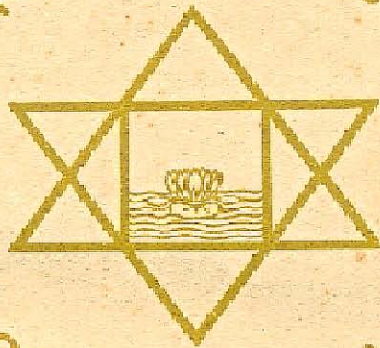




SRI AUROBINDO
BIRTH
CENTENARY LIBRARY



**COLLECTED PLAYS
AND SHORT STORIES**

PART TWO

SRI AUROBINDO



**COLLECTED
PLAYS**

AND SHORT STORIES

PART TWO

**BIRTH CENTENARY
LIBRARY**

VOLUME 7

SRI AUROBINDO BIRTH CENTENARY LIBRARY - POPULAR EDITION

© Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust 1971 . Published By Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry . Reproduced by offset at the All India Press, Pondicherry, India

PRINTED IN INDIA

SRI AUROBINDO

BIRTH

August 15, 1872



MAHASAMADHI

December 5, 1950



CENTENARY

August 15, 1972

CONTENTS

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Page 563

PRINCE OF EDUR

Page 741

THE MAID IN THE MILL

Page 825

THE HOUSE OF BRUT

Page 885

THE PRINCE OF MATHURA

Page 893

THE BIRTH OF SIN

Page 903

VIKRAMORVASIE

Page 911

SHORT STORIES

IDYLLS OF THE OCCULT

THE PHANTOM HOUR

Page 1013

THE DOOR AT ABELARD

Page 1025

THE DEVIL'S MASTIFF

Page 1047

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Page 1052

JUVENILIA

THE WITCH OF ILNI

Page 1059

FRAGMENT OF A DRAMA

Page 1085

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

A Dramatic Romance

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

HAROUN AL RASHEED, Caliph.

JAAFAR, his Vizier.

SHAIKH IBRAHIM, Superintendent of the Caliph's gardens.

MESROUR, Haroun's friend and companion.

MAHOMED BIN SULEYMAN OF ZAYNI, Haroun's cousin,
King of Bassora.

ALFAZZAL IBN SAWY, his chief Vizier.

NUREDDENE, son of Alfazzal.

ALMUENE BIN KHAKAN, second Vizier of Bassora.

FAREED, his son.

SALAR, confidant of Alzayni.

MURAD, a Turk Captain of Police in Bassora.

AJEBE, nephew of Almuene.

SUNJAR, a Chamberlain of the Palace of Bassora.

AZIZ,
ABDULLAH, } merchants of Bassora.

MUAZZIM, a broker.

AZEEM, steward of Alfazzal.

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

KAREEM, a fisherman of Bagdad.

SLAVES, SOLDIERS, GUARDS, EXECUTIONERS,

MERCHANTS, BROKERS.

AMEENA, wife of Alfazzal Ibn Sawy.

DOONYA, his niece.

ANICE-ALJALICE, a Persian slave-girl.

KHATOON, wife of Almuene, sister of Ameena.

BALKIS,
MYMOONA, } sisters, slave-girls of Ajebe.

SLAVE-GIRLS.

Act One

Bassora.

SCENE I

An antechamber in the palace.

Murad, Sunjar.

MURAD

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

SUNJAR

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

MURAD

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

SUNJAR

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

MURAD

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

SUNJAR

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

Enter Ibn Sawy.

IBN SAWY (*to himself*)

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

SUNJAR

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

MURAD

The peace, Álfazzal Ibn Sawy.

IBN SAWY

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

MURAD

Vizier, and my own!
I would impeach the Vizier Almuene

Before our royal master.

IBN SAWY

You'll do unwisely.

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

MURAD

I will be guided by you, sir.

IBN SAWY

My honest Turk, you will do well.

SUNJAR

He's here.

Enter Almuene.

MURAD

The peace upon you, son of Khakan.

ALMUENE

Captain,

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

MURAD

I govern Bassora more honestly
Than you the kingdom.

ALMUENE

Soldier! rude Turcoman!

IBN SAWY

Nay, brother Almuene! Why are you angry?

ALMUENE

That he misgoverns.

IBN SAWY

In what peculiar instance?

ALMUENE

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

MURAD

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

ALMUENE

Turk, I know you.

IBN SAWY

In all fraternal kindness hear me speak.
What Murad says, is truth. For your Fareed,
However before you he blinks angelically,
Abroad he roars half-devil. Never, Vizier,
Was such a scandal until now allowed

In any Moslem town. Why, it is just
Such barbarous outrage as in Christian cities
May walk unquestioned, not in Bassora
Or any seat of culture. It should be mended.

ALMUENE

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

IBN SAWY

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

ALMUENE

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

IBN SAWY

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

ALMUENE

Well, brother Turk, you are excused.

MURAD

Excused!

Viziers, the peace.

IBN SAWY

I'll follow you.

ALMUENE

Turk, the peace!

IBN SAWY

Peace, brother. See to it, brother.

Exit with Murad.

ALMUENE

Brother, peace.

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

(seeing Sunjar)

You! You! You spy? You eavesdrop?

And I must be rebuked with this to hear it!

Well, I'll remember you.

SUNJAR

Sir, I beseech you,

I had no smallest purpose to offend.

ALMUENE

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

Exit.

SUNJAR

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

Exit.

SCENE II

A room in Almuene's house.

Almuene, Khatoon.

KHATOON

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

ALMUENE

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

KHATOON

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

ALMUENE

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

KHATOON

I shall be glad some day to find your courage.

Enter Fareed, jumping and gyrating.

FAREED

Oh father, father, father, father, father!

KHATOON

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

ALMUENE

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

FAREED

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

ALMUENE.

My gamesome goblin!

KHATOON

You prompt him

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

Exit.

FAREED

Girl, father! such a girl! a girl of girls!
Buy me my girl!

ALMUENE

What girl, you leaping madcap?

FAREED

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

ALMUENE

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

FAREED

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

ALMUENE

How will you make your slave-girl love you, hunch?

FAREED

She'll be my slave-girl and she'll have to love me.

ALMUENE

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

FAREED

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

ALMUENE

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

FAREED

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

ALMUENE

You're my own lad.

FAREED

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

ALMUENE

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

FAREED

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

Exit, calling.

ALMUENE

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

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

Exit.

SCENE III

The Slave-market.

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

MUZZIM

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

BALKIS

Who is the handsome youth in that rich dress?

MUZZIM

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

BALKIS

Praise me to them poetically, broker.

MUZZIM

I promise you for the poetry. Biddings, gentlemen.

A MERCHANT

Three thousand for the pretty one.

MUZZIM

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

AZIZ

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

MUZZIM

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

BALKIS (*to Ajebe*)

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

AJEBE

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

BALKIS

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

AJEBE

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

MUAZZIM

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

AJEBE

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

MUAZZIM

Does any bid beyond?

MERCHANT

Let me see, let me see.

ABDULLAH

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

Crossing her wishes.

MERCHANT

Let her go, let her go.

MUAZZIM

To you, sir, she belongs.

BALKIS

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

AJEBE

She's fair, but not like you.

BALKIS

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

MUAZZIM

They make a single lot.

AJEBE

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

MUAZZIM

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

AJEBE

I'll send the money.

Exit with Balkis and Mymoona.

ABDULLAH

What, a bargain, broker?

MUAZZIM

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

AZIZ

The Vizier!

Enter Ibn Sawy.

ABDULLAH

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

MERCHANTS

Welcome, welcome, noble Vizier.

IBN SAWY

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

ABDULLAH

My brother's failed, sir.

IBN SAWY

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

MUAZZIM

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

IBN SAWY

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

MUZZIM

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

IBN SAWY

It is a sum.

MUZZIM

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

Exit Khalid.

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

IBN SAWY

A necklet!

MUZZIM

A costly trifle. "Send it to such a house,"
He tells me like a prince, "and dun my father
For the amount. I know you'll clap it on

As high as Elburz, you old swindler. Fleece him!"
He is a merry lad.

IBN SAWY

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

MUAZZIM

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

IBN SAWY

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

Exit.

MUAZZIM

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

Enter Khalid with Anice-Aljalice.
Khalid, run

And call the Vizier, he was here just now.

Exit Khalid. Enter Almuene, Fareed and slaves.

FAREED

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

ALMUENE

You deal, sir? I know you well. Today be more honest than is

your wont. Is she bid for?

MUAZZIM (*aside*)

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

ALMUENE

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

MUAZZIM

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

ALMUENE

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

MUAZZIM

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

ALMUENE

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

MUAZZIM

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

ALMUENE

Us! Between us! Thou dirty broking cheat,
Am I thy equal? Throw him the money, Nubian.

But if he boggle, seize him, have him flat
And powerfully persuade him with your sticks.
You, beauty, come. What, hussy, you draw back?

FAREED

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

MUAZZIM

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

ALMUENE

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

Enter Khalid with Ibn Sawy.

MUAZZIM

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

IBN SAWY

What is this?

MUAZZIM

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

IBN SAWY

Is this true,

Vizier?

ALMUENE

Someone beat out my foggy brains?

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

IBN SAWY

First, a word.

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

ALMUENE (*to himself*)

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

IBN SAWY

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

ALMUENE

Quite first.

Well, shall I see you at your house today?

IBN SAWY

State business, brother?

ALMUENE

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

IBN SAWY

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

ALMUENE

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

IBN SAWY

I hope so. Well, we'll talk.

ALMUENE

Fareed, come with me.

FAREED

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

ALMUENE

Wagtail, your uncle takes her.

FAREED

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

ALMUENE

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

FAREED

Oh!

ALMUENE

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

FAREED

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

Exit in a rage, followed by Almuene and slaves.

MUAZZIM

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

IBN SAWY

You, mistress! Does the earth contain such beauty?

MUAZZIM

Did I not tell you so?

IBN SAWY

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

Anice-Aljalice they call me.

IBN SAWY

What is your history?

ANICE-ALJALICE

My parents sold me
In the great famine.

IBN SAWY

What, is your mould indeed a thing of earth?

Peri, have you not come disguised from heaven
To snare us with your lovely smiles, you marvel?

ANICE-ALJALICE

I am a slave and mortal.

IBN SAWY

Prove me that.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBN SAWY

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

MUAZZIM

She is a gift to thee, O Vizier.

IBN SAWY

Ceremony?

I rate her value at ten thousand clear.

MUAZZIM

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

IBN SAWY

You counsel wisely. There's my poaching rascal, —
But I will seal her fast even from his questings,
The peace, Muazzim.

MUAZZIM

Peace, thou good Vizier, loaded with our blessings.

Exeunt.

SCENE IV

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

AMEENA

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

DOONYA

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

AMEENA

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

DOONYA

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

AMEENA

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

DOONYA

So the girls think

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

AMEENA

I a bad mother, Doonya?

DOONYA

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

AMEENA

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

DOONYA

Is it he who comes?

She goes out and returns.

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

AMEENA

A rival, you mad girl!

Enter Ibn Sawy and Anice-Aljalice.

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

I'll see to it.

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

I spoil him, husband!

IBN SAWY

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

DOONYA

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

IBN SAWY

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

DOONYA

When you last were harsh.

IBN SAWY

You shall be married off. I will not have you
Mocking an old and reverend man like me.
Whom will you marry, chit?

DOONYA

An old, old man,
Just such a smiling harsh old man as you,

None else.

IBN SAWY

And not a boy like young Fareed?
His father wishes it; he too, I think.

DOONYA

Throw me from this high window to the court
Or tell me ere the day and I will leap.

IBN SAWY

Is he so bad? I thought it. No, my niece,
You marry not with Khakan's evil stock,
Although there were no other bridegroom living.
I'll leave you, Ameena. Anice, I have a son,
Handsome and wanton. Let him not behold you!
You are wise and spirited beyond your years,
Above your sex; I trust in your discretion.

ANICE-ALJALICE

I will be careful, sir. Yet trust in bars
And portals, not in me. If he should find me,
I am his slave and born to do his will.

IBN SAWY

Be careful, dame.

Exit.

AMEENA

How fair you are, small lady!
'Tis better truly he should see you not.
Doonya, be careful of her. I'll go before
And make your casket ready for you, gem.
Bring her behind me, Doonya.

Exit.

DOONYA (*leaping on Anice*)

What's your name,

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

DOONYA

Tell it me without breathing.

ANICE-ALJALICE

It's too long.

DOONYA

Let's hear it.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Anice-Aljalice.

DOONYA

Anice,

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

She runs out.

ANICE-ALJALICE

My King is here. But they would give me
To some thick-bearded swart and grizzled Sultan
Who'd see me once a week and keep me penned
For service, not for mirth and love. My prince
Is like our Persian boys, fair-faced and merry,
Fronting the world with glad and open looks
That make the heart rejoice. Ten days! 'tis much.
Kingdoms have toppled in ten days.

Doonya returns.

DOONYA

Come, Anice.

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

Exeunt.

Curtain

Act Two

Bassora.

SCENE I

*Ibn Sawy's house. An upper chamber in the women's apartments.
Doonya, Anice-Aljalice.*

DOONYA

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

DOONYA

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

While he could see me.

DOONYA

Yes, that was Nureddene.

ANICE-ALJALICE

You'll help me?

DOONYA

Yes,

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

DOONYA

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

Comes he not daily then?

DOONYA

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

I'll stop all that when he is mine.

DOONYA

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

I will.

DOONYA

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

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

SCENE II

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

AMEENA

Has he come in?

DOONYA

He has.

AMEENA

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

DOONYA

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

AMEENA

Away, you madcap! Call him here.

DOONYA

The culprit
Presents himself unsummoned.

Enter Nureddene.

NUREDDENE (*at the door*)

Ayoob, Ayoob!
A bowl of sherbet in my chamber.
(*entering*)

Well, mother,
Here I am back, your errant gadabout,
Your vagabond scapegrace, tired of truancy
And very hungry for my mother's arms.

It's good to see you smile!

AMEENA

My dearest son!

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

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

AMEENA

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

DOONYA

Oh, now, now, we are stem!

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

True, true, and of the taste
Of different wines and qualities of girls;

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

DOONYA

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

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

Call it Cumcatchia or Nonsensicum.

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

From Bassora to the quite distant moon.

NUREDDENE

There I shall reign with beauty and splendour round

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

DOONYA

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

NUREDDENE

Your suit is granted.
And meanwhile, Doonya, I amuse myself
With nearer kingdoms, Miriam's wavy locks
And Shazarath-al-Durr's sweet voice of song.

DOONYA

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

AMEENA

Your father's angry.

I have not known him yet so moved. My child,
Do not force us to punish you.

NUREDDENE

With kisses?

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

AMEENA

Not care!

NUREDDENE

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

AMEENA

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

DOONYA

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

NUREDDENE

I have found her, Doonya.

DOONYA

The backward glance?

AMEENA

Your father!

Enter Ibn Sawy.

IBN SAWY

Ameena,

I'm called to the palace; something is afoot.
Ah, rascal! ah, you villain! you have come?

NUREDDENE

Sir, a long hour.

IBN SAWY

Rogue! scamp! what do you mean?

Knave, is my house a caravanserai
For you to lodge in when it is your pleasure?

NUREDDENE

It is the happiest home in Bassora,
Where the two kindest parents in the world
Excuse their vagabond son.

IBN SAWY

Hum! well! What, fellow,
You will buy trinkets? You will have me dunned?
And fledged?

NUREDDENE

Did he dun you? I hope he asked
A fitting price; I told him to.

IBN SAWY

Sir, sir,
What game is this to buy your hussies trinkets

And send your father in the bill? Who taught you
This rule of conduct?

NUREDDENE

You, sir.

IBN SAWY

I, rascal?

NUREDDENE

You told me

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

IBN SAWY

Logic of impudence?

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

NUREDDENE

Not in so many words.

IBN SAWY

So many devils!

NUREDDENE

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

IBN SAWY

I'm dumb!

NUREDDENE

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

IBN SAWY

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

NUREDDENE

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

IBN SAWY

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

NUREDDENE

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

IBN SAWY

What! What! Impudent rascal!
(*aside*)
You handsome laughing rogue! Hear, Ameena,
Let Doonya sleep with Anice every night.
No, come, hear farther.

Exit with Ameena.

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

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

NUREDDENE

I asked Muazzim.

DOONYA

A quite absolute liar.

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

What, could one backward glance sweep you so forward?

NUREDDENE

Why, Doonya!

DOONYA

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

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

What will you give me for it?
None of your night-hawk kisses, cousin mine!
But a mild loving kind fraternal pledge
I'll not refuse.

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

More, more! I must be flattered.

NUREDDENE

No more. Come, mischief,

You'll keep me in suspense?

Pulls her ears.

DOONYA

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

NUREDDENE

Doonya, Doonya!

But those two loving hypocrites, —

DOONYA

All's meant

To be surprise.

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

Stop, stop! You do not know;
There is an ogre at her door, a black

White-tusked huge-muscled hideous grinning giant,
Of mood uproarious, horrible of limb,
An Ethiopian fell ycleped Harkoos.

NUREDDENE

The eunuch!

DOONYA

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

NUREDDENE

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

Exit.

DOONYA

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

Exit.

SCENE III

*Ibn Sawy's house. The upper chambers of the women's apartments.
Doonya, sleeping on a couch. Enter Nureddene and Anice-Aljalice.*

NUREDDENE

I told you 'twas the morning.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Morning so early?

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

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

It is our star
And guards us both.

NUREDDENE

It is the star of Anice,
The star of Anice-Aljalice who came
From Persia guided by its silver beams
Into these arms of vagrant Nureddene
Which keep her till the end. Sweet, I possess you!
Till now I could not potently believe it.
Strange, strange that I who nothing have deserved,
Should win what all would covet! We are fools
Who reach at baubles taking them for stars.
O wiser woman who come straight to Heaven!
But I have wandered by the way and staled
The freshness of delight with gadding pleasures,
Anticipated Love's perfect fruit with sour
And random berries void of real savour.

Oh fool! had I but known! What can I say
But once more that I have deserved you not,
Who yet must take you, knowing my undesert,
Whatever come hereafter?

ANICE-ALJALICE

The house is stirring.

NUREDDENE

Who is this sleeping here? My cousin Doonya!

DOONYA (*waking*)

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

NUREDDENE

Dame Mischief, thanks; thanks, Mother Madcap.

DOONYA

Now, whither?

NUREDDENE

To earth from Paradise.

DOONYA

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

(*opening the door*)

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

Exit.

ANICE-ALJALICE

They will be angry.

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

Whatever comes, we are each other's now.

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

Yes,

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

NUREDDENE

You have the love.

Doonya returns.

DOONYA

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

Enter Ameena at the door.

AMEENA

Harkoos!

Sleeping!

HARKOOS

Gmm — Mmm —

DOONYA

Grunted almost like nature,
Thou excellent giant.

AMEENA

Harkoos, dost thou sleep?

HARKOOS

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

AMEENA

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

HARKOOS

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

AMEENA

My mind misgives me.
(*enters the room.*)

Was this well done, my child?

NUREDDENE

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

AMEENA

You, Doonya, too
Were part of this?

DOONYA

Part! you shall not abate
My glory; I am its artificer,
The auxiliary and supplement of Fate.

AMEENA

Quite shameless in your disobedience, Doonya?
Your father's anger will embrace us all.

NUREDDENE

And nothing worse than the embrace which ends
A chiding and a smile, our fault deserves.
You had a gift for me in your sweet hands
Concealed behind you; I have but reached round
And taken it ere you knew.

AMEENA

For you, my son?
She was not for you, she was for the King.
This was your worst fault, child; all others venial
Beside it.

NUREDDENE

For the King! You told me, Doonya,
That she was bought for me, a kind surprise
Intended?

DOONYA

I did, exact!

AMEENA

Such falsehood, Doonya!

DOONYA

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

NUREDDENE

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

AMEENA

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

NUREDDENE

The King!

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

Exit with Doonya.

AMEENA

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

HARKOOS

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

Exit.

AMEENA

Yet, Anice, tell me, is't too late? Alas!
Your cheeks and lowered eyes confess the fault.
I fear your nature and your nurture, child,
Are not so beautiful as is your face.
Could you not have forbidden this?

ANICE-ALJALICE

Lady,

Remember my condition. Can a slave
Forbid or order? We are only trained

To meek and quick obedience; and what's virtue
In freemen is in us a deep offence.

Do you command your passions, not on us
Impose that service; 'tis not in our part.

AMEENA

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

I deny not, lady,
My heart consented to this fault.

AMEENA

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

Exit Anice. Enter Harkoos and Ibn Sawy.

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

The worst.

IBN SAWY

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

HARKOOS

The way of the world. Whose peg's loose? Beat Harkoos.
Because my young master would climb through the wrong win-

dow and mistake a rope-ladder for the staircase, my back must ache. Was the window-sill my post? Have I wings to stand upon air or a Djinn's eye to see through wood? How bitter is injustice!

IBN SAWY

You shall be thrashed for your poor gift of lying.

AMEENA

Blame none; it was unalterable fate.

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

What will you do?

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

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

IBN SAWY

With lies?

AMEENA

With silence.

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

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

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

Do this.

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

IBN SAWY

This has a promise.
Give me a knife and let me try to frame

My looks to anger.

AMEENA

Harkoos, a dagger here!

Harkoos gives his dagger.

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

Trust me.

IBN SAWY

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

Exit Harkoos.

Go, Ameena.

Exit Ameena.

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

Enter Nureddene and Harkoos.

NUREDDENE

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

HARKOOS

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

NUREDDENE

Father!

IBN SAWY

O rascal, traitor, villain, imp!

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

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

NUREDDENE

Mother, quick!

Help, mother!

Ameena comes hurrying in.

The poor dear old man is mad.

IBN SAWY

Ah, woman! Wherefore do you come so soon?

NUREDDENE

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

IBN SAWY

Take me off, you villain?

NUREDDENE

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

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA (*frightened*)

Husband, what do you? think,
He is your only son.

IBN SAWY

And preferable

I had not him. Better no son than bad ones.

NUREDDENE

Is there no help then?

IBN SAWY

None; prepare!

NUREDDENE

All right.

But let me lie a little easier first.

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

This goes no farther.

ANICE-ALJALICE (*looking in*)

They are in angry talk.

Oh, kill me rather!

NUREDDENE

Waste not your terrors, sweet heart.

We are rehearsing an old comedy,
"The tyrant father and his graceless son".
Foolish, old man!

IBN SAWY

What! What!

NUREDDENE

See now the end
Of all your headstrong moods and wicked rages
You would indulge yourself in, though I warned you,
Against your gallant handsome virtuous son.

And now they have turned your brain! Vicious indulgence,
How bitter-dusty is thy fruit! Be warned
And put a rein on anger, curb in wrath,
That enemy of man. Oh, thou art grown
A sad example to all angry fathers!

IBN SAWY

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

HARKOOS

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

IBN SAWY

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

NUREDDENE

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

IBN SAWY

It was a fault, my child.

NUREDDENE

Which I cannot repent.

IBN SAWY

You are my son, generous and true and bold
Though faulty. Take the slave-girl then, but swear
Never hereafter mistress, slave or wife
Lies in your arms but only she; neither,

Until herself desire it, mayst thou sell her.
Swear this and keep thy love.

NUREDDENE

I swear it.

IBN SAWY

Leave us.

Exit Nureddene.

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBN SAWY

Go in, my child, go, Anice.

Exit Anice.

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

AMEENA

It is a weary time.

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

Who, husband?

IBN SAWY

Murad, Captain of the City.
He rises daily in Alzayni's favour.

AMEENA

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

IBN SAWY

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

AMEENA

Oh wherefore this?

IBN SAWY

'Tis likely that the boy,
Left here in sole command, will waste his wealth
And come to evil. If he's sober, well;
If not, when he is bare as any rock,
Abandoned by his friends, spewed out by all,
It may be that in this sharp school and beaten
With savage scourges the wild blood in him
May learn sobriety and noble use:
Then rescue him, assist his better nature.
And we shall see too how the loves endure
Betwixt him and the Persian; whether she
Deserves her monarchy in his wild will,
Or, even deserving, keeps it.

AMEENA

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

IBN SAWY

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

Exeunt.

SCENE IV

A room in Ajebe's house.

AJEBE

Balkis, do come, my heart.

Enter Balkis.

BALKIS

Your will?

AJEBE

My will!

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

BALKIS

Was it for abuse

You called me?

AJEBE

Bring your lute and sing to me.

BALKIS

I am not in the mood.

AJEBE

Sing, I entreat you.

I am hungry for your voice of pure delight.

BALKIS

I am no kabob, nor my voice a curry.
Hungry, forsooth!

Exit.

AJEBE

Oh, Balkis, Balkis! hear me.

Enter Mymoona.

MYMOONA

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

AJEBF

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

Exit.

MYMOONA

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

She conceals herself behind a curtain.

Re-enter Ajebe with Almuene.

ALMUENE

He goes tomorrow? Well. And Nureddene
The scapegrace holds his wealth in hand? Much better.
I always said he was a fool. (*To himself*) Easily
I might confound him with this flagrant lapse
About the slave-girl. But wait! wait! He gone,
His memory waned, his riches squandered quite,
I'll ruin his son, ruin the insolent Turk
He has preferred to my Fareed. His Doonya
And Arice slave-girls to my lusty boy,
His wife — but she escapes. It is enough
They come back to a desolate house. Oh! let
Their forlorn wrinkles hug an empty nest
In life's cold leafless winter! Meanwhile I set
My seal on every room in the King's heart;
He finds no chamber open when he comes.

AJEBE

Uncle, you ponder things of weight?

ALMUENE

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

AJEBE

We drink together.

ALMUENE

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

AJEBE

Why, uncle!

ALMUENE

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

AJEBE

All men desire those blessings, fear these ills.

ALMUENE

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

AJEBE

What service?

ALMUENE

Ruin wanton Nureddene.
Gorge him with riot and excess; rob him
Under a friendly guise; force him to spend
Till he's a beggar. Most, delude him on
To prone extremity of drunken shame
Which he shall feel, yet have no power to check.
Drench all his senses in vile profligacy,

Nor mere light gallantries, but gutter filth,
Though you have to share it. Do this and you're made;
But this undone, you are yourself undone.
Eight months I give you. No, attend me not.

Exit.

AJEBE

Mymoona! girl, where are you?

MYMOONA

Here, here, behind you.

AJEBE

A Satan out of hell has come to me.

MYMOONA

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

AJEBE

What shall I do?

MYMOONA

Not what he tells you to.

AJEBE

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

MYMOONA

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

AJEBE

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

MYMOONA

Do one thing.

AJEBE

I will do what you shall bid me.

MYMOONA

He has some vile companions, has he not?

AJEBE

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

MYMOONA

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

AJEBE

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

MYMOONA

And Balkis?

AJEBE

True.

MYMOONA

Be safe, be safe. The rest
Is doubtful, but one truth is sadly sure,

That dead men cannot love.

AJEBE

I'll think of it.

Mymoona, leave me; send your sister here.

Exit Mymoona.

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

Enter Balkis.

BALKIS

What's your command?

AJEBE

Bring me your lute and sing.

I'm sad and troubled. Cross me not, my girl,
My temper's wry.

BALKIS

Oh, threats?

AJEBE

Remember still

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

BALKIS

Do, do! yes, beat me! Or why beat me only?
Kill me, as you have killed my heart already
With your harsh words. I knew, I knew what all
Your love would end in. Oh! oh! oh! (*Weeps*).

AJEBE

Forgive me,

O sweetest heart. I swear I did not mean it.

BALKIS

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

AJEBE

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

BALKIS

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

Exit.

AJEBE

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

Exit.

Curtain

Act Three

SCENE I

Bassora.

Ibn Sawy's House.

A room in the outer apartments decorated for a banquet.

Doonya, Anice-Aljalice, Balkis.

DOONYA

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

BALKIS

It must be checked.

DOONYA

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

I?

DOONYA

Yes, you. Is there a bright
Unnecessary jewel you have seen
And have not bought? a dress that took your fancy

And was not in a moment yours? Or have you lost
A tiny chance of laughter, song and wine,
Since you were with him?

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

DOONYA

What did these trifles cost?

ANICE-ALJALICE

I do not know.

DOONYA

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

BALKIS

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

DOONYA

But if the skies grew darker?

ANICE-ALJALICE

If they should!
It was a bright and merry world. To see him

Happy and gay and kind was all I cared for,
There my horizon stopped. But if the skies
Did darken! Doonya, it shall cease today.

Enter Azeem.

Well, Azeem.

AZEEM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

AZEEM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

Call him.

AZEEM

He's here.

Enter Nureddene.

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

Like a painted tombstone
Sculptured and arabesqued, but death's inside
And bones, my brother, bones.

NUREDDENE

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

DOONYA

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

Serious, Anice?

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

Is this your doing, Doonya?

DOONYA

Yours, cousin, yours.

NUREDDENE

Is't so? Anice?

ANICE-ALJALICE

I've told you.

NUREDDENE

Show me the bills.

Go in, you three.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Ah, he is grieved and angry!
His eyes are clouded; let me speak to him.

BALKIS

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

DOONYA

Come.

Exit drawing away Anice, Balkis behind.

NUREDDENE

Well, sir, where are these bills?

AZEEM

You will see the bills?

NUREDDENE

The sums, the sums!

AZEEM

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

NUREDDENE

Leave the inventory.

AZEEM

To tailor Labkan another twenty thousand; to the baker two thousand; to the confectioner as much; to the Bagdad curio-merchant twenty-four thousand; to the same from Ispahan, sixteen thousand; to the jeweller on account of necklaces, bracelets, waist-ornaments, anklets, rings, pendants and all manner of trinkets for the slave-girl Anice-Aljalice, ninety thousand only; to the upholsterer —

NUREDDENE

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

AZEEM

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

NUREDDENE

Nothing but thousands!

AZEEM

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

NUREDDENE

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

AZEEM

The fruiterer —

NUREDDENE

Away! bring bags.

AZEEM

Bags, sir?'

NUREDDENE

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

Exit Azeem.

She frown on me! look cold! for sums, for debts!
For money, the poor paltry stuff we dig
By shovels from base mire. Grows love so beggarly
That it must think of piastres? O my heart!

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

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

Exit Azeem.

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

Enter Azeem ushering in the creditors.

Who asks for money?

COOK

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

NUREDDENE

Take thy amount, thou dingy-hearted rogue.

Throws a bag towards him.

You there, take yours.

JEWELLER

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

NUREDDENE

Give him two hundred bags.

HARKOOS

Bags, sir?♦

NUREDDENE

Do you grin, rogue, and loiter? Take that!

Strikes him.

HARKOOS

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

NUREDDENE

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

CREDITORS (*scrambling and quarrelling for the bag*)

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

NUREDDENE

Cudgel them from the room.

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

AZEEM

'Tis madness, sir.

Nureddene motions him away. Exit Azeem.

NUREDDENE

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

Enter Anice.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Nureddene, what have you done?

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

I did not think that you could frown on me
For money, for a matter of money!

ANICE-ALJALICE

You

Believe that? Is it so you know me? Dear,
While for my sake you ruined yourself, must I
Look smiling on? Nay, ruin then yourself
And try me.

NUREDDENE

Dear Anice, it was with myself
I was angry, but the coward in me turned
On you to avenge its pain. Let me forget
All else and only think of you and love.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Shall I sing to you?

NUREDDENE

Do, Anice.

ANICE-ALJALICE

There's a song —

Song

Love keep terms with tears and sorrow?
He's too bright.
Born today, he may tomorrow
Say good night.

Love is gone ere grief can find him;
But his way
Tears that falling lag behind him
Still betray.

I cannot sing.

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

Much happier, Anicè.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

Anice, we shall.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

Sit by me and tell it.

ANICE-ALJALICE

No, no, I'll stand.

NUREDDENE

Well, wilful. Now, your tale.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

As I have you.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

As I'll keep you.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

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

NUREDDENE (*after a pause*)

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

Enter Azeem.

What money still
Is in the treasury? What debts outstand?

AZEEM

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

NUREDDENE

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

AZEEM

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

NUREDDENE

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

Exit.

AZEEM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

There's always Ajebe.

AZEEM

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

Exeunt.

SCENE II

The same.

Anice-Aljalice, Nureddene.

ANICE-ALJALICE

And they all left?

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

This is their friendship!

NUREDDENE

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

Enter Ajebe.

Ajebe, you have come back, you only? Yes,
You were my friend and checked me always. Man
Is not ignoble, but has angel soarings,
Howe'er the nether devil plucks him down.
Still we have souls nor is the mould quite broken
Of that original and faultless plan
Which Adam spoilt.

AJEBE

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

NUREDDENE

What's this?

AJEBE

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

NUREDDENE *(after a silence)*

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

AJEBE

Are you entirely ruined?

NUREDDENE

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

AJEBE

If all I have, —

NUREDDENE

No more! return alive.

AJEBE

You punish home.

Exit.

NUREDDENE

The eunuch lingers.

Enter Harkoos.

Well, sir, your success?

HARKOOS

I went first to Ayoob. He has had losses, very suddenly, and is so colourous that he cannot help you.

NUREDDENE

Ghaneem?

HARKOOS

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

NUREDDENE

Cafoor?

HARKOOS

Has gone into the country — upstairs.

NUREDDENE

Zeb?

HARKOOS

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

NUREDDENE

Omar?

HARKOOS

Will burn his books sooner than lend you money.

NUREDDENE

Did all fail me?

HARKOOS

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

NUREDDENE

Go.

Exit Harkoos.

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

You still have me.

NUREDDENE

That's much.

ANICE-ALJALICE

No, everything.

NUREDDENE

'Tis true, and I shall feel it soon.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

Shall I take back my gifts?

ANICE-ALJALICE

If they are mine,
I choose to sell them.

NUREDDENE

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

Exeunt.

SCENE III

A room in Ajebe's house.

Balkis, Mymoona.

BALKIS

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

MYMOONA

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

BALKIS

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

MYMOONA

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

BALKIS

I think my heart will break.

MYMOONA

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

BALKIS (*in tears*)

How can you be so harsh to me, Mymoona?

MYMOONA

You foolish child! Why did you strain your power
To such a breaking tightness? There's a rhythm
Will shatter hardest stone; each thing in nature
Has its own point where it has done with patience
And starts in pieces; below that point play on it,
Nor overpitch the music. Look, he is coming.

BALKIS

I'll go.

MYMOONA (*holding her*)

You shall not.

Enter Ajebe.

AJEBE

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

BALKIS

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

AJEBE

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

BALKIS

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

AJEBE

Some have strange ways of tenderness, Mymoona.

BALKIS

Mymoona, some think all control a tyranny.

MYMOONA

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

AJEBE

My hand? Wherefore my hand?

MYMOONA

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

BALKIS

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

AJEBE

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

MYMOONA

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

AJEBE

Only to satisfy you,
Whom only I care for.

MYMOONA

Yours here on his neck.

BALKIS

I was about to yawn, therefore, I raised them.

MYMOONA

I go to fetch a cane. Look that I find you.
Much better friends. If you will not agree,
Your bones at least shall sympathise and ruefully.

Exit.

AJEBE

How could you be so harsh to my great love?

BALKIS

How could you be so cruel and so wicked?

AJEBE

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

BALKIS

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

AJEBE

Will you be kinder?

BALKIS

Will you be more obedient and renounce
Your hateful uncle?

AJEBE

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

BALKIS

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

AJEBE

My queen of love.

BALKIS

Both, both.

AJEBE

Why were you so long froward?

BALKIS

Do you remember

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

AJEBE

Vindictive shrew!

BALKIS

This time had I not reason to be angry?

AJEBE

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

Enter Mymoona.

MYMOONA

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

BALKIS

Never!

MYMOONA

He must. ,

AJEBE

I'll lend him thrice her value.

MYMOONA

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

BALKIS

Then let me keep her as a dear deposit,

SCENE IV

Ibn Sawy's house.

Anice-Aljalice, alone.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

Enter Nureddene.

Has Murad failed him?

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

The dresses and the gems you made me keep —

NUREDDENE

Keep them; they are your own.

ANICE-ALJALICE

I am your slave-girl.

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

NUREDDENE

Girl, would you have me strip you then quite bare?

ANICE-ALJALICE

What does it matter? The coarsest rag ten dirhams

Might buy, would be enough, if you'd still love me.

NUREDDENE

These would not meet one half of what I owe.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Master, you bought me for ten thousand pieces.

NUREDDENE

Be silent.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Has my value lessened since?

NUREDDENE

No more! You'll make me hate you.

ANICE-ALJALICE

If you do,
'Tis better, it will help my heart to break.

NUREDDENE

Have you the heart to speak of this?

ANICE-ALJALICE

Had I
Less heart, less love, I would not speak of it.

NUREDDENE

I swore to my father that I would not sell you.

ANICE-ALJALICE

But there was a condition.

NUREDDENE

If you desired it!

ANICE-ALJALICE

Do I not ask you?

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE (*weeping*)

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

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

I'll call him then.

Exit.

NUREDDENE

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

Anice returns with Ajebe, Balkis, Mymoona.

AJEBE

Am I forgiven?

NUREDDENE

Ajebe, let the past
Have never been.

AJEBE

You are Ibn Sawy's son.

NUREDDENE

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

MYMOONA

Nothing else?

ANICE-ALJALICE

Only myself

Whom he'll not sell.

MYMOONA

He must.

NUREDDENE

Never, Mymoona.

MYMOONA

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

O now there's light.

Blessed Mymoona!

NUREDDENE

It must not be. My oath!

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

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

MYMOONA

Too fine, too fine!

ANICE-ALJALICE

To serve awhile my sister!
For that she is in heart.

BALKIS

Serve only in name.

MYMOONA

She will be safe while you rebuild your fortunes.

NUREDDENE

I do not like it.

MYMOONA

Nor does any one
As in itself, but only as a refuge
From greater evils.

NUREDDENE

Oh, you're wrong, Mymoona,
To quibble with an oath! it will not prosper.
Straight dealing's best.

MYMOONA

You look at it too finely.

NUREDDENE

Have it your way, then.

MYMOONA

Call the broker here.

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

AJEBE

'Twould be the plague.

NUREDDENE

I fear it will not prosper.

Exeunt.

SCENE V

The slave-market.

Muazzim with Anice-Aljalice exposed for sale.

Ajebe, Aziz, Abdullah and merchants.

MUZZIM

Who bids?

AZIZ

Four thousand.

MUZZIM

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

AZIZ

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

MUZZIM

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

AJEBE

Five hundred to that bid.

Enter Almuene with slaves.

ALMUENE

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

(aloud)

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

AJEBE

All's lost.

MUAZZIM

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

ALMUENE

My nephew bids for me. Who bids against?

AJEBE

Uncle —

ALMUENE

Go, find out other slave-girls, Ajebe,
Do well until the end. (*Exit Ajebe*) Who bids against me?
She's mine then. Come.

ANICE-ALJALICE

I'll not be sold to you.

ALMUENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

ALMUENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

MUAZZIM

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

for the sale.

ALMUENE

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

MUAZZIM

Well, here he comes.

Enter Nureddene and Ajebe.

A MERCHANT

Shall we go, shall we go?

ABDULLAH

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

MUAZZIM

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

NUREDDENE

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

MUAZZIM

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

NUREDDENE

I'll tell the lie. One fine, pure seeming falsehood,
Admitted, opens door to all his naked

And leprous family; in, in, they throng
And breed the house quite full.

MUAZZIM

The Vizier wants her.
He bids four thousand pieces and five hundred.

NUREDDENE

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

ALMUENE

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

He draws his scimitar.

ABDULLAH

Pause, Vizier.

AZIZ

Be patient, Nureddene.

ALMUENE

I yet shall kill him.
Hence, harlot, foot before me to my kitchen.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

ALMUENE

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

NUREDDENE

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

ALMUENE

Help, help! Hew him in pieces.

The slaves are rushing forward.

ABDULLAH

What do you, fellows?

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

ALMUENE

Oh! Oh! Will you then kill me?

NUREDDENE

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

ALMUENE

Pardon, oh, pardon!

NUREDDENE (*throwing him away*)

Live then, in thy gutter.

Exit with Anice.

ABDULLAH

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

Exeunt slaves with Almuene.

He is well punished.

AZIZ

What will come of this?

ABDULLAH

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

AZIZ

I pray on us

This falls not.

Exeunt merchants.

MUAZZIM

Here was ill-luck!

AJEBE

Nor ends with this.

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

Exeunt.

SCENE VI

The palace at Bassora.

Alzayni, Salar.

ALZAYNI

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

SALAR

Alfazzal then

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

ALZAYNI

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

SALAR

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

ALZAYNI

Great dangers justify

The smaller. Caliph Alrasheed conceives
On trifling counts a dumb displeasure towards me
Which any day may speak; 'tis whispered of
In Bagdad. Alkhasib, the Egyptian Vizier,
Is in like plight. It is mere policy,
Salar, to build out of a common peril
A common safety.

SALAR

Haroun al Rasheed

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

ALZAYNI

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

Exit Salar.

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

Enter Murad.

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

MURAD

My blade is sharp and what I do is sudden.

ALZAYNI

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

MURAD (*to himself*)

But Kings like thee
Earth needs not.

VOICE WITHOUT

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

ALZAYNI

Who cries beneath my window? Chamberlain!

Enter Sunjar.

SUNJAR

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

ALZAYNI

Bring him here.

Exit Sunjar.

It is some brawl.

Enter Sunjar with Almuene.

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

ALMUENE

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

ALZAYNI

Name them at once and choose their punishment.

ALMUENE

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

MURAD

Nureddene!

ALZAYNI

Upon what quarrel?

ALMUENE

A year ago Alfazzal bought a slave-girl
With the King's money for the King, a gem
Of beauty, learning, mind, fit for a Caliph.
But seeing the open flower he thought perhaps

Your royal nose too base to smell at it,
So gave her to his royaller darling son
To soil and rumple. No man with a neck
Dared tell you of it, such your faith was in him.

ALZAYNI

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

ALMUENE

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

SUNJAR

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

MURAD

The dog has murdered both of them with his.

ALZAYNI

Now by the Prophet, my forefather! Out,
Murad! drag here the fellow and his girl,
Trail them with ropes tied to their bleeding heels,
Their faces in the mire, with pinioned hands
Behind their backs, into my presence here.

Sack Sawy's mansion, raze it to the ground.
What, am I grown so bare that by-lane dogs
Like these so loudly bay at me? They die!

MURAD

Sultan, —

ALZAYNI

He's doomed who speaks a word for them.

Exit.

ALMUENE

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

MURAD

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

ALMUENE

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

Exit.

SUNJAR

What will you do?

MURAD

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

SUNJAR

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

Exit Sunjar.

MURAD

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

Exit.

SCENE VII

Ibn Sawy's house.

Nureddene, Anice-Aljalice.

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

Oh, my lord, make haste and flee.

NUREDDENE

Whither and how? But come.

Enter Ajebe.

AJEBE

Quick, Nureddene.

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

NUREDDENE

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

AJEBE

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

NUREDDENE

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

Exeunt.

Curtain

Act Four

Bagdad.

SCENE I

*The gardens of the Caliph's Palace outside the Pavilion of Pleasure.
Anice-Aljalice, Nureddene.*

ANICE-ALJALICE

This is Bagdad!

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

Do you see the fruit,
Anice? Camphor and almond-apricots,
Green, white and purple figs and these huge grapes,
Round rubies or quite purple-black, that ramp
O'er wall and terrace; plums almost as smooth
As your own damask cheek. These balls of gold
Are lemons, Anice, do you think? Look, cherries,
And mid these fair pink-budded orange-blossoms
Rare glints of fruit.

ANICE-ALJALICE

That was a blackbird whistled.

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

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

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

Enter Shaikh Ibrahim from behind.

IBRAHIM

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

He advances stealthily with stick raised.

*Nureddene and Anice turn towards him, he drops
 the stick and remains with arm lifted.*

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

mouthered.

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE (*smiling*)

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

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

What, is it thine? And this pavilion?

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

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

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

Oh then indeed! She had the right divine to be wealthy. But I

trust thou hast good doctrinal justification for inheriting after her?

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM (*aside*)

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

It is indeed thine? we may enter?

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

Come, Anice.

IBRAHIM (*walking behind them*)

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

Exeunt to the pavilion.

SCENE II

The Pavilion of Pleasure.

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

NUREDDENE

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

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

What, old father, you grow young?

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

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

IBRAHIM

I take refuge with Allah. Wine! for sixteen years I have not

touched the evil thing. When I was young indeed! Ah well, when I was young. But 'tis forbidden. What saith Ibn Batata? That wine worketh transmutation. And Ibrahim Alhashhash bin Fuzfuz bin Bierbiloon al Sandilani of Bassora, he rateth wine sorely and averreth that the red glint of it is the shine of the red fires of Hell, its sweetness kisseth damnation and the coolness of it in the throat causeth bifurcation. Ay, verily, the great Alhashhash.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

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

IBRAHIM

Hm! My son, what is thy parable?

NUREDDENE

I will show you a trick to cheat the devil. Give three denars of mine to a neighbour's servant with a dirham or two for his trouble, let him buy the wine and clap it on an old ass, and let

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

IBRAHIM

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

Exit.

NUREDDENE

He is the very gem of hypocrites.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

You are happy, Anice?

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

But you are safe, my joy,
My darling.

She goes to him and kisses and clings about him.

NUREDDENE

Anice, your eyes are full of tears!

You are quite overwrought.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Let only you be safe

And all the world beside entirely perish.

My love! my master!

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

IBRAHIM

Allah! Allah! Allah!

ANICE-ALJALICE

Where's that old sober learning?

I want to dance, to laugh, to outriot riot.

Oh, here he is.

NUREDDENE

What a quick ass was this, Shaikh Ibrahim!

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

Dost thou ever lie, Shaikh Ibrahim?

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

She is my slave-girl.

IBRAHIM

Ah, ah! thy slave-girl? Ah, ah! a slave-girl! ah!

ANICE-ALJALICE

Drink, my lord.

NUREDDENE (*drinking*)

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

He lies down.

IBRAHIM

Allah! Allah! What, he sleeps?

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

Fie, fie, fie!

ANICE-ALJALICE

By my head and eyes!

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

Another.

IBRAHIM

No, no, no.

ANICE-ALJALICE

By my head and eyes!

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

Just one more.

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

No, no, no.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE (*starting up*)

Shaikh Ibrahim, thou drinkest?

IBRAHIM

Oh, ah! 'Twas thy slave-girl forced me. Verily, verily!

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

To you, my dear one.

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

To the shade of the great Alhashhash!

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE and NUREDDENE (*together*)

Shaikh Ibrahim! Shaikh Ibrahim! Shaikh Ibrahim!

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM (*drinks*)

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

She lights the eighty candles of the great candelabrum.

IBRAHIM (*drinks*)

Allah! it lights thee up, my slave-girl, my jewel. (*drinks*)

NUREDDENE

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

IBRAHIM (*drinks*)

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

Nureddene goes out lighting the lamps one by one and returns in the same way. Meanwhile Shaikh Ibrahim drinks.

IBRAHIM

Allah! hast thou lit them all?

ANICE-ALJALICE

Shaikh Ibrahim, drunkenness sees but double, and dost thou

see eightyfour? Thou art far gone in thy cups, O adept, O Ibn Batatist.

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

Whom fearest thou? Is not the pavilion thine?

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

Truly, he is a great Caliph.

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

I have found a lute.

NUREDDENE

Give it me.' Hear me improvise, Old Sobriety.

(*Sings*)

Saw you Shaikh Ibrahim the grave old man?

Allah! Allah! I saw him drunk and drinking.

What was he doing when the dance began?

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

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

I have a song for you.

(Sings)

White as winter is my beard,
All my face with wrinkles weird,
Yet I drink.

Hell-fire? judgment? who's afraid?
Ibrahim would kiss a maid
As soon as think.

IBRAHIM

Allah! Allah! Nightingale! Nightingale!

SCENE III

The Gardens outside the Pavilion.

Haroun al Rasheed, Mesrour.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

MESROUR

The Vizier comes, my lord.

Enter Jaafar.

JAAFAR

Peace be with thee,
Commander of the Faithful.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

JAAFAR

What words are these, O Caliph?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

JAAFAR (*to himself*)

What Djinn

Plays me this antic?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

I am waiting, Vizier.

JAAFAR

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

JAAFAR (*to himself*)

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

At least I'd see them.

MESROUR

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Mesroure, well thought of!

JAAFAR (*aside to Mesroure*)

A blister spoil thy tongue!

MESROUR (*aside to Jaafar*)

I'll head you, Jaafar.

HAROUN AL RASHEED (*listening*)

Is not that a lute?

A lute at such a grave and reverend meeting!

Shaikh Ibrahim sings within.

Chink-a-chunk-a-chink!

We will kiss and drink,

And be merry, O very very merry.

For your eyes are bright

Even by candle light

And your lips as red as the red round cherry.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Now by the Prophet! by my great forefathers!

He rushes into the tower followed by Mesrour.

JAAFAR

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

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Ho, Jaafar, see this godly ceremony

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

JAAFAR

Shaikh Ibrahim has utterly deceived me.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

The aged hypocrite! Who are this pair

Of heavenly faces? Was there then such beauty

In my Bagdad, yet Haroun's eyes defrauded

Of seeing it?

JAAFAR

The girl takes up the lute.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

JAAFAR

I hope she will play vilely.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Wherefore, Jaafar?

JAAFAR

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

ANICE-ALJALICE (*within*)

Song

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

JAAFAR

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

I'll go disguised.

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

As they descend, enter Kareem.

KAREEM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Who art thou?

KAREEM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Dost thou lament thy honesty?

What fish hast thou?

KAREEM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Show me thy basket, man.

Are these thy whitebait and thy two thin minnows?

KAREEM

Alas, sir, 'tis because I am honest.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Give me thy fish.

KAREEM

Here they are, here they are, my lord!

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

KAREEM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

KAREEM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

What, shall I wear thy gaberdine so long?

KAREEM

Commander of the Faithful! Since you are about to leave king-
craft and follow an honest living for the good of your soul, you
may wear worse than an honest fisherman's gaberdine. 'Tis a
good craft and an honourable.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

KAREEM

Glory to Allah! This comes of being honest.

Exit.

