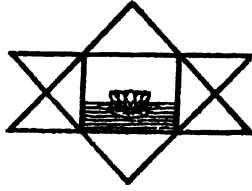


SRI AUROBINDO



**COLLECTED
PLAYS**

AND SHORT STORIES

PART ONE

**BIRTH CENTENARY
LIBRARY**



C O L L E C T E D P L A Y S
A N D S H O R T S T O R I E S

PART ONE

VOLUME 6

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PERSEUS THE DELIVERER

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 Achæan 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 of Syria.
SMERDAS,		

THEROPS, a popular leader.

PERISSUS, a citizen butcher.

DERCETES, a Syrian captain.

NEBASSAR, captain of the Chaldean Guard.

CHABRIAS,	}	townsmen and villagers.
DAMOETES,		
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,	}	Syrian women.
PASITHEA,		

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

**Between 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-venturning merchants from the East, or those
Who put from Tyre towards Atlantic gains,
Are by thy trident fiercely shaken forth
Upon the jagged 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 One

SCENE I

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-breezes?

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-breezes or to soothe with them 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

May be '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 scam-pishness 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, Cireas.

CIREAS

**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 II

The same.

Perseus descends on winged sandals from the clouds.

PERSEUS

Rocks on 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 Cireas, 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 may'st 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 III

*The Palace of Cepheus. A room in the women's apartments.
Praxilla, to her enters Diomedes.*

DIOMEDES

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 night-fall. Thou shalt learn what labour is.

DIOMEDES

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.

DIOMEDES (*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.

DIOMEDES

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.

DIOMEDE

And yet
I saw him on the wild sea-beach this morning.

PRAXILLA

What mean you, Diomedes?

DIOMEDE (*to Andromeda*)

You have not heard?
A ship was flung upon the rocks this morning
And all her human burden drowned.

ANDROMEDA

Alas!

DIOMEDE

It was a marvellous sight, my little playmate,
And made my blood with horror and admiration
Run richer in my veins. The great ship groaned
While the rough boulders dashed her into pieces,
The men with desperate shrieks went tumbling down
Mid laughter of the surge, strangled 'twixt billows
Or torn by strips upon the savage rocks
That tossed their mangled bodies back again
Into the cruel keeping of the surge.

ANDROMEDA

O do not tell me any more! How had you heart
To look at what I cannot bear to hear?
For while you spoke, I felt as if the rocks
Were tearing my own limbs and the salt surge
Choking me.

DIOMEDE

I suppose it must have hurt them.
Yes, it was pitiful. Still, 'twas a sight.
Meanwhile the deep surf boomed their grandiose dirge

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' woe.
 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.

DIOMEDES (*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.

DIOMEDES

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

Oh 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 would 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.

Curtain

Act Two

SCENE I

The audience-chamber in the Palace of Cepheus.

Cepheus and Cassiopea, seated.

CASSIOPEA

What will you do, Cepheus?

CEPHEUS

This that has happened

Is most unfortunate.

CASSIOPEA

What will you do?

I hope you will not give up to the priest

My Iolaus' golden head? I hope

You do not mean that?

CEPHEUS

Great Poseidon's priest

Sways all this land: for from the liberal blood

Moistening that high-piled altar grow our harvests

And strong Poseidon satisfied defends

Our frontiers from the loud Assyrian menace.

CASSIOPEA

Empty thy treasures, glut him with gold.

Let us be beggars rather than one bright curl

Of Iolaus feel his gloomy mischiefs.

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

Thy charges.

The prince is called to answer here

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? Think'st 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 throws 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. Think'st 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 ways 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,
Know'st 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 chooseth 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 in 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 II

*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 dialectitian, 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.
Diomedes, 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, Diomedes.

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 III

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 thy world.

PERSEUS

Only for Iolaus. Happy Cydone,
Who can lie here and babble to the river.
All day of love and light and Iolaus,
If't 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.

PERSEUS

And if perhaps,
He should not know you?

CYDONE

Then it will be night.

It is day now.

PERSEUS

A bright philosophy,
But with the tears behind. Hellas, thou livest
In thy small world of radiant white perfection
With eye averted from the night beyond,
The night immense, unfathomed. But I have seen
Snow-regions monstrous underneath the moon.
And Gorgon caverns dim. Ah well, the world
Is bright around me and the quick lusty breeze
Of strong adventure wafts my bright-winged sandals
O'er mountains and o'er seas, and Herpe's with me,
My sword of sharpness.

CYDONE

Your sword, my brother Perseus?
But it is lulled to sleep in scarlet roses
By the winged sandals watched. Can they really
Lift you into the sky?

PERSEUS

They can, Cydone.

CYDONE

What's in the wallet locked so carefully?
I would have opened it and seen, but could not.

PERSEUS

'Tis well thou didst not. For thy breathing limbs
Would in a moment have been charmed to stone
And these smooth locks grown rigid and stiffened, O Cydone,
Thy happy heart would never more have throbbed
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 baulked

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.

IOLAUS

Of strength and sweetness,

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 Three

SCENE I

The women's apartments of the Palace.

Andromeda, Diomedes.

ANDROMEDA

All's ready, let us go.

DIOMEDES

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.

DIOMEDES

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, Diomedes?
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 fear'st 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 II

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, puttest 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 laughter? 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

godhead 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 boggy 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 frown'st 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.

SMERDAS

But thy good sword will quickly shear them.

PERSEUS

Thou wilt give me all Babylonia holds
Of riches for reward?

SMERDAS

More, more, much more!

PERSEUS

**But thou must go to Babylon to fetch it.
Then what security have I of payment?**

SMERDAS

**Keep good Tyrnaus here, my almost brother.
I will come back and give thee gold, much gold.**

PERSEUS

**You'd leave him here? in danger? with the knife
Searching for him and grim Poseidon angry?**

SMERDAS

**What danger, when he is with thee, O youth,
Strong radiant youth?**

PERSEUS

**Yourself then stay with me,
And he shall bring the ransom from Chaldea.**

SMERDAS

Here? here? Oh God! they'll seize me yet again
And cut my heart out. Let me go, dear youth,
Oh, let me go; I'll give thee double gold.

PERSEUS

Thou sordid treacherous thing of fears, I'll not

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*)

Circas!

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

Circas! where are you, Circas? It is I.

CIREAS

It is the little palace scamp, Diomedes.
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 Diomedes 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 bring'st 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? Cereas!

TYRNAUS (*coming forward*)

O thou young goddess with the smile! Behold him,
Tyрнаus 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 know'st 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 Diomedes.
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 Circeas 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 Cereas
The hidden mouth. I'll loiter and expect you
Under the hill-side, where sweet water plashes
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, accursed!
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 III

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 armed 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 rang'st 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 appal'st 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, captain, 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 country-side 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. Think'st 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 took'st 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 will 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 Diomedes,
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, Diomede?
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.

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 the 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 outrooted. 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 said'st 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.

Act Four

SCENE I

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.

CRIES

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.

CRIES

True, true, true!

GARDAS

This is a wonderful man, this Therops. He has a brain, countrymen.

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.

CRIES

No kings, no kings!

GARDAS

Or Therops shall be king.

CRIES

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.

CRIES

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!

CRIES

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.**

CRIES

Polydaon for ever, the good Polydaon, Poseidon's Viceroy!

POLYDAON

Swear then to do Poseidon's will.

CRIES

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 II

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 recognized 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.*

DIOMEDE

You'll go?
What will you do alone against ten thousand?

IOLAUS

To die is always easy. This canaille
I do not fear; it is a coward rabble.

DIOMEDE

But terror gives them fierceness: they are dangerous.

IOLAUS

Keep Diomedes for your service, love,
If I am killed; escape hence with your mother
To Gaza; she has gold: you may begin
A life as fair there. Sometimes remember me.

CYDONE

Diomedes, will you comfort my dear mother?
Tell her I am quite safe and will be back
By nightfall. Hush! this in your ear, Diomedes.
Escape with her under the veil of night,
For I shall not come back. Be you her daughter
And comfort her sad lonely age, Diomedes.

IOLAUS

What do you mean, Cydone?

CYDONE

Are you ready?

Let us be going.

IOLAUS

Us, sweet lunatic?

CYDONE

Often you've said that you and I are only one,
I shall know now if you mean it.

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 III

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 Diomedes 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, to-morrow 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.

CRIES 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.

CRIES

Leave all to Polydaon! the good priest knows what he is doing.

POLYDAON

Soldiers, 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.

NEBASSAR

 If there were any help!
Go forth, O princess, O Andromeda.

CASSIOPEA

My child! my child!

ANDROMEDA

 Give me one kiss, my mother.
We shall yet meet, I think. My royal father,
Andromeda farewells you, whom you loved
And called your sunbeam. But the night receives me.

CEPHEUS

Alas!

DAMOETES

 How long will these farewells endure?
They are not needed: you shall meet presently
If Death's angels can collect your tattered pieces.

CASSIOPEA

O savage Syrians, let my curses brood
Upon your land, an anguished mother's curse.
May the Assyrian come and flay you living,
Impale your sons, rip up your ravished daughters
Before your agonising eyes and make you feel,
Who drag my child from me to butcher her,
The horror that you do. I curse you, Syrians.

ANDROMEDA

Hush, mother, mother! what they demand is just.

NEBASSAR

Lead back the King and Queen into the Palace,
Women. We too will from this sad surrender
Remove our eyes.

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 brodered 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.

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.

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.

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.

It is Perissus, the good and wealthy butcher. He is right. To the rocks with her!

Bind her first: we will see her bound!

**In all that is rational, I will indulge you.
Where is a cord?**

A cord, who has a cord?

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.

CRIES

Kill Cepheus the cuckold, the tyrant! Tear the harlot Cassiopea.

THEROPS

Is this thy sacred oath? Had not Nabassar
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 balked 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.
Sit'st 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 IV

On the road to the sea-shore.

Phineus and his Tyrians.

PHINEUS

A mighty 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.

CRIES (*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

Know'st 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 V

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 a 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 Five

SCENE I

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 kind dear 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,
 Athens? 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*)

He's free? **It was a cruel lie!**

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

Oh yes, in death. Together and released!

