



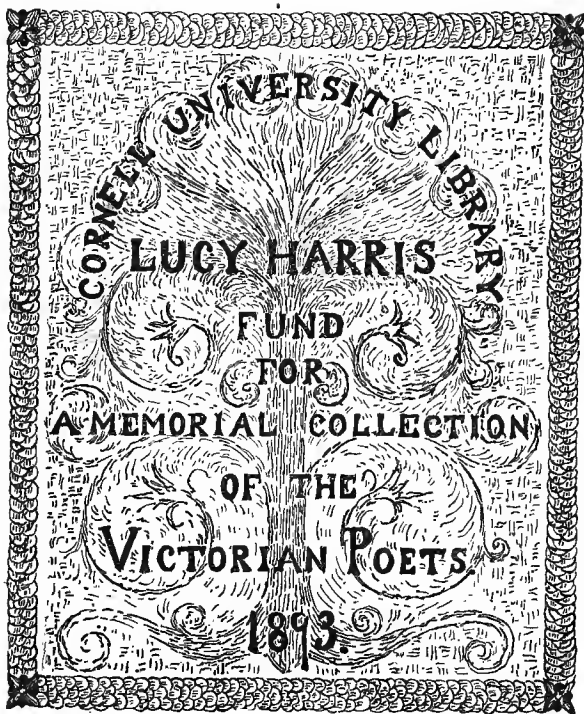
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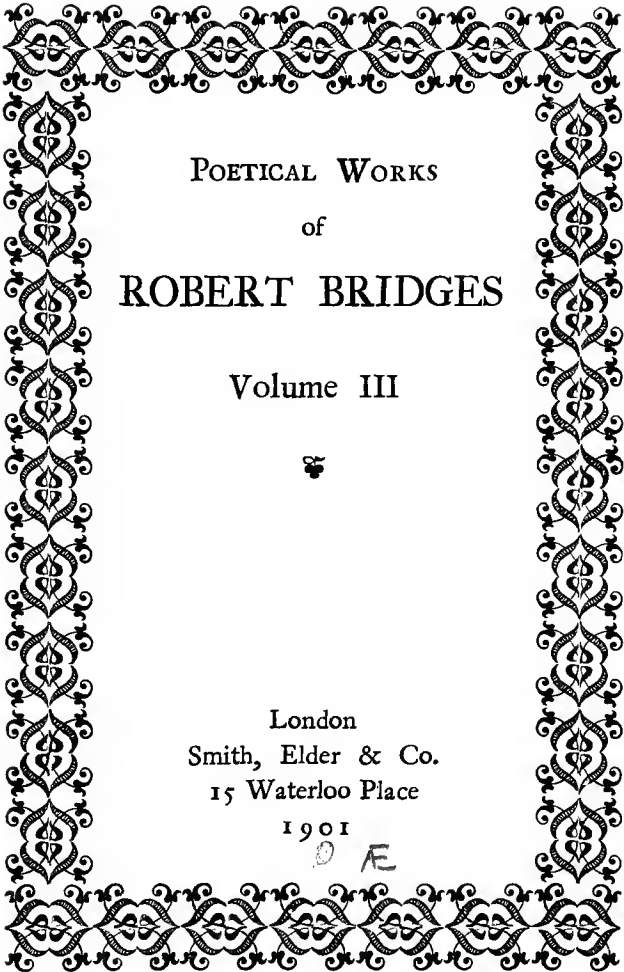
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POETICAL WORKS
of
ROBERT BRIDGES

Volume III



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*POETICAL WORKS OF
ROBERT BRIDGES*

*VOLUME THE THIRD
CONTAINING*

<i>THE FIRST PART OF NERO</i>	<i>p.</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>ACHILLES IN SCYROS</i>		<i>179</i>
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LIST OF PREVIOUS EDITIONS



THE FIRST PART OF NERO.

1. NERO. *An historical Tragedy of the first part of the reign of the emperor Nero. Published by Ewd. Bumpus. London, 1885. 4to.*

ACHILLES IN SCTROS.

1. ACHILLES IN SCTROS. *A drama in a mixed manner. Published by Ewd. Bumpus. London, 1890. 4to.*
2. ACHILLES IN SCTROS. *Uniform with Shorter Poems (I). George Bell & Sons, 1892.*



THE FIRST PART
OF THE
H I S T O R Y
OF
N E R O



A HISTORICAL
TRAGEDY





DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

NERO.

BRITANNICUS stepson to *Agrippina.*

BURRUS praetorian prefect.

SENECA tutor to *Nero.*

LUCAN, the poet, nephew to *Seneca*

OTHO } gentlemen of Rome } friends of *Nero.*

PETRONIUS }

PALLAS master of the imperial household.

TIGELLINUS successor to *Pallas.*

THRASEA, a Stoic

PRISCUS } honest senators.

ANICETUS an admiral.

PARIS a player, favourite of *Nero.*

SELEUCUS an astrologer.

Messengers, Servants, &c.

AGRIPPINA AUGUSTA. mother to *Nero.*

OCTAVIA wife to *Nero*, sister to *Britannicus.*

POPPÆA wife to *Otho*, loved of *Nero.*

DOMITIA sister-in-law to *Agrippina.*

FULVIA attendant on *Agrippina.*

Maids, &c.

Scene. The first four acts are laid in *ROME*; the fifth
is at *BALÆ.*



❁ N E R O ❁



A C T · I



S C E N E · I

On the Palatine. THRASEA & PRISCUS.

THRASEA.

IF you ask my advice then, it is silence. You are yet new to the senate, and must learn to give your opinion with least offence.

PRISCUS.

Can you mean this?

Thr. Yes—it is my serious advice.

Pr. Now, unless it were the silence of Brutus . . .

Thr. Hush, hush! Were this repeated, there is no greater peril than that word of yours.

Pr. But to you I know I may speak freely.

Thr. What know you of me?

10

Pr. I know Thrasea is brave, and resents his country's wrongs; that he has insight to see that liberty was never more outraged than now.

Tbr. Believe me, sir, this tale of things being at their worst is common to all times. Your judgment has gone astray upon a contempt for Cæsar's follies, or a hatred of his mother's crimes. Measure Nero but by what he has already done, and you may even find cause for congratulation. 19

Pr. We shall be ruled like the Britons by a Queen.

Tbr. O nay. It is not possible that Nero will suffer Agrippina's ambition to take such a place. 'Tis already a quarrel between them, and Seneca declares for him.

Pr. Then, I ask you, may there not be found in this quarrel an opportunity to bring in Britannicus? Now he is of age, he can no longer be held disqualified.

Tbr. There is no question of qualification or of claim. 28

Pr. How so? The late emperor Claudius in his will mentioned Britannicus for his successor, as being his own son

Tbr. May be. But then, sir, his empress made away with both him and his will; and the Roman people chose for Cæsar the son of the murderess, rather than the heir of the idiot they were glad to be rid of. Since which day Nero is as truly our Cæsar as Britannicus could

ever have been. Those who swore to Nero will remain by him ; as 'tis well they should, else were no stability.

Pr. Shall we then do nothing? 39

Thr. You take things by the wrong handle. Let us make the best of what we have. Our Cæsar is the pupil of a philosopher and guided in everything by his master's counsels.

Pr. You are very tolerant and hopeful.

Thr. Try and be so too, and I shall wish to see more of you. If you will visit my house, you will indeed be most welcome and may find congenial company. Only no more of Brutus.

Pr. Thank you for your kindness, if it is an earnest of your confidence—On another occasion . . . 50

Thr. O we will find many. (*Shouts heard.*) What is that? (*More shouts.*) It must be Cæsar : he is coming this way. Be not seen talking with me : go you that way : I will remain. Farewell.

Pr. Farewell, Thræsea. [*Exit.*

Thr. Young blood, hot blood and true :
 Yet is his energetic patriotism
 Useless,—nay, like a weapon out of date,
 Looks not to be a warlike weapon more.
 I think in me it had been truer wisdom, 60
 Knowing the forces of this drowning time,
 To have said outright—Good, honest Priscus,

Be good no longer, let thine honesty
 Rot, it can stead thee nothing ; there's no man
 Will be the better for it ; there's no field
 Where thou canst exercise it, not a place
 In all the world where in secure possession
 Thou mayst retire with it : cast it away ;
 For 'tis a burden far beyond thy freight.
 If thou wilt swim at all, swim with the times, 70
 An empty bottom on a shallow tide :
 Be that thy seamanship—No ; I am bold to say
 Our virtue hath the topmost vaunt of honour ;
 Seeing we are true to it in spite of shame,
 When its incompetence before the world
 Gives it the lie ; nor can the fawning curs,
 That bask in Cæsar's sunshine, when they mock us,
 Dream that we wish them other than they are.
 I give them joy. See here is folly's king,
 The hare-brained boy to whom injurious fortune 80
 Has given the throne and grandeur of the world :
 Now if I bow my head 'tis in thy game,
 Ridiculous fate ; and my soul laughs at thee.

[Retires aside.

Enter Nero, Otho, Lucan, Tigellinus, and Paris.

NERO.

This is the place : enlarge it on this side
 To take in all the hill. That house of Rufus

That blocks the way must down, and all the piles
On the south slope. Now say, is't fine or no?

LUCAN.

Magnificent.

OTHO.

It shows the mind of Cæsar.

TIGELLINUS.

Splendid.

Ner. At least the best : we still regret
A better than the best ; and I can see 90
These possibilities. Think if the hill
Were raised some hundred feet, till it o'ertopped
The Capitol—eh! lords. And so 'twere best ;
But still 'twill pass for good.

Luc. 'Twill be a palace
For site and size the first in all the world.

Ner. To kill the Jews' brag of Jerusalem?

Oth. I think it.

Ner. You, my friends, who know my scheme,
May mete and judge my general scope in this,
A sample of my temper coined and uttered 99
For the world's model, that all men's endeavours
May rise with mine to have all things at best,
Not only for myself but for the world ;
Riches and joy and heart's content for all.

It may be done, and who should do it but I?
 See now my years at best, my youth and strength
 With form and gifts agreeing, and my power,
 Know'st thou my power?—Oh! Otho, I tell thee
 The Cæsars which have been have never known
 What 'tis to be full Cæsar. Dost thou think?
 There's nothing good on earth but may be won 110
 With power and money; and I have them both;
 Ay, and the will.

Oth. Much may be done, no doubt.

Ner. Much! Why there's nothing, man, may not be
 done.

The curse of life is of our own devising,
 Born of man's ignorance and selfishness.
 He wounds his happiness against a cage
 Of his own make, and only waits the word
 For one to set his door open,—and look,
 Having his liberty is he not glad
 As heaven's birds are?—Now when fate's ordinance
 Sends him a liberator, ay, and one 121
 Not to cajole or preach, but, will or nill,
 Who'll force him forth and crush up his old cage,
 With all who would hang back and skulk therein,
 How shall he not be happy?

Luc. This shall be
 The world's last crown, by man with utmost power

Endowed to drive him to the good he shuns.

Ner. Ay. Be all human hopes summed up in mine
 And reach their goal. I say there shall be peace,
 There shall be plenty, pleasure, and content : 130
 The god on earth shall work the good whereof
 The folly of man hath baulked the gods in heaven :
 And good that men desire shall be as common
 As ills they now repine at. When I say
 There shall be justice, see, even at my word
 Injustice is no more.

PARIS.

The house of Rufus,
 Standing on justice there, will mar thy palace.

Ner. Fool. Why, I say to Rufus—I am Cæsar,
 And need thy house.—Says he—It cost my sire
 Ten million sesterces.—A trifle that, 140
 Say I, and give him twenty : and down it goes.
 Is not this more than justice ?

Par. Ay, 'tis power.

Ner. Thou quibbling meddler, learn this point of wit,
 To keep thy sphere ; answer in that : last night
 Sang I divinely ? Wert thou envious
 When I put on the lion's skin, and did
 The choice of Hercules ?

Par. Most mighty Cæsar,

I wished that I had asses ears to hear ;
Mine are not long enough.

Ner. Plague on thy jesting.

See static virtue stalks with folded arm 150
To set thee down. [*Thrasea comes forward.*]

Thr. Hail, Cæsar!

Ner. Thy opinion,
Thrasea, come, thy opinion. What dost thou think
If I extend my palace to take in
The hill whereon we stand?

Thr. The plan no doubt
Is worthy of the site, and for the site,
Why, 'tis the darling spot of Rome.

Ner. Well said.
Stay. I would ask my fellow senator
Wherefore he left the house three days ago
Without his voice or vote.

Thr. I judged the time 159
Unmeet to speak ; and, for my vote, the senate
Was of one mind : a vote was of no count.

Ner. Thou show'dst a sense against us in not voting.

Thr. That must thou look for, Cæsar, in the senate.

Ner. Well, I would have thee speak. We are not full
Without thy voice : nay more, such conduct makes
The senate but a name ; for times have been
When silence was well justified by fear.

Now we court criticism, ay, and look ill
On those that grudge their approbation. 169

Thr. Cæsar commands my service and my praise;
I shall not lack.

Ner. We look for much from thee.

Thr. Long live your majesty. [*Exit.*]

Ner. There's something good
In that man, Otho; spite of his dry mien
And Stoic fashion.

Oth. Nay, I like him not.
He's hardly flesh and blood. Old Seneca
Is stiff and prosy enough; but if you pinch him,
You find he yields, shows softness here and there.
This man is merely stone, foursquare by rule.

Ner. Do you despise divine philosophy?

Oth. Well, as I take it, all philosophy 180
Is questionable guessing, but the sense
A man grows up with bears the stamp of nature.

Ner. How mean you that?

Oth. At best this fine-spun system
Is but a part of man's experience
Drawn out to contradiction of the rest.
'Tis a fool's wisdom.

Luc. 'Tis a form of pleasure.

Oth. True. Though there be no theory of life
That's worth a button, yet the search for one

Seems to content some men better than life.

Ner. Call him not fool, Otho!

Oth. Unless I wrong him,

I speak as well of him as he of me. 191

Or if he say nothing, his guarded manner

Covers, be sure, a more unkind contempt.

Par. (apeing Thr.). That must thou look for, Cæsar,
in the senate.

Tig. Ha! ha! Excellent!

Ner. Paris would make a senator.

Oth. Well, give me life.

Ner. Ay, that is wisdom. Live.

Enjoy the hour; which minds me, for to-night

I have time well disposed: we sup with Actè;

She will inaugurate the new pavilion,

And after, there are masks and clubs provided. 200

Thou'lt join us, eh!

Oth. With all my heart.

Ner. (to Tig. and Luc.). And you.

And you. And, Paris, see Petronius comes,

And Anicetus. Hence, and bid them now.

[*Exit Paris.*

Good news for them I think; pleasure in store.

We'll make a merry night. Now tell me, Otho,

You're a good judge, have you ever seen a woman

Fit to compare with Actè?

Oth. I say no.

Ner. I mean not, man, for what our grandsires
praised,

Who knew no better ; I mean the perfect art 209
Which makes each moment feverous.

Oth. I know none.

Ner. 'Tis spoke as if thy judgment or thy envy
Grudged me the word.

Oth. Nay, Cæsar.

Ner. O, I know

Thou'rt a good husband, thy good wife commands thee.

Oth. Say, my good fortune, Cæsar.

Ner. Now if thy boast

Be true as it is rare, thy lady's presence

Would add much spirit to our gaieties.

I have never seen Poppæa, say that to-night

Thou bring her.

Oth. In this thing, for friendship's sake,

Hold me excused.

Ner. Nay, no constraint ; thy wish

Is all in all. Wrong me not ; I would not have, 220

And least to thee, my pleasures a command ;

But my commands are pleasures. Let us go.

[*Exeunt.*]

XX

S C E N E . 2

*A room in the palace. Enter OCTAVIA
and BRITANNICUS.*

BRITANNICUS.

Why art thou weeping, dearest? Has Nero been
Again unkind?

OCTAVIA.

Most unkind.

Br. Weep not so.

Octavia, weep not so.

Count but my tears as thine, so shall my pity
Comfort thy wrongs. Nay, wert thou not my sister,

How must I feel to see so base a rival

Honoured before thyself in Cæsar's palace!

Why even his mother could not grant him that 230

Unmoved, but wept with rage: while he himself,

I saw, was touched with shame.

Oct. Hush, hush! nay, 'tis not that;
I mind not that: at least they tell me now

I must not mind; and since he never loved me

It matters little. 'Tis not that at all.

Br. Then something fresh; what more?

Oct. I scarce dare tell.

What hast thou said or done, Britannicus,
That so could anger him ?

Br. Ah! is't with me then
He is angry ? Dost thou weep for me ?

Oct. For both.

Br. Now tell me all, sister.

Oct. O, 'tis the worst. 240

Here as I sat this morning strode he in,
More fired with rage than ever I have seen him,
More like his wicked mother, when her fury
Has made me tremble. All he said I heard not,
But this, that I, his wife, had turned against him
To plot with thee, and led thee on to boast
That being of age thou wert the rightful heir,
And more : what is his meaning ?

Br. 'Tis his spite
To seek my fault in thee.

Oct. Nay, that were nothing.
Brother, I fear thou wilt be sent from Rome. 250
He dare not face the truth. He cannot brook
Thy title : thou must go, ay, thou wilt go
And leave me in my prison.

Br. 'Twas last night
I vexed him suddenly in his cups, but thought
'Twould be as soon forgotten.

Oct. Say, how was it ?

Br. It was the feast of Saturn, — and as it
chanced

(Or rather, I should say, 'twas so arranged
To please him, at his own desire) he drew
The lot of king of the feast, and when the company
Were drunk he used his silly privilege 260
To have me be their fool.

Oct. Didst thou rebuke him?

Br. It happened thus. When all the guests in turn
Had answered to their forfeit, as his humour
Prescribed to each, he turned on me, and bade me
Show them a tragic scene, foreseeing how
The incongruence of time and place, the audience
Of drunken sots would turn my best to worst,
And smother passion in a sea of laughter.
But, for the wine I had been constrained to taste
Had mounted to my head, I felt at heart 270
A force to wither up their sottish jeers,
And ere I knew my purpose I was sitting
Upright upon the couch, and with full passion
Singing the old Greek song thou saidst so well
Suited our fortunes.

Oct. O, would I had been there!
They could not laugh at thee.

Br. They did not laugh.
The sadness and the sweetness of the music,

After their low hoarse songs, startled to sense
 Their sodden, maudlin brains : they listened all
 To the end, and then with daunted appetite 280
 Sat in constraint and silence.

Oct. Oh ! well done !

And what said Nero ?

Br. He but smiled until
 The tale tells how the poor child disinherited
 Was put to death by his usurping brother ;
 Then his eye sank ; and last, when Paris rose
 At the end and praised my acting, he grew wild,
 And said the feast was o'er, and bade us go.

Oct. Alas ! 'twas done too well.

Br. I mind it not :

I wear no mask : and manifold occasion
 Will oft surprise our closest guard, provoking 290
 Unbidden motions that betray the heart :
 'Twere vain to seek to quell them : they are like our
 shadows,
 Which, if the sun shine forth, appear and show
 Our form and figure. Such haps cannot be helped.

Enter Agrippina and attendants.

ATTENDANT.

The Augusta, your royal mother.

III

C

AGRIPPINA.

Good day, my son.

Br. Good morrow, mother.

Agr. Octavia still here! Child, why, know you not
 'Tis long past noon, and Dionysius
 Waits in the library? Begone, begone!
 What! crying? Here's a picture to recover 300
 A husband's favour!—Fulvia, attend my daughter
 Into my tiring-room, and treat her eyes
 To hide these scalded rings: and then, Octavia,
 Go to the library, talk thy full hour;
 Thy Greek is shameful. The rest go.

[Exeunt Octavia and attendants.

My son,

I'd speak with thee.

Br. My mother's pleasure?

Agr. Thou art my pleasure, child.

Fear me no more. I can be kinder to thee

Than ever I have been to my own true son. 309

Br. I thank your majesty.

Agr. Nay, now 'tis spoilt.

Best call me mother. Thou hast need of me.

I have heard all; what happed last night at supper.

Thou hast offended Cæsar.