JAAFAR (*coming up*)

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Jaafar, 'tis I.

JAAFAR

The Caliph?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Now to fry these fish and enter.

JAAFAR

Give them to me. I am a wondrous cook.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

Exeunt.

SCENE IV

Inside the pavilion.

Nureddene, Anice-Aljalice, Shaikh Ibrahim.

NUREDDENE

Shaikh Ibrahim, verily thou art drunk.

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

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

OUTSIDE

Fish! fish! sweet fried fish!

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

Enter Haroun.

ANICE-ALJALICE

What fish have you, good fisherman?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

NUREDDENE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

NUREDDENE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Art thou'as witty as beautiful?

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Thou sayest no more than truth.

NUREDDENE

What is your name, fisherman?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

IBRAHIM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

IBRAHIM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Now Allah save him!

IBRAHIM

Nay, let Allah save his soul if He will and if 'tis worth saving, but I fear me 'twill be a tough job for Allah. If it were not for my constant rebukes and admonitions and predications and pestri-giddi — prestigidgide — what the plague! prestidigitations, and some slaps and cuffs of which I pray you speak very low, he would be worse even than he is. Well, well, even Allah blunders; verily, verily!

ANICE-ALJALICE

Wilt thou be Caliph, Shaikh Ibrahim?

IBRAHIM

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

tipple, beauty, we will tipple.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

And Haroun?

IBRAHIM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED (*laughing*)

What an old treasonous rogue art thou, Shaikh Ibrahim!

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

Shaikh Ibrahim! Shaikh Ibrahim!

IBRAHIM

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

NUREDDENE

Fisherman, is thy need here over?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

NUREDDENE

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

IBRAHIM

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

(sings)

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

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

ANICE-ALJALICE *(sings)*

Song

Heart of mine, O heart impatient,
Thou must learn to wait and weep.
Wherefore wouldst thou go on beating
When I bade thee hush and sleep?
Thou who wert of life so fain,
Didst thou know not, life was pain?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

NUREDDENE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

NUREDDENE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

I vow I'll help thee.

NUREDDENE

Art thou the Caliph?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

If I were, by chance?

NUREDDENE

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

Exit with Haroun.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

IBRAHIM

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

darkened my brain with wine, and wilt Thou damn me afterwards?

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

Enter Nureddene.

NUREDDENE

He's writing out a letter.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

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

Enter Haroun.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

He is not fit
To be a King.

NUREDDENE

Nor ever was. 'Tis late.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Givest thou no gift at parting?

NUREDDENE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Nothing more valuable?

ANICE-ALJALICE

Wilt take this ring?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

No; give me what I ask.

NUREDDENE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Give me thy slave-girl.

(There is a silence.)

NUREDDENE

Thou hast entrapped me, fisherman.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Is it a jest?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Thou sworest by the Prophet, youth.

NUREDDENE

Tell me,

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

She pleases me.

ANICE-ALJALICE

O wretch!

NUREDDENE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Dost thou give her to me?

NUREDDENE

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

I mean thee well.

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

NUREDDENE

Thou art his; I cannot touch thee.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Kiss her once.

NUREDDENE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Where art thou bound?

NUREDDENE

To Bassora.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

That is, to death?

NUREDDENE

Even so.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Yet take this letter with thee to the Sultan.

NUREDDENE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

NUREDDENE

I know not who thou art, nor if this scrap
Of paper has the power thou babblest of,
And do not greatly care. Life without her
Is not to be thought of. Yet thou giv'st me something
I'd once have dared call hope. She will be safe?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

NUREDDENE

I'll go play

At pitch-and-toss with death in Bassora.

Exit.

IBRAHIM

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

He seizes Haroun by the beard.

HAROUN AL RASHEED (*throwing him off*)

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

He changes his dress.

JAAFAR

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

IBRAHIM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

Fair slave-girls, noble gifts. Possess thy heart
Once more, be glad.

ANICE-ALJALICE

O just and mighty Caliph!

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Shaikh Ibrahim.

IBRAHIM

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

IBRAHIM

Oh, her lips! her sweet lips!

JAAFAR

You speak to a drunken man, my lord.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Tomorrow bring him before me when he's sober.

Exeunt.

Curtain

Act Five

Bassora and Bagdad.

SCENE I

A room in Almuene's house.

Almuene, Fareed.

FAREED

You'll give me money, dad?

ALMUENE

You spend too much.

We'll talk of it another time. Now leave me.

FAREED

You'll give me money?

ALMUENE

Go; I'm out of temper.

FAREED (*dancing round him*)

Give money, money, money, give me money.

ALMUENE

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

FAREED

You have struck me!

ALMUENE

Why, you would have it. Go.

You shall have money.

FAREED

How much?

ALMUENE

Quite half your asking.

Send me a cup of water.

FAREED

Oh yes, I'll send it.

You'll strike me then?

Exit.

ALMUENE

Young Nureddene's evasion
Troubles me at the heart; it will not dislodge.
And Murad too walks closely with the King,
Who whispers to him, whispers, whispers. What?
Is't of my ruin? No, he needs me yet.
And Ibn Sawy's coming soon. But there
I've triumphed. He will have a meagre profit
Of his long work in Roum, — the headsman's axe.

Enter a slave with a cup of water.

Here set it down and wait. 'Tis not so bad.
I'll have their Doonya yet for my Fareed.

Enter Khatoon, dragging in Fareed.

KHATOON

He has not drunk it yet.

FAREED

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

KHATOON

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

ALMUENE

What's this?

KHATOON

This brat whose soul you've disproportioned

Out of all nature, turns upon you now.
There's poison in that cup.

ALMUENE

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

FAREED

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

KHATOON

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

ALMUENE

Go, slave,
And make some negro drink it off. (*Exit slave*). Woman,
What I have promised often, thou shalt have, —
The scourge.

KHATOON

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

ALMUENE

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

SLAVE

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

ALMUENE

Fareed!

FAREED

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

He runs out.

ALMUENE

God!

KHATOON

Will you not scourge me?

ALMUENE

Leave me.

Exit Khatoon.

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

Exit.

SCENE II

The palace in Bassora.

Alzayni, Murad, Almuene, Ajebe.

ALZAYNI

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

ALMUENE

A nothing,

I grieve I pressed; forget it, noble Murad.

MURAD

That's as you please.

ALMUENE

Come, you're my nephew too.

VOICE OUTSIDE

Ho, Mahomed Alzayni, Sultan, Ho!

ALZAYNI

Who is that Arab?

ALMUENE (*at the window*)

God! 'tis Nureddene.

Impossible!

ALZAYNI

Or he is courage-mad.

ALMUENE

'Tis he.

MURAD

The devil and his unholy joy!

ALZAYNI

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

Exit Ajebe.

I wonder in what strength he comes.

ALMUENE

The strength of madness.

MURAD

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

Enter Ajebe with Nureddene.

NUREDDENE

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

ALZAYNI

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

NUREDDENE

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

ALZAYNI

A letter, and to me?

NUREDDENE

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

ALZAYNI

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

NUREDDENE

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

ALZAYNI

. Read it, Almuene.

ALMUENE

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

NUREDDENE

It was the Caliph.

ALZAYNI

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

ALMUENE

To scan it better.

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

AJEBE

It was quite whole, I saw it.

ALMUENE

Boy, silence!

AJEBE

No, I will not. Thou hast torn it.

ALMUENE

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

ALZAYNI

Ho, there.

Enter Guards.

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

Exit Ajebe, guarded.

Thou, fellow,

Com'st thou with brazen face and blustering tongue
And forgeries in thy pocket? Hale him hence.
After fierce tortures let him be impaled.

MURAD

Hear me, O King.

ALZAYNI

Thou art his sister's husband.

MURAD

Yet for thy own sake hear me. Hast thou thought,
If this be true, what fate will stride upon thee
When Haroun learns thy deed? whom doubt not, King,
Thy many enemies will soon acquaint.

ALZAYNI

Send couriers; find this out.

ALMUENE

Till when I'll keep
My nephew safe under my private eye.

MURAD

Thou art his enemy.

ALMUENE

And thou his friend.
He will escape from thee once more.

ALZAYNI

Vizier,
Thou keep him, use him well.

ALMUENE

Ho! take him, guards.

Enter guards.

NUREDDENE

I lose the toss; 'tis tails.

Exit guarded.

ALZAYNI

All leave me. Vizier,
Remain.

Exit Murad.

Now, Almuene?

ALMUENE

Kill him and be at rest.

ALZAYNI

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

ALMUENE

Dare not!

Nay, then, put off thy crown at Haroun's bidding,
Who'll make thee his doorkeeper in Bagdad.
The Caliph? How long will this drunken freak
Have lodging in his lordly mind? Or fear'st thou
The half-veiled threat of thy own trusty Turk,
Sultan Alzayni?

ALZAYNI

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

Exit.

ALMUENE

You boggle, boggle; that is not the way
To keep a crown. Have him and hold's the Vizier,
Catch him and cut's the General. Loose your grip?
Let the hand shake? So monarchs are unkinged.
Ten days are mine at least. I have ten days
To torture him, though Caliphs turn his friend.
Will God befriend him next? My enemies
He gives into my potent hand. Murad is gone,
And I hold Doonya in my grip, Ameena too
Who, I have news, lives secret with her niece.
But where's the girl? God keeps her for me, I doubt not,
A last sweet morsel. It will please Fareed.
But there's Haroun! Why should he live at all,
When there are swords and poisons?

Exit.

SCENE III

A cell in Almuene's house.

Nureddene alone.

NUREDDENE

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

KHATOON

My Nureddene!

NUREDDENE

Good aunt, weep not for me.

KHATOON

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

SLAVE

I'll do it willingly.

KHATOON

What is this sound of many rushing feet?

Enter Almuene and slaves.

ALMUENE

Seize him and bind. O villain, fatal villain!
O my heart's stringlet! Seize him, beat to powder,

Have burning irons. Dame, what do you here?
Wilt thou prevent me then?

KHATOON

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

ALMUENE

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

KHATOON

What is it? Tell me quickly.

ALMUENE

Fareed is murdered.

KHATOON

God forbid! By whom?

ALMUENE

This villain's sister.

KHATOON

Doonya? You are mad. Speak, slave.

A SLAVE

Young master went with a great company
To Murad's house to carry Doonya off,
Who then was seated listening to the lute,
With Balkis and Mymoona, Ajebe's slave-girls.
We stormed the house, but could not take the lady;
Mymoona with a sword kept all at bay
For minutes. Meantime the city fills with rumour,
And Murad riding like a stormy wind
Came on us just too soon, the girl defender
Found wounded, Doonya at last in Fareed's grip

Who made a shield of that fair burden; but Balkis
Ran at and tripped him and the savage Turk
Fire-eyed and furious lunged him through the body.
He's dead.

KHATOON

My son!

ALMUENE

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

KHATOON

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

Exit.

ALMUENE

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

Exit.

NUREDDENE

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

SCENE IV

A house in Bassora.

Doonya, Ameena.

DOONYA

Comfort, dear mother, comfort.

AMEENA

Oh, what comfort?

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

DOONYA

I did not think
God was so keen-eyed for our petty sins,
When great offences and high criminals
Walk smiling. But there's comfort, mother, yet.
My husband writes from prison. You shall hear.

(reads)

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

That's for me only.

AMEENA

Let me hear it.

DOONYA

It is

Pure nonsense, — what a savage Turk would write.

AMEENA

Therefore you kissed it?

DOONYA

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

AMEENA

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

DOONYA (*to herself*)

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

AMEENA

How is Mymoona?

DOONYA

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

AMEENA

My son will yet be saved.

Exuent.

SCENE V

Bagdad.

A room in the Caliph's harem.

Anice-Aljalice with many slave-girls attending on her.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Girls, is he passing?

A SLAVE-GIRL

He is passing.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Quick, my lute!

Song

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

Girls, is he coming up?

A SLAVE-GIRL

The Caliph enters.

Enter Haroun and Jaafar.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Thou art the slave-girl, Anice-Aljalice?
Why cholest thou that song?

ANICE-ALJALICE

Caliph, for thee.

Where is my lord?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

A king in Bassora.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Who told thee?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

So it must be.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Is there news?

HAROUN AL RASHEED

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

ANICE-ALJALICE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Anice, I do believe thy lord is well.
And yet — No, by my great forefathers, no!
My seal and signature were on the script,

And they are mightier than a thousand armies.
If he has disobeyed, for him 'twere better
He were a beggar's unrespected child
Than Haroun's kin; — the Arabian simoom
Shall be less devastating than my wrath.
Out, Jaafar, out to Bassora, behind thee
Sweeping embattled war; nor night nor tempest
Delay thy march. I follow in thy steps.
Take too this damsel and these fifty slave-girls,
With robes and gifts for Bassora's youthful king.
I give thee power o'er Kings and Emperors
To threaten, smite and seize. Go, friend, I follow
As swift as thunder presses on the lightning.

Exit.

JAAFAR (*to the slave-girls*)

Make ready; for we march within the hour.

Exit.

SCENE VI

The public square of Bassora.

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

EXECUTIONER

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

(Low, to Nureddene)

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

NUREDDENE

Give me water;

I thirst.

MURAD

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

EXECUTIONER

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

ALMUENE *(coming up)*

Rebellious sworder! Givest thou drink
To the King's enemies!

A VOICE IN THE CROWD

God waits for thee,

Thou wicked Vizier.

ALMUENE

Who was that?

MURAD

A voice.

Behead it.

ALMUENE

Mighty Sultan, give the word.

ALZAYNI

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

ALMUENE

It is Ibn Sawy.

Oh, this is sweet!

CRIES

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

IBN SAWY

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

ALZAYNI

Virtuous Alfazzal! we will talk with thee
As ever was our dearest pleasure; first,
There is a spotted soul to be dislodged
From the fair body it disgraced; a trifle
Soon ended. There behold the criminal.

IBN SAWY

The criminal! Pardon me, mighty King;

The voice of nature will not be kept down.
Why wilt thou slay my son?

ALZAYNI

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

IBN SAWY

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

ALZAYNI

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

IBN SAWY

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

ALZAYNI

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

IBN SAWY

God!

ALZAYNI

Slaves, help my faithful Vizier; he will faint.

IBN SAWY

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

ALZAYNI

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

IBN SAWY

Merciful Allah!

And it is done?

ALZAYNI

I doubt not, it is done.

IBN SAWY

Their crime?

ALZAYNI

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

IBN SAWY

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

ALZAYNI

Nay, Vizier, clasp thy son,

And afterwards await within my hearing
Release.

IBN SAWY

My Nureddene, my child!

NUREDDENE

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

IBN SAWY

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

NUREDDENE

I well believe it.

IBN SAWY

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

ALZAYNI

Hast done, Alfazzal?

IBN SAWY

Do thy will, O King.

ALZAYNI (*waving his hand*)

Strike.

Trumpets outside.

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

ALMUENE

Let this wretch be slain;

We shall have leisure then for greater things.

ALZAYNI

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

Enter a soldier.

SOLDIER

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

ALZAYNI

What art thou, Arab?

SOLDIER

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

ALZAYNI

My guards!

My soldiers! here to me!

SOLDIER

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

ALZAYNI

'Tis well.

I have but erred. My Murad, here to me!
Murad, thou shalt have gold, a house, estate,

Noble and wealthy women for thy wives.
Murad!

MURAD

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

ALZAYNI

Am I betrayed?

MURAD

Call it so, King.

ALZAYNI

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

ALMUENE

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

ALZAYNI

They are here.

Enter Jaafar and soldiers.

JAAFAR

This sight

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

ALMUENE

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

JAAFAR

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

NUREDDENE

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

IBN SAWY

Ah, child,
Thy mother and thy sister!

MURAD

They are safe
And in my care.

IBN SAWY

Nay, God is kind; this world
Most leniently ruled.

JAAFAR

Sultan Alzayni, Vizier Almuene,
By delegated power I seize upon you,
The prisoners of the Caliph. Take them, guards.
I've brought a slave-girl for you, Nureddene,
The Caliph's gift.

NUREDDENE

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

SCENE VII

The palace in Bassora.

Ibn Sawy, Aameena, Nureddene, Anice-Aljalice, Doonya, Ajebe.

IBN SAWY

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

NUREDDENE

Surely I'll cherish

My heart's queen!

ANICE-ALJALICE

Only your slave-girl.

DOONYA

You've got a King,

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

NUREDDENE

Doonya, it is not Faeryland.

DOONYA

It is, it is, and Anice here its queen.
A faery King of faery Bassora,
Do make a General of my general nuisance.
I long to be my lady Generaless

Of Faeryland, and ride about and charge
At thorns and thistles with a charming-stick,
With Balkis and Mymoona for my Captains —
They're very martial, King, bold swashing fighters! —

NUREDDENE

Ajebe our Treasurer.

AJEBE

To ruin you again?

NUREDDENE

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

AMEENA

What nonsense, children! You a Sultan, child!

NUREDDENE

Your Sultan, mother, as I ever was.

IBN SAWY

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

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

• The peace, Commander of the Faithful!

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Noble Alfazzal, sit. Sit all of you.
This is the thing that does my heart most good
To watch these kind and happy looks and know
Myself for cause. Therefore, I sit enthroned,
Allah's Vicegerent, to put down all evil
And pluck the virtuous out of danger's hand.
Fit work for Kings! not merely the high crown

And marching armies and superber ease.
Sunjar, Murad and Ajebe, you your King
Can best reward. But, Ajebe, in thy house
Where thou art Sultan, those reward who well
Deserve it.

AJEBE

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

HAROUN AL RASHEED

'Tis well.

Sultan Alzayni, not within my realm
Shall Kings like thee bear rule. Great though thy crimes,
I will not honour thee with imitation,
To slay unheard. Thou shalt have judgment, King,
But for thy Vizier here, his crimes are open
And loudly they proclaim themselves.

ALMUENE

Lord, spare me.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

For some offences God has punished thee.
Shall I, His great Vicegerent, spare? Young King
Of Bassora, to thee I leave thy enemy.

ALMUENE

I did according to my blood and nurture,
Do thou as much.

NUREDDENE

He has beguiled me, Caliph.
I cannot now pronounce his doom.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Then I will.

Death at this moment! And his house and fortune
Are to thy father due. Take him and slay.

Exeunt guards with Almuene.

Let not his sad and guiltless wife be engulfed
In his swift ruin. Virtuous Alfazzal, —

IBN SAWY

She is my wife's dear sister and my home
Is hers, my children will replace her son.

HAROUN AL RASHEED

All then is well. Anice, you're satisfied?
I never was so scared in all my life
As when you rose against me.

ANICE-ALJALICE

Pardon me!

HAROUN AL RASHEED

Fair children worthy of each other's love
And beauty! till the Sunderer comes who parts
All wedded hands, take your delights on earth,
And afterwards in heaven. Meanwhile remember
That life is grave and earnest under its smiles,
And we too with a wary gaiety
Should walk its roads, praying that if we stumble,
The All-Merciful may bear our footing up
In His strong hand, showing the Father's face
And not the stern and dreadful Judge. Farewell.
I go to Roman wars. With you the peace!

IBN SAWY

Peace with thee, just and mighty Caliph, peace.

PRINCE OF EDUR

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

RANA CURRAN, Prince of Edur, of the Rahtore clan.

VISALDEO, a Brahmin, his minister; formerly in the service of the Gehelote Prince of Edur.

HARIPAL, a Rajpoot noble, General of Edur; formerly in the service of the Gehelote Prince.

BAPPA, son of the late Gehelote Prince of Edur, in refuge among the Bheels.

SUNGRAM,
PRITHURAJ, } young Rajpoot refugees, companions of Bappa.

KODAL, a young Bheel, foster brother and lieutenant of Bappa.

TORAMAN, Prince of Cashmere.

CANACA, the King's jester of Cashmere.

PRATAP, Rao of Ichalgurh, a Chouhan noble.

RUTTAN, his brother.

A CAPTAIN OF RAJPOOT LANCES.

MENADEVI, wife of Curran; a Chouhan princess, sister of the King of Ajmere.

COMOL CUMARY, daughter of Rana Curran and Menadevi.

COOMOOD CUMARY, daughter of Rana Curran by a concubine.

NIRMOL CUMARY, daughter of Haripal, friend of Comol Cumary.

ISHANY, a Rajpoot maiden, in attendance on Comol Cumary.

Act One

The palace in Edur. The forests about Dongurh.

SCENE I

The palace in Edur.

Rana Curran, Visaldeo.

CURRAN

He is at Delsa then?

VISALDEO

So he has written.

CURRAN

Send out a troop for escort, yielding him
Such honour as his mighty birth demands.
Let him be lodged for what he is, a Prince
Among the mightiest.

VISALDEO

You have chosen then?
You'll give your daughter, King, to this Cashmerian?

CURRAN

My brother from Ajmere writes to forbid me,
Because he's Scythian, therefore barbarous.
A Scythian? He is Cashmere's mighty lord
Who stretches out from those proud Himalayan hills
His giant arms to embrace the North.

VISALDEO

But still

A Scythian.

CURRAN

Whom many Aryan monarchs crouch to appease
 When he but shakes his warlike lance. A soldier
 And conqueror, — what has the earth more noble?
 And he is of the great Cushanian stock
 That for these centuries bestride the hills
 Against all comers. World-renowned Asoca
 Who dominated half our kingly East,
 Sprang from a mongrel root.

VISALDEO

Rana, you'll wed
 Your daughter to Prince Toraman.

CURRAN

I'm troubled
 By Ajmere's strong persistence. He controls
 Our Rajpoot world and it were madly done
 To offend him.

VISALDEO

That's soon avoided. Send your daughter out
 To your strong fort among the wooded hills,
 Dongurh; there while she walks among the trees,
 Let the Cashmerian snatch her to his saddle
 In the old princely way. You have your will
 And the rash Chouhan has his answer.

CURRAN

Visaldeo,
 You are a counsellor! Call the queen hither;
 I'll speak to her.

Exit Visaldeo.

O excellently counselled!
 What is it but a daughter? One mere girl
 And in exchange an emperor for my ally.
 It must be done.

Enter Menadevi and Visaldeo.

MENADEVI

You sent for me, my lord!

CURRAN

How many summers might our daughter count,
Mena?

MENADEVI

Sixteen, my lord.

CURRAN

She flowers apace
And like a rose in bloom expects the breeze
With blushing petals. We can delay no longer
Her nuptial rites.

MENADEVI

The Rao of Ichalgurh
Desires her. He's a warrior and a Chouhan.

CURRAN

A petty baron! O my dearest lady,
Rate not your child so low. Her rumoured charm
Has brought an emperor posting from the north
To woo her.

MENADEVI

Give me the noble Rajpoot blood,
I ask no more.

CURRAN

The son of great Cashmere
Journeys to Edur for her.

MENADEVI

Your royal will

Rules her and me. And yet, my lord, a child
Of Rajpoot princes might be better mated;
So much I'll say.

CURRAN

You are your brother's sister.
He says he will not have a Scythian wed her.

MENADEVI

He cherishes the lofty Chouhan pride.
You know, my lord, we hold a Rajpoot soldier
Without estate or purse deserves a queen.
More than a crowned barbarian.

CURRAN

You are all
As narrow as the glen where you were born
And live immured. No arrogance can match
The penniless pride of mountaineers who never
Have seen the various world beyond their hills.
Your petty baron who controls three rocks
For all his heritage, exalts himself
O'er monarchs in whose wide domains his holding's
An ant-hill, and prefers his petty line
To their high dynasties; — as if a mountain tarn
Should think itself more noble than the sea
To which so many giant floods converge.

MENADEVI

Our tarns are pure at least; if small, they hold
Sweet water only; but your seas are brackish.

CURRAN

Well, well; tomorrow send your little princess
To Dongurh, there to dwell till we decide
If great Cashmere shall have her. Visaldeo,
Give ten good lances for her escort.

MENADEVI

Only ten!

It is not safe.

VISALDEO

Rana, the queen is right.

The Bheels are out among the hills; they have
A new and daring leader and beset
All wayside wealth with swarms of humming arrows.

CURRAN

The lord of Edur should not fear such rude
And paltry caterans. When they see our banner
Advancing o'er the rocks, they will avoid
Its peril. Or if there's danger, take the road
That skirts the hills. Ten lances, Visaldeo!

Exit.

MENADEVI

My blood shall never mingle with the Scythian.
I am a Chouhan first and next your wife,
Edur. What means this move to Dongurh, Visaldeo?

VISALDEO (*as if to himself*)

Ten lances at her side! It were quite easy
To take her from them, even for a Cashmerian.

MENADEVI

I understand. The whole of Rajasthan
Would cry out upon Edur, were this marriage
Planned openly to soil their ancient purity.
The means to check this shame?

VISALDEO

Lady, I am

The Rana's faithful servant.

MENADEVI

So remain.

I'll send a horse to Ichalgurh this hour.
There may be swifter snatchers than the Scythian.

Exit.

VISALDEO

Or swifter even than any in Ichalgurh.
I too have tidings to send hastily.

Exit.

SCENE II

*The women's apartments in the palace at Edur.
Comol Cumary, Coomood Cumary.*

COMOL CUMARY

Tomorrow, Coomood, is the feast of May.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Sweetheart, I wish it were the feast of Will.
I know what I would will for you.

COMOL COOMARY

What, Coomood?

COOMOOD CUMARY

A better husband than your father'll give you.

COMOL CUMARY

You mean the Scythian? I will not believe
That it can happen. My father's heart is royal;
The blood that throbs through it he drew from veins
Of Rajpoot mothers.

COOMOOD CUMARY

But the brain's too politic.
A merchant's mind into his princely skull
Slipped in by some mischance, and it will sell you
In spite of all the royal heart can say.

COMOL CUMARY

He is our father, therefore blame him not.

COOMOOD CUMARY

I blame his brain, not him. Sweetheart, remember
Whomever you may marry I shall claim
Half of your husband.

COMOL CUMARY

If't be the Scythian, you may have
The whole uncouth barbarian with Cashmere
In the bad bargain.

COOMOOD CUMARY

We will not let him have you.
We'll find a mantra that shall call Urjoon
From Eden's groves to wed you; great Dushyanta
Shall leave Shacoontala for these wide eyes
Which you have stolen from the antelope
To gaze men's hearts out of their bodies with,
You lovely sorceress; or we'll have Udaian
To ravish you into his rushing car,
Edur's Vasavadatta. We'll bring crowding
The heroes of romance out of the past
For you to choose from, sweet, and not a Scythian
In all their splendid ranks.

COMOL CUMARY

But my poor Coomood,
Your hero of romance will never look at you,
Finding my antelope eyes so beautiful.
What will you do then?

COOMOOD CUMARY

I will marry him
By sleight of hand and never let him know.
For when the nuptial fire is lit and when
The nuptial bond is tied, I'll slip my raiment's hem
Into the knot that weds your marriage robes
And take the seven paces with you both
Weaving my life into one piece with yours
For ever.

Enter Nirmol Cumary.

NIRMOL CUMARY

News, princess, news! What will you give me for a sackful of news?

COMOL CUMARY

Two switches and a birchrod. A backful for your sackful!

NIRMOL CUMARY

I will empty my sack first, if only to shame you for your base ingratitude. To begin with what will please you best, Prince Toraman is arrived. I hear he is coming to see and approve of you before he makes the venture; it is the Scythian custom.

COMOL CUMARY

He shall not have his Scythian custom. In India it is we girls who have the right of choice.

NIRMOL CUMARY

He will not listen. These Scythians stick to their customs as if it were their skin; they will even wear their sheepskins in mid-summer in Agra.

COMOL CUMARY

Then, Nirmol, we will show you to him for the Princess Comol Cumary and marry you off into the mountains. Would you not love to be the Queen of Cashmere?

NIRMOL CUMARY

I would not greatly mind. They say he is big as a Polar bear and has the sweetest little pugnose and cheeks like two fat pouches. They say too he carries a knout in his hand with which he will touch up the bride during the ceremony as a promise of what she may expect hereafter; it is the Scythian custom. Oh, I envy you, Princess.

COMOL CUMARY

Nirmol, in sober earnest I will beat you.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Strike but hear! For I have still news in my sack. You must gather your traps; we are to start for Dongurh in an hour. What, have I made your eyes smile at last?

COMOL CUMARY

To Dongurh! Truth, Nirmol.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Beat me in earnest, if it is not. Visaldeo himself told me.

COMOL CUMARY

To Dongurh! To the woods! It is three years
Since I was there. I wonder whether now
The woodland flowers into a sudden blush
Crimsoning at the sweet approach of Spring
As once it did against that moonèd white
Of myriad blossoms. We shall feel again,
Coomood, the mountain breezes kiss our cheeks
Standing on treeless ridges and behold
The valleys wind unnoticeably below
In threads of green.

COOMOOD CUMARY

It is the feast of May.
Shall we not dance upon the wind-blown peaks
And put the peacock's feather in our hair
And think we are in Brindabon the green?

NIRMOL CUMARY

With a snubnosed Scythian Krishna to lead the dance. But they say Krishna was neither Scythian nor Rajpoot but a Bheel. Well, there is another Krishna of that breed out who will make eighth-century Rookminnies of you if you dance too far into the forest, sweethearts.

COOMOOD CUMARY

You mean this boy-captain of robbers who makes such a noise in

our little world? Bappa they call him, do they not?

NIRMOL CUMARY

'Tis some such congregation of consonants. Now, which sort of husband would the most modern taste approve? — a coal-black sturdy young Bheel, his face as rugged as Rajputana, or a red and white snubnosed Scythian with two prosperous purses for his cheeks. There's a problem in aesthetics for you, Coomood.

COMOL CUMARY

A barbarous emperor or a hillside thief
Are equals in a Rajpoot maiden's eyes.
Yon mountain-peak or some base valley clod,
'Tis one to the heaven-sailing star above
That scorns their lowness.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Yes, but housed with the emperor the dishonour is lapped in cloth of gold; on the thief's hillside it is black, naked and rough, its primitive and savage reality. To most women the difference would be great.

COMOL CUMARY

Not to me. I wonder they suffer this mountain springald to presume so long.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Why, they sent out a captain lately to catch him, but he came back a head shorter than he went. But how do you fancy my news, sweethearts?

COMOL CUMARY

What, is your sack empty?

NIRMOL CUMARY

Your kingly father was the last to stalk out of it. I expect him here to finish my story.

Enter Rana Curran, Menadevi and Visaldeo.

CURRAN

Maid Comol, are you ready yet for Dongurh?

COMOL CUMARY

I heard of it this moment, sir.

CURRAN

Make ready.

Prince Toraman arrives. You blush, my lily?

MENADEVI

There is a maiden's blush of bashfulness,
But there's her blush of shame too when her cheeks
Offended scorn a suitor far too base
Should bring such noble blood to flush their whiteness.

CURRAN

Maid Comol, which was yours?

COMOL CUMARY

I would learn that,
Father, from your high sovereign will. I am not
The mistress of my blushes.

CURRAN

Keep them for him,
Comol, for whom their sweetness was created.
Hearken, my little one, you are marked out
To reign an empress; 'tis the stars decree it
That in their calm irrevocable round
Weave all our fates. Then shrink not if thou hearest
The noise of battle round thy palanquin
Filling the hills, nor fear its rude event,
But veil thy cheeks in scarlet to receive
Thy warlike husband.

COMOL CUMARY

Father!

CURRAN

It is so.

Thou journeyest not to Dongurh but thy nuptials.

COMOL CUMARY

With Toraman?

CURRAN

With one whose lofty doom
Is empire. Keep this in thy joyous bosom
Throbbing in a sweet secrecy. Farewell.
When we foregather next, I hope to greet
My little empress.

Exit.

MENADEVI

Comol, what said he to thee?

COMOL CUMARY

What I unwillingly have heard. Mother,
Must I be mated to a barbarous stock?

MENADEVI

No, child. When you shall hear the trumpet's din
Or clash of blades, think not 'tis Toraman,
But your dear mother's care to save her child
From shameful mating. Little sweetheart, go.
When I shall meet you next, you'll shine, a flower
Upon the proudest crest in Rajasthan,
No Scythian's portion. Visaldeo, prepare
Her going quickly.

Exit.

COMOL CUMARY

What plots surround me? Nirmol,

Give me my sword with me. I'll have a friend
To help me, should the world go wrong.

VISALDEO

Our self,

Lady, is our best helper.

COMOL CUMARY

I believe it.

Which path's resolved on?

VISALDEO

'Tis the valley road
That clings to the deep bases of the hills.

COMOL CUMARY

'Tis not the shortest.

VISALDEO

The easiest, — to Cashmere.

COMOL CUMARY

The other's safer then for Dongurh?

VISALDEO

At least

'Tis green and beautiful, and love may walk there
Unhindered.

Exit.

COMOL CUMARY

Thou seemst to be my friend,
But I'll believe myself and no one else
Except my sword whose sharpness I can trust
Not to betray me. Come, girls, make we ready
For this planned fateful journey.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Let them keep
Our palanquins together. One fate for both,
Sweetheart.

COMOL CUMARY

If we must marry Toraman,
Coomood, it shall be in that shadowy country.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Where, I hope, justice will have set right the balance between his
nose and his cheeks. Girls, we are the prizes of this handicap
and I am impatient to know which jockey wins.

Exeunt.

SCENE III

The forest near Dongurh.

Bappa, Sungram, Prithuraj.

BAPPA

It is the secret friend from whom in childhood
I learned to wing my mounting thoughts aloft
High as an eagle's flight. I know the hand,
Though yet his name is hid from me.

SUNGRAM

Let's hear

The very wording.

BAPPA

“To the Sun's child, from Edur.

Comol Cumary, Edur's princess, goes
With her fair sister and a knot of lances
To Dongurh. Bappa, young lion of the hills,
Be as the lion in thy ranging; prey
Upon earth's mightiest, think her princesses
Meant only for thy spoil and serving-girls,
Her kings thy subjects and her lands thy prey.
Dare greatly and thou shalt be great; despise
Apparent death and from his lifted hand
Of menace pluck thy royal destinies
By warlike violence. Thus thy fathers did
From whose great blood thou springest, child of Kings.
Thy friend in Edur.”

SUNGRAM

Writes he that? The child of Kings!

He never spoke so plainly of your birth
Till now.

PRITHURAJ

A kindling hint to fire our blood!

Two princesses and only a knot of swords
For escort? The gods themselves arrange this for us.

SUNGRAM

Bappa, you are resolved to court this peril?

PRITHURAJ

Doubt you? Think how 'twill help our treasury.
The palanquins alone must be a mint
Of money and the girls' rich ornaments
Purchase half Rajasthan.

SUNGRAM

The immediate gain's
Princely, nor the mere capture perilous.
But afterwards the armed wrath of Edur
Descends upon us in a thunder and whirlwind.
Are we yet strong enough to bear the shock?

PRITHURAJ

Why, let it come. I shall rejoice to feel
The true and dangerous bite of war at last,
Not always play the mountain cateran's part,
To skulk among the hills and only assail
The weak and timid, or butcher distant force
With arrows. I long for open shocks of fight
And glorious odds and all the world for audience.

BAPPA

Sungram, I do not rashly take this step,
But with fixed policy. Unless we break
Edur's supreme contempt for our annoyance,
How can we bring him to the difficult hills?
So must we take the open where our Bheels
Will scatter from the massèd Rajpoot swords
Nor face their charging horsemen. But if we capture
Their princess, inconsiderate rage will hurl them

Into our very fastnesses to wear
Their strength out under our shafts. Then will I seize
At the right moment, they being few and weary,
Edur by force or guile and hold it fast
Though all the warlike world come up against me.

SUNGRAM

With Bheels?

BAPPA

I will invite all Rajpoot swords
That now are masterless and men exiled,
And desperate fortunes. So the iron hands
Join us and the adventurous hearts, to build
A modern seat of empire; minds like Sungram,
Wise to forecast and bold to execute,
Heroes like Prithuraj, who know not fear
Nor put a limit to their vaulting thoughts
Save death or unforgettable renown,
The Rajpoot's choice. Are we not strong enough?
We have a thousand hardy Bheels, expert
In mountain warfare, swift unerring bowmen,
We have ourselves to lead them, each worth thousands,
Sheva Ekling above us and in our hands
Our destiny and our swords.

SUNGRAM

They are enough.

Enter Kodal.

KODAL

Bappa, our scouts have come in. The prey is in the toils.

BAPPA

How many are they, Kodal?

KODAL

Merely ten lances. The servants and women they have sent

round by the lower road; the escort with four palanquins come up through the hills. They have run their heads into the noose. We will draw it tight, Bappa, and choke them.

BAPPA

Is their escape
Impossible?

SUNGRAM

Bappa, a hundred Bheels surround the pass
By which alone they can return. Myself
Have posted them.

BAPPA

Beside the waterfall
Surround them, Sungram. Kodal, let there be
No random shafts to imperil by mischance
Our lovely booty.

KODAL

Trust me for that, Bappa. We'll shoot through the twenty eye-balls of them and never even touch the white. Ten lances they are and ten arrows will stretch them flat; there shall be nothing left to be done but the burning. If I cannot do this, I am no Bheel, no Kodal and no foster-brother of Bappa.

BAPPA

Economise our strength. I will not lose
A single man over this easy capture.
You're captain, Sungram.

Exeunt Sungram and Kodal.

Prithuraj, my friend,

Today begins our steep ascent to greatness.

Exeunt.

SCENE IV

The forest near Dongurh. By the waterfall.

Enter Captain and soldiers escorting Comol Cumary, Coomood, Nirmol and Ishany in palanquins.

ISHANY (*from her palanquin*)

Set down the palanquins. Captain, make void
This region; here the princess would repose
Beside the murmuring waterfall awhile
And breathe into her heart the winds of Dongurh.

Exit Captain with soldiers and palanquin-bearers. The girls leave their palanquins.

COMOL CUMARY

Coomood, this is the waterfall we loved
To lean by, singing to the lyre the deeds
Our fathers wrought or listening silently
The soft continuous roar. Beyond that bend
We shall see Dongurh, — Dongurh, our delight
Where we were children, Coomood.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Comol, our tree's
All scarlet, as if splashed with crimson fire,
Just as of old.

COMOL CUMARY

O it is Spring, and this
Is Dongurh.

ISHANY

Girls, we must not linger long.
Our Scythian, missing us, may take the hills.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Purse-checks? Oh, he has lifted Mera the servant-girl to his

saddle-bow by now and is garlanding her Queen of Cashmere. I wish I were there to be bridesmaid.

COMOL CUMARY

That was a sweet touch of thine, Nirmol. But the child deserves her promotion; she has served me willingly. A Scythian throne is no great wages for service to a Rajpoot princess.

COOMOOD CUMARY

How the hill gives you back your laughter, repeating
Its sweetness with delight, as if it had a soul
To love you.

COMOL CUMARY

We have shaken them off prettily by turning away through the hills. Alas! my royal father will not greet his little empress this journey, nor my lady mother scent her blossom on a Rajpoot crest. They must even put up with their poor simple Comol Cumary just as she was, — (*aside*) and as she will be until her heart finds its mate.

NIRMOL CUMARY

It is a sin, I tell you, Comol; I am mad when I think of it. Why, I came out to be abducted; I did not come for a quiet stroll through the woodlands. But I have still hopes of our Bheel cateran, our tangle-locked Krishna of the hill-sides; surely he will not be so ungallant as to let such sweet booty pass through his kingdom ungathered.

COMOL CUMARY

I would gladly see this same stripling and talk to him face to face who sets his Bheel arrows against our Rajpoot swords. He should be a man at least, no Scythian Toraman.

ISHANY

The presumptuous savage! it will earn him a stake yet for his last session. Were I a man, I would burn these wasps from their

nest and catch and crush them in my mailed gauntlet as they buzzed out into the open.

SHOUTS OUTSIDE

Bappa! Bappa! Ho Sheva Ekling!

CAPTAIN (*shouting within*)

Lances, lances, Rajpoots! Bearers, to the palanquins!

COMOL CUMARY

Bappa!

NIRMOL CUMARY (*laughing*)

You'll have that talk with Bappa yet,
Comol.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Oh, let us flee! They swarm towards us.

ISHANY

Stand firm! Our gallant lances soon will prick
These bold hill-foxes to their lairs. Stand firm!
We should but fly into the mouth of danger.

COMOL CUMARY (*climbing on to a rock*)

You Gods! our Rajpoots all are overwhelmed
Before they used their weapons. What next, Ishany?
Shall we sit still to be made prisoners?

ISHANY

Get swiftly to your palanquin. The bearers
Run hither. Flee towards the valley road!
It may be that the swords of Ichalgurh
Range there already.

COMOL CUMARY

Shall I escape alone?

ISHANY

Ah, save the glory of Edur from disgrace
Of savage handling!

Enter the palanquin-bearers fleeing.

Halt! Take your princess, men,
And flee with her into the valley road.

1ST BEARER

The funeral fire in the mouth of your princess! Every man save himself.

Exit with most of the bearers.

2ND BEARER

Halt, halt! We have eaten and shall we not pay for the salt?
Yes, even with our blood. We four will take her, if we are not
cut into pieces first. Into the palanquin, lady.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Quick, Comol! or are you longing for your palaver with Tangle-locks?

Comol enters the palanquin.

COOMOOD CUMARY

What will become of us?

NIRMOL CUMARY

We shall become
Bheel housewives. After all, a Scythian throne
Was better.

ISHANY

We have our weapons to befriend us yet.
Coomood, look not so pale.

NIRMOL CUMARY

See, see, Ishany!
The Bheels are leaping down upon our rear.

ISHANY

Quick, bearers, bearers.

NIRMOL CUMARY

It is too late. She's taken.

Enter Kodal and Bheels.

KODAL

Whoever wants an arrow through his skull, let him move his shanks. Women, you are my brother Bappa's prisoners; we have need of some Rajpoot slave-girls for his kitchen. Take them, my children, and tie them.

ISHANY

Stab any who comes; let not these lumps of dirt
Insult your Rajpoot bodies with their fingers.

KODAL

Shut your mouth, Rajpootny, or I will skewer your tongue to your palate with an arrow. Knock their daggers out of their hands.

He lays his hand on Nirmol's wrist.

Enter Sungram.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Off, savage! I will have no tongue-skewerer for my husband.

SUNGRAM

Release her, Kodal. Lay not thy Bheel hand
Upon a Rajpoot virgin. Maiden of Edur,
Expect no outrage. We are men who keep
Some tincture of manners yet, though savage hills
Harbour us and our looks and deeds are rugged
As the wild land we dwell in.

NIRMOL CUMARY

I grant you that. If you are the master-jockey, the winners of this

handicap are no such rank outsiders after all.

KODAL

Because thou art a Rajpoot, must thou command me? To me, Bheels! Tie up these Rajpootnys, hand and leg like so many chickens. Heed not Sungram.

SUNGRAM

Mutineer!

(draws his sword)

ISHANY *(rapidly approaching the bearers)*

Slip off unnoticed while they brawl; run, run!
O save the princess!

2ND BEARER

We will do our man's best. Silently, men, and swiftly.

KODAL

I boggle not for your sword, Rajpoot. Taste my arrows.

Exeunt bearers with Comol in the palanquin. Bappa and Prithuraj enter from the other side.

BAPPA

Now, what's the matter, Kodal?

KODAL

Why, Bappa, these new servant-girls of yours will not come to heel; they talk proudly. Yet Sungram will not let me teach them manners, because, I think, they are his aunt's cousins.

BAPPA

They shall be obedient, Kodal. Leave them to me. Remember Sungram's your commander, brother. What, you, a soldier, and break discipline!

KODAL

I am your soldier, Bappa. Sungram, you shall have your Rajpootny. I am a soldier, Rajpoot, and know my duty.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Is this the Bheel? the rough and uncouth outlaw?
He has a princely bearing. This is surely
A Rajpoot and of a high-seated blood.

BAPPA

Which of you's Edur's princess? Let her stand
Before me.

ISHANY

Who art thou that speak'st so proudly
As if a Rajpoot princess were thy slave,
Outlaw?

BAPPA

Whoe'er I am, you are in my hands,
My spoil and captives. Speak, which is the princess?

COOMOOD CUMARY

Out of thy grip and now almost in safety,
Chieftain, upon the valley road.

ISHANY

Coomood,
Thou hast betrayed thy sister by thy folly
And into vilest shame.

COOMOOD CUMARY

At least I'll share it.

Exit.

BAPPA

Ay, so? these maidens are but three. Kodal,

Four palanquins were on the road, thou told'st me.

KODAL

Sungram, give thy sword a twist in my guts. While I wrangled with thee, the best shikar of all has skedaddled.

BAPPA

Nay, mend it, — intercept the fugitive.

Exit Kodal with Bheels.

The other too has fled? but she's on foot.
Sungram and Prithuraj, lead these fair captives
Into their prison. I will go and seize
The runaways.

ISHANY

They are not for thee yet,
Hill-cateran, while I stand between.

PRITHURAJ

O here's

A Rajpoot spirit.

BAPPA

Foolish girl, canst thou
Oppose the storm-blast with a dove's white wings?

*As he goes out, she strikes at him with a
dagger; he seizes her wrist and puts her by.*

Exit Bappa.

PRITHURAJ

Thou hast a brave but headstrong spirit, maiden.
It is no savages to whom your Fates
Are kind, but men of Rajpoot blood and nurture.
Have I your leave?

He lays his hand on her wrist.

ISHANY (*sullenly*)

You take it in these hills
Before the asking, as it seems.

(*throwing away her dagger*)

Away,

Thou useless helper.

PRITHURAJ

Very useless, maiden.
When help is needed, ask it of my sword.

ISHANY

You play the courteous brigand. I shall need
No help to cast myself out of the reach
Of villains' courtesies.

PRITHURAJ (*lifting her in his arms*)

'Tis not so easy.

Must I then teach you you're a prisoner?
Come, be more patient. You shall yet be glad
Of the sweet violence today we do you.

He carries her out.

SUNGRAM

Must we follow in the same order?

NIRMOL CUMARY

By your leave, no. I turn eleven stone or thereabouts.

SUNGRAM

I will not easily believe it. Will you suffer me to test the measure?

NIRMOL CUMARY

I fear you would prove an unjust balance; so I will even walk,
if you will help me over the rough places. It seems you were
not Krishna after all?

SUNGRAM

Why, take me for brother Balaram then. Is not your name Revaty?

NIRMOL CUMARY

It is too early in the day for a proposal; positively I will not say either yes or no till the evening. On, Balaram! I follow.

Exeunt.

SCENE V

The forest near Dongurh.

Enter bearers with Comol Cumary in the palanquin.

2ND BEARER

Courage, brothers, courage! We are almost out of the wood.

Enter Kodal, leaping down from a thicket in front.

KODAL

But it is too soon to hollo. Stop, you plain-frogs, or you shall gutturalize your last croak.

2ND BEARER

Put down the palanquin; we are taken. Great emperor of Bheels, be merciful.

KODAL

Stand still, rogues. I must first haul the runaway Rajpootny out of her dog-box.

As he approaches the palanquin, the bearer strikes him down suddenly and throws his bows and arrows down the hill-side.

2ND BEARER

Quick! Let us be off while he's stunned.

Enter Bappa and Coomood, followed by Bheels.

BAPPA

Your sister cannot overstep the pass,
Which is beset and ambushed. Ho, there, halt!
Put down the palanquin. Insensate fools,
Invite not death.

The Bheels crowd in and surround the bearers.
Is't Kodal? is he hurt?

KODAL (*rising*)

Only stunned, Bappa. The hillside was a trifle harder than

my head. Plain-frog, thou didst that trick handsomely. Give me thy paw, fellow.

BAPPA

Take these men prisoners and keep them safely.
Remove your men; and, Kodal, guard the road
Barring all rescue.

Exit Kodal and Bheels with the bearers.

Princess, take your sister
Out of the palanquin.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Comol, Comol.
Dear fugitive from fate's arrest you're taken.
Come out.

COMOL CUMARY

How was it?

COOMOOD CUMARY

I told him of your flight.
You'll leave me all alone to wed a Bheel?
You'll break our compact? I have dragged you back
To servitude.

COMOL, CUMARY

Nay, let me see my captor then.
For if you smile, my Coomood, I must be
Out of misfortune's reach.

(leaving the palanquin)

Stand back, sweet. Come,
Where is this mountain thief who wars with Kings
And lays his hands on Edur's princesses
As if his trunk were an immortal piece
And he unhangable?

BAPPA (*advancing*)

I am the man,
Bappa, the outlaw.

COMOL CUMARY

This Bappa! this the Bheel?

They gaze at one another.

(*smiling*)

Why, Coomood, it was Krishna after all.
Monarch of caterans, I am Edur's princess,
Comol Cumary. Why didst thou desire me?

BAPPA

O who would not desire thee, glorious virgin?
Thou art the rose of Rajasthan and I
Will wear thee on my crest.

COMOL CUMARY

'Twas prophesied me.
But roses, King of thieves, have thorns, and see!
I have a sword.

BAPPA (*smiling*)

Thinkst thou that pretty toy
Will save thee from me?

COMOL CUMARY

It will do its best.
And if you take me still, 'tis at your peril.
I am a dangerous creature to possess.

BAPPA

I will embrace the peril as a bride
If in thy shape it dwell.

COMOL CUMARY

I swear I pity you.

You rush upon you know not what. Come now,
If 'tis a gentle serving-girl you need,
Here is my sister, Coomood, who can cook
Divinely. Take her. Let me walk on to Dongurh.
You will regret it, youth.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Believe her not,
'Tis she's a Droupadie; and who possesses her
Is fated to be Emperor of the West.

BAPPA

Nay, you are twin sweet roses on one stalk
And I will pluck you both, O flowers of Edur.

COMOL CUMARY

Why did thy men beset me, mountaineer?
What was thy hope?

BAPPA

At first 'twas policy
And some desire of thy imperial ransom.
But now I've seen thee, I will hold thee fast.
Thou art not ransomable.

COMOL CUMARY

You shall not have me, sir, till you have fought
And beaten me. You shall not get me cheaply.
I am a swashbuckler. Bheel, I can fight.

BAPPA

Marvel, thou mayst and with great ease be victor
If thou but use thy soft and shining eyes
To dazzle me out of all possibility
Of sound defence.

COMOL CUMARY

Come, measure swords, on guard!

BAPPA

Thou wilt persist then in this pretty folly?