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, armipotent maiden, child of Zeus,
Shoot from his god-like 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 tossest 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 may'st 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 your 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 II

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 knew'st 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.

CRIES

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.

CRIES

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*)

Confusions! 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 plash 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?

CRIES

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?

CRIES

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 you 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-staring 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 school-mate; 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 feared'st, god.
I would have spoken, but thou wert chilled and stone.
What feared'st thou or whom? Wert 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 split 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 Diomedes from Cydon'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 chockfull 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 III

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
Unhidden.

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 helpest 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.

DIOMEDES

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?

DIOMEDES

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 betrayed'st 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 royalty
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.

PHINEUS

Thou art in love
With death: but I am pitiful, young Perseus,
Thou shalt not die. My men shall take thee living
And pedlars hawk thee for a slave in Tyre,

Where thou shalt see sometimes far off Andromeda,
A Queen of nations.

PERSEUS

Thou compassionate man!
But I will give thee, hero, marvellous death
And stone for monument, which thou deservest;
For thou wert a great King and famous warrior,
When still thou wert living. Forth and fight with me!
Afterwards if thou canst, come for Andromeda;
None shall oppose thy seizure. Behind me, captain,
So that the rabble here may not be tempted
To any treacherous stroke.

*Phineus goes out with the Tyrians, Damoetes and the
Syrian favourers of Phineus, followed by Perseus and
Dercetes. Cireas behind them at a distance.*

CEPHEUS

Sunbeam, I am afraid.

ANDROMEDA

I am not, father.

CEPHEUS

Alone against so many!

IOLAUS

Shall I go, father,
And stand by him?

CEPHEUS

He might be angry. Hark!
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 in his baldric. Blind I waited
And heard the loud approaching charge. Then suddenly
The rapid onset 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,
Hail, Perseus!

Perseus returns, followed by Cereas.

PERSEUS

King, the Tyrians all are dead,
Nor need'st 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*) I cannot feel sure yet
that I am not myself a statue. Ugh! this was a stony conjuring.

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 camest 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.**

Curtain

VASAVADUTTA

A dramatic romance

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The action of the romance takes place a century after the war of the Mahabharata; the capital has been changed to Cowsambie; the empire has been temporarily broken and the kingdoms of India are overshadowed by three powers, Maghadha in the East ruled by Pradyota, Avunthie in the West ruled by Chunda Mahasegn who has subdued also the southern kings, and Cowsambie in the Centre where Yougundharayan strives by arms and policy to maintain the house of Parikshit against the dominating power of Avunthie. Recently since the young Vuthsa has been invested with the regal power and appeared at Cowsambie, 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 Udayan.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

VUTHSA UDAYAN, King of Cowsambie.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN, His Minister, until recently Regent of
Cowsambie.

ROOMUNWATH, Captain of his armies.

ALURCA,	}	Young men of Vuthsa's age, his friends and companions.
VASUNTHACA,		

THE KING'S DOOR-KEEPER.

CHUNDA MAHASEGN, King of Avunthie.

GOPALACA,	}	His sons.
VICURNA,		

REBHA, Governor of Ujjayinie, the capital of Avunthie.

A CAPTAIN OF AVUNTHIE.

A SERVANT.

PARINACA, Attendant at Udayan's palace.

UNGARICA, Queen of Avunthie.

VASAVADUTTA, Daughter of Chunda Mahasegn and Ungarica.

UMBA, Her handmaiden.

MUNJOOLICA, The new name of Bundhumathie, the captive
Princess of Sourashtra, serving Vasavadutta.

Vaithae
 Courtship's majesty,
 Will brook no woman in this, Gopāla,
 At foreign summons. Surely my will and love
 Shall throne most high, not strong Arundhi's child,
 But Vāsavadattā; whether alone, here with
 And mine, the nation and the kingdom's good
 Consenting shall decide. Therefore this claim
 Hope not, my brother.

Gopāla Let not this divide us.
 The present's gladness is enough: the future's less
 And thine, Udayan, nor shall any man
 Compel thee. Boy, thy wrath was rash and fierce
 Wounding thy house and thy high father's will.
 Triled must thou in far Courtship dwell
 Until his wrath is dead.

Vimona I care not, brother
 I have done my will, I have observed the right.
 Near Vaithae and my sister's home enough
 And I shall see new countries.

Vaithae Follow behind,
 Sister's household.
 And all the force thou wilt. We shall go forth.
 Ride thou, at lance, near us; let thy harp
 Speak of love's anthems and her golden life
 To Vāsavadattā. Love, the storm is past,
 The peril o'er. Now we shall glide, my queen,
 Through green gold woods and between golden falls
 To float for ever in a golden dream.
 O earth's gold Elysium, till the shining gates
 Eternal open to us thy heavenly home.

Revised and recopied between April 5th and April 17th 1906.

Act One

SCENE I

An inner room of the palace in Avunthie.

Chunda Mahasegn, seated; Gopalaca.

MAHASEGN

Vuthsa Udayan drives my fortune 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 might the moonbeam feet of some bright laughing girl,
Her skill concealing in her reckless grace,
The measures of a rapid dance.

MAHASEGN

If this dawn
Brings its portentous morning to our gates,
Our suns are ended. Yet I had great dreams.
Oudh and Cowsambie were my high-carved doors;
Ganges, Godavarie and Nurmada
In lion race besprayed with sacred dew
The moonlit jasmines 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.
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

High thou soarest now
But with eyes shut to the tempest.

GOPALACA

Suest thou at last
To foemen for the end of haughty strife?

MAHASEGN

That never shall be seen. The boy must fall.

GOPALACA

He is young, noble, beautiful and bold,
But let him fall. We will not bear defeat.

MAHASEGN

How shall he fall, my son? For Heaven-admired
Rudra still guards my stern and high-eyed fates,
But many gods stood smiling at his birth.
Luxmie came full of fortunate days; Vishnu
Poured down his radiant sanction in 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.
Excused from effort and propped on difficult ascent
Birds that are brilliant-winged fly near to earth.
His hero hours are rare forgetful flights.
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. My son, spy out 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 Ujjayinie's golden groves.
Shall he not find there 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 bonds can give
Of 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 II

A hall in the palace at Cowsambie.

Yougundharayan, Roomunwath.

YUGUNDHARAYAN

I see his strength lie covered sleeping in flowers;
Yet is a greatness hidden in his years.

ROOMUNWATH

Nourish not such large hopes.

YUGUNDHARAYAN

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, changed
Into a warm great god. I seek a bride
For Vuthsa.

ROOMUNWATH

Wisely; but whom?

YUGUNDHARAYAN

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 by magic fate
On a fierce iron stock.

ROOMUNWATH

Vasavadutta,
Avunthie'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.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

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.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

And the State's cares,
King of Cowsambie?

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?

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

And when I pass?

VUTHSA

Thy passing I forbid.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Vuthsa, thou art
Cowsambie'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?

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Well, pass 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?

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Thy will
In small things train, Udayan, in the great
Make it a wrestler with the dangerous carth.

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?

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

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 Avunthie, 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.

PARINACA (*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.

YUGUNDHARAYAN

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.

YUGUNDHARAYAN

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.

Parinaca brings in Gopalaca.

GOPALACA

Which is Udayan, great Cowsambie's king?

VUTHSA

He stands here. What's thy need from Vuthsa? Speak.

YUGUNDHARAYAN

Roomunwath, look with care upon this face.

GOPALACA

Hail, then, Cowsambie'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, Avunthie'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 heard'st 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 Cowsambie? 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
Avunthie'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 Udayan, 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 demand'st and more than thou demand'st,
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 seek'st a refuge, thou shalt find a home:
Thou fleest a father, here a brother waits
To clasp thee in his arms.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Too frank, too noble!

VUTHSA

Come closer. Child of Mahasegn, wilt thou
Be king Udayan'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.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

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.

Curtain

Act Two

SCENE I

A room in the palace at Cowsambie.

Alurca, Vasuntha.

ALURCA

He'll rule Cowsambic in the end, I think.

VASUNTHA

Artist, be an observer too. His eyes
Pursue young Vuthsa like a hunted prey
And seem to measure possibility,
But not for rule or for Cowsambie care.
To reign's his nature, not his will.

ALURCA

**This man
Is like some high rock that was suddenly
Transformed into a thinking creature.**

VASUNTHA

There's

His charm for Vuthsa who is soft as spring,
Fair like a hunted moon in cloud-swept skies,
Luxurious like a jasmine in its leaves.

ALURCA

When will this Vuthsa grow to man? Hard-brained
Roomunwath, deep Yougundharayan rule;
The State, its arms are theirs. This boy between
Like a girl's cherished puppet stroked and dandled,
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 Parikshit, Janmejaya, think
Of Sathaneke, 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 Cowsambie.

GOPALACA

Wilt thou show
Them to me, Vindhya's crags, where forests dimly
Climb down towards my Avunthie?

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 Avunthie'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 will'st thou

That I should play the heaven-taught airs thou lov'st
On the Gundharva's magical guitar
Which lures even woodland beasts? For the elephant
Comes trumpeting to the enchanted sound,
A coloured blaze of beauty on the sword
The peacocks dance and the snake's brilliant hood
Lifts rythmed yearning from the emerald herb.

GOPALACA

Vuthsa Udayan, suffer me awhile
To walk alone, for I am full of thoughts.

VUTHSA

Thou shouldst not be. Cannot my love atone
For lost Avunthic?

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 takest all hearts and givest thine to none,
Udayan. 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 II

A forest-glade in the Vindhya hills.

Vicurna, a Captain.

VICURNA

The hunt rings distant still; but all the way
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 Avunthie. 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 arrives 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 Avunthie. 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? Come, I should know that 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 Avunthie?

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 citied 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.

After a few moments Vasuntha arrives.

VASUNTHA

The forest lives with sound. It is too late.
The thing is done.

*Yougundharayan, Roomunwath, Alurca
and others break in from all sides.*

YUGUNDHARAYAN

Where is King Vuthsa? where?
His bow hangs there! his sword and arrows lie!

VASUNTHA (*indifferently*)

I know not.

ALURCA

Know not! Thou wast with him!

