time
I will return thy insults on my swordpoint.
But now I am only a messenger.

ICHALGURH

I'll read
The princess' writing. (*reads*) "Baron of Ichalgurh,
My mother's clansman, warrior, noble Rajpoot,
Thrice over therefore bound to help the weak
And save the oppressed! A maiden overpowered,
Comol Cumary, Edur's princess, sues
For thy heroic arm of rescue, prince,
To the Bheel outlaws made a prey, unsought

By her own kin; whom if thou save, I am
 A princess and thy handmaid, else a captive
 Only and Bappa's slavegirl." Go! my warcry
 Echoing among the hills shall answer straightway
 This piteous letter. Ruttan, swift! Arm! arm!
 I will not vent my wrath in braggart words
 But till it leap into my sword, I suffer.

RUTTAN

You shall not wait for long.

Exit.

CAPTAIN

I have a letter
 To Toraman the Scythian.

ICHALGURH

Give it to him,
 For this is he.

Enter Canaca, Hooshka and Scythians.

CANACA

It will not fill. This paltry barren Rajpootana has not the where-
 withal to choke up the gulf within me. Ha! avaunt! Dost thou
 flutter paper before me? I have no creditors in Rajpootana.

CAPTAIN

I understand thee not. This is a script
 Comol Cumary sends thee, Edur's princess.

CANACA

Is it so? Well then, thou mayst kneel and lay it at my feet; I will
 deign to read it. (*The Captain flings it into his hands.*) What,
 thou dirty varlet! (*The Captain lays his hand on his sword.*) Nay,
 it is a game? Oh, I can catch, I can catch.

Exit Captain.

(reads)

“Prince Toraman, they say thou desirest me and camest from Cashmere as far as Edur for my sake. Thou must come a little farther, prince! Bappa, the outlaw, has been beforehand with thee and holds me in durance among the hills. Prince, if thou yet desirest this little beauty one poor body can hold, come up hither and fight for its possession which otherwise I must in seven days perforce yield to my captor. From whom if thou canst rescue me, — but I will not drive bargains with thee, trusting rather to thy knightly princeliness to succour a distressed maiden for no hope of reward. Comol Cumary.”

No, no, no; there is too much butter about thee. No hope of reward! What! I shall fight like an enraged rhinoceros, I shall startle the hills by my valour, I shall stick three thousand Bheels with my own princely hand like so many boar-pigs; and all this violent morning exercise for what? To improve my appetite? I have more gastric juice than my guts can accommodate. They roar to me already for a haunch of venison.

HOOSHKA

Prince Toraman, shall I give the order for the hills?

CANACA

Ay, Hooshka Longnose, hast thou news of venison, good fellow?

HOOSHKA

I meant, to rescue the Princess Comol Cumary from the Bheels.

CANACA

Didst thou mean so? Nay, I will not hinder thy excellent intentions. But bring some venison with thee as thou comest along with her, Hooshka.

HOOSHKA

Prince of Cashmere, lead us to the hills and tear her from the grip of the outlaws. As a prince and a soldier thou canst do no less.

CANACA

Thou liest through thy long nose! I can do much less than that. I will not suffer thee to put limits to my infinite ability. And I can tell a decoy-duck from a live gander. Shall I waddle my shins into Bappa's trap? This letter was written under compulsion.

HOOSHKA

The Princess must be rescued. I wonder, Prince Toraman, that thou wilt jest over a thing so grave and unhappy.

CANACA

Why, genius will out, you cannot stable it for long, Hooshka; it will break bounds and gallop. Yet go, Hooshka, go; take all my men, Hooshka. Hooshka, slay the Bheel; rescue the lady, Hooshka. I wish I could go with thee and swing my dreadful blade with my mighty arm till the mountains reechoed. But the simple truth is, I have a bleeding dysentery. Willingly would I shed my princely blood for my sweet lady, but it is shedding itself already otherwise.

HOOSHKA (*aside*)

Thou fat-gutted cowardly rogue, wilt thou blacken the name of a hero with thy antics? Out at once, or the Rajpoots shall know who thou art and carve thee into little strips for a dog's dinner.

CANACA

Sayst thou, my little captain? Thy arguments are strangely conclusive. Arms! arms! my horse! my horse! Out, Scythians, to the hills! My horse, I say! I will do deeds; I will paint the hills in blood and tattoo the valleys. (*Enter Scythians.*) Amitabha! Amitabha! Yell, you rogues, have you no lungs in your big greasy carcasses? With what will you fight then?

SCYTHIANS

Amitabha!

Enter Ruttan and Rajpoots.

RUTTAN

Rajpoots, to save a noble lady captured
We march today. No gallant open enemy,
But savages who lurk behind the rocks
Are our opposers. Sweep them from the hills,
Rajpoots, with the mere flashing of your swords
And rescue from their villain touch a princess.

Exeunt Ichalgurh, Ruttan and Rajpoots.

CANACA

March, Scythians! (*aside*) Hooshka, what say you? We will
keep behind these mad-dog Rajpoots and fight valiantly in their
shadow. That is but strategy.

HOOSHKA (*aside*)

If thou dost, I will kick thee into the enemy's midst with my
jackboots.

CANACA (*aside*)

Wilt thou muddy such a fine coat as this is? Hast thou the heart?
(*aloud*) Trumpets! Into the breach, into the breach, my soldiers!

Exeunt.

Scene 5

*In the forest.
Ichalgurh, Ruttan and Rajpoots.*

OUTSIDE

Bappa! Bappa! Ho, Sheva Ekling!

An arrow descends and a Rajpoot falls.

RUTTAN

Still upwards!

ICHALGURH

Upwards still! Death on the height
Sits crowned to meet us; downwards is to dishonour
And that's no Rajpoot movement. Brother Ruttan,
We're strangled with a noose intangible.
O my brave Rajpoots, by my headlong folly
Led to an evil death!

RUTTAN

What is this weakness,
Chouhan of famous Ichalgurh? Remember
Thyself, my brother. But a little more
And we have reached their wasps'-nest on the hills.

ICHALGURH

Not one alive.

Another arrow. A Rajpoot falls.

RUTTAN

I ask no better fate,
Brother, than at thy side however slain,

Victorious or defeated.

ICHALGURH

We have acted

Like heedless children, thinking we had to stamp
Our armoured heel on a mere swarm and rabble,
But find ourselves at grips with skilful fighters
And a great brain of war. Safe under cover
They pick us off; we battle blindly forwards
Without objective, smiting at the wind,
Stumbling as in a nightmare and transfixed
Ignobly by a foe invisible
Our falchions cannot reach, — like crows, like jackals,
Not like brave men and battle-famous warriors.

RUTTAN

Still on!

ICHALGURH

Yes, on, till the last man falls pierced
Upon the threshold that immures the sweetness
We could not save. Forward the Chouhan!

Enter Kodal.

KODAL

Halt!

A parley!

ICHALGURH

Speak, but talk not of surrender.

KODAL

'Tis that I'll talk of. I am Bappa's mouthpiece.
Rajpoots, you're quite surrounded. If we choose,
Our arrows buzzing through your brains can end you
In five swift minutes. Lay then at Bappa's feet
Your humble heads; else like mad dogs be skewered

And yelp your lives out.

ICHALGURH

Return unpunished; the name
Of envoy guards thy barbarous insolence.

Enter Sungram.

SUNGRAM

You speak too insolently your message, Kodal.
Chouhan of Ichalgurh, thou art too great
To die thus butchered. We demand a parley
For courteous equal terms, not base surrender.

ICHALGURH

Thou art a Rajpoot; dost thou lead these arrows?

SUNGRAM

I lead the shafts that wear thee out; another
Surrounds the Scythian; but we are the hands
Of one more godlike brain.

ICHALGURH

With him I'll parley.

SUNGRAM

'Tis well. Go, Kodal, learn our chieftain's will.

Exit Kodal.

ICHALGURH

Young man, thou hast a Rajpoot form and bearing,
Yet herdst with the wild forest tribes, remote
From arms and culture. Dost thou hide thy name too?

SUNGRAM

I am a Chouhan like thyself, of birth
As princely. Ask the warriors of Ajmere
Who valiant Martund was; his sons are we,

Sungram and Prithuraj.

ICHALGURH

O youth, thy father
Was my great pattern and my guide in war.
Brother and enemy, embrace me.

They embrace.

Sungram,
Who is thy captain? For the sons of Martund
Serve not a Bheel.

SUNGRAM

Thine eyes shall answer thee.

Enter Bappa and Kodal.

ICHALGURH

A noble-featured youth! What son of Kings
Lives secret in these rugged hills?

BAPPA

Chouhan
Of famous Ichalgurh, now if I'm slain
In battle, I can tell the dead I've seen thee,
Thou god of war. O let there be no hatred,
Hero, between us, but only faith.

ICHALGURH

Young chieftain,
Thou bearest a godlike semblance, but thy deeds
Are less than noble. Hast thou not seized a princess
By robber violence, forced her with thee
To thy rude lair and threatenest her sweet body
With shameful mastery?

BAPPA

We are warriors, Rajpoot;
Two ways of mating only fit for us,

By mutual sweet attraction undenied
 To grow to oneness as they do in heaven,
 Or else with lion leap to seize our bride
 And pluck her from the strong protecting spears
 Taking her heart by violence. We mate not
 Like castes unwarlike, from a father's hand
 Drawing an innocent wide-eyed wondering child
 Like cattle given or sold. This was the way
 Of Rajpoots long before the earth grew aged;
 And shall a Rajpoot blame it? Wherefore then rod'st thou
 Clanging last morn from Ichalgurh in arms,
 Pratap the Chouhan?

ICHALGURH

Chieftain, I am pledged
 To save the girl from thee.

BAPPA

But canst redeem
 The vow with thy dead body only. Hero,
 I too am sworn to keep her 'gainst the world.
 Let us in the high knightly way decide it.
 Deign to cross swords with me and let the victor
 Possess the maiden.

ICHALGURH

O thou springing stem
 That surely yet wilt rise to meet the sun!
 Agreed. Let no man intervene betwixt us.

BAPPA

Kodal, restrain thy Bheels.

Exit Kodal. They fight.

RUTTAN

Bold is thy chieftain
 To match his boyish arm against my brother!

SUNGRAM

He is a mighty warrior, but not age
Nor bulk can measure strength; the exultant spirit
Pressing towards glory gives the arm a force
Mightier than physical. He's down.

Ichalgurh falls wounded.

RUTTAN

Great Ichalgurh!

Who is this godlike combatant?

BAPPA

Surrender

My princess, Chouhan.

ICHALGURH

Thou hast her who deserv'st

Much more than her.

He rises.

Young hero who in thy first battle o'erbearst
Maturer victors! know Pratap the Chouhan
Unalterably thy friend. When thou shalt ask
My sword, 'tis thine.

BAPPA

Thou'rt wounded?

ICHALGURH (*binding his wound*)

I have been worse

And ridden far to meet the foe. Another day
We'll share one rocky pillow on the hills
And talk of battles.

BAPPA

Pratap, I could but offer
A rude and hillside hospitality.
But when I hold my court in mighty Edur

I will absolve this morning's debt.

Enter Captain.

ICHALGURH

Farewell.

BAPPA

Escort him, friend.

Exeunt Sungram, Ichalgurh, Ruttan and Rajpoots.

How speeds the battle, comrade,

There with the Scythians?

CAPTAIN

It is finished, prince.

They fell in slaughtered heaps.

BAPPA

Prince Toraman?

CAPTAIN

Lay flat and bellowed. We'd have taken him,
But Prithuraj, mad for the joy of battle,
Leaped on their foremost; while he hewed them down,
Like an untiring woodman, one giant Scythian
Crashing through bush and boulder hurled himself
Out of thy net; with him a loyal handful
Carried this Toraman.

Enter Prithuraj.

PRITHURAJ

Pardon my error,

Bappa.

BAPPA

It was a noble fault, my soldier.
We have done all we hoped. The amorous Scythian
Will not return in haste mid our green hills

To woo a Rajpoot maiden. Let us go.
I wonder when great Edur moves upon us.
I long to hear his war assail our mountains.

Exeunt.

Scene 6

*Outside Bappa's cot.
Comol Cumary alone.*

COMOL

Have I too dangerously ventured my all
Daring a blast so rude? The Scythian roar
Appals no more the forest, nor the warcry
Of Ichalgurh climbs mightily the hills;
The outlaws' fierce triumphant shout is stilled
Of their young war-god's name. Who has won? who fallen?

Enter Bappa.

COMOL (*coming eagerly to him*)

How went the fight? You're safe! And Ichalgurh?

BAPPA

Give me your hands; I'll tell you.

COMOL

I see your head's

Not in the basket.

He takes her hands and draws her towards him.

Cateran, I forbade you

To touch me till the seventh day.

BAPPA

I touch

What is my own. To bid or to forbid
Is mine upon this hillside where I'm sovereign.
Sit down by me.

COMOL

I will not be commanded.

She sits down at his feet.

BAPPA

Oh, you are right, love. At my feet's more fitting
Who am your master and monarch. Come, no rising.
Stay there, where I can watch your antelope eyes
Look up at me bright with all love's own sunshine.

COMOL

Oh, you provoke me. You've not met the Chouhan,
Or you'd have been much chastened.

BAPPA

I have met him.

COMOL

Great Ichalgurh?

BAPPA

We soon o'ercame the Scythians.
Your lover, Comol, the great Toraman,
Was borne, a mass of terror-stricken flesh,
By faithful fugitives headlong down the hillside.

COMOL

You need not triumph. These were only Scythians.
But what of Ichalgurh?

BAPPA

We fought. I conquered.

COMOL

Thou? thou? It is impossible.

BAPPA

But done.

COMOL

Why, you're a boy, a child! O my bright lion,
 You are a splendid and a royal beast,
 But very youthful. This was the maned monarch
 Whose roar shook all the forest when he leaped
 Upon his opposite. Then the great tusker
 Went down beneath his huge and tawny front
 As if it were an antelope. Him you've conquered?

BAPPA

He fell and yielded.

COMOL

You have learned romance
 From the wild hill-tops and the stars at night
 And take your visions for the fact.

BAPPA

Arch-infidel!

Ask Sungram.

COMOL

Then I understand. You won
 As in your duel with me, quite unfairly.
 You used your sleight of hand?

BAPPA

Perhaps, my princess,
 His foot slipped and he fell; 'twas my good fortune,
 Not I that conquered him.

