

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

SAUCE FOR THE EMPEROR

By

JOHN CHAPIN MOSHER



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Sauce for the Emperor

A Comedy in One Act

By JOHN CHAPIN MOSHER

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SAUCE FOR THE EMPEROR

Sauce for the Emperor

By JOHN CHAPIN MOSHER

As presented by the Provincetown Players
New York, Dec. 15th, 1916



Characters in the Play.

NERO	JUSTUS SHEFFIELD
MACRONIUS	RICHARD SILVESTER
DONOR	ALLEN NORTON
TRITOR	BETTY TURNER
OCTAVIA	ELSIE HARRISON
ADORA	MARGARET NORDFELDT
PAULA	VIRGINIA TOBEY
IO	PIERRE LOVING
TRICANTHUS	JOHN L. BAKER

Other retainers and suites belonging to Nero, Octavia and Adora.

The scene is laid in a room in Caesar's Palace.

Sauce for the Emperor

Io and Tricanthus cross the stage carrying covered plates and salvers and trays of various description.

IO: This is the seventh sauce the Emperor has tasted and ordered away today.

TRICANTHUS: If only his majesty's food continues to disagree with him, we shall soon be rich.

IO: He would have us flogged if he knew we were selling the food from his own table.

TRICANTHUS: He is a great emperor. May he live long.

IO: And also his dyspepsia.

TRICANTHUS: Who but Caesar would think to find a new sauce in such a way?

IO: Was it not droll to offer such a competition—and to force any cook who tried and failed to eat nothing but that sauce for the rest of life.

TRICANTHUS: Already twenty-nine have suffered the penalty.

IO: Two have committed suicide, and five have gone mad.

TRICANTHUS: Oh, here come some others. (*Enter left,*

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Tritor, Donor and Paula. Donor and Tritor carry salvers of their sauces).

IO: Ho—you—the Emperor tastes no more today.

TRITOR: Mine is such a sweet sauce.

IO: He will have you chopped in fine pieces and thrown to the squirrels.

PAULA (*stepping forward*) We can wait here for him, can't we?

IO: And what sauce do you bring? (*He pulls aside the veil she wears better to see her face, and quite obviously pleased would chuck her under the chin, but Donor throws him back so that he almost falls. Tritor laughs. But Paula catches Io up.*)

PAULA: Go to, Donor, I can care for myself.

IO: Ah, of course you can. (*He tries to kiss her again, and she whacks him across the face. Tricanthus, who has had one ear all the time for the right door, jumps out now.*)

TRICANTHUS: The Emperor!

IO: (*Seizing his sauce*) The Lady Aglaia will buy this sauce for a good sum.

(*Exeunt Io and Tricanthus. Paula, Tritor and Donor fall back terrified, to right rear, as the royal procession enters. Nero strolls in rather bored. In one hand he carries a napkin, in the other a lyre. Octavia and Adora follow him with anxious solicitude for his pleasure.*)

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None of the party notices the aspiring cooks, except Adora who draws aside with disgust.)

NERO: (*Strumming on the lyre and humming to himself*)
Omnia Gallia in partes tres divisa est. (*Macronius enters from left, and bows deeply.*)

MACRONIUS: Sire, the heralds desire to know the progress of the contest, in order to inform the provinces.

NERO: Can a man in public life have no peace? (*He draws back outraged, and then resignedly ascends his throne, Adora and Octavia group themselves beside him.*)

OCTAVIA: You are a martyr to your people.

NERO: Macronius, you have nothing to do all day but think up beautiful thoughts. Give a few to the heralds—so that all the world may know how great is Caesar.

MACRONIUS: They say, sire, much dissension has arisen over your probable decision, betting and such immorality in the more remote parts of your Empire. (*Tritor comes tremblingly forward, and holds up his salver.*)

TRITOR: Sire, before you answer, will you not try this of mine?

NERO: (*After glaring at him until he can hardly stand with fear*) Young man, you realize the responsibility you take in offering a sauce to the Emperor?

TRITOR: To please you, sire, has been the dream of my life.

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NERO: You are a loyal Roman. (*Looking at the sauce*)
It has a rich color.

TRITOR: I was head cook in the house of Cleo, the Egyptian.

NERO: I will taste. (*Murmur throughout the court: "The Emperor tastes."*)

DONOR: If this should win the prize and we should be just too late.

PAULA: We won't be too late. No sauce is half as well flavored as your's.

DONOR: Look at Tritor. Poor devil, it means as much to him as it does to us.

PAULA: Not quite—and I want you to win.