VASUNTHA

No.

He sent me from him. I think he's travelling
To Shiva in Avunthie.

ALURCA

And thou laugh'st?
Untimely jester!

YUGUNDHARAYAN

Impetuously pursue!
The forest ways and mountain openings flood
That flee to Avunthie. They can yet be seized.

VASUNTHA

Hear first king Vuthsa's message and command:
"Whatever seeks me from Fate, man or beast,
Let not war sound without thy prince's leave.
Vuthsa will rescue Vuthsa."

ROOMUNWATH

Jestest thou yet,
Or was this madness? or careless levity?

YUGUNDHARAYAN

See how the lion's cub breaks out, Roomunwath,
Whom we so guarded in our close control,
To measure with the large and dangerous world
The bounding rapture of his youth and force.
He throws himself into his foeman's lair
Alone and scorning every aid. I guess
His purpose, but it's rash, it's rash. What if
He failed? This boy and iron Mahasegn!
And yet we must obey.

ROOMUNWATH

He is not yet
Beyond the borders. But we'll seek him out
Armed in Avunthie. To the border speed!
They may be seized before they cross it still.

*All depart in a tumult of haste except
Yugundharayan and Alurca.*

YUGUNDHARAYAN

It will be vain. At least my spies shall pierce
Their inmost chambers, even in his prison
My help be near.

SCENE III

Avunthie, a wooded hill-side overlooking the plain.

Gopalaca in a chariot with Vuthsa; armed men surround them.

GOPALACA

Arrest our wheels. Those are our army's lights
That climb to us like fireflies from the plain.

VUTHSA (*awakened from sleep*)

Is this Avunthie?

GOPALACA

We have passed her bounds.

VUTHSA

So, thou dear traitor, this thou from the first
Cam'st planning?

GOPALACA

This and more for which it was done.

VUTHSA

Thou bearst me to thy father's house?

GOPALACA

Where thou

Shalt lie a jewel guarded carefully
Close to the dearest treasures of our house,
Nor all Yougundharayan's wiles prevail
To take thee from our guard.

VUTHSA

I must be cooped,
It seems, and guarded in a golden cage,
As I was watched o'er in Cowsambie once.
So all men think 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 never! If thou hadst thy bow indeed!

VUTHSA

Thou hadst me for the taking. I will break out
As easily.

GOPALACA

Thou shalt find the evasion hard,
Such keepers shall enring thy steps.

VUTHSA

But I will,
And carry with me something costlier far
Than what thou stealest from Cowsambie'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.

Vicurna passes.

Was't 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, now for thy own desired
Since I beheld thee, son of Mahasegn.

VICURNA

Vuthsa Udayan, 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 all gain
That awaits me in Avunthie. 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 passed overtaking in her skies
Our chariots long before Ujjayinie's seen.
The vanguard nears; make haste to join with them.
Roomunwath's cohorts should tread close behind.

VUTHSA

They will not come. My fate must ride with me
Unhindered to Ujjayinie.

GOPALACA

Captains, march.

Spur towards my father swift-hooved messengers
To cry aloud to him the prize we bring.
Shiva has smiled on us.

VUTHSA

Vishnu on me.

Vicurna, mount by us and talk to me.

Curtain

Act Three

Avunthie; in the palace.

SCENE I

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 hands.

UNGARICA (*laughing*)

Thou holdst the sun
Under thy armpit as the tailed god did.
What wilt thou do with it?

MAHASEGN

Make it my moon
And shine by him upon the eastern night.

UNGARICA

Thou canst?

MAHASEGN

Loved sceptic of my house, I can.
Have I not done all things I longed for yet
Since out of thy dim world I dragged thee alarmed
Into our sun and breeze and azure skies
By force, my fortune?

UNGARICA

Yes, by force; but here
By force it was not done. Wilt thou depart

From thy own nature, Chunda Mahasegn,
And hop'st for victory?

MAHASEGN

Thou art my strength, my fortune,
But not my counsellor.

UNGARICA

No, I obey and watch.
It is enough for me in your strange world.
For by your light I cannot guide myself.
Man is a creature, blinded by the sun,
Who errs by vision; but the world to you
That's 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 tender boy
As soft as summer dews or as the lily
That yields to every gentle pushing wave.
A hero? yes; all Aryan boys are that.

UNGARICA

Thy daughter, Vasavadutta, is the wave
That shall o'erflow this lily!

MAHASEGN

Thou hast seen?

UNGARICA

'Tis 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 her here, my queen.
She shall be taught the thing she has to do.

UNGARICA

Her heart will teach her. Veena, call to me
The princess.

MAHASEGN

Oh, the heart, it is a danger,
A madness. Let the thinking mind prevail.

UNGARICA

We're women, king.

MAHASEGN

No, princesses. My daughter
Has dignity, pride, wisdom, noble hopes.
She will not act as common natures do.

UNGARICA

Love will unseat them all and put them down
Under his flower-soft feet.

MAHASEGN

Thou hast chosen ever
To oppose my thoughts.

UNGARICA

It is their poor revenge
Who in their acts must needs obey. Thy lesson, King!
Vasavadutta enters and bows down to her parents.
Let royal wisdom teach a woman's brain
To use for statecraft's ends her dearest thoughts.

MAHASEGN

My daughter, Vasavadutta, my delight,
Now is thy hour to pay the long dear debt
Thou ow'st thy parents from whom thou wast made.
Hear me; thy brain is quick, will understand.
Vuthsa, Cowsambie's king, my rival, foe,
My fate's high stumbling-block, captive today
Comes to Avunthie. I mean that he shall be
Thy husband, Vasavadutta, and thy slave.
By thee he must become, who now resists,
My vassal even as other monarchs are.
Then shall thy father's fates o'erleap their bounds,
Then rule thy house, thy nation all this earth!
This is my will; my daughter, is it thine?

VASAVADUTTA

Father, thy will is mine, even as 'tis fate's.
Thou givest me to whom thou wilt; what share
In this have I but only to obey?

MAHASEGN

A greater part that makes thee my ally
And golden instrument; for without thee
I have no hold on Vuthsa. Thou, my child,
Must be the chain to bind him to my throne,
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 all my wish,
My nation's greatness is my dearest good.

MAHASEGN

Thou hast kept my dearest lessons; lose them not.
O thou art not as common 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 rule me.

MAHASEGN

I'll not teach thy woman's tact
How it should 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 an 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 unhopèd-for joy.

MAHASEGN

Thou art my pupil; statecraft was not wasted
Upon thy listening brain. Thou seest, my queen?

UNGARICA

Thou hast made thy treaty with thy daughter, King?
As if this babe could understand! Go, go
And leave me with my child. For I will speak to her
Another language.

MAHASEGN

But no breath against
My purpose.

UNGARICA

Fearest thou that?

MAHASEGN

No; speak to her.
He goes out from the chamber.

UNGARICA (*drawing 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
 And not to make its parent bed more high.
 Not for thy sire thy mother brought thee forth,
 But thy dear 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; let your wedded arms
 Be heaven; let his will be thine and thine
 Be his, his happiness thy regal pomp.
 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. Yes, tremble and yet fear
 Nothing. Thy mother watches over thee, child.

She puts Vasavadutta from her and 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 Udayan! 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 II

The same.

Mahasegn, Ungarica, Gopalaca, Vuthsa.

GOPALACA

King of Avunthie, Chunda Mahasegn,
Thy will I have performed. Thy dangerous foe,
The boy who rivalled thy ripe victor years
I lay, thy captive, at thy feet.

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 now to approach
Thy greatness otherwise.

MAHASEGN

Pleased thee, vain youth!

No, but thy fate indignant that thou strovest
Against much prouder fortunes.

VUTHSA

Think it so.

I am here. What wouldst thou with me, King, or wherefore
Hast thou by violence brought me to thy house?

MAHASEGN

To adore me as sole master, king and lord,
Assuming my great yoke as all have done
From Indus to the South.

VUTHSA

Thou art in error.

Thou hast not great Cowsambie's monarch here,
But Vuthsa only, Sathaneka's son,
Who sprang from sires divine.

MAHASEGN

And where then dwells
Cowsambie's youthful majesty if not
In thee, its golden vessel?

VUTHSA

Where my throne
In high Cowsambie 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. That, O king,
Was once Parikshit, that Urjoona's seed,
Janamejaya, that was Sathaneka,
That Vuthsa; and when Vuthsa is no more,
That shall live deathless in a hundred kings.

MAHASEGN

Thou speakest like the unripe boy thou seemst,
With thoughts high-winged; grown minds keep to earth's
More humble sureness and prefer to touch.
I am content to have thy gracious body here,
This earth of kingship; for with that I deal
And not with any high and formless¹ thought.

VUTHSA

My body! deal with it. It is thy slave
And captive by thy choice, as by my own.
What thou canst do with Vuthsa, do, O king.
In nothing will I pledge Cowsambie's majesty,
But Vuthsa is thy own and in thy hands.

¹ unseen

Him I defend not from thy iron will.

MAHASEGN

My prisoner, thou canst not so escape
My purpose.

VUTHSA

I embrace it. If escape
I simply meant, I should not now be here.
'Tis not by bars or gates I can be bound.

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

I am content. Find such,

MAHASEGN

Humble thy bearing proud!
Be Vuthsa or be great Cowsambie's king,
Thou art here my captive only and my slave.

VUTHSA

I accept thy stern rebuke as I accept
Whatever state the wiser gods provide
And bend my mood and action to their thought.

MAHASEGN

Vuthsa, thou hast opposed my sovereign will
Who meant to make all lands my private plot,
Fields for my royal tilling. Thou hast fought
And that by war I could not tame thee, hold
As thy most unexampled glory. Now

My proud resistless fortune brings thee here;
Thou must, young hero, brook enslaved my will.
Thou knowst the law; whoever offers empire
A sacrifice to the high-seated gods,
Him must his subject kings as menials serve;
And this compelled have many proud lords done
Whose high beginnings disappear in Time.
But now I will make all my royal days
A high continual solemn sacrifice of kingship.
Thee, who art Bharuth's heir, a high-throned son
Of emperors and my equal in the world,
All thy long time I will superbly keep
Ornament and emblem of my arrogant greatness,
A royal serf of my proud house. Thee, Vuthsa,
As fitting thy yet tender years, I make
My daughter's servant, by her handmaidens
Guarded, thy jailors firm whose gracious cordon
Not even thy courage can transgress. To this
Dost thou consent?