COMOL

Indeed it was
 Your high resistless fortune. O my king,

My hero, thou hast o'erborne great Ichalghurh;
Then who can stand against thee? Thou shalt conquer
More than my heart.

(Bappa takes her into his arms)

What dost thou, Bheel? Forbear!

I did but jest.

BAPPA

Do you recall your letter,
Comol? I have outdone the Chouhan, girl.

COMOL

Bheel, I wrote nothing, nothing.

BAPPA

I'll keep you now
For my sweet slavegirl, princess? You will not
Deny me?

COMOL

'Twas not my hand. Your Coomood forged it.
I'll not admit it.

BAPPA

Rebel against your heart!
You're trapped in your own spring. My antelope!
(kisses her)
I've brought you to my lair; shall I not prey on you?
Kiss me.

COMOL

I will not.
(kisses him)

O not now! O give me
The memory of this May to keep with me
Till death and afterwards, a dream of greenness
With visions of the white and vermeil spring,

A prelude set to winds and waterfalls
 Among the mountains of immortal Dongurh
 Far from the earth, in a delightful freedom
 Treading the hill-tops, all the joy of life
 In front of me to dream of its perfection,
 Bappa.

BAPPA

When you entreat, who shall refuse you,
 O lips of honey?

COMOL

Till the seventh morning,
 Bappa.

BAPPA

Only till then.

COMOL

That is a promise.

(escaping from him)

Which, having won, I do deny, unsay,
 Wholly recant and absolutely abjure
 Whatever flattery I have said or done
 To win it. You are still my Bheel and brigand,
 My lawless cateran; I great Edur's princess.
 I love you! Do not dream of it. Six days!
 By then my father'll smoke you from your lair,
 And take me from your dreadful claws, my lion,
 An antelope undevoured.

BAPPA

Have you yet thought
 Of the dire punishments you'll taste for this,
 Deceiver?

COMOL

Not till the seventh morning, lion.

Exit.

BAPPA

Till then, my antelope, range my hills and make them
An Eden for me with thy wondrous beauty
Moving in grace and freedom of the winds,
Sweetness of the green woodlands; for of these
Thou seemst a part and they thy natural country.

Exit.

Act III

The forest near Dongurb.

Scene 1

Comol, Coomood, meeting in the forest.

COOMOOD

Where were you hidden, Comol, all this morning?

COMOL

I have been wandering in my woods alone
Imagining myself their mountain queen.
O Coomood, all the woodland worshipped me!
Coomood, the flowers held up their incense-bowls
In adoration and the soft-voiced winds
Footing with a light ease among the leaves
Paused to lean down and lisp into my ear,
Oh, pure delight. The forest's unnamed birds
Hymned their sweet sovran lady as she walked
Lavishing melody. The furry squirrels
Peeped from the leaves and waved their bushy tails,
Twittering, "There goes she, our beloved lady,
Comol Cumary"; and the peacocks came
Proud to be seen by me and danced in front,
Shrilling, "How gorgeous are we in our beauty,
Yet not so beautiful as is our lady,
Comol Cumary." I will be worshipped, Coomood.

COOMOOD

You shall be. There's no goddess of them all

That has these vernal looks and such a body
Remembering the glory whence it came
Or apt to tread with the light vagrant breeze
Or rest with moonlight.

COMOL

That was what they told me,
The voices of the forest, sister Coomood, —
The myriad voices.

COOMOOD

What did they tell you, Comol?

COMOL

They told me that my hair was a soft dimness
With thoughts of light imprisoned in't; the gods,
They said, looked down from heaven and saw my eyes
Wishing that that were heaven. They told me, child,
My face was such as Brahma once had dreamed of
But could not, — no, for all the master-skill
That made the worlds, — recapture in the flesh
So rare a sweetness. They called my perfect body
A feast of gracious beauty, a refrain
And harmony in womanhood embodied.
They told me all these things, — Coomood, they did,
Though you will not believe it. I understood
Their leafy language.

COOMOOD

Come, you did not need
So to translate the murmurings of the leaves
And the wind's whisper. 'Twas a human voice
I'll swear, so deftly flattered you.

COMOL

Fie, Coomood,
It was the trees, the waters; the pure, soft flowers

Took voices.

COOMOOD

One voice. Did he roar softly, sweetheart,
To woo you?

COMOL

Oh, he's a recreant to his duty.
He loves the wild-deer fleeing on the hills
And the strong foeman's glittering blade, not Comol.
You must not talk of him, but of the hills
And greenness and of me.

COOMOOD

And Edur, Comol?

COMOL

Edur! It is a name that I have heard
In some dim past, in some old far-off world
I moved in, oh, a waste of centuries
And many dreams ago. I'll not return there.
It had no trees, I'm sure, no jasmine-bushes,
No happy breezes dancing with linked hands
Over the hill-tops, no proud-seated hills
Softening the azure, high-coped deep-plunging rocks
Or flowery greenness round, no birds, no Spring.

COOMOOD

We are the distance of a world from Edur.
Tomorrow is the May-feast's crowning day,
Comol.

COMOL

Oh then we shall be happy breezes
And dance with linkèd hands upon the hills
All the Spring-morning.

COOMOOD

It is a May to be
Remembered.

COMOL

It is the May-feast of my life,
Coomood, the May-feast of my life, the May
That in my heart shall last for ever, sweet,
For ever and for ever. Where are our sisters?

COOMOOD

Nirmol is carrying water from the spring;
Ishany hunts the browsing stag today,
A sylvan archeress.

COMOL

What have you in the basket?

COOMOOD

Flowers I have robbed the greenest woodland of
For Bappa's worship. They must hide with bloom
Sheva Ekling today. Tomorrow, sweet,
I'll gather blossoms for your hair instead
And weave you silver-petalled anklets, earrings
Of bright maybloom, zones of Spring honeysuckle,
And hide your arms in vernal gold. We'll set you
Under a bough, our goddess of the Spring,
And sylvanly adore, covering your feet
With flowers that almost match their moonbeam whiteness
Or palely imitate their rose; — our Lady,
Comol Cumary.

COMOL

Will Bappa worship me?
But I am an inferior goddess, Coomood,
And dare not ask the King of Paradise
To adore me.

COOMOOD

You must adore him, that's your part.

COMOL

I will, while 'tis the May.

COOMOOD

And afterwards?

COMOL

Coomood, we will not think of afterwards
In Dongurh, in the springtide.

COOMOOD

Tomorrow dawns
The seventh morning, Comol.

COMOL

I did not hear you.
Are these our hunters?

Enter Prithuraj and Ishany.

ISHANY

I have a better aim
Than yours.

PRITHURAJ

Did I deny it? Oh, you shoot
Right through the heart.

ISHANY

I'll never marry one
Whom I outdo at war or archery.
You tell me you are famous Martund's son,
The mighty Gehlote. Wherefore lurk you then
In unapproachable and tangled woods
Warding off glory with your distant shafts,

While life sweeps past in the loud vale below?
Not breast the torrent, not outbrave its shocks
To carve your names upon the rocks of Time
Indelibly?

PRITHURAJ

We will affront, Ishany,
The Ganges yet with a victorious gleam
Of armour. But our fates are infant still
And in their native thickets they must wait
To flesh themselves and feel their lion strengths
Before they roar abroad.

ISHANY

Until they do,
Talk not of love.

PRITHURAJ

What would you have me do?
O'erbear in arms the Scythian Toraman,
And slay the giant Hooshka? meet Ichalгурh
And come unharmed, or with my single sword
Say halt to a proud score of the best lances
You have in Edur? This and more I can
For thee, Ishany.

ISHANY

You talk, but do it first.
Doers were never talkers, Prithuraj.

PRITHURAJ

Oh, that's a narrow maxim. Noble speech
Is a high prelude fit for noble deeds;
It is the lion's roar before he leaps.
Proud eloquence graces the puissant arm
And from the hall of council to the field
Was with the great and iron men of old

Their natural stepping.

ISHANY

You only roar as yet.

I beat you with the bow today; sometime
I'll fight you with the sword and beat you.

PRITHURAJ

Will you?

Just as your lady did?

ISHANY

She played, she played,

But I would aim in earnest at your heart.
One day we'll fight and see.

PRITHURAJ

Why, if we do,

I'll claim a conqueror's right on your sweet body,
Ishany.

ISHANY

And my heart? You must do more,
If you'll have that.

PRITHURAJ

It cannot now be long
Before the mailed heel of Edur rings
Upon our hillside rocks. Then I'll deserve it.

ISHANY

Till then you are my fellow-hunter only,
Not yet my captain.

Enter Nirmol.

NIRMOL

Idlers and ne'er-do-weels, home! Here have I carried twelve full
jars from the spring, set wood on the stove, kindled the fire,

while you play gracefully the sylvan gadabouts. Where is the venison?

PRITHURAJ

Travelling to the cooking-pot on a Bheel's black shoulders.

NIRMOL

To your service, Ishany! or you shall not taste the stag you have hunted.

ISHANY

Child, do not tyrannize. I am as hungry with this hunting as a beef-swallowing Scythian.

Exit.

NIRMOL

Off with you, hero, and help her with your heroic shoulders.

Exit Prithuraj.

COMOL

A pair of warlike lovers!

NIRMOL

You are there, sister-truants? Have you no occupation but to lurk in leaves and eavesdrop upon the prattle of lovers?

COMOL

Why, Nirmol, I did my service before I came.

NIRMOL

Yes, I know! To sweep one room — oh, scrupulously clean, for is it not Bappa's? and to scrub his armour for a long hour till it is as bright as your eyes grow when they are looking at Bappa, — do they not, Coomood?

COOMOOD

They do, like stars allowed to gaze at God.

NIRMOL

Exact! I have seen her —

COMOL

Nirmol, I do not know how many twigs there are in the forest, but I will break them all on your back, if you persevere.

NIRMOL

Do you think you are princess of Edur here that you threaten me? No, we are in the democracy of Spring where all sweet flowers are equals. Oh, I will be revenged on you for your tyrannies in Edur. I have seen her, Coomood, when she thought none was looking, lay her cheek wistfully against the hilt of his sword, trying to think that the cold hard iron was the warm lips of its master and hers. I have seen her kiss it furtively —

COMOL (*embracing and stopping her mouth*)

Hush, hush, you wicked romancer.

NIRMOL

Go then and cook our meal like a good princess and I will promise not to repeat all the things I have heard you murmur to yourself when you were alone.

COMOL

Nirmol, you grow in wickedness with years.
Wait till I have you back in Edur, maiden;
I'll scourge this imp of mischief out of you.

NIRMOL

I have heard her, Coomood, —

COMOL

I am off, I am away! I am an arrow from Kodal's bow.

Exit.

NIRMOL

She is hard to drive, but I have the whiphand of her.

COOMOOD

Have you the crimson sandal-powder ready?
Flowers for the garlands Spring in sweet abundance
Provides us.

NIRMOL

Yes. She shall be wedded fast
Before she knows it.

COOMOOD

Unless my father's sword
Striking us through the flowery walls we hide in,
Prevent it, Nirmol.

NIRMOL

Coomood, our fragile flowers will weave
A bond that steel cannot divide, nor death
Dissever.

Exeunt.

The Prince of Mathura

AJAMEDE, Prince of Mathura, a fugitive in the mountains.

INDRADYUMNA, his friend and comrade.

ATRY, King of Mathura, by the help of the Scythians.

TORAMAN, Prince of Cashmere, son of the Scythian overlord of
the North-West.

CANACA, a Brahmin, his court jester.

HOOSHKA, captain of the Scythian bodyguard.

MAYOOR, Atry's general and minister.

INDRANY, Queen of Mathura.

URMILA, Princess of Mathura, daughter of Atry and Indrany.

LILA, daughter of Hooshka.

Act I

Scene 1

*Mathura. A room in the Palace.
Atry, Indrany.*

ATRY

However hard it be, however gross
The undisguised compulsion, none can stay
Compulsion by impracticable revolt,
Indrany. Deeper, viler the disgrace
If by rebellion we invite constraint
Naked, contemptuous, to a slave subdued.
The reed that bows to the insistent wind
Is wiser than the trunk which the cyclone
Indignantly uproots. To force we yield,
But to a force disguised in courtly forms.
That's better than to yield beneath the scourge.

INDRANY

There's a defeat more noble, not to yield,
Even though we break. And break, I know, we must,
But to live fouled for ever, vilely robed
In a soiled purple, marked out to all the world
For laughter by the puppet's tinsel crown,
That is disgrace indeed.

ATRY

We hold this realm
Because the northern Scythian helps our sword.

INDRANY

By princely compromise, alliance high,
Not yet by purchase or a social stain.

ATRY

Our child will be an empress.

INDRANY

And outcaste.

ATRY

There have been many nuptials mixed like these,
Of which world-famous emperors were born.

INDRANY

Yes, but we took, not gave, were lords, not slaves.
As ransom of his fate the conquered Greek
To Indian Chandragupta gave his child,
Knowing a son by her could never rule.

ATRY

There is no bar. The Scythian weds with all
And makes impartial Time the arbiter
Whether a native or a foreign womb
Shall be the shelterer of his empire's heir.

INDRANY

This honour's purchased at too vile a cost.

ATRY

There is no help. If we deny our girl,
He'll have her violently, make her his slave
And not his wife.

INDRANY

Do this then, seem to yield,
But send her to your fortress on the hills,

Whence let one take her with a show of force,
Whoever's noblest now of Aryan lords
In Magadha, Avanty or the South,
Fit mate for Atry's stock. Twixt him be strife
And the Cashmerian, we escape his wrath.

ATRY

It shall be so. I'll choose a trusty man
Who shall to Magadha before the morn.
Meanwhile prepare your daughter for the hills.

Indrany goes out joyfully.

It is not good. The man will learn the trick,
A fierce barbarian, rapid as the storm,
Violent, vindictive, stamping on the world
Like a swift warhorse, neighing to the winds
With nostrils wide for any scent of war,
For men to kill, lands to lay desolate,
Haughty and keen amid his violence
With the king's eye that reads the minds of men, —
Such is the man she counsels me to tempt
By palpable evasion. I will send
Urmila to my fortress on the hills.
But he, not Magadha, shall take her forth
By secret nuptials. He is honourable
Though violent, a statesman though too proud.
The prejudices of our race and day
Must yield to more commanding thoughts and views
That suit the changing times. Custom is mutable,
Only the breach of it is dangerous
If too impetuously we innovate. It's best
To circumvent opinion, not provoke.
Who's there? Call Mayoer!
The King's first task is to preserve his realm,
Means honourable or dishonourable
Are only means to use impartially,
The most effective first.