NERO: I will taste again. (*Murmur throughout the court: "He tastes again."*)

TRITOR: Most august Majesty, most righteous Judge.

DONOR: I'm glad for Tritor's sake anyway, he's a good fellow.

PAULA: Don't get sentimental, there is still hope.

NERO: This is certainly a rich sauce. It may be the one.

ADORA: Oh, I'm just dying to try it.

DONOR: It's all up with us.

PAULA: No, I know that you will win.

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NERO: (*Tasting again*) Umm-m.

TRITOR: That is the sweetest music in the world.

NERO: What is that?

TRITOR: Oh, your Majesty, what is it?

OCTAVIA: My liege, you are angry.

ADORA: Poison—Oh, I'm sure it's poison. I never was so excited in my life.

TRITOR: Have you bitten your tongue?

NERO: Caraway seed—there was certainly a caraway seed.

OCTAVIA: What an outrage.

TRITOR: I did not know.

NERO: You did not know. The rascal—take him out. Feed him his caraway seed all the rest of his life. I hope he enjoys it.

ADORA: It's the fault of these democratic days when anyone can offer sauce to the emperor.

DONOR: (*stepping forward*) Sire, perhaps this of mine—

NERO: Another? After all I have gone through today am I to have no peace?

OCTAVIA: And such a bold looking woman with him, too.

DONOR: If you would, Sire, I have waited so long—

NERO: Certainly not.

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PAULA: Your Majesty, let me speak for this youth. Let me tell you what this sauce is. It is no cheap, paltry concoction of spices and sweets which any man may mix.

NERO: Who are you?

PAULA: My name is Paula.

ADORA: I don't know what our young girls are coming to.

OCTAVIA: It just pains me to see a girl like that.

NERO: You are beautiful.

OCTAVIA: Her cheeks look as though they were painted with red clay from the bottom of the Tiber.

PAULA: Once before this sauce was made and then a lady, feasting on it, was so charmed she forgot to meet her lover and so stayed true to her husband.

ADORA: What a horrid scandal-monger. I don't believe a word of it.

NERO: You are charming.

PAULA: A Christian recalling its flavor in the arena, forgot his vision of Paradise and so perished in misery.

NERO: I will try this sauce.

PAULA: Then in after years they will say of it, not that men died for it or women stayed chaste for it, but rather that it is the sauce that pleased Caesar. (*With much ceremony Paula feeds Caesar the sauce herself out of a long gold spoon. His eyes are fixed always on her.*)

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OCTAVIA: This is a disgusting spectacle.

PAULA: A pious Christian saint, who died of starvation in the desert, in his last moments wrote an ode to it which his sect has since had the impudence to alter to their own blasphemous rites:

“Sauce divine, all sauce excelling,
Glory of Heaven to earth made known.”

NERO: (*His eyes still on her*) Yes, this is the sauce I have been looking for.

PAULA: Taste once again, your most august Majesty. (*She feeds the sauce to him again*).

NERO: The contest is closed. I have found the sauce. Octavia, remember it is your duty to uphold the sanctity of the home. Go to your looms. My Lady Adora, tell your vestal sisters, you shall have the box you desire at the gladiatorial entertainments and it shall be hung with pale green and lavender in accordance with the new art and your virginal complexions.

OCTAVIA: It doesn't matter what box one has nowadays, the circus is so dull. I don't mean to criticize, my lord, but last week when the wife of the consul of Abyssinia visited us there were only six Christians in the arena and the big wrestler who was so well advertised, sprained his ankle and didn't kill a man. When it was all over the Consul's wife said: "Is that all?" before she thought. I was so humiliated.

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NERO: We'll throw the Consul's wife to the lions if she doesn't look out.

ADORA: I know lots of people who are Christians. That big blonde girl that lives around the corner and makes eyes at the Senator I'm sure is.

OCTAVIA: Some very nice people are taking it up, of course in a really refined manner.

ADORA: I don't object to that at all, my dear. I always say everyone has a right to his own ideas; but my dear, if this love-your-neighbor idea becomes popular what will happen to the ideal of the home?

NERO: Now that we have found a lot of good reasons for keeping the ideas that are most convenient to us, we had better close the discussion.

ADORA: Farewell, most gracious, royal son of Gods. (*Exeunt Octavia and Adora with their suites. With a nod Caesar signifies that his own suite follow, leaving Donor and Paula*).

PAULA: Then, Sire, you—?

NERO: Why, here, you're not going too, are you?

PAULA: I thought you said you had affairs of state——?