VUTHSA

Not only I 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 then, Gopalaca,
My gift, this captive, to thy sister's feet.
He has a music that desires the gods,
A brush that outdoes Nature and a song
The luminous choristers of heaven have taught.
All this she can command or she can take;
For all he has, is hers. Thou smilest, boy?

VUTHSA

What thou hast said is simply truth. And yet
I smiled to see how strong and arrogant minds
Dream themselves masters of the things they do.

*Gopalaca and Vuthsa go out by a door leading
inward to Vasavadutta's apartments.*

MAHASEGN

'Tis only a charming boy, Ungarica,
Who vaunts and yields!

UNGARICA

What he has shown thee, King,
Thou seest.

MAHASEGN

Wilt thou lend next this graceful child,
Almost a girl in beauty, thoughts profound
And practised subtleties? I have done well,
Was deeply inspired.

He goes from the chamber towards the outer palace.

UNGARICA (*looking after him*)

For him thou hast and her.
Our own ends seeking Heaven's ends we serve.

SCENE III

A room in Vasavadutta's apartment.

Vasavadutta, Munjoolica, Umba.

VASAVADUTTA

Thou hast seen him?

MUNJOOLICA

Yes.

VASAVADUTTA

Then speak, thou 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,¹
O living Luxmie, beauty, wealth and joy
Run overpacked into thy days, and grandeurs
Unmeasured. Now the greatest king on earth
Is given thy servant.

VASAVADUTTA

That's the greatest king's
High 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 wilt not tell.
What is he like?

MUNJOOLICA

I have seen the god of love
Wearing a golden human body.

¹ Since thou first moved with thy soft feet on our earth,

VASAVADUTTA (*with a pleased smile*)

So fair?

MUNJOOLICA

As thou art and even more.

VASAVADUTTA

More!

MUNJOOLICA

Cry not out.

His eyes are proud and smiling like the gods',
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 seen truly?

It was not spoken to beguile my mind?

Then tell me all you saw there, dearest one;

Not that these things I care for, but would know.

MUNJOOLICA (*showing Gopalaca and Vuthsa who enter*)

Let thy eyes care not then, yet see.

VASAVADUTTA

My brother,

Long wast thou far from me.

GOPALACA

For thy sake I was far.

Much have I flung, my sister, at thy feet
 Nor thought my gifts were worthy of thy smile,
 Not even Sourashtra's conquered daughter here,
 But now I give indeed. This is that famous
 Vuthsa Udayan, great Cowsambie's king,
 Brought here by me to serve thee as thy slave,
 Thy royal serf, musician, singer, page.
 Look on him, tell me if I have deserved.

VASAVADUTTA

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 (*looking covertly at Vuthsa*)

Although my slave, dear then and prized.

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

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 lordly star inherited

And in thy girdle all the conquered earth.

VASAVADUTTA

I know it, brother.

GOPALACA

From thy childhood, yes,
Thou seemdst to know, thou heldst rule carelessly;
But since thou knowest, queen, assume thy fiefs,
Cowsambie and Ayodhya, for thy house!

VASAVADUTTA (*glancing at Vuthsa and avoiding his gaze*)

Since he's my slave, they are already mine.

GOPALACA

Nay, understand me, sister: make them thine.
Thou, Vuthsa, serve thy mistress and obey.

He goes out.

VASAVADUTTA

He is a boy, a golden marvellous 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 shudderest, 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 Cowsambie's king, —

VUTHSA

Men call me so.

VASAVADUTTA

And now my servant.

VUTHSA

That my heart repeats.

VASAVADUTTA (*smiling*)

I did not hear. Cowsambie'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 the line and hue of living truth
That makes earth's shadows pale? or wilt thou have
The infinite abysmal silences
Made vocal, clothed with form? These things at birth
The Kinnarie, Vidyadhar and Gundharva
Around me crowding on Himaloy dumb
Gave to the silent god that smiled 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 thou what thing shall please thee in thy slave,
What thou desir'st from Vuthsa?

VASAVADUTTA

Do I know?
Not less than all thou hast and all thou canst
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 have need of him,
Then bring him to me. Go, Vuthsa, to thy room.

Vuthsa makes an obeisance and touches her feet.

What dost thou? It is not permitted thee.

VUTHSA (*letting his touch linger*)

Not this? 'Tis hard.

VASAVADUTTA (*troubled*)

Thou art too bold a slave.

VUTHSA

Let me be earth beneath thy tread at least.

VASAVADUTTA

Oh, 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 tower-room
Closing the terrace where thou walkst when moonlight
Sleeps on the sward?

VASAVADUTTA

There; 'tis the nearest.

UMBA (*taking Vuthsa's hand*)

Come.

They go out with Vuthsa.

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 sway;

Surely I shall do all my will with him.

I sent him from me, for his words troubled me

And still delighted. They have a witchery, —

No, not his words, but voice. 'Tis not his voice,

Nor yet his smile, his face, 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 IV

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 sleep'st 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 is 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 art
Captive Cowsambie. 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.
I know what thy heart asks; 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 Cowsambie.

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 V

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, it 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 serve me, is not all thou hast
Mine, mine? Why dost thou, Vuthsa, keep from me
My own?

VUTHSA

Take all; claim all.

VASAVADUTTA (*collecting herself*)

Cowsambie 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, Udayan, thou must vow,
And the word bind thee, that none else shall be
Cowsambie'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 play'st 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 Parikshit 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 find a prison here?
My father is inflexible and stern.

VUTHSA

Dost thou desire this really in thy heart?
Vuthsa diminished,¹ art thou not diminished¹ too?

VASAVADUTTA

My rule thou hast vowed?

VUTHSA

 To obey thee in all things
Throned in Cowsambie, not as here I must,
Thy father's captive. There I shall be thine.

¹ Degraded

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.

Curtain

Act Four

SCENE I

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 know'st 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 knew'st, 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. Is it enough?

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 Cowsambie, 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 Ujjayinie? 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.

VICRUNA

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 II

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

Calledst 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.

MUNJOOLICA

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 III

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 (*approaching 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 awakens 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.

MUNJOOLICA (*outside, solemnly*)

Bolted.

VASAVADUTTA

For pity, sweet Munjoolica!

MUNJOOLICA

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 wilt 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.

Curtain

Act Five

SCENE I

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?
Thinkest thou my heart within me was not hot?
But now I am avenged on thee and all.

VASAVADUTTA

Vindictive traitress, I will beat thee.

MUNJOOLICA

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.*

MUNJOOLICA

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?

MUNJOOLICA

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.

MUNJOOLICA

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 jest 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

Yougundharayan 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 Avunthie's far-famed paragon of girls,
He shall have tithe of all my golden gains.

MUNJOOLICA

Why not to Avunthie'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
Frightened 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 Avunthie'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 Avunthie's loins
 Nearest Ujjayinie. 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?

MUNJOOLICA

Three, but the southern portal
Nearest the ramparts.

VUTHSA

There, how many guard?

MUNJOOLICA

Three armed Kiratha women keep the gate.

VUTHSA

I cannot hurt them. Thou must find a way.

MUNJOOLICA

They shall be drowned in wine. The streets outside?

VUTHSA

A chariot, — find one for me. I cannot fight
With Vasavadutta on my breast.

MUNJOOLICA

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 II

The pleasure-groves of the palace in Ujjayinie.

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 Gundharvas 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 Cowsambie.

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 moonlight 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?

MUNJOOLICA

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 Cowsambie's groves.

*He bears her towards the gate, Vicurna
crossing him in his return.*

VICURNA

Haste, haste! all's ready.

MUNJOOLICA

Umba! Umba! 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?

MUNJOOLICA

Weep not!
I'll have thee to Cowsambie if thou live.

VICURNA

Come, follow, follow. He is near the gates.

MUNJOOLICA

I to my freedom, she her royal crown!

SCENE III

Vasavadutta's apartment.

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 say'st 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

Cowsambie'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. Udayan 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
Ujjayinie, 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 Avunthie's prince,
 My second in my cares. Hear then! if 'twixt
 Ujjayinie 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 Cowsambie, but leave not
 Till she is solemnised as Vuthsa's queen.
 Sole let her reign throned by Udayan'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 IV

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 breathes 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.

MUNJOOLICA (*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 mock'st! 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 Ujjayinie. Therefore yield the princess.
Thyself depart a freeman to thy realms.

VUTHSA

Know'st 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 thæ 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?

She goes towards the grove.

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 pacans 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 V

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.

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

Two days only
Vasuntha's here. Yet is Udayan 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 Avunthie's edge
Rides to us. He quests forward with his eyes.

ROOMUNWATH

Whoe'er he be, he has travelled far. His beast
Labours and stumbles on.

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

This is no horseman,
It is a woman rides though swift and armed.

ALURCA

She has seen us and dismounts.

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

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.

MUNJOOLICA

Art thou king Vuthsa's captain?

ROOMUNWATH

I am he.

MUNJOOLICA

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 and where shall be my surety
That thou art no Avunthian sent to lure
Our force into an ambush?

MUNJOOLICA

This is surely
Youngundharayan 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 Avunthie Vasavadutta. Knowest thou
This ring?

YUGUNDHARAYAN

'Tis Vuthsa's.

MUNJOOLICA

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?

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Thy tale is strange; but thou at least art true.

MUNJOOLICA

Thou art not prudent only!

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Forward then.
Roomunwath's camp already is astir.

SCENE VI

Near the edge of the forest in Avunthie.

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 Avunthie's head.

VUTHSA

Yet still thy son.

YOUNGUNDHARAYAN

Hail, Vasavadutta, great Cowsambie'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.

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

They range their battle now.

VUTHSA

Speak thou to them.

War must not break.

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

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 Ujjayinie, then pursuit must cease?

REBHA

Then truly.

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

Send a horseman, Rebha, ask,
All meanwhile shall remain as now it stands.