Br. He does wrong

To use the freedom of the feast to insult me,

And then resent my freedom in repelling
His right-aimed insult.

Agr. True; the liberty
Should cover it: but in thy veins there runs
That which outcries thy speech; which, wert thou
dumb,
Would speak thee guilty, and being tongued proclaims
Thy needful sentence. 'Twas done bitterly. 320
I know thy song. Dost thou believe, Britannicus,
That I could give the tale another ending?—
—Suppose, I say, I read it in some book
Writ differently: how that the proud usurper,
Owing all to his mother—dost thou follow me?—
How, when he came to power, instead of sharing
With her who had toiled for him, and in her love
Had parted from all praise, looking to reap
In him the fuller recompense of glory,
How he, when time came he should make return,
Denied her even the common duty owed 331
By son to mother, set her will aside,
Laughed at her, added to her shames, reproached her,
Mocked her with presents taken openly
Out of her treasures,—as to say outright,
All now is mine, thou hast no claim at all;
See what I choose to give, thank me for these—
Held her as nothing, hated her, brought in

His strumpet to her chamber,—that was the sum—
 And she then, when she saw her love derided, 340
 I say, repented, came to the boy she had wronged. . . .

Br. I know, I know.

Agr. Then, if thou knowest, say ;
 What said he, when she told him she would turn
 Her love on him, would set him in the place
 Whence she had thrust him out ? What said he ?

Br. Nothing.

Agr. Nothing !

Br. Nay, I remember he said thus :
 Wronged have I been by all, and none can right me ;
 All hath been false to me save sorrow only ;
 Justice and truth forsworn : There is no word 349
 That I dare speak ; yet if thou stoop to insult me
 My tongue will show my wrongs are not forgotten.

Agr. My dearest boy, believe me.

Br. The last time
 Thou call'dst me thus 'twas when my father died.
 I thought then 'twas in kindness, afterwards
 I found the meaning.

Agr. Yea, I confess I wronged thee ;
 That is my meaning now : had I not wronged thee,
 My speech would have no sense at all : 'tis this
 I come to urge : in this thou must believe me.
 Canst thou not see, had I no pity in me,

No true remorseful pangs, yet still my wrongs 360
 Would move me thus? Though thou trust not my
 love,

Read in these tears of anger and despair
 The depth of my set purpose, my revenge.

Br. I partly do believe thee.

Agr. Believe me wholly,

And my revenge is thine.

Br. Nay, think not so.

There's blood in thy revenge; I'll none of it.

What are my private wrongs to Rome? If Cæsar

Stablish the empire, where's the citizen

Will take exception that he hath wronged his brother?

Since were I Cæsar I would vail my rights 370

To theirs, I still will act as I were Cæsar.

Agr. O could'st thou see this offer as thy last
 And only safety thou would'st not refuse me.

Br. I rather hope to be forgiven the thing
 I never thought, than win by doing it.

Agr. Thou wilt not join with me?

Br. There's nought to join,

Save to thy will to right me. I might join

A hope of justice, to vain will vain hope.

Agr. Think for thy sister, boy. She cannot long

Be Cæsar's wife. Then, were her brother Cæsar,

She might be matched with any excellence. 381

Octavia's happiness lies on thy word.

Br. Octavia, dear Octavia—Now if thou'rt true
There is a way. This matter's full presentment
Hath not been strange to me, though I have barred
the thought

And held no purpose in it; there's one way:
Those that have wronged can right. If thou would'st
speak

With Burrus, he is plain and honourable,
And if he think there's gain in the exchange,
And his heart goes with it, he has the guards,—my
name, 390

The sense of right, the promise of a largess,
Will win them to a man. The senate follows:
In a day, an hour, without a drop of blood
My wrongs are righted. Wilt thou speak with Burrus?

Agr. I dare not.

Br. Then do nothing. Or if thou canst,
Assure thy son that from my helpless state
And suffering spirit he has nought to fear.

Agr. Nay, thou wert right: and though 'tis difficult,
I'll speak with Burrus. 'Tis a most bold stroke,
But I can dare it. Good Burrus owes me much. [*Exit.*

Br. Strange, strange indeed. I have heard it said
that murder 401

Falls on itself: that in the guilty breast

The implacable crime ploughs up with rooting tusk
The bleeding strings of nature : and in this woman
Of no remorse hath fated vengeance stirred
Her heart to hate her son. O, I did wrong
Yielding a little. Yet, since Burrus loves me,
That he should rule my fate is my best safety.
For her, if she's my foe, he may work on her.—
These days have brought much change and food for
fear. 410





A C T · I I



S C E N E · I

A room in Seneca's house. SENECA and BURRUS.

SENECA.

THE Armenian papers came through me last evening ;
I sent them on at once.

BURRUS (refusing a seat).

Nay, thank ye, Seneca :
I have been two hours in the saddle.

Sen. 'Tis a matter
Of heavy import.

Bur. I demanded audience.

Sen. Well?

Bur. All is settled.

Sen. And who has the commission
To undertake the Parthian?

Bur. Corbulo.

Sen. 'Tis good. I like the choice. And what said
Nero?

Bur. He told me well and wisely what to do,

When I had shown him all that must be done.

Sen. I wish his judgment were as tractable 420
With me. Took he your word?

Bur. The affair went pat.
What luck for Corbulo!

Sen. Pray sit, good Burrus,
And let us talk : my thought is most at ease
When I am sitting.

Bur. I pray you then be seated.

Sen. (*sitting*). Burrus, my difficulties day by day
Increase. The cares of empire are as nothing
To managing an emperor.

Bur. Why, what's the matter?

Sen. Give but attention to me.

Bur. I attend.

Sen. Do so most carefully : 'tis not a business
That may be brushed aside.

Bur. I am all attention. 430

Sen. Nero has broken with Britannicus :
Heard you of that?

Bur. Heard of it? I was there.

Sen. Well, that has brought to head the jealous
difference

'Twixt Cæsar and his mother. Since he first,
At our advice, as was most fit, denied her
A place in power, she has striven to force a title

Out of her power for mischief: this you have seen :
 But now to hear how she hath edged her practice;
 She overskins her old accustomed hate
 Of young Britannicus, speaks kindly of him, 440
 Hints of his right; nay, even hath dared upbraid
 Cæsar with usurpation. This was matched
 With words from him, which she no sooner heard
 Than in her rage disordered flew she hither
 To win me to her part; when seeing that I
 Stood firm, she fled in furious passion, saying
 That I should learn what temper she was of.

Bur. I would that all the gods and goddesses
 Might burn them up to cinders.

Sen. Peace, I say.

Cannot you sit? I need your best advice. 450

Bur. Except the lad.—Advice concerning what?

Sen. Why this new phase of court affairs. See you,
 [Takes a paper.

'Twas my just counterpoise of warring forces
 Ensured stability. Here Agrippina,
 Saved from her own ambition in the splendour
 Of her son's estate, serves in his interest
 To guard Britannicus, whom else he had feared.
 The boy, in favour of his sister's title,
 Sinks his own right. Then Nero's youthful passions,
 Growing to hatred of Octavia's bed, 460

Are stayed at equilibrium, as my judgment
And knowledge of the world enables me ;
And all goes well, when an important factor,
The empress, rounds, and plays me false to her motive,
As here assumed, and vitiates with that flaw
The nice adjustment of each several item.—
I go to expound you this ; you scarce attend,
Or answer with an oath.

Bur. A pious prayer

To extricate you from a world of trouble.

Sen. O, I can do it, Burrus, trust to me. 470

I place them all as chessmen, and I find
Delight in difficulty: but 'tis hard,
When one has chosen, strengthened a position,
To change the value of a piece. I think
Much of your judgment, and I ask you now
What you would do. I must decide to-day.

Bur. Why must?

Sen. As if you knew not.

Bur. If your art

Be to adapt yourself to every change

Sen. You know 'tis not. I say, should Nero now
Banish his mother?

Bur. Hark ye, Seneca, 480

If you remember, I foresaw this trouble.
I know no remedy, nor is't my office

To arrange the affairs of the palace, gods be praised.
 But this is clear to me, that our three friends
 Will never live together : what I urge
 Is, separate them : if you cannot that,
 We must not stick in balance when they break.
 Whene'er that happens, our pre-eminent duty
 Lies in our oath to Cæsar, and our second 489
 May be his mother's pleasure, to whose schemes
 We owe our place. [Knocking heard.

Sen. Who's there? come in.

Enter Servant.

SERVANT.

The Augusta
 Has come in private, and desires an audience.

Sen. Again, you see, the Augusta.

Bur. Eh! I'll be off.

Sen. One moment, pray. (*To Servt.*) Beg her be
 pleased to enter. [*Exit Servt.*

Burrus, I adjure you not to go, your presence
 May moderate her passion : or, if not,
 'Twere best you saw it.

Bur. Well, all's one to me.

Enter Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA.

Be not surprised that I so soon return :

I have repented. Ha! the general here!
 Thou seest me, Burrus, on a woman's errand. 500
 Nay, no apology; thou hast o'erheard
 My merit, not my fault.

Bur. I thank your majesty.

I will withdraw.

Agr. Nay, I desire thee stay.

I came not here to find thee; but thy presence
 Mends my intention. Let us hold a council.
 'Tis not the first time our triumvirate,
 Secretly gathered in the nick of time,
 Hath preordained the changes which should fall
 Upon the earth like fate. To-day's decree,
 If we combine, will be as big with action 510
 As any we have uttered.

Bur. I fear I stand

In ignorance of the question.

Sen. I will explain.

Agr. Listen to me. We three who here are met
 Stand in such place, that, if we but unite,
 There's none can say us nay. I do not ask
 Who raised thee, Burrus, or thee, Seneca,
 To where ye are: nay, if I asked you that
 I'd look for no more answer than if asking
 What two and two make; 'tis self-evident,
 Unquestioned; it was I; and if you owe 520

Allegiance to another, 'tis to one
 Whom I made more than I made you ; ay, one
 Who has nothing but what was mine, and is mine :
 His body mine, his life and being mine,
 His power, his place, his honour mine, my son,
 My Nero, who, when my husband late deceased,
 The honest Claudius, passed to join the gods,
 Was raised and set by me under your guidance,
 To share with me the empire of the world.
 Now what it may be that hath warped his heart 530
 Is from the matter : enough that so it is.
 I might blame one of you, sure not myself,
 Who have ever held in love and kindness towards him
 The same intention ; nay, and from my kindness
 I swerve not now, though for a wholesome end
 I mask that kindness in severity.
 There's but this choice, I must withdraw my favour,
 Or suffer my disgrace : ay, and for you,
 Burrus and Seneca, be sure, the same.
 If I fall, ye will fall. Therefore being one 540
 In interest with me, I look to find you ready
 To stand by me in any scheme of action
 Which may preserve our station, while we may.
Sen. Your majesty says well. We have hitherto
 All held one purpose, and if now we are foiled
 Or thwarted, none is thwarted more than I.

And since it is my pride, in the high place
 Whereto your judgment called me, to exceed
 The measure which might justify your choice,
 I shall not fail. In these new difficulties 550
 I would make no display of fresh resource ;
 Full means there will be, yet what means it is
 I am not ripe to say.

Agr. What say'st thou, Burrus?

The matter Seneca avoids is this :
 Shall I be driven to exile, or will ye
 Join with me to forbid it ?

Bur. Hath your majesty,
 In urging opposition, any scheme
 That might give life to policy ?

Agr. Ay, something.

I would protect Britannicus: his claim
 And popularity being pressed, must drive 560
 Nero upon my side.

Bur. Such act were merely
 The boy's destruction, were't not done in earnest
 And backed by force.

Agr. Then, since the case demands
 All earnestness, and since we lack not force

Bur. Between your son's rule and your stepson's
 claim
 There lies no middle way.

Agr. I never held
That a stout purpose chose a middle way.

Sen. What, what! Consider, madam, what you urge
Is to dethrone your son.

Agr. I am desperate.

Sen. Indeed, indeed! 570

Agr. What say'st thou, Burrus? Hast thou not a hope
The rightful heir might prove the better Cæsar?

Bur. Were this in earnest, yet my oath to Cæsar
Forbids me even to think the thing you say.

Agr. Thy oath to him! Rather to me 'twas sworn;
Who raised thee up to swear, and made the Cæsar
For thee to swear to? I can dispense your oaths:
Or rather, since they were unjustly sworn,
Justice dispenses them. 'Twould be a deed
Truer than oaths to break the oaths ye swore. 580

Bur. Justice is still against you. 'Twas unjust
To burn the will of Claudius; 'twas unjust
To hide Britannicus, and to bring forth
Your own son in his place: these things were wrongs,
And these old wrongs would you redub with new.
For when upon your wrongs Rome set her seal,
Her choice made right of wrong, and we that swore,
Swore not to Nero or Britannicus,
But unto Rome and to her chosen Cæsar. 589

Agr. Nay, Seneca, I think, will scarce say thus.

Sen. Burrus is right; and were he wrong, your
scheme

But complicates the mischief.

Agr. Then ye desert me?

Sen. Nay, nay, in other ways I may do much.

I may win Nero back.

Agr. The thought is folly;

We fight against him.

Sen. Oh! 'tis open treason.

Agr. Eh! Why, I think my son's ingratitude
Is nought to this; he had the right to expect
My favours: but for you, whom I chose out
And set above the rest because I chose,
Made you my friends because I chose, for you 600
There is no excuse. Had ye no motive, yet
To see a woman in distress like mine,
Wronged by her son, and injured as no woman
Has ever been, should rouse a manly spirit,
Ay, make a coward burn to do me right.
But ye stand there aloof, and not a word.
O good Seneca,
Rememberest thou thy days in Corsica?
The stoic letters of thine exile, writ
With Naso's pang, and that exuberant page 610
To me, at the first tidings of recall.
I have it still, the letter, superscribed

Your most devoted slave. Was not that felt?
 Had'st thou not cause? Now is the opportunity
 Of my distress, now I stand to lose all,
 All that those hard times strove for, all they won.
 The faith thou owest me, still may make all mine;
 Wilt thou deny it me?

Sen. Alas, good lady!

Agr. Alas!

Is this the vein? Think you I come to hear
 Your lamentations? Ah! ye dare, I see, 620
 Pity me while ye wrong me: but the truth
 Ye dare not say. Ye dare not say, Lo, we,
 Raised by your clemency, sworn to your service,
 Seeing your fair wind is changed, and there's no hope
 Left to your following, do as all knaves do,
 Leave you to perish. Ah, all's lost, all's lost! [*Weeps.*

Bur. (to Sen.). Business attending me at home, I
 go. [*Going.*

Agr. Thou goest! Then go, thou wooden coun-
 terfeit.

Nay, I'll be with thee yet. (*Exit Bur.*) Pooh! let
 him go,

An ugly, one-armed, upstart, sneaking knave: 630
 A title seeker, a subservient villain.

And thou,

Philosopher! come, teach me thy philosophy.

Tell me how I may be a dauntless Stoic
And a most pitiful ass. Show me thy method
Of magnanimity and self-denial,
Which makes of slaves the richest men in Rome.
Philosopher! Ay, thou that teachest youth
Dishonesty, and coinest honied speeches
To gloss iniquity, sand without lime. 640
Out, out upon thee!
Thou miserable, painful, hackney-themed
Botcher of tragedies, that deem'st thyself
A new Euripides, a second Cato:
A pedant rather, pander and murderer.
I'll let Rome know how pumpkin Claudius died;
I'll not be ashamed to say, 'twas I that spiced
His fatal mushroom. Honest Seneca
Stood by and smiled. True, true! I'll be true yet;
I'll right Britannicus. I'll tell the so!diers 650
What they should look for. Hear'st thou not their
shouts?
Seneca to the Tiber! the philosopher,
The murderer to the Tiber! Fulvia, Fulvia!—
Fulvia, I go. Come, I will leave; lead on. [*Exit.*
Sen. And I to train the cub of such a dam!
[*Exit.*

XX

S C E N E · 2

*Room in Domitia's house. Enter DOMITIA
and SELEUCUS.*

DOMITIA.

'Tis a most shrewd surmise, but nothing more;
I cannot listen to it. Though I hate
My sister, and would take some risk to crush her,
Yet must I set my foot on surer ground.
My better engine is Poppæa's dream, 660
Of which thou'st told me: I can build on that.
Thou should'st be there, I think, to-night.

SELEUCUS.

Ay, madam.

I go at once.

Dom. Speak nothing waveringly.

Sel. Nay, madam.

Dom. 'Tis her fate to marry Cæsar.

Sel. My art needs no instruction.

Dom. It must be so.

Sel. It is so, madam.

Dom. See, thy prophecy
Is that which should determine it. Go now. [*To door,*
Her purse will satisfy thee well.

Sel. Yet once
Ere I be gone, madam, I'll make a stand
To win thy credit.

670

Dom. Thou must show me cause.
Thou say'st the Augusta plots against her son,
Supports Britannicus, tampers with Burrus.
How know'st thou this?

Sel. Why should I lie?

Dom. I think
There may be some who make it worth thy while.

Sel. I would not meddle in this thing for money.

Dom. Why tell me then at all?

Sel. To win thy help.

Dom. To what?

Sel. To save the prince.

Dom. If thou'rt in earnest,
Where is thy confidence? Assure me first,
At least, of what thou say'st. Whence know'st thou
this?

680

Sel. Fulvia, thy sister's maid, rewards my love
With many trifles: what she overhears
I piece together.

Dom. What of this was heard,
And how much pieced?

Sel. The Augusta sent all out,
And spake long time in private with the prince.

What passed I guess from this ; that ere she left,
 Being risen to go, as Fulvia at the door
 Stood just without, she heard her voice most plainly
 Angrily entreating, saying, that though he doubted,
 Yet she would still with him regain her power: 690
 If he held off yet he so far was right,
 As that 'twas best to speak with Burrus first.

Dom. And has she since seen Burrus?

Sel. I think she hath.

He lately came from Seneca's, and there
 The Augusta must have met with him.

Dom. What passed?

Sel. I know not yet. Fulvia will know and tell me.

Dom. But can'st thou trust her?

Sel. Ay, she hath no purpose.

Whate'er she hears is mine.

Dom. Then make this thine.

Her tampering with Britannicus is nought :
 But if she speak with Burrus, there is matter 700
 That I can work on. Ay, if that should be—
 Make sure of that, and bring me word at once.
 To-night thou hast thy business; go and do it.
 Poppæa marries Cæsar.

Sel. Madam, I go. [Exit.

Dom. Now, my good sister, if this tale is true,
 Thy fortune turns: I trample on thee now.

Ay, if she have spoke with Burrus, then one word
 To Nero, and she is doomed. Patience and time
 Bring us all opportunities: we need
 But watch and wait. The way I least expected 710
 She runs within the reach of my revenge. [Exit.

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### S C E N E · 3

*Room in Otho's house. Enter POPPÆA.*

POPPÆA.

My dream was strange: but why of all strange dreams  
 Stands forth this dream, to say it hath a meaning?  
 There lies the mystery: the dream were nothing.  
 'Tis such a dream as I have prayed to dream.  
 'Tis such a dream as an astrologer  
 Must love to interpret. Nay, there's but one way  
 Seleucus can explain it.

*Enter Seleucus.*

I looked for thee  
 An hour ago: thou'rt late.

SELEUCUS.

The seasons, lady, 720  
 Of divination are determinate  
 By stars and special omens: 'tis our skill

To observe their presage. The hour is favourable.  
Thy dream . . .

*Pop.* Is't good?

*Sel.* Beyond thy hope.

*Pop.* Then tell it.

*Sel.* Two thousand sesterces . . . .

*Pop.* I have it here.

See! I was ready for thee. [*Gives him a purse.*]

*Sel.* I thank thee, lady.

*Pop.* Now for thy message.

*Sel.* I have sought out thy dream

By every means our art . . . .

*Pop.* Mind not the means.

*Sel.* There is one interpretation clear throughout . . .

*Pop.* And that? 730

*Sel.* Thou shalt be wife unto two Cæsars.

*Pop.* Two! Now be Isis praised. Two! O, Seleucus,

Thou'rt an astrologer. Two! this is life,  
Seleucus; this is life as well as fortune.

What are the names?

*Sel.* There ends my message, lady.