COMOL CUMARY

Halt, halt! I will not fight except on terms.
You'll yield yourself my prisoner, Bheel, and free
My maidens, when I've drubbed you handsomely?

BAPPA

If when I've conquered, you will utterly
Surrender your sweet self into my arms,
Princess of Edur.

COMOL CUMARY

Take me if you can.

BAPPA

Thus then I take you.
(*disarms her*)

Rose, where is thy thorn?
Now thou must yield indeed.

COMOL CUMARY

Foul play! foul play!
It was not fair to rob me of my sword.
Call you this fighting? I'll not yield myself.

BAPPA

Thou hast no choice.

He seizes her.

COMOL CUMARY

I was not fairly won.
Avaunt! this is mere highway robbery.

I will not bear it.

BAPPA

Virgin, this is the moment
For which thy loveliness was born, alas.

COMOL CUMARY (*faintly*)

What will you do with me?

BAPPA

I'll carry thee,
A hungry lion, to my secret lair
Among the mighty hills, where none shall come
To save thee from me, O my glorious prey,
Bright antelope of Edur!

COOMOOD CUMARY

Will you play
With the young lion, Comol, and chafe his mood?
Now you are borne down by his heavy mane
And lie beneath his huge and tawny chest,
Trembling and silent.

BAPPA

Princess,—

COOMOOD CUMARY

May I walk on
To Dongurh?

BAPPA

No, thou mayst not. Follow me.
Hold fast my arm, nor, princess, fear to hang
Thy whole sleight weight on me up these abrupt
And breathless places, for the high ascent
Is steep and rough to our uncouth abodes.
Descent's for your small feet impossible,

Coomood, from your green prison on the heights.
There Spring shall wall you in with flowers and make
Her blossoming creepers chains for your bright limbs
Softly forbidding you, when you'd escape.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Comol, tomorrow is the feast of May.

Exeunt.

Curtain

Act Two

The forest near Dongurh.

SCENE I

In the forest near Dongurh.

Bappa, Sungram. The Captain and Rajput soldiers, guarded by Bheels.

BAPPA

Ponder it, captain. Sungram, see the bearers
Released, but let those cowards first be scourged
Who put their lives above their lady's honour.
Give golden largess to the faithful four
And send them with a script. Let Edur know
That Bappa holds his cherished daughter fast
And frees her not save for a lakh of mohurs,
Her insufficient ransom. If it displease him,
Let him come here with all his fighting men
And take her from my grip. Word it to wound him
So that he shall come thundering up the hills
Incensed inexorably.

Exit Sungram.

Soldier, again,

'Tis not my wont to slay my prisoners,
Who am a Rajpoot, and to pen you here
Eating your hearts away like prisoned lions
Were the world's loss and to myself no profit.
Take then your choice and either follow me
Or to your Edur back return unharmed.

CAPTAIN

Thou art a noble enemy, young chieftain;
But change thy boon; for I have lost my charge
Ingloriously and now can only entreat

The use of my own sword to avenge my honour
On its betrayer. Living I go not back
To Edur.

BAPPA

Soldier, thou art too scrupulous.
The wariest captain need not think it shame
To be surprised among these mountains. If Edur
Receive you not, follow my fortunes, Rajpoot.
I am as noble as the prince you serve,
And he who waits on Bappa's fateful star
May be more fortunate than kings.

CAPTAIN

Chieftain,
Save my old master's blood I serve no other
Than noble Edur.

(suddenly with excitement)

What is that jewel, boy,
Upon thy sword-hilt? Where hadst thou that weapon?

BAPPA

What moves thee thus? It is my father's sword,
Though who my father was, Fate hides from me.

CAPTAIN *(with emotion)*

I take thy offer, prince. I am thy soldier,
And all these men shall live and die for thee.

A SOLDIER

What dost thou, captain?

CAPTAIN

I have never swerved
From the high path of Rajpoot honour. Trust me,
Rajpoots.

SOLDIER

Thou wast our chief in war and always
We found thee valiant, proud and honourable.
Convince us that we may transfer unshamed
Our falchions only stained with foemen's blood,
And still we'll follow thee.

CAPTAIN

I will convince you

At a fit season.

BAPPA

Know'st thou something, soldier,
That's hid from me?

CAPTAIN

Pardon my silence, chieftain.
All things have their own time to come to light.

BAPPA

I will expect my hour then and meanwhile
Think myself twice as great as yesterday
Whom your strong hands now serve. Come, friends, with me;
Resume your swords for yet more glorious use
In Bappa's service.

Exeunt.

SCENE II

The road through the valley to Dongurh.

Toraman, Canaca, Hooshka and Scythians.

TORAMAN

I know not what impelled these mountain-boars
To worry Death with their blunt tusks. This insult
I will revenge in kind at first, then take
A bloody reckoning.

CANACA

Fegh! it was a trick even beyond my wits. To put a servant-girl
on the throne of Cashmere! All Asia would have been one grin
had the jest prospered.

TORAMAN

They take us for barbarians
And thought such gross imposture good enough
To puzzle Scythian brains. But I'll so shame
The witty clowns, they shall hang down their waggish heads
While they are still allowed to live. You'll wed
A princess of the Rajpoots, Canaca?

CANACA

I would prefer a haunch of Rajpoot venison any day; they have
fat juicy stags in their mountains.

TORAMAN

I give thee Edur's daughter. While I ride
With half my lances to our mountains, thou
Shalt ruffle round as Scythian Toraman
And wed the princess.

CANACA

Shall I indeed? Do you take me for a lettuce that you would have
me sliced for a Rajpoot salad? Oh, I'd love to be a prince if only

to comfort myself with one full meal in a lifetime; but an empty plebeian paunch is a more comfortable possession than a princely belly full of Rajpoot lances.

TORAMAN

Why should they at all
Discover thee, dull fool? None know me here.
The Rana and his men have not received me.
No doubt the arrogant princeling scorned to eat
As host and guest with me in Edur; even to dine
With us is thought a soil! Therefore 'twas fixed
In this rare plot that I should ride from Dilsa
On a fool's errand. Well, it helps me now,
Though I'll avenge it fearfully. 'Tis feasible.
None know us, you are richer-robed than I,
And what's uncouth in you, they will put down
To Scythia's utter barbarousness, whose princes
Are boors and boors unhuman. Oh, 'twill work.

CANACA

Will it? Well, so long as I keep my belly unprodded, 'tis a jest after my own heart.

TORAMAN

And mine. These haughty Rajpoots think themselves
The only purity on earth; their girls
So excellent in Aryan chastity,
That without Rajpoot birth an emperor's wooing
Is held for insult. This they hoped to avenge
By foisting a baseborn light serving-wench
On the prince of all the North. How will they stare,
How gnash their teeth and go stark-mad with shame
When they discover their sweet cherished lily,
The pride of Rajasthan, they thought too noble
To lower herself to Cashmere's lofty throne,
Bedded with the court-jester of Cashmere,
Soiled by the embraces of a low buffoon

Who patters for a wage, her pride a jest,
Her purity a puddle and herself
The world's sole laughing-stock.

CANACA

Hem! 'Twill be a jest for the centuries.

TORAMAN

About it, then.

Feign to laugh off the insult put on you
And urge your suit. Bound by their trick that failed,
They must, though with great sullenness, consent;
And that's desirable: the shame will taste
A thousand times more bitter afterwards.
Have her by force, if they are obstinate;
But have her. Soon, be sure, I will be back
With an avenging host and ring in Edur
With loud assaults till I have crucified
King, queen and princess on her smoking ruins.

Exit with a number of Scythians.

CANACA

Well then, I am Prince Toraman of Cashmere; remember that, villains. Or why not Prince Toraman-Canaca or Prince Canaca-Toraman? it is rounder and more satisfying to the mouth. Yet simple Prince Toraman has a chastity of its own and all the magnificence of Cashmere marches after it. Ho, slave! What sounds are those approaching my majesty? Send scouts and reconnoitre. Prince Toraman, the imperial son of Cashmere! It is a part I shall play with credit; nature made me for it of sufficient proportions and gave me a paunch imperial.

HOOSKA (*approaching*)

Prince Canaca-Toraman or Prince Toraman-Canaca or very simple Toraman, I hear tramp of men and the clang of armour. No doubt, the princess of Edur, thinking all safe by now, rides to Dongurh. Will you charge them and seize her?

CANACA

To cover, thou incompetent captain, to cover. Hast thou learned war and knowest not the uses of ambush? We will hide, slave. See thou pokest not out that overlong nose of thine! Find thyself a branch big enough to cover it.

HOOSKA

Humph! What signal shall we expect from your Majesty for the charge?

CANACA

Prate not to me of signals! How lacking are thy dull soldier-wits in contrivance! If I jump down into the road and howl, you will all come jumping and howling after me; but if I run, you will catch hold of my tail and run too like the very devil. Nay, I have a rare notion of tactics. To cover, to cover!

They conceal themselves. Enter the Rao of Ichalgurh, Ruttan and Rajpoots.

ICHALGURH

She has escaped me, or the Scythian has her.
The last were my dishonour.

RUTTAN

We've held the road
Since dawn. The Scythian had the serving women.
The princess has escaped.

ICHALGURH

I'm glad of it.

RUTTAN

Will you pursue it farther?

ICHALGURH

Ambition only

Engaged me once to woo her; now my honour

Is deeply pledged. The spur of chivalry
Suffers me not to yield a Rajpoot flower
To Scythian handling; nor could I refuse
A challenge to adventurous emprise
So fairly given. About, to Dongurh!

RUTTAN

Brother,
The place is strong, nor we equipped for sieges.

ICHALGURH

I'll have her out even from that fortified keeping
And set her in my crest at Ichalgurh
For gods to gaze at.

*Canaca leaps down into the road brandishing a sword,
followed by Hooshka and his Scythians.*

CANACA

Ho Amitabha! Buddha for Cashmere!

ICHALGURH

The Scythians on us! Swords!

CANACA

Put up your skewers! Quiver not, ye wretches; steady, steady your quaking kneecaps. Though I have cause for anger, yet am I merciful. Ye would have robbed me of some very pretty property, but ye are mountain-thieves by nature and nurture and know no better. Therefore peace. Sleep in thy scabbard, thou dreadful servant of the wrath of Toraman; await a fitter subject than these carcasses. Courage, Rajpoots, you shall not die.

ICHALGURH- (*smiling*)

Who is your Mightiness?

CANACA

I am the very formidable and valiant hero and Scythian, Tora-

man, prince of Cashmere. Nevertheless, tremble not. I am terrible to look at, but I have bowels; — ay, a whole paunchful of them.

ICHALGURH

You sought the Princess?

What, she has slipped through your most valiant fingers?

CANACA

As if she had greased herself with butter. But I am going to Dongurh straight away to demand her and dinner.

ICHALGURH

Together then. We're comrades in her loss;
Why not allies to win her?

CANACA

Am I to be so easily bamboozled? Wilt thou insult my cranium? Thou wouldst use my valiant and invincible sword to win her, thinking to steal her from me afterwards when I am not looking.

ICHALGURH

Who would dare

Defraud the formidable Toraman,
The valiant and heroic Scythian?

CANACA

Well!

I am content; fall in behind me, mountaineers.

ICHALGURH

Ruttan, we'll keep an eye upon this Scythian.
His show of braggart folly hides, I fear,
A deal of knavishness.

CANACA

Trumpets! To Dongurh! March!

Exeunt.

SCENE III

Bappa's cot on the hillside.

Bappa, the Captain, Coomood, decorating the cot with flowers.

BAPPA

Where was she when you had the script from her?

CAPTAIN

Singing of battle on the rocks alone
With wrestling winds in her wild hair and raiment,
A joyous Oread.

BAPPA

Said she anything?

CAPTAIN

She gave it me with glad and smiling eyes
And laughed: "This for my noble Bheel, my sovereign
Of caterans, my royal beast of prey,
These to their mighty owners."

COOMOOD CUMARY

Will you read it?

BAPPA (*reads*)

"Cateran, I have given thy captain letters which when thou hast read them, fail not to despatch. I have sent for teachers for thee to beat thee into modesty and lesson thee in better behaviour to a lady and princess —"

What letters has she given thee, captain? These?

CAPTAIN

To Pratap, Rao of Ichalgurh; — and one
To Toraman the Scythian.

BAPPA

Deliver them.

Thou'lt find at Dongurh both these warlike princes.
No, I'll not read them.

Exit Captain.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Let me hear the rest.

BAPPA

“Cateran, I will show thee the sum of thy bold and flagitious offences, though I dare not to hope that it will make thee ashamed. Thou hast laid injurious hands on a royal maiden, being thyself a mere Bheel and outlaw and of no parentage; thou hast carried me most violently to this thy inconsiderable and incommodious hut, treating the body of a princess as if it were a sack of potatoes; thou hast unmercifully and feloniously stripped my body with thy own rude Bheel hands of more ornaments than thou hast seen in thy lifetime and didst hurt me most cruelly in the deed, though thou vainly deniest it; thou hast compelled and dost yet compel me, the princess of Edur, by the infamous lack of women-servants in thy hut, to minister to thee, a common Bheel, menially with my own royal hands, so that my fingers are sore with scrubbing thy rusty sword which thou hast never used yet on anything braver than a hill-jackal, and my face is still red with leaning over the fire cooking thy most unroyal meals for thee; and to top these crimes, thou hast in thy robustious robber fashion taken a kiss from my lips without troubling thyself to ask for it, and thou yet keepest it with thee. All which are high misdoings and mortal offences; yet would I have pardoned them knowing thee to be no more than a boy and a savage. But now thou darest to tell me that I, a Rajpoot maiden, am in love with thee, a Bheel, and that even if I deny it, thou carest not; for I am thine already whether I will or no, thy captive and thy slave-girl. This is not to be borne. So I have written to my noble suitors of Ichalgurh and Scythia to avenge me upon thy Bheel body; I doubt not, they will soon carry thy head to Edur in a basket, if thou hast the manners to permit them. Yet since thy followers call thee Smiter of the Forest and

Lion of the Hills, let me see thee smite more than jackals and rend braver than flesh of mountain-deer. Cateran, when thou trundlest the Scythian down-hill like a ball, thou mayst marry me in spite of thy misdeeds, if thou darest; and when thou showest thyself a better man than the Chouhan of Ichalgurh, which is impossible, thou mayst even keep me for thy slave-girl and I will not deny thee. Meanwhile, thou shalt give me a respite till the seventh morn of the May. Till then presume not to touch me. Thy captive, Comol Cumary."

Why, here's a warlike and most hectoring letter,
Coomood.

COOMOOD · CUMARY

She pours her happy heart out so
In fantasies; I never knew her half so wayward.
The more her soul is snared between your hands,
The more her lips will chide you.

BAPPA

Can you tell
Why she has set these doughty warriors on me,
Coomood?

COOMOOD CUMARY

You cannot read a woman's mind.
It's to herself a maze inextricable
Of vagrant impulses with half-guessed tangles
Of feeling her own secret thoughts are blind to.

BAPPA

But yet?

COOMOOD CUMARY

Her sudden eager headstrong passion
Would justify its own extravagance
By proving you unparalleled. Therefore she picks
Earth's brace of warriors out for your opponents.

BAPPA

Pratap the Chouhan, Rao of Ichalgurh!
To meet him merely were a lifetime's boast;
But to cross swords with him! Oh, she has looked
Into my heart.

COOMOOD CUMARY

You'll give her seven days?

BAPPA

Not hours, — the dainty rebel! Great Ichalgurh
Will wing here like an eagle; soon I'll meet him
And overthrow, who feel a giant's strength,
Coomood, since yesterday. My fate mounts sunward.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Ours, Bappa, has already arrived. Our sun
Rose yesterday upon the way to Dongurh.

SCENE IV

Outside Dongurh.

Ichalgurh, a letter in his hand; Ruttan, the Captain.

ICHALGURH

Who art thou, soldier?

CAPTAIN

The leader of the lances
That guarded Edur's princess and with her
Were captured by the Bheels. Their chief I serve.

ICHALGURH

Thou hast dishonoured then the Rajpoot name
Deserting from thy lord to serve a ruffian
Under the eyes of death, thou paltry trembler.

CAPTAIN

My honour, Rao of Ichalgurh, is mine
To answer for, and at a fitting name
I will return thy insults on my swordpoint.
But now I am only a messenger.

ICHALGURH

I'll read

The princess' writing. (*reads*) "Baron of Ichalgurh,
My mother's clansman, warrior, noble Rajpoot,
Thrice over therefore bound to help the weak
And save the oppressed! A maiden overpowered,
Comol Cumary, Edur's princess, sues
For thy heroic arm of rescue, prince,
To the Bheel outlaws made a prey, unsought
By her own kin; whom if thou save, I am
A princess and thy handmaid, else a captive
Only and Bappa's slave-girl." Go! my war-cry
Echoing among the hills shall answer straightway

This piteous letter. Ruttan, swift! Arm! arm!
I will not vent my wrath in braggart words,
But till it leap into my sword, I suffer.

RUTTAN

You shall not wait for long.

Exit.

CAPTAIN

I have a letter
To Toraman, the Scythian.

ICHALGURH

Give it to him,
For this is he.

Enter Canaca, Hooshka and Scythians.

CANACA

It will not fill. This paltry barren Rajputana has not the where-
withal to choke up the gulf within me. Ha! avaunt! Dost thou
flutter paper before me? I have no creditors in Rajputana.

CAPTAIN

I understand thee not. This is a script
Comol Cumary sends thee, Edur's princess.

CANACA

Is it so? Well then, thou mayst kneel and lay it at my feet; I
will deign to read it. (*The Captain flings it into his hands.*) What,
thou dirty varlet! (*The Captain lays his hand on his sword.*) Nay,
it is a game? Oh, I can catch, I can catch.

Exit Captain.

CANACA (*reads*)

"Prince Toraman, they say thou desirest me and camest from
Cashmere as far as Edur for my sake. Thou must come a
little farther, prince! Bappa, the outlaw, has been beforehand

with thee and holds me in durance among the hills. Prince, if thou yet desirest this little beauty one poor body can hold, come up hither and fight for its possession which otherwise I must in seven days perforce yield to my captor. From whom if thou canst rescue me, — but I will not drive bargains with thee, trusting rather to thy knightly princeliness to succour a distressed maiden for no hope of reward. Comol Cumary.”

No, no, no; there is too much butter about thee. No hope of reward! What! I shall fight like an enraged rhinoceros, I shall startle the hills by my valour, I shall stick three thousand Bheels with my own princely hand like so many boar-pigs; and all this violent morning exercise for what? To improve my appetite? I have more gastric juice than my guts can accommodate. They roar to me already for a haunch of venison.

HOOSKA

Prince Toraman, shall I give the order for the hills?

CANACA

Ay, Hooshka Longnose, hast thou news of venison, good fellow?

HOOSKA

I meant, to rescue the Princess Comol Cumary from the Bheels.

CANACA

Didst thou mean so? Nay, I will not hinder thy excellent intentions. But bring some venison with thee as thou comest along with her, Hooshka.

HOOSKA

Prince of Cashmere, lead us to the hills and tear her from the grip of the outlaws. As a prince and a soldier thou canst do no less.

CANACA

Thou liest through thy long nose! I can do much less than that. I will not suffer thee to put limits to my infinite ability. And I

can tell a decoy-duck from a live gander. Shall I waddle my shins into Bappa's trap? This letter was written under compulsion.

HOOSHKA

The Princess must be rescued. I wonder, Prince Toraman, that thou wilt jest over a thing so grave and unhappy.

CANACA

Why, genius will out, you cannot stable it for long, Hooshka; it will break bounds and gallop. Yet go, Hooshka, go; take all my men, Hooshka. Hooshka, slay the Bheel; rescue the lady, Hooshka. I wish I could go with thee and swing my dreadful blade with my mighty arm till the mountains re-echoed. But the simple truth is, I have a bleeding dysentery. Willingly would I shed my princely blood for my sweet lady, but it is shedding itself already otherwise.

HOOSHKA (*aside*)

Thou fat-gutted cowardly rogue, wilt thou blacken the name of a hero with thy antics? Out at once, or the Rajpoots shall know who thou art and carve thee into little strips for a dog's dinner.

CANACA

Sayst thou, my little captain? Thy arguments are strangely conclusive. Arms! arms! my horse! my horse! Out, Scythians, to the hills! My horse, I say! I will do deeds; I will paint the hills in blood and tattoo the valleys. (*Enter Scythians.*) Amitabha! Amitabha! yell, you rogues, have you no lungs in your big greasy carcasses? With what will you fight then?

SCYTHIANS

Amitabha!

Enter Ruttan and Rajpoots.

RUTTAN

Rajpoots, to save a noble lady captured
We march today. No gallant open enemy,

But savages who lurk behind the rocks
Are our opposers. Sweep them from the hills,
Rajpoots, with the mere flashing of your swords
And rescue from their villain touch a princess.

Exeunt Ichalgurh, Ruttan and Rajpoots.

CANACA

March, Scythians! (*aside*) Hooshka, what say you? We will keep behind these mad-dog Rajpoots and fight valiantly in their shadow. That is but strategy.

HOOSKA (*aside*)

If thou dost, I will kick thee into the enemy's midst with my jackboots.

CANACA (*aside*)

Wilt thou muddy such a fine coat as this is? Hast thou the heart? (*aloud*) Trumpets! Into the breach, into the breach, my soldiers!

Exeunt.

SCENE V

In the forest.

Pratap, Ruttan and Rajpoots.

OUTSIDE

Bappa! Bappa! Ho, Sheva Ekling!

An arrow descends and a Rajpoot falls.

RUTTAN

Still upwards!

ICHALGURH

Upwards still! Death on the height
Seats crowned to meet us; downwards is to dishonour
And that's no Rajpoot movement. Brother Ruttan,
We're strangled with a noose intangible.
O my brave Rajpoots, by my headlong folly
Led to an evil death!

RUTTAN

What is this weakness,
Chouhan of famous Ichalgurh? Remember
Thyself, my brother. But a little more
And we have reached their wasps'-nest on the hills.

ICHALGURH

Not one alive.

Another arrow. A Rajpoot falls.

RUTTAN

I ask no better fate
Brother, than at thy side however slain,
Victorious or defeated.

ICHALGURH

We have acted

Like heedless children, thinking we had to stamp
Our armoured heel on a mere swarm and rabble,
But find ourselves at grip with skilful fighters
And a great brain of war. Safe under cover
They pick us off; we battle blindly forwards
Without objective, smiting at the wind,
Stumbling as in a nightmare and transfixed
Ignobly by a foe invisible
Our falchions cannot reach, — like crows, like jackals,
Not like brave men and battle-famous warriors.

RUTTAN

Still on!

ICHALGURH

Yes, on, till the last man falls pierced
Upon the threshold that immures the sweetness
We could not save. Forward the Chouhan!

Enter Kodal.

KODAL

Halt!

A parley!

ICHALGURH

Speak, but talk not of surrender.

KODAL

'Tis that I'll talk of. I am Bappa's mouthpiece.
Rajpoots, you're quite surrounded. If we choose,
Our arrows buzzing through your brains can end you
In five swift minutes. Lay then at Bappa's feet
Your humble heads; else like mad dogs be skewered
And yelp your lives out.

ICHALGURH

Return unpunished; the name

Of envoy guards thy barbarous insolence.

Enter Sungram.

SUNGRAM

You speak too insolently your message, Kodal.
Chouhan of Ichalgurh, thou art too great
To die thus butchered. We demand a parley
For courteous equal terms, not base surrender.

ICHALGURH

Thou art a Rajpoot; dost thou lead these arrows?

SUNGRAM

I lead the shafts that wear thee out; another
Surrounds the Scythian; but we are the hands
Of one more godlike brain.

ICHALGURH

With him I'll parley.

SUNGRAM

'Tis well. Go, Kodal, learn our chieftain's will.

Exit Kodal.

ICHALGURH

Young man, thou hast a Rajpoot form and bearing,
Yet herd'st with the wild forest tribes, remote
From arms and culture. Dost thou hide thy name too?

SUNGRAM

I am a Chouhan like thyself, of birth
As princely. Ask the warriors of Ajmere
Who valiant Martund was; his sons are we,
Sungram and Prithuraj.

ICHALGURH

O youth, thy father

Was my great pattern and my guide in war.
Brother and enemy, embrace me.

They embrace.

Sungram,
Who is thy captain? For the sons of Martund
Serve not a Bheel.

SUNGRAM

Thine eyes shall answer thee.

Enter Bappa and Kodal.

ICHALGURH

A noble-featured-youth! What son of Kings
Lives secret in these rugged hills?

BAPPA

Chouhan

Of famous Ichalgurh, now if I'm slain
In battle, I can tell the dead I've seen thee,
Thou god of war. O let there be no hatred,
Hero, between us, but only faith.

ICHALGURH

Young chieftain,

Thou bear'st a godlike semblance, but thy deeds
Are less than noble. Hast thou not seized a princess
By robber violence, forced her with thee
To thy rude lair and threatenest her sweet body
With shameful mastery?

BAPPA

We are warriors, Rajpoot;
Two ways of mating only fit for us,
By mutual sweet attraction undenied
To grow to oneness as they do in heaven,
Or else with lion leap to seize our bride
And pluck her from the strong protecting spears

Taking her heart by violence. We mate not
 Like castes unwarlike, from a father's hand
 Drawing an innocent wide-eyed wondering child
 Like cattle given or sold. This was the way
 Of Rajpoots long before the earth grew aged;
 And shall a Rajpoot blame it? Wherefore then rod'st thou
 Clanging last morn from Ichalgurh in arms,
 Pratap the Chouhan?

ICHALGURH

Chieftain, I am pledged
 To save the girl from thee.

BAPPA

But canst redeem
 The vow with thy dead body only. Hero,
 I too am sworn to keep her 'gainst the world.
 Let us in the high knightly way decide it.
 Deign to cross swords with me and let the victor
 Possess the maiden.

ICHALGURH

O thou springing stem
 That surely yet will rise to meet the sun!
 Agreed. Let no man intervene betwixt us.

BAPPA

Kodal, restrain thy Bheels.

Exit Kodal. They fight.

RUTTAN

Bold is thy chieftain
 To match his boyish arm against my brother!

SUNGRAM

He is a mighty warrior, but not age
 Nor bulk can measure strength; the exultant spirit

Facing towards glory gives the arm a force
Mightier than physical. He's down.

Ichalgurh falls wounded.

RUTTAN

Great Ichalgurh!

Who is this godlike combatant?

BAPPA

Surrender

My princess, Chouhan.

ICHALGURH

Thou hast her who deserv'st
Much more than her.

He rises.

Young hero who in thy first battle o'erbear'st
Maturer victors! Know Pratap the Chouhan
Unalterably thy friend. When thou shalt ask
My sword, 'tis thine.

BAPPA

Thou'rt wounded?

ICHALGURH (*binding his wound*)

I have been worse

And ridden far to meet the foe. Another day
We'll share one rocky pillow on the hills
And talk of battles.

BAPPA

Pratap, I could but offer
A rude and hill-side hospitality.
But when I hold my court in mighty Edur
I will absolve thy morning's debt.

Enter Captain.

ICHALGURH

Farewell.

BAPPA

Escort him, friend.

Exeunt Sungram, Ichalgurh, Ruttan and Rajpoots.

How speeds the battle, comrade,
There with the Scythians?

CAPTAIN

It is finished, prince.

They fell in slaughtered heaps.

BAPPA

Prince Toraman?

CAPTAIN

Lay flat and bellowed. We'd have taken him,
But Prithuraj, mad for the joy of battle,
Leaped on their foremost; while he hewed them down,
Like an untiring woodman, one giant Scythian
Crashing through bush and boulder hurled himself
Out of thy net; with him a loyal handful
Carried this Toraman.

Enter Prithuraj.

PRITHURAJ

Pardon my error,

Bappa.

BAPPA

It was a noble fault, my soldier.
We have done all we hoped. The amorous Scythian
Will not return in haste mid our green hills
To woo a Rajpoot maiden. Let us go.
I wonder when great Edur moves upon us.
I long to hear his war assail our mountains.

Exeunt.

SCENE VI

Outside Bappa's cot.

Comol Cumary alone.

COMOL CUMARY

Have I too dangerously ventured my all
Daring a blast so rude? The Scythian roar
Appals no more the forest, nor the war-cry
Of Ichalgurh climbs mightily the hills;
The outlaws' fierce triumphant shout is stilled
Of their young war-god's name. Who has won? who fallen?

Enter Bappa.

COMOL CUMARY (*coming eagerly to him*)

How went the fight? You're safe! And Ichalgurh?

BAPPA

Give me your hands; I'll tell you.

COMOL CUMARY

I see your head's

Not in the basket.

He takes her hands and draws her towards him.

Cateran, I forbade you

To touch me till the seventh day.

BAPPA

I touch

What is my own. To bid or to forbid
Is mine upon this hill-side where I'm sovereign.
Sit down by me.

COMOL CUMARY

I will not be commanded.

She sits down at his feet.

BAPPA

Oh, you are right, love. At my feet's more fitting
Who am your master and monarch. Come, no rising.
Stay there, where I can watch your antelope eyes
Look up at me bright with all love's own sunshine.

COMOL CUMARY

Oh, you provoke me. You've not met the Chouhan,
Or you'd have been much chastened.

BAPPA

I have met him.

COMOL CUMARY

Great Ichalgurh?

BAPPA

We soon o'ercame the Scythians.
Your lover, Comol, the great Toraman,
Was borne, a mass of terror-stricken flesh,
By faithful fugitives headlong down the hill-side.

COMOL CUMARY

You need not triumph. These were only Scythians.
But what of Ichalgurh?

BAPPA

We fought. I conquered.

COMOL CUMARY

Thou? thou? It is impossible.

BAPPA

But done.

COMOL CUMARY

Why, you're a boy, a child! O my bright lion,
You are a splendid and a royal beast,
But very youthful. This was the maned monarch
Whose roar shook all the forest when he leaped

Upon his opposite. Then the great tusker
Went down beneath his huge and tawny front
As if it were an antelope. Him you've conquered?

BAPPA

He fell and yielded.

COMOL CUMARY

You have learned romance
From the wild hill-tops and the stars at night
And take your visions for the fact.

BAPPA

Arch-infidel!

Ask Sungram.

COMOL CUMARY

Then I understand. You won
As in your duel with me, quite unfairly.
You used your sleight of hand?

BAPPA

Perhaps, my princess,
His foot slipped and he fell; 'twas my good fortune,
Not I that conquered him.

COMOL CUMARY

Indeed it was
Your high resistless fortune. O my king,
My hero, thou hast o'erborne great Ichalгурh;
Then who can stand against thee? Thou shalt conquer
More than my heart.

(Bappa takes her into his arms)

What dost thou, Bheel? Forbear!
I did but jest.

BAPPA

Do you recall your letter,

Comol? I have outdone the Chouhan, girl.

COMOL CUMARY

Bheel, I wrote nothing, nothing.

BAPPA

I'll keep you now
For my sweet slave-girl, princess? You will not
Deny me?

COMOL CUMARY

'Twas not my hand. Your Coomood forged it.
I'll not admit it.

BAPPA

Rebel against your heart!
You're trapped in your own springs. My antelope!
I've brought you to my lair; shall I not prey on you?
Kiss me.

COMOL CUMARY

I will not.
(*Kisses him*)

O not now! O give me
The memory of this May to keep with me
Till death and afterwards, a dream of greenness
With visions of the white and vermeil spring,
A prelude set to winds and waterfalls
Among the mountains of immortal Dongurh
Far from the earth, in a delightful freedom
Treading the hilltops, all the joy of life
In front of me to dream of its perfection,
Bappa.

BAPPA

When you entreat, who shall refuse you,
O lips of honey?

COMOL CUMARY

Till the seventh morning,

Bappa.

BAPPA

Only and till then.

COMOL CUMARY

That is a promise.

(escaping from him)

Which, having won, I do deny, unsay,
Wholly recant and absolutely abjure
Whatever flattery I have said or done
To win it. You are still my Bheel and Brigand,
My lawless cateran; I great Edur's princess.
I love you! Do not dream of it. Six days!
By then my father'll smoke you from your lair
And take me from your dreadful claws, my lion,
An antelope undevoured.

BAPPA

Have you yet thought
Of the dire punishments you'll taste for this,
Deceiver?

COMOL CUMARY

Not till the seventh morning, lion.

Exit.

BAPPA

Till then, my antelope, range my hills and make them
An Eden for me with thy wondrous beauty
Moving in grace and freedom of the winds,
Sweetness of the green woodlands; for of these
Thou seem'st a part and they thy natural country.

Exit.

Curtain

Act Three

The forest near Dongurh.

SCENE I

Comol, Coomood, meeting in the forest.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Where were you hidden, Comol, all this morning?

COMOL CUMARY

I have been wandering in my woods alone
Imagining myself their mountain queen.
O Coomood, all the woodland worshipped me!
Coomood, the flowers held up their incense-bowls
In adoration and the soft-voiced winds
Footing with a light ease among the leaves
Paused to lean down and lisp into my ear,
Oh, pure delight. The forest's unnamed birds
Hymned their sweet sovran lady as she walked
Lavishing melody. The furry squirrels
Peeped from the leaves and waved their bushy tails,
Twittering, "There goes she, our beloved lady,
Comol Cumary;" and the peacocks came
Proud to be seen by me and danced in front,
Shrilling, "How gorgeous are we in our beauty,
Yet not so beautiful as is our lady,
Comol Cumary." I will be worshipped, Coomood.

COOMOOD CUMARY

You shall be. There's no goddess of them all
That has these vernal looks and such a body
Remembering the glory whence it came
Or apt to tread with the light vagrant breeze
Or rest with moonlight.

COMOL CUMARY

That was what they told me,
The voices of the forest, — sister Coomood,
The myriad voices.

COOMOOD CUMARY

What did they tell you, Comol?

COMOL CUMARY

They told me that my hair was a soft dimness
With thoughts of light imprisoned in't; the gods,
They said, looked down from heaven and saw my eyes
Wishing that that were heaven. They told me, child,
My face was such as Brahma once had dreamed of
But could not — no, for all the master-skill
That made the worlds — recapture in the flesh
So rare a sweetness. They called my perfect body
A feast of gracious beauty, a refrain
And harmony in womanhood embodied.
They told me all these things, — Coomood, they did,
Though you will not believe it. I understood
Their leafy language.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Come; you did not need
So to translate the murmurings of the leaves
And the wind's whisper. 'Twas a human voice
I'll swear, so deftly flattered you.

COMOL CUMARY

Fie, Coomood,
It was the trees, the waters; the pure, soft flowers
Took voices.

COOMOOD CUMARY

One voice. Did he roar softly, sweetheart,
To woo you?

COMOL CUMARY

Oh, he's a recreant to his duty.
He loves the wild deer fleeing on the hills
And the strong foeman's glittering blade, not Comol.
You must not talk of him, but of the hills
And greenness and of me.

COOMOOD CUMARY

And Edur, Comol?

COMOL CUMARY

Edur! It is a name that I have heard
In some dim past, in some old far-off world
I moved in, oh, a waste of centuries
And many dreams ago. I'll not return there.
It had no trees, I'm sure, no jasmine-bushes,
No happy breezes dancing with linked hands
Over the hill-tops, no proud-seated hills
Softening the azure, high-coped deep-plunging rocks
Or flowery greenness round, no birds, no Spring.

COOMOOD CUMARY

We are the distance of a world from Edur.
Tomorrow is the May-feast's crowning day,
Comol.

COMOL CUMARY

Oh then we shall be happy breezes
And dance with linked hands upon the hills
All the Spring-morning.

COOMOOD CUMARY

It is a May to be
Remembered.

COMOL CUMARY

It is the May-feast of my life,

Coomood, the May-feast of my life, the May
That in my heart shall last for ever, sweet
For ever and for ever. Where are our sisters?

COOMOOD CUMARY

Nirmol is carrying water from the spring;
Ishany hunts the browsing stag today,
A sylvan archeress.

COMOL CUMARY

What have you in the basket?

COOMOOD CUMARY

Flowers I have robbed the greenest woodland of
For Bappa's worship. They must hide with bloom,
Sheva Ekling today. Tomorrow, sweet,
I'll gather blossoms for your hair instead
And weave you silver-petalled anklets, ear-rings
Of bright maybloom, zones of Spring-honeysuckle,
And hide your arms in vernal gold. We'll set you
Under a bough, our goddess of the Spring,
And sylvanly adore, covering your feet
With flowers that almost match their moonbeam whiteness
Or palely imitate their rose; — our Lady,
Comol Cumary.

COMOL CUMARY

Will Bappa worship me?
But I 'am an inferior goddess, Coomood,
And dare not ask the King of Paradise
To adore me.

COOMOOD CUMARY

You must adore him, that's your part.

COMOL CUMARY

I will, while 'tis the May.

COOMOOD CUMARY

And afterwards?

COMOL CUMARY

Coomood, we will not think of afterwards
In Dongurh, in the springtide.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Tomorrow dawns

The seventh morning, Comol.

COMOL CUMARY

I did not hear you.

Are these our hunters?

Enter Prithuraj and Ishany.

ISHANY

I have a better aim

Than yours.

PRITHURAJ

Did I deny it? Oh, you shoot
Right through the heart.

ISHANY

I'll never marry one

Whom I outdo at war or archery.
You tell me you are famous Martund's son,
The mighty Gehlote. Wherefore lurk you then
In unapproachable and tangled woods
Warding off glory with your distant shafts,
While life sweeps past in the loud vale below?
Not breast the torrent, not outbrave its shocks
To carve your names upon the rocks of Time
Indelibly?

PRITHURAJ

We will affront, Ishany,

The Ganges yet with a victorious gleam
Of armour. But our fates are infant still
And in their native thickets they must wait
To flesh themselves and feel their lion strengths
Before they roar abroad.

ISHANY

Until they do,
Talk not of love.

PRITHURAJ

What would you have me do?
O'erbear in arms the Scythian Toraman,
And slay the giant Hooshka? Meet Ichalгурh
And come unharmed, or with my single sword
Say halt to a proud score of the best lances
You have in Edur? This and more I can
For thee, Ishany.

ISHANY

You talk, but do it first.
Doers were never talkers, Prithuraj.

PRITHURAJ

Oh, that's a narrow maxim. Noble speech
Is a high prelude fit for noble deeds;
It is the lion's roar before he leaps.
Proud eloquence graces the puissant arm
And from the hall of council to the field
Was with the great and iron men of old
Their natural stepping.

ISHANY

You only roar as yet.
I beat you with the bow today; sometime
I'll fight you with the sword and beat you.

PRITHURAJ

Will you?

Just as your lady did?

ISHANY

She played, she played,
But I would aim in earnest at your heart.
One day we'll fight and see.

PRITHURAJ

Why, if we do,
I'll claim a conqueror's right on your sweet body,
Ishany.

ISHANY

And my heart? You must do more,
If you'll have that.

PRITHURAJ

It cannot now be long
Before the mailed heel of Edur rings
Upon our hill-side rocks. Then I'll deserve it.

ISHANY

Till then you are my fellow hunter only,
Not yet my captain.

Enter Nirmol.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Idlers and ne'er-do-weels, home! Here have I carried twelve full jars from the spring, set wood on the stove, kindled the fire, while you play gracefully the sylvan gadabouts. Where is the venison?

PRITHURAJ

Travelling to the cooking-pot on a Bheel's black shoulders.

NIRMOL CUMARY

In your service, Ishany! or you shall not taste the stag you have hunted.

ISHANY

Child, do not tyrannize. I am as hungry with this hunting as a beef-swallowing Scythian.

Exit.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Off with you, hero, and help, her with your heroic shoulders.

Exit Prithuraj.

COMOL CUMARY

A pair of warlike lovers!

NIRMOL CUMARY

You are there, sister-truants? Have you no occupation but to lurk in leaves and eavesdrop upon the prattle of lovers?

COMOL CUMARY

Why, Nirmol, I did my service before I came.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Yes, I know! To sweep one room — oh, scrupulously clean, for is it not Bappa's? and to scrub his armour for a long hour till it is as bright as your eyes grow when they are looking at Bappa, — do they not, Coomood?

COOMOOD CUMARY

They do, like stars allowed to gaze at God.

NIRMOL CUAMRY

Exact! I have seen her —

COMOL CUMARY

Nirmol, I do not know how many twigs there are in the forest,

but I will break them all on your back, if you persevere.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Do you think you are princess of Edur here that you threaten me? No, we are in the democracy of Spring where all sweet flowers are equals. Oh, I will be revenged on you for your tyrannies in Edur. I have seen her, Coomood, when she thought none was looking, lay her cheek wistfully against the hilt of his sword, trying to think that the cold hard iron was the warm lips of its master and hers. I have seen her kiss it furtively —

COMOL CUMARY (*embracing and stopping her mouth*)

Hush, hush, you wicked romancer.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Go then and cook our meal like a good princess and I will promise not to repeat all the things I have heard you murmur to yourself when you were alone.

COMOL CUMARY

Nirmol, you grow in wickedness with years. Wait till I have you back in Edur, maiden; I'll scourge this imp of mischief out of you.

NIRMOL CUMARY

I have heard her, Coomood, —

COMOL CUMARY

I am off, I am away! I am an arrow from Kodal's bow.

Exit.

NIRMOL CUMARY

She is hard to drive, but I have the whip-hand of her.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Have you the crimson sandal-powder ready?
Flowers for the garlands Spring in sweet abundance
Provides us.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Yes. She shall be wedded first
Before she knows it.

COOMOOD CUMARY

Unless my father's sword
Striking us through the flowery walls we hide in,
Prevent it, Nirmol.

NIRMOL CUMARY

Coomood, our fragile flowers will weave
A bond that steel cannot divide, nor death
Dissever.

Exeunt.

Curtain

Wait till I have you back in Edur, maiden; ·

I'll scourge this imp of mischief out of you.

Nirm. I have heard her, Coomood, -

Com. I am off, I am away! I am an arrow from Hodal's bow. Exit

Nirm. She is hard to drive, but I have the whip-hand of her.

Com. Have you the crimson sandal-powder ready?
Flowers for the garlands Spring misivet abundance
Provides us.

Nirm. Yes. She shall be wedded fast

Before she knows it

Com. Unless my father's word
Striking us through the flowery walls we hide in,
Prevent it, Nirmal.

Nirm. Coomood, ^{our fragile flowers will mean}
~~will we have with flowers~~
A bond that steel cannot divide, nor death
Disrupt.

Exit

Friday. February 10th 1907

Monday February 11th 1907

Tuesday. February 12th

THE MAID IN THE MILL

LOVE SHUFFLES THE CARDS

A Comedy

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

CUPID.

ATE.

KING PHILIP OF SPAIN.

COUNT BELTRAN, a nobleman.

ANTONIO, his son.

BASIL, his nephew.

COUNT CONRAD, a young nobleman.

RONCEDAS, }
GUZMAN, } Courtiers.

THE MILLER.

ACINTO, his son.

JERONIMO, a student.

CARLOS, a student.

FRIAR BALTASAR, a pedagogue.

EUPHROSYNE, the maid of the farm.

ISMENIA, sister of Conrad.

BRIGIDA, her cousin.

Scene 2.

A garden at the house of Count Bertran

Enter Antonio, Basil

Bas. I am ^{abashed} ~~astonished~~ ^{by} yours. What, make a lady
Woo you, and she a face so excellent
Of an address so admirably sweetly
It shows a goddess in her — at each sentence
Let pause to give you opportunity
And shame her with the dead silence of the hall
For her continual answer. He, you're not
Antonio, you're not Bertran's issue. Seek
Your kindred in the snowdrifts of the Alps,
Or call a post your father.

Ant.

I censure,

Your censure, Basil. Yet were it done again,
I know I should again be dumb. My tongue
Seems in imagination but is barren
In actuality. When I am from her,
I woo her with the accent of a god,

Act One

SCENE I

The King's Court at Salamanca.

King Philip, Conrad, Beltran, Roncedas, Guzman, Antonio, Basil, Ismenia, Brigida, Grandees.

KING PHILIP

Count Beltran.

BELTRAN

Sire?

KING PHILIP

Shall we know the device?

BELTRAN

It is no secret, Sire. And yet so little
This toy is mine, the name's far off from me.
Castilians, forged iron of old time
Armies to wield and empires, we're astray
With these smooth, silken things. We were never valiant
Vega with Calderon to weigh and con
Devices. But our sons, Sire, have outstripped
Their rough begetters, almost they are Frenchmen.
Speak you, Antonio.

ANTONIO

'Tis the Judgment, Sire,
Of Paris and the Rape of Spartan Helen.

KING PHILIP

That is an old device.

ISMENIA

Antonio? He

Antonio? O my poor eyes misled,
Whither have you wandered?

BELTRAN

Hush.

ANTONIO

The older, Sire,

The fitter for a masque that's heard but once.
For the swift action of the stage speeds on
And slow conception labouring after it
Roughens its subtleties, blurs o'er its shades,
Sees masses only. Then if the plot is new,
The mind engrossed with incidents, omits
To take the breath of flowers and lingering shade
In hurrying with the stream. But the plot known,
It is at leisure and may cull in running
Those delicate, scarcely-heeded strokes, which lost
Perfection's disappointed. There art comes in
To justify genius. Being old besides
The subject occupies¹ creative labour
To make old new. The other's but invention,
A frail thing, though a gracious. He's creator
Who greatly handles great material,
Calls order out of the abundant deep,
Not who invents sweet shadows out of air.
Pardon, Sir, I forgot my limits thus
To speak at random in so great a presence.

KING PHILIP

You have a hopeful son, Lord Beltran, modest
And witty, a fair conjunction, a large critic
And taking speaker.

ISMENIA

True, O true! He has taken

¹ amplifies

My heart out of my bosom.

BRIGIDA

Will you hush?

KING PHILIP

Count, I have heard your lands are very lavish
In Nature's best. I think I have not seen them.
Indeed I grudge each rood of Spanish earth
My eyes have not perused, my heart stored up.
Yet what with foreign boyhood, strange extraction
And hardly reaching with turmoil to power
I am a stranger purely. I have swept
Through beautiful Spain more like a wind than man,
Now fugitive, now blown into my right
On a mere whirlwind of success. But maybe
Great occupation has disabled you
From this poor trifle also.

BELTRAN

I avow

My son would answer better, Sire. I care not
Whether this tree be like a tower or that
A dragon: and I never saw myself
Difference twixt field and field, save the main one
Of size, boundary and revenue; and those
Were great once, — why now lessened and by whom
I will not move you by repeating, Sire,
Although my heart speaks of it feelingly.

KING PHILIP

Speak then, Antonio, but tell me not
Of formal French demesnes and careful parks,
Life dressed like a stone lady, statuesque,
They please the judging eye, but not the heart.
When Nature is disnatured, all her glowing
Great outlines chillingly disharmonised

Into stiff lines, the heart's dissatisfied,
Asks freedom, wideness, it compares the sweep
Of the large heavens above and feels a discord.
Your architects plan beauty by the yard,
Weigh sand with sand, parallel line with line
But miss the greatest. Since uncultured force
Though rude, yet striking home, by far exceeds
Artisan's work, mechanically good.

ANTONIO

Our fields, Sire, are a rural holiday,
Not Nature carved?

KING PHILIP

Has she a voice to you?
Silent, she's not so fair.

ANTONIO

Yes, we have brooks
Muttering through sedge and stone, and willows by them
Leaning dishevelled and forget-me-nots,
Wonders of lurking azure, rue and mallow,
Honeysuckle and painful meadowsweet,
And when we're tired of watching the rich bee
Murmur absorbed about one lonely flower
Then we can turn and hear a noon of birds.
Each on his own heart's quite intent, yet all
Join sweetness at melodious intervals.

KING PHILIP

You have many trees?

ANTONIO

Glades, Sire, and green assemblies
And separate giants bending to each other
As if they longed to meet. Some are pranked out,
Others wear merely green like foresters.

ISMENIA

Can hatred sound so sweet? Are enemies' voices
Like hail of angels to the ear, Brigida?

BRIGIDA

Hush, fool. We are too near. Someone will mark you.

ISMENIA

Why, cousin, if they do, what harm? Sure all
Unblamed may praise sweet music when they hear it.

BRIGIDA

Rule your tongue, madam. Or must I leave you?

KING PHILIP

You have made me sorrowful. How different
Is this pale picture of a Court, these walls
Shut out from honest breathing; God kept not
His quarries in the wild and distant hills
For such perversion. It was sin when first
Hands serried stone with stone. Guzman, you are
A wise, a patient reasoner, — is it not better
To live in the great air God made for us,
A peasant in the open glory of earth,
Feeling it, yet not knowing it, like him
To drink the cool life-giving brook nor crave
The sour fermented madness of the grape
Nor the dull exquisiteness of far-fetched viands
For the tired palate, but black bread or maize,
Mere wholesome ordinary corn. Think you not
A life so in the glorious sunlight bathed,
Straight nursed and suckled from the vigorous Earth
With shaping labour and the homely touch
Of the great hearty mother, edifies
A nobler kind than nourished is in Courts?
But we are even as children quite removed
From those her streaming breasts, and of the sun

Defrauded and the lusty salutation
Of wind and rain, grow up amphibious nothing,
Non-man, who are too sickly wise for earth
And too corrupt to be the heirs of heaven.

GUZMAN

I think not so, Your Highness.

KING PHILIP

Not so, Guzman?

Is not a peasant happier than a king?
For he has useful physical toil and sleep
Unbroken as a child's. He is not hedged
By swathing ceremony which forbids
A king to feel himself a man. He has friends,
For he has equals. And in youth he marries
The comrade of his boyhood whom he loved
And gets on that sweet helper stalwart children,
Then brings his grandchildren climbing on his knees,
A happy calm old man; because he lived
Man's genuine life and goes with task accomplished
Thro' death as thro' a gate, not questioning.