REBHA

I'll send no horseman; I will fight.

YOUGUNDHARAYAN

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 Avunthie'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 Umba, thou com'st safe to me!

GOPALACA

And all
My sister's household and her wealth comes fast
Behind me. Only one claim Avunthie keeps;
My sister shall sit throned thy only queen, —
Which, pardon me, my eyes must witness done
With honour to our name.

VUTHSA

Cowsambie's majesty
Will brook not even in this Gopalaca,
A foreign summons. Surely my will and love
Shall throne most high, not strong Avunthie'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, Udayan, 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 Cowsambie 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.

Curtain

R O D O G U N E

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

ANTIOCHUS, son of Cleopatra by her first husband

Nicanor (dead).

TIMOCLES, twin brother of Antiochus.

PHAYLLUS, Chancellor of Syria.

NICANOR, a prince of the house of Syria and father of Eunice.

PHILOCTETES, companion of Antiochus.

MELITUS, King's Chamberlain.

THOAS,	}	captains of Syrian army.
THERAMENES,		
LEOSTHENES,		
CALLICRATES,		
THERAS,		
EREMITE,		

CLEOPATRA, Queen of Syria, wife of King Antiochus of Syria.

RODOGUNE, Parthian princess, daughter of King Phraates of
Parthia, captive attendant of Cleopatra.

EUNICE, daughter of prince Nicanor and cousin to the brothers
Antiochus and Timocles and companion of
Cleopatra.

CLEONE, sister of Phayllus and companion of Cleopatra.

MENTHO, Egyptian nurse of Antiochus and Timocles.

ZOYLA, attendant of Cleopatra.

SCENE : *The city of Antioch, capital of Syria.*

Act One

Antioch. The palace, a house by the sea.

SCENE I

*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 lisping 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 hands 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 roads 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?

Zoyla enters.

ZOYLA

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 Zoyla.

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 Phayllys 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. Wilt thou 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 II

*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.

MELITUS

Your courtesy
Overwhelms me; but I am no captain, only

The King's poor chamberlain, your servant come
To greet you.

TIMOCLES

Not therefore less a cherished friend
Whose duty helps our daily happiness.
Thoas, your name is in our country's book
Inscribed too deeply to demand poor praise
From one who never yet has drawn his sword
In anger.

THOAS

I am honoured, Prince. Do not forget
Your mother is waiting for you after eighteen years.

TIMOCLES

My mother! O, I have a mother at last.
You lords shall tell me as we go, how fair
She is or dark like our Egyptian dames,
Noble and tall or else a brevity
Of queenhood. And her face — but that, be sure,
Is the sweet loving face I have seen so often
In Egypt when I lay awake at night
And heard the breezes whispering outside
With many voices in the moonlit hours.
It is late, Thoas, is it not, a child to see
His mother when eighteen years have made him big?
This, this is Paradise, a mother, friends
And Syria. In our swart Egypt 'twas no life, —
Although I liked it well when I was there;
But O, your Syria! I have spent whole hours
Watching your gracile Syrian women pass
With their bright splendid faces. And your flowers,
What flowers! and best of all, your sun, not like
That burning Egypt, but a warmth, a joy
And a kind brightness. It will be all pleasure
To reign in such a country.

ANTIOCUS (*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 sweet Orontes hastening to the sea!
Ride by me, Melitus, tell me everything.

SCENE III

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 fortune.

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 fear'st 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 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 unthrone.

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 than 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, O 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.

Curtain

Act Two

The palace in Antioch.

SCENE I

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 are 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

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 are 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
About 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.
Now has this love like lightning leaped at me!

SCENE II

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?

PHAYLLUS

Weigh not my speech,
But only my sincerity. I have a tongue
Displeasing to all women. Heed not that!

My heart is good, my meaning better still.

RODOGUNE

Perhaps! But know I yearn not for a throne.
And if I did, Antiochus is king
And not this younger radiance.

PHAYLLUS

That's your reason?

You are deceived. Besides he loves you not
Nor ever will put on a female yoke.
Prefer this woman's clay, this Timocles
And by my help you shall have empire, joy,
All the heart needs, the pleasures bodies use.

RODOGUNE

I need no empire save my high-throned heart,
I seek no power save that of sceptred love,
I ask no help beyond what Ormuzd gives.
Enough. I thank you.

PHAYLLUS

You're subtler than these Greeks.
Must he then pine? Shall he not plead his cause?

RODOGUNE

I would not have him waste his heart in pain
If what you say is true. Let him then know
This cannot be.

PHAYLLUS

He will not take from me
An answer you yourself alone can give.
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
If thou hast made me love thee. Tremble not,
Nor grow so pale and look with panic glances
As if a fire had clutched thee by the robe.
I am thy menial, thy poor trembling slave
And thou canst slay me with a passing frown.

RODOGUNE

Touch not my hand! 'tis sacred from thy touch!

TIMOCLES

It is most sacred; even the roseate nail
Of thee, O thou pale goddess, is a mystery
And a strange holiness. Scorched be his hand
Who dares with lightest sacrilegeous touch
Profane thee, O deep-hearted miracle,
Unless thy glorious eyes condone the fault
By growing tender. O thou wondrous Parthian,
Fear not my love; it grows a cloistered worship.
See, I can leave thee! see, I can retire.
Look once on me, one look is food enough
For many twelve months.

Eunice returns.

EUNICE

You wrong your mother, cousin.
Her moments linger when you are not there;
Always she asks for you.

TIMOCLES

My mother! you gods,
Forbid it, lest I weary of her love.

He goes.

EUNICE

What was this? Speak.

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 Menthos.*

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 III

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 would'st 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*)

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.
 O, 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 IV

The hall in the palace.

Timocles, Phayllus.

TIMOCLES

O, all the sweetness and the glory gathered
Into one smiling life, the others 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 Rodogunc.

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 were mine
To fling me over 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
Offend not. For the Parthian, she is mine
And I would keep her though a god desired.**

Exalt not thy presumptuous eyes henceforth
Higher than her sandals.

He goes out.

PHAYLLUS

 This is your brother!
Shall he not have the crown?

TIMOCLES

 Nor her, nor Syria.

*Rodogune and Eunice enter
 passing through the hall.*

My Rodogune, my star! Thou knowest the trade
Which others seek to make of thee. Resist it,
Prevent the insult of this cold award!
Say that thou lov'st me.

RODOGUNE

 Prince, I pity thee,
But cannot love.

She passes out.

EUNICE

 My cousin Timocles,
All flowers are not for your plucking. Roses
Enough that crave to satisfy your want
Are grown in Syria; take them. Here be wise;
Touch not my Parthian blossom.

She passes out.

TIMOCLES

How am I smitten as with a thunderbolt!

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 V

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 any one
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.

Curtain

Act Three

The palace in Antioch.

SCENE I

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 their 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 attend-
ance, 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?

**O not with oaths compel the Syrian blood!
My sons, do you consent?**

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.

Antiochus, my son!

**Your question, Madam, was for Timocles;
From me it needs no answer.**

Your mother's choice? **You accept**

**God's choice. My mother speaks
A thing concealed, not one unsettled.**

Prince,
Syria demands a plainer answer here.

**Who art thou? Art thou of Seleucus' blood
Who questionest Syria's kings?**

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 gate?
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 halls
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 has 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 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 II

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 would'st 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, imperial, 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 with 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 might'st 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 this 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,
Galloping, 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 III

Under the Syrian hills.

Antiochus, his generals, soldiers, Eunice, Rodogune, Menthos.

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 armed 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 know'st 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 barr'st with such ill-omened words my way
Discouraging new-born victory? What thou know'st,
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.

Curtain

Act Four

The palace in Antioch. Before the hills.

SCENE I

Cleopatra's chamber.

Cleopatra, Zoyla.

CLEOPATRA

Will he not come this morning? How my head aches!
Zoyla, 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?

ZOYLA

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. Zoyla,
You saw him with Cleone in the groves
That night of revel?

ZOYLA

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?

ZOYLA

Oh, constantly. One does not see such lovers.

CLEOPATRA (*shaking her off*)

Go!

ZOYLA

Madam?

CLEOPATRA

Thy touch is not like Rodogune's
Nor did her gentle voice offend me. Eunice,

Zoyla 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 II

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, myrtle, 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 meanness?

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 need'st 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 are 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.

TIMOCLES

I'll not be tempted by thee.

PHAYLLUS

No, by thyself
Be tempted and the thought of Rodogune.
Or shall we leave her to her present joys?
Perhaps she sleeps yet by Antiochus
Or held by him to sweeter vigilance.

TIMOCLES (*furiously*)

Accursèd ruffian, give her to my arms.
Use fair means or use foul, use steel, use poison,
But free me from these inner torments.

PHAYLLUS

From more
Than passion's injuries. Trust thy fate to me
Who am its guardian.

He goes out.

TIMOCLES

I am afraid, afraid!
What furies out of hell have I aroused
Within, without me? Let them do their will.
For I must have her once between my arms,
Though Heaven leap down in lightnings.

SCENE III

*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 IV

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 knew'st, 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 tents!
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 ended
The great Seleucus' work." Whatever else
O'ertake 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 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 V

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.**

Curtain

Act Five

The palace in Antioch.

SCENE I

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 perils, 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 forward.

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 chamber 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 even do 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 II

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 III

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 IV

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 wert;
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 think'st thyself!

PHAYLLUS

Thou know'st 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 see'st the sun
And think'st 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 seem'st 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 mightest 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 light.

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 An'iochus,
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 is 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-tainted 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.

Curtain

E R I C

A dramatic romance

CHARACTERS

ERIC

SWEGN

HARDICNUT

RAGNAR

GUNT HAR

HARALD

ASLAUG

HERTHA

SCENE :

*Eric's Palace in his town
of Yara. The Mountains,
Swegn's Fastness.*

And not a chain that binds, not won, gold
Nor any helpless thought that reason knows.
How shall I seize it? where? give me a net
By which the fugitive can be secured. It is
Too unsubstantial for my own mind.

Aslaug
(intends)

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

Who sings outside?

(to Harald as he enters.)

Harald, who sings outside?

Harald

Two dancing-girls from Gokberg. Shall they come?