*Pop.* 'Tis good so far, but stays unkindly. Search,  
I must know more. Above all things, the affair  
Is secret. (*Knocking heard.*) I will send my servant to  
thee.

Thou must be gone: our business will not suffer  
My husband stumbling on thee here. This way.

[*Exit Seleucus, being put out.*

My dream was true: my hopes and schemes inspired  
Of heaven; yet this is far beyond them all. 741  
Wife to two Cæsars; maybe, mother of Cæsars.

[*Noise at door.*

To sit upon their rare, successive thrones,  
A manifold Augusta! Here's my husband.  
What would he say? Two Cæsars, ay, two Cæsars!  
[*Laughing heard without.*

*Enter Otho.*

OTHO.

Good evening, love.

*Pop.* Who laughed with thee without?

*Oth.* Lucan. He walked with me from Cæsar's  
supper.

*Pop.* Was Cæsar riotous?

*Oth.* Beyond all bounds.

*Pop.* See what you husbands are. You go abroad  
For pleasure, and when met among yourselves 750  
Push all to excess, and never think how patiently  
Your wives must mope at home, and wait your coming.  
And when you do return, up to the door  
You bring your merriment; but at the door

'Tis left, and in you come, in solemn glumness,  
To vent the sour reaction of your revels  
Upon your housekeeper.

*Oth.* Enough, Poppæa ;

I would be cheered.

*Pop.* Then I will cheer thee, love.

But what's the matter ?

*Oth.* Listen. Thou hast reproached me  
With going forth alone. What else could be? 760  
Would'st thou consent to sit there at my side,  
Where I, a man, am oft ashamed to sit ?  
Would'st thou, could'st thou be one among the women  
Of Cæsar's fancy ?

*Pop.* I spake not seriously.

*Oth.* See, but I do. I tell thee, love, this night  
Thou wert invited.

*Pop.* I!

*Oth.* He would have pressed it.

*Pop.* Who would have pressed it ?

*Oth.* Cæsar.

*Pop.* What dost thou say ?

(*Aside.*) He treads on prophecy.

*Oth.* Knowing thy mind,  
And mine, I begged him for our friendship's sake  
Urge me no further.

*Pop.* Thou did'st well, and he ? 770

*Oth.* Again to-night he asked for thee. 'Twas this  
Which made me sad and thoughtful.

*Pop.* Why be sad?

*Oth.* The meaning, love, the meaning : thou must  
guess it.

*Pop.* The very reason, Otho, which thou urgest  
Against my going, is in truth the reason  
Why such as I should go. As Cæsar's friend,  
Thou would'st do well to save him from the slough  
He daily sinks in.

*Oth.* Nay, but such a stake  
For such a flimsy hope.

*Pop.* I see a hope  
In the invitation. Otho, let us see 780  
What may be done among his friends.

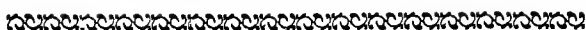
*Oth.* Poppæa,  
'Tis generously thought, but 'tis a thing  
Must not be thought. Trust to my judgment, love.  
'Tis Cæsar's love of power that threatens us here ;  
He would have nought held from him. Thee I hold,  
And most because I know thou would'st be mine.

*Pop.* Then thou must trust me, Otho.

*Oth.* And so I do.

*Pop.* Why, I were well his match. Let us go in.

[*Exeunt.*



## S C E N E · 4

*Room in the Palace. Enter AGRIPPINA and PALLAS.*

*AGRIPPINA.*

Pallas, thy date is out : thou art dismissed ;  
 Thou goest from the court : yet what thou takest 790  
 May soften thy regrets. Thy shiny days  
 Were not misspent, and thou may'st live like Cæsar.  
 Farewell, we still are friends : the debt I owe  
 I shall remember : 'twas thy power that first  
 Gave root to mine : for thee, I think my favours  
 Were once thy pleasure. If those days are gone,  
 We can look time in the face ; we have not wasted  
 The days that flew : 'tis now with what remain  
 Still to be careful. Friends and firm allies.

*Pal.* Ay, firm as ever.

*Agr.* Nay, though thou goest first,  
 That is not much : even that I cannot save thee 801  
 Is sign that I am fallen ere thou could'st fall :  
 A deeper, deadlier fall, unless indeed  
 My wit can save me still.

*Pal.* Alas, dear queen,  
 Fear makes this parting sad. But if there's hope,

'Tis this, to gain thy son.

*Agr.* Ay, till our schemes be ripe ;  
And even though Seneca betray me,—and that  
Is sure,—I fear not him. I know my son  
Better than he, and I shall win him yet.

My plan is now to seem resigned to all : 810  
I will pretend my purpose is to leave him,  
And fly from Rome to voluntary exile.

'Twill work upon his fear and duty both,  
To cut himself quite off from me, and all  
That goes with me. He will entreat me stay ;  
And if I stay—

*Pal.* Ay, if this storm go by,  
The turns of time may offer us reprisals.  
At present use all means to gain thy son.

*Agr.* I shall. Farewell.

*Pal.* Be bold. The gods protect you.  
Farewell. 820

*Agr.* Farewell. [*Exeunt severally.*]

*Enter Tigellinus and Paris.*

**TIGELLINUS.**

Look from the window : thou wilt see 'tis true ;  
He takes all with him.

**PARIS.**

Nay, if this is all.

*Tig.* This much were all : and yet this caravan  
Is but the least of six ; His monstrous Grace  
Brings up the rear.

*Par.* 'Tis nobly done of Cæsar.

*Tig.* 'Tis noble, say you, that the thief go quit  
With all his plunder from the house he plundered ?

*Par.* Hark how the weasel can upbraid the fox !  
Good Tigellinus, there's no need to grudge  
Pallas his scrapings ; the sea is full of fish : 830  
Rather thou should'st rejoice because thou seest  
Thy probable hap. Pray that as many mules,  
Litters and bags and bales, women and slaves  
May comfort thee.

*Enter Nero with Domitia.*

**NERO.**

Paris, what do you here ?

*Par.* I comfort Tigellinus on the fate  
Of his predecessor.

*Ner. (at window).* Gods ! see what a train  
Drags out the very bowels of the palace.  
No wonder my good mother's man resigns  
With resignation.

*Tig.* Ha ! ha !

*Ner.* I seek the Augusta.  
She late was here ; go find her ; say I wait her. 840

*[Exeunt Tigellinus and Paris.]*



*DOMITIA.*

Through my discovery, Nero, thy good fortune  
Lifts thee a corner of the veil whereunder  
Thy mother plots. Be not thou now deceived  
To further trust. She is bent upon thy ruin.

*Ner.* Though it be true she urged Britannicus  
Even in those words, we lack the surety yet  
She spokę them in good faith.

*Dom.* O, there's no doubt.

*Ner.* My mother is very deep, and often looks  
Far from her meaning. She will use this way  
To worm a confidence. 850

*Dom.* She did not then.

*Ner.* Yet must the boy have thought so, for you said  
That what she urged he took not all in kindness.

*Dom.* He bade her speak with Burrus.

*Ner.* The villainous brat!

*Dom.* Drive not the fault on him. Did Burrus waver,  
Nothing could save thee. And it seems thy mother  
Had hope to win him. She comes; now be thou firm.  
I will be gone. [Exit.

*Ner. (solus).* Now she cannot deceive me.

*Enter Agrippina.*

*Agr.* My son, thy mother comes at thy command.

*Ner.* O excellent mother !

*Agr.* What would'st thou with me, son ?  
I come to hear, and yet I scarce am fit 860  
For banter or abuse. I am ill to-day.

*Ner.* No wonder ; 'tis you do too much. 'Twere  
better  
You spared yourself. Go rest ; my business  
Will not cure headaches.

*Agr.* Speak whate'er it be.

*Ner.* Nay, if you're ill—

*Agr.* My sickness will not pass.  
To-morrow I shall leave thee ; that last grief  
Will soon engulph the rest : speak while thou may'st.

*Ner.* What's this ! leave me to-morrow ?

*Agr.* I would spare thee  
That worst disgrace of sending me away.  
I go of myself. 870

*Ner.* What now ?

*Agr.* 'Tis well resolved.  
I have been foolish ; 'twas a mother's fault,  
A tender fault : forget it, and hereafter  
Know my love better. If my presence bred  
Dislike, thy kinder mind may yet return  
When I am gone.

*Ner.* Why, what has happed, I pray ?

*Agr.* Nothing. I have only come to see my error.

I thought, 'twas I that gave him all . . . . .

*Ner.*

Tut! tut!

'Tis the old story told a thousand times.

*Agr.* Ay, and forgot as oft. Thy constant wrongs,  
I think, have dug my grave. Dost thou remember  
What answer once I made the sorcerer 881  
Who prophesied thy fortune? Thy son, he said,  
Shall reign, and kill his mother. Let him kill me,  
So that he reign, I cried. He spake the truth,  
But 'tis by grief thou slay'st me.

*Ner.*

That old rubbish

Were best forgotten.

*Agr.*

Indeed, I had forgot it :

But yesternight I dreamed it all again ;

A frightful dream : plain as I see thee now

Stood'st thou before me thus, with angry words

[*She acts.*

Mocking, until I wept for shame ; but thou 890

Did'st only laugh the more. Then ran I to thee,

And bared my breast, and cried, Kill me, O son !

And thou fastened'st thy snaky eyes upon me,

So that I could not see what thy hand did.

But, oh ! I knew. I heard thy weapon grate

Leaving the scabbard, and a fiery pang

Pierced through my heart. Ah !

*Ner. (aside).* Heavens, is she mad?—

Mother, good mother, mother! 899

*Agr.* 'Twas nothing. Nay, where am I? I was come  
To hear thy speech. What is't thou hast to say?

*Ner.* (*aside*). If this were trickery? Let the fact  
try.—

'Twas this: what speech you held the other morning  
With young Britannicus.

*Agr.* (*aside*). Ah! knows he that?—

Thy spies are most alert. This time, at least,  
I praise their zeal: though thou art slow to thank me  
For my kind service done to thee and him.

*Ner.* Whether is it kinder, say you, to him to urge  
him

To embrace the desperate plot, of which already  
He stood suspected, or more kind to me 910  
To water this rebellion with the tears  
Of your insidious passion?

*Agr.* Your man's a fool: I heard  
Your quarrel, and took pains to sound the boy.

*Ner.* Next you saw Burrus.

*Agr.* Well, and what said he?

*Ner.* Nay, that's for you to tell.

*Agr.* 'Twas this: Britannicus  
Most truly said that nought could help his claim,  
Except the guards and Burrus: at which word  
I flew to Burrus, offered him the bait;

And when he showed the scruple of his oath,  
Three words from me confirmed him. 920

*Ner.* If this were true!

*Agr.* How much you need me, Nero, will be plain  
When I am gone. Who has deceived you now?

Who works this madness in you, to conceive

That your disaster could be gain to me?

Have you believed what angry words I spoke

Were born of purpose, that my threats against you

Were aught but passion? You count not the tears,

The bitter, secret tears, for every pang

Your wrongs have wrought in me; and bitterer far,

The sharp remorse for each retaliation 930

Of speech provoked in anger. Let it end;

'Tis best I go.

*Ner.* See! if you had gone before

We had never quarrelled; now there's nought to lose

By going, 'tis a quarrel that you go.

*Agr.* No quarrel, nay. 'Tis only this: I thought  
That in your love I held perpetual office.

'Tis not so. Now my time is out: I go

As Pallas goes.

*Ner.* The sleek, extortionate Pallas,  
Dost thou defend the despicable Pallas?

*Agr.* I would be kind to friends; none will stand  
by you, 940

If you cast off those to whom most you owe.  
 'Twas first through him I came to seize the power  
 That made you Cæsar. Look! you have lost a friend.  
 Be wiser when I am gone.

*Ner.* I have good friends,  
 Burrus and Seneca : I trust them both.

*Agr.* Cannot you read the cause why still they urge  
 you  
 To cast me off ?

*Ner.* 'Tis the disgrace they feel  
 To see the empire managed by a woman.

*Agr.* 'Tis the constraint they feel in all their actions  
 Being overruled by me. Do you not see 950  
 They are my ministers, and you are ruled  
 By them in all they counsel? Rid of me,  
 They rule the world. Think you, when they have cast  
 What was above them underneath their feet,  
 They will have care to exalt what was below ?

*Ner.* They both are honest men ; you chose them  
 well.

*Agr.* You are too trustful, Nero. As you love  
 Your life, I say, be jealous of these men ;  
 These men that now would rule thee but to take  
 The empire from thy hands. They may speak ill 960  
 Of me,—believe that if thou list,—but oh!  
 If once they seem to encroach, delay not then ;

Hear no excuse nor explanation ; strike,  
Kill them, I say, before they murder thee.

*Ner.* But, mother, Seneca loves me.

*Agr.* As a master  
Will love a pupil while he takes instruction.  
He'll love you while you let him reign. Alas !  
I scarce dare leave you to him. You are too kind ;  
Will shrink to use the sword as it is needful  
For one who rules to wield.

*Ner.* You cannot think 970  
These men would serve me so.

*Agr.* What is my purpose ?  
My life's one object, my supreme ambition ?  
Was't not to raise thee where thou art, and now  
Is't not to keep thee there ?

*Ner.* So once I thought.

*Agr.* O think it yet. Look ! there is none can love  
you,  
Nero, as I must love you ; there's not one  
Can guard you as I can. Have I not proved  
My power ? While I am by you, it is yours.

*Ner.* Stay then.

*Agr.* O that it might be !

*Ner.* Thou shalt not go.  
Resign thy outward power ; be in all else 980  
As heretofore. Forget what I suspected.

Be still my mother.

*Agr.* Alas!

*Ner.* Yea, I will have it.

*Agr.* It cannot be.

*Ner.* Why not?

*Agr.* Seneca, my son,

Will not permit it.

*Ner.* Who is Seneca

To say me nay?

*Agr.* Unless you join with me

He will o'errule you.

*Ner.* He shall not o'errule me.

*Agr.* For that I'd stay. I would give up all else  
To stand by you: ay, and be happy so.

*Ner.* And so it shall be. Have thy private fortune,  
Remain in Rome.

*Agr.* But can you trust me, Nero? 990

*Ner.* Nay, I will never more suspect thee. Kiss me.

*Agr.* O, now you are good and kind. Tell me, who  
was it

Did me this wrong?

*Ner.* It was Domitia told me.

She spied on thee.

*Agr.* My sister! ha! you know not

The grudge between us?

*Ner.* Yes, I know of that.



*Agr.* And not suspect her slander? Did she also  
Commit Britannicus?

*Ner.* She cast all blame  
On thee.

*Agr.* I feared she might have wronged the boy.

*Ner.* Is he, then, innocent?

*Agr.* I went so far  
In sounding him as even to risk my credit. 1000  
Let not unjust suspicion add a weight  
To the just blame we bear. You must protect him.  
Promise me that.

*Ner.* I will ask Seneca.

*Agr.* Forgive, at least, his foolish indiscretion.  
He begged me make his peace. Now have I made it?

*Ner.* I'll think no more of that.

*Agr.* My dearest son,  
The joy of a good action will be yours  
As well as mine. O, I am happy now—  
Indeed, most happy now.

*Ner.* Come then, dear mother.

[*Exeunt.*]



# A C T . I I I



## S C E N E . I

*The same. SENECA.*

*SENECA.*

**B**URRUS was right. The more I think of it,  
The time has come that one or both must go ;  
So the more dangerous first, then are we quit  
At once of all our mischief and disgrace.      1013  
'Tis past belief that she who plunged in crime  
To enthrone her son should now plot to dethrone  
him.

There is no bridle for a wicked woman.  
Men may despise the venerable path  
Of virtue, and refuse the wholesome laws  
Of plain philosophy, but still they lean  
Towards reason, even in their wickedness.      1020  
There's an accountable consistency  
Found in their actions ; but if once a woman  
Throw off, as men soon do, the first restraints  
Of credulous childhood ; if her nature lack  
Tenderness, modesty, and that respect

To self which sees in self a thing to guard  
 From passion and caprice, and in the pleasure  
 Of fitness finds a law,—if she lack that  
 Or overpass it,—there's no further bound :  
 All things are mixed together ; virtue, crime, 1030  
 Wisdom and folly. For they have a spirit  
 Of infinite wrong genius. Rule, I say,  
 Such women if you can ; rule them with iron.

*Enter Nero.*

NERO.

Good-morrow, Seneca. Thou comest in time ;  
 I need thy counsel.

*Sen.* I am here to give it.

*Ner.* Then tell me : Where I have been lately  
 threatened,

Am I in danger ? I will use thy judgment.  
 Is't needful for my safety to remove  
 Britannicus ?

*Sen.* I have well considered all.

You must dismiss your mother. 1040

*Ner.* Not so, Seneca.

She now resigns all power and sign of empire,  
 And is content to live in quiet, retired  
 With few attendants and contracted state.

*Sen.* She offered terms ?

*Ner.* See, since she now concedes  
All reasonable claims, my duty towards her  
Patches our quarrel.

*Sen.* Whence this newborn trust?

*Ner.* She must remain. What of Britannicus?

*Sen.* He need not trouble you.

*Ner.* So said my mother.

I had thought differently, and even had made  
Full preparation for his going hence. 1050  
Would'st thou too bid me think there is no danger?

*Sen.* None, if your mother goes.

*Ner.* But nay, she stays.

*Sen.* That makes him dangerous.

*Ner.* Thy reason, Seneca?

*Sen.* I well can guess, Nero, your mother's vein  
With you in private: but 'twould much divert  
Your inclination from it, could you know  
Her latest way with me.

*Ner.* What hath she said?

*Sen.* Will you now think she hath urged Burrus  
and me

To set our honoured oaths and firm allegiance  
To you aside, as being unjustly sworn; 1060  
To undo all she has done, and bring Britannicus  
Back to the people as Rome's rightful heir?

*Ner.* I knew this, Seneca; and if 'twere meant,

Where lies the danger ?

*Sen.* True ; but then she vows  
Plainly that, rather than resign her power,  
She will make known her crimes, nor spare herself,  
If in the implication of her ruin  
She may involve us too. Know you of that ?

*Ner.* She could not mean it.

*Sen.* Certainly 'twas in passion  
Spoken, and fury : but 'tis such a thing 1070  
As might be done in passion.

*Ner.* And what says Burrus ?

*Sen.* He too would urge, as I, the Augusta's exile.

*Ner.* Yet must she stay.

*Sen.* Nay, Nero, she must go.

*Ner.* I bade thee, Seneca, to counsel me :  
Call'st thou this counsel ? 'Tis in the exigence  
Of such affairs that their necessity  
Precludes the true decision : this thou'st taught me :  
And that the man of counsel is but he  
Who handles best the circumstance, most gently  
Resolves the knot, not cuts it. In this difficulty  
Is there no course ? 1081

*Sen.* I go not back from this ;  
If both remain there's none.

*Ner.* Is my life threatened ?

*Sen.* Ay.

*Ner.* Then Britannicus must go, and shall go,  
As first I purposed.

*Sen.* Whither will you send him?

*Ner.* Far out of hearing of his claim. 'Tis not  
A trifling matter.

*Sen.* See now to the other extreme  
How you o'erleap the mean from wrong to wrong!

*Ner.* Such wrongs the title of my power condones.  
Shall I at the outset of a world-wide policy  
Stick at a household scruple, and for fear 1090  
To do a private wrong forfeit the power  
Which makes me Cæsar? See my glory trip  
At a little ill because I will not level  
My safety with the welfare of the world?

*Sen.* But what you must not, that you cannot do.

*Ner.* Rather what Cæsar must do, that he may.  
Rome understands not empire yet: we learned  
Something of Herod.

*Sen.* O the injustice, Nero!  
The wrong! How! Will you sooner spill a life  
So innocent, your creditor in kindness, 1100  
Than do disgrace to another, one so guilty  
As to deserve, sinking all exigency,  
The fearful penalty you now misplace?  
Think twice.

*Ner.* Why, if I think of it again,

Is not thy error fourfold more than mine?

This need is granted to all tyrannies,  
To slay pretenders, ay, and most of all  
Those of the family: but for a mother,  
The very Persian or the unrivalled Jew  
Would shrink from her dishonour.