GUZMAN

Each creature labouring in his own vocation
Desires another's and deems the heavy burden
Of his own fate the world's sole heaviness.
Each thing's to its perceptions limited,
Another's are to it intangible,
A shadow far away, quite bodiless,
Lost in conjecture's wide impalpable.
On its unceasing errand through the void
The earth rolls on, a blind and moaning sphere.
It knows not Venus' sorrows, but it looks
With envy crying, "These have light and beauty,
I only am all dark and comfortless."
The land yearning for life, endeavours seaward,

The sea, weary of motion, pines to turn
Into reposeful earth: yet were this done
Each would repine again and hate the doer;
The land would miss its flowers and grass and birds,
The sea long for the coral and the cave.
For he who made labour the base of life,
Gave with it power, a thing so dear to existence,
To lose't is death. Toil is the form of power;
Nay, toil's self creates answering energy
And makes the loss of toil a wretchedness.
The labourer physically is divine,
Inward a void, yet in his limits blest.
But were the city's cultured son, who turns
Watching an envious, crying "Were I simple,
Primeval in my life as he, how happy!",
Into such environs confined, how then
His temperament would beat against the bars
Of circumstance and rage for wider field.
Uninterchangeable their natures stand
And self-confined; for so Earth made them, Earth,
The brute and kindly mother groping for mind.
She of her vigorous nature bore her sons
Made lusty with her milk and the warm force
Redundant in her veins, else like the lark
Aiming from her to heaven. And souls are there
Who rooted in her puissant animalism
Are greatly earthy, yet widen to the void
And heighten to the sky. But these are rare
And of no privileged country citizens
Nor to the city bounded nor the field.
They are wise and royal in the furrow, keep
In schools their chastened vigour from the soil
To base their spirits vastly. Man is strong
Antaeuslike, based on his native Earth
From which being lifted great communities
Die in their intellectual grandeur. So then
Let the soil's son and grafting of the city

Keep their conditions, heightened or refreshed
With breath and force of each a different spirit
If may be; one not admit untutored envy
The other vain imagination making
Return to nature a misleading name
For a reversion most unnatural.

KING PHILIP

You reason well, Guzman; nor must we pine
At stations where God and his saints have set us.
And yet because I'd feel the rural air,
Of greatness unreminded, I will go
Tomorrow as a private nobleman.
My lords, forget for one day I'm the king
Nor watch my moods, nor with your eyes wait on me
Nor disillusionize by high observance
But keep as to an equal courtesy.

MAJORDOMO

But, Your Majesty —

KING PHILIP

Well, Sir, Your Ancient Wisdom —

MAJORDOMO

The Kings of Spain —

KING PHILIP

Are absolute, you'd say,
Over men only? Custom masters kings.
I'll not be ruled by your stale ceremonies.
As kings are by an arrogating Senate,
But will control them, wear them when I will,
Walk disencumbered when I will. Enough
You have done your part in protest. I have heard you.
And now, my lords.

LORDS

Your Highness is obeyed.

KING PHILIP

Tell on, Antonio, who perform the masque.

BELTRAN

That can I tell Your Highness, rural girls,
The daughters of the soil, whom country air
Has given the ruddy health to bloom in their cheeks.
Full of our Spanish sunlight are they, voiced
Like Junos and will make our ladies pale
Before them. There's a Miller's lovely daughter,
A marvel. Robed in excellent apparel
As she will be, there's not a maid in Spain
Can stand beside her and stay happy. My sons
Have spared nor words nor music nor array
Nor beauty to express their loyal duty.

KING PHILIP

I am much graced by this their gentle trouble
And yet, Lord Beltran, there are nobler things
Than these brocaded masques, not that I scorn these,
Do not believe I would be so ungracious, —
Nor anything belittle in which true hearts
Interpret their rich silence. Yet there's one
Desire, I would exchange for many masques,
'Tis noble: an easy word bestows it wholly,
And yet, I fear, for you too difficult.

BELTRAN

My lord, you know my service and should not
Doubt my compliance. Name and take it. Else judge me.

KING PHILIP

Why, noble reconciliation, Conde Beltran;
Sweet friendship between mighty jarring houses

And by great intercession war renounced
Betwixt magnificent hearts: these are the masques
Most sumptuous, these the glorious theatres
That subjects should present to princes. Conrad
And noble Beltran, I respect the wrath
Sunders your pride: yet mildness has the blessing
Of God and is religion's perfect mood.
Admit that better weakness. Throw your hearts
Wide to the knocks of entering peace: let not
The ashes of a rage the world renounces
Smoulder between you nor outdated griefs
Keep living. What, quite silent? Will you, Conrad,
Refuse to me your answer, who so often
Have for my sake your very life renounced?

CONRAD

My lord, the hate that I have never cherished
I know not how to abandon. Not in the sway
Of other men's affections I have lived
But walked in the straight road my fortunes build me.
Let any love who will or any hate who will,
I take both with a calm, unburdened spirit,
Inarm my lover as a friend, embrace
My enemy as a wrestler: do my will,
Because it is my will, go where I go,
Because my path lies there. If any cross me,
That is his choice, not mine. And if he suffer,
Again it is his choice, not mine. It's I,
That is my star. I curse him not for it:
My fate's beyond his making as my spirit's
Above affection by him. I hate no man,
And if Lord Beltran give to me his hand,
I will most gladly clasp it and forget
Outdated injuries and wounds long healed.

BELTRAN

○ you are most noble, Conrad, most benign.

Who now can say the ill-doer ne'er forgives?
Conrad has dispossessed my kinsmen, slain
My vassals, me of ancient lands relieved,
Thinned my great house; but Beltran is forgiven.
Will you not now enlarge your generous nature,
Wrong me still more, have new and ampler room
For exercise to your forgiving heart,
I must embrace misfortune and fresh loss
Before your friendship, lord.

KING PHILIP

No more of this.

BELTRAN

Pardon, Your Highness; this was little praise
For so deep¹ Christianity. Lord Conrad,
I will not trouble you further. And perhaps
With help of the good saints and holy Virgin
I too shall make me some room to pardon in.

CONRAD

I fear you not, Lord Count. Our swords have clashed:
Mine was the stronger. For what I have won,
I got it by decree of arms. So you
Had won mine, had you taken sides with fortune
And kept her faithful with your sword. Your satire
Has no sharp edge till it cut that from me.

KING PHILIP

This is unprofitable. No more of it.
Lord Conrad, you go homeward with the dawn?

CONRAD

Winning your gracious leave to have with me
My sisters, Sir.

¹ much

KING PHILIP

The Queen is very loth
To lose her favourite, but to disappoint you
Much more unwilling. You'll come with me,
My lords, you too, Lord Beltran.

Exeunt King, Beltran, Guzman & Grandees.

RONCEDAS

A word, with you Lord Conrad.

CONRAD

As many as you will, Roncedas.

RONCEDAS

This. (*whispers*)

My lord, your good friend always.

CONRAD

So you have been.

Exit Roncedas.

Cousin, and sweetest sister, I am bound
Homeward upon a task that needs my presence.
Don Mario and his wife will bring you there.
Are you content or shall I stay for you?

ISMENIA

With all you do, dear brother, yet would have
Your blessing by me.

CONRAD

May your happiness
Greatly exceed my widest wishes.

ISMENIA

So

It must do, brother or I am unhappy.

BRIGIDA

What task will he have now? Some girl-lifting.
What other task! Shall we go, cousin?

ISMENIA

Stay.

Let us not press so closely after them.

BRIGIDA

Good manners? Oh, your pardon. I was blind.

BASIL

Are you a lover or a fish,¹ Antonio?
Speak. She yet lingers.

ANTONIO

Speak?

BASIL

The devil remove you

Where you can never more have sight of her.
I lose all patience.

BRIGIDA

Cousin, I know you're tired
With standing. Sit, and if you tire with that,
As perseverance is a powerful virtue,
For your reward the dumb may speak to you.

ISMENIA

What shall I do, dear girl?

BRIGIDA

Why, speak the first,
Count Conrad's sister! Be the Mahomet
To your poor mountain. Hang me if I think not

¹ sheep,

The prophet's hill more moveable of the two;
An earthquake stirs not this. What ails the man?
He has made a wager with some lamp-post surely.

ISMENIA

Brigida, are you mad? Be so immodest?
A stranger and my house's enemy!

BRIGIDA

No, never speak to him. It would be indeed
Horribly forward.

ISMENIA

Why, you jest, Brigida.
I'm no such light thing that I must be dumb
Lest men mistake my speaking. Let frail men
Or men suspect to their own purity
Guard every issue of speech and gesture. Wherefore
Should I be hedged so meanly in? To greet
With few words, cold and grave, as is befitting
This gentle youth, why do you call immodest?

BRIGIDA

You must not.

ISMENIA

Must not? Why, I will.

BRIGIDA

I say

You must not, child.

ISMENIA

I will then, not because
I wish (why should I?), but because you always
Provoke me with your idle prudities.

BRIGIDA

Good! You've been wishing it the last half-hour
And now you are provoked to't. Charge him, charge him.
I stand here as reserve.

ISMENIA

Impossible creature!

But no! You shall not turn me.

BRIGIDA

'Twas not my meaning.

ISMENIA

Sir —

BASIL

Rouse yourself, Antonio. Gather back
Your manhood, or you're shamed without retrieval.

ISMENIA

Help me, Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Not I, cousin.

ISMENIA

Sir,

You spoke divinely well. I say this, Sir,
Not to recall to you that we have met —
Since you will not remember — but because
I would not have you — anyone — think this of me
That since you are Antonio and my enemy
And much have hurt me — to the heart, therefore
When one speaks or does worthily, I can
Admire not, nor love merit, whosoe'er
Be its receptacle. This was my meaning.
I could not bear one should not know this of me.

Therefore I spoke.

BASIL

Speak or be dumb forever.

ISMENIA

I see, you have mistook me why I spoke
And scorn me. Sir, you may be right to think
You have so sweet a tongue would snare the birds
From off the branches, ravish an enemy,
— Some such poor wretch there may be — witch her heart out,
If you could care for anything so cheap
And hold it in your hand, lost, — lost, — Oh me!
Brigida!

BASIL

O base silence! Speak! She is
Confounded. Speak, you sheep, you!

ISMENIA

Though this *is* so,
You do me wrong to think me such an one,
Most flagrant wrong, Antonio. To think that I
Wait one word of your lips to woo you, yearn
To be your loving servant at a word
From you, — one only word and I am yours.

BASIL

Admirable lady! Saints, can you be dumb
Who hear this?

ISMENIA

Still you scorn me. For all this
You shall not make me angry. Do you imagine
Because you know I am Lord Conrad's sister
And lodge with Donna Clara Santa Cruz
In the street Velasquez, and you have seen it

With marble front and the quaint mullioned windows,
That you need only after vespers, when
The streets are empty, stand there, and I will
Send one to you? Indeed, indeed I merit not
You should think poorly of me. If you're noble
And do not scorn me, you will carefully
Observe the tenour of my prohibition,
Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Come away with your few words,
Your cold grave words. You have frozen his speech with them.
Exeunt.

ANTONIO

Heavens! it was she — her words were not a dream,
Yet I was dumb. There was a majesty
Even in her tremulous playfulness, a thrill
When she smiled most, made my heart beat too quickly
For speech. O that I should be dumb and shamefast,
When with one step I might grasp Paradise.

BASIL

Antonio!

ANTONIO

I was not deceived. She blushed,
And the magnificent scarlet to her cheeks
Welled from her heart an ocean inexhaustible.
Rose but outcrimsoned rose. Yes, every word
Royally marred the whiteness of her cheeks
With new impossibilities of beauty.
She blushed, and yet as with an angry shame
Of that delicious weakness, gallantly
Her small imperious head she held erect
And strove in vain to encourage those sweet lids
That fluttered lower and lower. O that but once

My tongue had been as bold as were mine eyes!
But these were fastened to her as with cords,
Courage in them naked necessity.

BASIL

Ah poor Antonio. You're bewitched, you're maimed,
Antonio. You must make her groan who did this.
One sense will always now be absent from him.
Lately he had no tongue. Now that's returned
His ears are gone on leave. Hark you, Antonio
Why do we stay here?

ANTONIO

I am in a dream.
Lead where you will; since there is no place now
In all the world, but only she or silence.

SCENE II

A garden at the town-house of Count Beltran.

Antonio, Basil.

BASIL

I am abashed of¹ you. What, make a lady
Woo you, and she a face so excellent,
Of an address so admirably lovely
It shows a goddess in her — at each sentence
Let pause to give you opportunity
Then shame with the dead silence of the hall
For her continual answer. Fie, you're not
Antonio, you are not Beltran's issue. Seek
Your kindred in the snowdrifts of the Alps
Or call a post your father.

ANTONIO

I deserve

Your censure, Basil. Yet were it done again,
I know I should again be dumb. My tongue
Teems in imagination but is barren
In actuality. When I am from her,
I woo her with the accent of a god,
My mind o'erflows with words as the wide Nile
With waters. Let her but appear and I
Am her poor mute. She may do her will with me
And O remember but her words. When she,
Ah she, my white divinity with that kindness
Celestial in the smiling of her eyes
And in her voice the world's great music, rose
Of blushing frankness, half woman and half angel,
Crowned me unwooed, lavished on me her heart
In her prodigious liberality,
Could I then speak? O to have language then
Had been the index to a shallow love.

¹ for

BASIL

Away! You modest lovers are the blot
Of manhood, traitors to our sovereignty.
I'd have you banished, all of you, and kept
In desert islands, where no petticoat
Should enter, so the brood of you might perish.

ANTONIO

You speak against the very sense of love
Which lives by service.

BASIL

Flat treason! Was not man made
Woman's superior that he might control her,
In strength to exact obedience and in wisdom
To guide her will, in wit to keep her silent,
Three Herculean labours. O were women
Once loose, they would new-deluge earth with words,
Sapiently base creation on its apex,
Logic would be new-modelled, arithmetic
Grow drunk and reason despairing abdicate.
No thunderbolt could stop a woman's will
Once it is started.

ANTONIO

O you speak at ease,
Loved you, you would recant this without small
Torture to quicken you.

BASIL

I? I recant?
I wish, Antonio, I had known your case
Earlier. I would have taught you how to love.

ANTONIO

Come, will you woo a woman? Teach me at least

By diagram, upon a blackboard.

BASIL

Well,

I will so, if it should hearten your weak spirits.
And now I think of it, I am resolved
I'll publish a new Art of Love, shall be
The only Ovid memorable.

ANTONIO

On, on! Let's hear you.

BASIL

First, I would kiss her.

ANTONIO

What, without leave asked?

BASIL

Leave? Ask a woman leave to kiss her! Why
What was she made for else?

ANTONIO

If she is angry?

BASIL

So much the better. Then you by repetition
Convince her of your manly strength, which is
A great point gained at the outset and moreover
Your duty, comfortable to yourself.
Besides she likes it. On the same occasion
When she will scold, I'll silence her with wit.
Laughter breaks down impregnable battlements.
Let me but make her smile and there is conquest
Won by the triple strength, horse, foot, artillery,
Of eloquence, wit and muscle. Then but remains
Pacification, with or else without

The Church's help, that's a mere form and makes
No difference to the principle.

ANTONIO

There should be
Inquisitions for such as you. What after?

BASIL

Nothing unless you wish to assure the conquest,
Not plunder it merely like a Tamerlane.
I'll teach that also. 'Tis but making her
Realise her inferiority.
Unanswerably and o'erwhelmingly
Show her how fortunate she is to get you
And all her life too short for gratitude;
That you have robbed her merely for her good,
To civilize her or to train her up:
Punish each word that shows want of affection.
Plague her to death and make her thank you for it.
Accustom her to sing hosannas to you
When you beat her. All this is ordinary,
And every wise benevolent conqueror
Has learnt the trick of it. Then she'll love you for ever.

ANTONIO

You are a Pagan and would burn for this
If Love still kept his Holy Office.

BASIL

Am safe from him.

ANTONIO

And therefore boast securely
Conducting in imagination wars
That others have the burden of. I've seen
The critical civilian in his chair
Win famous victories with wordy carnage,

Guide his strategic finger o'er a map,
Cry "Eugene's fault! here Marlboro' was to blame,
And look, a child might see it, Villars' plain error
That lost him Malplaquet!" I think you are
Just such a pen-and-paper strategist.
A wooer!

BASIL

Death, I will have pity on you,
Antonio. You shall see my great example
And learn by me.

ANTONIO

Good, I'm your pupil. But hear,
A pretty face or I'll not enter for her,
Wellborn or I shall much discount your prowess.

BASIL

Agreed. And yet they say experimentum
In corpore vili. But I take your terms
Lest you substract me for advantages.

ANTONIO

Look where the enemy comes. You are well off
If you can win her.

BASIL

A rare face, by Heaven.
Almost too costly a piece of goods for this
Mad trial.

ANTONIO

You sound retreat?

BASIL

Not I an inch.
Watch how I'll overcrow her.

ANTONIO

Hush, she's here.

Enter Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Señor, I was bidden to deliver this letter to you.

BASIL

To me, sweetheart?

BRIGIDA

I have the inventory of you in my books, if you be he truly. I will study it. Hair of the ordinary poetic length, dress indefinable, a modest address, — I think not you, Señor, — a noble manner, — Pooh, no! — a handsome face. I am sure not to you, Señor.

BASIL

Humph.

ANTONIO

Well, cousin. All silent? Open your batteries, open your batteries!

BASIL

Wait, wait. Ought a conqueror to be hurried? Caesar himself must study his ground before he attempts it. You will hear my trumpets instanter.

BRIGIDA

Will you take your letter, Sir?

ANTONIO

To me then, maiden? A dainty-looking note, and I marvel much from whom it can be. I do not know the handwriting. A lady's, seemingly, yet it has a touch of the masculine too — there is rapidity and initiative in its flow. Fair one, from whom comes this?

BRIGIDA

Why, Sir, I am not her signature; which if you will look within, there I doubt not you will find a solution of your difficulty.

BASIL

Here's a clever woman, Antonio, to think of that, and she but eighteen or a miracle.

ANTONIO

Well, cousin.

BRIGIDA

This Don Witty-pate eyes me strangely. I fear he will recognize me.

ANTONIO

Ismenia Ostrocadiz! O my joy.

BRIGIDA

You're ill, sir, you change colour.

ANTONIO

Now, by Heaven

Were death within my heart's door or his blast
Upon my eyelids, this would exile him.
The writing, swims before me.

BRIGIDA

Sir, you pale

Extremely. Is there no poison in that letter?

ANTONIO

O might I so be poisoned hourly. Let me
No longer dally with my happiness,
Let it take wings or turn a dream. Hail, letter,

For thou hast come from that white hand I worship.

“To Lord Antonio:

Señor, how you may deem of my bold wooing,
How cruelly I suffer in your thoughts,
I dread to think. Take the plain truth, Antonio.
I cannot live without your love. If you
From this misdoubt my nobleness or infer
A wanton haste or instability, —
As men pretend quick love is quickly spent—
Tear up this letter, and with it my heart.
And yet I hope you will not tear it. I love you
And since I saw our family variance
And your too noble fearfulness withhold me
From my heart's lord I have thrown from me shame
And the admirèd dalliance of women
To bridge it. Come to me, Antonio! Come,
But come in honour. I am not nor can be
So far degenerate from my house's greatness
Or my pure self to love ignobly. Dear,
I have thrown from me modesty's coy pretences
But the reality I'll grapple to me
Close as your image. I am loth to end,
Yet must, and therefore will I end with this
'Beloved, love me, respect me or forget me?.'”

Writing more sweet than any yet that came
From heaven to earth, O thou dear revelation.
Make my lips holy. Ah, could I imagine
Thee the white hand that wrote thee, I were blest
Utterly. Thou hast made me twice myself.
I think I am another than Antonio.
The sky seems nearer to me or the earth
Environed with a sacred light. O come!
I'll study to imprint this on my heart,
That when death comes he'll find it there and leave it,
A monument and an immortal writing.

BASIL

Damsel, you are of the Lady Ismenia's household?

BRIGIDA

A poor relative of hers, Señor.

BASIL

Your face seems strangely familiar to me. Have I not seen you in some place where I constantly resort?

BRIGIDA

O Sir, I hope you do not think so meanly of me. I am a poor girl but an honest.

BASIL

How, how?

BRIGIDA

I know not how. I spoke only as the spirit moved me.

BASIL

You have a marvellously nimble tongue. Two words with you.

BRIGIDA

Willingly, Señor, if you exceed not measure.

BASIL

Fair one —

BRIGIDA

Oh, Sir, I am glad I listened. I like your two words extremely. God be with you.

BASIL

Why, I have not begun yet.

BRIGIDA

The more shame to your arithmetic. If your teacher had rec-

koned as loosely with his cane-cuts, he would have made the carefuller scholar.

BASIL

God's wounds, will you listen to me?

BRIGIDA

Well, Sir, I will not insist upon numbers. But pray, for your own sake, swear no more. No eloquence will long stand such draft upon it.

BASIL

If you would listen, I would tell you a piece of news that might please you.

BRIGIDA

Let it be good news, new news and repeatable news and I will thank you for it.

BASIL

Sure, maiden, you are wondrous beautiful.

BRIGIDA

Señor, Queen Anne is dead. Tell me the next.

BASIL

The next is, I will kiss you.

BRIGIDA

Oh, Sir, that's a prophecy. Well, death and kissing come to all of us, and by what disease the one or by whom the other, wise men care not to forecast. It profits little to study calamities beforehand. When it comes, I pray God I may learn to take it with resignation, if I cannot do better.

BASIL

By my life, I will kiss you and without farther respite.

BRIGIDA

On what ground?

BASIL

Have I not told you, you are beautiful.

BRIGIDA

So has my mirror, not once but a hundred times, and never yet offered to kiss me. When it does, I'll allow your logic. No, we are already near enough to each other. Pray, keep your distance.

BASIL

I will establish my argument with my lips.

BRIGIDA

I will defend mine with my hand. I promise you 'twill prove the abler dialectician of the two.

BASIL

Well.

BRIGIDA

I am glad you think so, Señor. My lord, I cannot stay. What shall I tell my lady?

ANTONIO

Tell her my heart is at her feet, and I
Am hers, hers only until heaven ceases
And after. Tell her that I am more blest
In her sweet condescension to my humbleness
Than Ilian Anchises when Love's mother
Stooped from her golden heavens into his lap.
Tell her that as a goddess I revere her
And as a saint adore; that she and life
Are one to me, for I've no heart but her,
No atmosphere beyond her pleasure, light
But what her eyes allow me. Tell, O tell her —

BRIGIDA

Hold, hold, Señor. You may tell her all this yourself. I would not remember the half of it and could not understand the other half. Shall I tell her, you will come surely?

ANTONIO

As sure as is the sun to its fixed hour
Or midnight to its duty. I will come.

BRIGIDA

Good! there are at last three words a poor girl can understand. Mark then, you will wait a while after nightfall, less than half a bowshot from the place you know towards the Square Velasquez, within sight of the Donna's windows. Then I will come to you. Sir, if your sword be half as ready and irresistible as your tongue, I would gladly have you there with him, though Saint Iago grant that neither prove necessary. You look sad, Sir. God save you for a witty and eloquent gentleman.

Exit.

ANTONIO

O cousin, I am bewitched with happiness.
Pardon me that I leave you. Solitude
Demands a god and godlike I am grown
Unto myself. This letter deifies me.
I will be sole with my felicity.

Exit.

BASIL

God grant that I am not bewitched also! Saints and angels! How is it? How did it happen? Is the sun still in heaven? Is that the song of a bird or a barrel-organ? I am not drunk either. I can still distinguish between a tree and the squirrel upon it. What, am I not Basil? whom men call the witty and eloquent Basil? Did I not laugh from the womb? Was not my first cry a jest upon the world I came into? Did I not invent a conceit upon my mother's milk ere I had sucked of it? Death! And have I

been bashed and beaten by the tongue of a girl? silenced by a common purveyor of impertinences? It is so and yet it cannot be. I begin to believe in the dogmas of the materialist. The gastric juice rises in my estimation. Genius is after all only a form of indigestion, a line of Shakespeare the apotheosis of a leg of mutton and the speculations of Plato an escape of diseased tissue arrested in the permanency of ink. What did I break my fast with this morning? Kippered herring? Bread? Marmalade? Tea? O kippered herring, art thou the material form of stupidity and is marmalade an enemy of wit? It must be so. O mighty gastric juice! Mother and Saviour! I bow down before thee. Be propitious, fair goddess, to thy adorer.

Arise, Basil. Today thou shalt retrieve thy tarnished laurels or be expunged for ever from the book of the witty. Arm thyself in full panoply of allusion and irony, gird on raillery like a sword and repartee like a buckler. I will meet this girl tonight. I will tund her with conceits, torture her with ironies, tickle her with jests, prick her all over with epigrams. My wit shall smother her, tear her, burst her sides, press her to death, hang her, draw her, quarter her, and if all this fails, Death! as a last revenge, I'll marry¹ her. Saints!

¹ beat

SCENE III

Ismenia's chamber.

ISMENIA

Brigida lingers. O he has denied me
And therefore she is loth to come, for she
Knows she will bring me death. It is not so.
He has detained her to return an answer.
Yet I asked none. I am full of fear, O heart,
I have staked thee upon a desperate cast,
Which if I win not, I am miserable.
'Tis she. O that my hope could give her wings
Or lift her through the window bodily
To shorten this age of waiting. I could not
Discern her look. Her steps sound hopefully.

Enter Brigida.

Dearest Brigida! at last! What says Antonio? Tell me quickly.
Heavens! you look melancholy.

BRIGIDA

Santa Catarina! How weary I am! My ears too! I think they
have listened to more nonsense in these twenty minutes than in
all their natural eighteen years before. Sure, child, thou hast
committed some unpardonable sin to have such a moonstruck
lover as this Antonio.

ISMENIA

But, Brigida!

BRIGIDA

And his shadow too, his Cerberus of wit who guards this poetical
treasure. He would have eaten me, I think, if I had not given
him the wherewithal to stop the three mouths of him.

ISMENIA

Why, Brigida, Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Saints! to think how men lie! I have heard this Basil reputed loudly for the Caesar of wits, the tongue and laughter of the time; but never credit me, child, if I did not silence him with a few stale pertnesses a market-girl might have devised for her customers. A wit, truly! and not a word in his mouth bullet-head Pedro could not better.

ISMENIA

Distraction! What is this to Antonio? Sure, your wits are bewildered, Brigida. What said Antonio? Girl, I am on thorns.

BRIGIDA

I am coming to that as fast as possible. Jesus! What a burning hurry you are in, Ismenia! You have not your colour, child. I will bring you salvolatile from my chamber. 'Tis in a marvellous cut-bottle with a different hue to each facet! I filched it from Donna Clara's room when she was at matins yesterday.

ISMENIA

Tell me, you magpie, tell me.

BRIGIDA

What am I doing else? You must know I found Antonio was in his garden. Oh, did I tell you, Ismenia? Donna Clara chooses the seeds for me this season and I think she has as rare a notion of nasturtiums as any woman living. I was speaking to Pedro in the summer house yesterday; for you remember it thundered terrifically before one had time to know light from darkness; and there I stood miles from the garden door —

ISMENIA

In the name of pity, Brigida —

BRIGIDA

Saints! how you hurry me. Well, when I went to Antonio in his garden — There's an excellent garden, Ismenia. I wonder

where Don Beltran's gardener had his bignolias.

ISMENIA

Oh-h-h!

BRIGIDA

Well, where was I? Oh, giving the letter to Antonio. Why, would you believe it, in thrust Don Wit, Don Cerberus, Don Subtle-three-mouths.

ISMENIA

Will you tell me, you ogress, you paragon of Tyrannesses, you she-Nero, you compound of impossible cruelties?

BRIGIDA

Saints, what have I done to be abused so? I was coming to it faster than a mail-coach and four. You would not be so unconscionable as to ask me for the appendage of a story, all tail and nothing to hang it on? Well, Antonio took the letter.

ISMENIA

Yes, yes and what answer gave he?

BRIGIDA

He looked all over the envelope to see whence it came, dissertated learnedly on this knotty question, abused me your handwriting foully.

ISMENIA

Dear cousin, sweet cousin, excellent Brigida! On my knees, I entreat you, do not tease me longer. Though I know you would not do it, if all were not well, yet consider what a weak tremulous thing is the heart of woman when she loves and have pity on me. On my knees, sweetest.

BRIGIDA

Why, Ismenia, I never knew you so humble in my life, — save

indeed to your brother; but him indeed I do not reckon. He would rule even me, if I let him. On your knees, too! This is excellent. May I be lost, if I am not tempted to try how long I can keep you so. But I will be merciful. Well, he scanned your handwriting and reviled it for the script of a virago, an Amazon.

ISMENIA

Brigida, if you will not tell me directly, without phrase and plainly, just what I want to know and nothing else, by heaven, I will beat you.

BRIGIDA

Now, this is foul. Can you not keep your better mood for fifty seconds by the clock? O temper, temper. Ah, well, where was I? Oh, yes, your handwriting. Oh! Oh! Oh! What mean you, cousin? Lord deliver me. Cousin! Cousin! He will come! He will come! He will come!

ISMENIA

Does he love me?

BRIGIDA

Madly! distractedly! like a moonstruck natural! Saints!

ISMENIA

Dearest, dearest Brigida! You are an angel. How can I thank you?

BRIGIDA,

Child, you have thanked me out of breath already. If you have not dislocated my shoulder and torn half of my hair out —

ISMENIA

Hear her, the Pagan! A gentle physical agitation and some rearrangement of tresses, 'twas less punishment than you deserved. But there! that is salve for you. And now be sober, sweet. What said Antonio? Come, tell me. I am greedy to know.

BRIGIDA

I'll be hanged if I do. Besides I could not if I would. He talked poetry.

ISMENIA

But did he not despise me for my forwardness?

BRIGIDA

Tut, you are childish. But to speak the bare fact, Ismenia, I think he is most poetically in love with you. He made preparations to swoon when he saw no more than your name; but I build nothing on that;¹ there are some faint when they smell a pinch of garlic or spy a cockchafer. But he waited ten minutes copying your letter into his heart or some such note-book of love affairs; yet that was nothing either; I doubt if he found room for you, unless on the margin. Then he began drawing cheques on Olympus for comparisons, left that presently as antique and out of date, confounded Ovid and his breviary in the same quest; left that too for mediaeval, and diverged into Light and Heat, but came not to the very modernness of electricity. But Lord! cousin, what a career he ran! He had imagined himself blind and breathless when I stopped him. I tremble to think what calamities might have ensued had I not thrown myself under the wheels of his metaphor. The upshot is, he loves you, worships you and will come to you.

ISMENIA

Brigida, Brigida, be you as happy as you have made me.

BRIGIDA

Truly, the happiness of lovers, children, with a new plaything and mad to handle it. But when they are tired of the game — ah, well, I will have nothing of it. No, I will be the type and patroness of spinsters, the noble army of old maids shall gather about my

¹ but there was nothing in that;

tomb to do homage to me.

ISMENIA

And he will come tonight?

BRIGIDA

Yes, if his love lasts so long.

ISMENIA

For a thousand years. Come with me, Brigida, and help me to bear my happiness. Till tonight!

SCENE IV

A street in Madrid.

ANTONIO

This is the place.

BASIL

'Tis farther.

ANTONIO

This, I know it.

Here's the square Velasquez. There in his saddle
Imperial Charles watches the silent city
His progeny could not keep. Where the one light
Stands beckoning to us, is Don Mario's dwelling.
O thou celestial lustre, wast thou kindled
To be her light who is my sun? If so,
Thou art most happy. For thou dost inherit
The sanctuary of her dear sleep and art
The confidant of those sweet secrecies.
Though thou live for a night, yet is thy short
And noble ministry, more rich and costly,
Than ages of the sun. For thou hast seen,
O blessed, her unveiled and gleaming shoulder
Make her thick-treasured hair more precious. Thou
Hast watched that face upon her heavenly pillow
Slumbering amid its peaceful curls. O more!
For thou perhaps hast laid one brilliant finger
On her white breast mastered with sacred sleep,
And there known Paradise. Therefore thou'rt famous
Above all lights that human hands have kindled.

BASIL

Here's a whole epic on an ounce of oil
A poor, drowned wick bought from the nearest chandler
And a fly sodden in it.

ANTONIO

Listen! one comes.

BASIL

Stand back, abide not question.

ANTONIO

They'll not doubt us.

We are far from the building.

BASIL

Am I mad?

Do you think I'll trust a lover? Why, you could not
Even ask the time but you would say, "Good Sir,
How many minutes to Ismenia?"

ANTONIO

Well,

Stand back.

BASIL

No need. I see it. 'Tis the she-guide,
The feminine Mercury, the tongue, the woman.

Enter Brigida.

Hark to the bell now.

BRIGIDA

You, my lord Antonio?

This way, my lord.

ANTONIO

Which way you will. I know
You are my guide to heaven.

BRIGIDA

O you have come?

I take this kindly of you, Señor. Tell me,

Were you not hiding when I came up to you?
What was it, Sir? A constable or perhaps
A creditor? For to be dashed by a weak girl
I know you are too bold. What did you say?
I did not hear you. We are there, my lord.
Now quietly, if you love her, your sweet lady.

(To Basil)

Can you be silent, Señor? We are lost else.

SCENE V

Ismenia's antechamber.

ISMENIA *waiting*

It is too dark. I can see nothing. Hark!
Surely it was the door that fastened then.
My heart, control thyself! Thou beat'st too quickly
And wilt break in the arms of happiness.
Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Here. Enter, my lord, and take her.

ANTONIO

Ismenia!

ISMENIA

Antonio! Oh Antonio!

ANTONIO

My heart's dearest!

BRIGIDA

Bring your wit this way, Sir.

It is not needed.

Exit with Basil.

ISMENIA

O not thus! You shame me.
This is my place, dear, at your feet; and then
Higher than is my right.

ANTONIO

I cannot suffer
Blasphemy to touch my heaven, though your lips

Have hallowed it. Highest were low for you.
You are a goddess and adorable.

ISMENIA

Alas, Antonio, this is not the way.
I fear you do not love me, you despise me.
Come, do you not despise me?

ANTONIO

The leaf might then
Despise the moonbeam that has come to kiss it.
I love and reverence.

ISMENIA

Then you must take me,
As I have given myself to you, your servant,
Yours wholly, not to be prayed to and hymned
As a divinity but to be commanded
As a dear handmaid. You must rule me, sweet,
Or I shall spoil with liberty and lose you.

ANTONIO

Must I? I will then. Yet you are so queenly,
I needs must smile when I attempt it. Come,
Shall I command you?

ISMENIA

Do, sweet.

ANTONIO

Lay your head
Upon my shoulder so and do not dare
To lift it till I give you leave.

ISMENIA

Alas,
I fear you'll be a tyrant. And I meant

To bear at most a limited monarchy.

ANTONIO

No murmuring. Answer my questions.

ISMENIA

Well,

That's easy and I will.

ANTONIO

And truly.

ISMENIA

Oh,

But that's almost impossible. I'll try.

ANTONIO

Come, when did you first love me?

ISMENIA

Dear, today.

ANTONIO

When will you marry me?

ISMENIA

Tomorrow, dear.

ANTONIO

Here is a mutinous kingdom to my hands.
Now truly.

ISMENIA

Truly then, seven days ago,
No more than seven, at the court I saw you,
And with the sight my life was troubled; heard you
And your voice tore my heart out. O Antonio,

I was an empty thing until today.
I saw you daily, but because I feared
What now I know, you were Lord Beltran's son
I dared not ask your name, nay shut my ears
To knowledge. O my love, I am afraid
Your father seems a hard vindictive man.
What will you do with me, Antonio?

ANTONIO

Fasten

My jewel safe from separating hands
Holly on my bosom. My father? He
Shall know not of our love, till we are sure
From rude disunion. Though he will be angry
I am his eldest and beloved son,
And when he feels your sweetness and your charm
He will repent and thank me for a daughter.

ISMENIA

When 'tis your voice that tells me, I believe
Impossibilities. Well, let me know —
You've made me blush, Antonio, and I wish
I could retaliate — were you not amazed
At my mad forwardness, to woo you first,
A youth unknown?

ANTONIO

Yes, even as Adam was
When he first saw the sunrise over Eden.
It was unsunlike to uplift the glory
Of those life-giving rays, unwooed, uncourted.

ISMENIA

Alas, you flatter. Did you love me, Antonio?

ANTONIO

Three days before I had the bliss to win

The wonder of your eyes.

ISMENIA

Three days! Oh me,
Three days, Antonio? Three whole days before
I loved you?

ANTONIO

Three days, dearest.

ISMENIA

Oh,
You've made me jealous. I am angry. Three
Whole days! How could it happen?

ANTONIO

I will make
You compensation, dear; for in revenge
I'll love you three whole days, when you have ceased
To love me.

ISMENIA

O not even in jest, Antonio,
Speak of such separation. Sooner shall
The sun divorce his light than we two sunder.
But you have given me a spur. I must
Love you too much, I must, Antonio, more
Than you love me, or the account's not even.
A noise?

ANTONIO

One passes in the street.

ISMENIA

We are
Too near the window and too heedless, love.
Come this way; here 'tis safe; I fear your danger.

Exeunt. After a while enter Brigida.

BRIGIDA

No sound? Señor! Ismenia! Surely they cannot have embraced each other into invisibility. No, Cupid has flown away with them. It cannot have been the devil, for I smell no brimstone. Well, if they are so tedious I will not mortify myself with solitude either. I have set Don Cerberus on the stairs out of respect for the mythology. There he stands with his sword at point like the picture of a sentinel and protects us against a surprise of rats from the cellar; for what other wild beasts there may be to menace us, I know not. Don Mario snores hard and Donna Clara plays the violin to his bassoon. I have heard them three rooms off. These men! these men! and yet they call themselves our masters. I would I could find a man fit to measure tongues with me. I begin to feel lonely in the Alpine elevation of my own wit. The meditations of Matterhorn come home to me and I feel a sister to Monte Rosa. Certainly this woman's fever is catching, and spreads a most calamitous infection. I have overheard myself sighing; it is a symptom incubatory. Heighho! when turtles pair, I never heard that the magpie lives lonely. I have at this moment a kindly thought for all suffering animals. I begin to pity Cerberus even. I will relieve him from guard. Hist! Señor! Don Basil!

Enter Basil.

Is all quiet?

BASIL

Not a mouse stirring!

BRIGIDA

Put up your sword, pray you; I think there is no danger, and if one comes, you may draw again in time to cut its tail off.

BASIL

At your service, Señorita. If it were not treason to my wit, I begin to feel this strip of a girl is making an ass of me. I am trans-

formed; I feel it. I shall hear myself bray presently. But I will defy enchantment, I will handle her. A plague! Must I continually be stale-mated by a will-o'-the-wisp, all sparkle and nowhere? Courage, Basil.

BRIGIDA

You meditate, Señor? If it be to allay the warmth you have brought from the stairs, with the coolness of reflection, I would not hinder you.

BASIL

In bare truth, Señorita, I am so chilled that I was even about to beg of you a most sweet and warming cordial.

BRIGIDA

For a small matter like that, I would be loth to deny you. You shall have it immediately.

BASIL

With your permission, then.

BRIGIDA

Ah, Señor, beware. Living coals are dangerous; they burn, Señor.

BASIL

I am proof.

BRIGIDA

As the man said when he was bitten by the dog they thought mad; but it was the dog that died. Pray, Sir, have a care. You will put the fire out.

BASIL

Come, I have you. I will take ten kisses for the one you refused me this forenoon.

BRIGIDA

That is too compound an interest. I do entreat you, Sir, have a care. This usury is punishable by the law.

BASIL

I have the rich man's trick for that. With the very coin I have unlawfully gathered, I will stop her mouth.

BRIGIDA

O Sir, you are as wasteful an accountant of kisses as of words. I foresee you will go bankrupt. No more, Señor, what noise was that on the stair? Good, now you have your distance. I will even trouble you to keep it. No nearer, I tell you. You do not observe the laws of the duello. You take advantages.

BASIL

With me? Pooh, you grow ambitious. Because I knew that to stop your mouth was to stop your life, therefore in pity I have refused your encounter.

BRIGIDA

Was it, truly? Alas, I could weep to think of the violence you have done yourself for my sake. Pray, sir, do not torture yourself so. To see how goodness is misunderstood in this world! Out of pity? And made me take you for a fool!

BASIL

Well.'

BRIGIDA

O no, Señor, it is not well, indeed it is not well. You shall not do this again. If I must die, I must die. You are scatheless. Pray now, disburden your intellect of all the brilliant things it has so painfully kept to itself. Plethora is unwholesome and I would not have you perish of an apoplexy of wit. Pour it out on me, conceit, epigram, irony, satire, vituperation; flout and invective, tuquo-

que and double-entendre, pun and quibble, rhyme and unreason, catcall and onomatopoeia; all, all, though it be an avalanche. It will be terrible, but I will stand the charge of it.

BASIL

St. Iago! I think she has the whole dictionary in her stomach. I grow desperate.

BRIGIDA

Pray, do not be afraid. I do not indeed press you to throw yourself at my head, but for a small matter like your wit, I will bear up against it.

BASIL

This girl has a devil.

BRIGIDA

Why are you silent, Señor? Are you angry with me? I have given you no cause. This is cruel. Don Basil, I have heard you cited everywhere for absolutely the most free and witty speaker of the age. They told me that if none other offer, you will jest with the statues in the Plaza Mayor and so wittily they cannot answer a word to you. What have I done that with me alone you are dumb?

BASIL

I am bewitched certainly.

BRIGIDA

Señor, is it still pity? But why on me alone? O Sir, have pity on the whole world and be always silent. Well I see your benevolence is unconquerable. With your leave, we will pass from unprofitable talk; I would be glad to recall the sound of your voice. You may come nearer, since you decline the duello.

BASIL

I thank you, Señorita. Whose sheep baaed then?

BRIGIDA

Don Basil, shall we talk soberly?

BASIL

At your pleasure, Madam.

BRIGIDA

No Madam, Señor, but a poor companion. You go to Count Beltran's house tomorrow?

BASIL

It is so intended.

BRIGIDA

O the masque, who play it?

BASIL

Masquers, Señorita.

BRIGIDA

O Sir, is this your pity? I told you, you would burst if you kept in your wit too long. But who are they by condition? Goddesses are the characters and by rule modern they should be live goddesses who play them.

BASIL

They are so.

'BRIGIDA

Are they indeed so lovely?

BASIL

Euphrosyne, Christofir's daughter, is simply the most exquisite beauty of the kingdom.

BRIGIDA

You speak very absolutely, Señor. Fairer than Ismenia?

BASIL

I speak it with unwillingness, but honestly the Lady Ismenia, rarely lovely as she is, could not stand beside this miller's daughter.

BRIGIDA

I think I have seen her and I do not remember so outshining a beauty.

BASIL

Then cannot you have seen her, for the wonders she eclipses, themselves speak to their disgrace, even when they are women.

BRIGIDA

Pardon me if I take you to speak in the pitch of a lover's eulogy.

BASIL

Were it so, her beauty and gentleness deserve it; I have seen none worthier.

BRIGIDA

I wish you joy of her. I pray you for permission to leave you, Señor.

BASIL

Save one indeed.

BRIGIDA

Ah! and who was she?

BASIL

You will pardon me.

BRIGIDA

I will not press you, Sir, I do not know her, do I?

BASIL

O 'tis not so much as that either. 'Twas only an orange-girl I

saw once at Cadiz.

BRIGIDA

Oh!

BASIL

Ha! she is galled, positively. This is as sweet to me as honey.

BRIGIDA

Well, Señor, your taste is as undeniable as your wit. Flour is the staff of life and oranges are good for a season. What does this paragon play?

BASIL

Venus; and in the after-scene, Helen.

BRIGIDA

So? May I know the others? You may find one of them to be a poor cousin of mine.

BASIL

Catriona, the bailly's daughter to Count Conrad, and Sofronia, the student Geronimo's sister; she too is of the Count's household.

BRIGIDA

It is not then difficult to act in a masque.

BASIL

A masque demands little, Señorita. A taking figure, a flowing step, a good voice, a quick memory — but for that a speaking memory hard by in a box will do much at an emergency.

BRIGIDA

True, for such long parts must be a heavy tax on the quickest.

BASIL

There are but two such, Venus-Helen and Paris. The rest are

only a Zephyr's dance in, a speech and a song to help the situation and out again with a scurry.

BRIGIDA

God be with you. You have a learned conversation and a sober, and for such I will always report you. But here comes a colon to it. We will keep the full stop for tomorrow.

Enter Antonio and Ismenia.

ISMENIA

I think the dawn moves in the east, Brigida.
Pray you, unlock the door, but noiselessly.

BRIGIDA

Teach me not. Though the wild torrent of this gentleman's conversation have swept away half my wit, I have at a desperate peril saved the other half for your service. Come, Sir, I have need of you to frighten the mice away.

BASIL

St. Iago!

Exit Brigida with Basil.

ISMENIA

Dear, we must part. I would have you my necklace
That I might feel you round my neck for ever,
Or life be night and all men sleep that we
Need never part: but we must part, Antonio.
Will you forget me?

ANTONIO

When I cease to feel.

ISMENIA

I know you cannot, but I am so happy.
I love to play with my own happiness
And ask it questions. Dear, we shall meet soon.

I'll make a compact with you, sweet. You shall
Do all my will and make no question, till
We're married; then you know, I am your servant.
Will you, till then?

ANTONIO

Till then and after.

ISMENIA

Go now,
Love, I must drive you out or you'll not go.

ANTONIO

One kiss.

ISMENIA

You've had one thousand. Well, one more,
One only or I shall never let you part.

Enter Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Are you both distracted? Is this, I pray you, a time for lingering and near dawn over the east? Out with you, Señor, or I will set your own Cerberus upon you, and I wager he bites well, though I think poorly of his bark.

Exit with Antonio.

ISMENIA

O I have given all myself and kept
Nothing to live with when he's gone from me.
My life's his moon and I'm all dark and sad
Without him. Yesterday I was Ismenia,
Strong in myself, an individual woman.
Today I'm but the body of another,
No longer separate reality.
Well, if I gain him, let me lose myself,
And I'm still happy. The door shuts. He's gone.

Re-enter Brigida.

Ah, Brigida.

BRIGIDA

Come, get in, get in. Snatch a little sleep, for I promise you, you shall have none tomorrow.

ISMENIA

How do you mean by that? Or is it jest merely?

BRIGIDA

Leave me alone. I have a whole drama in my head, a play in a play and yet no play. I have only to rearrange the parts a little and tomorrow's sunlight shall see it staged, scened, enacted and concluded. To bed with you.

Exeunt.

Curtain

Act Two

SCENE I

A room in Conrad's house.

Conrad, a servant.

CONRAD

Where is Flaminia?

SERVANT

He's in waiting, Sir.

CONRAD

Call him.

Exit servant.

I never loved before. Fortune,
I ask one day of thee and one great night,
Then do thy will. I shall have reached my summit.

Enter Flaminia.

FLMAINIA

My lord!

(Incomplete)

THE HOUSE OF BRUT

Fragment of a Play

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

BRUTUS, Prince of Britain.

CORINEUS, }
ASSARAC, } his brothers.

DEVON, son of Corineus.

CAMBRE, Prince of Cambria. }
ALBANACT, Prince of Albany. } Sons of Brutus.
LOCRINE, Prince of Leogryst. }

HUMBER, King of Norway.

OFFA, }
SIGFRID, } Norwegian leaders.

GUENDOLEN, daughter of Corineus.

ESTRILD, A Pictish princess, concubine of Humber.

Act Two

SCENE I

The camp of Humber.

Humber, Offa, Norwegians.

HUMBER

Drinkhael, dragons and stormwinds of the sea!

(Drinks)

Spare not to drain this sweetened juice of earth,

You Vikings! How it bubbles to the lips

Vigorous as newspilt blood. Drink deep, and shout

“Glory to Thor and Humber!” With the sun

Upon the force of Albanact we march.

Shout, Norsemen! Let the heavens hear your menace.

Drinkhael!

(Drinks)

ALL

Washael! Glory to ancient Thor
And Humber.

HUMBER

I am the hammer old of Thor
When he would crush the nations. He is merry
With wine and smites the world with me.

(Drinks)

Or wherefore

Should I derive my glory? Have I not
Rushed through the angry waters when the whale
Was stunned between two waves and slain my foe
Betwixt the thunders? Have not the burning hamlets
Of Gaul lighted me homeward for a league?
Erin has felt me, Norsemen.

ALL

Glory to Humber.

HUMBER

Have I not slain the Alban hosts and bound
The necks of princes? Yea, their glorious star
And wonder for whom three kingdoms strove, Estrild,
Led to my ships? The queens of the Orcades
Are slaves and concubines to private Norsemen.

ALL

Glory to Humber, Thor's hammer! Humber! Humber!

HUMBER

Have I not harried Ireland, Denmark, Orkney?
Shattered the Pictish wheels, broken their scythes,
Unpeopled living tracts? Why then prefer you
Thor's self to me? Has he filled up your ships
With gold and wines of France, rich rings and jewels,
Metals untold and beautiful sharp steel?
Who has enriched and aggrandised you all
Till you are gods, to each hand a country's wealth,
To each sword a century's glory? Who has given
The commonest men beauty divine to sleep with,
Made queens your slaves and kings your thralls, you Norsemen?

ALL

Humber, Humber! Not Thor, but mightier Humber.

HUMBER

Drink, Norsemen. Ye shall all be kings. Scotia
And Albany and Ireland shall be mine.
I'll have as many kingdoms as the year
Has moons. Do you doubt me, Vikings? Do you mutter?
But you shall see my glory. Call Estrild,
You thralls of Humber.

ALL

Glory to great Humber!
Humber shall now be Thor. He shall new-make
The bones of Heimir in his hands. Cry "Humber!"

HUMBER

This river we ascend, shall now no more
Bear its old name but mine; and all this region
Be Albany no more but Humberland:
The world's name changed shall be my monument.

Enter thralls with Estrild.

ESTRILD

Gods, if you be, protect me!

ALL

Glory to Humber.

HUMBER

Lo she whose mystic¹ eyes enthral the nations,
Comes to do reverence to Humber, glad
To be his glory's meanest satellite.
Kneel down, daughter of princes, favoured more
Than Freya or Gudrun; for these were wives
Of gods or demigods, but thou the slave
Of Humber. Lo whose pleasure kingdoms strove
To do, is made my footstool. I have slain
Nations to win her and have ravished her
Before her father's eyes, not yet made blood
And faces of a hundred warlike lovers.
Yet all these could not help her cries.

ALL

Humber!