NERO: My dear girl, affairs of state are to a monarch what a grandmother's funeral is to our retainers. Come here.

PAULA: Sire?

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DONOR: If, my sauce has pleased you I am the proudest of men.

NERO: Who is this man, pray?

DONOR: Why, I——

PAULA: He made the sauce you have been good enough to find palatable.

NERO: I had forgotten about him. Well, what are you doing now?

DONOR: I thought you might tell me my reward for the sauce.

NERO: You look like a man who spent most of his time hoping for things. Well, can't you see that I am busy now?

DONOR: Come, Paula, we shall return when Caesar wills it.

NERO: Young man, you are not especially clever, I conjecture. Wait in the antechamber until I summon you. This lady and I have matters of moment to discuss.

DONOR: As you will, Sire. (*Exit Donor*).

NERO: Dear me, how stupid people are.

PAULA: How can I serve your Majesty?

NERO: You are beautiful.

PAULA: Caesar.

NERO: Listen, my darling, I have a villa in Sicily that

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only three men in Rome know of. It is built of granite blue as the faces of the Nazarene martyrs we made torches of in our gardens last year. There is a peristyle of bronze and a bath of green jade. The gardens the king built long ago for his Queen in Babylon were not so fair as Caesar's palace in Sicily. Even I have never been able to write a song that did justice to that house of mine.

PAULA: And the last lady who was mistress there was given a bouquet of roses, whose poisoned fumes stifled her in her bed.

NERO: How do you know that? But surely you would run some risk if I told you that I loved you. Do you hear that, Caesar himself says he loves you.

PAULA: I am truly blessed among women.

NERO: You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. You are more lovely than that little Greek girl who killed herself for love of me.

PAULA: It is too great splendor for me. You had best send me back to my father's farm on the hillsides of the Apennines. I would not become such a lofty position.

NERO: You'll get used to it soon enough. I never met a woman yet who had any trouble that way.—I shall tell Octavia that my nerves need a rest. It's perfectly true. I was thinking the other day how important it was for the welfare of the Empire that I should not over-strain. We shall sail for Sicily to-morrow.

PAULA: Oh, Donor, what will he do?

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NERO: What did you say? Who is Donor?

PAULA: No one, Sire, of any importance, only the man who made the sauce for you.

NERO: You say the man who made the one sauce I have been able to eat in weeks is of no importance? My dear, you are so young. It is quite charming of you. But don't worry about him, he shall go with us.

PAULA: Go with us?

NERO: Certainly—to Sicily. We've got to have someone cook for us. Though, come to think of it, I'm not sure it wasn't the way it was served that made it so delicious. What do you say to that, my little one?

PAULA: Most august Lord, I beg you let me speak—you have done me such great honor, I know not what to say—but, Oh, Sire, I am only a peasant girl—I cannot fill the position you offer. I shall be grateful to you all my life. I shall teach my daughters to weave the deeds of Caesar into their embroideries so that all posterity may know how kingly he was. I shall train my sons to model their hearts after Caesar's, to fight for him and live for him—but this, my Lord, I cannot do.

NERO: Anyone can do anything Caesar wishes. I see you don't realize the circumstances.

PAULA: Only the rarest women of earth, the daughters of kings and great chieftains are fit for the first ruler of the world.

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NERO: It is for me to decide who is worthy of me and who isn't. And you must get over that illusion of the superiority of royalty. Look at Octavia. Come kiss me, little one.

PAULA: I cannot.

NERO: This obsession of yours is tiresome. I am a human being, after all, not a god.

PAULA: I won't kiss you.

NERO: Cunning, I like your spirit. But come, we can't play away the whole day—pretty, pretty one.

PAULA: You can't kiss me—I won't let you kiss me—I mean it—I shall die first.

NERO: She is certainly out of her head. Come, dear, don't you recognize me? It is Caesar, Nero Caesar, whom every woman loves—and he loves you.

PAULA: Yes—of course I know you—what a fool I am—don't know what I am saying. Certainly, I love—kiss me—there—I am—a—little—faint—that is because I love you so.

NERO: Adorable, you are so innocent, so young—Oh, we shall be so happy in Sicily.

PAULA: Yes, so very happy—in Sicily. But now I must leave you to tell my family how much honored is their daughter.

NERO: Yes, I can see that you are wearied. Macronius will show you your apartment in the palace.

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PAULA: But I must leave the palace for a moment—to get ready for our journey.