Eric

Admit them. 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

Hail, Eric, these are they who sang

Eric

Who are you? or what god directed you? ^{Women,}

Aslaug

The god that rules all men, Necessity

Eric

Was thou that sangst!

Aslaug

My lips at least were used

Act One

Eric's palace.

SCENE I

Eric, Aslaug, Hertha, Harald, Gunthar.

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 only by the swiftness of his sword
That monarchy's assured,¹ headlong, athirst,
My iron hound pursues its panting prey.²
And 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; one³ strength's behind
I have not; I would search⁴ it out. Help me,
Whatever Power thou art that mov'st the world,
To Eric unrevealed. Some sign I ask.

ASLAUG (*outside, singing*)

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.

¹ secured ² Ineffugably that pursues its prey. ³ some ⁴ must find

Love is the hoop of the gods
Hearts to combine.

ERIC (*rising from his seat*)

Is that your answer? Freya, Mother of Heaven,
Thou wast forgotten. The heart! the seat is there;
For unity is substance of the heart
And not a chain that binds, not iron, gold
Nor any helpless thought that¹ 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 (*outside, singing*)

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?

(*to Harald, as he enters*)

Harald, who sings outside?

HARALD

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

¹ our / the

But thinks his mind the mover of his words.

Harald returns with Aslaug and Hertha.

HARALD

King Eric, these are they who sang.

ERIC

Women,
Who are you? or what god directed you?

ASLAUG

The god that rules all men, Necessity.

ERIC

'Twas thou that sang'st!

ASLAUG

My lips at least were used.

ERIC

Thou sayest. Dost thou know by whom?¹

ASLAUG

By Fate.

For she alone is prompter on our stage,
Things seen and unforeseen move by a doom,²
Not freely. Eric's sword and Aslaug's song,
Music and thunder are but petty chords
Of one majestic harp. She builds, she breaks,
She thrones, she slays, as needed for her harmony.³

ERIC

I think the soul is master.

(Turning to Hertha)

¹ Thou knowest. Know'st thou too by whom?

² And all things move by an established doom,

³ for the balance of her harmonies.

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 wild,
Too rough to love the sweetness of a song,
The rhythm of a dance, by need coerced
We passed 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?¹ What news?

GUNT HAR

Swegn, Earl of Trondhjem, lifts his outlawed head.
By desperate churls and broken nobles joined
He moves towards the Swede.

¹ host

ERIC

Let Sigurd's force
From Sweden and his lairs cut off the rude¹
Revolted lord. He only now resists,
Champion of discord, ruthless, fell and fierce²
This partisan and pattern of the past.
Such men are better with the Gods than here
To trouble earth. Let him not live, if taken.³

ASLAUG

Not live?⁴

HERTHA

Will you be silent?⁵

ASLAUG

Blame my heart;⁶
For⁷ it remembered too⁸ unseasonably
That Olaf Thorleikson ruled Norway once,⁹
Swegn was his heir.¹⁰

ERIC

Will you remain with me,
Forgetting Gothberg and your golden¹¹ gains?
Since I have been the fount of your distress,¹²
Make me the source of your great plenty too.¹³

HERTHA

A kingly¹⁴ bounty shall atone for much.

ASLAUG (*low to herself*)

Nobler atonement's asked for.¹⁵

¹ fierce ² bold ³ (i) Let him not live, o'ercome. (ii) Let him not live, if seized.
(iii) Taken, let him not live. ⁴ (i) And yet. . . (ii) Taken, who shall live? ⁵ Be silent.
⁶ (i) 'Twas my heart (ii) It was my heart ⁷ And ⁸ though ⁹ was Norway's Lord
¹⁰ And Swegn his son ¹¹ Swedish ¹² Since I was reason that you are distressed,
¹³ Let me be reason of your plenty too. ¹⁴ The royal ¹⁵ needed.

SCENE II

Hertha, Aslaug.

ASLAUG

Hertha, we dance before the man tonight.
Why not tonight?

HERTHA

Because I do not choose¹
Merely to wound and then be stayed.²

ASLAUG

To near,
To strike, while all posterity applauds.
For Norway's poets to the end of time
Shall sing in praises 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 we³ risk defeat?
Shall⁴ Swegn of Norway roam until the end
The desperate snows and forest⁵ silences,
Outlawed, proscribed, pursued⁶?

ASLAUG

Never⁷ defeat!

HERTHA

The man we come to slay —

ASLAUG

A mighty man!

¹ Because I will not strike, ² Wound perhaps only and be stayed. ³ Will you/If we
⁴ Must ⁵ mountain ⁶ and poor? ⁷ Not again

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 an earl of Odin's stock.

ASLAUG

His fable since he rose! A pauper house
Of one poor vessel and a narrow fiord
And some pine-trees possessor, — that was he,
The root he sprang from.

HERTHA

But from that to tower
In three short¹ summers undisputed² 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.
His voice is like a chant of victory.
But Fate alone decides, when all is said,
Not Thor, not Odin. I will try my Fate.

HERTHA

He is a mere usurper, is he not?
Norway's election made him King, they say.

ASLAUG

Left Olaf Thorleikson no heirs behind?

¹ brief/swift ² the magnificent

Was the throne empty?

HERTHA

Of Trondhjem, that's their cry.
The inland¹ and the north were free to choose.

ASLAUG

As rebels are.

HERTHA

There was a discord there.
The South exulting in her golden gains
Cried, "I am Norway," but the northern earls
Refused consent or, free auxiliaries,
Admitted only leadership in war.
We chose the arbitration of the sword,
That last appeal of all, — the sword has judged
Against our claim.

ASLAUG

The dagger shall o'erride.²

HERTHA

Still you come back to that. Yet think this out.³
Rather than by our blood to call⁴ for his
Is not a gentle peace still possible?⁵
Swegen might have⁶ Trondhjem, Eric all⁷ the north
The suzerainty? It is his. We fought for it.⁸
We have lost it.⁹ Think of this before we strike.

ASLAUG

Better our barren empire of the snows!
Nobler¹⁰ with reindeer herding to survive,

¹ centre ² The dagger overrides. ³ (i) Now think it out. (ii) But think a little.

⁴ pay ⁵ Is not a composition possible? ⁶ rule ⁷ in

⁸ (i) The suzerainty his: we fought for it. (ii) The suzerainty? Is it not his? We fought,

⁹ And lost it. ¹⁰ Better

Or else a free and miserable death
Together.

HERTHA

Better is a tried resolve.¹
Therefore I cast the doubt before your mind.
Be sure in striking.² Aslaug, did you see
The eyes of Eric on you?

ASLAUG (*indifferently*)

I am fair.
Men look upon me.

HERTHA

It gives us the great chance.
At ease, alone with us, absorbed, suddenly
You strike, I leap in seconding the blow.³
Can he escape then? Swegn shall have his throne.⁴

ASLAUG

Arrange it as you will. You have a swift
Contriving careful brain I cannot match.
To dare, to act was always Aslaug's part.

HERTHA

You will not shrink?

ASLAUG

I am not of 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.

¹ It is good to be resolved. ² One strikes more (out) surely.

³ Suddenly you strike, I come in, widen the blow.

⁴ Shall not Swegn have the throne?

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.

She goes out.

HERTHA (*alone*)

Pride violent! loftiness intolerable!
The grandiose kingdom-breaking blow is hers,
The baseness, the deception are for me.
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;
Then 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 resistless time, — then comes, —
All things too great end soon, — death, overthrow,
And our late summer when cold spring is past.

SCENE III

Eric, Aslaug.

ERIC
Come hither.

ASLAUG
Thou hast sent for me?

ERIC
Come hither.
Who 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 the art, and song,
The natural expression of thy soul,
Comes from thy lips, floats, hovers and returns
Like a wild bird that wings around its nest.
This art the princesses of Sweden learn
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 sought'st thou out
Eric of Norway? Wherefore brought'st thou here
That beauty as compelling as thy song,
No man can gaze on and possess his soul?

ASLAUG

I am a dancing-girl. My song and face
Are all my stock; I have carried them for gain
To the most wealthy market.

ERIC

Is it so?¹
I buy these² from thee. Aslaug, thy body too!

ASLAUG

Release me! Wilt thou lay thy hands on death?
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.

¹ Dost thou, girl? ² I have bought them

Will he discover me? Will he compel?

ERIC

If Norway has not sold itself my slave,
Thou hast. Remember what thou art — or claim'st to be.¹

ASLAUG (*to herself*)

He is subtle, terrible. I see the thing
He drives at and admire unwillingly
The mighty tyrant.

ERIC

Better play thy part.²

If thou art really nobler than thou feign'st,
Declare it. If³ thou art a dancing-girl,
I have bought⁴ thee for my⁵ hire, thy song, thy dance,
Thy body. I shrink not from whatever way I can
Possess thee more than hesitates the sea to engulf
What it embraces.⁶

ASLAUG

King, thou speakest words
I scorn to answer.

ERIC

Or even to understand?
Thou art an enemy who⁷ in disguise
Enterest my court to know and break my plans.⁸

¹ Thou hast. Remember what thou art — or else
Thou claim'st to be.

ASLAUG

I am caught in a snare.

² Therefore choose thy part. ³ But ⁴ I hold ⁵ a

⁶ Alternative to "I shrink...embraces"

Girl, I care not by what way
I shall possess thee.

⁷ that ⁸ Seekest my court to spy upon my plans.

ASLAUG

What if I were?

ERIC

Thou hast too lightly then
Devised thy chains and long imprisonment,¹
Too thoughtlessly adventured a divine
And glorious stake, thyself.

ASLAUG

What canst thou to me?²
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 greater peril?

ASLAUG

Than death? None that I tremble at or shun.

ERIC

Dost thou not see that thou art by thy choice
Caged with the danger of the lion's mood?³
Dost thou not see the hunger of his eyes,
Feel on thy face the breath of his desire?

ASLAUG (*alarmed*)

I came not here to spy.

ERIC

Why cam'st thou then?

ASLAUG

To sing, to dance and earn.

¹ Devised thy capture and imprisonment, ² What canst thou do? ³ paw?