¹ starlike

OFFA

The strong, the noble Humber!

HUMBER

Girl, arise

And serve me. Thou shalt do it royally.

This is thy father's skull

(Incomplete)

THE PRINCE OF MATHURA

This seems to be a first version of PRINCE OF EDUR

PERSONS OF DRAMA

AJAMEDE, Prince of Mathura, a fugitive in the mountains.

INDRADYUMNA, his friend and comrade.

ATRY, King of Mathura, by the help of the Scythians.

TORAMAN, Prince of Cashmere, son of the Scythian, warlord of the North West.

CANACA, his Brahmin, his court jester.

HOOSHKA, Captain of the Scythian bodyguard.

MAYOOR, Atry's general and minister.

INDRANY, Queen of Mathura.

URMILA, Princess of Mathura, daughter of Atry and Indrany.

LILA, daughter of Hooshka.

Act One

SCENE I

Mathura, a room in the palace.

Atry, Indrany.

ATRY

However hard it be, however gross
The undisguised compulsion none can stay,
Compulsion by impracticable revolt,
Indrany, deeper, viler the disgrace
If by rebellion we invite constraint
Naked, contemptuous, to a slave subdued.
The reed that bows to the insistent wind
Is wiser than the trunk which the cyclone
Indignantly uproots. To force we yield,
But to a force disguised in courtly forms.
That's better than to yield beneath the scourge.

INDRANY

There's a defeat more noble, not to yield,
Even though we break. And break, I know, we must,
But to live fouled for ever, vilely robed
In a soiled purple, marked apart¹ to all the world
For laughter by the puppet's tinsel crown,
That is disgrace indeed.

ATRY

We hold this realm
Because the northern Scythian helps our sword.

INDRANY

By princely compromise, alliance high,
Not yet by purchase or a social stain.

¹ Uncertain reading.

ATRY

Our child will be an empress.

INDRANY

And outcaste.

ATRY

There have been many nuptials mixed like these
Of which world-famous emperors were born.

INDRANY

Yes, but we took, not gave, warlords¹ not slaves.
A ransom of his fate the conquered Greek
To Indian Chandragupta gave his child,
Knowing a son by her could never rule.

ATRY

There is one bar. The Scythian weds with all
And makes Impartial Time the arbiter
Whether a native or a foreign womb
Shall be the shelterer of his empire's heir.

INDRANY

This honour's purchased at too vile a cost.

ATRY

There is no help. If we deny our girl
He will have her violently, make her his slave
And not his wife.

INDRANY

Do this then, seem to yield,
But send her to your fortress on the hills,
Whence let one take her with a show of force,
Whoever's noblest now of Aryan lords .
In Magadha, Avanty or the South,
Fit mate for Atry's stock. Twixt him, be strife,

¹ Uncertain reading.

And the Cashmerian, we escape his wrath.

ATRY

It shall be so. I'll choose a trusty man
Who shall to Magadha before the morn.
Meanwhile, prepare your daughter for the hills.

(Indrany goes out joyfully.)

It is not good. The man will learn the trick,
A fierce barbarian, rapid as the storm,
Violent, vindictive, stamping on the world,
Like a swift warhorse, neighing to the wind,
With nostrils wide for any scent of war,
For men to kill, lands to lay desolate,
Haughty and keen, armed with his violence,
With the king's eye that reads the minds of men, —
Such is the man she counsels me to tempt
By palpable evasion. I will send
Urmila to my fortress on the hills,
But he, not Magadha, shall take her forth
By secret nuptials. He is honourable
Though violent, a statesman though too proud¹.
The prejudices of our race and day
Must yield to more commanding thoughts and views
That suit the changing times. Custom is mutable,
Only the breach of it is dangerous,
If too impetuously we innovate. It's best
To circumvent opinion², not provoke.
Who is there?, Call Mayoer!
The King's first task is to preserve his realm,
Means honourable or dishonourable
Are only means — to use impartially
The most effective first.

Mayoor enters.

Mayoor, you know,
The motion³ made by the Cashmerian's son
To wed my daughter.

¹ ² ³ Uncertain reading.

MAYOOR

We have spoken of it
Already.

ATRY

You are still of the same mind?
You think my subjects will revolt?

MAYOOR

It's sure.

ATRY

The Scythian sword can keep them hushed and still.

MAYOOR

And you its slave and pensioner, impotent.

ATRY

Then do it thus. The thing is secret still
Let it remain so. Let Prince Toraman
Wed Urmila in secret in the hills
As if herself had yielded to his suit,
Not my consent. Against whom then, Mayoor,
Shall Mathura revolt?

Mayoor

It may be done.

But will the Scythian's pride assent, or if
The bond is secret, will he own the bond?

ATRY

He shall, he must. To break by any means
The bar of pride that lowers him beneath
The lowest of his Aryan tributaries,
He will consent to much. And for the bond
He shall engage his honour, then possess.
Yourself go to him, Mayoor, where he's camped;

Persuade him. Let an escort start at once
With Urmila to Roodhra in the hills.
I trust you, Mayoor, for entire success.
My crown, my honour are upon this cast.

MAYOOR

Your crown is safe with me, your honour, King,
I'll save.

ATRY

Always few words were yours, Mayoor,
But each one solid gold.

He goes out.

MAYOOR

To cheat you's best
Of the dishonour to which you aspire
And for the crown it's safer in my hands
Than Toraman's, the Scythian giant, bold,
Subtle and violent, who spreads his toils
Over all India, helping force with guile
And guile with force

Enter Mekhala.

MEKHALA

He is alone. Hear you,
Mayoor!

MAYOOR

It's from the queen?

MEKHALA

Read it and see.

MAYOOR

Tell her my word is pledged and Urmila
Saved from the Scythian wedlock.

MEKHALA

And that means

You'll do it?

MAYOOR

She shall not wed Toraman

Mekhala goes out.

This is another coil. The King it seems
Deceives his people and deceives his queen.
She trusts him not, nor they. A lying King
Tortuous and serpentine in policy,
Loses as much by the distrust he breeds
As all his shufflings gain. I'll write to Magadha
In other terms than Queen Indrany dreams.
I will send out my messengers at once.
Our first to Ajamede, the Lion dispossessed,
Where in the hills of Roodhra now he lingers.
Another to the mighty Magadhan
Who gathers up his strength to free the land
From the barbarian's tread. Myself shall go
To Toraman, and meet the Scythian will.
The end shall be as God from old desired.

(Several pages torn off)

THE BIRTH OF SIN

A Drama

**The revised form of THE BIRTH OF SIN appears
in Volume V - COLLECTED POEMS**

PERSONS OF DRAMA

LUCIFER, the Angel of Power.

SIRIOTH, the Angel of Love.

GABRIEL, the Angel of Obedience.

MICHAEL, the Angel of War.

RAPHAEL, the Angel of Sweetness.

THE ELOHIM.

BELIAL, the Angel of Reason.

BAAL, the Angel of Worldly Wisdom.

MOLOCH, the Angel of Wrath.

SUN.

ASHTORATH, the Angel of Beauty.

MEROTH, the Angel of Youth.

PROLOGUE

Act One

LUCIFER

Master of light and glory, lift thy rays
Over the troubled flood; lift up thy rays.
Obey me.

THE SUN

Lucifer! who gaveth thee power
Over the gods that rule the ancient world?
Or why should I obey thee? Art thou God?
Hast thou dethroned the Omnipotent from Heaven
And cast Him down into the nether glooms,
Revolting? Gave He then His supreme command?
Speak as a servant then and minister
Not with the accent that controls the stars.

LUCIFER

Who then compelled thee from thy bright repose,
Or wherefore hast thou come?

THE SUN

By Him compelled
Before whose mandate tremble all the Gods.

LUCIFER

By His or mine. That I will see. Rise, Sun,
And from thy luminous majestic orb
Cast out into the azure hold of Space
Creative Energy and Pregnant Fire
Whirling around thee, while the years endure.

THE SUN

Lucifer, Son of Morning, first in Heaven,

What madness seizes thee? What awful force
Darkly magnificent, brilliantly ominous
Looks out from eyes that own no more the calm?

LUCIFER

Obey!

THE SUN

I cannot choose. Power leaps from thee
Upon me. I am seized with fiery pangs.
Spare me, thou dreadful Angel. I obey.

Exit.

LUCIFER .

Power to make and unmake the world!
Power grows in me. I am omnipotent.
Children of immortality whose ranks
And brilliant armies people the infinite,
Creatures of wonder, creatures of desire¹,
O suns that wheel in everlasting fire,
O stars that sow the ethereal spaces thick,
O worlds of various life! I am your king.
This I have learnt that God and I are one.
If one, then equal! Rightly too I deemed
That God develops, God increases. I,
Younger than He am greater than the Power
From which I sprang; the new excels the old.

BELIAL

What dost thou, Lucifer, Angel of God?
The infinite spaces murmur like a sea,
The ethereal realms are rocked as with a wind,
All Nature stands amazed. Whence this revolt?
Who gave thee force to overturn the world?

LUCIFER

Watch, Belial, watch with me. A crisis comes

¹ Uncertain reading.

In the infinite, mobile and progressive world.
For God shall cease and Lucifer be God.

BELIAL

Thou speakest a thing that madness only speaks.
If God be God, how can He change or cease?

LUCIFER

Watch, Belial! I will prove to thee the truth,
Thou reasonable Angel.

VIKRAMORVASIE
OR
THE HERO AND THE NYMPH

Translated from the Sanskrit Play of Kalidasa

CHARACTERS

PURURAVAS, Son of Budha and Ila, grandson of the Moon, King of the world, reigning at Pratisthana.

MANAVAKA, A Brahmin, the King's jester and companion.

LATAVYA, Chamberlain of the King's seraglio.

CHITRARATH, King of the Gandharvas, musicians of Heaven.

GALAVA, } Disciples of Bharat, Preceptor of the Arts
PELAVA, } in Heaven.

AYUS, Son of Pururavas.

CHARIOTEER of Pururavas.

THE QUEEN AUSHINARIE, Wife of Pururavas and daughter of the King of Kashi.

URVASIE, An Apsara or Nymph of Heaven, born from the thigh of Narayan.

NIPUNIKA, The Queen's handmaid.

CHITRALEKHA, }
SAHAJANYA, } Nymphs of Heaven, companions of Urvsie.
RAMBHA, }
MENAKA, }

SATYAVATIE, A hermitess.

A HUNTRESS.

GIRLS, ATTENDANT ON THE KING; AMAZONS.

Act One

INVOCATION

He in Vedanta by the Wise pronounced
Sole Being, who the upper and under world
Pervading overpasses, whom alone
The name of God describes, here applicable
And pregnant — crippled else of force, to others
Perverted — and the Yogins who aspire
To rise above the human death, break in
Breath, soul and senses passionately seeking
The Immutable, and in their own hearts find —
He, easily by work and faith and love
Attainable, ordain your heavenly weal.

After the invocation the Actor-Manager speaks.

MANAGER

No need of many words.

He speaks into the greenroom.

Hither good friend.

The Assistant-Manager enters.

ASSISTANT

Behold me.

MANAGER

Often has the audience seen
Old dramas by our earlier poets staged;
Therefore today a piece as yet unknown
I will present them, Vikram and the Nymph.
Remind our actors then most heedfully
To con their parts, as if on each success
Depended.

ASSISTANT

I shall do so.

He goes.

MANAGER

And now to you,
O noble audience, I bow down and pray,
If not from kindness to us your friends
And caterers, yet from pride in the high name
That graces this our plot, heedful attention,
Gentles, to Vikramorvasie, the work
Of Kalidasa.

VOICES

Help! O help, help, help!
Whoever is on the side of Heaven, whoever
Has passage through the paths of level air.

MANAGER

What cry is this that breaks upon our prologue
From upper worlds, most like the wail distressed
Of ospreys, sad but sweet as moan of bees
Drunken with honey in deep summer bloom,
Or the low cry of distant cuckoo? or hear I
Women who move on Heaven's azure stage
Splendid with rows of seated Gods, and chant
In airy syllables a liquid sweetness?

(After some thought)

Ah, now I have it. She who from the thigh
Of the great tempted sage Narayan sprang
Radiant, Heaven's nymph, divinest Urvasie,
In middle air from great Coilasa's lord
Returning, to the enemies of Heaven
Is prisoner; therefore the sweet multitude
Of Apsaras send forth melodious cry
Of pathos and complaint.

*He goes. The Nymphs of
Heaven enter, Rambha, Menaka,*

Sahajanya and many others.

NYMPHS

Help, help, O help!

Whoever is on the side of Heaven, whoever
Has passage through the paths of level air.

*Pururavas enters suddenly and with speed
in a chariot with his charioteer.*

PURURAVAS

Enough of lamentation! I am here,
Ilian Pururavas, from grandiose worship
In Surya's brilliant house returned. To me,
O women! say 'gainst what ye cry for rescue.

RAMBHA

Rescue from Titan violence, O King.

PURURAVAS

And what has Titan violence to you
Immortal done of fault, O Heaven's women?

MENAKA

King, hear us.

PURURAVAS

Speak.

MENAKA

Our sister, our dear sister!
The ornament of Eden and its joy!
Whom Indra by asceticism alarmed
Made use of like a lovely sword to kill
Spiritual longings, the eternal refutation
Of Luxmie's pride of beauty, Urvsie!
Returning from Cubera's halls, O she

PURURAVAS

O nobly driven! With speed like this I could
 O'ertake Heaven's eagle though he fled before me
 With tempest in his vans. How much more then
 This proud transgressor against Heaven's King!
 Look, charioteer, beneath my sudden car
 The crumbling thunder-clouds fly up like dust,
 And the wheel's desperate rotation seems
 To make another set of whirling spokes.
 The plumes upon the horses' heads rise tall,
 Motionless like a picture, and the wind
 Of our tremendous speed has made the flag
 From staff to airborne end straight as if pointing.

They go out in their chariot.

RAMBHA

Sisters, the King is gone. Direct we then
 Our steps to the appointed summit.

MENAKA

Hasten,

O hasten.

ALL

Hasten, O hasten, come, come, come.

They ascend the hill.

RAMBHA

And O, will he indeed avail to draw
 This stab out of our hearts?

MENAKA

Doubt it not, Rambha.

RAMBHA

No, Menaka, for not so easily
 Are Titans overthrown, my sister.

MENAKA

Rambha,
Remember this is he whom Heaven's King,
When battle raised its dreadful face, has called
With honour from the middle world of men,
Set in his armèd van, and conquered.

RAMBHA

Here too
I hope that he will conquer.

SAHAJANYA

Joy, sisters, joy!
Look where the chariot of the moon appears,
The Ilian's great deer-banner rushing up
From the horizon. He would not return
With empty hands, sisters. We can rejoice.

*All gaze upwards. Pururavas enters in his chariot
with his charioteer; Urvasie, her eyes closed in terror,
supported on the right arm of Chitralekha.*

CHITRALEKHA

Courage, sweet sister, courage.

PURURAVAS

O thou too lovely!
Recall thy soul. The enemies of Heaven
Can injure thee no more; that danger's over.
The Thunderer's puissance still pervades the worlds.
O then uplift these long and lustrous eyes.
Like sapphire lilies in a pool where dawn
Comes smiling.

CHITRALEKHA

Why does she not yet, alas!
Recover her sweet reason? Only her sighs
Remind us she is living.

PURURAVAS

Too rudely, lady,
Has thy sweet sister been alarmed. For look!-
What tremblings of the heart are here revealed.
Watch the quick rise and fall incessantly
That lift between these large magnificent breasts
The flowers of Eden.

CHITRALEKHA

Sister, O put by
This panic. Fie! thou art no Apsara.

PURURAVAS

Terror will not give up his envied seat
On her luxurious bosom soft as flowers,
The tremors in her raiment's edge and little
Heavings and flutterings between her two breasts
Confess him.

Urvasie begins to recover.

(with joy)

Thou art fortunate, Chitralkha!
Thy sister to her own bright nature comes
Once more. So have I seen a glorious night
Delivered out of darkness by the moon,
Nocturnal fire break through with crests of brightness
Its prison of dim smoke. Her beauty, wakening
From swoon and almost rescued, to my thoughts
Brings Ganges as I saw her once o'erwhelmed
With roar and ruin of her banks, race wild,
Thickening, then gradually from that turmoil
Grow clear, emerging into golden calm.

CHITRALEKHA

Be glad, my sister, O my Urvasie.
For vanquished are the accursed Titans, foes
Of the divine, antagonists of Heaven.

URVASIE (*opening her eyes*)

Vanquished? By Indra then whose soul can see
Across the world.

CHITRALEKHA

Not Indra, but this King
Whose puissance equals Indra.

URVASIE (*looking at Pururavas*)

O Titans,
You did me kindness!

PURURAVAS (*gazing at Urvasie*)

And reason if the nymphs
Tempting Narayan Sage drew back ashamed
When they beheld this wonder from his thigh
Starting. And yet I cannot think of her
Created by a withered hermit cold:
But rather in the process beautiful
Of her creation Heaven's enchanting moon
Took the Creator's place, or very Love
Grown all one amorousness, or else the month
Of honey and its days deep-mined with bloom.
How could an aged anchoret, dull and stale
With poring over scripture and oblivious
To all this rapture of the senses, build
A thing so lovely?

URVASIE

O my Chitrlekha,
Our sisters?

CHITRALEKHA

This great prince who slew our fear
Can tell us.

PURURAVAS

Sad of heart they wait, O beauty!

For with thy sweet ineffugable eyes
Who only once was blessed, even he without thee
Cannot abstain from pining. How then these
Original affections sister-sweet
Rooted in thee?

URVASIE

How courteous is his tongue
And full of noble kindness! Yet what wonder?
Nectar is natural to the moon. O prince,
My heart's in haste to see once more my loved ones.

PURURAVAS

Lo, where upon the Peak of Gold they stand
Gazing towards thy face, and with such eyes
Of rapture as when men behold the moon
Emerging from eclipse.

CHITRALEKHA

O sister, see!

URVASIE (*looking longingly at the King*)

I do and drink in with my eyes my partner
Of grief and pleasure.

CHITRALEKHA (*with a smile; significantly*)

Sister, who is he?

URVASIE

He? Oh! Rambha I meant and all our friends.

RAMBHA

He comes with victory. Urvasie's beside him
And Chित्रalekha. Now indeed this King
Looks glorious like the moon, when near the twin
Bright asterisms that frame best his light.

MENAKA

In both ways are we blest, our lost dear one
Brought back to us, this noble King returned
Unwounded.

SAHAJANYA

Sister, true. Not easily
Are Titans conquered.

PURURAVAS

Charioteer, descend.
We have arrived the summit.

CHARIOTEER

As the King
Commands.

PURURAVAS

O I am blest in this descent
Upon unevenness. O happy shock
That threw her great hips towards me. All her sweet shoulder
Pressed mine that thrilled and passioned to the touch.

URVASIE (*abashed*)

Move yet a little farther to your side,
Sister.

CHITRALEKHA (*smiling*)

I cannot; there's no room.

RAMBHA

Sisters,
This prince has helped us all. 'Twere only grateful
Should we descend and greet him.

ALL

Let us do it.

They all approach.

PURURAVAS

Stay, charioteer, the rush of hooves that she
Marrying her sweet-browed eagerness with these
May, mingling with their passionate bosoms, clasp
Her dearest, like the glory and bloom of spring
Hastening into the open arms of trees.

NYMPHS

Hail to the King felicitous who comes
With conquest in his wheels.

PURURAVAS

To you, O nymphs,
As fortunate in your sister's rescued arms.

Urvasie descends from the chariot supported on Chitrakha's arm.

URVASIE

O sisters, sisters, take me to your bosoms.

All rush upon her and embrace her.

Closer, O closer! hurt me with your breasts!
I never hoped to see again your sweet
Familiar faces.

RAMBHA

Protect a million ages,
Monarch, all continents and every sea!

Noise within.

CHARIOTEER

My lord, I hear a rumour in the east
And mighty speed of chariots. Lo, one bright
With golden armet, looming down from Heaven
Like a huge cloud with lightning on its wrist,
Streams towards us.

NYMPHS

Chitrarath! 'tis Chitrarath.

CHITRARATH (*approaches the King with great respect*)

Hail to the Indra-helper! Fortunate
Pururavas, whose prowess is so ample,
Heaven's King has grown its debtor.

PURURAVAS

The Gandharva!

Welcome, my bosom's friend.

They clasp each other's hands.

What happy cause

Of coming?

CHITRARATH ·

Indra had heard from Narad's lips
Of Urvashie by Titan Cayshy haled.
He bade us to her rescue. We midway
Heard heavenly bards chanting thy victory,
And hitherward have turned our march. On, friend,
With us to Maghavan and bear before thee
This lovely offering. Great thy service done
To Heaven's high King; for she who was of old
Narayan's chief munificence to Indra,
Is now thy gift, Pururavas. Thy arm
Has torn her from a Titan's grasp.

PURURAVAS

Comrade,

Never repeat it; for if we who are
On Heaven's side, o'erpower the foes of Heaven,
'Tis Indra's puissance, not our own. Does not
The echo of the lion's dangerous roar
Reverberating through the mountain glens
Scatter with sound the elephants? We, O friend,
Are even such echoes.

CHITRARATH

This fits with thy great nature,

For modesty was ever valour's crown.

PURURAVAS

Not now nor hence is't seasonable for me,
Comrade, to meet the King of Sacrifice.
Thou, therefore, to the mighty presence lead
This beauty.

CHITRARATH

As thou wilt. With me to Heaven!

URVASIE (*aside to Chitrlekha*)

I have no courage to address my saviour.
Sister, wilt be my voice to him?

CHITRALEKHA (*approaching Pururavas*)

My lord,

Urvasie thus petitions —

PURURAVAS

What commands

The lady?

CHITRALEKHA

She would have thy gracious leave
To bear into her far immortal Heavens
The glory of the great Pururavas
And dwell with it as with a sister.

PURURAVAS (*sorrowfully*)

Go then;

But go for longer meeting.

The Gandharvas and the nymphs soar up into the sky.

URVASIE

Sister, stay!

My chain is in this creeper caught. Release it.

CHITRALEKHA (*looking at the King with a smile*)

Oh, yes, indeed, a sad entanglement!
I fear you will not easily be loosed.

URVASIE

Do not mock me, sister. Pray you, untwine it.

CHITRALEKHA

Come, let me try. I'll do my possible
To help you.

She busies herself with the chain.

URVASIE (*smiling*)

Sister, think what thou hast promised
Even afterwards.

PURURAVAS (*aside*)

Creep, thou dost me friendship;
Thou for one moment holdest from the skies
Her feet desirable. O lids of beauty!
O vision of her half-averted face!

*Urvasie, released, looks at the King, then with a
sigh at her sisters soaring up into the sky.*

CHARIOTEER

O King, thy shaft with the wild voice of storm
Has hurled the Titans in the salt far sea,
Avenging injured Heaven, and now creeps back
Into the quiver, like a mighty snake
Seeking its lair.

PURURAVAS

Therefore bring near the chariot,
While I ascend.

CHARIOTEER

'Tis done.

The King mounts the chariot.

PURURAVAS

Shake loose the reins.

URVASIE (*gazing at the King, with a sigh, aside*)

My benefactor! my deliverer!
Shall I not see thee more?

She goes out with Chitrlekha.

PURURAVAS (*looking after Urvasie*)

O Love! O Love!

Thou mak'st men hot for things impossible
And mad for dreams. She soars up to the Heavens,
Her father's middle stride, and draws my heart
By force out of my bosom. It goes with her,
Bleeding; as when a wild swan through the sky
Wings far her flight, there dangles in her beak
A dripping fibre from the lotus torn.

They go.

Curtain

Act Two

SCENE 1

Park of the King's palace in Pratisthana. — In the background the wings of a great building, near it the gates of the park, near the bounds of the park an arbour and a small artificial hill to the side.

Manavaka enters.

MANAVAKA

Houp! Houp! I feel like a Brahmin who has had an invitation to dinner; he thinks dinner, talks dinner, looks dinner, his very sneeze has the music of the dinner-bell in it. I am simply bursting with the King's secret. I shall never manage to hold my tongue in that crowd. Solitude's my only safety. So until my friend gets up from the session of affairs, I will wait for him in this precinct of the House of Terraces.

Nipunika enters.

NIPUNIKA

I am bidden by my lady the King's daughter of Kashi, "Nipunika, since my lord came back from doing homage to the Sun, he has had no heart for anything. So just go and learn from his dear friend, the noble Manavaka, what is disturbing his mind." Well and good! but how shall I overreach that rogue — a Brahmin he calls himself, with the murrain to him! But there! thank Heaven, he can't keep a secret long; 'tis like a dewdrop on a rare blade of grass. Well, I must hunt him out. O! there stands the noble Manavaka, silent and sad like a monkey in a picture. I will accost him. (*approaching*) Salutation to the noble Manavaka!

MANAVAKA

Blessing to your ladyship! (*aside*) Ugh, the very sight of this little rogue of a tiring-woman makes the secret jump at my

throat. I shall burst! I shall split! Nipunika, why have you left the singing lesson and where are you off to?

NIPUNIKA

To see my lord the King, by my lady's orders.

MANAVAKA

What are her orders?

NIPUNIKA

Noble sir, this is the Queen's message. "My lord has always been kind and indulgent to me, so that I have become a stranger to grief. He never before disregarded my sorrow" —

MANAVAKA

How? how? has my friend offended her in any way?

NIPUNIKA

Offended? Why, he addressed my lady by the name of a girl for whom he is pining.

MANAVAKA (*aside*)

What, he has let out his own secret? Then why am I agonizing here in vain? (*aloud*) He called her Urvasie?

NIPUNIKA

Yes. Noble Manavaka, who is that Urvasie?

MANAVAKA

Urvasie is the name of a certain Apsara. The sight of her has sent the King mad. He is not only tormenting the life out of my lady, but out of me too with his aversion to everything but moaning.

NIPUNIKA (*aside*)

So! I have stormed the citadel of my master's secret. (*Aloud*) What am I to say to the Queen?

MANAVAKA

Nipunika, tell my lady with my humble regards that I am endeavouring my best to divert my friend from this mirage and I will not see her ladyship till it is done.

NIPUNIKA

As your honour commands.

She goes.

BARDS (*within*)

Victory, victory to the King!
The Sun in Heaven for ever labours; wide
His beams dispel the darkness to the verge
Of all this brilliant world. The King too toils,
Rescuing from night and misery and crime
His people. Equal power to these is given
And labour, the King on earth, the Sun in Heaven.
The brilliant Sun in Heaven rests not from toil;
Only at high noon in the middle cusp
And azure vault the great wheels slacken speed
A moment, then resume their way; thou too
In the mid-moment of daylight lay down
Thy care, put by the burden of a crown.

MANAVAKA

Here's my dear friend risen from the session. I will join him.
He goes out, then re-enters with Pururavas.

PURURAVAS (*sighing*)

No sooner seen than in my heart she leaped.
O easy entrance! since the bannered Love
With his unerring shaft had made the breach
Where she came burning in.

MANAVAKA (*aside*)

Alas the poor
King's daughter of Kashi!

PURURAVAS (*looking steadfastly at him*)

Hast thou kept thy trust —

My secret?

MANAVAKA (*depressed*)

Ah! that daughter of a slave
Has overreached me. Else he would not ask
In just that manner.

PURURAVAS (*alarmed*)

What now? Silence?

MANAVAKA

Why, sir,

It's this, I've padlocked so my tongue that even
To you I could not give a sudden answer.

PURURAVAS

'Tis well. O how shall I beguile desire?

MANAVAKA

Let's to the kitchen.

PURURAVAS

Why, what's there?

MANAVAKA

What's there?

The question! From all quarters gathered in
Succulent sweets and fivefold eatableness,
Music from saucepan and from frying-pan,
The beauty of dinner getting ready. There's
A sweet beguiler to your emptiness!

PURURAVAS (*smiling*)

For you whose heart is in your stomach. I
Am not so readily eased who fixed my soul

Upon what I shall hardly win.

MANAVAKA

Not win?

Why, tell me, came you not within her sight?

PURURAVAS

What comfort is in that?

MANAVAKA

When she has seen you,

How is she hard to win?

PURURAVAS

O your affection

Utters mere partiality.

MANAVAKA

You make me

Desperate to see her. Why, sir, she must be
A nonpareil of grace. Like me perhaps?

PURURAVAS

Who could with words describe each perfect limb
Of that celestial whole? Take her in brief,
O friend, for she is ornament's ornament,
And jewels cannot make her beautiful.
They from her body get their grace. And when
You search the universe for similes,
Her greater beauty drives you to express
Fair things by her, not her by lesser fairness:
So she is perfection's model.

MANAVAKA

No wonder then,

With such a shower of beauty, that you play
The rainbird open-mouthed to let drops glide

Graciously down his own particular gullet.
But whither now?

PURURAVAS

When love grows large with yearning,
He has no sanctuary but solitude.
I pray you, go before me to the park.

MANAVAKA (*aside*)

Oh God, my dinner! There's no help.
(aloud) This way.
Lo, here the park's green limit. See, my lord,
How this fair garden sends his wooing breeze
To meet his royal guest.

PURURAVAS

O epithet
Most apt. Indeed this zephyr in fond arms
Impregnating with honey spring-creeper
And flattering with his kiss the white May-bloom,
Seems to me like a lover-girl divided
Between affection smooth and eager passion.

MANAVAKA

May like division bless your yearning, sir.
We reach the garden's gate. Enter, my lord.

PURURAVAS

Enter thou first. O! I was blindly sanguine,
By refuge in this flowery solitude
Who thought to heal my pain. As well might swimmer
Hurled onward in a river's violent hands
Oppose that roaring tide, as I make speed
Hither for my relief.

MANAVAKA

And wherefore so?

PURURAVAS

Was passion not enough to torture me,
Still racking the resistless mind with thoughts
Of unattainable delight? But I
Must add the mango-trees' soft opening buds,
And hurt myself with pallid drifting leaves,
And with the busy zephyr wound my soul.

MANAVAKA

Be not so full of grief. For Love himself
Will help you soon to your extreme desire.

PURURAVAS

I seize upon thy word, — the Brahmin's speech
That never can be false!

MANAVAKA

See what a floral
Green loveliness expresses the descent
And rosy incarnation of the spring.
Do you not find it lovely?

PURURAVAS

Friend, I do.
I study it tree by tree and leaf by leaf.
This courbouc's like a woman's rosy nail,
But darkens to the edge; heavy with crimson,
Yon red asoka breaking out of bud
Seems all on fire; and here the carvy mounting
Slight dust of pollen on his stamen-ends
Clusters with young sweet bloom. Methinks I see
The infant honeyed soul of spring, half-woman,
Grow warm with bud of youth.

MANAVAKA

This arbour green
With blossoms loosened by the shock of bees

Upon a slab of costly stone, prepares
With its own hands your cushioned honours. Take
The courtesy.

PURURAVAS

As you will.

MANAVAKA

Here sit at ease.

The sensitive beauty of the creepers lax
Shall glide into your soul and gently steal
The thought of Urvasie.

PURURAVAS

O no, mine eyes

Are spoilt by being indulged in her sweet looks,
And petulantly they reject all feebler
Enchantings, even the lovely embowering bloom
Of these grace-haunted creepers bending down
To draw me with their hands. I am sick for her.
Rather invent some way to my desire.

MANAVAKA

Oh rare! when Indra for Ahalya pined
A cheapjack was his counsellor; you as lucky
Have me for your ally. Mad all! mad all!

PURURAVAS

Not so! affection edges so the wit,
Some help it's sure to find for one it loves.

MANAVAKA

Good, I will cogitate. Disturb me not
With your love-moanings.

PURURAVAS (*his right arm throbbing. Aside*)

Her face of perfect moonlight

Is all too heavenly for my lips. How canst thou then
Throb expectation in my arm, O Love?
Yet all my heart is suddenly grown glad
As if it had heard the feet of my desire.

*He waits hopefully. There enter in the
sky Urvasie and Chitralkha.*

CHITRALEKHA

Will you not even tell me where we go?

URVASIE

Sister, when I upon the Peak of Gold
Was stayed from Heaven by the creeper's hands,
You mocked me then. And have you now to ask
'Whither it is I go?'

CHITRALEKHA

To seek the side
Of King Pururavas you journey then?

URVASIE

Even so shameless is your sister's mind.

CHITRALEKHA

Whom did you send before, what messenger
To him you love?

URVASIE

My heart.

CHITRALEKHA

O yet think well,
Sister; do not be rash.

URVASIE

Love sends me, Love
Compels me. How can I then think?

CHITRALEKHA

To that

I have no answer.

URVASIE

Then take me to him soon.

Only let not our way be such as lies
Within the let of hindrance.

CHITRALEKHA

Fear not that.

Has not the great Preceptor of the Gods
Taught us to wear the crest invincible?
While that is bound, not any he shall dare
Of all the Heaven-opposing faction stretch
An arm of outrage.

URVASIE (*abashed*)

Oh true! my heart forgot.

CHITRALEKHA

Look, sister! For in Ganges' gliding waves
Holier by influx of blue Yamuna,
The palace of the great Pururavas,
Crowning the city with its domes, looks down
As in a glass at its own mighty image.

URVASIE

All Eden to an earthly spot is bound.
But where is he who surely will commiserate
A pining heart?

CHITRALEKHA

This park which seems one country
With Heaven, let us question. See the King
Expects thee, like the pale new-risen moon

Waiting for moonlight.

URVASIE

How beautiful he is —
Fairer than when I saw him first!

CHITRALEKHA

'Tis true.

Come, we will go to him.

URVASIE

I will not yet.

Screened in with close invisibility,
I will stand near him, learn what here he talks
Sole with his friend.

CHITRALEKHA

You'll do your will always.

MANAVAKA

Courage! your difficult mistress may be caught,
Two ways.

URVASIE (*jealously*)

O who is she, that happy she
Being wooed by such a lover, preens herself
And is proud?

CHITRALEKHA

Why do you mock the ways of men
And are a Goddess?

URVASIE

I dare not, sweet, I fear
To learn too suddenly my own misfortune,
If I use heavenly eyes.

MANAVAKA

Listen, you dreamer!
Are you deaf? I tell you I have found a way:

PURURAVAS

Speak on.

MANAVAKA

Woo sleep that marries men with dreams,
Or on a canvas paint in Urvasie
And gaze on her for ever.

URVASIE (*aside*)

O sinking coward heart, now, now revive.

PURURAVAS

And either is impossible. For look!
How can I, with this rankling wound of love,
Call to me sleep who marries men with dreams?
And if I paint the sweetness of her face,
Will not the tears, before it is half done,
Blurring my gaze with mist, blot the dear vision?

CHITRALEKHA

Heard'st thou?

URVASIE

I have heard all. It was too little
For my vast greed of love.

MANAVAKA

Well, that's my stock
Of counsel.

PURURAVAS (*sighing*)

Oh me! she knows not my heart's pain,
Or knowing it, with those her heavenly eyes

Scorns my poor passion. Only the arrowed Love
Is gratified tormenting with her bosom
My sad, unsatisfied and pale desire.

CHITRALEKHA

Heard'st thou, sister?

URVASIE

He must not think so of me!
I would make answer, sister, but to his face
I have not hardihood. Suffer me then,
To trust to faery birch-leaf mind-created
My longing.

CHITRALEKHA

It is well. Create and write.

*Urvasie writes in a passion of timidity and excitement, then
throws the leaf between Pururavas and Manavaka.*

MANAVAKA

Murder! murder! I'm killed! I am dead! help! help!
(*looking*)
What's this? a serpent's skin come down to eat me?

PURURAVAS (*looks closely and laughs*)

No serpent's slough, my friend, only a leaf
Of birch-tree with a scroll of writing traced upon it.

MANAVAKA

Perhaps the invisible fair Urvasie
Heard you complain and answers.

PURURAVAS

To desire
Nothing can seem impossible.

*He takes the leaf and reads it
to himself, then with joy.*

O friend,
How happy was your guess!

MANAVAKA

I told you so.
The Brahmin's speech! Read, read! aloud, if it please you.

URVASIE (*aside*)

The Brahmin has his own urbanity!

PURURAVAS

Listen.

MANAVAKA

I am all ears.

PURURAVAS (*reading aloud*)

“My master and my King!
Were I what thy heart thinks and knows me not,
Scorning thy love, would then the soft-winged breeze
Of deathless gardens and the unfading flowers
That strew the beds of Paradise, to me
Feel fire!”

URVASIE

What will he say now?

CHITRALEKHA

What each limb,
That is a drooping lotus-stalk with love,
Has said already.

MANAVAKA

You're consoled, I hope?
Don't tell me what you feel. I've felt the same
When I've been hungry and one popped in on me
With sweetmeats in a tray.

PURURAVAS

Consoled! a word

How weak! I con this speaking of my sweet,
This dear small sentence full of beautiful meaning,
This gospel of her answering love, and feel
Her mouth upon my mouth and her soft eyes
Swimming and large gaze down into my own,
And touch my lifted lids with hers.

URVASIE

O even

Such sweetness feels thy lover.

PURURAVAS

Friend, my finger

Moistening might blot the lines. Do thou then hold
This sweet handwriting of my love.

He gives the leaf to Manavaka.

MANAVAKA

But tell me.

Why does your mistress, having brought to bloom
Your young desire, deny its perfect fruit?

URVASIE

O sister, my heart flutters at the thought
Of going to my lord. While I cajole
And strengthen the poor coward, show yourself,
Go to him, tell him all that I may speak.

CHITRALEKHA

I will.

She becomes visible and approaches the King.

Hail, lord our King.

PURURAVAS (*joyfully*)

O welcome, welcome!

He looks around for Urvasie.

Yet, fair one, as the Yamuna not mixed
With Ganges, to the eye that saw their beauty
Of wedded waters, seems not all so fair,
So thou without thy sister givest not
That double delight.

CHITRALEKHA

First is the cloud's dim legion
Seen in the Heavens; afterwards comes the lightning.

MANAVAKA (*aside*)

What! this is not the very Urvasie?
Only the favourite sister of that miracle!

PURURAVAS

Here sit down, fairest.

CHITRALEKHA

Let me first discharge
My duty. Urvasie by me bows down
Her face thus to her monarch's feet, imploring —

PURURAVAS

Rather commanding.

CHITRALEKHA

She whom in Titan hands
Afflicted thou didst pity, thou didst rescue,
Now needs much more thy pity, not by hands
Titan, but crueller violence of love
Oppressed — the sight of thee her sudden cause.

PURURAVAS

O Chित्रलेखा, her thou tell'st me of
Passionate for me. Hast thou not eyes to know
Pururavas in anguish for her sake?

One prayer both pray to Kama, 'Iron with iron
Melts in fierce heat; why not my love with me?'

CHITRALEKHA (*returning to Urvasie*)

Come sister, to your lord. So much his need
Surpasses yours, I am his ambassador.

URVASIE (*becoming visible*)

How unexpectedly hast thou with ease
Forsook me!

CHITRALEKHA (*with a smile*)

In a moment I shall know
Who forsakes whom, sister. But come away
And give due greeting.

*Urvasie approaches the King fearfully and
bows down, then low and bashfully.
Conquest to the King!*

PURURAVAS

I conquer, love, indeed, when thy dear lips
Give greeting to me, vouchsafed to no mortal
But Indra only.

He takes her by both hands and makes her sit down.

MANAVAKA

I am a mighty Brahmin and the friend
Of all earth's lord. O'erlook me not entirely.

Urvasie smiles and bows to him.

Peace follow you and keep you.

MESSENGER OF THE GODS (*cries from within*)

Chित्रalekha, urge haste on Urvasie.
This day the wardens of the ancient worlds
And the great King of Heaven himself will witness
That piece where all the passions live and move,
Quickened to gracious gesture in the action

Deposed in you by Bharat Sage, O sisters.

All listen, Urvasie sorrowfully.

CHITRALEKHA

Thou hearest the Messenger of Heaven? Take leave,
Sweet, of the King.

URVASIE

I cannot speak!

CHITRALEKHA

My liege,

My sister not being lady of herself
Beseeches your indulgence. She would be
Without a fault before the Gods.

PURURAVAS (*articulating with difficulty*)

Alas!

I must not wish to hinder you when Heaven
Expects your service. Only do not forget
Pururavas.

*Urvasie goes with her sister, still looking
backwards towards the King.*

O she is gone! my eyes
Have now no cause for sight: they're worthless balls
Without an object.

MANAVAKA

Why, not utterly.

He is about to give the birch-leaf.

There's — Heavens! 'tis gone; it must have drifted down,
While I, being all amazed with Urvasie,
Noticed nothing.

PURURAVAS

What is it thou wouldst say?

There is — ?

MANAVAKA

No need to droop your limbs and pine.
Your Urvasie has to your breast been plucked
With cords of passions, knots that will not slacken
Strive as she may.

PURURAVAS

My soul tells me like comfort.
For as she went, not lady of her limbs
To yield their sweets to me for ever, yet
Her heart, which was her own, in one great sob
From 'twixt two trembling breasts shaken with sighs
Came panting out. I hear it throb within me.

MANAVAKA (*aside*)

Well, my heart's all a-twitter too. Each moment
I think he is going to mention the damned birch-leaf.

PURURAVAS

With what shall I persuade mine eyes to comfort?
The letter!

MANAVAKA (*searching*)

What! Hullo! It's gone! Come now,
It was no earthly leaf; it must have gone
Flying behind the skirts of Urvasie.

PURURAVAS (*bitterly, in vexation*)

Will you then never leave your idiot trick
Of carelessness? Search for it.

MANAVAKA (*getting up*)

Oh, well! well!
It can't be far. Why here it is — or here — or here.

*While they search, the Queen enters, with
her attendants and Nipunika.*

AUSHINARIE

Now, maiden, is it true thou tell'st me? Saw'st thou really
My lord and Manavaka approach the arbour?

NIPUNIKA

I have not told my lady falsehood ever
That she should doubt me.

AUSHINARIE

Well, I will lurk thick-screened
With hanging creepers and surprise what he
Disburdens from his heart in his security.
So I shall know the truth.

NIPUNIKA (*sulkily*)

Well, as you please.

They advance.

AUSHINARIE (*looking ahead*)

What's yonder like a faded rag that lightly
The southern wind guides towards us?

NIPUNIKA

It is a birch-leaf.
There's writing on it; the letters, as it rolls,
Half show their dented outlines. Look, it has caught
Just on your anklet spike. I'll lift and read.

She disengages the leaf.

AUSHINARIE

Silently first peruse it; if 'tis nothing
Unfit for me to know, then I will hear.

NIPUNIKA

It is, oh, it must be that very scandal.
Verses they seem and penned by Urvasie,
And to my master. Manavaka's neglect

Has thrown it in our hands.

Laughs.

AUSHINARIE

Tell me the purport.

NIPUNIKA

I'll read the whole. "My master and my King!
Were I what thy heart thinks and knows me not,
Scorning thy love, would then the soft-winged breeze
Of deathless gardens and unfading flowers
That strew the beds of Paradise, to me
Feel fire!"

AUSHINARIE

So! by this dainty love-letter,
He is enamoured then, and of the nymph.

NIPUNIKA

It's plain enough.

They enter the arbour.

MANAVAKA

What's yonder to the wind
Enslaved, that flutters on the parkside rockery?

PURURAVAS (*rising*)

Wind of the south, thou darling of the Spring,
Seize rather on the flowery pollen stored
By months of fragrance, that gold dust of trees.
With this thou mightest perfume all thy wings.
How wilt thou profit, snatching from me, O wind,
My darling's dear handwriting, like a kiss
All love? When thou did'st woo thine Anjana,
Surely thou knewest lovers' dying hearts
Are by a hundred little trifles kept,
All slight as this!

NIPUNIKA

See, mistress, see! A search
In progress for the leaf.

AUSHINARIE

Be still.

MANAVAKA

Alas!

I was misled with but a peacock's feather,
Faded, a saffron splendour of decay.

PURURAVAS

In every way I am undone.

AUSHINARIE (*approaching suddenly*)

My lord,

Be not so passionate; here is your dear letter.

PURURAVAS (*confused*)

The Queen! O welcome!

MANAVAKA (*aside*)

I'll come, if 'twere convenient

To tell the truth.

PURURAVAS (*aside*)

What shall I do now, friend,

Or say?

MANAVAKA (*aside*)

Much you will say! A thief red-handed
Caught with his swag!

PURURAVAS (*aside*)

Is this a time for jesting?

(*aloud*)

Madam, it was not this I sought but other,
A record of state, a paper that I dropped.

AUSHINARIE

Oh, you do well to hide your happiness.

MANAVAKA

My lady, hurry on His Majesty's dinner.
When bile accumulates, dinner does the trick.

AUSHINARIE

A noble consolation for his friend
The Brahmin finds! Heard'st thou, Nipunika?

MANAVAKA

Why, madam, even a goblin is appeased
By dinner.

PURURAVAS

Fool! by force you'd prove me guilty.

AUSHINARIE

Not yours the guilt, my lord! I am in fault
Who force my hated and unwelcome face
Upon you. But I go. Nipunika,
Attend me.

She is departing in wrath.

PURURAVAS (*following her*)

Guilty I am. O pardon, pardon!
O look on me more kindly. How can a slave
Be innocent, when whom he should please is angry?

He falls at her feet.

AUSHINARIE (*aside*)

I am not so weak-minded as to value
Such hollow penitence. And yet the terror

Of that remorse I know that I shall feel
 If I spurn his kindness, frightens me — but no!

She goes out with Nipunika and attendants.

MANAVAKA

She has rushed off like a torrent full of wrath.
 Rise, rise! she's gone.

PURURAVAS (*rising*)

O she did right to spurn me.
 Most dulcet words of lovers, sweetest flatteries,
 When passion is not there, can find no entrance
 To woman's heart; for she knows well the voice
 Of real love, but these are stones false-coloured
 Rejected by the jeweller's practised eye.

MANAVAKA

This is what you should wish! The eye affected
 Brooks not the flaming of a lamp too near.

PURURAVAS

You much misjudge me. Though my heart's gone out
 To Urvashie, affection deep I owe
 My Queen. But since she scorned my prostrate wooing,
 I will have patience till her heart repent.

MANAVAKA

Oh, hang your patience! keep it for home consumption.
 Mine's at an end. Have some faint mercy instead
 And save a poor starved Brahmin's life. It's time
 For bath and dinner! dinner!!

PURURAVAS (*looking upward*)

'Tis noon. The tired
 And heated peacock sinks to chill delight
 Of water in the tree-encircling channel,
 The bee divides a crimson bud and creeps

Into its womb; there merged and safe from fire,
He's lurking. The duck too leaves her blazing pool
And shelters in cold lilies on the bank,
And in your summer-house weary of heat
The parrot from his cage for water cries.

They go.

Curtain

Act Three

SCENE I

Hermitage of the Saint Bharat in Heaven.

Galava and Pelava.

GALAVA

Pelava, thee the Sage admitted, happier
Chosen, to that great audience in the house
Of highest Indra — I meanwhile must watch
The sacred flame; inform my absence. Was
The divine session with the acting pleased?

PELAVA

Of pleased I know not; this I well could see
They sat all lost in that poetic piece
Of Saraswatie, "Luxmie's Choice" — breathlessly
Identified themselves with every mood.
But —

GALAVA

Ah, that but! It opens doors to censure.

PELLAVA

Yes, Urvasie was heedless, missed her word.

GALAVA

How? how?

PELAVA

She acted Luxmie; Menaka
Was Varunie; who asking, "Sister, see,
The noble and the beautiful of Heaven,
And Vishnu and the guardians of the worlds.
To whom does thy heart go mid all these glories?" —

Urvasie should have answered 'Purushottam,'
But from her lips 'Pururavas' leaped forth.

GALAVA

Our organs are the slaves of fate and doom!
Was not the great Preceptor angry?

PELAVA

Yes;
He cursed her, but high Indra blessed.

GALAVA

What blessing?

PELAVA

"Since thou hast wronged my teaching and my fame,
For thee no place in Heaven" — so frowned the Sage.
Heaven's monarch marked her when the piece was ended,
Drooping, her sweet face bowed with shame, and said,
With gracious brows, "Since thou hast fixed thy heart
Upon my friend and strong ally in war,
I will do both a kindness. Go to him
And love and serve him as thy lord until
A child is got in thee and he behold
His offspring's face."

GALAVA

O nobly this became
Indra; he knows to value mighty hearts.

PELAVA (*looking at the Sun*)

Look, in our talk if we have not transgressed
Our teacher's hour for bathing. Galava,
We should be at his side.

GALAVA

Let us make haste.

They go out.

SCENE II

Outside the palace of Pururavas, beneath the House of Gems. The terrace of the House of Gems with a great staircase leading up to it.

The Chamberlain Latavya enters.

LATAVYA (*sighing*)

All other men when life is green and strong
Marry and toil and get them wealth, then, ageing,
Their sons assume the burden, they towards rest
Their laboured faces turn. But us for ever
Service, a keyless dungeon still renewed,
Wears down; and hard that service is which keeps
O'er women ward and on their errands runs.
Now Kashi's daughter, careful of her vow,
Commands me, "I have put from me, Latavya,
The obstinacy of offended love
And wooed my husband through Nipunika.
Thou too entreat him." Therefore I linger here
Waiting till the King's greatness swiftly come,
His vesper worship done. It dims apace.
How beautifully twilight sits and dreams
Upon these palace walls! The peacocks now
Sit on their perches, drowsed with sleep and night,
Like figures hewn in stone. And on the roof
The fluttering pigeons with their pallid wings
Mislead the eye, disguised as rings of smoke
That from the window-ways have floated out
Into the evening. In places flower-bestrewn
The elders of the high seraglio, gentle souls
Of holy manners, set the evening lamps,
Dividing darkness; flames of auspice burn.
The King! I hear the sound of many feet,
Ringed round with torches he appears, his girls
Hold up with young fair arms. O form august
Like Mainak, when as yet the hills had wings,

Moving, and the slim trees along its ridge
Flickered with vermeil shaken blooms. Just here
I'll wait him, in the pathway of his glance.

*Enter Pururavas, surrounded by girl attendants
carrying torches; with him Manavaka.*

PURURAVAS (*aside*)

Day passes with some pale attempt at calm,
For then work walls the mind from the fierce siege
Of ever-present passion. But how shall I
Add movement to the tardy-footed night,
The long void hours by no distraction winged?