NERO: I shall supply all you need, of course. And the Emperor's own heralds shall inform your parents.—Macronius. (*He steps to the doorway and calls again.*) Macronius. (*Enter Macronius—he makes obeisance to the Emperor, ignoring Paula.*)

NERO: This lady remains in the palace. Show her all honor—all honor—You understand, Macronius? (*Macronius wheels about and faces Paula. He stares at her a moment in amazement and then suddenly the Emperor's meaning dawns on him. Instantly he bows low.*)

MACRONIUS: Most gracious lady, I am your slave. Is it your pleasure to withdraw now to your apartments?

NERO: It is.

MACRONIUS: So? By the way, your Majesty, the cook of the new sauce apparently has the hardihood to expect some further notice from you.

NERO: Yes, I will see him now. (*Macronius, with a bow to Paula and to Nero, leaves the room.*)

PAULA: I implore you—let this be your first gift to me—say nothing of this to Donor.

NERO: Charming little lady, I am merely going to give him news that will make him the happiest and proudest of young men. (*Enter Donor and Macronius.*)

NERO: How do you do, young man. I feel that the ser-

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vice you have done your country deserves my especial commendation. You are to be first cook in the house of your Emperor. He himself is to test your genius.

DONOR: It is the ambition of my life.

NERO: A worthy one. Cooking is the one art that does not have to excuse itself with a philosophy. If I had more leisure I would cook instead of write poetry, but it requires so much more study. Well, well, however that may be, be ready to sail tomorrow.

DONOR: To sail?

NERO: I go to Sicily tomorrow for a short respite from the—ah—the tribulations of the throne. Uneasy, my dear Macronius, lies the head that wears a crown. Fair line, that—almost worthy of my sonnets. The kind of thing that might appeal to the vulgar taste.

DONOR: Sicily?

PAULA: Caesar——

NERO: Young man, you are to have the honor, not only of serving your Emperor, but also the infinite honor of serving the lady your Emperor loves.

DONOR: And the lady goes with you tomorrow? Sire, this is an opportunity too glorious. Oh, the gods are good to me indeed. And I shall serve you, Sire, such dishes as would ravish the God of Love himself. The lady shall have sweetmeats such as no other lady has ever eaten, delicacies rare as jewels. Perhaps I might ask her what were

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her favorite flavorings. I have a way of frying snails that no other master has ever succeeded in. And my cheese-cake—Oh, I am sure the lady will like my cheese-cakes. As for my honey tarts—oh—rich. Then goose eggs, prepared with pastry—my last master always had them at his feasts, and for you I shall make them doubly luscious. I have a way of fixing apples too, so that when you press them just a little they will squirt saffron water into your face—a pretty idea, you know, and if a party is at all stiff, it loosens things up splendidly.—For a roast, sow's breasts—or perhaps she would prefer hare, fixed regally with feathers in its back?

NERO: That's the spirit. Do you prefer hare or sow's breasts, Paula?

DONOR: What does it matter about her? Why do you ask her?

NERO: She is the lady concerned.

DONOR: Paula! (*Enter Io—he quietly crosses the stage to the table on which is Donor's sauce, and starts out with it.*)

NERO: What are you doing with that?

IO: I thought you were through with it, your Majesty—I beg your pardon, I am very sorry—very.

NERO: Am I to be starved to death in my own palace?

IO: It is my mistake—I—I—she wanted it especially, as it was the prize sauce, and so—and so—I'll put it here, shall I, your Majesty?

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NERO: And who may she be, who inveigles my servants to snatch the food from my very mouth—your sweetheart, I suppose, some horse-haired vixen.

IO: Oh, no, Sire, it is a Lady, your Majesty—She thinks, Sire, that dishes from your table bring her good fortune.

NERO: A woman might reason in that way. What is her name?

IO: Aglaia—she is new to Rome.

NERO: Aglaia? Oh—well, well, we shall see. Leave the sauce there for the present. (*Io puts it back on the table and goes out*). Paula, my dear, have you given this man your orders? You may command anything in the world—the chief attainment of our foreign conquests is to add new delicacies to our menu.

PAULA: Sire, this man and I—we were to be married—I fear—he might not cook as well if you took him from me.

NERO: So that's the case. What better could he want than to cook for you—express his passion in the pastry.

DONOR: You won't take her from me—not if you were Emperor of the world. She is mine—mine—only over my dead body—

NERO: A trifling stipulation. But we can't bother about that now. Take him out, Macronius.

PAULA: Sire, you see, I was wrong. He does want me. You will free us both.

NERO: Remove the man.

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MACRONIUS: Perhaps I had better call the guards.

NERO: Call Semprinus, he is just back from the army in the East and can manage him.

MACRONIUS: Semprinus is not in the palace at present.