Mayoor enters.

The lowest of his Aryan tributaries,
He will consent to much. And for the bond
He shall engage his honour, then possess.
Yourself go to him, Mayoer, where he's camped.
Persuade him. Let an escort start at once
With Urmila to Roondhra in the hills.
I trust you, Mayoer, for entire success.
My crown, my honour are upon this cast.

MAYOOR

Your crown is safe with me; your honour, King,
I'll save.

ATRY

Always few words were yours, Mayoer,
But each one solid gold.

He goes out.

MAYOOR

To cheat you's best
Of the dishonour to which you aspire
And for the crown, it's safer in my hands
Than Toraman's, the Scythian giant, bold,
Subtle and violent, who spreads his toils
Over all India, helping force with guile
And guile with force.

Enter Mekhala.

MEKHALA

He is alone. Hear you,
Mayoor!

MAYOOR

It's from the queen?

MEKHALA

Read it and see.

MAYOOR

Tell her my word is pledged and Urmila
Saved from the Scythian wedlock.

MEKHALA

You'll do it?

And that means

MAYOOR

She shall not wed Toraman.

Mekhala goes out.

This is another coil. The King, it seems,
Deceives his people and deceives his queen.
She trusts him not, nor they. A lying King
Tortuous and serpentine in policy,
Loses as much by the distrust he breeds
As all his shufflings gain. I'll write to Magadha
In other terms than Queen Indrany dreams.
I will send out my messengers at once.
One first to Ajamede, the lion dispossessed,
Where in the hills of Roondhra now he lairs.
Another to the mighty Magadhan
Who gathers up his strength to free the land
From the barbarian's tread. Myself shall go
To Toraman and meet the Scythian will.
The end shall be as God long since decreed.

The Birth of Sin

A Drama

LUCIFER, the Angel of Power.
SIRIOTH, the Angel of Love.
GABRIEL, the Angel of Obedience.
MICHAEL, the Angel of War.
RAPHAEL, the Angel of Sweetness.
THE ELOHIM.
BELIAL, the Angel of Reason.
BAAL, the Angel of Worldly Wisdom.
MOLOCH, the Angel of Wrath.
SUN.
ASHTAR, the Angel of Beauty.
MEROETH, the Angel of Youth.

Prologue



Act I

LUCIFER

Master of light and glory, lift thy rays
Over the troubled flood; lift up thy rays.
Obey me.

SUN

Lucifer! who gave thee power
Over the gods that rule the ancient world?
Or why should I obey thee? Art thou God?
Hast thou dethroned the Omnipotent from Heaven
And cast Him down into His nether glooms,
Revolting? Gave He then His supreme command,
Speak as a servant then and minister,
Not with the accent that controls the stars.

LUCIFER

Who then compelled thee from thy bright repose,
Or wherefore hast thou come?

SUN

By Him compelled,
Before whose mandate tremble all the Gods.

LUCIFER

By His or mine? That I will see. Rise, Sun,
And from thy luminous majestic orb
Cast out into the azure hold of Space
Creative Energy and pregnant Fire

Whirling around thee while the years endure.

SUN

Lucifer, Son of Morning, First in Heaven,
 What madness seizes thee? What awful force
 Darkly magnificent, brilliantly ominous
 Looks out from eyes that own no more the calm?

LUCIFER

Obey!

SUN

I cannot choose. Power leaps from thee
 Upon me. I am seized with fiery pangs.
 Spare me, thou dreadful Angel. I obey.

Exit.

LUCIFER

Power, power to make and to unmake the world!
 Power grows in me. I am omnipotent.
 Children of immortality whose ranks
 And brilliant armies people the infinite,
 Creatures of wonder, creatures of desire,
 O suns that wheel in everlasting fire,
 O stars that sow the ethereal spaces thick,
 O worlds of various life! I am your King.
 This I have learnt that God and I are one.
 If one, then equal! Rightly too I deemed
 That God develops, God increases. I,
 Younger than He am greater than the Power
 From which I sprang; the new excels the old.

BELIAL

What dost thou, Lucifer, Angel of God?
 The infinite spaces murmur like a sea,
 The ethereal realms are rocked as with a wind,
 All Nature stands amazed. Whence this revolt?

Who gave thee force to overturn the world?

LUCIFER

Watch, Belial, watch with me. A crisis comes
In the infinite, mobile and progressive world.
For God shall cease and Lucifer be God.

BELIAL

Thou speakst a thing that madness only speaks.
If God be God, how can He change or cease?

LUCIFER

Watch, Belial! I will prove to thee the truth,
Thou reasonable Angel.

Fragment of a Play

Act I

Mathura.

Scene 1

*A street in Mathura. Ahuca's house.
Sudaman, Ocroor.*

SUDAMAN
What art thou?

OCROOR
One that walks the Night.

SUDAMAN
Thou art Ocroor by thy voice. No Ogre!

OCROOR
Whatever name
The Lord has given his creature. Thou shouldst be
Sudaman.

SUDAMAN
If I am?

OCROOR
Walk not alone
When the black-bellied Night has swallowed earth
Lest all thou hast done to others should return
Upon thee with a sword in the dumb Night

And no man know it.

SUDAMAN

Care not; I am shielded.

OCROOR

Not by the gods!

SUDAMAN

No, by a greater god
Than any that have seats near Vishnu's throne.

OCROOR

What god whom even Sudaman worships?

SUDAMAN

Terror

Whose shoe I have enshrined in Mathura
And all men kiss it and their tongues declare
'Tis justice and mild rule while their hearts hate
And quiver.

OCROOR

Thou art the Ogre. Has the blood
Of many nobles not contented thee?
Dost thou not feel enough thy furious greatness yet,
Sudaman?

SUDAMAN

Ocroor, I have a belly to digest
Much more than Mathura.

OCROOR

So Ravan had

Who perished.

SUDAMAN

What dost thou in this black night
Whose shadows help the lover and the thief,
Two kindred traders? Which of these art thou?

OCROOR

Both, may be.

SUDAMAN

If thou be, then let thy theft
Attain some Yadav's house, that I may laugh
At his dishonour.

OCROOR

Thou hatest much, it seems,
Thy father's nation!

SUDAMAN

Whom I have imprisoned
That I may mock him daily, else were he dead
And with the gods he worships.

OCROOR

Thou shalt end
Evilly yet.

SUDAMAN

If it is so, 'tis so
Because the round of being leads to that,
And not because of gods or virtue.

Stories

Occult Idylls

The Phantom Hour

STURGE Maynard rose from the fireside and looked out on the blackish yellow blinding fog that swathed London in the dense folds of its amplitude. In his hand he carried the old book he was reading, his finger was still in the page, his mind directed, not with entire satisfaction, to the tenour of the writer's imaginations. For, if these pleased his sense of the curious, they disgusted his reason. A mystic, mediaeval in epoch and temperament, the old Latinist dealt with psychological fancies the modern world has long discarded in order to bustle to the polling booth and the counting house. Numerous subtleties occurred repulsive to the rigid and definite solutions of an age which, masterful with knowledge in the positive and external, tries to extend its autocracy in the shape of a confident ignorance over the bounds of the occulter world within, occult — declared the author, — only because we reject a key that is in everyone's hand, himself.

“Prosaist of mysteries,” thought Sturge, “trafficker in devious imaginations, if one could find only the thinnest fact to support the cumbrous web that is here woven! But the fog is less thick than the uncertainty in which these thoughts were content to move.”

In a passage of unusual but bizarre interest the German mystic maintained that the principle of brilliancy attended with a ceaseless activity the motions of thought, which, in their physical aspect, are flashes of a pure, a lurid or a murky light. It was, he said, a common experience with seers in intense moments of rapid cerebration to see their heads, often their whole surroundings besieged by a brilliant atmosphere coruscating with violet lightnings. Even while he wondered at these extravagances, it flashed across Sturge's memory that he himself in his childhood had been in the habit of seeing precisely such violet coruscations

about his head and had indulged his childish fancy with them until maturer years brought wonder, distrust and the rapid waning of the phenomenon.

Was there then some justification of experience for the fancies of the German? With an impulse he tried vainly to resist, he fixed his eye piercingly on the fog outside the window and waited. At the moment he was aware of a curious motion in his head, a crowding of himself and all his faculties to the eye; then came the sight of violet flashes in the fog and a growing excitement in his nerves watched by a brain that was curiously, abnormally calm. A whole world of miraculous vision, of marvellous sound, of ancient and future experience was surely pressing upon him, surging against some barrier that opposed intercourse. Astonished and interested, but not otherwise disturbed, his reason attempted to give itself some account of what was happening. The better to help the effort, he fixed his eye again on the fog for repetition or disproof of what he had seen. There were no further violet flashes, but something surely was hinting, forming, manifesting in the grey swathe outside. It became bright, it became round, it became distinct. Was it a face or a globe? With a disappointed revulsion of feeling he saw himself face to face with nothing more romantic than a clock. He smiled and turned to compare with that strong visualised image his own substantial, unmythic, workday companion on the mantelpiece. His body grew tense with a shock of surprise. There indeed was the clock, his ebony-faced, gold-lettered recorder of hours, balanced lightly on a conventional Father Time in the centre and two winged goddesses at the side; the hands, he noted, were closing upon the twelve and the five, and there would soon ring out the sound of the hour. But, by its side, what was this phantasmal and unwonted companion, fixed, distinct, aping reality, ebony-faced also, but silver-lettered, solidly pedestalled, not lightly balanced, pointing to the hour eight with the same closeness as the real clock pointed to the hour five? He had time to notice that the four of this timepiece was not lettered in the ordinary Roman numerals, but with the four vertical and parallel strokes; then the apparition disappeared.

An optical hallucination! Probably, the mental image intensely visualised, of some familiar timepiece in a friendly sitting-room. Indeed, was it not more than familiar? Surely he knew it, — had seen it, daily, insistently, — that ebony face, that silver lettering, that strong ornamented pedestal, even that figure four! But where was it, when was it? Some curious bar in his memory baffled the mind wandering vainly for the lost details.

Suddenly the clock, his own clock, struck five. He counted mechanically the familiar sounds, sharp, clear, attended with a metallic reverberation. And then, before the ear could withdraw itself from its object, another clock began, not sharp, not clear, not metallic but with a soft, harmonious chime and a musical jangling at the end. And the number of the strokes was eight!

Sturge sat down at the table and opened his book at random. If this were a hallucination, it was a carefully arranged and well-executed hallucination. Was someone playing hypnotic tricks with his brain? Was he hypnotising himself? His eye fell on the page and met not mediaeval Latin, but ancient Greek, though unHomeric hexameters. Very clear was the lettering, very plain the significance.

“For the gods immortal wander always over the earth and come unguessed to the dwellings of mortals; but rare is the eye that can look on them and rarer the mind that can distinguish the disguise from the deity.”¹

Hypnotism again! for he knew that the original lucubrations of the old mystic, subtle in substance, but in expression rough, tedious, amorphous, persisted from the beginning to the end in their crabbed Latin and deviated nowhere into Greek, flowered nowhere into poetry. There was yet more of the hexameters, he noticed, and he read on.

“And men too live disguised in the sunlight and never from their birth to their death shalt thou see the mask uplifted. Nay,

¹ αἰεὶ γὰρ θεοὶ ἀθάνατοι περὶ γαῖαν ἀλῶνται
θνητῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ δώματα προσβαίνουσι
κρυπτοὶ τοὺς δὲ τίς αὖ προσδέχεται ὄμμασι κρυπτούς;
εἶτα τί δαιμόνιον τί κενὸν καὶ σχῆμα τίς οἶδε;

thou thyself, O Pelops, hast thou seen even once the daemon within thee?"²

There the hexameters ceased and the next moment the physical page reappeared with its native lettering. But sweet, harmonious, clear in his hearing jangled once more the chimes of the phantom hour. And again the number of strokes was eight.

Sturge Maynard rose and waited for some more definite sign. For he divined now that some extraordinary mental state, some unforgettable experience was upon him. His expectation was not deceived. Once more the chimes rang out, but this time it seemed to him as if a woman's voice were crying to him passionately under cover of that perfectly familiar melody. But were the two phantasmal sounds memories of this English land and birth or was it out of some past existence they challenged him, insisting and appealing, inviting him to remember some poignant hour of a form he had worn and discarded, a name he had answered to and forgotten? Whatever it was, it was near to him, it touched potently his heart-strings. And then immediately following the eighth stroke there came, as if far off, an unmistakable explosion of sound, the report of a modern revolver.

Sturge Maynard left the fireplace and the room, descended the stairs, put on his hat and overcoat, and moved towards the door of his house. He had no clear idea where he would go or what he must do, but whatever it might be, it had to be done. Then it occurred to him that he had forgotten his revolver which was lying in the drawer of his wardrobe. He went up, possessed himself of the weapon, loaded it, put it in his right-hand side pocket, assured himself that the pocket carried his two latchkeys, once more descended the stairs and walked out into one of the densest of London fogs, damp, choking and impenetrable.

He moved through a world that seemed to have no existence

² χρυπτοὶ καὶ βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ἐν αὐγαῖς ἡλίου εἰσὶν
οὐδὲ τὰ τέγματ' ἀπωθοῦσιν χρυπτοὶ δὲ θανοῦνται.
καὶ σύ, Πέλοψ, πότε τὸν σὸν ἔτ' ἔνδον δαίμον' ἐπεῖδες;

except in memory. There was no speed of traffic. Only an occasional cartman hoarsely announced from time to time the cautious progress of his vehicle. Sturge could not see anything before or around him, — except when he neared the curb and a lamp-post strove to loom out on him shadowily or on the other side a spectral fragment of wall brushed his coatsleeve. But he was certain of the pavement under his feet, and he felt he could make no false turn. A surer guide than his senses and memory led him.

He crossed the road, entered the gates of Hyde Park, traversed in a sure and straight line of advance the fogbound invisible open, passed through the Marble Arch, and in Oxford Street, for the first time, hesitated. There were two women who were dear to him, either of whom by her death could desolate half his existence. To whom should he go? Then his mind, or something within it, decided for him. These speculations were otiose. He need not go to his sister Imogen. What possible evil could happen to her in her uncle's well-appointed, well-guarded comfortable home, in the happy round of her life full of things innocently careless and harmlessly beautiful. But Renée! Renée was different.