1110

*Sen. (aside).* What to say?

Being out of kinship 'twere the lesser blot—  
Yet there's his innocence. Necessity  
Cannot suborn morality so far  
As such confusion,—nor the alternative  
May yet be shunned,—and when the best is wrong . . .

*Ner.* What thinkest thou?

*Sen.* Wait: it shall be my office  
To find some better means.

*Ner.* 'Twill be thine office  
To show in such a speech as I may make  
After his death, that, howsoe'er he died,—  
Which you shall know no more than shall my hearers,—  
'Twas for the general good.

1121

*Sen.* Be counselled, Nero.  
This is not my advice.

*Ner.* Thou offerest none  
Which can be taken.

*Sen.* See, I have brought your speech  
Touching the Parthian war.

*Ner.* 'Tis long.

*Sen.* The matter

Being very weighty, 'twill be looked for from you  
To say thus much: but if it seem too long,  
'Tis so composed that with these brackets here,  
Skipped as you list, the speech is any length.

*Ner.* I thank thee. I shall need that other speech.

*Sen.* I pray you may not need it. My advice 1130  
Is wait.

*Ner.* Is it? Stay—Seneca, dost thou think  
My mother was in earnest when she urged  
Treason on thee and Burrus? And dost thou think  
She fooled me in saying that she made proposal  
To Burrus but to sound his honesty?

*Sen.* Eh! with that tale she took you?

*Ner.* Is't not true?

*Sen.* That true!

*Ner.* She was in earnest though in passion?  
Answer me.

*Sen.* Ay, she was.

*Ner.* I pray thee leave me.

I shall not wait.

[*Exit Seneca.*

I stand alone. Such officers as share

1140

The functions of tyrannic government

Cannot be looked to for a policy

Of personal security; they lack



The motive that abates the fear of crime.  
 Britannicus must go, and 'tis my hand  
 Must aim his death. I have a medicine  
 Which he must drink for me, to save my life.  
 To-night shall do it. But for my other enemy,  
 My mother, who with such dissimulation  
 Won me, spite of foreknowledge of her deeds, 1150  
 And judgment of her purpose—Ha! indeed;  
 Seneca's laughing-stock! Now, what I do  
 Will much surprise her. If it kill her hope  
 And prove my temper towards her, 'twill be well.

[*Exit.*

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S C E N E · 2

*Room in Domitia's house. Enter DOMITIA
 and PARIS.*

DOMITIA.

Come hither, Paris!
 Thou art my freedman.

PARIS.

Ay, madam.

Dom.

Hitherto

Thou hast served me well.

Par. Ay, madam.

Dom. Would'st thou now
Retrieve thy purchase money?

Par. Dost thou say
Thou wilt restore me that for any service
I can perform?

Dom. I do.

Par. But name the deed. 1160

Dom. Dost thou remember Crispus Passienus?

Par. Could I forget thy honoured husband, madam,
That was my master?

Dom. Paris, thou hast a wife,
And thy wife hath a sister . .

Par. Ay.

Dom. How think'st thou
Thy wife would love her sister, if that sister
Supplanted her with thee, sowed seeds of hate,
Contrived divorce, and when thou wert divorced
Should marry thee herself?

Par. Madam, I know
Thy wrong, and share thy hate.

Dom. That was not all.

Par. Not all?

Dom. Nay, listen, Paris: if I forget 1170
My kinship in my hatred, I have cause.
I loved him, and have now no thought in life

But to avenge his murder.

Par. Why! can'st thou think? . . .

Dom. Think! do I think? I cannot speak of it.

If 'tis suspicion, be it so—and yet . . .

Well, thou hast seen my heart—even were my sister

Kind I should not forgive: but seeing she works

Against me still to drive me from the court,

I put my strength with Cæsar, to disbarrass

The palace of this plague. Say wilt thou aid me? 1180

Par. The favour Cæsar shows me binds me, lady,

To have no thought but his; and if his mother

Misses his love, 'tis not made up by mine.

Dom. I'd have thee on my side whate'er I do.

I have now contrived a scheme which hangs on thee

To bring it home.

Par. I will do anything

That will not touch my life.

Dom. She is hard to catch.

Late, when she plotted with Britannicus,

Though 'twas as clear as day, when brought to question

She quite out-faced us all.

Enter Servant.

SERVANT.

Madam, Seleucus

1190

The astrologer would speak with you.

Dom. Admit him. [*Exit Servus.*
 Paris, I'll tell thee later of my plans.
 Meanwhile keep close with Nero : let me hear
 Aught he lets fall that might advance our matter :
 Seleucus' visit is a part of it ;
 I'll speak with him alone.

Par. Madam, I go. [*Exit.*

Enter Seleucus.

Dom. How now, Seleucus ? Foiled !

SELEUCUS.

I warned you, lady,
 How impotent and vain an arm hath truth
 Unhelped by art.

Dom. Thou did'st but well, and now
 I shall lean more on thee. Hast thou persuaded 1200
 Poppæa of her fortune ?

Sel. Ay, my lady,
 I promised her two Cæsars.

Dom. Two ! how two ?

Sel. A secret that of art ; our divination
 Hath many such. The gods are favourable.

Dom. Talk not to me of gods. One was enough ;
 Yet the other matters not. Two Cæsars indeed !
 Most favourable gods !—See, here I give you
 Two hundred sesterces : but for that sum

Require another service.

Sel. I thank you, madam.

Dom. Locusta hath been seen with Nero.

Sel. Ah, 1210

How knew you that?

Dom. Attend to what I say.

I fear 'tis for Britannicus: the Empress,
Ridding herself, cannot have quitted him.

If 'tis his death is aimed at—and 'tis for thee
To probe and reach the truth—then if 'tis possible
Thou must prevent it. Go, give him a message,
He must not sup with Cæsar if he is bid.

Find you the probabilities, and lay
The warning where is need.

Sel. 'Twere a good office, lady.

Dom. Go quickly then. If thou do well in this,
I will reward thee well. 1221

Sel. I will deserve it. [*Exeunt.*]

xx

S C E N E · 3

*The room in Otho's house. Enter POPPÆA
and MAID.*

MAID.

Madam, the litter waits.

POPPÆA.

Give me my mirror, miss.

Why, see how slovenly thou'st done my hair ;

'Tis out already.

Maid. With your pardon, madam,

'Tis very well. Nay, 'tis as firm as a rock.

You look your best to-night.

Pop. Where is the flower

I gave thee ?

Maid. Here, my lady.

Pop. Put it in.

There, there. Ay, that will do. Now where's my

cloak ? [*Exit Maid.*]

Enter Otho.

OTHO.

So then you are going ?

Pop. Yes, I go alone,

1230

Since you will not come with me.

Oth. You are always free
To have your way ; but when your wish is mine,
It is twice yours. This time you know 'tis not :
And were I used to set constraint upon you,
Could it be said Otho e'er crossed his wife
With a command, it should be now : I'd say
This I forbid.

Pop. And why ?

Oth. I entreat you, dearest.

Pop. I am pledged to go.

Oth. Go not.

Pop. There's now no choice.

Oth. A light excuse would serve : a sudden sickness,
A cold, a headache. Do not go.

Pop. Why, look ! 1240
If you are not jealous, Otho ! jealous, jealous.
You see not straight.

Oth. I see you smile on Cæsar.

Pop. And think you, then, I must have turned my
love
Where I have smiled ? that I would play you false
For the pleasure of it ?

Oth. Why then sup with Cæsar ?

Pop. A trifle hangs upon him I would wear,—
The world.

Oth. So dazzled by the imperial splendour !

Think : to be Cæsar's mistress for a year
Is not to rule the world.

Pop. I will be Cæsar's wife.

Oth. Ah! look you then so high? 1250

Pop. Who shall be called my rival?

Oth. Cæsar's wife.

Pop. She hinders not.

Oth. Oh, thou would'st never dare it,
Did'st thou not love him.

Pop. What should I not dare?

Oth. Hast thou considered well the ambiguous style
Thou goest to take, and yet determined?

Pop. Ay.

Oth. 'Tis death, 'tis death. I speak now but for thee:
Not for myself. The cup Octavia drinks
To quit thy place thou too wilt come to taste.

Pop. That is my risk. The sport were tame with-
out it:

The game can boast a sting. 1260

Oth. Weigh well the danger:
Think of it thus; to live on a caprice
Whose jealousy is death; where for the reason
One seems to love thee will be ten to hate thee;
Where not to be beforehand with a treachery
Is to be victim.

Pop. I can steer my way.

Oth. And for this desperate venture wilt cast off
My love, our love?

Pop. What is love?

Oth. Art thou Poppæa?
Wer't any else butthou that questioned thus,
My answer then were ready: I should say
Ask of Poppæa, 'tis the thing she knows; 1270
Ask Otho's wife what love is, she can tell.
And thou to ask! as if 'twere some strange matter
Wide of experience, and to ask of me
Who won thee for my teacher!

Pop. 'Tis true the impeachment
I make of love is that he hath exhausted
His treasure rather than denied us aught.

Oth. Exhausted love! how mean you?

Pop. See! I am made
Of other stuff and passions besides love.
You cannot wish that all my life should move
Pent in this narrow circle, day by day 1280
Keeping the pretty game up which I learned
When I was green: that I should ne'er do else
Than this one thing, and that so constantly
That even the habit and the practice of it
Are scarce employment; that I should grow grey,
And see the wide and seasonable field
Of life's exertion and excitement fallow

With this one weed of love?

Oth. A weed, you say!

Pop. I have other motions in me. I've an itch
Men call ambition, and I see a prize 1290
Looks worth the having.

Oth. 'Tis not worth the having.

Pop. Why, what were I to thee, could'st thou be
Cæsar?

Oth. Even all thou art; I have no itch to rule
Merely to see that game played out, and cry
At the end—what is ambition?

Pop. It hath no end.

Oth. 'Tis plain love hath an end.

Pop. Nay, as I love thee,
I still shall love thee. Only, Otho

Oth. What?

Pop. I thought your eye was open to perceive
The grandeur of my scheme.

Oth. Thou wert mistaken.

Pop. Upon what falls to-night, let us decide. 1300
I have no secrets from you: if I prosper,
Desert me if you will, but blame me not:
For dared I combat Cæsar's inclination
There were as much to lose. The thing I do
Will be your safety.

Oth. Rather would I die,

Ay, rather far that thou should'st die than do
This baseness willingly.

Pop. Nay, speak not so.

I shall do nothing base.

Oth. Thou must succeed.

Only before thou goest I'll kiss thee once. [*Kisses Pop.*
Otho's last kiss. Farewell. 1310

Pop. Good night. I go.

Lesbia, my cloak! I shall have news ere morn. [*Exit.*

Oth. Gone! With a grace

As firm, as pleasant, gay and self-possessed
As that with which she hath come a thousand times
To meet me, kiss me, and call me hers, she goes
To change her husband . . . gone! and not a sign
To show that leaving me was losing aught!
Fool that I was! To the soul I knew her vain,
Self-seeking, light, petulant at the breath
Of contradiction, and yet I trusted. What, 1320
Asks she, is love. Ay, what? I love my dog;
He is devoted beyond reason, pitiful
In his dependence; he will scarce reproach me
With some short wondering sorrow, if I strike him—
I love my horse; he bears me willingly,
Answering spiritedly; with all his strength
Generous and gentle. But woman, if man love her,—
Seeing she is less devoted than the hound,

Less noble than the horse,—’tis that we deem,
 That being human she can gauge the worth 1330
 Of our intensity, and in kind somewhat
 Repay it : ’tis a delusion ; spite of shew,
 She hath not in her heart that which her eyes
 Fondly declare. There is no passion possible
 Which beauty can interpret or soft speech
 Express, which was not mine ; ay, by that title
 O’er and o’er ; yet I think no dog in Rome
 Would leave the meanest slave that fed him once,
 As hath this woman left the man that loved her.

[*Knocking.*

Enter Lucan and Petronius.

LUCAN.

Ha ! here he is. We have come to fetch you, Otho.

Oth. I do not go to-night. 1341

PETRONIUS.

Not go ! What is’t, man ?—ill ?

Oth. My wife has gone, therefore I do not go :—
 You see the matter, maybe have foreseen it ;
 I was too blind. Spare me your condolence ;
 I do not wish even sympathy. You know
 I loved her, but ’tis over. Let me give you
 Such knowledge as I wish my friends to have,
 Else might they mistake somewhat. See ! she is gone

To-night against my wish : 'tis nothing more : 1350
But this will lead to much. I let my house ;
Sell you my wine, Petronius, if you wish it,
And take—I shall not want for interest—
The Lusitanian proconsulate.

Luc. You go from Rome ?

Oth. I do.

Petr. Break not with Cæsar.

Oth. I'll take employment.

Petr. Jove! I think you're wise,
Otho ; you're wise. I've half a mind myself
To give my friends the slip. But as it is,
Well . . come, I'll take the wine ; what is your price ?

Oth. The price I gave. 1360

Petr. A bargain. I shall send for it.

Luc. (to Otho). Otho, I will not go. Although thy
wrong

Cannot be stayed, yet would I rather die
Than sit and smile on it.

Oth. I thank thee, Lucan.

I'd ask thee rather look upon the matter
As on a thing of course : I think it is.
Go, take no note of it.

Luc. If 'tis thy wish.

Oth. It is. Good night.

Luc. and Petr. Good night. [Exeunt.]

XX

S C E N E · 4

A room in the Palace. Enter AGRIPPINA.

AGRIPPINA.

Thus must it be then. I must be cast out,
 Turned from the palace, lodged in a private house,
 Retired, reduced, forgotten, like any relic 1370
 Of barbarous royalty, caged out of reach
 Of good or ill; my state just so much show
 As has no meaning. Now may some god of mischief
 Dare set me in the roll of puny spirits.
 Ah!—Hath this my seal, seemeth it? O may my foes
 Be fooled so far to think that guile will stay
 First in catastrophe. Nay, if I crouch,
 'Tis but to plant a foot whence I may bound
 With braver spring.—I am clear; the right's my hope.
 Right against blood hath still been honourable. 1380
 Men love the name of Brutus. The first Brutus
 Slew his own son; the last his Cæsar. Ha!
 'Tis madness; nay, that's not my thought, not that.
 'Twould fright the world that there should be a woman
 Who could slay Cæsar and son in one. Nay, nay,
 That lies beyond all fate. Yet, short of that,—
 O blood, thou sacrament and bond of nature,

Look to the strain : summon thy best allies,
 Thy yearnings and thy shudderings, thy terrors
 And dreams of dread ; marshal the myriad fingers
 Of scorn and hate : else, O thy rottenness .1391
 Will out. Indeed I think thou'rt a weak thing,
 Bred of opinion ; when I would have trusted thee,
 Hath not that other rivet of thy chain
 Snapped at the mutual end ? Thy boasted anchor
 Drags on the bottom, and my ship drifts on
 To the rocks, to the rocks : missing that hold, the sense
 Is dizzy with madness ; ay, and whither I go
 Is hidden ; nor aught I know, save that the future,
 Whate'er it be, I shall do much to make. 1400

Enter Britannicus.

Ah ! ah ! 'tis thee.
 Speak softly, for these walls have ears.

BRITANNICUS.

Thou thinkest

That Cæsar watches me.

Agr. To-day thy spies
 Are mine, but must not hear.

Br. Hast thou seen Burrus ?

Agr. He is thine enemy : no hope from him.

Br. I would not have this spoken of as my hope.

Agr. True, boy. I mentioned not thy name, and
 Nero,

Being now persuaded thou art innocent,
 Forgives thee. Let the risk I ran for thee
 Be earnest of more good.

1410

Br. I thank thee for it.

Agr. 'Tis nothing, this. Thou yet shalt reign.

Br. I pray thee

Draw me not into thy deep-plotted schemes
 That rush on guilt. If I have hope or wish,
 'Tis but to live till the divorce be writ
 'Twixt Cæsar and my sister : that is not long
 To wait ; and then her exile, which must follow,
 If I may share, I think some days of peace
 May be in store for both. That is my hope,
 Not Rome, nor empire, but some tranquil spot
 Where innocence may dwell, and be allowed 1420
 To be its own protection.

Agr. Are you that fool ?

Br. I would none doubted it.

Agr. Can it be possible
 That thou, who in thy veins hast the best blood
 Of Rome, should'st own so beggarly a spirit,
 And being the heir of all the world should'st wish
 Only to hide thy claim, so thou may'st live
 The life which broken-hearted slaves, and men
 Diseased and aged scarce prize ?

Br. I hear, I hear,

And am not shamed.

Agr. Nay, then I have more to say.

Br. I too might say somewhat. Is it not strange,
Thou being a lady, should'st possess a heart 1431
So fond of wrong, and blood, and wrathful deeds?

Agr. Ah, ah! Thou thinkest that thou know'st me
rightly,

And yet would'st dare to taunt me, and to thwart
My stablished purpose? Child, I say, remember
The deeds thou castest in my teeth, and think
Whether it were not much better now at last
To side with me, and take the help I proffer.
I have sworn to set thee on the throne; think twice
Ere thou oppose my will.

Br. Did'st thou not say 1440
Thou had'st persuaded Nero of my innocence?

Agr. Say I was wrong.

Br. Nay, thou wert right in that,
Wrong now returning on disclaimed ambition.

Agr. Art thou content to see thyself deposed,
Thy sister thus dishonoured

Br. Say no more.

Agr. Consider!

Br. Nay, I'll not consider.

Agr. Now

This once again I bid thee, child, consider.

Doubt not my power.

Br. No more. I will not join thee.

Agr. Then hear me, child. Whether thou join or
not,

Whether thou wilt be Cæsar, or refuseth, 1450

Thou shalt be Cæsar. If thou wilt not plot,

It shall be plotted for thee : in my hands

I hold thy life, and guard it but for this,

To make thee Cæsar. Ay, and if thou shrinkest

When the day comes, I'll have a doll made like thee;

My men shall carry it about, and style it

Britannicus, and shout to it as to Cæsar.

I say thou shalt be Cæsar, think it o'er.

Dare not refuse me : 'tis not yet too late ;

To-morrow I will speak with thee again. 1460

Now to thy better thought. [*Exit.*]

Br. O murderess !

And for this last turn must I thank my folly,

That partly trusted her. Now would to heaven,

If live I must, that I might change my lot

With any man soe'er, though he be chosen

And picked for misery. Surely there's none

In all the empire can show cause to stand

And weigh his woe with mine. Find me the man,

If such there be, that hath an only sister

'Spoused to a murderer and adulterer, 1470

Who hates her virtue, since it shames pretext
To cast her off: or, if such man be found,
Hath he for mother one that slew his father,
And threats him with like death? or if all this
Be matched in one, hath he no remedy?
Is his speech treason? Is his silence treason?
Is he quite friendless, helpless?
Forbidden to budge a foot from the dread focus
Of crime and anguish? 'Mongst his lesser wrongs
Hath he this brag, that he hath been robbed, as I,
Of the empire of the world? O happy hinds, 1481
Who toil under clear skies, and for complaint
Discuss long hours, low wages, meagre food,
Hard beds and scanty covering: ye who trail
A pike in German swamps, or shield your heads
On Asian sands, I'd welcome all your griefs
So I might taste the common nameless joys
Which ye light-heartedly so lightly prize,
And know not what a text for happiness
Lies in a thoughtless laugh: what long, impassable,
Unmeasured gulfs of joy sunder it off 1491
From my heart-stifling woe.

Enter Octavia.

Thou art welcome, sister.

OCTAVIA.

Brother, a request you must grant.

Br. Anything,

Dearest, to thee.

Oct. Sup not to-night with Cæsar.

Br. I must. Yet what's thy reason? Thou art
moved

Strangely beyond the matter.

Oct. Read this paper.

Br. (reads). *Britannicus, sup not to-day with Cæsar.*

How came you by it?

Oct. 'Tis from Fulvia,

The maid that loves Seleucus; whence 'tis his.

Br. Most like; I know the turbaned mountebank
Keeps an old kindness for me. Yet nay, nay— 1500
If this should now be found—nay, he's too shrewd
To put himself in writing.

Oct. He might dare

With Fulvia.