NERO: Where is he then?

MACRONIUS: In attendance, Sire, I fear, of a lady. He is losing all sense of duty, Sire.

NERO: Semprinus a suitor of a lady, and what woman has got him in her toils?

MACRONIUS: That same Lady Aglaia.

NERO: Aglaia—again.

MACRONIUS: Rascal, have you no respect for your Emperor—out with you. (*Enter Adora in great excitement*).

NERO: What is this—more gossip?

ADORA: Sire, I have been insulted—grossly insulted. I rushed right back to put the matter in your hands. Never in my life have I known of such a thing—and after the life I've lead—always kept up my position—no one has ever been able to say a word against the Vestal Virgins—except those horrid scandals which everyone knows aren't true. But when it comes to being held up half an hour in the streets in front of that woman's house, I felt it my duty to tell you, Sire, what was going on in Rome—actually in Rome.

NERO: Someone insulted you—fancy that, now.

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ADORA: Just now as I was returning to the temple, I was deep in the thought of what a truly noble city your infinite wisdom had made Rome. Suddenly my chair stopped. I peered forth, chastely, from behind my curtains, as becomes a woman of my station; to my amazement I saw a long line of chairs and they were chairs of the patricians. Sire, I bade my slaves find who dared to block the passage of a Vestal Virgin. He returned and told me—I blush—I simply cannot continue—but yes, it is my duty. That blockade, your Majesty, was due to the crowds which were arriving at the house of that woman who has just come to Rome—the creature who makes her disgusting eyes at the very Senators.

NERO: You mean to tell me that the street was blocked with the chariots of the visitors of a woman—?

ADORA: You are no more shocked than I am, I said to my slaves at once: "Take me back to the Emperor; he shall know of this at once." In my opinion such license can only be explained by Christianity.

NERO: Macronius, you haven't told me about this woman.

MACRONIUS: I didn't think you would be interested.

NERO: Don't you know how close to my heart is the morality of Rome?

ADORA: They say that my lord Macronius's own chariot sometimes attends there.

NERO: So that's how the land lies. Oh, Macronius, Macronius—to quote a similar occasion. Et tu, Macronius.

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(*Enter Io, Tricanthus, bearing salvers, bowls, trays of all shapes and sizes. They solemnly arrange them on the table and then turn and face the Emperor*).

IO: Sire, I have them all back.

NERO: What are these?

IO: All the sauces, Sire, I bought them back from the Lady Aglaia.

ADORA: That is the creature's name.

NERO: And were none of them eaten?

IO: Fortunately, the lady is of such charm that no one can think of anything but of herself when in her house.

PAULA: (*to Donor*) There is nothing we can do. We are powerless. But I shall throw myself from the galley into the sea.

DONOR: And I shall swim out after you until strength leaves me, and then I shall sink into your arms.

MACRONIUS: (*aside to Donor*) How dare you whisper to that lady. Your presence is an insult to her.

NERO: Dear Lady Adora, if you will leave us now I think we can cope with this problem.

ADORA: I shall go home a different way, you may be sure.

NERO: She will feel that deeply, I am sure. (*Exit Adora*) Oh, Macronius, Macronius, a woman in Rome who makes

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a riot in the streets and Caesar is the last to hear of it. Where is your patriotism now, I wonder? And you would send me to a desert island so that you could have a clear field. They do not eat my sauces, because she is so fair. Think of that, now. Macronius, quick, hand me that sauce, with my own hands I shall bear it to her.

MACRONIUS: But the lady Paula?

NERO: I have never heard of any riots on the Apennines where she comes from. Paula, my dear, don't do what that little Greek girl did. Rather follow your kitchen scullion to his pots and ewers. At all events, my very nice little one, be grateful to us for making you first lady of the world, if only for an hour. Hand me that salver, Macronius, and follow. Aglaia—Aglaia—charming name. On the way over think up some rhymes for it, we must immortalize it in verse—Aglaia—Aglaia—and they would separate us—whom love has joined, no man must sunder. Remember that, Macronius, Aglaia—(*Exit Nero in state, holding that salver high before him, which holds Donor's sauce, followed by Macronius and the slaves, all now indifferent to Paula and Donor*).

DONOR: (*Throwing his arms about Paula in a passionate embrace of love and relief*) We are free, my darling—thank God—Oh, we shall be happy now forever. We owe it all to that strange woman who must be so beautiful, the Lady Aglaia—my dearest, are you not happy?

PAULA: I don't believe she is a bit more beautiful than I am. Her nose is curved like a boat-hook.

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