He pursued his walk in a familiar direction. As he went, it flashed across his memory that she had forbidden him to visit her today. There was some living reminiscence of her past life coming to her, someone she did not care for Sturge to meet, she had said with her usual frank carelessness; he must not come. He had not questioned. Since he first knew her, he had never questioned, and the past of Renée Beauregard was a void even for the man to whom she had surrendered everything. There was room in that void for unusual incidents, supreme perils. He remembered now that her parting clasp had been almost convulsive in its strength and intensity, her speech vibrant with some unexplained emotion. He had been aware of it without observing it, being preoccupied with his passion. Whatever part of his mind had noted it, had confined its possible cause within the limits of the usual, as men are in the habit of doing, ignoring the unusual until it seizes and surprises them.

He reached the square and the house in which she lived,

opened the door with one of the latchkeys in his pocket, divested himself of his coat and hat, and directed his steps to the drawingroom. A girl of nineteen or twenty rose, calm and pale, fronting the open doorway. The clutch of her hand on the chair, the rigid forward impulse in her frame were the index of a great emotion and an intense expectation. But her face flushed, the hand and figure relaxed, when she saw her visitor. Renée Beauregard was a Frenchwoman of the South, rich in physical endowment, in nervous vitality, in the élan of her tongue and her spirit. Her exquisite full limbs, her buoyant gait, the mobility of her crimson lips, her smiling dark eyes made great demands on life, on success, on pleasure, on love. But in the invincibly happy flame of the eyes there was at the moment the shadow of a tragic disappointment haunting and disfiguring their natural expression. This was plainly a woman with a past, — and a present. And her nature, if not her fate, demanded a future.

“Sturge!” She took a step towards the door. Sturge walked over to the fireplace and took her hand.

“I forgot your prohibition till I was too near to turn back. And there was the fog; and return was cheerless and you were here!”

“You should not have forgotten!” she said, but she smiled, well-pleased at his coming. Then the dark look reusurped those smiling eyes. “And you must go back. No, not now. In a quarter of an hour. You may stop for quarter of an hour.”

She had glanced at the clock, and his eyes followed hers. He saw an ebony-faced timepiece, silver-lettered, solidly-pedestalled, rendering the figure four in parallel strokes, and smiled at the curious tricks that his memory had played him. It was five minutes past six.

“I will go to Imogen’s,” he said, very deliberately. She looked at him, looked at the clock, then cried impulsively, leaning towards him: “And you will come at eight and dine with me! Rachel shall lay the covers for two,” then drew back, as if repenting her invitation.

Eight! Yes, he would dine with her — after he had done his work. That seemed to be the arrangement, — not hers, but

whose? The daemon's perhaps, the god's, within or without. They sat talking for a while, and it seemed to him that never had their talk been so commonplace in form or so vibrant with emotion. At twenty past six he rose, took his farewell and moved out to the fog; but she followed him to the door, helped him on with his overcoat, trembling visibly as she did so. And before he went, she embraced and kissed him once, not vehemently, but with a strong quietude and as if some fateful resolution had at that moment been formed in her heart, and expressed itself in her caress.

"I shall be back by eight," he said quietly. He had accepted, but not returned her embrace.

By eight! Yes, and before. But he did not tell her that. He swung through the fog to his uncle's residence, with a light, clear and careless mind, but an intense quiet in his heart. He reached the place, in a very aristocratic neighbourhood, and was invited in by a portly footman. Sir John was out, at the House, but Miss Imogen Maynard was at home. The next hour Sturge passed calmly and lightly enough; for in his sister's everyday attractive personal talk coursing lightly over the surface of life, amusements and theatres, books, music, paintings varied with politics and a shade of politely hinted scandal, even his heart insensibly lost its tension and he slipped back into the usual, forgetting the within in the without.

The next hour and more. It was Imogen Maynard who rose and said:

"Ten minutes to eight, Sturge. I must go and dress. You are sure you won't dine?"

Sturge Maynard looked at the clock and his heart stood still. He bid his sister a hasty adieu, ran down the stairs, clutched his hat and coat and was out in the fog, donning his overcoat as he walked. He made sure of the revolver and the latchkeys, then broke into a run. His great dread was that he might lose the turning in his haste and arrive after the stroke of the hour. But it was difficult to miss it, the only open space for half a mile! And the daemon? was he a spirit of prophecy only? Did he not visit to save?

He turned into Renée's square and, as he strode to the house and ascended the steps, the agitation passed from him and it was with an even pulse and a steady nerve that he turned to the drawingroom door. He had flung aside his hat but not waited to divest himself of the coat. His hand was in the pocket and the butt of the revolver was in his hand.

The door was open and, unusual circumstance, veiled by the Japanese screen. He stood at its edge and looked into the room which was intensely still, but not untenanted — for on the rug before the fireplace, at either end of it, stood Renée Beauregard and a man unknown to Sturge. He looking at her as if waiting for her speech; she calm, pale, resolute in silence, with the heavy burden of her past in her eyes. The stranger's back was half turned to Sturge and only part of his profile was visible, but the Englishman quivered with his hatred even as he looked at him. Was this what he had to do? He took out the revolver and put his finger on the trigger. Then he glanced at the clock, — it wanted four minutes to the hour; and at the stranger again, — in his hand, too, was a revolver and his finger also rested on the trigger. Sturge Maynard smiled.

Then the man's voice was heard. "It has to be then, Idalie!" he said, in a thin, terrible, mournful plaint, "You have decided it. Don't bear any grudge. You know it can't be helped. You have to die."

Sturge remembered that Idalie was Renée's second name, but she had always forbidden him to use it. The thin voice continued, this time with a note of curious excitement in its plaintiveness.

"And you throw it all on me! What does it matter how I got you, what I did afterwards? Everything's allowed to a lover. And I loved you. It's dangerous to play with love, Idalie. You find it now!"

Sturge looked at the man. Danger for her there was none, but great danger for this rigid, thin-voiced assassin, this man whom Sturge Maynard hated with every muscle in his body, with every cell of his brain. It seemed to him that each limb of him greatedened and vibrated with the energy of the homicide,

with the victorious impulse to slay. There was a fog outside, what a fog! and he could easily dispose of the body. Really that was a good arrangement. God did things very cleverly sometimes. And he laughed in himself at the grimness of his conceit. Yet somehow he believed it. God's work, not his. And yet his, too, preordained — since when? But the doomed voice was going on.

“I give you still a chance, Idalie — always, always a chance. Will you go with me? You've been false to me, false with your body, false with your heart. But I'll forgive. I forgave your desertion, I'll forgive this too. Come with me, Idalie. And if not, — Renée Idalie, it is going to strike eight, and when the hour has done striking, I strike. It's God shoots you with this hand of mine, — the God of Justice, the God of Love. It's both you have offended. Will you come?”

She shook her head. A deadly pallor swept over the man. “It's done then,” he cried, “you've done it. You have got to die.” He trained the pistol on her and his finger closed on the trigger. Sturge remained motionless. Nothing could happen before the hour struck. That was the moment destined, and no one could outrun Fate by a second. The man went on:

“Don't say it till the clock strikes! There's time till then. When I shoot you, Rachel will run up and I will shoot her. I left the door open so that she might hear the sound. Who else in England knows that I exist? I shall go out — oh, when you are both dead, not before. There's a fog, there's not a soul about, and I shall walk away very quietly. No one will see, no one will hear. God with his fog has blinded and deafened the world. You see it's He or it would not have been so perfectly arranged for me.”

Very grimly Sturge Maynard smiled. Men who hated each other might, it seemed, have very similar minds. Perhaps that was why they clashed. Well, if it was God, He was a tragic artist too and knew the poetical effectiveness of dramatic irony! Everything this man reckoned on or had arranged for his deed and his safety, had been or would be helpful to his own executioner! And then the consciousness came upon him that this had all happened before. But not here, not in these English surroundings! A great

blur of green came before his eyes, obscuring the clock. Then it leaped on him — green grass, green trees, green-covered rocks, a green sea and on the sward a man face downward, stabbed in the back, over him his murderer, the stiletto fresh-stained with blood. A boat rocked on the waters; it had been arranged for the assassin's escape, and in it there lay a woman, bound. Sturge knew those strange faces very well and remembered how he had lain dead on that sward. It was strange to see it all again in this drawingroom with the fateful modern ebony-faced timepiece seen through the green of Mediterranean trees! But it was going to end very differently this time.

Then the voice of the woman rang out, cold, strong, like the clang of iron. "I will not go," she said, simply. And the hour struck. It struck once, it struck twice, thrice, four times. And then she lifted her eyes and saw Sturge Maynard walking forward from the side of the screen. He was a good shot and there was no chance of his bungling it and killing her. But he would make sure!

The woman in her intensity had summoned up a marvellous self-control, and it did not break now; she neither moved, nor uttered a sound. But a look came into her eyes poignant in its appeal, terrible in its suggestion. For it was a cry for life, a command to murder.

The doomed man was looking at the clock, not at her, still less at any possible danger behind. He looked up as the eighth musical jangle died away and Sturge saw his light, steady, cruel eyes gleaming like those of a beast. He pressed his finger on the trigger.

"It is finished!" cried the man. And as he spoke, Sturge Maynard fired. The room rang with the shot, filled with the smoke. When the smoke cleared, the stranger was seen prostrate on the rug: his head lay at the feet of the woman he had doomed.

There was a running of steps in the passage and the maid Rachel entered, — as the man who lay there had foreseen. She was trembling when she came, but she saw the man on the rug, paused, steadied herself, and smiled. "We must carry it out at once into the fog," she said simply in French. With

a simultaneous impulse both she and Sturge approached the corpse. Then Renée, breaking into excited motion, ran to Sturge and putting her hand on his shoulder made as if to push him out of the room.

“I will see to that!” she panted, “Go!”

He turned to her with a smile.

“You must go at once,” she reiterated, “For my sake, do not be found in this house. Others besides Rachel may have heard the shot.”

But he took her by the wrists, drew her away from the fireplace and set her in a chair.

“We lose time, Monsieur,” said Rachel, again.

“It is better to lose time, Rachel,” he said, “we will give ten minutes to Fate.” And the serving-woman nodded and proceeding to the corpse began to tie up the wound methodically in her apron. The others waited in absolute stillness, Sturge arranging in his mind the explanation he would give, if any had heard the report and broke in on them. But silence and fog persisted around the house.

They took up the body. “If anyone notices, we are carrying a drunken man home,” said Sturge. “Carry it carefully; there must be no trail of blood.” And so into the English fog they carried out the man who had come living from foreign lands, and laid him down in the public road, far from the house and the square where he had perished. When they returned to the room, Rachel took up the bloodstained rug and apron, sole witnesses of the thing that had been done.

“I will destroy these,” she said, “and bring the rug from Madame’s room. And then,” she said, as simply as before, “Monsieur and Madame will dine.”

Renée shuddered and looked at Sturge.

“I remain here,” he said, “till the body is found. We are linked henceforth indissolubly and for ever, Idalie.” And as he stressed lightly the unwonted name, there was a look in his eyes she dared not oppose.

That night, when Renée had gone to her room, Sturge, sitting over the fire, remembered that he had not told her the

strange incident which had brought about one tragedy today and prevented another. When he went into her chamber, she came to him, deeply agitated, and clasped him with violence.

“Oh, Sturge, Sturge!” she cried, “to think that if you had not chanced to come, I should be dead now, taken from you, taken from God’s beautiful world!”

Chanced! There is no such thing in this creation as chance, thought Sturge. But who then had given him that mystic warning? Who had put the revolver in his hand? or sent him on a mission of slaughter? Who had made Imogen rise just in time? Who had fired that shot in the drawingroom? The God within? The God without? The Easterns spoke of God in a man. This might well be He. And then there returned to his memory those fierce emotions, the hatred that had surged in him, the impulse and delight of slaughter, the song of exultation that his blood yet sang in his veins, because a man that had lived, was dead and could not return to life again. He remembered, too, the command in Renée’s eyes. God in a man? — was God in a man a murderer then? In him? and in her?

“It is to enquire too curiously to think so,” he concluded, “but very strangely indeed has He made His world.”

Then he told her about the German mystic and the chime of the phantom hour that had brought him to her in the tragic moment of their destinies. And when he spoke of the daemon within, the woman understood better than the man.

The Door at Abelard

CHAPTER I

THE VILLAGE of Streadhew lay just under the hill, a collection of brown solid cottages straggling through the pastures, and on the top of the incline Abelard with its gables and antique windows watched the road wind and drop slowly to the roofs of Orringham two miles away. For many centuries the house and the village had looked with an unchanged face on a changing world, and in their old frames housed new men and manners, while Orringham beyond adapted itself and cast off its mediaeval slough. The masters of Abelard lived with the burden of a past which they could not change.

Stephen Abelard of Abelard, the last male of his line, had lived in the house with the old gables for the past twenty years mixing formally in the society of his equals, discharging the activities incidental to his position with a punctilious conscientiousness, but withdrawn in soul from the life around him. That was since the death of his wife in childbirth followed soon afterwards by the fading of the son to give whom she had died. Two daughters, Isabel and Aloÿse, survived. Stephen Abelard did not marry again; he was content that the old line should be continued through the female side, and when his daughter Isabel married Richard Lancaster, the younger son of a neighbouring country family, he stipulated that the husband should first consent to bear the name of his wife's ancestors. This attachment to the old name was the one thing known in the lord of the old house that belonged to the past. For Stephen Abelard, in spite of his spiritual aloofness, was a man forward in thought, with a keen emancipated intellect which neither present nor past dogma could bind, and gifted with a high courage to act according to the light that he had.

A strange series of accidents had helped to bring the old family near to extinction. For the last hundred years no daughter-in-law of the house had been able to survive by many days the birth of her first male child. Girl-children had been born and no harm had happened but some fatality seemed to attend the birth of a son. Stephen's great-grandfather had male issue, Hugh and Walter, and one daughter, Bertha, who died tragically, murdered in her chamber, no one knew by whom. It was after this incident that the fatality seemed to weigh on the house and popular superstition was not slow to connect the fatality with the deed. Hugh Abelard had already a wife and two sons at the time of the occurrence, but Walter was unmarried. One year after the tragic and mysterious death of his sister he brought a bride home to Abelard and in yet another year a son had been born to him. But only seven days after the birth of her child Mary Abelard was found dead in her room, possibly from some unexplained shock to the heart, for she was strong and in good health when she perished, and Walter, unhinged by the death of his young wife, went into foreign lands where he too died. The tongues of the countryside did not hesitate to whisper that he only paid in his affliction the penalty of an undetected crime. Hugh's sons grew up and married, but the same fatality fell upon the unions they had contracted; they died early and their sons did not live to enjoy the estate they successively inherited. Then Walter Abelard's son came with his wife and daughter and took possession. Stephen was born two years later and within three days of his birth his mother had shared the fate of all women who married into the fated house. So strong was the impression made upon Richard Abelard by this fate or this strong recurrent coincidence that when he married again, he would not allow his wife to enter the home of his ancestors. He bought a house in the neighbouring county and lived there till his death from an accident in the hunting-field. After him Stephen reigned, a man modern-minded, full of energy and courage, who returned, scornful of antiquated superstitions, to the old family house, married and had two daughters, and then — well, coincidence insisted and the male child came and the mother, adored of her

husband, passed away. But there was no mystery about this death. She died of collapse after childbirth, her life fought for by skilful doctors, watched over by careful attendants, sleeplessly guarded at night by her husband. A coincidence, nothing more.