Br. Nay. I cannot think 'tis his.
And were it, what's his credit? I do not trust
These fellows far. They trade in mystery,
And love to thicken water,—and if there be
A plot to poison me, to-day's occasion
Offers no easier vantage than to-morrow's.
My safety lies elsewhere.

Oct. O do not go.

Br. Fear not, Octavia, I am very careful, 1510
And eat but sparingly of any dish,
Nor aught but what goes round. To stay away
Might show suspicion, and could serve no end.

Oct. Brother, be warned, go not to-night; to-
morrow

We may learn more. I beg . . .

Br. Nay, urge me not,
Since with this warning I am doubly safe.

Oct. Oh, I dread Nero's anger; 'tis most certain
That ill will come of it.

Br. Nay, fear him not.
Let us go sup. I will use all precaution, 1519
Thou may'st be sure, since for thy sake I do it:
And while thou livest I shall have both reason
And wish to live. Have care, too, for thyself;
I think thy peril is no less than mine. [*Exeunt.*]

XX

S C E N E . 5

*Supper-room in the Palace. All are reclined at two
tables, thus :*

<i>Agrippina,</i>	<i>Nero,</i>	<i>Poppæa.</i>	<i>A gentm.,</i>	<i>Octavia,</i>	<i>A lady.</i>
<i>Tigellinus,</i>	<i>A gentm.</i>		<i>Britannicus,</i>	<i>Paris.</i>	
<i>A lady,</i>	<i>Domitia.</i>				
<i>Petronius,</i>	<i>Lucan.</i>				

Waiters, tasters, etc. Some are talking.

NERO.

I will propose a question to the table :
Which of the arts is greatest ? Lucan, these sausages
Are something new : try them.

POPPÆA.

You question, Cæsar,

Which of the arts is greatest ? I would answer
The one which Cæsar honours.

TIGELLINUS.

But if Cæsar

Should honour more than one ?

PETRONIUS.

The sausages 1529

Are good enough. As for the arts, here's Lucan

Can speak for poetry.

Ner. If any man

Could prove one art beyond contention first,

I would reward him excellently. With me

To know the best and follow it are one :

Success being easy in all, my difficulty

Lies in distraction : show me then the best,

I'll perfect that.

Pop. What ! Cæsar give up singing ?

Ner. For better things.

Tig. Which be the arts ?

Petr. (to servants). Here, vermin,

This wine's half-way to vinegar.

Ner. Who will name

The arts ? There's sculpture, painting, poetry, 1540

Singing . .

PARIS.

And acting.

Ner. Well, what more ?

Tig. Horse-racing.

Pop. (across). Ruling I think's an art.

AGRIPPINA (across).

And making love.

Ner. 'Tis of the fine arts we would speak.

(To servants) Ho ! fellows,

Pour out the wine! Ah, here's a lovely mullet.
Has this been tasted?

TASTER.

Ay, Cæsar. 'Tis stuffed with truffles.

Ner. A mullet stuffed with truffles. Now, Poppæa,
Will not this please?

Pop. I thank you.—(*aside*) Prithee, bid
Lucan to speak for poetry.

BRITANNICUS (to servant).

Nay, the mullet.

Ner. Lucan, what say you for your art?

LUCAN.

I claim

The first place for it, and I say 'tis proved 1550
Nobler than any plastic art in this;
It needs not tools nor gross material,
And hath twin doors to the mind, both eye and ear.
Nay, even of drama Aristotle held,
Though a good play must act well, that 'tis perfect
Without the stage: which shows that poetry
Stains not her excellence by being kind
To those encumbrances, which, in my judgment,
Are pushed to fetter fancy.—Then hath our art
Such strong and universal mastery 1560
O'er heart and mind, that here 'tis only music

Competes, and she is second far in scope,
Directness, and distinction.

Ner. You think that?

Luc. Ay, Cæsar.

Ner. Do you! you who have ever been
More gracious to my voice than to my pen!
Am I a better singer than than poet,
Think you?

Luc. Nay, Cæsar; but

Ner. Ha! then you are envious.
You would not have me write because, forsooth,
You write yourself. Now, by the god, I swear
Thou shalt not publish nor recite a verse 1570
Within my empire till I give thee leave.
One man to keep the muses to himself!
Monstrous!

Pop. And serve him right.

Luc. (*aside*). Monstrous indeed!

Ner. (*to servants*). Heat me some wine.
Come, lords, ye drink not. Eh! what have we here?

Servant. Cherubim, Cæsar.

Ner. What is Cherubim?

Petr. The gods of the Jews.

Ner. Hoo! let us eat their gods.
They are much like pheasants.

Servt. 'Tis a pheasant, Cæsar,

And stuffed with woodcock.

Petr. Cæsar, there's one art
Has not been mentioned; though I think at table
It should not be passed o'er. 1581

Ner. What art is that?

Petr. I shall contend it is the first of all.

Ner. Name it.

Petr. It hath no name. It scarce exists.
I think the goddess never walked the earth.

Par. Ranks she with poetry?

Petr. I avouch above.

Par. Cæsar, if this be proved, thou must rescind
Thy poet's sentence.

Ner. Let him prove it first.

Petr. I see in other arts some wit or fancy
Extrinsical to nature. I can find
No ground of need in any, save maybe 1590
In architecture,—which ranks not so well
As to be mentioned by you.—Now, if I
Show you an art whose matter every day
Is life's necessity, which gives more scope
To skill than any other, which delights
Among the senses one which the other arts
Wholly neglect, would you not say this art
Hath the first claim? See, I could live without
The joys of harmony, colour, or form,

But without this it were impossible 1600
To outlast the week.

Par. Oh! Cookery.

Several. Cookery, cookery!

Petr. There's the mistake I gird at. None of you
But thinks this art I speak of, which includes
Pleasures of entertainment, ease and elegance,
The mind's best recreation, the satisfaction
Of the body's nearest needs, the preservation
Of health, and with all this, the gratifying
Of that one sense, which above all the senses
Is subtle, difficult, discerning, ticklish,
And most importunate,—that this great art 1610
Is a cook's province.

Ner. True, Petronius, true;
There's room for bettering these things.

Petr. Why, wine—
Just think of wine. A hundred vintages
Lie in my cellar; by my taste I tell
Each one; are eye or ear so delicate?

Par. Here's half a case already.

Petr. Then again,
Look on this side. You bid your friends to supper:
That is a promise; and hath all your life
An hour more suitable for skilful kindness? 1619
They come perturbed, fatigued, hungry and thirsty;

Nature exhausts them for you, drains them empty
 To take all kinds of pleasure ; their grated nerves
 Ask music, their wearied limbs soft cushioned couches,
 Their harassed mind wise cheerful conversation,
 Their body's appetites fawn at the word
 Of food and wine : and yet we see these things,
 Which should be studied, ordered, suited, measured,
 All jumbled in confusion, till a feast,
 Instead of relaxation and renewal,
 Becomes, I say, for body and for mind 1630
 The worst discomfort and the stiffest trial
 That life can show.

Par. Bravo! bravo!

Ner. For one,
 I am converted. Thou shalt be henceforth
 Arbiter of my table.

Br. (to servt.) 'Tis boiling hot ;
 Taste it.

Ner. (to Petron.) Accept you the office?

Petr. This would make me
 A Cæsar above Cæsar.

Ner. In the province
 Of imperial æsthetics.

Servt. to Brit. Pardon, your highness,
 I will add water to it : 'tis yet unmixed.

[*They pour in the poison.*

Petr. 'Twill be a tyranny. For look, I hold
 Man's stomach is not to be trifled with. 1640
 Not only should your table give delight
 Even to the ravishment of every palate,
 But since the end and final cause of food
 Is not to breed diseases in the flesh,
 Nor heat the spirits more than they can bear,
 But rather to build up and comfort health,
 I'd order first that there be served at table
 Nothing but what is wholesome.

Br. (*after drinking while Petr. speaks*). Ah!

[*Falls back.*

Oct. The wine, the wine!

Br. Ah! [*Dies.*

Oct. He is dead. O dead! O dead! 1650

Lucan, Petronius and Paris go to Britannicus.

Domitia follows.—All rising.

Agr. What is this?

Ner. He hath a fit.

Petr. He doth not breathe.

Oct. (*has come round to front*). Alas, alas! my brother;
 he is dead.

Ner. Nay, sit you down; look not aghast, I say.
 He hath the falling sickness, and will oft
 Faint on a sudden, as ye see. He lies
 An hour as dead, and then awakes again

With nought amiss. Best take him out in quiet.

(*To servants.*) Carry him from the room.

Luc. Lift you his feet, Petronius.

We two will take him.

Ner. Let him be, I say. 1660

His servants will attend him. Return to table :

We cannot spare you.

Par. (to Oct.) Honoured lady, be hopeful :
For hath your noble brother e'er been taken
Like this, he may recover.

Oct. (to Par.) Never—
Never ! O never ! he is dead ! I knew it ! [*Going.*]

Ner. (to Oct.) Heh, sit you down. What could you
do, I pray ?
He will come round.

Oct. Oh ! I will follow him.

[*Exit with servants who are carrying Brit.*]

Petr. (to Par.) How happened it ?

Par. (to Petr.) He drank a draught of wine
Fresh mixed, and then fell back just as you saw.
What think you ?

Petr. (to Par.) Think you 'twas aught ? 1670

Par. (to Luc.) What think you ?

Luc. Impossible.

Dom. (aside). He is poisoned. Yet my sister
Was nothing privy to it. She is pale.

Ner. Come, sit you down, aunt : come, Petronius,
Lucan, be seated. Let not the horrid sight
Unwhet your appetites.

Petr. (to Luc.) That was no fit. [*To Par.*
He is dead. What if 'twere poison? Where's the
drink?

Par. 'Twas hurried out.

Luc. O God!

Ner. (to servts.) Serve out the wine.
We all must need a bumper ; 'tis most natural.
I have known the mere revulsion to provoke
In a strong man a seizure similar 1680
To that which frightened him.

Par. (aside). 'Twould not amaze me,
Had he such drink to cheer him. [*All refuse drink.*

Pop. (to Nero). I will not drink.

Ner. From my cup.

Pop. Well, from thine. [*Drinks.*

Luc. (aside). He is self-betrayed.

Ner. Where were we ?

Petr. At the point where Cæsar made me
Arbiter of his table. I shall ask
To inaugurate my office.

Ner. Do so, Petronius.

Petr. Then know you are all dismissed. Let all go
home,

And for the prince's safety offer up [*All rise.*

What vows ye may unto the gods. Myself,

I set the example, and go first. Come, Lucan. [*Going.*

Ner. Eh! eh! yet thus 'tis best. Good night,

Petronius, 1691

Thou hast spoken well; may the gods hear thy prayers.

I wish you all good night.

In disorder of going curtain falls.



A C T · I V



S C E N E · I

The same. A public place. THRASEA and PRISCUS meeting.

PRISCUS.

I WAS coming to your house.

THRASEA.

'Tis well we meet.

How went it in the senate ?

Pr. As you said.

A message read from Nero.

Thr. Seneca ?

Pr. No doubt.

Thr. And in what terms touched he the murder ?

Pr. With double tongue, as being an ill which none,
And Cæsar least, could have desired ; and yet
A good none should lament.

Thr. He is very prompt. 1700

What glozing for the hasty burial ?

Pr. The speech was thus ; that 'twas the better
custom

Of simple times to shun all vain parade :
 That private grief was mocked by frigid pomp,
 And public business and quiet thereby
 Idly disturbed ;—*Then for myself*, it ran,
To have lost the aid and comfort of a brother
Demands your sympathy. Of your goodwill
I make no doubt ; the more that my misfortune
Throws me upon it, seeing that all my hopes 1710
Now anchor wholly on the commonwealth.
Wherefore to you, my lords, and to the people,
I look so much the more for maintenance
And favour, since I now am left alone
Of all my family, to bear the cares
Your empire throws upon me.

Thr. This was well.

Pr. Then were there gifts decreed to all his friends.

Thr. Hush-money. Did none murmur ?

Pr. There were none
 So much as frowned.

Thr. See, Lucan ! let us speak with him.

Enter Lucan.

If now he be not shaken, I mistake 1720
 His temper.

LUCAN.

Good day, Thræsea.

Thr. A dull morning.

Luc. Comest thou from the house?

Tbr. Nay, more's the pity.

There was a distribution, as I hear,
To friends of order. Say, how didst thou fare?

Luc. In many things, Thræsea, I hold not with thee,
Nor will pretend that I can see in virtue
A self-sufficiency invulnerable
Against the crime of others. I believe
The world is wronged, and burn to avenge the wrong.
But, as an honest man, I take thy hand. 1730

Tbr. I looked for this, Lucan, and take thy hand.
Frivolity and crime are most unworthy
Of thy companionship.

Luc. My uncle's hope
Tainted my judgment. I have been blind, and
wronged thee.

Tbr. Where I am misconceived I blame myself.

Luc. Hear me abjure.

Tbr. Spare words. There's no more fear
Thou wilt be duped. Cæsar, in slaying his brother,
Has doffed the mask.

Luc. The heart of Rome must swell
To put the monster down.

Tbr. We have our part :
But in the sorry tragedy he makes 1740
We can be but spectators. On his stage

There's nought but folly. Come thou home with me:
I'll show thee how we may regard this play,
Take note of all the actors, and watch the end.

[*Exeunt.*

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## S C E N E · 2

*The room in Domitia's house. Enter DOMITIA and  
PARIS.*

*DOMITIA.*

'Twas a most shameful deed ; we take upon us  
A just revenge.

*PARIS.*

But 'tis the general thought  
That Nero killed his brother ; that his mother  
Had no hand in it, rather would have saved him.

*Dom.* 'Twas her intrigues determined him, and they  
Who egg on others are the real movers. 1750  
Now will he hate her more a thousand-fold  
For driving him to crime. She will not 'scape :  
Our plot will stand.

*Par.* Is it thy scheme to push  
Silana's accusation ?

*Dom.* Ay, 'tis that.

We shall accuse the Augusta of intent  
To marry Plautus, to assert his claim,  
And thus assail the throne.

*Par.* How wilt thou broach it?

*Dom.* We have fixed to-night. Cæsar will dine at  
home,

And with convenient company. 'Tis agreed  
When he's well drunk, you enter, announce the plot  
As freshly hatched, and so unmask the affair 1761  
That he shall be persuaded.

*Par.* How glibly, madam,  
Speech can glide o'er the hitch; I must feel flattered  
That just in the awkward place I am shovelled in  
To carry it through, who have no heart in the matter.

*Dom.* No heart! had you no ear then to my promise?

*Par.* 'Tis little for the risk. But what of Burrus?

*Dom.* Seeing that without his name the plot were  
weak,

And that to avouch his treason would discredit it,  
We say he is suspected.

*Par.* 'Twill not stand. 1770

We lack confederates.

*Dom.* You forget Poppæa.

I have sent for her to try her. If I mistake not,  
'Tis she that knocks. Get you behind the door,

And watch what passes. There! [*Paris hides.*

*Enter Poppæa.*

Now this is kind.

POPPÆA.

I am bounden, lady, to wait on Cæsar's aunt.

*Dom.* I count the days, Poppæa, when you yourself  
Will call me aunt : and in that happy hope  
I'll stand thy friend.

*Pop.* I shall have full need, madam,  
Of all good offices.

*Dom.* Maybe : my sister  
Is an unscrupulous enemy. Beware! 1780  
She stole from me a husband, and will now  
Keep you from winning one.

*Pop.* She doth not hide  
Her disapproval of my love to Cæsar,  
And thus appears my foe ; but in truth, madam,  
Half of my heart sides with her, and the fear  
Lest the full passion which I bear your nephew  
May shame his rank, conquers my love so far  
That oft I doubt if I have a heart to bear  
The honour I have dreamed of, or a love  
Worthy of him, since it so much can fear. 1790

*Dom.* Tut, tut! if you're the woman that I think  
You're just what I would wish his wife to be.

Wronged in his marriage, he since hath wronged himself :

Octavia is a ninny, but his low  
 And last intrigues have scandalized the court :  
 Our family is hurt. You are his equal  
 In wit and manners, and can hold your place ;  
 Nor in opposing you is it his good  
 His mother weighs : rather it suits her schemes  
 To have his wife a fool. 'Tis not unknown 1800  
 What lately she had dared to keep her place,  
 But that Britannicus' so sudden death  
 Blasted her plots : now in her constant project  
 Your marriage threatens her.

*Pop.* The more I see  
 It blackens more. May I dare ask you, madam,  
 To tell your sister that I willingly  
 Retire, if she prevail upon her son  
 Quite to forget his love and put me by ?

*Dom.* Which side to take ? that must you first  
 determine ;  
 'Tis Cæsar or his mother. I supposed 1810  
 'Twas him you loved, not her. Now should I tell you  
 That she is deeply pledged to take his life,  
 And seize the empire . . .

*Pop.* Oh ! what wicked crimes !  
 Impossible !

*Dom.* But if I prove it to you?

*Pop.* I could not hear it.

*Dom.* Nay, but if 'tis true,  
Side you with us who hinder it, or her  
Who pushes it?

*Pop.* O madam, 'tis incredible.

*Dom.* Ay, and to-night, as Nero sits at supper,  
When Paris brings the news he'll not believe it.  
But then a word from you might turn the scale, 1820  
And rouse his better judgment.

*Pop.* The very thought  
That her destruction were my safety, madam,  
Would hold my tongue. Indeed you have wronged  
me much,  
Telling me this.

*Dom.* Why, such things you will hear.

*Pop.* Nay, let me go.

*Dom.* Ay, go, but think upon it.

*Pop.* Farewell. [Exit.

*Dom.* (*sola*). Was I mistaken?

*Par.* (*re-entering*). My mind is changed.

*Dom.* How now! what say you?

*Par.* Madam, the plot will stand.

*Dom.* Did you hear all?

*Par.* And saw.

*Dom.* All that compunction . . .



*Par.* Ay, be sure of it.

Why she and I could carry anything. 1830

She's a born actress : we must keep good friends  
With her.

*Dom.* Then this is well ; go learn your part.

[*Exeunt.*

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S C E N E . 3

*At the tomb of Britannicus. Enter OCTAVIA and
ATTENDANTS.*

OCTAVIA.

Hang there, sweet roses, while your blooms are wet,
Hang there and weep unblamed ; ay, weep one hour,
While yet your tender, fleshly hues remember
His fair young prime ; then wither, droop, and die,
And with your changèd tissues paint my grief.

Nay, let those old wreaths lie, the shrivelled petals
Speak feelingly of sorrow ; strew them down
About the steps : we mock death being trim. 1840
Now here another. Ah ! see, set it you :

I cannot reach. Have you not thought these roses
Weave a fit emblem—how they wait for noon
That comes to kill their promise, and the crown
Is but a mock one ?

ATTENDANT.

'Tis a good custom, lady,
To honour thus the tombs of those we love.

Oct. Custom! Is this a custom? Then I think
I wrong my sorrow in such common shows.

Att. Nay, it doth ease affliction to be busy;
And grief, that cannot reckon with a mystery, 1850
Is comforted by trifles.

Oct. Why, thou'rt wrong;
It brings no comfort.

Att. And 'tis kindly done
To hide the fresh-cut stone. Death is hard featured
In a new-built tomb.

Oct. O, hold thy peace! I see
Thou canst not be my comforter. Alas,
I blame thee not. But yet, whate'er be said,
Think not our gracious deed finds its account
In the honour done: the wreaths I bring were woven
More for myself; the tears I shed, I shed
The more abundantly that they are crimes 1860
In the sight of him that slew him.

Att. Speak not so,
Lady; thou'rt o'er-distraught.

Oct. What would'st thou have me?
Knowing my sorrow thou should'st rather wonder,
And think it well that I speak sense at all.

Att. Let not such passion kill thy courage, lady;
The greatest die. There stands the tomb of Julius,
Whose mighty march was no less foully stayed
At noon of power: there is Augustus' tomb,
Wherein so many lie . . .