ERIC

Then richly earn.¹

Aslaug, even then² thou knowest why I looked
 Upon thee, why I kept thee in my house.
 Thou, thou hast given the means of my desire!³
 Yet if thy form and speech more nobly express
 The truth of thee than thy vocation can,
 Avow it, beg my clemency.

ASLAUG (*violently*)

Thy clemency!

(*controlling herself*)

I am a dancing-girl. I came to earn.

ERIC

Choose yet.

ASLAUG (*after a pause*)

I have not anything to choose.

ERIC

Because thou hast the lioness in thy mood,
 Thou thought'st to play with Eric. It is I
 Who play with thee. Thou liest in my grasp.
 How wilt thou now escape my passionate will?
 I am enamoured of thy golden hair,
 Thy body like the snow, thy antelope eyes,
 Thy neck that seems to know it carries heaven
 Upon it easily. Thy song, thy speech,
 The rhythmic motion of thy gracious limbs
 Walking or dancing, and the careless pride
 That undulates in every gesture and tone,
 Have seized upon me smiling sweet control.

¹ Then earn, Aslaug. ² Thou art no fool,³ Two cancelled lines after this:

Nor think thy feet have entered to escape
 Unchained the antre of thy enemy.

I have not learnt to yield to any power,
But to surprise, to force and to command.
So will I hold thee. Prisoner and enemy,
Or dancing-girl and purchased chattel, choose.
Thou art perturbed? 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 or slay? For thou art capable
Even of such daring.

ASLAUG *(to herself)*

Swiftly, swiftly done,
It may be yet. To put him off an hour,
Some minutes and to strike!

ERIC

What dost thou choose?

ASLAUG *(turning to him)*

I have laughed till now. Unthinking I came here
And dallied with thy thoughts, a little amazed,
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 or¹ violence,
That they suspect all hearts, yes, every word

¹ and

Of sheltering a kindred violence
Or subtler fraud, and they expect their fall
Sudden and savage as their rise has been.
I am a dancing-girl and nothing more.

ERIC

Thou art my dancing-girl and nothing more?
Wear then this necklace and submit thyself, —
Nor think it all thy price.

Aslaug dashes the necklace to the ground.
Thou art not subtle.

ASLAUG (*agitated*)

It is not thus that women's hearts are wooed.

ERIC

If so I woo thee, so do all men woo,
Enamoured of what thou hast claimed to be.
Was't falsely claimed? Wilt thou deny it now
And hope to earn thy pardon with a smile?
Art thou the dancing-girl of Norway still,
Or some disguised, high-reaching, nobler soul?

ASLAUG (*suddenly*)

I am thy dancing-girl, King Eric. See
I take thy necklace.

ERIC

Take it; still be free
As thou decidest, thy price or else my gift.
No light decision I would have thee make,
But one that binds us both. I give thee time.
Ponder and let thy saner mind prevail,
Not courage most perverse, though ardent, rule.
Confess thy treason, Aslaug, trust thy King.

*He goes out. Aslaug, after a silence,
takes the chain from her neck, admires*

*it and throws it on a chair.*¹

ASLAUG

You are too much like drops of royal blood.

*After another pause she takes it again.*²

A necklace? No, a chain! Or wilt thou prove

A god's death-warrant?

*(resuming the necklace on her neck)*³

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?

¹ Aslaug alone, lifts the chain, admires it and throws it on a chair.

² She lifts it again. ³ She puts it round her neck.

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, not heart-perplexed:
But these are thoughts that 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 owes his crown
To our great sacrifice and soothe his grief,
That it was necessary, 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 that 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 license 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.

She goes out.

HERTHA (*alone*)

Swegn then might rule!

(*with a laugh*)

I had almost forgotten Fate between
Smiling, alert, and the unconquered gods.

SCENE IV

Eric, Aslaug.

ERIC

They say the anarchy of love disturbs
Gods even, shaken are the marble natures,
The deathless¹ hearts are melted to the pang
And rapture. Still, O Odin, I would be
Monarch of a calm royalty within,
My blood my subject. But I hear her come.
(to Aslaug who enters)
Art thou resolved and hast thou 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
Understood nothing?²

ASLAUG

What should I understand?

¹ iron

² Another version, starting with this line, omits the next speech of Aslaug and continues Eric's words:

Yet nothing understood? Or art thou, Aslaug,
Surrendered to thy fate? This earthly heaven

ERIC

What I shall do with thee. This earthly heaven
 In which thou liv'st shall not be thine at all;
 It was not shaped to bear¹ 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 sinks² prostrate in such absolute
 Surrender.

ERIC

Thy heart! Is it thy heart that yields?
 (*taking her hands in his own*)
 O thou unparalleled enchanting frame
 For housing of a strong immortal guest!
 If man could seize the heart as palpably,
 The forms, 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:

He touches her eyes and body as he speaks.

For if life's barriers twixt our souls were broken
 Men would be free and our earth paradise
 And the gods live neglected.

ASLAUG (*quickly*)

This heart of mine?
 Purchase it richly, for it is for sale.

¹ It was not fashioned for² falls

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 heard'st 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 gave¹ all for an equal price?
Thou giv'st thy blood of rubies, I my life.

ERIC

Thou hast not chosen then to understand.
Thy soul is truthfuller, Aslaug, than thy words:
Thy lips consent, thy eyes defy me still.

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.

He goes out.

ASLAUG (*breaking into a laugh*)

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.

Curtain

¹ give

Act Two

A room in Eric's house.

SCENE I

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 sudden fierceness*)

Thou err'st,
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 fear'st.

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

If it's that thou fear'st?
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

Whatever was thy purpose, thou art taken,
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
Between our yearnings, passionately take
Thy 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 disturb'st the musing stars
With passion? Soul of Aslaug, art thou mine?

ASLAUG (*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.¹

ASLAUG

It would be best,²

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 still 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.

¹ Of something unachieved. ² Yet that were best,

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 roam'st
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 say'st.
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, he 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 II

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
Of Norway entertained, to whom a child
I was delivered. Song and dance were hers;
I made them mine.

ERIC

Their names? the thrall? the lord?

HERTHA

Olaf of Norway, earl of Trondhjem then,
And Thiordis whom he loved.

ERIC

Thou knowest Swegn,
The rebel?

HERTHA

Yes, I know.

ERIC

And lov'st perhaps?

HERTHA

Myself much better.

ERIC

Yes? He is a man
Treachorous and rude and ruthless, is he not?

HERTHA (*with a movement*)

I would not speak of kings and mighty earls:
These things exceed my station.

ERIC

Ah, thou lov'st!
Thou wilt not blame.

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 think'st 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 know'st 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 Thorleikson,
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 thought! 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 help'st me even as Thor and Odin did.
I make my Norway one.

Curtain

Act Three

The chamber of Eric.

SCENE I

Eric, Harald.

ERIC

At dawn have all things ready for my march.
I come not back without the head of Swegn
Or else his living body. Send to me!¹
Aslaug the dancing-girl.

Harald goes out.

I have resumed
The empire with² 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 various³ harmonies, nor turn
The manifold music of humanity
Into a single and a maddening note.
Strength in the nature,⁴ 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 gap⁵ I could not fill.
It left my soul the torso of a god,
A great design unfinished and my works
Mighty and crude like things admired that pass,
Bare of the immortality that keeps
The ages. O, the word they spoke was true!

¹ Alternative to two lines:

Let none be near tonight. Send here to me

² and ³ ordered ⁴ spirit, ⁵ space

'Tis Love, 'tis Love fills up the gulfs¹ 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,
Reflected in the nature of a man.²

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?
Knowest thou it? Wilt thou lead me there? Thy step
Swift and exultant, canst thou tread its flowers?

¹ gaps ² When Love completes the godhead in a man.

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 seize¹ 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!

¹ That will hold

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 we 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

Thou knowest

Why thou art called?

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

Desired'st 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, since he watches and he knows!
I'll strike him suddenly. One who was fit
For what I purpose, would not shrink at all
Finding the abyss about her either way,
But striking cleanse the touch in her own blood.
So might one act who was not her heart's prey.

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 movement¹ grow a dream of love.

¹ motion

But that shall be when Norway's only mine,
 Swegn taken. Tomorrow at the dawn I march¹
 Towards vehement² 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 when 'tis done, I'll strike myself and finish
 With grief and shame and love.

ERIC

Where is thy chain

I gave thee, Aslaug? I would watch it rise,
 Rubies of passion on a bosom of snow,
 And climb again upon thy breast aheave³
 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.

¹ Alternative to two lines:

Tomorrow at the dawning will I march

² violent ³ And climb forever on thy breast aheave

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 none 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 easily 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.
If I must strike, it could be only now;¹
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

¹ I must strike blindly out or not at all;

Watching us.¹ While I pause, my brother's slain,
 Myself I am doomed a concubine and slave!
 I must not think of him! Close, O mind, close, O eyes!
 Free the unthinking hand to its harsh work.

*She lifts twice the dagger and lowers
 it twice, then flings it on the ground, falling
 on her knees at Eric's feet.*

Eric of Norway, live and do thy will
 With Aslaug, sister of Swegn and Olaf's child,
 Aslaug of Trondhjem! For her thought is grown²
 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

¹ me. ² now

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

Is't a condition? I am lord of thee
And lord of Swegn to slay him or to spare.

ASLAUG

No, an entreaty. I am fallen here,
My head is at thy feet, my life is in thy hands.
The luxury of fall is in my heart.

ERIC

Rise up then, Aslaug, and obey thy lord.

ASLAUG

What is thy will with me?

ERIC

 This, Aslaug, first.
Take up thy dagger, Aslaug, dance thy dance
Of Thiordis with the dagger. See those near me;
For I shall sit nor, shouldst thou strike, defend.
What thy passion chose, let thy fixed heart confirm;
My life and kingdom twice are in thy hands
And I will keep them only as thy gift.

ASLAUG

So are they thine already; but I obey.
Eric, my King and Norway's, my life is mine
No longer, but for thee to keep or break.

ERIC

Swegn's life I hold. Thou gavest it to me

With the dagger.

ASLAUG

It is thine to save.

ERIC

Norway

Thou hast given casting it forever away
From Olaf's line.