LATAVYA (*approaching*)

Long live the King! My lady says, "The moon
Tonight in splendour on the House of Jewels
Rises like a bright face. On the clear terrace,
My husband by my side, I would await
With Rohinie, his heavenly fair delight,
The God's embracings."

PURURAVAS

What the Queen wills, was ever
My law, Latavya.

LATAVYA

So I'll tell my lady.

He goes.

PURURAVAS

Think you in very truth for her vow's sake
My lady makes this motion?

MANAVAKA

Rather I deem
'Tis her remorse she cloaks with holy vows,
Atoning thus for a prostration scorned.

PURURAVAS

O true! the proud and loving hearts of women,
Who have their prostrate dear ones spurned, repenting
Are plagued with sweet accusing memories
Of eyes that ask forgiveness, outstretched hands,
Half-spoken words and touches on their feet,
That travel to the heart. Precede me then
To the appointed terrace.

MANAVAKA

Look, my lord,
The crystal stairs roll upward like bright waves
On moonlit Ganges; yonder the terrace sleeps
Wide-bosomed to the cold and lovely eve.

PURURAVAS

Precede me; we'll ascend.

They ascend to the terrace.

MANAVAKA

The moon is surely
Upon the verge of rise; swiftly the east
Empties of darkness, and the horizon seems
All beautiful and brightening like a face.

PURURAVAS

O aptly said! Behind the peak of rise
The hidden moon, pushing black night aside,
Precedes himself with herald lustres. See!
The daughter of the imperial East puts back
The blinding tresses from her eyes, and smiles,
And takes with undimmed face my soul.

MANAVAKA

Hurrah!

The king of the twice-born has risen all white
And round and luscious like a ball of sugar.

PURURAVAS (*smiling*)

A glutton's eloquence is ever haunted
With images of the kitchen.

(*bowing with folded hands*)

Hail, God that rulest

The inactive night! O settler with the sun
For ritual holy, O giver to the Gods
And blessed fathers dead of nectarous wine,
O slayer of the vasty glooms of night,
Whose soul of brightness crowns the Almighty's head,
O moon, all hail! accept thy offspring's prayer.

MANAVAKA .

Well now, your grandpapa has heard your vows;
You'll take it from a Brahmin's mouth, through whom
Even he may telepath his message. So,
That's finished. Now sit down and give me a chance
Of being comfortable.

PURURAVAS (*sitting down, then looking at his attendants*)

The moon is risen;
These torches are a vain reiteration
Of brightness. Ladies, rest.

ALL

Our lord commands us.

They go.

PURURAVAS

It is not long before my lady comes.
So, let me, while we yet are lonely here,
Unburden me of my love-ravaged thoughts.

MANAVAKA

They are visible to the blind. Take hope and courage
By thinking of her equal love.

PURURAVAS

I do;
And yet the pain within my heart is great.
For as a mighty river whose vast speed
Stumbles within a narrow pass of huge
And rugged boulders, chides his uncouth bed,
Increasing at each check, even so does love,
His joy of union stinted or deferred,
Rebel and wax a hundredfold in fire.

MANAVAKA

So your love-wasted limbs increase their beauty,
They are a sign you soon will clasp your love.

PURURAVAS

O friend, as you my longing heaviness
Comfort with hopeful words, my arm too speaks
In quick auspicious throbs.

He looks with hope up to the sky.

MANAVAKA

A Brahmin's word!

*There enter in the air Chitralkha
with Urvashie in trysting-dress.*

URVASIE (*looking at herself*)

Sister, do you not think my trysting-dress,
The dark-blue silk and the few ornaments,
Becomes me vastly? Do you not approve it?

CHITRALEKHA

O inexpressibly! I have no words
To praise it. This I'll say; it makes me wish
I were Pururavas.

URVASIE

Since Love himself

Inspires you, bring me quickly to the dwelling
Of that high beautiful face.

CHITRALEKHA

Look, we draw near.
Your lover's house lifts in stupendous mass,
As it were mountain Coilas, to the clouds.

URVASIE

Look, sister, with the eye of Gods and know
Where is that robber of my heart and what
His occupation?

CHITRALEKHA (*aside, with a smile*)

I will jest with her.

(*aloud*)

I see him. He, in a sweet region made
For love and joy, possesses with desire
The body and the bosom of his love.

URVASIE (*despairingly*)

Happy that woman, whosoe'er she be!

CHITRALEKHA

Why, sweet faint-hearted fool, in whom but thee
Should his thoughts joy?

URVASIE (*with a sigh of relief*)

Alas, my heart perverse
Will doubt.

CHITRALEKHA

Here on the terraced House of Gems
The King is with his friend sole-sitting. Then,
We may approach.

They descend.

PURURAVAS

O friend, the widening night
And pangs of love keep pace in their increase.

URVASIE

Sister, my heart is torn with apprehension
Of what his words might mean. Let us, ourselves
Invisible, hear their unfettered converse.
My fears might then have rest.

CHITRALEKHA

Good.

MANAVAKA

Take the moonbeams
Whose pregnant nectar comforts burning limbs.

PURURAVAS

But my affliction's not remediable
With such faint medicines. Neither smoothest flowers,
Moonlight nor sandal visiting every limb,
Nor necklaces of cool delightful pearl,
Only Heaven's nymph can perfectly expel
With bliss, or else —

URVASIE (*clutching at her bosom with her hand*)

O me! who else? who else?

PURURAVAS

Speech secret full of her unedged pangs.

URVASIE

Heart that left me to flutter in his hands,
Now art thou for that rashness recompensed!

MANAVAKA

Yes, I too when I cannot get sweet venison

And hunger for it, often beguile my belly
With celebrating all its savoury joys.

PURURAVAS

Your belly-loves, good friend, are always with you
And ready to your gulp.

MANAVAKA

You too shall soon
Possess your love.

PURURAVAS

My friend, I have strange feeling.

CHITRALEKHA

Hearken, insatiable, exacting, hearken,
And be convinced!

MANAVAKA

What feeling?

PURURAVAS

This I feel,
As if this shoulder by her shoulder pressed
In the car's shock bore all my sum of being,
And all this frame besides were only weight
Cumbering the impatient earth.

CHITRALEKHA

Yet you delay!

URVASIE (*suddenly approaching Pururavas*)

O me! sister!

CHITRALEKHA

What is it now?

URVASIE

I am
Before him, and he does not care!

CHITRALEKHA (*smiling*)

O thou
All passionate unreasoning haste! Thou hast not
Put off as yet invisibility.

VOICE (*within*)

This way, my lady.

All listen, Urvasie and Chित्रalekha are despondent.

MANAVAKA (*in dismay*)

Hey? The Queen is here?
Keep watch upon your tongue.

PURURAVAS

You first discharge
Your face of conscious guilt.

URVASIE

Sister, what now?

CHITRALEKHA

Be calm. We are unseen. This princess looks
As for a vow arrayed, nor long, if so,
Will tarry.

*As she speaks, the Queen and Nipunika enter
with attendants carrying offerings.*

AUSHINARIE

How does yonder spotted moon
Flush with new beauty, O Nipunika,
At Rohinie's embracings.

NIPUNIKA

So too with you,

Lady, my lord looks fairer than himself.

MANAVAKA

The Queen, my lord, looks very sweet and gracious,
Either because I know she'll give me sweetmeats
Or 'tis a sign of anger quite renounced,
And from your memory to exile her harshness
She makes her vow an instrument.

PURURAVAS

Good reasons both;

(*smiling*)

Yet to my humble judgment the poor second
Has likelier hue. For she in gracious white
Is clad and sylvanly adorned with flowers,
Her raven tresses spangled with young green
Of sacred grass. All her fair body looks
Gentle and kind, its pomp and pride renounced
For lovely meekness to her lord.

AUSHINARIE (*approaching*)

My husband!

ATTENDANT

Hail to our master!

MANAVAKA

Peace attend my lady.

PURURAVAS

Welcome.

He takes her hand and draws her down on a seat.

URVASIE

By right this lady bears the style
Of Goddess and of Empress, since no whit
Her noble majesty of fairness yields

To Heaven's Queen.

CHITRALEKHA

O bravely said, my sister!
'Twas worthy of a soul where jealous baseness
Ought never harbour.

AUSHINARIE

I have a vow, my lord,
Which at my husband's feet must be absolved.
Bear with me that I trouble you one moment.

PURURAVAS

No, no, it is not trouble, but a kindness.

MANAVAKA

The good trouble that brings me sweetmeats! often,
O often may such trouble vex my belly.

PURURAVAS

What vow is this you would absolve, my own?

Aushinarie looks at Nipunika.

NIPUNIKA

'Tis that women perform to win back kindness
In eyes of one held dear.

PURURAVAS

If this be so,
Vainly hast thou these tender flower-soft limbs
Afflicted with a vow's austerities,
Beloved. Thou suest for favour to thy servant,
Propitiatest who for thy propitiated
All-loving glance is hungry.

URVASIE

Greatly he loves her!

CHITRALEKHA

Why, silly one, whose heart is gone astraying,
Redoubles words of kindness to his wife.
Do you not know so much?

AUSHINARIE (*smiling*)

Not vain my vow,
That to such words of love has moved already
My husband.

MANAVAKA

Stop, my lord, a word well spoken
Is spoilt by any answer.

AUSHINARIE

Girls, the offering
With which I must adore this gentle moonlight
That dreams upon our terrace!

NIPUNIKA

Here, my lady,
Are flowers, here costly scents, all needed things.

AUSHINARIE

Give them to me.

*She worships the moonbeams with
flowers and perfumes.*

Nipunika, present
The sweetmeats of the offering to the Brahmin.

NIPUNIKA

I will, my lady. Noble Manavaka,
Here is for you.

MANAVAKA

Blessings attend thee. May
Thy vow bear fruit nor end.

AUSHINARIE

Now, dear my lord,
Pray you, draw nearer to me.

PURURAVAS

Behold me, love!
What must I do?

*Aushinarie worships the King, then bowing
down with folded hands.*

AUSHINARIE

I, Aushinarie, call
The divine wife and husband, Rohinie
And Mrigalanchhan named the spotted moon,
To witness here my vowed obedient love
To my dear lord. Henceforth whatever woman
My lord shall love and she desire him too,
I will embrace her and as a sister love,
Nor think of jealousy.

URVASIE

I know not wholly
Her drift, and yet her words have made me feel
All pure and full of noble trust.

CHITRALEKHA

Be confident,
Your love will prove all bliss; surely it must
When blessed and sanctioned by this pure, devoted
And noble nature.

MANAVAKA (*aside*)

When from 'twixt his hands
Fish leaps, cries me the disappointed fisher,
"Go, trout, I spare you. This will be put down
To my account in Heaven."

(*aloud*)

No more but this
You love my friend, your husband, lady?

AUSHINARIE

Dull fool!

I with the death of my own happiness
Would give my husband ease. From this consider
How dearly I love him.

PURURAVAS

Since thou hast power on me
To give me to another or to keep
Thy slave, I have no right to plead. And yet
I am not as thou thinkest me, all lost,
O thou too jealous, to thy love.

AUSHINARIE

My lord,

We will not talk of that. I have fulfilled
My rite, and with observance earned your kindness.
Girls, let us go.

PURURAVAS

Is thus my kindness earned?
I am not kind, not pleased, if now, beloved,
Thou shun and leave me.

AUSHINARIE

Pardon, my lord. I never
Have yet transgressed the rigour of a vow.

Exeunt Queen, Nipunika and attendants.

URVASIE

Wife-lover, uxorious is this King, and yet
I cannot lure my heart away from him.

CHITRALEKHA

Why, what new trick of wilful passion's this?

PURURAVAS (*sitting down*)

The Queen is not far off.

MANAVAKA

Never heed that,
Speak boldly. She has given you up as hopeless.
So doctors leave a patient, when disease
Defies all remedy, to his own sweet guidance.

PURURAVAS

O that my Urvasie —

URVASIE

Today might win
Her one dear wish.

PURURAVAS

From her invisible feet
The lovely sound of anklets on my ear
Would tinkle, or coming stealing from behind
Blind both my eyes with her soft little hands
Like two cool lotuses upon them fallen:
Or, Oh, most sweet! descending on this roof
Shaken with dear delicious terrors, lingering
And hanging back, be by her sister drawn
With tender violence, faltering step by step,
Till she lay panting on my knees.

CHITRALEKHA

Go, sister,
And satisfy his wish.

URVASIE

Must I? well then,
I'll pluck up heart and play with him a little.

She becomes visible, steals behind the King and covers his eyes with her hands. Chitralekha puts off her veil of

invisibility and makes a sign to Manavaka.

MANAVAKA

Now say, friend, who is this?

PURURAVAS

The hands of beauty.

'Tis that Narayan-born whose limbs are sweetness.

MANAVAKA

How can you guess?

PURURAVAS

What is there here to guess?

My heart tells me. The lily of the night

Needs not to guess it is the moon's cool touch.

She starts not to the sunbeam. 'Tis so with me.

No other woman could but she alone

Heal with her little hands all my sick pining.

*Urvasie removes her hands and rises to her feet;
then moves a step or two away.*

URVASIE

Conquest attend my lord!

PURURAVAS

Welcome, O beauty.

He draws her down beside him.

CHITRALEKHA

Happiness to my brother!

PURURAVAS

Here it sits

Beside me.

URVASIE

Because the Queen has given you to me,

Therefore I dare to take into my arms
Your body like a lover. You shall not think me
Forward.

MANAVAKA

What, set the sun to you on this terrace?

PURURAVAS

O love, if thou my body dost embrace
As seizable, a largess — from my Queen,
But whose permission didst thou ask, when thou
Stolest my heart away?

CHITRALEKHA

Brother, she is
Abashed and has no answer. Therefore a moment
Turn to me, grant me one entreaty.

PURURAVAS

Speak.

CHITRALEKHA

When spring is vanished and the torrid heat
Thickens, I must attend the glorious Sun.
Do thou so act that this my Urvasie
Left lonely with thee, shall not miss her Heaven!

MANAVAKA

Why, what is there in Heaven to pine for? There
You do not eat, you do not drink, only
Stare like so many fishes in a row
With wide unblinking eyes.

PURURAVAS

The joys of Heaven
No thought can even outline. Who then shall make
The soul forget which thence has fallen? Of this

Be sure, fair girl, Pururavas is only
Thy sister's slave: no other woman shares
That rule nor can share.

CHITRALEKHA

Brother, this is kind.
Be brave, my Urvasie, and let me go.

URVASIE (*embracing Chitralkha, pathetically*)
Chitralkha, my sister, do not forget me!

CHITRALEKHA (*with a smile*)
Of thee I should entreat that mercy, who
Hast got thy love's embrace.
She bows down to the King and goes.

MANAVAKA

Now nobly, sir,
Are you increased with bliss and your desire's
Accrual.

PURURAVAS

You say well. This is my increase;
Who felt not half so blest when I acquired
The universal sceptre of the world
And sovran footstool touched by jewelled heads
Of tributary monarchs, as today
I feel most happy who have won the right
To touch two little feet and am allowed
To be thy slave and do thy lovely bidding.

URVASIE

I have not words to make a sweeter answer.

PURURAVAS

How does the winning of one loved augment

Sweet contradictions! These are the very rays
Of moonlight burned me late, and now they soothe;
Love's wounding shafts caress the heart like flowers,
Thou being with me; all natural sights and sounds
Once rude and hurtful, now caressing come
Softly, because of thee in my embrace.

URVASIE

I am to blame that I deprived my lord
So long.

PURURAVAS

Beloved and beautiful, not so!
For happiness arising after pain
Tastes therefore sweeter, as the shady tree
To one perplexed with heat and dust affords
A keener taste of Paradise.

MANAVAKA

We have courted
For a long hour the whole delightfulness
Of moonlight in the evening. It is time
To seek repose.

PURURAVAS

Guide therefore this fair friend
The way her feet must henceforth tread.

MANAVAKA

This way.

PURURAVAS

O love, I have but one wish left.

URVASIE

What wish, my lord?

PURURAVAS

When I had not embraced thee, my desire,
One night in passing seemed a hundred nights;
O now if darkness would extend my joys
To equal length of real hours with this
Sweet face upon my bosom, I were blest.

They go.

Curtain

Act Four

SCENE I

*The sky near the doors of the sunrise; clouds everywhere.
Chitrlekha and Sahajanya.*

SAHAJANYA

Dear Chitrlekha, like a fading flower
The beauty of thy face all marred reveals
Sorrow of heart. Tell me thy melancholy;
I would be sad with thee.

CHITRALEKHA (*sorrowfully*)

O Sahajanya!

Sister, by rule of our vicissitude,
I serving at the feet of the great Sun
Was troubled at heart for want of Urvasie.

SAHAJANYA

I know your mutual passion of sisterliness.
What after?

CHITRALEKHA

I had heard no news of her
So many days. Then I collected vision
Divine into myself to know of her.
O miserable knowledge!

SAHAJANYA

Sister, sister!

CHITRALEKHA (*still sorrowfully*)

I saw that Urvasie

Taking with her Pururavas and love—
For he had on his ministers imposed

His heavy yoke of kingship — went to sport
Amorously in Gandhamadan green.

SAHAJANYA (*proudly*)

O love is joy indeed, when in such spots
Tasted. And there?

CHITRALEKHA

And there upon the strands
Of heavenly Ganges, one, a lovely child
Of spirits musical, Udayavatie,
Was playing, making little forts of sand;
On her with all his soul the monarch gazed.
This angered Urvasie.

SAHAJANYA

O natural!
Deep passion always is intolerant.
Afterwards?

CHITRALEKHA

She pushed aside her pleading husband,
Perplexed by the Preceptor's curse forgot
The War-God's vow and entered in that grove
Avoidable of women; but no sooner
Had trod its green, most suddenly she was
A creeper rooted to that fatal verge.

SAHAJANYA (*in a voice of grief*)

Now do I know that Fate's indeed a thing
Inexorable, spares no one, when such love
Has such an ending; O all too suddenly!
How must it be then with Pururavas?

CHITRALEKHA

All day and night he passions in that grove
Seeking her. And this cool advent of cloud

That turns even happy hearts to yearning pain
Will surely kill him.

SAHAJANYA

Sister, not long can grief
Have privilege over such beautiful beings.
Some God will surely pity them, some cause
Unite once more.

(looking towards the east)

Come, sister. Our lord the Sun
Is rising in the east. Quick, to our service.

They go.

SCENE II

Pururavas enters disordered, his eyes fixed on the sky.

PURURAVAS (*angrily*)

Halt, ruffian, halt! Thou in thy giant arms
Bearest away my Urvasie! He has
Soared up from a great crag into the sky
And wars me, hurling downward bitter rain
Of arrows. With this thunderbolt I smite thee.

*He lifts up a clod and runs as to hurl it;
then pauses and looks upwards.*

(*pathetically*)

Oh me, I am deceived! This was a cloud
Equipped for rain, no proud and lustful fiend,
The rainbow, not a weapon drawn to kill,
Quick-driving showers are these, not sleety rain
Of arrows; and that brilliant line like streak
Of gold upon a touchstone, cloud-inarmed,
I saw, was lightning, not my Urvasie.

(*sorrowfully*)

Where shall I find her now? Where clasp those thighs
Swelling and smooth and white? Perhaps she stands
Invisible to me by heavenly power,
All sullen? But her anger was ever swift
And ended soon. Perhaps into her Heavens
She has soared? O no! her heart was soft with love,
And love of me. Nor any fiend adverse
To Heaven had so much strength as to hale her hence
While I looked on. Yet is she gone from me
Invisible, swiftly invisible —
Whither? O bitter miracle! and yet —

He scans each horizon, then pauses and sighs.

Alas! when fortune turns against a man,
Then sorrow treads on sorrow. There was already
This separation from my love, and hard
Enough to bear; and now the pleasant days,

Guiltless of heat, with advent cool of rain
Must help to slay me.

(laughing)

Why do I so tamely
Accept addition to my pangs? For even
The saints confess "The king controls the seasons";
If it be so, I will command the thunder
Back to his stable.

(pausing to think)

No, I must permit
The season unabridged of pomp; the sighs
Of storm are now my only majesty;
This sky with lightning gilt and laced becomes
My canopy of splendour, and the trees
Of rain-time waving wide their lavish bloom
Fan me; the sapphire-throated peacocks, voiced
Sweeter for that divorce from heat, are grown
My poets; the mountains are my citizens,
They pour out all their streams to swell my greatness.
But I waste time in idly boasting vain
Glories and lose my love. To my task, to my task!
This grove, this grove should find her.

He moves onward.

And here, O here

Is something to enrage my resolution.
Red-tinged, expanding, wet and full of rain,
These blossom-cups recall to me her eyes
Brimming with angry tears. How shall I trace her,
Or what thing tell me "Here and here she wandered?"
If she had touched with her beloved feet
The rain-drenched forest-sands, there were a line
Of little gracious footprints seen, with lac
Envermeilled, sinking deeper towards the heel
Because o'erburdened by her hips' large glories.

He moves onward.

(exultantly)

Oh joy! I see a hint of her. This way

Then went her angry beauty! Lo, her bodice
Bright green as is a parrot's belly, smitten
With crimson drops. It once veiled in her bosom
And paused to show her navel deep as love.
These are her tears that from those angry eyes
Went trickling, stealing scarlet from her lips
To spangle all this green. Doubtless her heaving
Tumult of breasts broke its dear hold and, she
Stumbling in anger, from my Heaven it drifted.
I'll gather it to my kisses.

(He stoops to it, then sorrowfully)

O my heart!

Only green grass with dragon-wings enamelled!
From whom shall I in all the desolate forest
Have tidings of her, or what creature help me?
Lo, in yon waste of crags the peacock! he
Upon a cool moist rock that breathes of rain
Exults, aspires, his gorgeous mass of plumes
Seized, blown and scattered by the roaring gusts.
Pregnant of shrillness is his outstretched throat,
His look is with the clouds. Him I will question:
Have the bright corners of thine eyes beheld,
O sapphire-throated bird, her, my delight,
My wife, my passion, my sweet grief? Yielding
No answer, he begins his gorgeous dance.
Why should he be so glad of my heart's woe?
I know thee, peacock. Since my cruel loss
Thy plumes that stream in splendour on the wind,
Have not one rival left. For when her heavy
Dark wave of tresses over all the bed
In softness wide magnificently collapsed
On her smooth shoulders massing purple glory
And bright with flowers, she passioning in my arms,
Who then was ravished with thy brilliant plumes,
Vain bird? I question thee not, heartless thing,
That joyest in others' pain.

(turning away)

Lo, where, new-fired
With sweet bird-passion by the season cool,
A cuckoo on the plum-tree sits. This race
Is wisest of the families of birds
And learned in love. I'll greet him like himself.
O cuckoo, thou art called the bird of love,
His sweet ambassador, O cuckoo. Thou
Criest and thy delightful voice within
The hearts of lovers like an arrow comes,
Seeks out the anger there and softly kills.
Me also, cuckoo, to my darling bring
Or her to me. What saidst thou? "How could she
Desert thee loving?" Cuckoo, I will tell thee.
Yes, she was angry. Yet I know I never
Gave her least cause. But, cuckoo, dost thou know not
That women love to feel their sovereignty
Over their lovers, nor transgression need
To be angry? How! Dost thou break off, O bird,
Our converse thus abruptly and turn away
To thine own tasks? Alas, 'twas wisely said
That men bear easily the bitter griefs
Which others feel. For all my misery
This bird, my orison disregarding, turns
To attack the plum-tree's ripening fruit as one
Drunken with love his darling's mouth. And yet
I cannot be angry with him. Has he not
The voice of Urvashie? Abide, O bird,
In bliss, though I unhappy hence depart.

He walks on, then stops short and listens.

O Heaven? what do I hear? the anklets' cry
That tell the musical footing of my love?
To right of this long grove 'twas heard. Oh, I
Will run to her.

(hurrying forward)

Me miserable! This was
No anklets' cry embraceable with hands,
But moan of swans who seeing the grey wet sky

Grow passionate for Himaloy's distant tarns.
Well, be it so. But ere in far desire
They leap up from this pool, I well might learn
Tidings from them of Urvasie.

(approaching)

Listen,

O king of all white fowl that waters breed.
Afterwards to Himaloy wing thy way,
But now thy lotus fibres in thy beak
Gathered by thee for provender resign;
Ere long thou shalt resume them. Me, ah, first
From anguish rescue, O majestic swan,
With tidings of my sweet; always high souls
Prefer another's good to selfish aims.
Thou lookest upward to the Heavens and sayest,
"I was absorbed with thoughts of Himaloy;
Her have I not observed." O swan, thou liest,
For if she never trod upon thy lake's
Embankment, nor thou sawest her arched brows,
How couldst thou copy then so perfectly
Her footing full of amorous delight,
Or whence didst steal it? Give me back my love,
Thou robber! Thou hast got her gait and this
Is law that he with whom a part is found
Must to the claimant realise the whole.

(laughing)

O yes, thou flyest up, clanging alarm,
"This is the king whose duty is to punish
All thieves like me!" Go then, but I will plunge
Into new hopeful places, seeking love.
Lo, wild-drake with his mate, famed chocrobacque,
Him let me question. O thou wondrous creature,
All saffron and vermilion! Wilt thou then
Not tell me of my love? Oh, sawest thou not
My Goddess laughing like a lovely child
In the bright house of spring? For, wild-drake, thou
Who gettest from the chariot's orb thy name,

I who deprived am of her orb'd hips,
The chariot-warrior great Pururavas,
Encompassed with a thousand armed desires,
Question thee. How! "Who? Who?" thou sayest to me!
This is too much. It is not possible
He should not know me! Bird, I am a king
Of kings, and grandson to the Sun and Moon,
And earth has chosen me for her master. This
Were little. I am the loved of Urvashi!
Still art thou silent? I will taunt him, then
Perhaps he'll speak. Thou, wild-drake, when thy love,
Her body hidden by a lotus-leaf,
Lurks near thee in the pool, deemest her far
And wailest musically to the flowers
A wild deep dirge. Such is thy conjugal
Yearning, thy terror such of even a little
Division from her nearness. Me afflicted,
Me so forlorn thou art averse to bless
With just a little tidings of my love!
Alas, my miserable lot has made
All creatures adverse to me. Let me plunge
Into the deeper wood. Oh no, not yet!
This lotus with the honey-bees inside
Making melodious murmur, keeps me. I
Remember her soft mouth when I have kissed it
Too cruelly, sobbing exquisite complaint.
These too I will implore. Alas, what use?
They will despise me like the others. Yet,
Lest I repent hereafter of my silence,
I'll speak to him. O lotus-wooing bee,
Tell me some rumour of those eyes like wine,
But no, thou hast not seen that wonder. Else
Wouldst thou, O bee, affect the lotus' bloom,
If thou hadst caught the sweetness from her lips
Breathing, whose scent intoxicates the breeze?
I'll leave him. Lo! with his mate an elephant.
His trunk surrounds a nym-tree to uproot.

To him will I, he may some rumour have
Or whisper of my love. But softly! Haste
Will ruin me. Oh, this is not the time!
Now his beloved mate has in her trunk
Just found him broken branches odorous
And sweet as wine with the fresh leaves not long
In bud, new-honied. These let him enjoy.
His meal is over now. I may approach
And ask him. O rut-dripping elephant,
Sole monarch of the herd, has not that moon
With jasmynes all a glory in her hair
And limbs of fadeless beauty, carrying
Youth like a banner, whom to see is bliss,
Is madness, fallen in thy far ken, O king?
O joy! he trumpets loud and soft as who
Would tell me he has seen indeed my love.
Oh, I am gladdened! More to thee I stand
Attracted, elephant, as like with like.
Sovereign of sovereigns is my title, thou
Art monarch of the kingly elephants,
And this wide freedom of thy fragrant rut
Interminable imitates my own
Vast liberality to suppliant men,
Regally; thou hast in all the herd this mate,
I among loveliest women Urvasie.
In all things art thou like me; only I pray,
O friend, that thou mayst never know the pang,
The loss. Be fortunate, king, farewell! Oh, see,
The mountain of the Fragrant Glens appears,
Fair as a dream, with his great plateaus trod
By heavenly feet of women. May it not be,
To this wide vale she too has with her sisters
Brought here her beautiful body full of spring?
Darkness! I cannot see her. Yet by these gleams
Of lightning I may study, I may find.
Ah God! the fruit of guilt is bounded not
With the doer's anguish; this stupendous cloud

Is widowed of the lightning through my sin.
 Yet I will leave thee not, O thou huge pile
 Of scaling crags, unquestioned. Hear me, answer me!
 O mountain, has she entered then the woods,
 Love's green estate — ah, she too utter love!
 Her breasts were large like thine, with small sweet space
 Between them, and like thine her glorious hips
 And smooth fair joints a rapture.

Dumb? No answer?

I am too far away, he has not heard me.
 Let me draw nearer. Mountain, seen was she,
 A woman all bereaved, her every limb
 A loveliness, in these delightful woods?

ECHO

Nearer, O nearer! Mountain-seen was she,
 A woman all bereaved, her every limb
 A loveliness, in these delightful woods.

PURURAVAS

He has answered, answered! O my heart, I draw
 Nearer to her! In my own words the hill
 Answers thee, O my heart. As joyous tidings
 Mayst thou too hear, mountain. She then was seen,
 My Urvasie in thy delightful woods?

ECHO

Mountain! mountain! mountain! She then was seen,
 My Urvasie in thy delightful woods,
 In thy delightful woods, delightful woods.

PURURAVAS

Alas! 'tis Echo mocks me with my voice
 Rolling amid the crags and mountain glens.
 Out on thee, Echo! Thou hast killed my heart.
 O Urvasie! Urvasie! Urvasie!

He falls down and swoons.

(recovering)

I am all weary and sad. Oh, let me rest
Beside this mountain river for a moment
And woo the breeze that dances on the waves.
All turbid is this stream with violent rain,
And yet I thrill to see it. For, O, it seems
Just like my angry darling when she went
Frowning — as this does with its little waves, —
A wrathful music in her girdle — and see!
This string of birds with frightened clangour rise;
She trailed her raiment as the river its foam,
For it loosened with her passion as she moved
With devious feet, all angry, blind with tears,
And often stopped to brood upon her wrongs:
But soon indignantly her stormy speed
Resumed, so tripping, winding goes the stream,
As she did. O most certainly 'tis she.
My sweet quick-tempered darling, suddenly changed
Into a river's form. I will beseech her
And soothe her wounded spirit. Urvasie?
Did I not love thee perfectly? Did not
My speech grow sweetness when I spoke to thee?
And when did my heart anything but hate
To false our love? O what was the slight fault
Thou foundest in thy servant that thou couldst
Desert him, Urvasie, O Urvasie!
She answers not! It is not she, merely
A river. Urvasie would not have left
Pururavas to tryst with Ocean. And now
Since only by refusal to despair
Can bliss at last be won, I will return
Where first she fled from my pursuing eyes.
This couching stag shall give me tidings of her,
Who looks as if he were a splendid glance
Some dark-eyed Dryad had let fall to admire
This budding foliage and this young green beauty
Of grass. But why averts he then his head

As though in loathing? I perceive his reason.
Lo, his fair hind is hasting towards him, stayed
By their young dearling plucking at her teats.
With her his eyes are solely, her with bent
Lithe neck he watches. Ho, thou lord of hind!
Sawst thou not her I love? O stag, I'll tell thee
How thou shouldst know her. Like thine own dear hind
She had large eyes and loving, and like hers
That gaze was beauty. Why does he neglect
My words and only gaze towards his love?
All prosperous creatures slight the unfortunate!
'Tis natural. Then elsewhere let me seek.
I have found her, I have found her! O a hint
And token of her way! This one red drop
Of summer's blood the very codome was,
Though rough with faulty stamens, yet thought worthy
To crown her hair. And thou, asoka red,
Didst watch my slender-waisted when she gave
So cruelly a loving heart to pain.
Why dost thou lie and shake thy windy head?
How couldst thou by her soft foot being untouched
Break out into such bloom of petals stung
And torn by jostling crowds of bees, who swarm
All wild to have thy honey? Ever be blest,
Thou noble trunk. What should this be, bright red,
That blazes in a crevice of the rocks?
For if it were a piece of antelope's flesh
Torn by a lion, 'twould not have this blaze,
This lustre haloing it; nor can it be
A spark pregnant of fire; for all the wood
Is drowned in rain. No, 'tis a gem, a miracle
Of crimson, like the red felicitous flower,
And with one radiant finger of the sun
Laid on it like a claim. Yet I will take it,
For it compels my soul with scarlet longing.
Wherefore? She on whose head it should have burned,
Whose hair all fragrant with the coral-bloom

I loved like Heaven, is lost to me, beyond
Recovery lost to me. Why should I take it
To mar it with my tears?

A VOICE

Reject it not, ·
My son; this is the jewel Union born
From the red lac that on the marvellous feet
Was brilliant of Himaloy's child, and, soon,
Who bears it, is united with his love.

PURURAVAS

Who speaks to me? It is a saint who dwells
In forest like the deer. He first of creatures
Has pitied me. O my lord anchoret,
I thank thee. Thou, O Union, if thou end
My separation, if with that small-waisted
Thou shouldst indeed be proved my Union,
Jewel, I'll use thee for my crown, as Shiva
Upon his forehead wears the crescent moon.
This flowerless creeper! Wherefore do mine eyes
Dwell with its barren grace and my heart yearn
Towards it? And yet, O, not without a cause
Has she enchanted me. There standst thou, creeper,
All slender, thy poor sad leaves are moist with rain,
Thou silent, with no voice of honey-bees
Upon thy drooping boughs; as from thy lord
The season separated, leaving off
Thy habit of bloom. Why, I might think I saw
My passionate darling sitting penitent
With tear-stained face and body unadorned,
Thinking in silence how she spurned my love.
I will embrace thee, creeper, for thou art
Too like my love. Urvasie! all my body
Is thrilled and satisfied of Urvasie!
I feel, I feel her living limbs.

(despairingly)

But how
Should I believe it? Everything I deem
A somewhat of my love, next moment turns
To other. Therefore since by touch at least
I find my dear one, I will not separate
Too suddenly mine eyes from sleep.

(opening his eyes slowly)

O love,

'Tis thou!

He swoons.

URVASIE

Upraise thy heart, my King, my liege!

PURURAVAS

Dearest, at last I live! O thou hadst plunged me
Into a dark abyss of separation,
And fortunately art thou returned to me,
Like consciousness given back to one long dead.

URVASIE

With inward senses I have watched and felt
Thy whole long agony.

PURURAVAS

With inward senses?

I understand thee not.

URVASIE

I will tell all.

But let my lord excuse my grievous fault,
Who, wretch enslaved by anger, brought to this
My sovereign! Smile on me and pardon me!

PURURAVAS

Never speak of it. Thy clasp is thy forgiveness.
For all my outward senses and my soul

Leap laughing towards thy bosom. Only convince me
How thou couldst live without me such an age.

URVASIE

Hearken. The War-God Skanda, from of old
Virginity eternal vowing, came
To Gandhamadan's bank men call the pure,
And made a law.

PURURAVAS

What law, beloved ?

URVASIE

This

That any woman entering these precincts
Becomes at once a creeper. And for limit
Of the great curse, "Without the jewel born
From crimson of my mother's feet can she
Never be woman more." Now I, my lord,
My heart perplexed by the Preceptor's curse,
Forgot the War-God's oath and entered here,
Rejecting thy entreaties, to the wood
Avoidable of women: at the first step,
All suddenly my form was changed. I was
A creeper growing at the wood's wild end.

PURURAVAS

Oh now intelligible! When from thy breasts
Loosening the whole embrace, the long delight,
I sank back languid, thou wouldst moan for me
Like one divided far. How is it then
Possible that thou shouldst bear patiently
Real distance between us? Lo, this jewel,
As in thy story, gave thee to my arms.
Admonished by a hermit sage I kept it.

URVASIE

The jewel Union! Therefore at thy embrace

I was restored.

She places the jewel gratefully upon her head.

PURURAVAS

Thus stand a while. O fairest,
Thy face, suffused with crimson from this gem
Above thee pouring wide its fire and splendour,
Has all the beauty of a lotus reddening
In early sunlight.

URVASIE

O sweet of speech! remember
That thy high capital awaits thee long.
It may be that the people blame me. Let us,
My own dear lord, return.

PURURAVAS

Let us return.

URVASIE

What wafture will my sovereign choose?

PURURAVAS

O waft me
Nearer the sun and make a cloud our chariot,
While lightning like a streaming banner floats
Now seen, now lost to vision, and the rainbow
With freshness of its glory iridescent
Edges us. In thine arms uplift and waft me,
Beloved, through the wide and liquid air.

They go.

Curtain

Act Five

SCENE I

Outside the King's tents near Pratisthana. In the background the confluence of the river Ganges and Yamuna.

Manavaka alone.

MANAVAKA

After long pleasuring with Urvasie
In Nandan and all woodlands of the Gods,
Our King's at last returned, and he has entered
His city, by the jubilant people met
With splendid greetings, and resumed his toils.
Ah, were he but a father, nothing now
Were wanting to his fullness. This high day
At confluence of great Ganges with the stream
Dark Yamuna, he and his Queen have bathed.
Just now he passed into his tent, and surely
His girls adorn him. I will go exact
My first share of the ointments and the flowers.

MAIDS (*within lamenting*)

O me unfortunate! the jewel is lost
Accustomed to the noble head of her
Most intimate with the bosom of the King,
His loveliest playmate. I was carrying it
In palm-leaf basket on white cloth of silk;
A vulture doubting this some piece of flesh
Swoops down and soars away with it.

MANAVAKA

Unfortunate!

This was the Union, the crest-jewel, dear
O'er all things to the King. Look where he comes,
His dress half-worn just as he started up

On hearing of his loss, I'll go to him.

He goes.

Then Pururavas enters with his Amazons of the Bactrian Guard and other attendants in great excitement.

PURURAVAS

Huntress! huntress! Where is that robber bird
That snatches his own death? He practises
His first bold pillage in the watchman's house.

HUNTRESS

Yonder, the golden thread within his beak!
Trailing the jewel how he wheels in air
Describing scarlet lines upon the sky!

PURURAVAS

I see him, dangling down the thread of gold
He wheels and dips in rapid circles vast.
The jewel like a whirling firebrand red
Goes round and round and with vermilion rings
Incarnadines the air. What shall we do
To rescue it?

MANAVAKA (*coming up*)

Why do you hesitate to slay him?
He is marked out for death, a criminal.

PURURAVAS

My bow! my bow!

AN AMAZON

I run to bring it!

She goes out.

PURURAVAS

Friend,

I cannot see the bird. Where has it fled?

MANAVAKA

Look! to the southern far horizon wings
The carrion-eating robber.

PURURAVAS (*turns and looks*)

Yes, I see him.

He speeds with the red jewel every way
Branching and shooting light, as 'twere a cluster
Of crimson roses in the southern sky
Or ruby pendant from the lobe of Heaven.

Enter Amazon with the bow.

AMAZON

Sire, I have brought the bow and leathern guard.

PURURAVAS

Too late you bring it. Yon eater of raw flesh
Goes winging far beyond an arrow's range,
And the bright jewel with the distant bird
Blazes like Mars the planet glaring red
Against a wild torn piece of cloud. Who's there?
Noble Latavya?

LATAVYA

Your Highness?

PURURAVAS

From me command

The chief of the police, at evening, when
Yon winged outlaw seeks his homing tree,
That he be hunted out.

LATAVYA

It shall be done.

He goes out.

MANAVAKA

Sit down and rest. What place in all broad-earth

This jewel-thief can hide in, shall elude
Your world-wide jurisdiction?

PURURAVAS (*sitting down with Manavaka*)

It was not as a gem
Of lustre that I treasured yonder stone,
Now lost in the bird's beak, but 'twas my Union
And it united me with my dear love.

MANAVAKA

I know it, from your own lips heard the tale.

Chamberlain enters with the jewel and an arrow.

LATAVYA

Behold shot through that robber! Though he fled,
Thy anger darting in pursuit has slain him.
Plumb down he fell with fluttering wings from Heaven
And dropped the jewel bright.

All look at it in surprise.

Ill fate o'ertaking
Much worse offence! My lord, shall not this gem
Be washed in water pure and given — to whom!

PURURAVAS

Huntress, go, see it purified in fire,
Then to its case restore it.

HUNTRESS

As the King wills.

She goes out with the jewel.

PURURAVAS

Noble Latavya, came you not to know
The owner of this arrow?

LATAVYA

Letters there are

Carved on the steel; my eyes grow old and feeble,
I could not read them.

PURURAVAS

Therefore give me the arrow.
I will spell out the writing.

The Chamberlain gives him the arrow and he reads.

LATAVYA

And I will fill my office.

He goes out.

MANAVAKA (*seeing the King lost in thought*)

What do you read there, sir?

PURURAVAS

Hear, Manavaka, hear
The letters of this bowman's name.

MANAVAKA

I'm all

Attention; read.

PURURAVAS

O hearken then and wonder.

(*reading*)

"Ayus, the smiter of his foeman's lives,
The warrior Ilian's son by Urvasie,
This arrow loosed."

MANAVAKA (*with satisfaction*)

Hail, King! now dost thou prosper,
Who hast a son.

PURURAVAS

How should this be? Except
By the great ritual once, never was I

Parted from that beloved; nor have I witnessed
One sign of pregnancy. How could my Goddess
Have borne a son? True, I remember once
For certain days her paps were dark and stained,
And all her fair complexion to the hue
Of that wan creeper paled, and languid-large
Her eyes were. Nothing more.

MANAVAKA

Do not affect
With mortal attributes the living Gods.
For holiness is as a veil to them
Concealing their affections.

PURURAVAS

This is true.
But why should she conceal her motherhood?

MANAVAKA

Plainly, she thought, "If the King sees me old
And matron, he'll be off with some young hussy."

PURURAVAS

No mockery, think it over.

MANAVAKA

Who shall guess
The riddles of the Gods?
(*enter Latavya*)

LATAVYA

Hail to the King!
A holy dame from Chyavan's hermitage
Leading a boy would see my lord.

PURURAVAS

Latavya,

Admit them instantly.

LATAVYA

As the King wills.

*He goes out, then re-enters with Ayus
bow in hand and a hermitess.*

Come, holy lady, to the King.

They approach the King.

MANAVAKA

How say you,

Should not this noble boy be very he,
The young and high-born archer with whose name
Was lettered yon half-moon of steel that pierced
The vulture? His features imitate my lord's.

PURURAVAS

It must be so. The moment that I saw him,
My eyes became a mist of tears, my spirit
Lightened with joy, and surely 'twas a father
That stirred within my bosom. O Heaven! I lose
Religious calm; shudderings surprise me; I long
To feel him with my limbs, pressed with my love.

LATAVYA (*to the hermitess*)

Here deign to stand.

PURURAVAS

Mother, I bow to thee.

SATYAVATIE

High-natured! may thy line by thee increase!

(*aside*)

Lo, all untold this father knows his son.

(*aloud*)

My child,

Bow down to thy begetter.

Ayus bows down, folding his hands over his bow.

PURURAVAS

Live long, dear son.

AYUS (*aside*)

O how must children on their father's knees
Grown great be melted with a filial sweetness,
When only hearing that this is my father
I feel I love him!

PURURAVAS

Vouchsafe me, reverend lady,
Thy need of coming.

SATYAVATIE

Listen then, O King;
This Ayus at his birth was in my hand
By Urvasie, I know not why, delivered,
A dear deposit. Every perfect rite
And holiness unmaimed that princely boys
Must grow through, Chyavan's self, the mighty Sage,
Performed, and taught him letters, scripture, arts—
Last, every warlike science.

PURURAVAS

O fortunate
In such a teacher!

HERMITESS

The children fared a field
Today for flowers, dry fuel, sacred grass,
And Ayus faring with them violated
The morals of the hermitage.

PURURAVAS (*in alarm*)

O how?

SATYAVATIE

A vulture with a jag of flesh was merging
Into a tree-top when the boy levelled
His arrow at the bird.

PURURAVAS (*anxiously*)

And then?

SATYAVATIE

And then

The holy Sage, instructed of that slaughter,
Called me and bade, "Give back thy youthful trust
Into his mother's keeping." Therefore, sir,
Let me have audience with the lady.

PURURAVAS

Mother,

Deign to sit down one moment.

The hermitess takes the seat brought for her.

Noble Latavya,

Let Urvasie be summoned.

LATAVYA

It is done.

He goes out.

PURURAVAS

Child of thy mother, come, O come to me!
Let me feel my son! The touch of his own child,
They say, thrills all the father; let me know it.
Gladden me as the moonbeam melts the moonstone.

SATYAVATIE

Go, child, and gratify thy father's heart.

Ayus goes to the King and clasps his feet.

PURURAVAS (*embracing the boy and seating him on his footstool*)

This Brahmin is thy father's friend. Salute him,
And have no fear.

MANAVAKA

Why should he fear? I think
He grew up in the wood and must have seen
A mort of monkeys in the trees.

AYUS (*smiling*)

Hail, father.

MANAVAKA

Peace and prosperity walk with thee ever.

Latavya returns with Urvasie.

LATAVYA

This way, my lady.

URVASIE

Who is this quivered youth
Set on the footstool of the King? Himself
My monarch binds his curls into a crest!
Who should this be so highly favoured?
(*seeing Satyavatie*)

Ah!

Satyavatie beside him tells me; it is
My Ayus. How he has grown!

PURURAVAS (*seeing Urvasie*)

O child, look up.
Lo, she who bore thee, with her whole rapt gaze
Grown mother, the veiled bosom heaving towards thee
And wet with sacred milk!

SATYAVATIE

Rise, son, and greet

Thy parent.

She goes with the boy to Urvasie.

URVASIE

I touch thy feet.

SATYAVATIE

Ever be near

Thy husband's heart.

AYUS

Mother, I bow to thee.

URVASIE

Child, be thy sire's delight. My lord and husband!

PURURAVAS

O welcome to the mother! sit thee here.

He makes her sit beside him.

SATYAVATIE

My daughter, lo, thine Ayus. He has learned
All lore, heroic armour now can wear.
I yield thee back before thy husband's eyes,
Thy sacred trust. Discharge me. Each idle moment
Is a religious duty left undone.

URVASIE

It is so long since I beheld you, mother,
I have not satisfied my thirst of you,
And cannot let you go. And yet 'twere wrong
To keep you. Therefore go for further meeting.

PURURAVAS

Say to the Sage, I fall down at his feet.

SATYAVATIE

'Tis well.

AYUS

Are you going to the forest, mother?
Will you not take me with you?

PURURAVAS

Over, son,
Thy studies in the woods. Thou must be now
A man, know the great world.

SATYAVATIE

Child, hear thy father.

AYUS

Then, mother, let me have when he has got
His plumes, my little peacock, jewel-crest,
Who'd sleep upon my lap and let me stroke
His crest and pet him.

SATYAVATIE

Surely, I will send him.

URVASIE

Mother, I touch thy feet.

PURURAVAS

I bow to thee,
Mother.

SATYAVATIE

Peace be upon you both, my children.

She goes.

PURURAVAS

O blessed lady! Now I am grown through thee
A glorious father in this boy, our son;
Not Indra, hurler down of cities, more
In his Jayanta of Paulomie born.

Urvasie weeps.

MANAVAKA

Why is my lady suddenly all tears?

PURURAVAS

My own beloved! How art thou full of tears
While I am swayed with the great joy of princes
Who see their line secured? Why do these drops
On these high peaks of beauty raining down,
O sad sweet prodigal, turn thy bright necklace
To repetition vain of costlier pearls?

He wipes the tears from her eyes.

URVASIE

Alas, my lord! I had forgot my doom
In a mother's joy. But now thy utterance
Of that great name of Indra brings to me
Cruel remembrance torturing the heart
Of my sad limit.

PURURAVAS

Tell me, my love, what limit.

URVASIE

O King, my heart held captive in thy hands,
I stood bewildered by the curse; then Indra
Uttered his high command: "When my great soldier,
Earth's monarch, sees the face that keeps his line
Made in thy womb, to Eden thou returnest."
So when I knew my issue, sick with the terror
Of being torn from thee, all hidden haste,
I gave to noble Satyavatie the child,
In Chyavan's forest to be trained. Today
This my beloved son returns to me;
No doubt she thought that he was grown and able
To gratify his father's heart. This then

Is the last hour of that sweet life with thee,
Which goes not farther.

Pururavas swoons.

MANAVAKA

Help, help!

URVASIE

Return to me, my King!

PURURAVAS (*reviving*)

O love, how jealous are the Gods in Heaven
Of human gladness! I was comforted
With getting of a son — at once this blow!
O small sweet waist, I am divorced from thee!
So has a poplar from one equal cloud
Received the shower that cooled and fire of Heaven
That kills it.

MANAVAKA

O sudden evil out of good!
For I suppose you now will don the bark
And live with hermit trees.

URVASIE

I too unhappy!
For now my King who sees that I no sooner
Behold my son reared up than to my Heavens
I soar, will think that I have all my need
And go with glad heart from his side.

PURURAVAS

Beloved,
Do not believe it. How can one be free
To do his will who's subject to a master?
He when he's bid, must cast his heart aside
And dwell in exile from the face he loves.

Therefore obey King Indra. On this thy son
I too my kingdom will repose and dwell
In forests where the antlered peoples roam.

AYUS

My father should not on an untrained steer
Impose the yoke that asks a neck of iron.

PURURAVAS

Child, say not so! The ichorous elephant
Not yet full-grown tames all the trumpeting
Of older rivals; and the young snake's tooth
With energy of virulent poison stored
Strikes deadly. So is it with the ruler born:
His boyish hand inarms the sceptred world.
The force that rises with its task, springs not
From years, but is a self and inborn greatness.
Therefore, Latavya!

LATAVYA

Let my lord command me.

PURURAVAS

Direct from me the council to make ready
The coronation of my son.

LATAVYA (*sorrowfully*)

It is

Your will, sire.

He goes out. Suddenly all act as if dazzled.

PURURAVAS

What lightning leaps from cloudless Heavens?

URVASIE (*gazing up*)

'Tis the Lord Narad.