Oct. Why, what are they
To me? Is't not my brother that is dead? 1870
Whose life was mine, as needful to my day
As is the sun; as natural, old a want
To very life as is the bathing air
That my blood battens on. Take these away
And give him back; it then were likelier
I should not gasp, fret, pale, nor starve, nor pine.
He is gone! O miserably, suddenly,
For ever; alas! alas!—See, who comes hither?

Att. 'Tis Agrippina, lady; and she carries
Wreaths such as ours. 1880

Oct. Let us begone in haste.

Att. Alas! she hath seen us, lady: 'tis too late.

Oct. I'll but salute her. I pray you all keep back,
Nor speak with her attendants.

Enter Agrippina, Fulvia, and Attendants.

AGRIPPINA.

My dearest daughter,
I have longed for this embrace. Where else but here

Beside this sacred tomb should we have met ?
I should have been much with thee in thy sorrow,
But am forbidden the palace.

Oct. I must thank thee
Doing this grace to my unhappy brother.
The gods grant thee kind messages. Farewell.

Agr. Nay, go not thus. See how I hang these garlands.

Oct. Not there, nay, not on mine ; not there ! thy
grief 1891
Must own a lower place ; mix not its show
With mine. He was my brother.

Agr. Thou art right.
Set them here, Fulvia. If my heart is wronged,
'Tis done unwittingly ; thou canst not know.

Oct. I leave thee.

Agr. Grant one word.

Oct. Would'st thou be kind
'Twill be but one.

Agr. 'Tis this then : I am kind.
In sum 'twas this I came to say.

Oct. If hither
Thou didst but come to seek me, know I had chosen
The hour to be alone.

Agr. My dearest child, 1900
My injured child ! See, I would have thee trust
My friendship. 'Twas my constant, loving wish.

To right thy brother's wrongs, and now my heart
Is wholly turned on thee.

Oct. Think not of me.

Am I not past all help? nor do I crave
The help that leads to death.

Agr. O never dream

That I had hand in that accursèd deed.

The terror of it rather hath possessed

My purpose with the justice of revenge. 1909

Oct. I cannot thank thee, and from thy messengers
Have gathered all. There's nought to say. Farewell.

Agr. Thou dost not know Poppæa marries Cæsar.

Oct. Ay.

Agr. Thou consentest?

Oct. Say, would my refusal

Or my consent be counted?

Agr. It shall not be.

Oct. It matters not.

Agr. Thou lookest for divorce?

Oct. Can I remain his wife who killed my brother?

Agr. Thou art the last branch of the house of
Claudius,

And if thou wilt forget the hurt now done thee,
May'st yet retrieve thy blood; but being too proud,
Wilt more dishonour what thou seemest to honour.
If now thou'rt brave, and wilt join hands with me

Oct. O never, never! was it not that hand
 That O my brother, with thy trait'rous foe
 Make peace, and at thy tomb! Ask clemency
 Of him that murdered thee! O never.—
 Thou most dear shade, who wast too mild and kind,
 If death seal not thy spiritual sense
 To my loud sorrow, hear me! O thou my joy,
 By whom the bitterness of life, my lot
 Of horror, was quite sweetened,—cruelly, 1930
 Most cruelly slain. Ay, I will all forget
 When he who wrought this thing can bring again
 Out of thy cold unmotionable ashes
 The well-compacted body and grace of life.
 Ay, if he make one smile of thine, although
 It last no time, I will forget: but else,
 I say, the thing he hath done, since so tis done
 That he cannot undo it, he must o'er-do
 Ere I forget.

Agr. I will be yet thy friend—

[*Exit Oct. with Attendants.*]

There comes no help from her. Maybe her grief
 Is yet too fresh. Come, Fulvia, let us go. 1941
 She would not speak with me. Now on all hands
 Thou seest I am set aside, and count for nought.
 Yet not for this am I a whit discouraged;
 I shall rise yet. Am I not Agrippina? [*Exeunt.*]

XX

S C E N E · 4

*A room in the Palace. Enter through a door from the
supper-room NERO and POPPÆA.*

NERO.

Now ere they follow, Poppæa, ease my heart,
And tell me thy request.

POPPÆA.

Thou'lt grant it me?

Ner. Whate'er it be, if thou wilt come to Baiæ.

Pop. I'll have it without bargain or not at all.

Ner. I grant it: ask. 1950

Pop. 'Tis that you give my husband
The post in Lusitania which he begs.

Ner. 'Tis his. Would he were there.

Pop. My thanks.

Ner. I prithee

Call him not husband.

Pop. Ah, now I pierce this veil
Of generosity: why, when he goes
I must go with him.

Ner. Eh! if that's the case
I grant not his commission.

Pop. 'Tis a promise.

Ner. I had a promise once.

Pop. That was conditioned.

Ner. And what condition have I not fulfilled?

Pop. Heavens! is't forgotten?

Ner. Say, what have I lacked in?

Pop. Or did I dream 'twas promised me? 'Twas
this; 1960

Marriage.

Ner. By Juno, I will marry thee.

But come to Baiæ.

Pop. Nay; thine oath is vain

Upon the point of honour. There are things

Idle and ceremonial, and that count

In love as nought, but which alone can make

Divorce from Otho honourable, nay,

To me, I say, possible. Till the day

Octavia is divorced I am Otho's wife,

Ay, and am well content to be: he loves me,

And lacks in nothing that a gentleman 1970

And lover should observe. I sometimes think

That you mistake . . .

Ner. Ah!

Pop. But to mistake in that!

Seem to forget! I fly.

Ner. O most impatient!

I have yet no pretext.

Pop. Nay, nor ever will.
Besides, your mother rules : she would not suffer it.
I have no desire to taste her dishes.

Ner. Hush !
They come.

*Enter through the door Petronius, Tigellinus and
Anicetus.*

Where be the others ?

TIGELLINUS.

They have taken
Cæsar's gracious permission, and gone home.
'Tis late.

Ner. Why, who art thou to say 'tis late ?
Be seated, be seated. I'll tell thee, Anicetus, 1980
More of my scheme anon ; but for the present
We keep Minerva's feast at Baiæ ; thither
Must thou convey the court. Combine high pomp
With masterly dispatch ; our games shall reach
The limit of invention, and ourselves
Take part. To thee I say, come not behind.

ANICETUS.

Grant me the means to be great Cæsar's herald,
I'll make a wonder that shall fetch the nymphs
From their blue depths in ravishment to see

His ships upon the waters. 1990

Ner. I shall be liberal,

And give thee full instruction. (*To Pop.*) Think, my
love,

What could be pleasanter, now spring is come,
Than to confide our vexed and careful spirits
To nature's flush ; to leave our memories
With the din and smoke of Rome, and force a pageant
Upon the lazy mirror of the bay,—
One to make Venus jealous, and confound
The richness of the season. Thou dost not guess
What I can do. Say, would'st thou miss the seeing
Of my magnificence ? 2000

Enter Paris.

Pop. See, here is Paris.

Ner. He comes to make us merry. The gods
defend us !

He has seen a ghost.

Pop. He has something to deliver.

Ner. Patience! I know his mood : he will be tragic ;
And you shall see the severe and tearful muse
Outstride her dignity, and fall along.
(*To Paris*) Begin !

PARIS.

Most mighty and most honoured Cæsar,

I cannot speak for shame.

Petr. Why, man, thou'st spoken.

Ner. He opens well.

Petr. Like the nurse in Seneca's tragedy.

Par. The tale I bring, my lords, is little suited
To make your sport.

Petr. No?

Ner. This is excellent. 2011

Pop. I think he is in earnest.

Ner. 'Tis his art.

Par. I am a messenger now, and no actor,
Sent by your royal aunt Domitia
To unmask a thing, which, though the gods be praised
That in discovery have wrought prevention,
Is yet a damnèd plot

Ner. (*rising*). A plot, a plot! [*All rise.*
Stand off, stand off! a plot, thou say'st? a plot?

Pop. (*aside to Nero*). Pray heaven this prove not now
some fresh contrivance

Of the empress. 2020

Ner. Stand all aside. Art thou in earnest?

Par. Pardon me, Cæsar. Did this plot concern
Less than thy life

Ner. My life! by all the gods,
Speak but his name who dares.

Par. Will Cæsar's ear

Grant me indulgence?

Ner. Speak, fool, or thou diest.

Par. The matter is disclosed by certain freedmen
Engaged by the empress.

Ner. Ah!

Pop. (to Nero). Said I not so?

Ner. Be this proved, 'tis the last.

Pop. (to Nero). Ay, till the next.

Ner. Paris, as thou would'st live another moment,
Speak now but truth.

Par. (shows a paper). See here the evidence.
If Cæsar read this, 'twill give certain colour 2030
To worst suspicion. Here are writ the names.

Ner. Read me the names.

Par. Rubellius Plautus.

Ner. Ha!

Enough. I know 'tis true the villain's blood
Hath from Augustus equal claim with mine.
Who else?

Par. Balbillus and Arruntius Stella,
With Fænius Rufus, and your royal mother,
And some who 'scape the crime disclosing it.

Ner. I'll have their lives to-night.

Tig. I pray now, Cæsar,
Grant me this order.

Anic. Or me.

Ner. Nay, who are ye?

Go, Tigellinus, fetch me Burrus hither. 2040

Par. I have his name set down with the conspiracy.

Ner. Burrus?

Par. 'Tis question of him, nothing certain.

Ner. Escort him here unarmed; I'll speak with him.

Tig. Cæsar, I go. [Exit.

Ner. Give me thy paper, sirrah.

What have we here? [Reads.

Petr. (to *Servt.*) Call me my servant there.

Anic. Wilt thou go?

Petr. Ay, 'tis sadly out of place,

This business at this time. Look, Anicetus,

Thou'rt new to Cæsar's suppers; let me tell thee

There's ever something wrong. See how he takes it!

Mad, mad! 2050

Ner. (*aside*). I see. Plautus. This hits my life:

Britannicus being dead, that hope cut off,

She looks to Plautus' claim: and I to be

Poisoned or what appears not: yet I doubt not

Poisoned. 'Tis found in time. Now 'tis plain war;

The strongest wins. Poison! 'Tis life for life.

Nay, maybe already I have swallowed down

Some death-steeped morsel; ay, this very night

Have tasted of it, and the subtle drug

Runs in my veins concocting: my spirit sickens,

I faint and tremble. What is it ?

Anic. (advancing). Cæsar, a word. 2060

Ner. What would'st thou say ?

Anic. (to Ner.) 'Tis I can do this thing.

None that be here lack will : I have the means.

'Twere easy, would you give me the command.

Ner. What would be easy ?

Anic. Why, this thing that hangs,
Which you for Rome so wisely, and for you
Rome and your friends have wished. If but your foe
Step on a ship of mine, I'll beg my death
If it touch land again. We go to Baiæ,
And there upon the hazard of the sea
May this disorder sleep.

Enter Burrus with Tigellinus.

Ner. (to Anic.) I thank thy zeal ; 2070
There is no need ; give way.—Burrus, thou'rt called
Upon a stern occasion. Is't not death
To any man or woman whosoe'er
That plots to murder Cæsar ?

BURRUS.

Death deserved.

Ner. Here be the names of some who thus offend.
Thine is amongst them : of thine honesty
I am too well persuaded to demand

More proof than this, that thou do execute
All these conspirators to-night.

Bur. —Cæsar

Is not mistaken in me. Let me see 2080

The names. [*Takes paper and reads.*]

Par. (aside). Now may Jove blast the general's wits,
Else we be lost.

Petr. (to Anic.) Take my advice. (*going*).

Anic. (to Petr.) Nay, nay,

I'll see it out. [*Exit Petronius.*]

Bur. (aside). What's this? Why, 'tis mere non-
sense.—

What evidence hath Cæsar of this plot?

Ner. Confession of the traitors. Paris brings it
Fresh from Domitia.

Bur. Now, with your permission,
I'll question Paris.

Ner. Question! why, is't not plain?
Question is treasonous; and thou to question,
Whose name the black suspicion pricks! wilt thou
Question?—who hast the deepest cause of all 2090
For sure conviction? Is't not horrible
That I, to whose security the empire
Looks for stability, should most of all
Live an uneasy and precarious life,
And find no remedy because my ministers,

Who should be over-zealous to protect me
 Even from imagined danger, shut their eyes
 And ears to plots and perils which I hear
 My slaves and women prate of?

Bur. Cæsar, the matter
 Demands inquiry. That you have been much wronged
 Is clear : by whom is doubtful. Let me pray 2101
 You save your judgment from reproach of haste,
 And hear what I advise.

Ner. Speak ; I will hear.
 Speak.

Bur. First dismiss the company : 'tis ill
 To have had this audience.

Ner. Friends, you are all dismissed.
 Begone without a word : this business presses.

Pop. (*to Nero*). Have some one with you, Nero ;
 are you advised ?
 Keep a guard while you can.

Ner. (*to Pop.*) Nay, have no fear.

Pop. I would not trust him. Did not Paris say
 His name was with the rest ?

Ner. (*to Pop.*) Be not afraid.— 2110
 Good night, my lords. (*To Bur.*) Shall Paris stay ?

Bur. No, none.

Ner. Paris, await without ; the rest go home.

[*Anic. Tig. and Par. go out : Poppæa tarries.*

Pop. (*to Nero*). Oh, do not trust this man!

Ner. (*to Pop.*) He's not my enemy.

Pop. I fear to leave thee with him.

Ner. Have no fear.

Pop. Could he not kill thee?

Ner. Nay, nay.

Pop. Oh, he will.

Alas! alas! Oh! oh! [*Faints.*]

Ner. Why, thou must go.

[*Exit Nero carrying out Poppæa.*]

Bur. (*solus*). Be hanged! the fool's gone too.

Re-enter Nero.

Ner. Now, Burrus, now.

Art thou my friend?

Bur. —We are alone, and while
There's none to hear, you must excuse a soldier
If he speak plainly, Cæsar.

Ner. Indeed, Burrus, 2120
Thou art my only friend; speak as a friend.

Bur. I have heard it said the German warriors,
Meet o'er their cups, and, hot with wine, resolve
Matters of state; but ere they put in act
Their midnight policy, they meet again
In morning hours to see if sober sense
Approve what frenzied zeal inspired. The custom

Has been applauded. Chance has given to you
The one half of the method : use the other.

Ner. I am not drunk. 2130

Bur. Such wandering judgment, Cæsar,
Asks such excuse.

Ner. My judgment wanders not.
I am cool. My face is flushed?

Bur. How will this look
If, sitting here at table, at a breath
Of hearsay you commit to instant death
Your mother and four noble citizens,
With others of less note?

Ner. Choose I the time?
Shall the conspirators be pardoned then
'Cause Cæsar sups? or say Cæsar must fast
And touch no wine, lest when his blood be warm
Some treasonous practice creep into his ears, 2140
And they who would befriend conspiracy
May point suspicion on his judgment! Now
Is a good hour for treason ; Cæsar sups,
And must not credit it.

Bur. I do not blame
Your feast.

Ner. No more then : let it be to-night.

Bur. What ! on a charge unproven ?

Ner. Thou may'st prove it.

Bur. See, you acquit me ; why not then the rest ?

Ner. Acquit my mother ! would'st thou persuade
me, Burrus,
She can be acquitted ?

Bur. Of the deeds she has done
She is guilty ; for this action charged against her,
It is not hers.

Ner. Oh, more, much more is hers 2151
Than thou dost dream. The crime men charge on me,
My brother's death, Burrus, indeed, I swear,
Though thou believe me not, yet if my part
In that were separate and weighed 'gainst hers . . .
I would not tell thee. . . Oh, I had been happy had I
But heard thee then.

Bur. Your peace even now as much
Hangs on good counsel. You are hot : be guided,
Cæsar.

Ner. Nay, now thou'rt changed, thou'rt wrong :
thou goest round
To the other side. If thou would'st give the advice
I need, I'd take it gladly. Listen, Burrus : 2161
I have another secret ; if I tell thee
Thou may'st befriend me. I will tell thee. Hark !
'Tis this : I fear my mother ; I cannot sound
Her heartlessness ; my terror shames the shows
And feeble efforts of my trust and love.

I have read her eyes—

Oh, there's no tenderness, no pious scruple
Writ in my favour there ; nothing but hate.

To think that I am her son but whets to fierceness

Her fury, and her hellish plots are laid 2171

More recklessly and safely that she deems

I am not knit of that obdurate nerve

To sear the tender place of natural love.

I would not do it, Burrus, though I fear her

And hate her, as I must ; but let it end

Ere it be worse. I pray thee do it, Burrus.

Bur. The cause of fear is magnified by terror :

The present circumstance were amply met

By Agrippina's exile, which I urge, 2180

As ever, now. But let such sentence rest

On proven crime.

Ner. Oh, thus were ne'er an end.

Done, we stand clear.

Bur. Thus done, 'twere a foul crime :

And if you have found remorse in what before

Was schemed in fear and haste, consider, Cæsar,

If you would thank me for subserviency

Did I obey ; for your sake I refuse.

Ner. Eh !

Bur. I refuse.

Ner. I have other friends.

Bur. So be it.

Take my demission. But remember, Cæsar,
That he who fills my place, handles the power 2190
That holds you up; he that hath strength to help
May find the will to hurt you.

Ner. I meant not that.
I trust thee, Burrus: I'll be guided by thee.
What wilt thou do?

Bur. The wisest course is thus:
To-morrow Seneca and I will go
With chosen witnesses to Agrippina,
And lay the charge. If she draw quit of it,
Well; but if not, I promise that her place
Shall not win favour of me.

Ner. Dost thou promise?

Bur. I promise that.

Ner. And if there be a doubt, 2200
Thou'lt wrest it to my side?

Bur. I promise that.

Ner. 'Tis death.

Bur. Ay, death.

Ner. If that be thy last word
I am free. I would I had more such friends as thou.
But bring it not back; take all my power. Thou saidst
I had no cause for fear?

Bur. What should you fear?

Ner. I think thou'rt right.

Bur. Now, Cæsar, I will leave you.
Your spirits are much moved.

Ner. Indeed I swear
I am not moved. There was no need to blame
My supper, Burrus.

Bur. Nay, I blamed it not.

Ner. I am not sensible to wine as others. 2210
Of all I meet there's none, no, not the best,
Can eat and drink as I. There's something, Burrus,
In that. I think if I, who rule the world,
Could not enjoy my wine, that were a blemish
Which scorn might hit.

Bur. I never blamed your supper.

Ner. Hadst thou been there, thou would'st have
praised it well.
I have learned much lately in these things. Petronius,
Ay, he's the man—I'm blessed in this Petronius.
Thou know'st him?

Bur. Ay, and would not keep his hours.
'Tis late, to bed.

Ner. Well, Burrus, I'll to bed. 2220
But thou must sup with me. I'd gladly have thee
One of our party. I shall tell Petronius.

Bur. Cæsar, good night.

Ner. By heaven, I had forgot ;

Where did I leave Poppæa ? I remember.

Good night, Burrus, good night. [Exit.

Bur. Now may brave Bacchus

Reclaim the field ; for me, I'll gather up

This quenched brand, and be off. What must men
think

Of Cæsar, who would fetch him with such trash ?

The Augusta marry Plautus ! Master Paris

For this will need his wit to save his skin. [Exit.

XX

S C E N E . 5

*A small room in Agrippina's house. Enter AGRIPPINA
and FULVIA.*

AGRIPPINA.

My days are weary, Fulvia. Know you not 2231
Some art to make time fly ? another month
Of prison and neglect would kill me quite.

FULVIA.

Is't not the change more than the solitude
Vexes your majesty ?

Agr. Nay, I was never made

For isolation, and even by my friends
I am utterly forsaken.

Ful. Junia Silana

Was very constant, tho' we have not seen her
Now for four days.

Agr. Bah! she's my foe. I wronged her
That way a woman ne'er forgives. 'Twas I 2240
Broke off her match with Sextius, you remember.

Ful. Your true friends dare not come : they stand
aloof,
Watching the time to do you service, madam.

Agr. You speak of Pallas : there's none else.

Ful. The lot
Of late befallen your majesty is such
As all our sex have borne, who have not raised
Nor much demeaned themselves beyond the rest.