Therefore Isabel and Richard Lancaster Abelard came fearlessly to live at the fated house. The daughters of the house had been immune from any fatality, and when she became enceinte, no superstitious fears haunted the mind of any among the numerous friends and relatives who loved her for her charm and her gaiety. About three months before the birth of the child could be expected her sister Aloyse married, not as the Abelards had hitherto done, into the neighbouring families, but, contrary to all precedent, a young foreign doctor settled at Orringham, a man not only foreign, but of Asiatic blood. Popular as Dr. Armand Sieurcaye was in the neighbourhood, the alliance had come with something of a shock to the countryside; for the Abelards, though less wealthy than many, were the oldest of the county families. But neither Abelard nor his daughter were troubled with these prejudices. The young man had powerfully attracted them both and the marriage was as much the choice of the father as of the daughter.

Armand Sieurcaye came from the south of France, and there was only the glossy blackness of his hair and the richer tint of the olive in his face to suggest a non-European origin. His grandfather, son of the mixed alliance of a Maratha Sirdar with the daughter of a French adventurer in the service of Scindia, had been the first to settle in France purchasing an estate in Provence with the riches amassed and hoarded by battle and plunder on Indian soil. Armand was the younger of two sons and had studied medicine at Nancy and then, driven rather by some adventurous strain in his blood than any necessity, sought his fortune abroad. He went first to Bombay, but did little there beyond some curious investigations which interested his keen, sceptical and inquiring mind, but did not help his purse. At Bombay, he met John Lancaster, Richard's brother, and was induced by him to try his fortune in the English county town aided by whatever local influence his friend, plucked by an almost

miraculous cure from the grip of a fatal disease, could afford him in gratitude for the saving of his life. In twelve months Armand Sieurcaye had won for himself universal popularity, a lucrative practice, and Aloÿse Abelard.

The old house, bathed in spring sunshine, had little in it of the ominous or weird to Armand Sieurcaye when with his young wife he entered it for a lengthened stay in the month of Isabel's delivery. He was attracted by its old-world quaintness, by the mass of the green ivy smothering the ancient walls, by the heavenward question of its short pointed towers; but there was nothing there to alarm or to daunt. Isabel had hurried to the study to her father, and Armand guided by Richard Lancaster repaired to the room into which the domestics had already carried his belongings.

"Awfully good of you to leave your practice and come," said Lancaster, "It's a relief to have you. Herries is a fool and I'm not used to the worry."

Armand looked at him with some surprise. He had not expected even so much nervousness in his cheerful, vigorous, commonplace brother-in-law.

"Is there any trouble?" he asked lightly, "Isabel seems strong. There can't be any reason for fear."

"Oh, there isn't. But I tell you, I'm not used to the worry," and, then, starting off from the subject, "How do you like your room?"

Armand had not looked at his room, but he looked at it now. It was a comfortable, well-furnished room with nothing apparently unmodern about it except the old oak panelling of the walls and the unusual narrowness and length of the two windows that looked out on the grounds behind the house. His eyes fell on a door in the wall to his right hand.

"What's there?" he asked. "I thought the room was the last at this end of the house."

"I haven't any idea," was the indifferent answer. "It can't be anything more than a balcony or closet."

The door attracted Armand's attention strangely. Of some slighter wood, not of the oak with which Abelard abounded, it

was carved with great plainness and struck him as more modern than the rest of the house. Still it was not precisely a modern door. He walked over to it to satisfy his curiosity, but the attempt to turn the handle brought no result.

“Locked?” questioned Lancaster, a little surprised. He too sauntered over and turned the handle in vain.

“I hope it’s not a haunted chamber,” said Armand, making the useless attempt again. He had spoken carelessly and was not prepared for the unwonted ebullition that followed his words. Richard’s face darkened, he struck the floor with his heel, angrily.

“It’s a beastly house,” he cried. “When old Stephen dies, I’ll sell it for a song.”

More and more surprised, Armand turned to look closely at his brother-in-law. It might be his fancy which told him that the young man’s face was paler than ordinarily and an uneasy restless look leaped from time to time into the shallowness of his light blue eyes. It was certainly his fancy which said that Richard looked as an animal might look when it is aware of some hidden enemy hunting it. He dismissed the imagination immediately, and put away from him the thought of the door.

But it occurred to him again when, returning from a solitary walk in the grounds, he chanced to look up at the angle of the house occupied by his room and the locked closet or balcony.

A corner of wall there did jut out beyond what he judged to be the limit of his room and then curved lightly round and formed a porch supporting a small room that could not have been more than eight feet by twelve in size; over the room a peaked tower. The erection was meant to imitate and harmonise with the older pointed towers of the building, but a slight observation confirmed the Doctor’s surmise that here was a later excrescence inharmoniously added for some whim or personal convenience. But the ivy was unusually thick on this side and even covered the great carved and high-arched orifices that all along the length of the erection did duty for windows. It must then be rather in the nature of a closed balcony than a room. It struck him casually how easy it would be for an intruder to climb up the strong thick growths of ivy from outside and enter

the house by the balcony. The possibility, no doubt, explained the locked door. Greatly relieved, he knew not why, Armand continued his walk. But he thought of the door idly more than once before nightfall.

That night, Armand Sieurcaye, sleeping by the side of his wife, was awakened by what seemed to him a noise in or outside his room. The lamp was burning low but nothing stirred in the dimness of the room. His eyes fell on the locked door and a disagreeable attraction rivetted them upon it; to his newly-awakened senses there seemed to be something weird and threatening in the plain mass of wood. With a violent effort he flung the fancy from him and sought slumber again; the noise that awakened him was possibly some figment of senses bewildered by sleep. He knew not after how long an interval he again woke, but this time a cold air upon him, and before he opened unwilling eyes, he was aware of the door of his room being softly opened and closed. Still the lamp burned,—the room was empty. Involuntarily his eyes sought the locked door. It was swung back on its hinges, wide open! And if the closed door had alarmed something sensitive and irrational within him, how much ghastlier, more menacing seemed that open rectangle with the pit of darkness beyond!

Cursing his nerves for fools Armand Sieurcaye leaped from the bed, turned up the lamp and, conquering a nervous reluctance the violence of which surprised him, stood, lamp in hand, at the threshold of the darkness beyond. It was, as he had conjectured, a wide balcony walled in so as to form a habitable sitting or sleeping-room in summer, and it seemed as such to have been utilised; for a bare iron bedstead occupied the width of the room near the wall, an old armchair with faded and tarnished cushions stood against the opposite end of the room. But the arched orifices were now heavily curtained with the thick folds of the climbing ivy. Otherwise the room was entirely empty. He decided to look out from these windows into the moonlit world outside.

But as he advanced into the room, he was aware of a growing disorder in his nerves which he could not control. It was

not fear, so much as an intense horror and hatred — of what, he could not determine, but, it almost seemed to him, of that bare iron bed, of that faded armchair. In any case, he carefully kept his full distance from both as he crossed the room to the ivied openings and thrusting aside part of those green curtains peered into the night. A great world of dark green flooded with moonlight met his eyes. And then he noticed in the moonlight a man standing in the grounds of Abelard looking up at the balcony with a hand shading his eyes. It was Richard Lancaster Abelard, heir of the old house, he who knew nothing of the door and the balcony. And then the strong descendant of old French and Maratha fighters recoiled as if he had received a blow. He did not look again but hastily crossed the balcony and entered his room casting a glance of loathing as he passed to each side of him, once at the iron bed, once at the disused armchair. He could almost have sworn that a shadowy form lay propped upon shadowy pillows on the old iron bed, that somebody looked at him ironically from the tarnished cushions of the chair.

Wondering at himself Armand put on a dressing gown and sat down in an easy chair. “I must have it out with my nerves,” he said, resolutely; “Whoever entered my room and opened the door, will, I feel sure, return to close it; I will wait, I will see him and prove to my nerves what unspeakable superstitious idiots they are. There is nothing strange in Richard Lancaster being out there in the moonlight; no doubt, he could not sleep and was taking a stroll outside to help pass away some sleepless hours. What I saw in him, was an optical effect of the moonlight — nothing more, I tell you, nothing more.”

For about half an hour he kept his vigil. As he sat his mind left its present surroundings and turned to the experiments in occultism he had conducted in Bombay. From his childhood he had been a highly imaginative lad with a nervous system almost as sensitive as an animal's. But if Armand Sieurcaye had the nervous temperament of the Asiatic mystic, his brain had been invincibly sceptical not only with the material French scepticism but with the merciless Indian scepticism which, once aroused, is far more obstinate and searching than its grosser European

shadow. Refusing to accept secondhand proof, however strong, and aware of his own rich nervous endowment, he had himself experimented in occult science with the double and inconsistent determination to be rigidly fair to the supernatural and allow it to establish itself if it existed, and, secondly, to destroy and disprove it for ever by the very fairness and thoroughness of his experiments. He had been able to establish as undoubtedly existing in himself a fair power of correct presentiment, but against this he had to set a number of baulked presentiments; he therefore dismissed the gift as merely a lively power of divining the trend of events. He was also aware that his personal attractions and repulsions were practically unerring; but, after all, was not this merely the equivalent in man to the instinct which so often warns children and animals of their friends and enemies? It was probable that the adventurous life of his Maratha forefathers, compelled to be always on the alert against violence and treachery, had stamped the instinct deep into the hereditary temperament of their issue. All the rest of the phenomena valued by occultists he had, he thought, proved to be sensory hallucinations or inordinate subconscious cerebral activity.

In the course of his reflections he returned suddenly to his immediate surroundings and, with a start, looked towards the balcony-chamber. The door was closed, that had been open! There it stood shut, plain, dumb, denying that it had ever been anything else. Amazed, Armand leaped to his feet, strode to the door and turned the handle, ignoring a cry within that commanded him to desist. The door yielded not; it was not only closed but locked. Was it possible for any human being to have crossed his room, closed that door and locked it, under his very eyes and yet without his knowledge? Then he remembered the completeness of his absorption and how utterly his mind had withdrawn into itself. "Nothing wonderful in that!" he said. "How often have I been oblivious to time and space and circumstance outside when absorbed in a train of thoughts or in an experiment." The visitor must have thought him asleep in the easy chair and moved quietly. There was nothing more to be done that night and he returned, baffled, to his slumbers.

The first man he met next morning was Richard Lancaster who greeted him with his usual shallow and cheerful cordiality. There was no trace of yesterday's disturbance in his look or demeanour.

"Slept well?" asked Armand casually, but carefully watching his features.

"Like a top!" answered Richard, heartily. "Didn't raise my head once from the pillow from eleven to seven."

Wondering Armand passed him and entered the library. Stephen Abelard sat deep in the pages of a book; a cup of tea stood untasted beside his elbow. After some ordinary conversation suggested by the book, Armand suddenly questioned his father-in-law:

"By the way, sir, is there a room next to mine? I noticed a locked door between."

Stephen Abelard's eyes narrowed a little and he looked at his questioner before he replied. He had raised the cup of tea to his lips, but he put it down still untasted.

"Disturbed?" he questioned, sharply.

"Not at all," parried Armand. "Why should I be?"

"Why indeed? You don't believe in the supernatural. Who does? But in our nerves and imaginations we are all of us the fools our ancestors made us. I had better tell you." Stephen Abelard began sipping his tea and then pursued with a careful deliberateness. "The room you sleep in was the chamber occupied by the unfortunate girl, Bertha Abelard, with whose name scandal in her life and superstition after her death have been busy. You've heard all that nonsense about the curse on Abelard. I need not repeat the rubbish. But this is true that only two people have slept in the balcony-chamber since her death. One was a guest, and he refused to sleep there after the first night."

"Why?"

"Nervous imaginations! Somebody resenting his presence, somebody in the armchair opposite. What will not men imagine? The other was Hugh Abelard's youngest son and he — "

A shade crossed the face of the master of the house.

“And he — ”

“Was found dead in the iron bed the next morning.”

Armand Sieurcaye quivered like a horse struck by the lash. He restrained himself.

“Any cause?”

“Failure of the heart. The Abelards are subject to failure of the heart. Might it not have happened equally in any other room? It has so happened, in fact, more than once.”

Armand nodded. Hereditary weakness of the heart! It might very well be. But what then was Richard Lancaster or the hallucination of him doing outside in the moonlight?

“Since that death, out of deference to prejudices the balcony is kept locked and opened twice a week only when Roberts takes the key of the door from Isabel and cleans up. Roberts has no nerves. She believes in the ghost, but argues she, ‘Miss Bertha won’t hurt me; I’m only keeping her quarters clean for her.’”

Armand remembered the stories in circulation in the county. Rumour had charged Walter Abelard with the responsibility for the death of his sister, partly on the ground of subsequent incidents, partly on the impossibility of an outside assassin penetrating so far or, even supposing he entered, committing the deed and effecting his escape without leaving one trace behind. Why, there was the ivy. And even if the ivy were not so thick one hundred years ago, an agile man and a gymnast could easily ascend the porch to the arched orifices and descend again after his work had been done.

“You are interested?” said Abelard, “well, we’ll go at once and see the room.” And he rang for a servant to bring the key of the ominous chamber.

Armand had by this time almost convinced himself that his nocturnal experience was only a peculiarly vivid and disagreeable dream. He followed Stephen with the expectation, — or was it not the hope? — of finding the room quite other than he had seen it in that uncomfortable experience. As Stephen Abelard opened the door and light overcame its native dimness, the first thing Armand saw was a bare iron bed in the width of the outer wall, the next a faded armchair with tarnished cushions against

the inner masonry. The room was dim by reason of the thickness of the ivy choking its arched stone orifices.