PURURAVAS

Narad? Yes 'tis he.

His hair is matted all a tawny yellow
Like ochre-streaks, his holy thread is white
And brilliant like a digit of the moon.
He looks as if the faery-tree of Heaven
Came moving, shooting twigs all gold, and twinkling
Pearl splendours for its leaves, its tendrils pearl.
Guest-offering for the Sage!

Narad enters: all rise to greet him.

URVASIE

Here is guest-offering.

NARAD

Hail, the great guardian of the middle world!

PURURAVAS

Greeting, Lord Narad.

URVASIE

Lord, I bow to thee.

NARAD

Unsundered live in sweetness conjugal.

PURURAVAS (*aside*)

O that it might be so!

(*aloud to Ayus*)

Child, greet the Sage.

AYUS

Urvasiean Ayus bows down to thee.

NARAD

Live long, be prosperous.

PURURAVAS

Deign to take this seat.

Narad sits, after which all take their seats.

What brings the holy Narad ?

NARAD

Hear the message

Of mighty Indra.

PURURAVAS

I listen.

NARAD

Maghavan,

Whose soul can see across the world, to thee

Intending loneliness in woods —

PURURAVAS

Command me.

NARAD

The seers to whom the present, past and future

Are three wide-open pictures, these divulge

Advent of battle and the near uprising

Of Titans warring against Gods. Heaven needs

Thee, her great soldier; thou shouldst not lay down

Thy warlike arms. All thy allotted days

This Úrvasie is given thee for wife

And lovely helpmeet.

URVASIE

Oh, a sword is taken

Out of my heart.

PURURAVAS

In all I am Indra's servant.

NARAD

'Tis fitting. Thou for Indra, he for thee,
With interchange of lordly offices.
So sun illumes the fire, fire the great sun
Ekes out with heat and puissance.

He looks up into the sky.

Rambha, descend

And with thee bring the high investiture
Heaven's King has furnished to crown Ayus, heir
Of great Pururavas.

Apsaras enter with the articles of investiture.

NYMPHS

Lo! Holiness,

That store!

NARAD

Set down the boy upon the chair
Of the anointing.

RAMBHA

Come to me, my child.

She seats the boy.

NARAD (*pouring the cruse of holy oil on the boy's head*)
Complete the ritual.

RAMBHA, (*after so doing*)

Bow before the Sage,
My child, and touch thy parents' feet.

Ayus obeys.

NARAD

Be happy.

PURURAVAS

Son, be a hero and thy line's upholder.

URVASIE

Son, please thy father.

BARDS (*within*)

Victory to Empire's heir.

Ode

First the immortal seer of Brahma's kind
And had the soul of Brahma; Atri's then
The Moon his child; and from the Moon again
Sprang Budha-Hermes, moonlike was his mind.
Pururavas was Budha's son and had
Like starry brightness. Be in thee displayed
Thy father's kindly gifts. All things that bless
Mortals, descend in thy surpassing race.

Epode

Thy father like Himaloy highest stands
Of all the high, but thou all steadfast be,
Unchangeable and grandiose like the sea,
Fearless, surrounding Earth with godlike hands.
Let Empire by division brighter shine;
For so the sacred Ganges snow and pine
Favours, yet the same waters she divides
To Ocean and his vast and heaving tides.

NYMPHS (*approaching Urvasie*)

O thou art blest, our sister, in thy son
Crowned heir to Empire, in thy husband blest
From whom thou shalt not part.

URVASIE

My happiness
Is common to you all, sweet sisters: such
Our love was always.

She takes Ayus by the hand.
Come with me, dear child,

To fall down at thy elder mother's feet.

PURURAVAS

Stay yet; we all attend you to the Queen.

NARAD

Thy son's great coronation mindeth me
Of yet another proud investiture —
Kartikeya crowned by Maghavan, to lead
Heaven's armies.

PURURAVAS

Highly has the King of Heaven
Favoured him, Narad; how should he not be
Most great and fortunate?

NARAD

What more shall Indra do
For King Pururavas?

PURURAVAS

Heaven's King being pleased,
What further can I need? Yet this I'll ask.

He comes forward and speaks towards the audience.

Learning and fortune, Goddesses that stand
In endless opposition, dwellers rare
Under one roof, in kindly union join
To bless for glory and for ease the good.
This too; may every man find his own good,
And every man be merry of his mind,
And all men in all lands taste all desire.

Curtain

IDYLLS OF THE OCCULT

Short Stories

The Phantom Hour

STURGE Maynard rose from the fireside and looked out on the blackish yellow blinding fog that swathed London in the dense folds of its amplitude. In his hand he carried the old book he was reading, his finger was still in the page, his mind directed, not with entire satisfaction, to the tenor of the writer's imaginations, for if these pleased his sense of the curious they disgusted his reason. A mystic, mediaeval in epoch and temperament, the old Latinist dealt with psychological fancies the modern world has long discarded in order to bustle to the polling booth and the counting-house. Numerous subtleties occurred repulsive to the rigid and definite solutions of an age which, masterful with knowledge in the positive and external, tries to extend its autocracy in the shape of a confident ignorance over the bounds of the occult world within, occult — declared the author — only because we reject a key that is in everyone's hand, himself.

“Prosaist of mysteries,” thought Sturge, “trafficker in devious imaginations, if one could find only the thinnest fact to support the cumbrous web that is here woven! But the fog is less thick than the uncertainty in which these thoughts were content to move.”

In a passage of unusual but bizarre interest the German mystic maintained that the principle of brilliancy attended with a ceaseless activity the motions of thought, which in their physical aspect are flashes of a pure, a lurid or a murky light. It was, he said, a common experience with seers in intense moments of rapid cerebration to see their heads, often their whole surroundings besieged by a brilliant atmosphere coruscating with violet lightnings. Even while he wondered at these extravagances, it flashed across Sturge's memory that he himself in his childhood had been in the habit of seeing precisely such violet coruscations about his head and had indulged his childish fancy with them

until maturer years brought wonder, distrust and the rapid waning of the phenomenon.

Was there then some justification of experience for the fancies of the German? With an impulse he tried vainly to resist, he fixed his eye piercingly on the fog outside the window, and waited. At the moment he was aware of a curious motion in his head, a crowding of himself and all his faculties to the eye; then came the sight of violet flashes in the fog and a growing excitement in his nerves watched by a brain that was curiously, abnormally calm. A whole world of miraculous vision, of marvellous sound, of ancient and future experience was surely pressing upon him, surging against some barrier that opposed intercourse. Astonished and interested, but not otherwise disturbed his reason attempted to give itself some account of what was happening. The better to help the effort, he fixed his eye again on the fog for repetition or disproof of what he had seen. There were no further violet flashes, but something surely was hinting, forming, manifesting in the grey swathe outside. It became bright, it became round, it became distinct. Was it a face or a globe? With a disappointed revulsion of feeling he saw himself face to face with nothing more romantic than a clock. He smiled and turned to compare with that strong visualised clock his own substantial, unmythic, workaday companion on the mantelpiece. His body grew tense with a shock of surprise. There indeed was the clock, his ebony-faced, gold-lettered recorder of hours, balanced lightly on a conventional Father Time in the centre and two winged goddesses at the edge; the hands, he noted, were closing upon the twelve and the five, and there would soon ring out the sound of the hour. But, by its side, what was this phantasmal and unwonted companion, fixed, distinct, aping reality, ebony-faced also, but silver-lettered, solidly pedestalled, not lightly balanced, pointing to the hour eight with the same closeness as the real clock pointed to the hour five? He had time to notice that the four of this timepiece was not lettered in the ordinary Roman numerals, but with the four vertical and parallel strokes; then the apparition disappeared.

An optical hallucination! Probably, the mental image intensely visualised of some familiar timepiece in a friendly sitting room. Indeed, was it not more than familiar? Surely, he knew it, — had seen it, clearly, insistently, — that ebony face, that silver-lettering, that strong ornamented pedestal, even that figure four! But where was it, when was it? Some curious bar in his memory baffled his mind wandering vainly for the lost details.

Suddenly the clock, his own clock, struck five. He counted mechanically the familiar sounds, sharp, clear, attended with a metallic reverberation. And then, before the ear could withdraw itself from its object, another clock began, not sharp, not clear, not metallic but with a soft, harmonious chime and a musical jangling at the end. And the number of the strokes was eight!

Sturge sat down at the table and opened his book at random. If this were a hallucination, it was a carefully arranged and well-executed hallucination. Was someone playing hypnotic tricks with his brain? Was he hypnotising himself? His eye fell on the page and met not mediaeval Latin, but ancient Greek, though un-Homeric hexameters. Very clear was the lettering, very plain — the significance.

“For the gods immortal wander always over the earth and come unguessed to the dwellings of mortals; but rare is the eye that can look on them and rarer the mind that can distinguish the disguise from the deity.”¹

Hypnotism again! for he knew that the original lucubrations of the old mystic, subtle in substance, but in expression rough, deviated, tedious, amorphous, persecuted from the beginning to the end in crabbed Latin, and flowered nowhere into Greek, nowhere into poetry. There was yet more of the hexameter, he noticed, and he read on.

¹ *Aiei gar theoi ahanatoi peri gaian alontai
Thneton di anthron epi domata prosbalnousti
Kruptoi tousde tis au proderketai ommasi kruptous?
Eita ti daimonion ti kenon kai okhema tis oide?*

“And men too live disguised in the sunlight and never from their birth to their death shalt thou see the mask uplifted. Nay, thou thyself, O Pelops, hast thou seen even once the daemon within thee?”¹

There the hexameters ceased and the next moment the physical page reappeared with its native lettering. But sweet, harmonious, clear in his hearing jangled once more the chimes of the phantom hour. And again the number of strokes was eight.

Sturge Maynard rose and waited for some more definite sign. For he divined now that some extraordinary mental state, some unforgettable experience was upon him. His expectation was not deceived. Once more the chimes rang out, but this time it seemed to him as if a woman's voice were crying to him passionately under cover of that perfectly familiar melody. But were the two phantasmal sounds memories of this English land and birth or was it out of some past existence they challenged him, insisting and appealing, inviting him to remember some poignant hour of a form he had worn and discarded, a name he had answered to and forgotten. Whatever it was, it was near to him, it touched potently his heart-strings. And then immediately following the eighth stroke, there came as if far off, an unmistakable explosion of sound, the report of a modern revolver.

Sturge Maynard left the fireplace and the room, descended the stairs, put on his hat and overcoat, and moved towards the door of his house. He had no clear idea where he would go or what he must do, but whatever it might be it had to be done. Then it occurred to him that he had forgotten his revolver which was lying in the drawer of his wardrobe. He went up, possessed himself of the weapon, loaded it, put it in his right-hand side-pocket, assured himself that the pocket carried his two latchkeys, once more descended the stairs and walked out into one of the densest of London fogs, damp, choking and impenetrable.

He moved through a world that seemed to have no existence

¹ *Kruptoi kai brotoi andres en augais heliou eisin
Ou pote tegmat'apothasa kruptoi de thanountai
Kai su Pelops pote ton son et'endon daimon epeides*

except in memory. There was no speed of traffic. Only an occasional cartman hoarsely announced from time to time the cautious progress of his vehicle. Sturge could not see anything before or around him, — except when he neared the curb and a lamp post strove to beam out on him shadowily or on the other side a spectral fragment of wall brushed his coat-sleeve. But he was certain of the pavement under his feet, and he felt he could make no false turn. A surer guide than his senses and memory led him.

He crossed the road, entered the gates of Hyde Park, traversed in a sure and straight line of advance the fogbound invisible open, passed through the Marble Arch, and in Oxford Street for the first time, hesitated. There were two women who were dear to him, either of whom by her death could desolate half his existence. To whom should he go? Then his mind, or something within it, decided for him. These speculations were otiose. He need not go to his sister Imogen. What possible evil could happen to her in her uncle's well-appointed, well-guarded, comfortable home, in the happy round of her life full of things innocently careless and harmlessly beautiful. But Renée! Renée was different.

He pursued his walk in a familiar direction. As he went, it flashed across his memory that she had forbidden him to visit her today. There was some living reminiscence of her past life coming to her, someone she did not care for Sturge to meet, she had said with her usual frank carelessness; he must not come. He had not questioned. Since he first knew her, he had never questioned, and the past of Renée Beauregard was a void even for the man to whom she had surrendered everything. There was room in that void for unusual incidents, supreme perils. He remembered now that her parting clasp had been almost convulsive in its strength and intensity, her speech vibrant with some unexplained emotion. He had been aware of it, without observing it, being preoccupied with his passion. Whatever part of his mind had noted it, had confined its possible cause within the limits of the usual, as men are in the habit of doing, ignoring the unusual until it seizes and surprises them.

He reached the square and the house in which she lived,

opened the door with one of the latchkeys in his pocket, divested himself of his coat and hat, and directed his steps to the drawing-room. A girl of nineteen or twenty rose, calm and pale, fronting the open doorway. The clutch of her hand on the chair, the rigid forward impulse in her frame were the index of a great emotion and an intense expectation. But her face flushed, the hand and figure relaxed, when she saw her visitor. Renée Beauregard was a Frenchwoman of the South, rich in physical endowment, in nervous vitality, in the élan of her tongue and her spirit. Her exquisitely full limbs, her buoyant gait, the mobility of her crimson lips, her smiling dark eyes made great demands on life, on success, on pleasure, on love. But in the invincibly happy flame of the eyes there was at the moment the shadow of a tragic disappointment haunting and disfiguring their natural expression. This was plainly a woman with a past, — and a present. And her nature, if not her fate, demanded a future.

“Sturge!” she took a step towards the door. Sturge walked over to the fireplace and took her hand.

“I forgot your prohibition till I was too near to turn back. And there was the fog; and return was cheerless and you were here!”

“You should not have forgotten!” she said, but she smiled, well-pleased at his coming. Then the dark look reusurped those smiling eyes. “And you must go back. No, not now. In a quarter of an hour. You may stop for quarter of an hour.”

She had glanced at the clock, and his eyes followed hers. He saw an ebony-faced time-piece, silver-lettered, solidly-pedestalled, rendering the figure four in parallel strokes, and smiled at the curious tricks that his memory had played him. It was five minutes past six.

“I will go to Imogen’s,” he said, very deliberately. She looked at him, looked at the clock, then cried impulsively, leaning towards him, “And you will come at eight and dine with me! Rachel shall lay the covers for two,” then drew back, as if repenting her invitation.

Eight! Yes, he would dine with her — after he had done his work. That seemed to be the arrangement, — not hers, but

whose? The daemon's perhaps, the god's within or without. They sat talking for a while, and it seemed to him that never had their talk been so commonplace in form or so vibrant with emotion. At twenty past six he rose, took his farewell and moved out to the fog; but she followed him to the door, helped him on with his overcoat, trembling visibly as she did so. And before he went, she embraced and kissed him once, not vehemently, but with a strong quietude and as if with some fateful resolution which had at that moment been formed in her heart, and expressed itself in her caress.

"I shall be back by eight," he said quietly. He had accepted, but not returned her embrace.

By eight! Yes, and before. But he did not tell her that. He swung through the fog to his uncle's residence, with a light, clear and careless mind, but an intense quiet in his heart. He reached the place, in a very aristocratic neighbourhood, and was invited in by a portly footman. Sir John was out, at the House, but Miss Imogen Maynard was at home. The next hour Sturge passed calmly and lightly enough; for in his sister's everyday attractive personal talk coursing lightly over the surface of life, amusements and theatres, books, music, paintings varied with politics and a shade of politely hinted scandal, even his heart insensibly lost its tension and slipped back into the usual, forgetting the within in the without.

The next hour and more. It was Imogen Maynard who rose and said:

"Ten minutes to eight, Sturge. I must go and dress. You are sure you won't dine?"

Sturge Maynard looked at the clock and his heart stood still. He bid his sister a hasty adieu, ran down the stairs, clutched his hat and coat and was out in the fog, donning his overcoat as he walked. He made sure of the revolver and the latchkeys, then broke into a run. His great dread was that he might lose the turning in his haste and arrive after the stroke of the hour. But it was difficult to miss it, the only open space for half a mile! And the daemon? was he a spirit of prophecy only? Did he not visit to save?

He turned into Renée's square and, as he strode to the house and ascended the steps, the agitation passed from him and it was with an even pulse and a steady nerve that he turned to the drawing-room door. He had flung aside his hat but not waited to divest himself of the coat. His hand was in the pocket and the butt of the revolver was in his hand.

The door was open and, unusual circumstance, veiled by the Japanese screen. He stood at its edge and looked into the room which was intensely still, but not untenanted — for on the rug before the fireplace, at either end of it, stood Renée Beauregard and a man unknown to Sturge — he looking at her as if waiting for her speech; she calm, pale, resolute in silence, with the heavy burden of her past in her eyes. The stranger's back was half turned to Sturge and only part of his profile was visible, but the Englishman quivered with his hatred even as he looked at him. Was this what he had to do? He took out the revolver and put his finger on the trigger. Then he glanced at the clock, — it wanted four minutes to the hour; and at the stranger again, — in his hand, too, was a revolver and his finger also rested on the trigger. Sturge Maynard smiled.

Then the man's voice was heard. "It has to be then, Idalie," he said, in a thin, terrible, mournful plaint. "You have decided it. Don't bear any grudge. You know it can't be helped. You have to die."

Sturge remembered that Idalie was Renée's second name, but she had always forbidden him to use it. The thin voice continued, this time with a note of curious excitement in its plainness.

"And you throw it all on me! What does it matter how I got you, what I did afterwards? Everything's allowed to a lover. And I loved you. It's dangerous to play with love, Idalie. You find it now!"

Sturge looked at the man. Danger for her there was none, but great danger for this rigid, thin-voiced assassin, this man whom Sturge Maynard hated with every muscle in his body, with every cell of his brain. It seemed to him that each limb of him greatedened and vibrated with the energy of the homicide, with

the victorious impulse to slay. There was a fog outside, what a fog! and he could easily dispose of the body. Really that was a good arrangement. God did things very cleverly sometimes. And he laughed in himself at the grimness of his conceit. Yet somehow he believed it. God's work, not his. And yet his, too, pre-ordained — since when? But the doomed voice was going on:

“I give you still a chance, Idalie — always, always a chance. Will you go with me? You've been false to me, false with your body, false with your heart. But I'll forgive. I forgive your desertion, I'll forgive this too. Come with me, Idalie. And if not, — Renée Idalie Marviranne, it is going to strike eight, and when the hour has done striking, I strike. It's God shoots you with this hand of mine, — the God of Justice, the God of Love. It's both you have offended. Will you come?”

She shook her head. A deadly pallor swept over the man. “It's done then,” he cried, “you've done it. You have got to die.” He trained the pistol on her and his finger closed on the trigger. Sturge remained motionless. Nothing could happen before the hour struck. That was the moment destined, and no one could outrun Fate by a second. The man went on:

“Don't say it till the clock strikes! There's time till then. When I shoot you, Rachel will run up and I will shoot her, I left the door open so that she might hear the sound. Who else in England knows that I exist? I shall go out — oh, when you are both dead, not before. There's a fog, there's not a soul about, and I shall walk away very quietly. No one will see, no one will hear. God with his fog has blinded and deafened the world. You see it's He or it would not have been so perfectly arranged for me.”

Very grimly Sturge Maynard smiled. Men who hated each other might, it seemed, have very similar minds. Perhaps that was why they clashed. Well, if it was God, He was a tragic artist too and knew the poetical effectiveness of dramatic irony! Everything this man reckoned on or had arranged for his deed and his safety had been or would be helpful to his own executioner! And the consciousness then came upon him that this had all happened before. But not here, not in these English surroundings!

A great blur of green came before his eyes, obscuring the clock. Then it leaped on him — green grass, green trees, green-covered rocks, a green sea, and on the sward a man face downward, stabbed in the back, over him his murderer, the stiletto fresh-stained with blood. A boat rocked on the waters; it had been arranged for the assassin's escape, and in it there lay a woman, bound. Sturge knew those strange faces very well and remembered how he had lain dead on that sward. It was strange to see it all again in this drawing-room with the fateful modern ebony-faced timepiece seen through the green of Mediterranean trees! But it was going to end very differently this time.

Then the voice of the woman rang out, cold, strong, like the clang of iron. "I will not go," she said, simply. And the hour struck. It struck once, it struck twice, thrice, four times. And then she lifted her eyes and saw Sturge Maynard walking forward from the side of the screen. He was a good shot and there was no chance of his bungling it and killing her. But he would make sure!

The woman in her intensity had summoned up a marvellous self-control, and it did not break now, she neither moved, nor uttered a sound. But a look came into her eyes poignant in its appeal, terrible in its suggestion. For it was a cry for life, a command to murder.

The doomed man was looking at the clock, not at her, still less at any possible danger behind. He looked up as the eighth musical jangle died away and Sturge saw his light, steady, cruel eyes gleaming like those of a beast. He pressed his finger on the trigger.

"It is finished!" cried the man. And as he spoke, Sturge Maynard fired. The room rang with the shot, filled with the smoke. When the smoke cleared, the stranger was seen prostrate on the rug: his head lay at the feet of the woman he had doomed.

There was a running of steps in the passage and the maid Rachel entered, — as the man who lay there had foreseen. She was trembling when she came, but she saw the man on the rug, paused, steadied herself, and smiled. "We must carry it out at once into the fog," she said simply, in French. With a simul-

taneous impulse both she and Sturge approached the corpse. Then Renée, breaking into excited motion, ran to Sturge and putting her hand on his shoulder made as if to push him out of the room.

“I will see to that!” she panted, “Go!”

He turned to her with a smile.

“You must go at once,” she reiterated, “For my sake, do not be found in this house. Others besides Rachel may have heard the shot.”

But he took her by the wrists, drew her away from the fireplace and set her in a chair.

“We lose time, Monsieur,” said Rachel, again.

“It is better to lose time, Rachel,” he said, “we will give ten minutes to Fate.” And the serving woman nodded and proceeding to the corpse began to tie up the wound methodically in her apron. The others waited in absolute stillness, Sturge arranging in his mind the explanation he would give, if any had heard the report and broke in on them. But silence and fog persisted around the house.

They took up the body. “If anyone notices, we are carrying a drunken man home,” said Sturge. “Carry it carefully; there must be no trail of blood.” And so into the English fog they carried out the man who had come living from foreign lands, and laid him down in the public road, far from the house and the square where he had perished. When they returned to the room, Rachel took up the blood-stained rug and apron, sole witnesses of the thing that had been done.

“I will destroy these,” she said, “and bring the rug from Madame’s room. And then,” she said, as simply as before, “Monsieur and Madame will dine.”

Renée shuddered and looked at Sturge.

“I remain here,” he said, “till the body is found. We are linked henceforth indissolubly and for ever, Idalie.” And as he stressed lightly the unwonted name, there was a look in his eyes she dared not oppose.

That night, when Renée had gone to her room, Sturge, sitting over the fire, remembered that he had not told her the

strange incident which had brought about one tragedy today and prevented another. When he went into her chamber, she came to him, deeply agitated, and clasped him with violence.

“Oh, Sturge, Sturge!” she cried, “to think that if you had not chanced to come, I should be dead now, taken from you, taken from God’s beautiful world!”

Chanced! There is no such thing in this creation as chance, thought Sturge. But then who had given him that mystic warning? Who had put the revolver in his hand? or sent him on a mission of slaughter? Who had made Imogen rise just in time? Who had fired that shot in the drawing-room? The God within? The God without? The Easterns spoke of God in a man. This might well be He. And then there returned to his memory those fierce emotions, the hatred that had surged in him, the impulse and delight of slaughter, the song of exultation that his blood yet sang in his veins, because a man that had lived was dead and could not return to life again. He remembered, too, the command in Renée’s eyes. God in a man? Was God in a man a murderer then? In him? and in her?

“It is to enquire too curiously to think so,” he concluded, “but very strangely indeed has He made His world.”

Then he told her about the German mystic and the chime of the phantom hour that had brought him to her in the tragic moment of their destinies. And when he spoke of the daemon within, the woman understood better than the man.

The Door at Abelard

THE village of Streadhew lay just under the hill, a collection of brown solid cottages straggling through the pastures, and on the top of the incline Abelard with its gables and antique windows watched the road wind and drop slowly to the roofs of Orringham two miles away. For many centuries the house and the village had looked with an unchanged face on a changing world, and in their old frames housed new men and manners, while Orringham beyond adapted itself and cast off its mediaeval slough. The masters of Abelard lived with the burden of a past which they could not change.

Stephen Abelard of Abelard, the last male of his line, had lived in the house with the old gables for the past twenty years mixing formally in the society of his equals, discharging the activities incidental to his position with a punctilious conscientiousness, but withdrawn in soul from the life around him. That was since the death of his wife in childbirth followed soon afterwards by the fading of the son to give whom she had died. Two daughters, Isabel and Aloyse, survived. Stephen Abelard did not marry again; he was content that the old line should be continued through the female side, and when his daughter Isabel married Richard Lancaster, the younger son of a neighbouring country family, he stipulated that the husband should first consent to bear the name of his wife's ancestors. This attachment to the old name was the only thing known in the lord of the old house that belonged to the past. For Stephen Abelard, in spite of his spiritual aloofness, was a man forward in thought with a keen emancipated intellect which neither present nor past dogma could bind, and gifted with a high courage to act according to the light that he had.

A strange series of accidents had helped to bring the old family near to extinction. For the last hundred years no daughter-in-law of the house had been able to survive by many

days the birth of her first male child. Girl-children had been born and no harm had happened, but some fatality seemed to attend the birth of a son. Stephen's great grandfather had male issue, Hugh and Walter and one daughter, Bertha, who died tragically, murdered in her chamber, no one knew by whom. It was after this incident that the fatality seemed to weigh on the house and popular superstition was not slow to connect the fatality with the deed. Hugh Abelard had already a wife and two sons at the hour of the occurrence, but Walter was unmarried. One year after the tragic and mysterious death of his sister he brought a bride home to Abelard and in yet another year a son had been born to him. But only seven days after the birth of her child Mary Abelard was found dead in her room, possibly from some unexplained shock to the heart, for she was strong and in good health when she perished, and Walter, unhinged by the death of his young wife, went into foreign lands where he too died. The tongues of the countryside did not hesitate to whisper that he only paid in his affliction the penalty of an undetected crime. Hugh's sons grew up and married, but the same fatality fell upon the unions they had contracted, they died early and their sons did not live to enjoy the estate they successively inherited. Then Walter Abelard's son came with his wife and daughter and took possession. Stephen was born two years later and within three days of his birth his mother had shared the fate of all women who married into the fated house. So strong was the impression made upon Richard Abelard by this fate or this strong recurrent coincidence that when he married again, he would not allow his wife to enter the home of his ancestors. He bought a house in the neighbouring county and lived there till his death from an accident in the hunting-field. After him Stephen reigned, a man modern-minded, full of energy and courage, who returned, scornful of antiquated superstitions, to the old family house, married and had two daughters, and then — well, coincidence insisted and the male child came and the mother, adored of her husband, passed away. But there was no mystery about this death. She died of collapse after childbirth, her life fought for by skilful doctors, watched over by careful attendants, sleeplessly guarded

at night by her husband. A coincidence, nothing more.

Therefore Isabel and Richard Lancaster Abelard came fearlessly to live at the fated house. The daughters of the house had been immune from any fatality, and when she became enceinte, no superstitious fears haunted the mind of any among numerous friends and relatives who loved her for her charm and her gaiety. About three months before the birth of the child could be expected her sister Aloyse married, not as the Abelards had hitherto done, into the neighbouring families, but, contrary to all precedent, a young foreign doctor settled at Orringham, a man not only foreign, but of Asiatic blood. Popular as Dr. Armand Sieurcaye was in the neighbourhood, the alliance had come with something of a shock to the countryside, for the Abelards, though less wealthy than many, were the oldest of the country families. But neither Abelard nor his daughter were troubled with these prejudices. The young man had powerfully attracted them both and the marriage was as much the choice of the father as of the daughter.

Armand Sieurcaye came from the south of France, and there was only the glossy blackness of his hair and the richer tint of the olive in his face to suggest a non-European origin. His grandfather, son of the mixed alliance of a Maratha Sirdar with the daughter of a French adventurer in the service of Scindia, had been the first to settle in France purchasing an estate in Provence with the riches amassed and hoarded by battle and plunder on Indian soil. Charles was the younger of two sons and had studied medicine at Nancy and then, driven rather by some adventurous strain in his blood than any necessity, sought his fortune abroad. He went first to Bombay, but did little there beyond some curious investigations which interested his keen, sceptical and inquiring mind, but did not help his purse. At Bombay, he met John Lancaster, Richard's brother, and was induced by him to try his fortune in the English country town aided by whatever local influence his friend, plucked by an almost miraculous cure from the grip of a fatal disease, could afford him in gratitude for the saving of his life. In twelve months Armand Sieurcaye had won for himself universal popularity,

a lucrative practice, and Aloyse Abelard.

The old house, bathed in spring sunshine, had little in it of the ominous or weird to Armand Sieurcaye when with his young wife he entered it for a lengthened stay in the month of Isabel's delivery. He was attracted by its old-world quaintness, by the mass of the green ivy smothering the ancient walls, by the heavenward question of its short pointed towers; but there was nothing there to alarm or to daunt. Isabel had hurried to the study to her father, and Armand guided by his brother-in-law Richard Lancaster repaired to the room into which the domestics had already carried his belongings.

"Awfully good of you to leave your practice and come," said Lancaster, "It's a relief to have you. Harris is a fool and I'm not used to the worry."

Armand looked at him with some surprise. He had not expected even so much of nervousness in his cheerful, vigorous, commonplace brother-in-law.

"Is there any trouble?" he asked lightly, "Isabel seems strong. There can't be any reason for fear."

"Oh, there isn't. But I tell you, I'm not used to the worry," and, then, starting off from the subject — "How do you like your room?"

Armand had not looked at his room, but he looked at it now. It was a comfortable, well-furnished room with nothing apparently unmodern about it except the old oak panelling of the walls and the unusual narrowness and length of the two windows that looked out on the grounds behind the house. His eyes fell on a door in the wall to his right hand.

"What's there?" he asked. "I thought this room was the last at this end of the house."

"I haven't any idea," was the indifferent answer. "It can't be anything more than a balcony or closet."

The door attracted Armand's attention strangely. Of some slighter wood, not of the oak with which Abelard abounded, it was carved with great plainness and struck him as more modern than the rest of the house. Still it was not precisely a modern door. He walked over to it to satisfy his curiosity, but the

attempt to turn the handle brought no result.

“Locked?” questioned Lancaster, a little surprised. He too sauntered over and turned the handle in vain.

“I hope it’s not a haunted chamber,” said Armand, making the useless attempt again. He had spoken carelessly and was not prepared for the unwonted ebullition that followed his words. Richard’s face darkened, he struck the floor with his heel, angrily.

“It’s a beastly house,” he cried, “When old Stephen dies, I’ll sell it for a song.”

More and more surprised, Armand turned to look closely at his brother-in-law. It might be his fancy which told him that the young man’s face was paler than ordinarily, and an uneasy restless look leaped from time to time into the shallowness of his light blue eyes. It was certainly his fancy which said that Richard looked as an animal might look when it is aware of some hidden enemy hunting it. He dismissed the imagination immediately, and put away from him the thought of the door.

But it occurred to him again when, returning from a solitary walk in the grounds, he chanced to look up closer at the angle of the house occupied by his room and the locked balcony.

A corner of wall there did jut out beyond what he judged to be the limit of his room and then curved lightly round and formed a porch supporting a small room that could not have been more than eight feet by twelve in size; over the room a peaked tower. The erection was meant to imitate and harmonise with the older pointed towers of the building, but a slight observation confirmed the Doctor’s surmise that here was a later excrescence inharmoniously added for some whim or personal convenience. But the ivy was unusually thick on this side and even covered the great carved and high-arched orifices that all along the length of the erection did duty for windows. It must then be rather in the nature of a closed balcony than a room. It struck him casually how easy it would be for an intruder to climb up the strong thick growths of ivy from outside and enter the house by the balcony. The possibility, no doubt, explained the locked door. Greatly relieved, he knew not why, Armand

continued his walk. But he thought of the door idly more than once before nightfall.

That night, Armand Sieurcaye, sleeping by the side of his wife, was awakened by what seemed to him a noise in or outside his room. The lamp was burning low but nothing stirred in the dimness of the room. His eyes fell on the locked door and a disagreeable attraction rivetted them upon it; to his newly-awakened senses there seemed to be something weird and threatening in the plain mass of wood. With a violent effort he flung the fancy from him and sought slumber again, the noise that awakened him was possibly some figment of senses bewildered by sleep. He knew not after how long an interval he again woke, but this time a cold air upon him, and before he opened unwilling eyes, he was aware of the door in his room being softly opened and closed. Still the lamp burned, — the room was empty. Involuntarily his eyes sought the locked door. It was wide open swung back on its hinges! And if the closed door had alarmed something sensitive and irrational within him, how much ghastlier, more menacing seemed that open rectangle with the pit of darkness beyond!

Cursing his nerves for fools Armand Sieurcaye leaped from the bed, turned up the lamp and, conquering a nervous reluctance the violence of which surprised him, stood, lamp in hand, at the threshold of the darkness beyond. It was, as he had conjectured, a wide balcony walled in so as to form a habitable sitting or sleeping-room in summer, and it seemed as such to have been utilised; for a bare iron bedstead occupied the width of the room near the wall, an old armchair with faded and tarnished cushions stood against the opposite end of the room. But the arched orifices were now heavily curtained with the thick folds of the climbing ivy. Otherwise the room was entirely empty. He decided to look out from these windows into the moonlit world outside.

But as he advanced into the room, he was aware of a growing disorder in his nerves which he could not control. It was not fear, so much as an intense horror and hatred — of what he could not determine, but, it almost seemed to him, of that bare iron bed, of that faded armchair. In any case, he carefully kept

his full distance from both as he crossed the room to the ivied openings and thrusting aside part of those green curtains peered into the night. A great world of dark green flooded with moonlight met his eyes. And then he noticed in the moonlight a man standing in the grounds of Abelard looking up at the balcony with a hand shading his eyes. It was Richard Lancaster Abelard, heir of the old house, he who knew nothing of the door and the balcony. And then the strong descendant of old French and Maratha fighters recoiled as if he had received a blow. He did not look again but hastily crossed the balcony and entered his room casting a glance of loathing as he passed to each side of him, once at the iron bed, once at the disused armchair. He could almost have sworn that a shadowy form lay propped upon shadowy pillows on the old iron bed, that somebody looked at him ironically from the tarnished cushions of the chair.

Wondering at himself Armand put on a dressing-gown and sat down in an easy chair. "I must have it out with my nerves," he said, resolute. "Whoever entered my room and opened the door, will, I feel sure, return to close it. I will wait, I will see him and prove to my nerves what unspeakable superstitious idiots they are. There was nothing strange in Richard Lancaster being out there in the moonlight; no doubt, he could not sleep and was taking a stroll outside to help pass away some sleepless hours. What I saw in him was an optical effect of the moonlight — nothing more, I tell you, nothing more."

For about half an hour he kept his vigil. As he sat his mind left its present surroundings and turned to the experiments in occultism he had conducted in Bombay. From his childhood he had been a highly imaginative lad with a nervous system almost as sensitive as an animal's. But if Armand Sieurcaye had the nervous temperament of the Asiatic mystic, his brain had been invincibly sceptical not only with the material French scepticism but with the merciless Indian scepticism which, once aroused, is far more obstinate and searching than its grosser European shadow. Refusing to accept second-hand proof, however strong, and aware of his own rich nervous endowment, he had himself experimented in occult science with the double

and inconsistent determination to be rigidly fair to the supernatural and allow it to establish itself if it existed, and secondly, to destroy and disprove it for ever by the very fairness and thoroughness of his experiments. He had been able to establish as undoubtedly existing in himself a fair power of correct presentiment, but against this he had to set a number of balked presentiments; he therefore dismissed the gift as merely a lively power of divining the trend of events. He was also aware that his personal attractions and repulsions were practically unerring; but, after all, was not this merely the equivalent in man to the instinct which so often warns children and animals of their friends and enemies? It was probable that the adventurous life of his Maratha forefathers, compelled to be always on the alert against violence and treachery, had stamped the instinct deep into the hereditary temperament of their issue. All the rest of the phenomenon, valued by the occultists, he had, he thought, proved to be sensitive hallucinations or inordinate subconscious cerebral activity.

In the course of his reflections he returned suddenly to his immediate surroundings and, with a start, looked towards the balcony-chamber. There it stood shut, plain, dumb, denying that it had ever been anything else. The door was closed, that had been open! Amazed, Armand leaped to his feet, strode to the door and turned the handle, ignoring a cry within that commanded him to desist. The door yielded not; it was not only closed but locked. Was it possible for any human being to have crossed his room, closed that door and locked it, under his very eyes and yet without his knowledge? Then he remembered the completeness of his absorption and how utterly his mind had withdrawn into itself. "Nothing wonderful in that!" he said. "How often have I been oblivious to time and space and circumstances outside when absorbed in a train of thought or in an experiment! The visitor must have thought me asleep in the easy chair and moved quietly." There was nothing more to be done that night and he returned baffled to his slumbers.

The first man he met next morning was Richard Lancaster who greeted him with his usual shallow and cheerful cordiality.

There was no trace of yesterday's disturbance in his look or demeanour.

"Slept well?" asked Armand casually, but carefully watching his features.

"Like a top!" answered Richard, heartily. "Didn't raise my head once from the pillow from eleven to seven."

Wondering Armand passed him and entered the library. Stephen Abelard sat deep in the pages of a book; a cup of tea stood untasted beside his elbow. After some ordinary conversation suggested by the book, Armand suddenly questioned his father-in-law,

"By the way, sir, is there a room next to mine? I noticed a locked door between."

Stephen Abelard's eyes narrowed a little and he looked at his questioner before he replied. He had raised the cup of tea to his lips but he put it down still untasted.

"Disturbed?" he questioned, sharply.

"Not at all," parried Armand, "Why should I be?"

"Why indeed? You don't believe in the supernatural. Who does? But in our nerves and imaginations we are all of us the fools our ancestors made us. I had better tell you." Stephen Abelard began sipping his tea and then pursued with a careful deliberateness. "The room you slept in was the chamber occupied by the unfortunate girl, Bertha Abelard, with whose name scandal in her life and superstition after her death have been busy. You've heard all that nonsense about the curse on Abelard. I need not repeat the rubbish. But this is true that only two people have slept in the balcony-chamber since her death. One was a guest, and he refused to sleep there after the first night."

"Why?"

"Nervous imaginations! Somebody resenting his presence, somebody in the armchair opposite. What will not men imagine? The other was Hugh Abelard's youngest son and he —"

A shade crossed the face of the master of the house.

"And he —"

"Was found dead in the iron bed the next morning."

Armand Sieurcaye quivered like a horse struck by the lash. He restrained himself.

“Any cause?”

“Failure of the heart. The Abelards are subject to failure of the heart. Might it not have happened equally in any other room? It has so happened, in fact, more than once.”

Armand nodded. Hereditary weakness of the heart! It might very well be. But what then was Richard Lancaster or the hallucination of him doing outside in the moonlight?

“Since that death, out of deference to prejudices the balcony is kept locked and opened twice a week only when Roberts takes the key of the door from Isabel and cleans up. Roberts has no nerves. She believes in the ghost, but argues she, ‘Miss Bertha won’t hurt me; I am only keeping her quarters clean for her’”.

Armand remembered the stories in circulation in the country. Rumour had charged Walter Abelard with the responsibility for the death of his sister, partly on the ground of subsequent incidents, partly on the impossibility of an outsider assassin penetrating so far or, even if supposing he entered, committing the deed and effecting his escape without leaving one trace behind. Why, there was the ivy. And even if the ivy were not so thick one hundred years ago, an agile man and a gymnast could easily ascend the porch to the arched orifices and descend again after his work had been done.

“If you are interested”, said Abelard, “well, we go at once and see the room.” And he rang for a servant to bring the key of the ominous chamber.

Armand had by this time almost convinced himself that his nocturnal experience was only a peculiarly vivid and disagreeable dream. He followed Stephen with the expectation — or was it not the hope? — of finding the room quite other than he had seen it in that uncomfortable experience. Stephen Abelard opened the door and light overcame its native dimness. The first thing Armand saw was a bare iron bed in the width of the outer wall, the next a faded armchair with tarnished cushions against the inner masonry. The room was dim by reason of the thickness of the ivy choking its arched stone orifices.

No dream then but a reality! Someone had twice entered his room, once to open, once to shut the door of ill omen. Was it Mme. Roberts, somnambulist, vaguely drawn to the door she alone was accustomed to unlock? But where at night could she get the key? For it was, Stephen had said, with Isabel Abelard. Again, it was as if a blow struck him. For, if the key was with Isabel, only Richard Lancaster could easily have got it from her at night, only he or she could have made that nocturnal entry. And it was Richard Lancaster he had seen under the balcony when he looked out into the moonlight. Was it the heir of the house who had entered, opened the door, gone out to look up at the room from outside and afterwards returned to shut it? But on what conceivable impulse? Was it the memory of a somnambulist returning to Armand's question of the morning? That was a very likely explanation and fitted admirably with the circumstances. Or was his action in any way linked to those nervous perturbations so new and out of place in this shallow, confident and ordinary nature? That was a circumstance into which the theory did not fit quite easily. A great uneasiness was so growing on Armand Sieurcaye. In a supernatural mystery he did not believe, but he was too practised in life not to believe in natural human mysteries underlying the even surface of things. He knew that men of the most commonplace outside have often belied their appearance by their actions. A presentiment of dangerous and calamitous things was upon him, and he remembered that his presentiments had more often justified themselves than not. But to Stephen Abelard he said nothing, least of all did he say anything to Richard Abelard of that nocturnal outing which he had so glibly denied.

II

Another week had passed by, but Armand's nerves were not reconciled to the door of ill omen that looked nightly at him with the secret of Bertha Abelard's death behind it. Nothing farther had happened of an unusual nature. Richard Abelard

was often absent and distracted, a thing formerly unknown to him, and his speech was occasionally irritable, but there was nothing out of the ordinary in his action. He walked, smoked, shot, rode, hunted, played billiards and read the light literature that pleased him, without any deviation from his familiar habits. Armand noticed that on some days he was entirely his old self, and then he invariably spoke with great satisfaction of the profound sleep he had enjoyed all night. Sieurcaye finally dismissed the presentiment from his mind. He had accepted the somnambulist theory; it was sleeplessness that was telling on Richard's nerves. The whole mystery received a rational explanation on that simple hypothesis.

Two nights after he arrived at this cheerful conclusion, he woke at night for the first time after the experience of the open door. Every night he had thought of watching for the somnambulist, though he had been accustomed all his life to light slumbers, but a sleep as profound as that of which Richard Lancaster boasted, glued his head to the pillow. On this particular night his wife was not with him, for, to satisfy a caprice of Isabel's, she was sleeping with her sister in the old nursery. Armand turned on his pillow, noticed with the surprise of a half-sleeping-man the absence of his wife, then glanced about the room and observed that the door of his chamber was slightly open. A meaningless detail at first, the circumstance began to awaken a sort of indolent wonder — had Aloyse come into the room to visit his sleep and gone back to the nursery? Or was it Richard the somnambulist driven by the monomania of the locked room? And then, as if galvanised by a shock of electricity, he sat up on bed, suddenly, violently, and stared at the door with unbelieving eyes. It had come back to him that, before turning into bed, on the spur of some unaccountable impulse, he had locked his room and lain down wondering at his own purposeless action. And there now was the door he had thus secured open, with the key in the lock, challenging him for an explanation. Had he got up himself in his sleep and opened it? Had he too grown a somnambulist? He remembered the profound slumber, so unusual to him, so similar to Lancaster's, that had surprised him for the last few nights.

Then an idea occurred to his rapidly working mind; he got out of bed, went to the inner door and turned the handle. It opened! He looked into the room with the iron bed. There was no one there, only the bed and the armchair. Then he closed the door, walked over to his own door, locked it, put the key under his pillow and got into bed again. His heart was beating a little faster than usual as he lay gazing at the door of Bertha Abelard's death-chamber. And then a very simple explanation flashed on him. Baulked by the locked door, Richard had climbed up by the ivy from outside and effected his entry from Bertha's chamber. But Isabel was not with Richard tonight — how could he have got possession of the key? Well, conceivably Isabel might have left her keys by oversight in her own chamber, or the somnambulist might have entered the nursery and detached what he needed from his wife's chatelaine. But what settled waking idea, what persistent fancy of sleep drove Richard Lancaster to the ominous chamber, forced him to devise entrance against every obstacle and by such forbidden means? Armand shuddered as he remembered the story of Bertha Abelard's death and his own theory of the means by which her assassin had gained entrance.

As he expected, he soon fell asleep. Rising the next morning, his first action was to walk over to the inner door and try it. It was locked! Well, that was natural. Somnambulists were often alert and keen-minded even beyond their waking selves and Richard, foiled again by the locked door, had climbed up once more by the ivy to efface all proof of his nocturnal visit.

Armand contrived that morning to be alone with Isabel in order to ask her where she kept the key of Bertha Abelard's chamber. She turned to him with laughing eyes.

"You are not haunted, Armand? No? It's always with me and the ghost, if she's there, must get through solid wood to invade your room. I keep my chatelaine at night under my pillow."

"You had it there last night?"

"Armand! I am positive our ancestress has visited you. Yes, last night too." And then suddenly, "Why, no, it was not.

I put it last night in the box where I kept my doll and my toys. Don't be surprised, Armand. I'm a great baby still in many things and I wanted to have everything last night just as it was when we were children. I was a very careful and jealous little house-wife, and before I slept I used always to lock up my chate-laine with my doll and playthings and treasure the tiny key of my box in a locket under my night-gown. I did all that last night. If you have been haunted, I'm not responsible."

"Did you tell anybody what you were going to do?"

"I did not think of it till we went to bed. Only Aloyse knew."

"Does anybody else know of this habit of your childhood?"

"Only Robert's and papa. They don't remember, probably. I had forgotten it myself till last night. What is puzzling you, Armand?"

"Oh, it is only an idea I had," he replied, and rapidly escaped from further question to the sitting-room set apart for himself and Aloyse.

The thing was staggering. Somnambulism did not make one omniscient, and it was impossible that Richard Abelard should have known this arrangement of Isabel's far-off childhood, extracted the key from his sleeping wife's locket, the chatelaine from the box and restored them undiscovered, when his need was finished. The theory involved such a chain of impossibilities and improbabilities that it must be rejected. And then, as always, a solution suggested itself — Richard Abelard must have taken, long ago, the impress of the key and got a duplicate of it made for his own secret use. But if so, what an unavowable design, what stealthy manoeuvres must such a subterfuge be intended to serve! What legitimate need could Richard Abelard have of this secret and ominous exit or entry? Was it not Armand's duty to warn Stephen Abelard of proceedings that must conceal in them something abnormal, perilous or even criminal? But there was the danger that Isabel might come to hear of it and receive a shock. Armand decided to wait till after her delivery.

A knock at the door roused him from his thoughts and in

response to his invitation Richard Abelard himself entered. He walked up to the fireplace, flung himself into a chair opposite Armand and jerked out abruptly,

“Dr. Armand, you are a dab at medical diagnosis. Can’t you tell me what’s the matter with me?”

“Name your symptoms.”

“You’ve seen some of them yourself. I’ve observed you noticing me. But that’s nothing. It’s the mind.”

“What of the mind?”

“Oh, how should I know? Dreams, imaginations, sensations, impulses. Yes, impulses.” He grew pale as he repeated the word.

“Can’t you be more precise?”

“I can’t; the thing’s vague.” He paused a moment; and then his features altered, a look of deep agony passed over them. “Somebody is hunting me,” he cried, “somebody’s hunting me.”

A great dread and sickness of the heart seized upon Armand Sieurcaye as he looked at his brother-in-law.

“Steady!” he cried, “it’s a nervous disorder, of course, nothing more. But you are hiding something from me. That won’t do.”

“Nerves? Don’t tell me I’m going mad! Or if I am, prevent it, for Isabel’s sake.”

“Of course, I’ll prevent it. But you have got to be frank with me. I must know everything.”

A visible hesitation held Richard for a few seconds, then he said, “I’ve told all I can think of, all that’s definite.” Then, suddenly, striking the arm of his chair with his closed hand, “It’s this beastly house,” he cried, “There’s something in it! There’s something in it that ought not to be there.”

“If you think so, you must leave it till your nerves are restored. Look here, why not take John’s yacht and go for a cruise, oh, to America, if you like, — or to Japan? Japan will give you a longer spell of the sea.”

“I’ll do it,” cried Richard Lancaster, “as soon as Isabel’s safe through this, I’ll go. Thank you, Armand.” And with a look of great relief on his face, he rose and left the room.

Armand had not much time to ponder over this singular interview, though certain phrases Richard had used kept ringing in his brain; for that night the pangs of childbirth came upon Isabel and she was safely delivered of a male child. An heir was born to the dying house of Abelard. The strong health of Isabel Abelard easily shook from it the effects of the strain. There was no danger for her and the child seemed likely to inherit the robust physique of his parents. As for Richard, he was joyous, at ease and seemed to have put from him his idea of a flight from Abelard.

But on the third night after the delivery Armand Sieurcaye had troubled dreams and wandered through strange afflictions; the rustling of a dress haunted him; a pang of terror; a movement of agony seemed to come from someone's heart into his own, and there was a laughter in the air he did not love. And in the grey of the autumn morning, Stephen Abelard with a strange look in his eyes stood by his side.

"Get up, Armand, dress and come. Do not disturb Aloyse."

In three minutes Armand was outside on the landing where Stephen Abelard was pacing to and fro under the whip of the sorrow that had lashed upon him.

"Isabel is dead," he said briefly.

With a dull brain that refused to think Armand followed the father to the death-chamber of his child. The wall lamp was flaring high above the bed. A night lamp that no one had thought to put out, burned on the toilette table. In a chair far from the bed Richard Lancaster with his face hidden in his hands sat rocking himself, his body shaken by sobs. When Armand entered, he uncovered his face, cast at him a tragic look from eyes full of tears, and went swaying from the room.