ASLAUG

What thou hast taken, I give.

ERIC

At last thyself without one refuge left
Against my passionate strong devouring love.
Thou seest I spare thee nothing.

ASLAUG (*faintly*)

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
This 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?
Thy dagger could no more have touched my heart,¹
Though undefended, than a wind the sun:

¹ breast,

Fate and thy love were my friends within thy heart.
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 or 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

But I will have thy heart's surrender, not
The 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 hopes 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. Nor Thor for thee,
But Freya.

ASLAUG

Thou for me! not other gods.

ERIC

Aslaug, thou hast a ring upon thy hands:
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 upbuilt 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 II

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 thinks thy heart?

ASLAUG

That Swegn shall live.

ERIC

Thou know'st his safety from deliberate swords.
None shall dare touch the head that Aslaug loves.
Yet if some evil chance came edged with doom
Which Odin and my will shall not allow
Or in the fight his splendid rashness slew,
Thou wouldst not hold me guilty of his death,
Aslaug?

ASLAUG

Fate orders all and Fate I now
Have recognised all the world's mystic will
That loves and labours.

ERIC

Because it labours and loves
Our hearts, our wills are counted, are indulged.
Aslaug, for these few days in hope and trust
Anchor thy mind. I shall bring back thy joy,
Because I go with mercy and from love.

He embraces her and goes.

ASLAUG

Swegn lives. A heart, not iron gods, o'errules.¹

Curtain

¹ Swegn lives. A Mind, not iron gods, with laws
Deaf and inevitable, overrules.

Act Four

SCENE I

Swegn's fastness in the hills.

Swegn, Hardicnut, Ragnar, 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 pardons? 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 followed. 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.

GUNTHAR

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 (*scornfully*)

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, 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.

GUNTAR

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.

GUNTAR

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

But why
Am I astonished if triumphant mud
Conceives that the pure heavens are of its stuff
And nature?...
Still there are men who hope to purchase¹ Swegn's
Allegiance, to intimidate with death
And bribe with safety Olaf's son. It seems
Your pastime to insult the seed of Kings.
Think'st thou that 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

¹ ask for

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 right.
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 speak'st
Was fatally by hostile Powers inspired.

SWEGN

Thou liest — they are safe and with the Swede.

GUNTAR

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,
 Think'st 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 Gunther may believe, who even can think
 That Yarislaf begot a god!

SWEGN

Gunthar,

I have my fortune, thou thy answer. Go.

GUNTAR

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 is 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 II

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,...¹
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....

Curtain

Act Five

Eric, Gunthar, Swegn, Aslaug, Hertha.

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. He could not honour¹
This unfamiliar movement of my soul
But would contemn and think my seated strength
Had changed to trembling. Sound² the audience-gong,³
Herald. 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's 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 has put Eric here, Swegn there,
Aslaug between. But I have seen myself,
O you revealing gods, and know though veiled
The immortality that thinks in me,
That plans and reasons.⁴ Masters of Norway, hail!
For all are masters here, not I alone

¹ Alternative for two lines:

For he will not honour mildness nor revere

² Strike ³ bell, ⁴ That loves, that labours.

GUNT HAR

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 the 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. 'Thou vauntest thy blood,
Thy strength? Thou art much stronger, so thou say'st,
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 thou liest? 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. Thou hast no strength,
For thou and these are only Eric's slaves
Who have been his stubborn hinderers. Therefore Fate,
Norway, whose favourite and brother I have grown,
Turned wroth and brought¹ 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, I offer, Swegn, yield to me,
Stand by my side and share thy father's throne.

¹ dragged

SWEGN (*after a silence*)

Yes, thou art fierce and subtle! Let them pronounce
My duty's preferences, if not my heart's,
To them or Right.

ERIC

O narrow obstinate heart!
Had this been but thy country or a cause
Men worship, then it would indeed have been¹
A noble blindness, but thou serv'st thy pride.
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 with him and aim at his heart.
Hertha, my subject, Aslaug, thou my thrall,
Save, if he will, this life. Remember, Swegn,
If Olaf's children must be shame-crowned slaves,
'Tis thou that makest them so.

SWEGN

'Tis thus we meet, —
Were not the snows of Norway preferable,
Daughter of Olaf?

ASLAUG

They were high, but cold.

¹ Men worship, thine would then indeed have been

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 consent. 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

Not 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 not find¹
The argument that can excuse thy fall,
O not to me, but to that worshipped self
Thou wast, my sister?

ASLAUG

What argument?

¹ Alternative to the words starting with "Can it not find...."

Let me hear

What arguments thou hast to justify

A thing our father's spirit cries upon.

After this, Aslaug's speech begins with "I seek no argument...." See next page:

I seek 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,
O my beloved, has been great to me,
Though great, was never wise! but must it ask
So huge a recompense?

ASLAUG

Thou hadst myself. Thou askest my honour.
Will this persuade thee? I have nothing else.

SWEGN

O thou hast overcome my strength at last.
Thou only and so only couldst prevail.
King, thou hast conquered. Not to thee I yield,
But those I loved are thy allies. From these
Recall the wrath, on me instead pronounce
What doom thou wilt — though yielding is doom enough
For Swegn of Norway.

ERIC

Abjure rebellion then,
Receive my mercy.¹

SWEGN

O fortune! It will out.²
The spirit of Olaf will no more sit still
Within me. O though thou slaughter these with pains
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 cast'st 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

¹ Receive my boons. ² I have said; it is received.

To all that I shall do to thine. Learn, Swegn,
I am more cruel! Thou shalt live and see
On them my vengeance. Aslaug, go 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 that had shut....¹
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 thought'st 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,
My thralls, remove your outer robes.

SWEGN

What must I see?

ERIC

As dancing-girls the 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.

¹ Illegible

ERIC

And to break.

Aslaug re-enters.

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?
But hadst thou loved me still, I should not need.

ERIC

Dance.

SWEGN

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,
I shall be faithful to my own disgrace.¹

ERIC

O fear not, King. I can be great again.
Without conditions hast thou yielded.

¹ Yet yield — that name I remember, speak this word.

SWEGN

No.

Let these be spared all shame — for that I yield
My honour has a price — and it is small.

ERIC

That's given without terms binding.

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,
Thy house in Nara, Eric's court — thy country,
To whom thou yielddest, 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 unharassed — thou seest thou wast safe.

Trondhjem's and Olaf's treasures with thee take
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 instead
This ring and recognise it.

SWEGN

It's Freya's ring, worn
On Aslaug's hand. And she who once wears it
Thenceforth sits on Norway's throne.

ERIC

Possess thy father's chair
Intended for thee always from the first.
Nor be amazed that in these dancing-robcs
I scat her here — for they increase its beauty
More than imperial purple. Nor think, Swegn,
Thy sister shamed or false who came to me
....¹ spilling my blood and hers,
A violent and mighty purpose — such
As only noble hearts conceive; and only
She yielded to that noble heart at last
Because 'twas Odin's purpose.

SWEGN

So they came.
Aslaug, thou sought'st my throne, but findst thine own.
I grudge it not to thee — for thy great heart

¹ Illegible

Deserves it. Eric, thou hast won at last
Norway.

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 thou seest that thou couldst not have rebelled
Except by treason against 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 has....¹
With my heart's strings.

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 yet has pardoned.

ERIC

Forgive, Swegn,
Sigurd, thy foe, as I have pardoned first
My father's slaughterer. This is thy....²

SWEGN

'Tis pardoned, not forgiven. Let him not come
Too often in my sight.

¹ Illegible ² Illegible

ERIC

Swegn, I too have boons
To ask of thee.

SWEGN

Let them be difficult then,
If thou wouldst have me grant them.

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 adorn'st thy throne.

ERIC

Rest, brother, from thy hardships and thy wars
Until I need thy sword that matched with mine
To smite my foemen.
Aslaug, what thinkest thou?
If thou art satisfied, then all well, nobly done.

ASLAUG

Thou hast the tyrant in thy nature still
And so I love thee best. What canst thou do but well?
For in thy every act and word I see
The gods compel thee.

ERIC

Or thou hast changed me with thy starry eyes,
Daughter of Olaf, and....¹ a man

¹ Illegible

Where was but height and iron, all my roots
Of action, mercy, greatness, enterprise
Sit now transplanted in thy breast, O charm,
O noble marvel! From thy bosom my strength
Comes out to me.

Thou sangst, Aslaug, once of the golden hoop,
Mightier and swifter than the warrior's sword.
Dost thou remember what thou cam'st to do,
Aslaug, from Gothberg?
The gods have spoken since and shown their hand.
They shut our eyes and drive us, but at last
Our souls remember when the act is done.

ASLAUG

That it was fated. Now for us, O beloved,
The world begins again, who since the stars were formed
Playing the game of games by Odin's will
Have met and parted, parted, met again
For ever.

Curtain

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

PERSEUS THE DELIVERER was originally published in serial form in the weekly *Bande Mataram*, Calcutta, 1907. Subsequently it was included in *Collected Poems and Plays* of Sri Aurobindo, published in 1942, with the exception of two scenes which were not available at that time. The missing scenes (Act II, Scenes 2 & 3) were later found and included in the 1955 edition.

VASAVADUTTA exists in several versions, not all of them complete. What seems to be the last complete version has this note at the end: "Revised and recopied between April 8th and April 17th, 1916." An earlier version has a similar entry at the end: "Copied Nov. 2, 1915 — written between 18th and 30th October 1915. Completed 30th October. Revised in April 1916. Pondicherry." The first edition of **VASAVADUTTA** was published in 1957. It was reprinted in 1965.

RODOGUNE belongs to the end of the Baroda period. It is dated February 1906, just before Sri Aurobindo left Baroda for Bengal. It was first published in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1958, and also issued in book-form in the same year.

ERIC was written in Pondicherry in 1912 or 1913. Several drafts were made of some of its acts and each carries its own later corrections. One is not always sure which corrections were the last to be made. The text published now is more or less a combination of two or more drafts wherever it was thought that the author's purposes would be served better by this arrangement. Alternatives, however, have been given in the footnotes. **ERIC** was first published in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1960, and also issued in book-form in the same year.