Agr. True; but 'twas never mine ; I made escape.
They that would lock us up in idleness,
Shut us from all affairs, treat us as dolls 2250
Appointed for their pleasure; these but make it
The easier for a woman with a will
To have her way. Life lacks machinery
To thwart us. Had I been a man, methinks
I had done as well, but never with the means
I have used. Nay, nay, 'tis easy for a woman,
Be she but quick and brave, to have her will.

Enter Servant, who speaks to Fulvia, and she to Agrippina.

Burrus and Seneca you say! Admit them.
Fulvia, here's one apiece : make your own choice ;
I've none, and can be generous. Pray come in. 2260

Enter Burrus and Seneca with two others.

Come in, my lords, come in. You are very welcome.
Look, Fulvia, now if Mercury have not heard
Our prayers and sent us noble visitors !
Pray you be seated. Alas, in this poor house
I fear I cannot show you the reception
You and your gallant followers deserve.
'Tis not what thou'rt accustomed to at home,
Seneca, I know : pardon it. Thou lookest cold.
Come near the fire : pray heaven this bitter weather
May not have touched thy chest. A Gallic winter !
I can remember no such fall of snow 2271
In March these twenty years ; but looking back,
I find one noted in my journal then.
How goes your health, my lords ?

SENECA.

Well, thank you, madam.

Agr. I am very glad : your visit is well meant ;
It cheers me much.

BURRUS.

The truth is, madam, we come
At Nero's order.

Agr. Ha! then I strike you off [*Rising.*
My list of friends again. I thought as much;
I wondered how you dared me this affront
In my last poor retreat, here where I sit 2280
Alone and friendless, in the worst disgrace
Woman can suffer;—ay, and caused by you.
But learn that, if nought else, this house is mine;
If 'tis so small that it can welcome little,
It can exclude the more. At Cæsar's order
Ye have forgot your manners, now at mine
Resume them. Ye have done his hest, begone!
Begone!

Sen. I pray you, madam, hear the message;
We may not leave without delivering it.
Burrus will speak it.

Agr. Oh—Burrus speak it. 2290
If Burrus speak, the affair is mighty black.
There's none like him to break an ugly business.
[*Sitting.*

Hey! Well, we have nought to do, so let us hear
The last of the court. Octavia's divorce?

Sen. Believe me, lady, I feel much aggrieved
In all that hurts you here.

Agr. Stranger than fiction.
Now what's the matter ?

Bur. There has been information
To Cæsar of plots against his life, the which
The informers charge on you. This the chief item,
That you have entered with Rubellius Plautus 2300
Into conspiracy to set him up
In Nero's place, and to dethrone your son.
I come with Seneca and these witnesses
To hear the answer, which your majesty
No doubt hath very ready, and accordingly
To acquit you of the charge.

Agr. —Excellent!
Now, Seneca, 's thy turn ; or will these gentlemen ?
Fulvia, we have depositions to be made :
Fetch pens and paper ; all shall be in order.

Sen. Madam, remember on what past occasions
Cæsar hath shown suspicion, and believe, 2311
Whate'er your innocency, there is cause
To make it clear.

Agr. Thy prudence, Seneca,
Is vanity, not kindness ; spare it, pray.
Here is your paper, gentlemen : I'll give you
Matter for Cæsar's reading. Tell me first
Who's my accuser ?

Bur. There are two—the first

Junia Silana, the other is your sister
 Domitia : they bring forth as evidence
 The informers, certain freedmen, Atimetus, 2320
 Iturius, and Calvisius, who affirm
 That you have lately been on terms with Plautus,
 Stirring him up to make an enterprise
 Against the state ; that you, by marrying him
 (Who by the mother's side may claim a line
 As rightly from Augustus as doth Nero),
 Might reinstate yourself, dethrone your son,
 And bring disaster to the commonwealth.
 That is the charge, of which we are come to hear
 The refutation, not to press the count. 2330

Agg. Pah ! You're a brace of idiots, if ye think
 This needs refuting. Who's Silana, pray,
 That if she speak, the very bonds of nature
 And heaven must be repealed to give her credit,
 Saying a mother plots to kill her son ?
 I marvel not that she, being childless, dares
 Avouch such madness, never having known
 How near the affections of all mothers are,
 Nor that a mother cannot shift her love
 Like an adulteress ;—nay, nor do I wonder 2340
 That she should find among her freedmen those,
 Who, having in luxury spent all their substance,
 Will for the promise of the old lady's purse

Sustain the accusation : but that for this
 I should be seriously held suspect
 Of the infamy of parricide, or Cæsar
 Of giving ear to it, this I marvel at.

As for Domitia, I would thank my sister
 Even for her jealousy, were but the strife 2349
 One of good will and kindness towards my Nero.
 But now she wastes her time with her man Patis,
 Composing as 'twere fables for the stage.
 Let her go back to Baiaæ and her fishpools ;
 They kept her trifling spirit well employed,
 When by my efforts Nero's first adoption,
 Proconsular authority, consulate,
 And other steps to empire were procured.
 Are ye now answered?—
 Or is there any can be brought to show
 That I have practised with the city cohorts, 2360
 Corrupted the loyalty of the provinces,
 Solicited the freedmen to rebellion?
 Or to what purpose think ye? Had Britannicus
 Been Cæsar, then I grant I might have lived ;
 But if 'tis Plautus, or whoever else
 Should get the power, how should I lack accusers
 To charge me, not with words escaped in passion,
 But deeds and crimes—crimes—ay, Seneca, crimes,
 Of which I could not hope to be acquitted

Save as a mother by her son? And ye 2370
 Think I shall here defend myself to you!
 Send Cæsar to me. By the gods I swear
 I'll be revenged on all who have had a hand
 In this most cowardly and senseless plot.
 I wait him here: tell him that to none other
 Will I resolve this matter.

Bur. Be content

To say so much in form, that our report
 Suffice for your acquittal.

Agr. I bid you go.

Bur. Cæsar shall hear your message.

Sen. Madam, we go.

Agr. Ay, go, good fellows; though ye have roused
 my passion, 2380

Your coming here hath cheered me wondrously.
 Nay, if ye have ever such another matter,
 Bring it again; be not abashed, but come;
 Or send your wives, and those two gentlemen,
 Whose names I know not. My lords, your humble
 servant.

[*Exeunt Burrus and Seneca and two Gentlemen.*]

Plautus! now is it possible I was wrong
 Not to have thought of Plautus? No, I laugh,
 'Tis merely laughable. At forty-five
 To marry a pretender; and Plautus too!

He would not have me. Fulvia, do you think 2390
 That Plautus wants to marry me? Ha! ha!
 Is it my beauty, think you, or my virtue,
 Or my good fortune tempts the stoic? Oh,
 Domitia, oh, you are dull. I cannot fear
 This plot. We shall retire with more than honour.
 'Twas strange, I think, that Pallas was not struck;
 His name escaped.

Ful. There is ample reason, madam.
 They say that in his house he holds such caution
 As not to speak before his slaves. His orders
 Are given by nod and sign, or if there's need 2400
 He writes: there's none can say they have heard him
 speak.

Agr. May good come of it. 'Twould be hard indeed
 If they should exile Plautus for a fear
 Lest I should marry him. That were a fate
 Of irony. Why, give the man his choice
 Of marrying me and exile, would he not
 Fly to the pole? Poor Plautus! marry Plautus!

Both. Ha! ha! ha! he! he!

Enter Nero. Agrippina is seated.

NERO.

I find you merry, mother; the gods be praised
 That you deny the impeachment.

Agr. Really, Nero,
Burrus' memory is getting very short
If he said I denied it. I did not.

Ner. You did not?

Agr. Nay, I'd not be at the pains.

Ner. Called you me hither?

Agr. Ay, you seem misled.

I guess who 'tis. But let that pass. I hoped
I might advise you privately; I knew
You would not wish it known. Now, was I wrong?

Ner. Do you deny what is affirmed against you?

Agr. No, son: for if you wished to take my life,
Why should I rob you of this grand pretence? 2420
Yet since you cannot, and the charge itself
But moves my laughter, as you overheard,
My only wish is you should now retire
With dignity, and act as Cæsar ought.

Ner. (aside). This then is added to my shames.

Agr. What say you?

Fulvia, await without. [*Exit Fulvia.*] Who brought
this to thee?

Ner. Paris.

Agr. The player! when?

Ner. Last night at supper.

Agr. Tell me, didst thou believe it? is it possible?
Thou didst! Whence gottest thou thy wits I wonder;

Certain they are not mine, no, nor thy father's :
 I think they came of Claudius by adoption. 243 I
 Dost thou believe it still?

Ner. Whate'er I have done
 Was on advice.

Agr. A pious caution truly.
 Is this thy trust? Yet, yet I must forgive thee.
 See, I was angered. Nay, 'twas not thy judgment :
 I know who leads. But for these foolish women
 I sentence exile.

Ner. Sentence whom to exile?

Agr. The two devisers. Yet I think my sister
 Is harmless ; but the other, that Silana—

Ner. Silana must be banished? 2440

Agr. Judge her, Nero,
 When thou hast heard. She and thy aunt Domitia
 Have been the two who, in my sad retirement,
 Have visited me most. Day after day
 They have made a show of kindness, finding joy
 In my disgrace, to view it ; and have but left me
 To try this trick.

Ner. (aside). 'Tis plain I have been fooled.

Agr. For those that brought the tale, thou knowest
 that they
 Must taste the penalties they sought to inflict ;
 That thou must know ; but 'tis not all. The acquittal

Of those accused will not be full without 2450
Some honour shown them. Best among the names
Stand Fænius Rufus and Arruntius Stella,
Who may have city posts : gentle Balbillus,
Who has long deserved it, must be paid at last
With a proconsulate. For myself, thou knowest
I have taken all disgrace so patiently
That I expect some boon, though yet I fear
To ask ; but when I have seen my slandered friends
Honoured, I'll write it thee.

Ner. I shall be quick
To punish and to make amends. 'Tis just 2460
Towards Burrus, I should tell you from the first
He took your part.

Agr. What could he else? Now, Nero,
I have done : go home, and there resolve the matter
With common sense ; take Burrus into counsel
As to what penalties and what promotions
Shall be distributed. Before the people
Remember that some feeling must be shown,
And anger for effronteries attempted
Against your majesty. Now go, the affair
Has somewhat tired me.—Nay, touch me not ; fare-
well. 2470

Ner. I see you are right ; farewell.

Agr. I have more advice,

Which I will write to thee. [*Exit Nero.*
 Excellent this—I have not had my way
 Thus for a long long while : ay, now is my time
 To strike. I'll venture with a letter to him
 And claim my boon, that he dismiss Poppæa.
 There's much to say on that which may seem aimed
 More at his good than mine ; and if she have plunged
 In this false step, his vanity being touched 2479
 May shake his liking. I will do it at once. [*Exit.*

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## S C E N E . 6

*A room in the Palace. Enter NERO and POPPÆA.*

NERO.

All for thy sake was planned, and now my pleasure  
 In scheming thine is fled ; for what is Baiæ,  
 And what Minerva's feast, blue skies and seas,  
 Or games, or mirth, or wine, or the soft season,  
 If thou deny me ? Prithee say thou'lt come.

POPPÆA.

Nay, I'll not go.

*Ner.*           Thou wilt not ?

*Pop.*                       Nay, I cannot.

*Ner.* Cannot to Cæsar ?

*Pop.* Prove me then thou'rt Cæsar,  
And not a ward.

*Ner.* A ward!

*Pop.* I said a ward.  
May I not see thee vexed? 'Tis what men whisper,  
Who dare not vex thee. Well, thy mother's child,  
So much that at her beck thou forfeitest 2491  
Empire and liberty.

*Ner.* Wouldst thou enrage me!  
What dost thou mean, Poppæa?

*Pop.* Deny not that:  
If 'tis not that hinders our marriage, then  
The case, I fear, blackens. I, who can smile  
At that, must weep another cause. I'll think  
Thou'rt tired of me.

*Ner.* Now by what sign?

*Pop.* Maybe  
Thou hast seen a better beauty, and repented  
The promise given to me.

*Ner.* O treason, treason!

*Pop.* Thinkest my blood unworthy of alliance 2500  
With thine—tho', truth, my ancestors have triumphed.

*Ner.* Who dares that lie shall bleed.

*Pop.* Or that our bed  
Is not like to be blest.

*Ner.* The fruitful gods

With all their oracles avert the omen.

*Pop.* Or that I urge my marriage for advancement ;  
And thou, doubting my love, pressest denial  
To proof of faith.

*Ner.* Ay, that is it ; thou'st hit it.

*Pop.* Or that I, oncethy wife, would cross thy mother,  
Divulge her crimes, the hate the senate bear her,  
And last, though that's well known, how she hates thee.

*Ner.* Speak of this once for all, then let the jest  
Be dead.

*Pop.* Nay, 'tis no jest, for Agrippina 2512  
Will never love a daughter who loves thee.  
Restore me to my husband. I were happier  
In any place, howe'er remote from Rome,  
Where thy disgrace and wrongs can but be spoken,  
Not seen and felt as here. See why I go.

*Ner.* Poppæa, since I have never hid from thee  
My quarrel with my mother, thou mayst know  
It draws to end.

*Pop.* Oh, is't the turn for kindness ? 2520  
Hath she been kind again ? Why, 'tis deception.  
When her plot failed she cast it off, and now  
Exults : 'tis her fresh confidence seems kind.

*Ner.* 'Twas not her plot. Or else I'd rather think  
She put the snare to catch my foolish aunt,  
Who blindly took the bait.

*Pop.* Then she pretended  
 Treason, that she might better hurt her sister :  
 And yet can win thy trust !

*Ner.* Nay, heaven forbid ;  
 I trust her not.

*Pop.* She hates me.

*Ner.* Nay, her kinship  
 Is jealous for Octavia ; but . . .

*Pop.* Ah, true ! 2530  
 To kill one's husband, plot against one's son,  
 Should leave unsatisfied some tender feelings  
 To spend upon a step-child. Why, she knows  
 Those arts which manage you would not gull me,  
 A woman not her child. Her whole design  
 Is bent to thwart our marriage ; and she will.  
 I know it.

*Ner.* I swear that were this proved against her,  
 Came it to a question 'twixt herself and thee,  
 Which to take, which to lose, then not a moment  
 Would I delay : the blow I have often sworn 2540  
 To strike should fall.

*Enter Messenger.*

*MESSENGER.*

A letter from the Augusta. [Exit.

*Pop.* Now, as she loves me, this is mine.

Ner. Not so.

Pop. Then as thou lovest me.

Ner. Well.

Pop. (*reading*). Ho! ho! ho! ho!

Now shines the sun at noon.

Ner. What is't?

Pop. I read?

Ner. Read then.

Pop. (*reads*). *To her dearest son. Ha! ha! ha! When last we met thou wilt remember to have confessed some shame for wrong done to me. The wrong I forgive, but eagerly seize on thy sorrow to ask of thee, in regard for thine own happiness, this only favour. 'Tis my earnest prayer and advice that thou dismiss Poppæa.* 2551

Ner. Ha! writes she so?

Pop. Attend, the reasons follow.

(*Reading*.) *Beware of her: nor think that I grudge thee the happiness which thou now findest in her. Marriage with her can lead only to thy misery. I know her well.*

Now hear my character.

Ner. Give me the letter.

Pop. *She is vain, deceitful, self-seeking, and, being by nature cold, hath the art to assume the mask of passion; and 'neath the show of virtue designedly conceals her wickedness and mischief. She loves thee no better than she loves Otho.* 2561

*Ner.* Give me the letter.

*Pop.* Nay, one sentence more.

*Believe a woman sees further than a man, since to her eyes beauty is no veil.*

She grants me beauty then. [*Gives letter to Nero.*]

*Ner. (reading).* 'Tis so, 'tis so. Ye gods! and thou wert right.

Poppæa, this is the end. Come not to Baiæ.

Wait my return.

*Pop.* What's now to do, I pray?

*Ner.* Ask not: when I return I shall be free.

We will be married.

*Pop.* Will you banish her? 2570

*Ner.* Ask nothing.

*Pop.* From her exile still her plottings

Will reach to Rome.

*Ner.* Not so, for she shall go

Whence nothing reaches Rome.

*Pop.* Oh, now I fear

I have said too much; let not my love o'ercome thee.

Maybe she meant not this.

*Ner.* Thou meddle not!

*Pop.* Oh, but at least no crimes, Nero, no crimes! Promise me that; rather I'll fly to-night.

*Ner.* Poppæa, in earnest of the happy day When thou wilt be my wife, I bid thee now



Depart.

2580

*Pop.* (*kissing him*). Husband, I go.[*Exit.**Ner.*

What ho! what ho!

*Enter a Servant.*

Is Anicetus in the palace?

*SERVANT.*

Ay, Cæsar.

*Ner.* Go, bid him hither straight. [*Exit Servant.*

It shall be done.

Ay, now it shall be done. Let me consider ;  
 I must be cool, lest I be foiled once more.  
 Where lies my hindrance? not in her ; she has twice  
 Deceived me and escaped : now in my turn  
 I steal her weapon, and can use it better,  
 Having been plain before. Then Seneca . . .  
 He shall not know, so are his scruples quiet.  
 For mine, they are hushed already ; but 'twere best  
 Recount the terms which reason can oppose 2591  
 To too rebellious nature : first there's my motive,  
 Huge as the earth ; liberty, happiness,  
 Empire : that cannot slide, I fear not that.  
 Then there's the ground of justice ; Claudius' death,  
 O'er which the executive too long hath slept  
 In Cæsar's piety : the sentence now  
 O'ertakes the murderess with a doub'e score,

Since she by her conspiracy contrived  
 Britannicus should die . . . ay, for his death 2600  
 The heavy penalty hangs o'er some head ;  
 Now let it fall on hers,—so I am quit.  
 All this condemns her, long-expected justice  
 Cries, and occasion hurries on the hand.  
 Ay, ay, I am clear. Poppæa being my stake,  
 I cannot shrink nor swerve. What was't she wrote ?  
 Why here is more. [Reads.

*Be with me in this matter,  
 But if thou should'st refuse, we are worse foes.*

She dares the threat.

*Enter Anicetus.*

**ANICETUS.**

Cæsar hath summoned me.

*Ner.* Good Anicetus, tell me, is there none 2610  
 Greater than Cæsar ?

*Anic.* Nay, Cæsar, there is none.

*Ner.* But were there one to whom it might be said  
 Cæsar owed life and fortune—dost thou take me ?

*Anic.* Cæsar would say the Augusta.

*Ner.* Nay, thou'rt dull :  
 'Twas thee I meant.

*Anic.* Me, Cæsar !

*Ner.* Dost remember  
 Boasting to me that thou hadst sailor means

To do a certain thing?

*Anic.* Ay.

*Ner.* Do it now.

I'll owe thee life and fortune. Canst thou be trusted?

*Anic.* My love for Cæsar follows hand in hand  
With his command in this.

*Ner.* Then do it, I say; 2620  
No words, no explanation. Agrippina  
Will come to Baiæ: there have thou thy ship.

*Anic.* I will have one at Bauli, one at Baiæ:  
If she take either it shall serve the turn.

*Ner.* Go now contrive thy means; let nothing  
'scape thee  
To me or any other: when 'tis done  
Hold thy head high.

*Anic.* Cæsar, I go to do it. [*Exit.*]

*Ner.* Now comes my part: ay, though it vex my soul  
To stoop; tho' this be Cæsar's greatest wrong,  
That he must patch his faultless power with guile,  
And having all command, miss of his will 2631  
But for a subterfuge . . . yet for this once  
I'll do it—'tis little; but to write a letter,  
Feign to discard Poppæa, as mistrusting  
Her love and character; and from that vantage  
I surely win my mother to come forth  
And join the court at Baiæ—she will come.



# A C T · V



## S C E N E · I

*Baia. A room in Agrippina's villa; the back gives out on the sea, where a galley is seen moored to quay of villa. AGRIPPINA and FULVIA.*

### *AGRIPPINA.*

Is not this charming, Fulvia? what a day!  
I feel I have never breathed spring air before.  
And how the people cheered! it did me good. 2640  
Here's my old seat. The villa's looking well.  
Could but Domitia see us now! How smoothly  
Her little plot went off! My first suspicions,  
Fulvia, I am sure were wrong: this invitation  
Was most well meant; and see the tenderness  
Has even called up my tears. You cannot know  
What fond associations make this house  
A home indeed. I wish I had not refused  
To take the yacht at Bauli: 'twas an error,  
Over-precaution.