Armand stood at the bedside and looked at the dead girl. As he looked, a pang of fear troubled his heart, for his practised perceptions, familiar with many kinds of death gave him an appalling intimation. Isabel had not died easily! Then something peculiar in the pose of the head and neck struck his awakened brain. He bent down suddenly, rose as suddenly, his olive face yellow with some strong emotion, strode to the

toilette table, seized the night-lamp and returning held it to Isabel's neck.

"What is it?" asked Stephen Abelard. One could see that he was holding himself tight to meet a possible shock. Armand carefully put back the lamp where it had stood and returned to the bedside before he answered. In the shock of his discovery he had forgotten his surroundings, forgotten to whom he was about to speak.

"It is a murder," he said, slowly and mechanically.

"Armand!"

"It is a murder," he continued, unheeding the cry of the father, "I cannot be mistaken. And effected by unusual means. There is a spot in the body which has only to be found by the fingers and receive a peculiar pressure and a man dies suddenly, surely, with so light a trace only the eyes of the initiate can discover it — not even a trace, only an indication, but a sure indication. The Japanese wrestlers know the device, but do not impart it except to those who are too self-disciplined to abuse it. That is what has been done here."

Stephen Abelard seized Armand's shoulder with a tense, violent grip. "Armand," he cried, "Who besides yourself knows of this means of murder?"

"John Lancaster knows it."

Stephen's hand fell simply from his son-in-law's shoulder. After a time he said in a voice that was again calm, "Armand, my child died of heart failure as so many of the Abelards have done."

"It is best so," replied Armand Sieurcaye.

"Now go, Armand," continued Stephen quietly, "go and leave me alone with my child."

Armand did not return to his chamber, but went into the sitting-room, lighted a candle and sat, looking at the chair in which Richard Abelard had consulted him only three days ago. John Lancaster, Richard's brother, who alone near Orringham knew of the Japanese secret! What share had John Lancaster, friend of Armand Sieurcaye, in the murder of Isabel Abelard? Was it for his entry that Richard had provided by the duplicate

key, by his strange and perilous manoeuvres with the ivy and the balcony room? But why not open the front door for him, or leave unshuttered one of the lower windows, a much easier and less dangerous passage? Then he remembered that the great dog, Brilliant, lay at the bottom of the stairs and would not allow any but an inmate to pass unchallenged. John Lancaster was his friend, his benefactor, but Armand knew the man, a reckless flamboyant profligate capable of the most glorious and self-immolating actions and capable equally of the most cruel and cynical crimes. He remembered, too, how he himself had taught John that peculiar trick of the Japanese art of slaying. In a certain sense he himself was responsible for Isabel's death. How wise were the Eastern in their rigid reticence when they taught only to prepared and disciplined natures the secrets that might be misused to harm mankind! And then his mind travelled to Isabel and her sorrowful end slain in the supreme moment of a woman's joy by the husband she loved. What grim and inexorable Power ruling the world, Fate, Chance, Providence, had singled out for this doom a girl whose whole life had been an innocent shedding of sunshine on all who came near! Providence! He smiled. There were still fools who believed in an overruling Providence, a wise and compassionate God! And then the insoluble problem returned to baffle his mind, what possible motive moved Richard to compass this heartless crime or John to assist him?

All that day of sorrow Richard was absent from the house, and Armand had no chance of probing him. It was late at night, about eleven, that he entered. Armand met him on his way to his room, candle in hand.

"I would like a word with you, Richard," he said.

Richard turned on him, laughing with a terrible gaiety. "No use, Doctor Armand. You could not save me, you see. The thing was too strong. Mark my words, the thing will be too strong even for you." And he strode to his room leaving Armand amazed on the staircase.

Aloyse had elected to sleep that night with her dead sister's child, and Armand once more found himself alone in Bertha

Abelard's chamber with no companion except the locked door, accomplice perhaps in the tragedy that had darkened the house. Again his slumbers were troubled and he dreamed always of the locked door open and someone traversing the room on a mission of evil, a work of horror. He woke with a start, his heart in him dull and heavy as lead and full of the conviction, which it called knowledge, that the tragedy was not finished but more crimes mysterious and unnatural were about to pollute the old walls of Abelard. Then his thought flew to Aloyse. He dressed himself hastily and went to the room where she was sleeping. Aloyse was asleep and the child's nurse slept on a bed some five feet away, but Armand cast only a fleeting glance at the two women, for between the beds was the cradle of Isabel's child and over it was a figure stooping, and as it lifted its face towards the opened door, he saw a face that was and yet was not the face of Richard Lancaster. Richard immediately moved over to the door. As he moved, Armand drew away from it with the first pang of absolute terror in his heart he had ever experienced since his childhood. Richard Lancaster noted the emotion and it seemed to amuse him, for he laughed. And again there was something in the laugh that was not in the laugh of Richard Lancaster or of any human mirth to which Armand Sieurcaye had ever listened. As soon as Richard had left the room, Armand almost ran to the door, locked it and sat down at his wife's bedside shaking with an excitement he could not control. He soon recovered hold of his nerves, but he did not leave the room and its unconscious inmates. He sat there motionless till at four o'clock in the morning a light knock at the door startled him. When he opened it, Stephen Abelard entered. He took Armand's presence as a matter of course and went calmly to the side of the child and began looking down on the heir of his house, the little baby was all that was left to him of Isabel. When he turned from the cradle, Armand spoke.

"Sir, you must do something about Richard."

Stephen looked at him. "Come to my room, Armand," he said, "We will talk there." Before following Stephen, Armand woke the nurse and bade her watch over the child. "Lock the

door," he added, "and keep it locked till I return." As he went through the corridors, he passed Richard's room. The door was open, but the room absolutely dark; still his practised eyes perceived in the doorway a figure standing, which drew back when he looked at it, obviously not the figure of Richard, for it was shorter, slenderer. When he was entering Stephen's room, it occurred to him that he had unconsciously carried away in his mind the impression that it was the figure of a woman. After the first disagreeable feeling had passed, he shook the absurdity from him; it must have been the dressing-gown that gave him the idea of a woman's robe. After a brief talk with Stephen, the two were pulling in silence at the cigars they had lighted, when, perhaps half an hour after his leaving the nursery, someone knocked at the door and the nurse appeared and beckoned to Armand Sieurcaye. There was a look of terrible anxiety on her face that brought Armand striding to the door.

"Will you come, sir?" she said, "I don't know what's the matter with the child."

"Did you lock the door?" asked Armand, as they went.

The nurse looked troubled. "I thought I did, though I could not understand why you wanted it. But it seems I can't have turned the key well. For when I dozed off for two minutes, I woke to find the door open." Then she paused and added with great hesitation. "And almost felt, sir, as if I had noticed a woman in the room standing by the candle, but I was too sleepy to understand. It wasn't Mrs. Sieurcaye, for I had to wake her up afterwards."

A woman! And the locked door that opened! Armand groaned, he could understand nothing, but he knew what he would find even before he bent with the already awakened and anxious Aloyse over the dead child who had thus so swiftly followed his mother to the grave. And it was by the same way.

That morning Stephen Abelard spoke to his elder son-in-law. "Richard," he said, "you will start for your sea-voyage today. Take John's yacht at Bristol. You need not wait for the funeral nor mind what people will say. If I were you, I'd have a doctor on board."

Richard Lancaster was very calm and deliberate as he replied, "I had settled that, sir, before you spoke. I'm going on a long journey and I'm going direct, not by Bristol nor in the yacht. As you suggest, I'll not wait for the funeral and I'm past caring what people will say."

"Don't forget the doctor," insisted Stephen.

"The doctor can't come," said Richard. "And he would not like the voyage. I'm not mad, sir, — worse luck!" The two sons-in-law of Stephen Abelard left the house-steps together, Armand for a stroll in the grounds to steady his heated brain and his shaken nerves, Richard in the direction of the stables.

When Armand was returning to the house, a pale-faced groom ran up to him and pointed in the direction of the great avenue of stately trees before Abelard.

"Mr. Richard's lying there," he faltered, " — shot!"

Armand stood stock-still for a moment, then ran to the spot indicated. Of this last tragedy he had had no presentiment. What was it? What was this maddening and bloody tangle? This death-dance of an incomprehensible fate which had struck down mother, father and child in less than thirty hours? No gleam of motive, no shred of coherence illuminated the nightmare. His reason stood helpless at last in the maze. It was the locked door, he thought, that opened and revealed nothing. But his reason insisted. Richard Abelard was mad, and in his madness he had used the device John must have incautiously taught him to slay wife and child; and this last act of self-slaughter was the natural refuge of a disturbed brain made aware by Armand's looks and by Stephen's words of discovery.

Richard Abelard lay dead on the grass by the avenue, shot through the heart and the revolver lay fallen two feet from his outstretched and nerveless hand. Armand bending to assure himself that life was extinct, caught sight of a small piece of paper lying close to the knee of the dead man. When he rose, he turned to the groom, "Mr. Richard's dead," he said, "go and tell Mr. Abelard and bring men here to carry him in."

The man reluctantly departed and Armand caught up the paper and put it swiftly into his pocket. It was not till an hour

later that he had time to take it out in his parlour and look at it. As he had suspected, it was a brief note in Richard's handwriting, and thus it ran, brief, pointed, tragic, menacing:

“Armand, you knew! But it was not I, God is my witness, I am not guilty of murder. I can say no more; but in mercy to Aloyse, look to yourself!”

For a long time Armand Sieurcaye held in his hand the dead man's mysterious warning. Then he flung it into the fire and watched its whiteness blacken, shrivel and turn into ashes.

(Incomplete)

The Devil's Mastiff

THERE had been a heavy fall throughout the whole of that December day. The roads were white and indistinguishable in a thick pall of moonlight and dazzling snow; here and there a drift betrayed the footing. In the sky a bright moon pursued by clouds ran timidly up the ascent of the firmament; great arms of darkness sometimes closed over it; sometimes it emerged and proceeded with its still luminous race, ran, swayed, floated, glided forward intently, unflinching. Patrick Curran, treading uncautiously the white uncertain flooring of earth, stumbling into snowdrifts, scouting into temporary darkness for his right road, cursed the weather and his fortunes.

"It is not enough," he complained, "that I should be a proscribed fugitive hiding my head in every uncertain refuge from the pursuit of this devil's Cromwell, doomed already to the gallows, owing my life every day to the trembling compassion of my poor father's tenants; it is not enough that I should have lost Alicia and that Luke Walter should have her; but the very moon and the snow and the night are his allies against me. Since God is so hard on me, I wonder why the devil does not come to my help — I would sell my soul to him this moment willingly. But perhaps he too is afraid of Cromwell."

"It is hardly probable," said a voice at his side suddenly.

Patrick Curran turned with a fierce start and clutched at his dagger. He was aware in the darkness of a dim form pacing beside him with a step much quieter and more assured than his own.

"Who are you?" he cried, rigid and menacing.

"A wayfarer like yourself," said the other, "I travel earth as a fugitive."

"From whom or what?" asked Patrick.

"How shall I say?" said the shadow, "Perhaps from my own thoughts, perhaps from a too powerful enemy."

After the discovery of the recent conspiracy to murder Cromwell and restore Charles Stuart, the country was full of Royalist fugitives, hiding by day, travelling by night, in the hope of reaching a port whence they could sail for Ostende or Calais. For the inquisitions of the Republican magistrates were imperative and indiscriminating.

"I would give," he said to himself, "my soul and the rest of my allotted days as a free gift to Satan, if I might once clasp Alicia in my arms and take with me into Hell the warm sense of the joy of her body and if I might see Luke Walter dead before me or be sure he was following me. Oh if I can once be sure of that, let the brown dog of the Dacres leap on me the next moment, I care not."

"You may be sure of it," answered the voice at his side, strangely sweet, yet to Patrick's ear formidable. He turned, thrilling.

"You must be the devil himself," he almost shouted.

"I may be only one who can read your thoughts," said the other in that sweet sinister voice which made the young man fancy sometimes that a woman spoke to him. "And that I can, you will easily judge when I have told you a very little of what I know of you. You are Patrick, the second son of Sir Gerald Curran who got his estate from his wife, Margaret Dacre, his baronetcy from King James and his death from Cromwell who took him prisoner at Worcester and hanged him. You were to have married Lady Alicia Nevil, when the conspiracy of which you were one of the heads as well as the hand destined to strike down the Puritan tyrant, was discovered by the discernment, luck and ruthless skill of Colonel Luke Walter."

The young Cavalier started and uttered a furious imprecation.

"It was he," said the other, "he has great brain-power and penetration and a resolute genius. It is even possible he may succeed Cromwell, if the God of the Puritans gives him a lease long enough."

"If I have the chance, I will shorten it," cried Patrick Curran.

"Or I," said the unknown, "for just now I too am a Royalist.

But to proceed. You were proclaimed and doomed to a felon's death in your absence; the Earl, implicated in the conspiracy, was compelled as the price of his pardon to betroth his daughter to Luke Walter, and the marriage is fixed for tonight."

"Tonight!" groaned the young man, and he smote his thigh miserably with his hand.

"At the Church of Worndale."

"But will it matter if Luke Walter perishes before he has consummated his nuptials?"

"I promise you that," said the unknown. "It does not suit you that Alicia should marry another. It does not suit me that there should be a strong successor to Cromwell. Charles Stuart is my good friend, and I wish that he should rule England. Therefore, Patrick, it is a bargain."

"Who the devil are you?" cried the young man again, marvelling.

As if to answer the moon peeped out from between two heavy angry masses of black cloud, illumining the earth's intense and inclement whiteness. He saw beside him a young man of remarkable beauty, whose face was perfectly familiar, but his name could not be remembered.

"As for your soul and your life," said the stranger, and as their eyes met, Patrick shuddered, "you need not give them to the devil whether freely or as part of the bargain, for they are already his."

He laughed a laugh of terrible and ominous sweetness, and in a moment Patrick remembered. He knew that laugh, he knew that face. They were his own.

At that moment the moon passed away into the second fragment of cloud. Patrick stood, unable to speak, looking at the dim shadow in front of him. Then it vanished.

It was sometime before the young man could command himself sufficiently to pursue his way. He tried to think for a moment that it was John Dacre, the illegitimate son of Sir Gerald by his sister-in-law Matilda Dacre, who resembled Patrick strongly and was his sworn comrade and lover. But he knew it was not John. That was not John's face or John's speech or

John's thinking. It must have been a vivid dream or a waking illusion. He walked forward in the darkness, greatly disturbed, but with recovered courage.

Again the moon shone out, this time with a clear gulf of sky just in front of her. Before Patrick the white road stretched long, straight and visible to a great distance and was marked out here by high snow-covered hedge from the equally white indistinguishable country around.

"Come now, that is better," said Patrick Curran. As he spoke, he saw far off on the road a dark object travelling towards him; he slackened his pace and was minded to turn off the road to avoid it. But it was approaching with phenomenal speed. As it came nearer, he saw that it was only a dog. Again Patrick stood still. A dog! There was nothing in that. It was not what he had feared. But he remembered that singular conversation and the impious prayer that had arisen in his heart about the brown dog of the Dacres, — the dog which showed itself always when a Dacre was about to die and leaped on him whenever the doom was by violence. He smiled, but a little uncertainly. Then the moonlight seemed to dwell on the swiftly-travelling animal more intensely and he saw that it was brown.

Never had Patrick seen any earthly thing master of such a terrible speed. It ran, it galloped, it bounded, and the wretched man watching the terrific charge of that phantasmal monster, — for it was a gigantic mastiff, — felt his heart stop and his warm youthful blood congeal in his veins. It was now within twenty paces; he felt the huge eyes upon him and knew that it was going to leap. He went down heavily with the ponderous frame of the animal oppressing his breast, its leonine paws on his shoulders, its hot breathing moistening his face. And then there was nothing.

That was the most terrible part of it, to have been borne down physically by a semblance, an unearthly hallucination, a thing that was this moment and the next was not. Patrick struggled to his feet, overcome by a panic terror; his nerves cried to him to run, to travel away quickly from this accursed night and this road of ghastly encounters. But he felt as if ham-

strung, helpless, clutched by an intangible destruction. He sat down on the snow, panted and waited.

After a few minutes the blood began to flow more quietly through his veins, the pounding of his heart slackened and the sick agitation of his nerves yielded to a sudden fiery inrush. He leaped furiously to his feet. "The Dog of the Dacres," he cried, "the brown Dog, the Devil's Mastiff! And no doubt it was his master spoke to me in my own semblance. I am doomed, then. But not to the gallows. No, by God, not to the gallows. God's doom and the devil's, since I can resist neither, but not man's, not Cromwell's!" Then he paused. "Tonight!" he cried again. "At Worndale Church! But I will see her once before I go down to Hell. And it may be I shall take Luke Walter with me. It may be that is what the Devil wants of me."

He looked about the landscape and thought he could distinguish the trees that bordered the distant Church of Worn-dale. That was in front of him. Also in front, but much more to the left, was Trevesham Hall, the home of Alicia Nevil. He began walking rapidly, no longer with his first cautious and doubtful treading, but with a bold reckless stride. And it was noticeable that he no longer stumbled or floundered into snowdrifts. Patrick knew that he had only a few brief inches of his life's road left to his treading; for no man of the Dacre blood had ever lived more than twenty-four hours after the Brown Dog leaped on him. A desperate courage had entered into his veins. He would see

(Incomplete)

The Golden Bird

IT WAS in the forests of Asan that the Golden Bird first flew out from a flower-besieged thicket and fluttered before the dazzled eyes of Luilla. It was in the forests of Asan, — the open and impenetrable, the haunt of the dancers and untrodden of human feet, coiling place of the cobra and the Python, lair of the lion and jaguar, formidable retreat of the fleeing antelope, yet the green home of human safety where a man and a maiden could walk in the moonlit night and hear unconcerned the far-off broil of the Kings of the wilderness. It was into the friendly and open places that the golden bird fluttered, but it came no less from the coverts of dread and mystery. From the death and the night it flew out into the sunlight where Luilla was happily straying.

Luilla loved to wander on the verges of danger, just where those flower-besieged thickets began and formed for miles together a thorny and tangled rampart full at once of allurements and menace. She did not venture in, for she had a great fear of the thorns and brambles and a high respect for her radiant beauty, her own constant object of worship and the daily delight of all who dwell for a while on earth labouring the easy and kindly soil on the verges of the forests of Asan. But always she wandered close to the flowery wall and her mind, safe in its voluntary incorporeality, strayed like a many-hued butterfly, far into the forbidden region which the gods had so carefully secluded. Perhaps secretly she hoped that some day some kingly and leonine head would thrust itself out through the flowers and compel her with a gaze of friendly and majestic invitation or else that the green poisonous head of a serpent reposing itself on a flower would scrutinise her out of narrow eyes and express a cunning approval of her beauty. It was not out of fear of the lions and the serpents that Luilla forbore to enter the secret places. She knew she could overcome the most ferocious intentions of any

destroyer in the world, firm-footed or footless, if only he would give her three minutes before making up his mind to eat or bite her. But neither lion nor serpent strayed out of these appointed haunts. It was the golden bird that first fluttered out from the thickets to Luilla.

Luilla looked at it as it flitted from bough to bough, and her eyes were dazzled and her soul wondered. For the little body of the bird was an inconstant flame of flying and fleeting gold and the wings that opened and fluttered were of living gold and the small shapely head was crested gold and the long graceful quivering tail was trailing feathered gold; all was gold about the bird, except the eyes and they were two jewels of a soft everchanging colour and sheltered strange-looking depths of love and thought in their gentle brilliance. On the bough where it perched, it seemed as if all the soft-shaded leaves were suddenly sunlit. For as Luilla accustomed her eyes to the flickering brightness of the golden bird, it hovered at last on a branch, settled and sang. And its voice also was of gold.

The bird sang in its own high secret language; but Luilla's ear understood its thoughts and in Luilla's soul as it thirsted and listened and trembled with delight, the song shaped itself easily into human speech. This then was what the bird sang — the bird that came out of the Death's night, sang to Luilla a song of beauty and of delight:

“Luilla! Luilla! Luilla! green and beautiful are the meadows where the children run and pluck the flowers and green and beautiful the pastures where the calm-eyed cattle graze, green and beautiful the corn-field ripening on the village bounds, but greener are the impenetrable thickets of Asan than her open places of life, and more beautiful than the meadows and the pastures and the cornfields are the forests of death and night. More ensnaring to some is the danger of the jaguar than the attractive face of a child, more welcome the foot-tracks of the lion as it haunts the pastures of the cattle, more fair and fruitful the thorn and the wild briar than the fields full of ripening grain. And this I know that no such flowers bloom in the safety and ease of Asan's meadows, though they make a thick and divine

treading for luxurious feet, as I have seen blooming on the borders of the wild morass, in the heart of the bramble thicket and over the mouth of the serpent's lair. Shall I not take thee, O Luilla! into those woods? Thou shalt pluck the flowers in the forests of night and death, thou shalt lay thy hands on the lion's mane.

O Luilla! O Luilla! O Luilla!"

J U V E N I L I A

THE WITCH OF ILNI

A Dream of the Woodlands

CHARACTERS

CORILLO : prince of Ilni

VALENTINE : a courtier

IAMBlichus

PALLEAS

MARCION

} foresters

MELANDER : a sylvan poet

FORESTERS : courtiers

ALACIEL : the witch of Ilni

GUENDOLEN : her sister

MYRTIL

DORIS

HERMENGILD

or

ERMENILD

} forest damsels

GIRLS OF THE FOREST

PERSONAE MUTAE

The Witch of Ilni

The Woodlands of Ilni.

Girls and youths dancing.

Song

Under the darkling tree
Who danceth with thee,
Sister, say?
His hair is the sweet sunlight
His eyes a starry night
In May.

Under the leaf-wrought screen
Who crowns thee his queen
Kissing thee?
His lips are a ruby bright,
His cheek the May-bloom's light
On the tree.

Under the grass-green bough
Whom pillowest thou
On thy breast?
His voice is a swallow's flight,
His limbs are jonquils white
Dewy drest.

IAMBlichus

Unwind the linkèd rapture of the dance!
For in the purple verge and slope of morn
Fast-flowering blooms, fire-robed and honey-haired,
In stainless wastes the daffodil of heaven.
Here till the golden-handed sun upbuilds
The morning's cenotaph blue-domed and vast,
On daisy-dotted bank where sunlight nods

We'll spin a curious weft of eerie tales.

MYRTIL

Be it so. But what occupation stays
Our deftest in the jewelry of rhymes,
Our liberal dispenser of sweet words,
Our laureate with the throstle in his throat?
Sleeps he so long? who saw Melander last,
Melander ashbud-browed with April hair?

HERMENGILD

Before the russet-hooded morn gave birth
In Day's embraces to the fire-eyed sun
I spied him nigh a mossy mantled cave
Which rosy trailers draped, and at his side
The silver-seeming witch Alaciel.

MYRTIL

Pray God, the black-haired witch may do no harm!
She is most potent and her science plucks
The ruby nightshade, Hecate's deadly plum,
Soul-killing meadow-sweet, the hemlock starred
And berries brown, crushed in the vats of death,
Her mother's hell-brewed legacy of arts.

MARCION

Were it not wisely done to call him hither?

IAMBLICUS

'Tis wisely urged, good Marcion, make good haste
And drench thy words in Hybla's golden milk
To lure him thence. But you with dance and song
Beguile the laggard moments into joy.

Exit Marcion.

A glade in the woodlands.

ALACIEL

Why wilt thou go? Noon has not budded, sweet.
Fresh-fallen dew stars yet the silvered grass,
The leaves are lyrical with lisp of birds
And piping voices flutter thro' the grove.
Repose thyself where blue-eyed violet
Is married to that bugle of pale gold
We call the cowslip, and I'll chain thee here
With flowery bands of rosebud-linkèd tales
Or murmur Orphic falls to draw thy soul
Upon the smoother wings of measured song.
Noon has not budded, sweet. Why wilt thou go?

MELANDER

The sylvan youths expect my lyric touch
To guild their leisure: nor am I so bold
To linger by thy snowy side too long
Whom men call perilous. Oh thou art fair!
Dawn reddens in thy vermil-tinted cheeks
And on thy tresses pansy-purple night
Hangs balsam-drenched with dewdrops for her stars.
Thou art a flower with candid petals wide,
Moon-flushed, most innocent-seeming to the eye;
But in thy cup, they say, lurks venomèd wine
Which whoso sucks, pale Hades on him lays
Ensnaring arms to drag from the sweet sun.

ALACIEL

Whom will not Envy's livid tooth assail?
'Tis true my wisdom dwarfs their ignorance;
That is most true: for in my fledgeling days
When callow childhood loved the rushy nest,
My mother drew my steps thro' fretted walks,
Rose-rubied gardens, acorn-pelted glades.
Green seas of pasture, rural sweeps of bloom,

And taught the florid sensuous dialect
Of simple plants. This way I learned to love
The shining sisterhood of rhythmic names.
Roses and lilies, honey-hiding thyme
Pied gilliflowers, painted wind-blossoms,
Gold crocus, milky bell, sweet marjoram
Fire-coloured furze and wayside honey-suckle.
Nor these alone, but all the helpful plants
Gave me the liquid essence of their souls
Potent to help or hurt, to cure or kill.
Indeed the milky juice of pungent roots
I poured you in that curious walnut cup
With moderation just, were in excess
More deadly than the hemlock's dooming wine.

Melander

It fused new blood into my pulsing veins
Raising me twice the stature of a soul.

ALACIEL

'Tis margarite, the rare and pungent root,
That brewed this foamy vintage in his wand.
For twixt the bulb and pithy texture wrapt
You find a pod nut-form with misty skin,
In size no bigger than the early grape
But full and sweet with honey-tempered wine.
Such are my potions, philtres, poisons, drugs,
Distempered brews, and all the juggling arts
Your ignorance rebukes my wisdom with.

MELANDER

From such sweet lips when popped utterance falls,
The carping spirit of disdain must sleep;
For subtler logic drops in simple words
From woman's tongue, than phraseful orator
Or fine scholastic wit may offer up
On his.

ALACIEL

Sweet youth, why should I net you with deceit?
Ah yet, in truth you are too beautiful!
Come, you are skilled in phrases, are you not?
You dice with women's hearts — they tell me 'tis
A pastime much in vogue with idle youths.
(The philtre works: his eyelids brim with dew.)
You throw coggled dice with women for their souls,
You barter with them and deny the price,
Is it not so? (O rare, fine margarite!)
Oh you are deft at such deceits: you make
Your beauty lime to cozen linnets with
And bid them sing, if they'd have sustenance.
Oh you will not deceive me, think it not:
You are just such a fowler to my guess.

MELANDER

Dear linnet, did I lime you in my nets,
One fine, sweet Hamadryad note would lift
The tangle from your wild-rose-petal wings.

ALACIEL

Ah but when lurking faces flower the bush,
Wild birds mock expectation with wild wings.

MELANDER

Nay, dear, you shall not go: I have you fast.
Come, where's your ransom? the sweet single note
I bargained for, ere you may climb the winds?
Prune not your fluttering wings: I have you fast.

ALACIEL

I pray you, make not earnest of my jest.
You are too quick: you shall not have a stiver,
No, not a coin to bless repentance with.

MELANDER

Then I will pay myself, sweet: from that warm

Moist blow the breezes with the myrrhy tears
Of pining night, and ruffle every blade
That keeps his pearls from clutch of dewy thieves
Until their indignation murmur past
From airy flute, from seraph-stringèd harp
A daedal rain of music drop on drop
Wells past to rule the waft of dove-like feet.
The clustered edges of close heapèd thyme,
A murmurous haven souled by merchant bees,
Are crumbling into fragrance and young flowers
Make fat by their decay the greedy earth,
While golden youths and silver feet of girls
Pass fluttering as with glimpse of gorgeous hues
A fleet of moths on emigrating winds.
There you shall see upon the pearlèd grass
The forest antelope, brown Hermengild,
Iamblichus the honey-hearted boy,
Rose-cheeked Iamblichus with roses wreathed,
And Myrtil honey-haired, our woodland moon,
Myrtil the white, a silver loveliness,
But tipped with gold. Thou only lingerest:
Only thy voice, the pilot of our moods,
Only thy thrush-lips welling facile rhymes
Mar the sweet harmonies of holiday
With one chord missing from the clamorous harp.

MELANDER

I thank you, Marcion, for your careful pain
But cannot guerdon you with more than thanks.
I am not well: the fumes of midnight thought
Unfit me for a holiday attire.

MARCION

Fie, fie, Melander: when have you before
Denied the riches of your tongue to eke
Our poorness with? The forest waits for you
Dew-drenched with tears because you will not come.

MELANDER

Well, I will go with you, but not for long.
I'll join you where deep-cushioned in soft grass
The stream turns inward like a scimitar.
Go on before, I pray you. I will come.

Exit Marcion.

ALACIEL

There, there, I said so! you are docile, sir.
Indeed I did not spy the leading-strings,
But they must be there. 'Twas your paedagogue,
Was it not, come to fetch the truant back?

MELANDER

Dear, be not vexed with me. I will return
Ere noon has dotted with her golden ball
The eminence of heaven. It seems not well,
When judgment has decreed the award of merit,
To disappoint Persuasion of her prize:
In sweetly cultured minds civility
Breathes music to the touch of wooing words.

ALACIEL

Oh words and words enough! but what's the gist,
The run, the purport? Tush, a chattering pie,
A pie that steals and chatters, would not deign
To jeer this flaunting daw. What, did he deem
His gaudy colony of phrases roofed
The meaning from my eyes? The prosing fool
Fibs very vilely: why, he has not conned
The rudiments and letters of his craft.

MELANDER

You do miscall sincerest courtesy,
Sweet courtesy that solders our conditions
Into the builded structure of a state.

ALACIEL

Yes, till the winds unbuild it for worse ruin.
But go your way. I'll know you as a man
That honeys leisure with a lovely face
And coins sweet perjuries to make the hearts
Of women bankrupt. No defence, I pray you.
I'll have no slices of your company.

MELANDER

Leave wrangling, sweet, and tell me soft and kind
Where shall I see you next? I may not tarry.

ALACIEL

Why, nowhere: for I'll not receive you, sir.
But if you love a door shut in your face
Come to my cottage on the forest's hem
Where rarer thickets melt into the plain.

MELANDER

Thither I will outstrip the climbing noon.
For this one tedious hour, dear love, farewell.

ALACIEL

I pray you, sweet, do not break promise with me,
For that will kill me. I will think of you
And comfort solitude with sighs and tears
Until you dawn afresh, a noontide star.

Exeunt.

The Woodlands as at first.

Foresters and Girls.

Melander leans against a tree absorbed in thought: in one group Marcion and Ermenild are talking: in another Iamblichus and Myrtil: Myrtil comes forward.

MYRTIL

What passion, dear Melander, numbs thy voice?
 Why wilt thou cherish humorous peevishness,
 The nursling of a moment and a mood?
 Now kernelled in the golden husk of day
 Pale night with all her pomp of sorrow sleeps,
 And stinted of soft-clinging melancholy
 The elegiac nightingale is hushed,
 Of melancholy from whose sombre grape
 She crushes music out in foamy drops.
 But all the votarists of happy Light,
 A rainbow-throated anarchy of wings,
 Lift anthems to the young viceregent sun:
 Behind green curtains woven of fibrous baize
 His lyric thrill unmasks the robin brown,
 White with soft passion-pained moan the dove
 Murmurs his love-notes in the long-lived elm:
 The linnet pipes his simple pastoral,
 Nay, all the winged poets of the air
 Recite their stanzas from the pulpit sprays.
 Why is thy crimson house of music shut,
 Thy lips that passion into murmured song?

MELANDER

Sweet friend, my spirit is too deeply hued
 With sombre-sweet Imagination's brush
 To dress the nimble spirit of the dance
 In lilt of phrase and honey-packing rhyme.
 I pray you, urge it not. I am not well.

IAMBlichus

Urge him no more. The rash and humorous spirit
That governs him at times, will not be schooled,
But since the sweetest tongue of all is mute
Some harsher voice prick on the creeping hour.

MYRTIL

Ah no, Iamblichus! when winds are hushed
Fall then the clapping cymbals of the sea
And every green-haired dancing girl downdrops
Her foam-tipped sinuous wand to kiss her feet!
The loss of sweetest palls what is but sweet,
For should the honey-throated mavis die,
Who in the laughing linnet takes delight
Or lends ear to the rhyming hedge-priest wren?
Let us not challenge passion-pale regret,
But hand-in-hand down ruby-tinted walks
Gather the poppies of sweet speech, to press
For opiates when dank autumn looms and Life
Is empty of her rose. Were not this well?

IAMBlichus

Thy words are sweet as joy, more wise than sorrow.
Come, friends, let us steal honey from the hours
For memory to suck when winter comes.

Exeunt all but Melander.

MELANDER

Ask me, what drug Circean wakes in me?
My blood steals from my heart like pulsing fire
And the fresh sap exudes upon my brow.
O faster, faster urge thy golden wheels,
Thou sun that like a fiery lizard creepst
Glib-footed to the parapet of heaven!
Oh that my hand might clutch thy saffron curls
And thrust thee in the loud Atlantic! So
The violet manes of Evening may drink up

The sweet, damp wind, so dawn the ivory moon
And lurk shy-peeping in my darling's eyes.
For my desire is like the passionate sea
That calls unto her paramour the wind
And only hears a strangled murmur pant,
Mute, muffled by the hollow-breasted hills.

Enter Iamblichus with Myrtil in his arms.

MYRTIL

No farther drag my steps, Iamblichus!
I am not fond to bow my doating neck
Under your feet, like other woodland girls
Who image beauty's model in your shape,
Heaven in your eyes and nectar in your kiss.
Fie, fie, be modest, sir. Let go your grasp.

* * *

Ah me, again a sea of subtle fire
Clamours about the ruby gates of Life!
My soul, expanding like a Pythian seer
Thrives upon torture, and the insurgent blood,
Swollen as with wine, menaces mutiny.
How slowly buildst thou up the spacious noon
To dome thy house, O architect of day!
Not from the bubbling smithy where Love works
Smooth Hebe fetched thy world-revealing fires;
Nor to the foam-bound bride-bed of the sea
Thou sailest, but like one with doom foreseen
Whose bourne and culmination lapses down
To sunless hell. Hope thou not to set out
My seasons in the golden ink of day:
My heart anticipates the pilot moon
Who steers the cloudy-wimpled night. Pale orb,
Thou art no symbol for my burning soul:

Lag thou behind or lag not, I will lead.

He is going out.

Re-enter foresters with Palleas.

MARCION

What's this, Melander? Noon not yet has sealed
His titles with the signet of the sun.
'Tis early yet to leave. Why will you go?

MELANDER

I am bound down by iron promises,
The hour named. Would I not linger else?
Even now the promise has outstript the act.

MYRTIL

Melander, do not go.

MELANDER

Dear child, I must.

IAMBlichus

Come, come, you shall not go. 'Tis most unkind,
Let me not say uncourteous, to withdraw
The sunshine of your presence from this day,
Our little day of unmixed joy. Be ruled.

PALLEAS

Boy, let me 'counsel you. This eager fit
And hot eruption does much detriment
To youth and bodes no good to waning years.
When I was young, I ruled my dancing blood,
Abstained from brabbles, women, verses, wine,
And now you see me bask in hale old age
Mid Autumn's gilded ruin one green leaf.
Life's palate dulls with much intemperance,
And whoso breaks the law, the law shall break.
Love is a specious angler —

MELANDER

Dotard, off!

Confide thy heavy rumours to the grave
Where thou shouldst now be rotting.

Exit.

Act Three

SCENE I

Before Alaciel's House.

GUENDOLEN

But what you tell me is not credible.
Could Love at the prime vision slip your fence
And his red bees wing humming to your heart?
What, at the premier interchange of eyes
Seed bulged into the bud, the bud to flower,
Bloom waxing into fruit? can passion sink
Thus deep embedded in a maiden soil?
Masks not your love in an unwonted guise?

ALACIEL

Sweet girl, you are a casket yet unused,
A fair, unprinted page. These mysteries
Are alien to your grasp, until Love pen
His novel lithograph and write in you
Songs bubbling with the music of a name.
Oh, I am faster tangled in his eyes
Than, in the net smoke-blasted Vulcan threw,
Foam-bosomed Cytherea to her Mars.

GUENDOLEN

But will'he push his fancy to your bent.

ALACIEL

How else? for in the coy glance of a girl
A subtle sorcery lies that draws men on
As with a thread, nor snaps not ere it should.
Love's palate is with acid flowers edged
When what the lips repel, the eyes invite.

GUENDOLEN

Have you forgotten then, my sister, how
 Since war's ensanguined dice have thrown a cast
 So fatal to our peace, the sweet confines
 Of Ilni and her primitive content
 Are hedged and meted by the savage Law?

ALACIEL

Child, I have not forgotten; but first love
 Poseidon-like submerges with his sea
 All barriers, and the checks that men oppose
 But make him fret and spume against the sky.
 Who shall withstand him? not the gnawing flame
 Nor toothèd rocks nor gorgon-fronted piles
 Nor metal bars; thro' all he walks unharmed.
 But lo where on the forest's lip there dawns
 My noon-star in the garish paths of day
 He should not see you, sweet. Prithee, go in.

Enter Melander.

How now? was this your compact? Lift your glance
 Where yet the primrose-pale Hyperion clings
 Upon the purple arches of the air
 Nor on the cornice prints his golden seal.
 You are too soon. Why with this fire-eyed haste
 Have you overshot the target of your vows?

MELANDER

Ah, cruel child! what hast thou done to me?
 What expiation in the balance pends
 Against thy fault? Not the low sweets of sound
 Fetched by thy piping tongue from ruby stops,
 Nor fluttering glances under velvet lids,
 Nor the rich tell-tale blush that sweetly steals
 As if a scarlet pencil would indite
 A love-song in thy cheeks. These candid brows,
 The hushed seraglio to thy veiled thoughts,
 These light wind-kissing feet, these milky paps

That peep twixt edge and loosely married edge,
Thy slumber-swollen purple-fringed orbs,
Thy hands, cinque-petalled rosebuds just apart
Beneath the wheedling kiss of spring, thy sides
Those continents of warm, unmelting snow,
All in the balance are but precious air.
Nay, with thy whole dear sum of beauties fill
The scale, it will not tremble to the dust
Save hooped upon thy breast my weight helps thine.
Therefore, dear girl, let thy necessity
Upon the linked union of our loves
Pronounce a solemn benediction.

ALACIEL

I owe you not a doit. You shall not have
So much of tender as will serve to buy
One grain of sand, one withered blade of grass.
My riches, sir, are in good coffers locked
And will evade a hungrier search than yours.

MELANDER

If you deny me my just claim, I'll snatch
You from yourself and torture with the whips
Of Love, till you disclose your hoardings. Oh
To seize this loaded honeycomb of bliss
And make a rich repast! Oh turn from me
The serious wonder of those orbéd fires!
Their lustre stabs my heart with agony.
Hide in thy hair those passion-moulded lips!
Veil up those milky glimpses from my sight!
Oh I will drag thy soul out in a kiss!
Wilt thou add fire to fire? Torture not
My longing with reluctance; forge not now
The pouted simulation of disdain.
Leap quick into my arms! there lose thyself.

(She embraces him)

Pardon me, sweet: thy beauties in my soul

Blow high the leaping billows of desire
And temperance is a wreck merged in his sea.

ALACIEL

Loveliest Melander, if I have offended,
Here like a Roman debtor yield I up
My body to thy mercy or thy doom.
Take my soul too! and in thy princely pomp
Let this rebellious heart that needs will fret
To be thy slave, be dragged to thralldom. See,
I hang, a lustrous jewel, on thy neck:
Break me or keep me! I am thine to keep
Or break: fear not to do thy utmost will.

MELANDER

Hang there till thou hast grown a part of me!
Ah yet, if passion be Love's natural priest
Let not his fire-lipped homage scare thy soul.
Thy ripe, unspotted girlhood give to me,
For which the whole world yearns. A gift is sweet
And thou, O subtle thief, hast stolen my calm
Who was before not indigent of bliss.
Oh closer yet! Let's glue our lips together,
That all eternity may be a kiss.

ALACIEL

What, will you bury me with kisses? Dear,
Be modest. Tell me why by a full hour
You outran expectation's reaching eye?

MELANDER

Inquire the glowing moon why she has dared
Forestal the set nor wait the ushering star;
Inquire the amorous wind why he has plucked,
Ere Autumn's breath have tempered with her hair,
Petal on crimson petal the red rose:
Nay, catechise the loud rebombing sea

Who in a thunderous summer dim with rain
 Conspired with hoarse rebellious winds to merge
 The lonely life of ocean-wading ships:
 Then ask fire-footed passion why his rage
 Has shipwrecked me upon thy silver breasts.
 Ah love, thyself the culprit, thine the fault,
 Alaciel, thou — O sweet unconscious sin! —
 Hast in my members kindled such a fire
 As only sorcery knows: which to atone
 Thy virgin hours must sweetly swoon to death
 While in the snowy summer of thy lap
 Kind Night shall cool these passion-melted limbs.
 When thou dost imitate the blushing rose,
 I swear thy tint is truer than the life,
 Than loveliness more lovely. Dearest one,
 Let naked Love abash the curtained prude.
 Shame was not made to burn thy field of roses
 Nor in this married excellence of hues
 Unfurl disorder's ruby-tinted flag.

ALACIEL

Dear, if I blush, 'tis modesty, not shame.
 I can refuse you nothing. When 'tis night
 And like a smile upon a virgin's lips
 Young moonlight dallies with a sleepy rose,
 Then come and call me gently twice and thrice,
 And I will answer you. Observe this well
 In that the harsh and beldam Law excludes
 Nature's sweet rites and Paphian marriage.
 Unless his bleared eyes be privy too.

MELANDER

O love, have you forgot the long elapse
 And weary pomp of hours ere the sun
 That follows now a path sincere of foam
 Make sanguine shipwreck on the lurid west?
 Scarce now his golden eye drops vertical

Upon the belt and midline of our scope.
Shorten your sentence by a term of hours
When I shall ease my pain. Turn caution out
To graze in nunneries: his sober feint
Of prudence suits not with a lover's tryst.

ALACIEL

Content you, sweet: let patience feed on hope.
Until night's purple awning bar from view
The hidden thefts of love. Nay, go not yet:
Sit here awhile until yon sloping disk
Swings prone above the poplar. Sweet, come in.

Exeunt.

SCENE II

Before Alaciel's house.

MELANDER (*alone*)

Now, for her widowed state is wooed by night
The sable-vested air puts on her stars
And in her bosom pins for brooch the moon.
She from her diamond chalice soon will pour
Her flowing glories on a rose's hair,
In pity of my love. Sweet crimson rose,
Alaciel's lamp, the beacon of my bliss,
O kindle quickly at the moon thy rays.
How happy art thou being near my love!
For thou who hast the perfume of her breath,
Why shouldst thou the spice-lippèd Zephyr want?
Her dove's feet whispering in the happy grass
Are surely lovelier to thee than the dawn;
Or wilt thou woo the world-embracing orb,
Who hast the splendour of her eyes to soothe
Thy slumber into waking? O red rose,
Might I but merge in thee, how would her touch
Thrill all my petals with delicious pain!
O could I pawn my beauty for a kiss,
How happy were I to waste all myself
In shreds of scarlet ruin at her feet!
It is my hour! for see, the cowslip-curlèd
Night-wandering patroness of lovers throws
Her lantern's orange-coloured beams, where sleeps
A bright, blown rose. Hail, empress of the stars!
Be thou tonight my hymeneal torch.
Alaciel! Echo, hush thy babbling tongue!
'Tis not Narcissus calls. I am a thief
Who steal from beauty's garden one sweet bud
Nor need like visitants thy tinkering bell.
Alaciel! O with thy opiate wand
Thought-killing Mercury, seal every eye

On whom the drowsy Morpheus has not breathed
Yet once again the charm. Alaciel!
Now at thy window dawn, thou lovelier moon,
Than sojourns in the sky! look out on me,
An ivory face thro' rippling clouds of hair.

*Enter Alaciel above.
Marcion and Doris behind.*

ALACIEL

Who calls?

FRAGMENT OF A DRAMA

ACHAB

Stamp out, stamp out the sun from the high blue
And all overarching firmament of heaven;
Forget the mighty ocean when it spumes
Under the thunder-deafened cliffs and soars
To crown their tops with spray, but never hope
That Baal will excuse, Baal forgive.
That's an ambition more impossible,
A thought more rebel from the truth.

ESAR

Baal!

It seems to me that thou believ'st in Baal!

ACHAB

And what dost thou believe in? The gross crowd
Believe the sun is God or else a stone.
This though I credit not, yet Baal lives.

ESAR

And if he lives, then you and I are Baal,
Deserve as much the prayer and sacrifice
As he does. Nay, then, sit and tell him, "Lord,
If thou art Baal, let the fire be lit
Upon thy altar without agency,
Let men believe." Can God do this, and if
He cannot, if he needs a flint and fuel
And human hands to light his sacred fire,
Is he not less than man? The flint and fuel
Are for our work sufficient. What is he
If not a helpless name that cannot live
Unless men's lips repeat him?

ACHAB

And the flint,

The fuel? Who made these or formed the hands
That lit the fire? the lips that prove him nothing?

Or who gave thee thy clear and sceptic brain,
Thy statecraft and thy bold and scornful will
Despising what thou usest? Was it thou
That mad'st them?

ESAR

No, my parents did. Say then
The seed is God that touched my mother's womb
And by familiar process built this house
Inhabited by Esarhaddon.

ACHAB

Who
Fashioned the seed?

ESAR

It grew from other seed,
That out of earth and water, light and heat,
And ether, eldest creature of the world.
All is a force that irresistibly
Works by its nature which it cannot help,
And that is I and that the wood and flint,
That Achab, that Assyria, that the world.

ACHAB

How came the force in being?

ESAR

From of old
It is.

ACHAB

Then why not call it Baal?

ESAR

For me
I care not what 'tis called, Mithra or God,
You call it Baal, Perizade says

'Tis Ormuzd, Mithra and the glorious sun.
I say 'tis force.

ACHAB

Then wherefore strive to change
Assyria's law, o'erthrow the cult of Baal?

ESAR

I do not, for it crumbles of itself.
Why keep the rubbish? Priest, I need a cult
More gentle and less bloody to the State,
Not crying at each turn for human blood
Which means the loss of so much labour, gold,
Soldiers and strength. This Mithra's worship is.
Come, priest, you are incredulous yourself,
But guard your trade; so do I mine, so all.
Will it be loss to you, if it be said
Baal and Mithra, these are one, but Baal
Changes and grows more mild and merciful,
A friend to men? Or if instead of blood's
Unprofitable revenue we give
Offerings of price, and heaps of captive gold
In place of conquered victims?

ACHAB

So you urge,
The people's minds are not so mobile yet.

ESAR

If you and I agree, who will refuse?
I care not, man, how it is done. Invent
Scriptures, forge ancient writings, let the wild
Mystics who slashed their limbs on Baal's hill,
Cry out the will of Baal while they slashed.
You are subtle, if you choose. The head of all
Assyria's state ecclesiastical,
Assured a twentieth of my revenues,

And right of all the offerings votaries heap
On Mithra, that's promotion more than any
Onan can give, the sullen silent slave,
Or Ikbal Sufas with his politic brain.

ACHAB

Why that?

ESAR

You think I do not know! I see
Each motion of your close conspiring brain,
Achab.

ACHAB

And if you do, why hold your hand?

ESAR

That's boldly questioned, almost honestly.
Because a State is ill preserved by blood,
The policy that sees a fissure here,
A wall in ill repair, and builds it up,
Is better than to raze the mansion down
And make it new. I know the people's mind
Sick of a malady no leech can name;
I see a dangerous motion in the soil,
And make my old foundations sure. Achab,
You know I have a sword, and yet it sleeps;
I offer you the gem upon the hilt
And friendship. Will you take it? See, I need
A brain as clear as yours, a heart as bold,
What should I do by killing you, but lose
A statesman born?

ACHAB

You have conquered, king, I yield.

ESAR

'Tis well. Here is my hand on our accord.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA is one of the early works of Sri Aurobindo on a major scale. Written in Baroda, it has a curious history attached to it. Sri Aurobindo seems to have had especial fondness for this early creation of his. He particularly mentioned it in the Introduction to *Collected Poems and Plays* as one of the two works lost—the other being a translation of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta (Cloud-Messenger)*.

By a strange turn of destiny the drama was recovered from the Government Archives in 1951 along with other manuscripts which had been exhibits in the Alipore Conspiracy Case.

This play was published in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1959, and also issued in book-form in the same year.

PRINCE OF EDUR was written, as noted in the manuscript, in 1907, that is to say, in the very thick of Sri Aurobindo's political activity. It is not complete as it has only three acts and not five. THE PRINCE OF MATHURA, available as a fragment and printed here for the first time, is a different version of the same theme.

PRINCE OF EDUR was first published in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1961.

THE MAID IN THE MILL and THE HOUSE OF BRUT are both incomplete and belong to Sri Aurobindo's early Baroda period. They were printed in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1962, for the first time.

THE BIRTH OF SIN printed here as a play seems to be the first version of what appeared as a dialogue in poetic form in *Collected Poems and Plays* of Sri Aurobindo in 1942.

VIKRAMORVASIE or THE HERO AND THE NYMPH, translated from Kalidasa's play in Sanskrit, was written in Baroda and it was first published in book-form in 1911. The second edition appeared in 1941 and the third was published in 1952 with "On Translating Kalidasa" as an Introduction and "The Character of the Hero" as an Appendix, both being studies written in Baroda.

SHORT STORIES: The three stories — THE PHANTOM HOUR, THE DOOR AT ABELARD and THE DEVIL'S MASTIFF — the last two of which are incomplete — belong to a projected series called IDYLLS OF THE OCCULT. The fourth story, THE GOLDEN BIRD, seems to be symbolic. All these stories belong to the early period in Pondicherry. They have been printed in Ashram journals. THE PHANTOM HOUR was also published in book-form in 1951.

JUVENILIA: Just as the printing of Volume 7 was brought to an end one incomplete play and one fragment of a play came to light. They belong to Sri Aurobindo's student days in London. THE WITCH OF ILNI bears the date: October, 1891.