No dream then, but a reality! Someone had twice entered his room, once to open, once to shut the door of ill omen. Was it M^{rs} Roberts, somnambulist, vaguely drawn to the door she alone was accustomed to unlock? But where at night could she get the key? for it was, Stephen had said, with Isabel Abelard. Again, it was as if a blow struck him. For, if the key was with Isabel, only Richard Lancaster could easily have got it from her at night, only he or she could have made that nocturnal entry. And it was Richard Lancaster he had seen under the balcony when he looked out into the moonlight. Was it the heir of the house who had entered, opened the door, gone out to look up at the room from outside and afterwards returned to shut it? But on what conceivable impulse? Was it the memory of a somnambulist returning to Armand's question of the morning? That was a very likely explanation and fitted admirably with all the circumstances. Or was his action in any way linked to those nervous perturbations so new and out of place in this shallow, confident and ordinary nature? That was a circumstance into which the theory did not fit quite so easily. A great uneasiness was growing on Armand Sieurcaye. In a supernatural mystery he did not believe, but he was too practised in life not to believe in natural human mysteries underlying the even surface of things. He knew that men of the most commonplace outside have often belied their appearance by their actions. A presentiment of dangerous and calamitous things was upon him, and he remembered that his presentiments had more often justified themselves than not. But to Stephen Abelard he said nothing; least of all did he say anything to Richard Abelard of that nocturnal outing which he had so glibly denied.

CHAPTER II

Another week had passed by, but Armand's nerves were not reconciled to the door of ill omen that looked nightly at him with the secret of Bertha Abelard's death behind it. Yet nothing farther had happened of an unusual nature. Richard Abelard was often absent and distracted, a thing formerly unknown in him, and his speech was occasionally irritable, but there was nothing out of the ordinary in his action. He walked, smoked, shot, rode, hunted, played billiards and read the light literature that pleased him, without any deviation from his familiar habits. Armand noticed that on some days he was entirely his old self, and then he invariably spoke with great satisfaction of the profound sleep he had enjoyed all night. Sieurcaye finally dismissed the presentiment from his mind. He had accepted the somnambulist theory; it was sleeplessness that was telling on Richard's nerves. The whole mystery received a rational explanation on that simple hypothesis.

Two nights after he arrived at this cheerful conclusion, he woke at night for the first time after the experience of the open door. Every night he had thought of watching for the somnambulist, but, though he had been accustomed all his life to light slumbers, a sleep as profound as that of which Richard Lancaster boasted, glued his head to the pillow. On this particular night his wife was not with him, for, to satisfy a caprice of Isabel's, she was sleeping with her sister in their old nursery. Armand turned on his pillow, noticed with the surprise of a half-sleeping man the absence of his wife, then glanced about the room and observed that the door of his chamber was slightly open. A meaningless detail at first, the circumstance began to awaken a sort of indolent wonder — had Aloyse come into the room to visit his sleep and gone back to the nursery? Or was it Richard the somnambulist driven by the monomania of the locked room? And then, as if galvanised by a shock of electricity, he sat up in bed, suddenly, violently, and stared at the door with unbelieving eyes. It had come back to him that, before turning into bed, on the spur of some unaccountable impulse, he had locked his

room and lain down wondering at his own purposeless action. And there now was the door he had thus secured, open, with the key in the lock, challenging him for an explanation. Had he got up himself in his sleep and opened it? Had he too grown a somnambulist? He remembered the profound slumber, so unusual to him, so similar to Lancaster's, that had surprised him for the last few nights. Then an idea occurred to his rapidly working mind; he got out of bed, went to the inner door and turned the handle. It opened! He looked into the room with the iron bed. There was no one there, only the bed and the armchair. Then he closed the door, walked over to his own door, locked it, put the key under his pillow and got into bed again. His heart was beating a little faster than usual as he lay gazing at the door of Bertha Abelard's death chamber. And then a very simple explanation flashed on him. Baulked by the locked door, Richard had climbed up by the ivy from outside and effected his entry from Bertha's chamber. But Isabel was not with Richard tonight — how could he have got possession of the key? Well, conceivably, Isabel might have left her keys by oversight in her own chamber, or the somnambulist might have entered the nursery and detached what he needed from his wife's chatelaine. But what settled waking idea, what persistent fancy of sleep drove Richard Lancaster to the ominous chamber, forced him to devise entrance against every obstacle and by such forbidden means? Armand shuddered as he remembered the story of Bertha Abelard's death and his own theory of the means by which her assassin had gained entrance.

As he expected, he soon fell asleep. Rising the next morning, his first action was to walk over to the inner door and try it. It was locked! Well, that was natural. Somnambulists were often alert and keen-minded even beyond their waking selves and Richard, foiled again by the locked door, had climbed up once more by the ivy to efface all proof of his nocturnal visit.

Armand contrived that morning to be alone with Isabel in order to ask her where she kept the key of Bertha Abelard's chamber. She turned to him with laughing eyes.

"You are not haunted, Armand? No? It's always with me and the ghost, if she's there, must get through solid wood to

invade your room. I keep my chatelaine at night under my pillow.”

“You had it there last night?”

“Armand! I am positive our ancestress has visited you. Yes, last night too.” And then suddenly, “Why, no, it was not. I put it last night in the box where I kept my doll and my toys. Don’t look surprised, Armand. I’m a great baby still in many things and I wanted to have everything last night just as it was when we were children. I was a very careful and jealous little housewife, and before I slept I used always to lock up my chatelaine with my doll and playthings and treasure the tiny key of my box in a locket under my nightgown. I did all that last night. If you have been haunted, I’m not responsible.”

“Did you tell anybody what you were going to do?”

“I did not think of it till we went to bed. Only Aloÿse knew.”

“Does anybody else know of this habit of your childhood?”

“Only Roberts and papa. They don’t remember, probably. I had forgotten it myself till last night. What is puzzling you, Armand?”

“Oh, it is only an idea I had,” he replied, and rapidly escaped from farther question to the sitting-room set apart for himself and Aloÿse.

The thing was staggering. Somnambulism did not make one omniscient, and it was impossible that Richard Abelard should have known this arrangement of Isabel’s far-off childhood, extracted the key from his sleeping wife’s locket, the chatelaine from the box and restored them undiscovered, when his need was finished. The theory involved such a chain of impossibilities and improbabilities that it must be rejected. And then, as always, a solution suggested itself. Richard Abelard must have taken, long ago, the impress of the key and got a duplicate of it made for his own secret use. But if so, what unavowable design, what stealthy manoeuvres must such a subterfuge be intended to serve? What legitimate need could Richard Abelard have of this secret and ominous exit or entry? Was it not Armand’s duty to warn Stephen Abelard of proceedings that must conceal in them something abnormal, perilous or even criminal? But there

was the danger that Isabel might come to hear of it and receive a shock. Armand decided to wait till after her delivery.

A knock at the door roused him from his thoughts and in response to his invitation Richard Abelard himself entered. He walked up to the fireplace, flung himself into a chair opposite Armand and jerked out abruptly:

“D^r. Armand, you are a dab at medical diagnosis. Can’t you tell me what’s the matter with me?”

“Name your symptoms.”

“You’ve seen some of them yourself. I’ve observed you noticing me. But that’s nothing. It’s the mind.”

“What of the mind?”

“Oh, how should I know? Dreams, imaginations, sensations, impulses. Yes, impulses.” He grew pale as he repeated the word.

“Can’t you be more precise?”

“I can’t; the thing’s vague.” He paused a moment; and then his features altered, a look of deep agony passed over them. “Somebody is hunting me,” he cried, “somebody’s hunting me.”

A great dread and sickness of heart seized upon Armand Sieurcaye as he looked at his brother-in-law.

“Steady!” he cried, “it’s a nervous disorder, of course, nothing more. But you are hiding something from me. That won’t do.”

“Nerves! Don’t tell me I’m going mad! Or if I am, prevent it, for Isabel’s sake.”

“Of course, I’ll prevent it. But you have got to be frank with me. I must know everything.”

A visible hesitation held Richard for a few seconds, then he said, “I’ve told all I can think of, all that’s definite.” Then, suddenly, striking the arm of his chair with his closed hand, “It’s this beastly house,” he cried; “there’s something in it! There’s something in it that ought not to be there.”

“If you think so, you must leave it till your nerves are restored. Look here, why not take John’s yacht and go for a cruise, oh, to America, if you like, — or to Japan. Japan will give you a longer spell of the sea.”

"I'll do it," cried Richard Lancaster, "as soon as Isabel's safe through this, I'll go. Thank you, Armand." And with a look of great relief on his face, he rose and left the room.

Armand had not much time to ponder over this singular interview, though certain phrases Richard had used, kept ringing in his brain; for that night the pangs of childbirth came upon Isabel and she was safely delivered of a male child. An heir was born to the dying house of Abelard. The strong health of Isabel Abelard easily shook from it the effects of the strain. There was no danger for her and the child seemed likely to inherit the robust physique of his parents. As for Richard, he was joyous, at ease and seemed to have put from him his idea of a flight from Abelard.

But on the third night after the delivery Armand Sieurcaye had troubled dreams and wandered through strange afflictions; the rustling of a dress haunted him; a pang of terror, a movement of agony seemed to come from someone's heart into his own, and there was a laughter in the air he did not love. And in the grey of the autumn morning, Stephen Abelard with a strange look in his eyes stood by his side.

"Get up, Armand; dress and come. Do not disturb Aloyse."

In three minutes Armand was outside on the landing where Stephen Abelard was pacing to and fro under the whip of the sorrow that had leaped upon him.

"Isabel is dead," he said briefly.

With a dull brain that refused to think Armand followed the father to the death chamber of his child. The wall lamp was flaring high above the bed. A night-lamp that no one had thought to put out, burned on the toilette-table. In a chair far from the bed Richard Lancaster with his face hidden in his hands sat rocking himself, his body shaken by sobs. When Armand entered, he uncovered his face, cast at him a tragic look from eyes full of tears, and went swaying from the room.

Armand stood at the bedside and looked at the dead girl. As he looked, a pang of fear troubled his heart, for his practised perceptions, familiar with many kinds of death, gave him an appalling intimation. Isabel had not died easily! Then something

peculiar in the pose of the head and neck struck his awakened brain. He bent down suddenly, then rose as suddenly, his olive face sallow with some strong emotion, strode to the toilette-table, seized the night-lamp and returning held it to Isabel's neck.

"What is it?" asked Stephen Abelard. One could see that he was holding himself tight to meet a possible shock. Armand carefully put back the lamp where it had stood and returned to the bedside before he answered. In the shock of his discovery he had forgotten his surroundings, forgotten to whom he was about to speak.

"It is a murder," he said, slowly and mechanically.

"Armand!"

"It is a murder," he continued, unheeding the cry of the father, "I cannot be mistaken. And effected by unusual means. There is a spot in the body which has only to be found by the fingers and receive a peculiar pressure and a man dies suddenly, surely, with so light a trace only the eyes of the initiate can discover it—not even a trace, only an indication, but a sure indication. The Japanese wrestlers know the device, but do not impart it except to those who are too self-disciplined to abuse it. That is what has been done here."

Stephen Abelard seized Armand's shoulder with a tense, violent grip. "Armand," he cried, "who besides yourself knows of this means of murder?"

"John Lancaster knows it."

Stephen's hand fell limply from his son-in-law's shoulder. After a time he said in a voice that was again calm, "Armand, my child died of heart-failure as so many of the Abelards have done."

"It is best so," replied Armand Sieurcaye.

"Now go, Armand," continued Stephen quietly, "go and leave me alone with my child."

Armand did not return to his chamber, but went into his sitting-room, lighted a candle and sat, looking at the chair in which Richard Abelard had consulted him only three days ago. John Lancaster, Richard's brother, who alone near Orringham knew of the Japanese secret! What share had John Lancaster,

friend of Armand Sieurcaye, in the murder of Isabel Abelard? Was it for his entry that Richard had provided, by the duplicate key, by his strange and perilous manoeuvres with the ivy and the balcony room? But why not open the front door for him or leave unshuttered one of the lower windows, a much easier and less dangerous passage? Then he remembered that the great dog, Brilliant, lay at the bottom of the stairs and would not allow any but an inmate to pass unchallenged. John Lancaster was his friend, his benefactor, but Armand knew the man, a reckless flamboyant profligate capable of the most glorious and self-immolating actions and capable equally of the most cruel and cynical crimes. He remembered, too, how he himself had taught John that peculiar trick of the Japanese art of slaying. In a certain sense he himself was responsible for Isabel's death. How wise were the Easterns in their rigid reticence when they taught only to prepared and disciplined natures the secrets that might be misused to harm mankind! And then his mind travelled to Isabel and her sorrowful end slain in the supreme moment of a woman's joy by the husband she loved. What grim and inexorable Power ruling the world, Fate, Chance, Providence, had singled out for this doom a girl whose whole life had been an innocent shedding of sunshine on all who came near? Providence! He smiled. There were still fools who believed in an overruling Providence, a wise and compassionate God! And then the insoluble problem returned to baffle his mind, what possible motive moved Richard to compass this heartless crime or John to assist him?

All that day of sorrow Richard was absent from the house, and Armand had no chance of probing him. It was late at night, about eleven, that he entered. Armand met him on his way to his room, candle in hand.

"I should like a word with you, Richard," he said.

Richard turned on him, laughing with a terrible gaiety. "No use, Doctor Armand. You could not save me, you see. The thing was too strong. Mark my words, the thing will be too strong even for you." And he strode to his room leaving Armand amazed on the staircase.

Aloÿse had elected to sleep that night with her dead sister's child and Armand once more found himself alone in Bertha Abelard's chamber with no companion except the locked door, accomplice perhaps in the tragedy that had darkened the house. Again his slumbers were troubled and he dreamed always of the locked door open and someone traversing the room on a mission of evil, a work of horror. He woke with a start, his heart in him dull and heavy as lead and full of the conviction, which it called knowledge, that the tragedy was not finished but more crimes mysterious and unnatural were about to pollute the old walls of Abelard. Then his thoughts flew to Aloÿse. He dressed himself hastily and went to the room where she was sleeping. Aloÿse was asleep and the child's nurse slept on a bed some five feet away, but Armand cast only a fleeting glance at the two women, for between the beds was the cradle of Isabel's child and over it was a figure stooping, and as it lifted its face towards the opened door, he saw a face that was and yet was not the face of Richard Lancaster. Richard immediately moved over to the door. As he neared, Armand drew away from it with the first pang of absolute terror in his heart he had ever experienced since his childhood. Richard Lancaster noted the emotion and it seemed to amuse him, for he laughed. And again there was something in the laugh that was not in the laugh of Richard Lancaster or of any human mirth to which Armand Sieurcaye had ever listened. As soon as Richard had left the room, Armand almost ran to the door, locked it and sat down at his wife's bedside shaking with an excitement he could not control. He soon recovered hold of his nerves, but he did not leave the room and its unconscious inmates. He sat there motionless till at four o'clock in the morning a light knock at the door startled him. When he opened it, Stephen Abelard entered. He took Armand's presence as a matter of course and went calmly to the side of the child and began looking down on the heir of his house, the little baby who was all that was left to him of Isabel. When he turned from the cradle, Armand spoke.

"Sir, you must do something about Richard."

Stephen looked at him. "Come to my room, Armand," he

said, "We will talk there." Before following Stephen, Armand woke the nurse and bade her watch over the child. "Lock the door," he added, "and keep it locked till I return." As he went through the corridors, he passed Richard's room. The door was open, but the room absolutely dark; still his practised eyes perceived in the doorway a figure standing which drew back when he looked at it, obviously not the figure of Richard, for it was shorter, slenderer. When he was entering Stephen's room, it occurred to him that he had unconsciously carried away in his mind the impression that it was the figure of a woman. After the first disagreeable feeling had passed, he shook the absurdity from him; it must have been the dressing-gown that gave him the idea of a woman's robe. After a brief talk with Stephen, the two were pulling in silence at the cigars they had lighted, when, perhaps half an hour after his leaving the nursery, someone knocked at the door and the nurse appeared and beckoned to Armand Sieurcaye. There was a look of terrible anxiety on her face that brought Armand striding to the door.

"Will you come, sir?" she said, "I don't know what's the matter with the child."

"Did you lock the door?" asked Armand, as they went.

The nurse looked troubled. "I thought I did, though I could not understand why you wanted it; but it seems I can't have turned the key well. For when I dozed off for two minutes, I woke to find the door open." Then she paused and added with great hesitation. "And I almost felt, sir, as if I had noticed a woman in the room standing by the cradle, but I was too sleepy to understand. It wasn't M^{rs} Sieurcaye, for I had to wake her up afterwards."

A woman! And the locked door that opened! Armand groaned; he could understand nothing, but he knew what he would find even before he bent with the already awakened and anxious Aloÿse over the dead child who had thus so swiftly followed his mother to the grave. And it was by the same way.

That morning Stephen Abelard spoke to his elder son-in-law. "Richard," he said, "you will start for your sea-voyage today. Take John's yacht at Bristol. You need not wait for the

funeral nor mind what people will say. If I were you, I'd have a doctor on board."

Richard Lancaster was very calm and deliberate as he replied, "I had settled that, sir, before you spoke. I'm going on a long journey and I'm going direct, not by Bristol nor in the yacht. As you suggest, I'll not wait for the funeral and I'm past caring what people will say."

"Don't forget the doctor," insisted Stephen.

"The doctor can't come," said Richard, "And he wouldn't like the voyage. I'm not mad, sir, — worse luck!"

The two sons-in-law of Stephen Abelard left the house-steps together, Armand for a stroll in the grounds to steady his heated brain and his shaken nerves, Richard in the direction of the stables.

When Armand was returning to the house, a pale-faced groom ran up to him and pointed in the direction of the great avenue of stately trees before Abelard.

"M^r. Richard's lying there," he faltered, "— shot!"

Armand stood stock-still for a moment, then ran to the spot indicated. Of this last tragedy he had had no presentiment. What was it? What was this maddening and bloody tangle? This death dance of an incomprehensible fate which had struck down mother, father and child in less than thirty hours? No gleam of motive, no shred of coherence illuminated the nightmare. His reason stood helpless at last in the maze. It was the locked door, he thought, that opened and revealed nothing. But his reason insisted. Richard Abelard was mad, and in his madness he had used the device John must have incautiously taught him to slay wife and child; and this last act of self-slaughter was the natural refuge of a disturbed brain made aware by Armand's looks and by Stephen's words of discovery.

Richard Abelard lay dead on the grass by the avenue, shot through the heart and the revolver lay fallen two feet from his outstretched and nerveless hand. Armand, bending to assure himself that life was extinct, caught sight of a small piece of paper lying close to the knee of the dead man. When he rose, he turned to the groom. "M^r. Richard's dead," he said, "go and tell

M^r. Abelard and bring men here to carry him in.”

The man reluctantly departed and Armand caught up the paper and put it swiftly into his pocket. It was not till an hour later that he had time to take it out in his parlour and look at it. As he had suspected, it was a brief note in Richard’s handwriting, and thus it ran, brief, pointed, tragic, menacing.

“Armand, you knew! But it was not I. God is my Witness, I am not guilty of murder. I can say no more; but in mercy to Aloÿse, look to yourself!”

For a long time Armand Sieurcaye held in his hand the dead man’s mysterious warning. Then he flung it into the fire and watched its whiteness blacken, shrivel and turn into ashes.

CHAPTER III

[*The story was abandoned here.*]

Incomplete and Fragmentary Stories

1891–1912

Fictional Jottings

M^{rs} Bolton was one of those sharp and rancid women whose very aspect gives a cultured man the toothache; it recalls vividly the taste of sour grapes. There had perhaps been a time when she was not elderly, but the boldest flight of metaphor would never have imaged her as young. The slanders of her enemies drew a frightful picture of the low-class Gorgon: they compared her chin to a penknife, her lips to a pair of icicles: her smile was a perpetual reminder of vinegar, her voice was like frost against the teeth. The sobriety of history merely records that her face was twin sister to a ferret, her features sharp and if the word may be used without offence gritty: altogether she was an excellent type of that class of crude failures whose mould nature has left unbroken that there may be a scourge for the refined and a pattern for housewives.

Her face was Nemesis sculptured in marble

In her distress the child of the hothouse spoke the language of nature.

“I never forgive, but I bear no malice when I have requited”

She felt as if she were groping for a coin in the dark

A fire of remembrance burned a forgotten sentence into her brain and wrote it in crimson on her cheeks.

The voiceful hurry of the indicator copied the pattering footfall of the fugitive hours.

His amazement unwound itself in a coil of laughter.

Just as the clouds that steal the sunshine cannot throttle the sunlight as well

Fragment of a Story

A QUIET hilly country on the confines of Bengal after rain. Grey cloud yet banked up the horizon except in the north and sloped over the eastern down-curve in great sheeny ribs brownish and grey like the ribs of a fan. The mango trees by the road with their crowded burden of ruddy or stained-yellow blossom looked moist and quite fresh, the earth discoloured, dragged and limp with the wet, but healed of the dusty thirst and discomfort of many showerless days. The west showed patches of pale bluish steel-grey sky where the veil of cloud was thinnest and the sinking light able to break through; just on the verge one or two of the outlying clouds were ruddy like a dull fire just meaning to go out. The moon must be somewhere eastward, a pale wisp of half-lucid yellow, waiting for the brilliancy to come, but in the east the long dark-ribbed layers ran down with a forbidding thickness. They were the skirts of the retreating storm.

The soldier Rajmohan as he reined in his horse on the top of a rise looked behind him once at the western and once at the southern sky and observed with a contraction of the brow the line of the southern horizon growing a heavy black and glaring up with a lowering threat at the half-cleared zenith.

“A storm brews there” he muttered to himself “and it may break here or it may pass. Either way there is no moonlight for me tonight.”

The Devil's Mastiff

THERE had been a heavy fall throughout the whole of that December day. The roads were white and indistinguishable in a thick pall of moonlight and dazzling snow; here and there a drift betrayed the footing. In the sky a bright moon pursued by clouds ran timidly up the ascent of the firmament; great arms of darkness sometimes closed over it; sometimes it emerged and proceeded with its still luminous race, ran, swayed, floated, glided forward intently, unflinching. Patrick Curran, treading cautiously the white uncertain flooring of earth, stumbling into snowdrifts, scouting into temporary darkness for his right road, cursed the weather and his fortunes.

"It is not enough," he complained, "that I should be a proscribed fugitive hiding my head in every uncertain refuge from the pursuit of this devil's Cromwell, doomed already to the gallows, owing my life every day to the trembling compassion of my poor father's tenants; it is not enough that I should have lost Alicia and that Luke Walter should have her; but the very moon and the snow and the night are his allies against me. Since God is so hard on me, I wonder why the devil does not come to my help—I would sell my soul to him this moment willingly. But perhaps he too is afraid of Cromwell."

"It is hardly probable," said a voice at his side suddenly.

Patrick Curran turned with a fierce start and clutched at his dagger. He was aware in the darkness of a dim form pacing beside him with a step much quieter and more assured than his own.

"Who are you?" he cried, rigid and menacing.

"A wayfarer like yourself," said the other, "I travel earth as a fugitive."

"From whom or what?" asked Patrick.

"How shall I say?" said the shadow, "Perhaps from my own

thoughts, perhaps from a too powerful enemy.”

After the discovery of the recent conspiracy to murder Cromwell and restore Charles Stuart, the country was full of Royalist fugitives, hiding by day, travelling by night, in the hope of reaching a port whence they could sail for Ostende or Calais. For the inquisitions of the Republican magistrates were imperative and indiscriminating.

“I would give,” he said to himself, “my soul and the rest of my allotted days as a free gift to Satan, if I might once clasp Alicia in my arms and take with me into Hell the warm sense of the joy of her body and if I might see Luke Walter dead before me or be sure he was following me. Oh if I can once be sure of that, let the brown dog of the Dacres leap on me the next moment, I care not.”

“You may be sure of it,” answered the voice at his side, strangely sweet, yet to Patrick’s ear formidable. He turned, thrilling.

“You must be the devil himself,” he almost shouted.

“I may be only one who can read your thoughts,” said the other in that sweet sinister voice which made the young man fancy sometimes that a woman spoke to him. “And that I can, you will easily judge when I have told you a very little of what I know of you. You are Patrick, the second son of Sir Gerald Curran who got his estate from his wife, Margaret Dacre, his baronetcy from King James and his death from Cromwell who took him prisoner at Worcester and hanged him. You were to have married Lady Alicia Nevil, when the conspiracy of which you were one of the heads as well as the hand destined to strike down the Puritan tyrant, was discovered by the discernment, luck and ruthless skill of Colonel Luke Walter.”

The young Cavalier started and uttered a furious imprecation.

“It was he;” said the other, “he has great brain-power and penetration and a resolute genius. It is even possible he may succeed Cromwell, if the God of the Puritans gives him a lease long enough.”

“If I have the chance, I will shorten it,” cried Patrick Curran.

“Or I;” said the unknown, “for just now I too am a Royalist. But to proceed. You were proclaimed and doomed to a felon’s death in your absence; the Earl, implicated in the conspiracy, was compelled as the price of his pardon to betroth his daughter to Luke Walter, and the marriage is fixed for tonight.”

“Tonight!” groaned the young man, and he smote his thigh miserably with his hand.

“At the Church of Worndale.”

“But will it matter if Luke Walter perishes before he has consummated his nuptials?”

“I promise you that,” said the unknown. “It does not suit you that Alicia should marry another. It does not suit me that there should be a strong successor to Cromwell. Charles Stuart is my good friend, and I wish that he should rule England. Therefore, Patrick, it is a bargain.”

“Who the devil are you?” cried the young man again, marvelling.

As if to answer the moon peeped out from between two heavy angry masses of black cloud, illumining the earth’s intense and inclement whiteness. He saw beside him a young man of remarkable beauty, whose face was perfectly familiar, but his name could not be remembered.

“As for your soul and your life,” said the stranger, and as their eyes met, Patrick shuddered, “you need not give them to the devil whether freely or as part of the bargain, for they are already his.”

He laughed a laugh of terrible and ominous sweetness, and in a moment Patrick remembered. He knew that laugh, he knew that face. They were his own.

At that moment the moon passed away into the second fragment of cloud. Patrick stood, unable to speak, looking at the dim shadow in front of him. Then it vanished.

It was some time before the young man could command himself sufficiently to pursue his way. He tried to think for a moment that it was John Dacre, the illegitimate son of Sir Gerald by his sister-in-law Matilda Dacre, who resembled Patrick strongly and was his sworn comrade and lover. But he knew

it was not John. That was not John's face or John's speech or John's thinking. It must have been a vivid dream or a waking illusion. He walked forward in the darkness, greatly disturbed, but with recovered courage.

Again the moon shone out, this time with a clear gulf of sky just in front of her. Before Patrick the white road stretched long, straight and visible to a great distance and was marked out here by a high snow-covered hedge from the equally white indistinguishable country around.

"Come now, that is better," said Patrick Curran. As he spoke, he saw far off on the road a dark object travelling towards him; he slackened his pace and was minded to turn off the road to avoid it. But it was approaching with phenomenal speed. As it came nearer, he saw that it was only a dog. Again Patrick stood still. A dog! There was nothing in that. It was not what he had feared. But he remembered that singular conversation and the impious prayer that had arisen in his heart about the brown Dog of the Dacres, — the dog which showed itself always when a Dacre was about to die and leaped on him whenever the doom was by violence. He smiled, but a little uncertainly. Then the moonlight seemed to dwell on the swiftly-travelling animal more intensely and he saw that it was brown.

Never had Patrick seen any earthly thing master of such a terrible speed. It ran, it galloped, it bounded, and the wretched man watching the terrific charge of that phantasmal monster, — for it was a gigantic mastiff, — felt his heart stop and his warm youthful blood congeal in his veins. It was now within twenty paces; he felt the huge eyes upon him and knew that it was going to leap. He went down heavily with the ponderous frame of the animal oppressing his breast, its leonine paws on his shoulders, its hot breathing moistening his face. And then there was nothing.

That was the most terrible part of it, to have been borne down physically by a semblance, an unearthly hallucination, a thing that was this moment and the next was not. Patrick struggled to his feet, overcome by a panic terror; his nerves cried to him to run, to travel away quickly from this accursed night

and this road of ghastly encounters. But he felt as if hamstrung, helpless, clutched by an intangible destruction. He sat down on the snow, panted and waited.

After a few minutes the blood began to flow more quietly through his veins, the pounding of his heart slackened and the sick agitation of his nerves yielded to a sudden fiery inrush. He leaped furiously to his feet. "The Dog of the Dacres," he cried, "the brown Dog, the Devil's Mastiff! And no doubt it was his master spoke to me in my own semblance. I am doomed, then. But not to the gallows. No, by God, not to the gallows. God's doom and the devil's, since I can resist neither, but not man's, not Cromwell's!" Then he paused. "Tonight!" he cried again. "At Worndale Church! But I will see her once before I go down to Hell. And it may be I shall take Luke Walter with me. It may be that is what the Devil wants of me."

He looked about the landscape and thought he could distinguish the trees that bordered the distant Church of Worndale. That was in front of him. Also in front, but much more to the left, was Trevesham Hall, the home of Alicia Nevil. He began walking rapidly, no longer with his first cautious and doubtful treading, but with a bold reckless stride. And it was noticeable that he no longer stumbled or floundered into snowdrifts. Patrick knew that he had only a few brief inches of his life's road left to his treading; for no man of the Dacre blood had ever lived more than twenty-four hours after the Brown Dog leaped on him. A desperate courage had entered into his veins. He would see [incomplete]

The Golden Bird

IT WAS in the forests of Asan that the Golden Bird first flew out from a flower-besieged thicket and fluttered before the dazzled eyes of Luilla. It was in the forests of Asan,—the open and impenetrable, the haunt of the dancers and the untrodden of human feet, coiling place of the cobra and the Python, lair of the lion and the jaguar, formidable retreat of the fleeing antelope, yet also the green home of human safety where a man and a maiden could walk in the moonlit night and hear unconcerned the far-off brool of the kings of the wilderness. It was into the friendly and open places that the golden bird fluttered, but it came no less from the coverts of dread and mystery. From the death and the night it flew out into the sunlight where Luilla was happily straying.

Luilla loved to wander on the verges of danger just where those flower-besieged thickets began and formed for miles together a thorny and tangled rampart full at once of allurement and of menace. She did not venture in, for she had a great fear of the thorns and brambles and a high respect for her radiant beauty, her constant object of worship and the daily delight of all who dwelt for a while on earth labouring the easy and kindly soil on the verges of the forests of Asan. But always she wandered close to the flowery wall and her mind, safe in its volatile incorporeality, strayed like a many-hued butterfly far into the forbidden region which the gods had so carefully secluded. Perhaps secretly she hoped that one day some kingly and leonine head would thrust itself out through the flowers and compel her with a gaze of friendly and majestic invitation or else that the green poisonous head of a serpent, reposing itself on a flower, would scrutinise her out of narrow eyes and express a cunning approval of her beauty. It was not out of fear of the lions and the serpents that Luilla forbore to enter the secret places. She

knew she could overcome the most ferocious intentions of any destroyer in the world, four-footed or footless, if only he would give her three minutes before making up his mind to eat or bite her. But neither lion nor serpent strayed out of their appointed haunts. It was the golden bird that first fluttered out from the thickets to Luilla.

Luilla looked at it as it flitted from bough to bough, and her eyes were dazzled and her soul wondered. For the little body of the bird was an inconstant flame of flying and fleeting gold and the wings that opened and fluttered were of living gold and the small shapely head was crested gold and the long graceful quivering tail was feathered trailing gold; all was gold about the bird, except the eyes and they were two jewels of a soft ever-changing colour and sheltered strange looming depths of love and thought in their gentle brilliance. On the bough where it perched, it seemed as if all the soft shaded leaves were suddenly sunlit. For as Luilla accustomed her eyes to the flickering brightness of the golden bird, it hovered at last over a branch, settled and sang. And its voice also was of gold.

The bird sang in its own high secret language; but Luilla's ear understood its thoughts and in Luilla's soul as it thirsted and listened and trembled with delight, the song shaped itself easily into human speech. This then was what the bird sang — the bird that came out of the death and night, sang to Luilla a song of beauty and of delight.

“Luilla! Luilla! Luilla! green and beautiful are the meadows where the children run and pluck the flowers, green and beautiful the pastures where the calm-eyed cattle graze, green and beautiful the cornfields ripening on the village bounds, but greener are the impenetrable thickets of Asan than her open places of life and more beautiful than the meadows and the pastures and the cornfields are the forests of death and night. More ensnaring to some is the danger of the jaguar than the attractive face of a child, more welcome the foot-tracks of the lion as it hunts than the pastures of the cattle, more fair and fruitful the thorn and the wild-briar than the fields full of ripening grain. And this I know that no such flowers bloom in the safety and ease of

Asan's meadows, though they make a thick and divine treading for luxurious feet, as I have seen blooming on the borders of the wild morass, in the heart of the bramble thicket and over the mouth of the serpent's lair. Shall I not take thee, O Luilla, into those woods? Thou shalt pluck the flowers in the forests of night and death, thou shalt lay thy hands on the lion's mane.

“O Luilla! O Luilla! O Luilla!

Note on the Texts

Note on the Texts

COLLECTED PLAYS AND STORIES comprises all of Sri Aurobindo's dramatic and fictional writings, with the exception of prose dialogues, verse dialogues more in the nature of poems than plays, and translations from Sanskrit drama. Writings in these three categories are published in *Early Cultural Writings*, *Collected Poems*, and *Translations*, volumes 1, 2 and 5 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO.

Collected Plays and Stories is divided into three parts according to type of material. The first part includes the five complete plays; the second, incomplete and fragmentary plays; the third, prose fiction, complete, incomplete and fragmentary. The first two parts are arranged chronologically, from earliest to latest. The third is subdivided into two sections: *Occult Idylls*, a series planned by the author, followed by a section consisting of all other pieces of fiction, arranged chronologically.

COMPLETE PLAYS

The first of these plays was written around 1905, the last in 1915. Only one of them, *Perseus the Deliverer*, was published during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime.

The Viziers of Bassora. The manuscript of this play was seized by the police at the time of Sri Aurobindo's arrest in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case in May 1908. It seems to have been written a few years before that, towards the end of the period of his employment in the Baroda State (1893–1906).

Sri Aurobindo never saw the manuscript of *The Viziers* after his arrest, and he is said to have particularly regretted its loss. Once in Pondicherry he tried to reconstruct one of the missing scenes using a partial draft he had with him, but soon abandoned the effort. In March 1952, fifteen months after his passing, the manuscript was handed over

to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram by the Government of West Bengal. It was transcribed and in 1959 published in the *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, as well as separately.

The source of the plot of *The Viziers of Bassora* is “Nur al-Din Ali and the Damsel Anis al-Jalis”, a story told in the *Arabian Nights* (thirty-fourth to thirty-eighth nights). Sri Aurobindo owned in Baroda a multi-volume edition of Richard Burton’s translation of the Arabic text (London, 1894), which he considered “as much a classic as the original”.

Rodogune. Two complete, independent versions of this play exist. Sri Aurobindo wrote the first one in Baroda between 31 January and 14 February 1906, on the eve of his departure from the state to join the national movement. In May 1908 the notebooks containing his fair copy of *Rodogune*, like the notebook containing *The Viziers of Bassora*, were seized by the police when Sri Aurobindo was arrested. Fortunately, other notebooks remaining in his possession contained much of the penultimate draft of the 1906 version. Basing himself on these passages, he was able to reconstruct the play in Pondicherry around 1912. This version was published in the *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* and separately in 1958. It supersedes the Baroda version, which was recovered in 1952.

The plot of *Rodogune* derives ultimately from the history of Cleopatra, Queen of Syria, as recounted by such classical historians as Appian, Justin and Josephus. The immediate source probably was *Rodogune* (1645), by the French dramatist Pierre Corneille.

Perseus the Deliverer. Sri Aurobindo wrote this play during the period of his political activity, and its publication history is marked by the uncertainties of that era. A notation from the now-lost manuscript, accidentally set in type, gives 21 June 1906 as the date of the writing or copying of Act III, Scene 1. Sri Aurobindo seems to have intended the play to be published in Baroda, and parts of it were composed there by August of the same year. This plan fell through, however, and the play did not appear until 1907, when it was brought out serially between 30 June and 20 October in the weekly edition of the *Bande Mataram*, a journal of political opinion edited by Sri Aurobindo. The next year a book-edition was printed, but was destroyed by the printer

at the time of Sri Aurobindo's arrest. In 1942 the *Bande Mataram* text of *Perseus the Deliverer* — with the exception of three passages published in issues of the journal that were not then available, namely, all of Act II, Scenes 2 and 3, and the end of Act V, Scene 3 — was included in Sri Aurobindo's *Collected Poems and Plays*. Sri Aurobindo revised this text, adding a new ending but ignoring the missing scenes of Act II. (The issues of *Bande Mataram* containing these two scenes were subsequently rediscovered, and in 1955 they were restored to the text.)

The plot of *Perseus the Deliverer* derives of course from the Greek legend of Perseus and Andromeda, the most important surviving classical source of which is the fourth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Notable among modern retellings of the story are Corneille's *Andromède* (1650) and Charles Kingsley's *Andromeda* (1859), a poem in English hexameters with which Sri Aurobindo was familiar.

Eric. Sri Aurobindo began work on this play in 1910, shortly after his arrival in Pondicherry, and continued intermittently over a period of several years. No complete fair copy of the play survives. The fullest manuscript, a typed copy that contains the last version of Act II, breaks off in the middle of Act IV, Scene 2. Handwritten versions subsequent to the typed copy exist for Acts I and III and part of Act IV. There is only a single draft of Act V. Its interlinear and marginal revisions present unusual textual difficulties.

Eric was first published in 1960 in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* and as a separate book. The present text is thoroughly re-edited. As a rule, the last version of each act has been transcribed as far as it goes; where the last version is incomplete, the previous version is used for the remainder of the act. The order in which the last two manuscripts of Acts I and III were written and revised is not entirely clear. The unused versions of these two acts are reproduced in the reference volume (volume 35), along with two partial rewritings of Act IV, Scene 1, which could not be worked into the text of the play.

No specific source of the plot of *Eric* is known. Sri Aurobindo seems to have made free use of names and events from the history of Norway in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, a period that was the subject of much mediaeval Scandinavian literature.

Vasavadutta. This play was written in Pondicherry in 1915. The earliest extant draft is dated thus at the end: “Copied Nov. 2, 1915. Written between 18th & 30th October 1915. Completed 30th October. Pondicherry. Revised in April 1916.” The fair copy, used as the text from Act III, Scene 4, to the end, gives details of this revision: “Revised and recopied between April 8th and April 17th 1916.” Subsequently, on three or four different occasions, Sri Aurobindo began to rewrite the play, stopping at an earlier point each time. The editors have used the last version of a given passage as far as it goes and then reverted to the previous version.

A typed copy of *Vasavadutta* was prepared for Sri Aurobindo sometime in the late 1930s or early 1940s, and he made a few scattered revisions to it. When its publication was proposed, he demurred, saying it was “too romantic”. The play did not appear in print until 1957, when it was published in the *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* and as a separate book.

As stated by Sri Aurobindo in his author’s note, he took the plot of *Vasavadutta* from the *Kathasaritsagara*, an eleventh-century Sanskrit story-cycle written by Somadeva Bhatta.

INCOMPLETE AND FRAGMENTARY PLAYS (1891–1915)

The Witch of Ilni. Sri Aurobindo wrote this piece when he was an undergraduate at Cambridge. The manuscript bears dates ranging between October and December 1891.

The source of the plot of *The Witch of Ilni* is not known, but the play evidently owes much to Milton’s *Comus* and similar works.

The House of Brut. Sri Aurobindo wrote this fragment during the early part of his stay in Baroda, probably in 1899.

The idea for *The House of Brut* seems to have come from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* or another chronicle of early Britain.

The Maid in the Mill. This piece was written in Baroda, probably around 1902.

The source of the plot of *The Maid in the Mill* was apparently *The Maid in the Mill* by John Fletcher and William Rowley (1647). The

two plays have many characters and situations in common. Certain plays of Shakespeare and Calderón may also have influenced the plot of Sri Aurobindo's play.

The Prince of Edur. Editorial title. Sri Aurobindo wrote the three acts of this incomplete play between 28 January and 1 February 1907, and copied them on 11 and 12 February. He was at that time staying at his family's house in Deoghar, Bihar, during a brief respite from his political activities.

The plot of *The Prince of Edur* is based loosely on the life of Bappa Rawal, the eighth-century Rajput hero. The scene, which includes parts of what is now eastern Gujarat, was familiar to Sri Aurobindo, who was posted in the area while serving as a Baroda state officer.

The Prince of Mathura. Editorial title. This fragment, related in theme to *The Prince of Edur*, was written a few years later, probably in 1909 or 1910.

The Birth of Sin. This fragment, written in the same notebook as *The Prince of Mathura*, must date from the same period, that is, 1909–10. In December 1909 a related piece, also entitled *The Birth of Sin*, was published in the *Karmayogin*, a weekly newspaper edited by Sri Aurobindo. The *Karmayogin* piece is more in the nature of a poem, and was published as such in *Collected Poems and Plays* (1942). (It is included in *Collected Poems*, volume 2 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO.) The present draft is structured more as a drama, and is published as such here. The exact relationship between the two texts is not clear. Both obviously owe much to Milton.

Fragment of a Play. This piece was written in Pondicherry sometime around 1915. The plot appears to be based on an episode in the Bhagavata Purana.

STORIES

More than once Sri Aurobindo remarked in conversation that he had written some stories that subsequently were lost. "The white ants have

finished them and with them has perished my future fame as a storyteller”, he noted ironically in 1939. All his known stories and fragments of fiction are published here in two sections.

Occult Idylls

Sri Aurobindo wrote fair copies of the two pieces published in this section in the same notebook. On the first page he wrote the general title “Occult Idylls”.

The Phantom Hour. Sri Aurobindo wrote this, his only complete story, during the early part of his stay in Pondicherry, 1910–12, or perhaps a year or two earlier.

The Door at Abelard. This piece was written around the same time as *The Phantom Hour*, but was never completed.

Incomplete and Fragmentary Stories (1891–1912)

Fictional Jottings. Sri Aurobindo wrote down these lines on two pages of a notebook he used at Cambridge between 1890 and 1892.

Fragment of a Story. Sri Aurobindo wrote this piece around 1904, either in Baroda or while on vacation in Bengal.

The Devil’s Mastiff. Nothing is known for certain about the date of this piece, but it seems to belong to the period of “Occult Idylls” and may have been intended for that series. The manuscript was lost after being published in the *Advent* in February 1954.

The Golden Bird. This piece was written in Pondicherry, probably in 1911 or 1912.

PUBLISHING HISTORY

As mentioned above, *Perseus the Deliverer* was published in the weekly *Bande Mataram* in 1907, and in *Collected Poems and Plays* in 1942. All the other pieces in the present volume were brought out posthumously. “Fictional Jottings” and “Fragment of a Story” appear here for the first time. All the texts have been checked against Sri Aurobindo’s manuscripts.