### *FULVIA.*

Madam, I but told you 2650

The very words Seleucus . . . . [*A noise without.*

*Agr.* What is that noise?

*Ful.* 'Tis Cæsar coming with a company.

*Agr.* Oh, I will see. (*Looking forth.*) And there is Seneca

And Burrus. There's much meaning in this visit.

How grand he looks with all his lords about him!

There never was a Cæsar like him: others

Have been but Cæsars; he's an emperor,

And wears the full magnificence of state

In beardless boyhood.—Fulvia, I do love splendour.

To be so young and rule the world! 2660

*Enter Nero, Seneca, and Burrus.*

Now, welcome,

Welcome, my son!

NERO.

Welcome to Baiæ, mother.

We are come the first day of the feast to pay you

The season's compliments.

*Agr.* A prompt return.

What pleasure 'tis, Nero, I cannot say.

Welcome, my lords.

SENECA.

My loving service, lady.

*Ner.* Crossed you the bay from Bauli?

*Agr.* Nay, you'll laugh;  
 'Twas foolish; but I wished the folk to see  
 My joy and reconciliation, and in the thought  
 To please so many friends I kept my litter.

*Ner.* You'll all sup with us? 2670

*Agr.* I look for nothing better.

*Ner.* Whom will you bring?

*Agr.* I have no one with me here  
 But Polla Acerronia.

*Ner.* And where is she?

*Agr.* She took the yacht, and so arrived before us,  
 But has not left it: like the child she is,  
 The new toy quite distracts her: she is there.

*Ner.* Row you this afternoon upon the bay?

*Agr.* I had thought of it; and now, if you would  
 come  
 That were a double pleasure.

*Ner.* I am sorry, I must go  
 Order to-morrow's games.

*Agr.* Your lords mayhap  
 Will join me. I can take them to your villa. 2680

*Sen.* I'll gladly come: the dust the crowd treads up  
 Has filled my throat and set me coughing shrewdly.

*Ner.* Nay, I shall want you both.

*Agr.* Some other time  
 I hope, my lords.

## BURRUS.

I thank your majesty.

*Ner.* Farewell till supper.

*Agr.* Why! so short a visit!

*Ner.* We shall meet soon.

*Agr.* Well, I will sail alone

With Polla; 'tis her wish. Escort me, Nero?

*Ner.* Ay.

*Agr.* For the sake of that I'll go at once.

I love the sea.

*[Exeunt Nero with Agr. and Fulv. down the quay,  
where they are still seen.]*

*Sen.* Burrus, what say you now!

Has not the thing I looked for come to pass? 2690

*Bur.* There's as you say a most astounding change;  
Can you explain it?

*Sen.* Well, you see it, Burrus.

*Bur.* How came it all about?

*Sen.* See now how tenderly

They both embrace.

*Bur.* Who would have thought it?

*Sen.* I;

I should have thought it: and I point to this

To justify my words those many times

Our speech has come to difference.

*Re-enter Nero. Fulvia goes into house.*

*Ner.* Now, lords,

I go.

*Bur. and Sen.* We follow, Cæsar.

*Ner.* I have changed my mind;

I want you not. [*Going.*

*Bur.* Will Cæsar name the hour

When we shall wait on him? 2700

*Ner.* Why, come at once.

I cannot tell what hour I may not want you.

Attend me at my villa. [*Exit.*

*Bur.* Of a sudden

He is changed again.

*Sen.* You see how easily

He is overcome with kindness. Would you know

The noble sacrifice he has made?

*Bur.* What's that?

*Sen.* Why, he has renounced Poppæa.

*Bur.* Nay!

*Sen.* Ay.

*Bur.* Who told you?

*Sen.* I saw the letter.

*Bur.* How! Poppæa shows it?

*Sen.* 'Twas writ his mother.

*Bur.* Then he has deceived her.

*Sen.* Can you think that?



*Bur.* The letter makes all plain.

Why did he write it?

*Sen.* Why?

*Bur.* Well, well.

*Sen.* Oh, Burrus, 2710

I have every cause for hope; and here to-day

The meeting in this house more than assures me

He must redeem the promise of his youth.

'Twas in this very room, ten years ago,

I first saw Nero—Ay, 'tis now ten years—

I was arrived from Corsica at Rome,

And there found summons to attend the Augusta

At Baiæ: hither in all haste I came.

The yearnings and the miseries of exile

Would make a mean deliverer seem a god, 2720

And my return drove me half mad with joy.

I entered: in that chair sat Agrippina,

My kind deliverer, my friend, the empress.

Time had not marred her beauty, and as she spake

Impatience flushed her cheek—she shared my joy.

I knelt in tears there, nor ashamed of tears,

Though at her side I was aware was standing

A boy of some twelve years; whom, when I rose,

She then presented as her son, and bade me

Take him for pupil. As I saw him then 2730

In fullest grace of boyhood, apt in all

Boys should be manly in, and gifted further  
 Than boys are wont with insight, and the touch  
 Of human sympathy and learned taste,  
 Proficient in some arts and dull in none,  
 But coy withal and generous, 'twas no wonder  
 If ere that evening passed I had admitted  
 The schemes his mother had laid, which in short time  
 Were brought to pass.

*Bur.* 'Twas a black day.

*Sen.* And yet,

Burrus, if after you had seen how kindly 2740  
 He took instruction, how he came to love me,  
 You would not wonder—nay, I can remember  
 Claudius himself was shamed if his Britannicus,  
 Being younger but by some two years, were by  
 Where Nero was: and had I been the father  
 I might have wished, I think, to have done as he,  
 And called the best my son.

*Bur.* He killed Britannicus.

*Sen.* Burrus, if as it seems you quite distrust him,  
 Why hold you still the office which establishes  
 His power?

*Bur.* Because it is an office, Seneca, 2750  
 The top of my profession: yet, by the gods,  
 Find you a better man, and I'll be gone.  
 But, as a soldier, I'll not see the guards

Commanded by some brute like Tigellinus.

*Sen.* Nay, be not angry.

*Bur.* Would not you be angry  
Thus to be questioned?

*Sen.* Nay, indeed, by habit  
I question oft myself.

*Bur.* Then, for one question  
I'll be appeased. I know you, Seneca,  
For a man of many parts, a scholar, poet,  
Lawyer, and politician, what you will; 2760  
A courtier too besides, a man of business,  
A money-maker; in short, a man of the world,  
That like a ship lifting to every wave,  
Heeling to every blast, makes good her way  
And leaves no track. Now what I ask is this:  
How ride so lightly with the times, and yet  
Be the unbending stoic, the philosopher,  
The rock, I say, that planted in the deep  
Moves not a hair, but sees the buffeting breakers  
Boil and withdraw? Which is the matter, Seneca?  
Nay, 'tis a pertinent and friendly question— 2771  
I'll take your answer as we go along.

[*Exeunt Burrus and Seneca.*]

*Re-enter Fulvia.*

*Ful.* Of all delights I think that liberty

Is the prime element : nothing is pleasant  
 Joined with a must. Why, even this journey hither  
 That has so cheered my mistress, all the talk  
 Of sky and fields and trees, tired me to death.  
 I'm sick of servitude, with 'time for this'  
 And 'time for that': I'd give my ears for freedom ;

[*She sits in Agrippina's chair.*

To have my servants, and say—Prithee, Fulvia,  
 What is o'clock?—Fetch me the little kerchief  
 I left upon my bed—Come, Fulvia, quick ;      2782  
 I want you—Fulvia, go, order my litter—  
 Fulvia, be gone ; we've business—Fulvia, stay,  
 Amuse me for a while.—I would to heaven  
 I were in Rome again ! (*Shouts heard.*) Hey, what a  
 noise !

Cheering my lady ! here's a change indeed.  
 Well, I shan't lose by that. Gods, how they cheer !  
 She might have taken me with her. I know well  
 I shan't see the outside of these villa walls      2790  
 Till bound for home. And here no visitors,  
 At least for me. Cheer on, my lads ! and yet  
 If I should get the chance I'd like to see  
 These famous Neapolitans : I'm told  
 They're wondrous saucy, and ingenious singers.  
 What's that ? a boat ! my lady ! gracious heavens !

[*A boat rows up to quay.*

My lady, O my lady, what's the matter?

*Enter Agrippina up from the quay, clothes dripping; the boat remains.*

*Agr.* An accident, and I am escaped by swimming :  
Yet thou must know, Fulvia, 'twas a contrivance  
To take my life—the kindness was all hollow—  
A dastardly contrivance : 'twas the ship 2801  
Seleucus spoke of. Look, I am hurt in the shoulder,  
Yet 'tis not much.

*Ful.* Alack, alack, my lady!

*Agr.* I am cold and faint. I must at once go shift  
These dripping habits. When I am rested somewhat  
Thou shalt hear all : meanwhile, call in the sailors  
Who rowed me hither : get from them whate'er  
They saw or know, and promise a reward  
Worthy of my deliverance. [Going.

*Ful.* Praised be the gods,  
My lady, that thou'rt safe.

*Agr. (turning).* Polla is killed. [Exit.

*Ful.* What, Polla! Killed! she said killed. Polla  
killed! 2811

Ho! fellows, come within, nay, come within.

*Sailors enter.*

*SAILOR.*

We are not fit, my lady. By thy leave,

We are poor fishermen.

*Ful.* Come, fellows, come.

Which is the captain ?

*Sail.* Me, so please thee, lady.

*Ful.* Ye have brought the empress safe, and for that  
service

Shall have a good reward. But, tell me now,  
How came she in your boat ?

*Sail.* 'Twas thus, my lady,

It being the feast, we smartened up the boat  
And pulled her close along the shore, to find 2820  
A party of landsmen, such as love to visit  
Misenum, or be rowed across the bay  
To Pausilypum, lady, and Virgil's villa.  
When, as we lay, the Augusta's galley passed,  
Not half a cable's length, and then we cheered,  
And after took no note of her, till Gripus,  
He cries, Look ! see the galley. And there she was  
Laid on her beam-ends in the offing. Ho !  
We cried, and gave the alarm, and led the chase  
To reach her first : when presently she righted, 2830  
Steadied, and trimmed her oars, and drew away.  
While we were wondering and talking of it  
I spied a something floating, and again  
Putting about, saw 'twas a swimmer's head.  
Four other boats with ours made for it too ;

But we gave way with a will and held our own,  
 And coming alongside, found 'twas the Augusta.  
 I reached her out an oar, and I and my mate  
 Lifted her in handsomely. Then she bad us  
 Straight row her hither. She's a most brave lady,  
 Ay, and can swim. 284I

*Ful.* Know you no more?

*Sail.* No, lady.

We looked, but saw naught else, not even a spar.  
 The Augusta told us there was none but she.

*Ful.* What was the reason why the galley heeled?

*Sail.* I cannot tell.

*Ful.* What could it be?

*Sail.* D'ye see,

My lady, 'tis the Admiral's boat, this galley.

It's not for me . . . .

*Ful.* There's not a breath of wind.

*Sail.* The mischief was aboard.

*Ful.* You know no more?

*Sail.* Nothing, my lady.

*Ful.* Then begone; to-morrow

Come for your recompense. I know not yet 2850

The Augusta's pleasure.

*The Sailors.* Thank thee, thank thee, my lady.

[*Exeunt Sailors.*]

*Ful.* 'Tis plain the men know nothing.

*Sailor (returning).* Please thee, lady,  
If not too bold, we'll ask thee if the *Augusta*  
Has taken harm from being so long in the water.

*Ful.* Thank you, my men. I pray she's none the  
worse.

*Sail.* 'Tis bitter cold, indeed. But I can tell  
She's of good stuff; ay, and can swim.

*Ful.* Be sure  
You are fortunate to have done her this good service.

*Sail.* I make my humble duties. [Exit.

*Ful.* Alas, alas!  
What can this mystery mean? I die to hear. 2860  
I must now go attend her; ah! here she comes.

*Enter Agrippina.*

*Agr.* Fetch me some wine and a warm coverlet;  
The fur one from my bed.

*Ful.* Ay, madam, quickly. [Exit.

*Agr.* I have no friend here but her and the few  
servants

Upon the place: 'tis plotted well indeed  
To catch me thus alone: Mistress Poppæa  
Is seen in this. Yet being escaped, I think  
I yet will prove her match.

*Re-enter Fulvia.*

Ah, thank you, so.



*Ful.* Are you recovered, madam, from the shock?

*Agr.* I am warm again. I think too that my hurt  
Is very little: but I am somewhat shaken. 2871

*Ful.* What is it that hath happed? The sailors knew  
Nothing but that they found you.

*Agr.* Did they see  
Nothing?

*Ful.* They saw the galley lurch, and say  
The Admiral must know.

*Agr.* 'Tis likely enough  
'Twas his contrivance. Now I'll tell thee all,  
Fulvia, and thou must help me all thou canst  
When thou hast heard: indeed I tell thee partly  
To clear my judgment.—We had rowed about a mile,  
Polla and I, and sat upon the poop, 2880  
Taking our pleasure, when, all on a sudden,  
Darkness; the awning fell, with such a crash  
As took away my spirits, and Polla and I  
Were thrown down from our couches by the weight  
Of falling cloth and spars: one heavy beam  
Grazed my left shoulder, and we lay crushed down  
Upon the deck. Then I heard Polla laugh,  
Finding we were not hurt, and she crept forth  
Forward, beneath the curtains; the oars stopped:  
I heard a rush of feet, and presently 2890  
Came Polla's voice, 'Hold, slay me not, ye villains,

I am Agrippina.' Then, ' Ah me, I am slain !'  
And one long deathly groan. This, when I heard,  
Taught me my part, and towards the other side,  
Crawling, I came to the window o'er the stern,  
Where lay my only escape ; and silently,  
Feet foremost, I crept out, and by the ladder  
Slipped down without a sound into the sea.  
The galley still held way, and in few strokes  
I saw that I was left and unperceived ;                 2900  
And so swam on until the fishermen  
Hailed me by name, and took me in their boat.

*Ful.* Who can have laid this plot to kill you, madam?

*Agr.* 'Tis Nero, Fulvia, he who seemed but late  
So kind and dutiful : 'twas all hollowness,  
Part of the plot, to bring me here alone,  
Away from friends : ay, and perceive this too,  
To lay my death to charge of an accident,  
And hide, maybe, even my dead body, drowned  
And lost in the depths of the sea. Now, being alone,  
I shall need thee to aid me.

*Ful.*                                 Dearest madam,                 2911  
What can I do ?

*Agr.*             Thou must be faithful to me  
Whatever happens. Hearken, I said 'twas Nero  
Had done this : 'tis not so ; my real enemy,  
The mover, is Poppæa. I blame not Nero :

I bade him to discard her : he was driven  
 To choose between us : she hath carried it.  
 But being escaped, and she not here, I yet  
 Can right myself with him. 'Tis not too late ;  
 Nay, I can amply trust those broad affections, 2920  
 Which 'twixt a mother and her son remain  
 At bottom, spite of all. Ay, they remain.  
 The common knowledge of this guilty attempt  
 Will clear the way : and when I show the path,  
 He will be glad to escape. I have writ a letter,  
 Which, if he read, will work. 'Tis pure submission.  
 Remember, we must ever speak of this  
 But as an accident. Here is the letter ;  
 Send Agerinus with it straight to Cæsar ;  
 Of all my servants he's the one must bear it : 2930  
 Nero has known him from a child, will trust him ;  
 Nay, he hath rid so oft upon his shoulders  
 That he is half a brother, half a father.  
 Send him at once : I have bidden him await :  
 He should be here.

*Ful.* Alas, this is a day  
 Of sorrow indeed. I pray Minerva guard  
 Her feast from ill. [*Exit with letter.*]

*Agr.* Indeed I have little fear,  
 If he but read. Yet now, after this warning,  
 I must beware. 'Tis plain the people love me ; 2939

They cheered me so. My escape will add to favour.

*Ful. (re-entering).* He waited at the gate, and with full speed

Runs with the letter.

*Agr.* Come; one business

Must now be not neglected; there's poor Polla.

Bring pens and ink and wax: we will seal up

All her effects, and make an inventory

In proper form, and do whate'er we may

While we have time. Let us go see to it. [*Exeunt.*

#####

## S C E N E . 2

*A room in Nero's villa. A table with papers. Enter NERO, SENECA, BURRUS, and TIGELLINUS.*

*NERO.*

We have an hour: sit down, my lords, we'll hold  
A privy council. I have in my mind a matter  
Touching the subsidies.

*BURRUS.*

The day is good 2950  
For market matters, 'tis Minerva's peace:  
The sword is sheathed.

*Ner. (to Servants).* Set light upon the table.

## SENECA.

To talk of subsidies hurts no man's conscience.

What is the business, Cæsar ?

*Ner.* I am vexed

By the complaints against the imperial household

In the gathering of tolls.—Here in these papers

Are weighty charges 'gainst Pomponius

Silvanus, and Sulpicius Camerinus :

Read them at leisure. But I ask you first

Whether there be not cause for discontent 2960

In present management ?

*Sen.* 'Tis a deep evil.

But never was the empire better governed ;

Nor is there more extortion now, I think,

Than ever was.

*Ner.* And were there no extortion ?

*Sen.* Nay, while you farm the taxes there will be  
Extortion still.

*Ner.* You all think that, my lords ?

*Sen.* Ay, ay.

*Ner.* And so say I. You have my grounds.

Now hear my scheme, by which for once and all

I rid the empire of this blot. 'Tis this.

I will have no more tolls or tallages, 2970

Customs or duties levied : nay, not one

Through all the empire. I will make this present

To the human race : I say, their old vexation  
And burden shall away.

*TIGELLINUS.*

Magnificent.

*Sen.* 'Tis generously meant, most generously.  
But is it possible ?

*Ner.* Why not ?

*Sen.* The treasury,  
Eased of this sum, must fill the deficit  
By other means. If you cut off the customs,  
You must increase the tributes, rates, and rents.  
If one shoe pinches, 'tis no remedy 2980  
To stuff both feet in the other.

*Ner.* But my scheme  
Has precedent ; there was no tallage taken  
Throughout all Italy for some six years  
Ere Julius.

*Sen.* Ay, but he restored the customs  
As needful.

*Ner.* Whence they seemed the price of empire.

*Sen.* Unjustly. In the times of greatest liberty  
Consuls and tribunes have ordained new customs,  
Which yet remain.

*Tig.* I praise the scheme.

*Ner. (to Bur.)* And you ?

*Bur.* Where look you then for revenue?

*Ner.* The rents,

We'll have the rents. The land . . . . 2990

*Enter Messenger with Officer of the Guard.*

Why, who is this?

Whence come you, man?

**MESSENGER.**

Cæsar, from Anicetus.

He asks great Cæsar's pardon ere I tell.

*Ner.* Thou'rt free to speak.

*Mess.* There has an accident  
Befallen the Augusta's yacht.

*Ner.* Hey! what was that?

*Mess.* At a lurch of the ship the awning fell and  
dragged

The Augusta overboard.

*Ner.* Speak, man, speak on.

*Mess.* We thought her drowned.

*Ner.* Ha!

*Mess.* But by the grace of the gods  
She is escaped.

*Ner.* Escaped!

*Mess.* She swam to shore unharmed.

*Ner.* Thou wretch,  
And comest thou here in thy master's place 2999

To bate mine anger? Forth and send him hither.  
Fly, or I kill thee.

*Mess.* Pardon, great Cæsar, pardon.  
The Admiral follows and will straight be here.

[*Runs out.*

*Ner. (aside).* Escaped! after such boast, escaped!  
I am lost.—

To have done this thing had tried me; to have  
attempted it  
And failed is ruin.

*Sen. (aside from Nero).* What is this?

*Bur. (to Sen.)* 'Tis clear  
Cæsar knows what: and her escape not being  
His pleasure tells us that 'twas not his purpose.

*Sen. (aloud).* Alas, alas!

*Ner.* What friend there cries Alas?  
Who now stands by me? who will aid me now?

*Tig.* If Cæsar make his will but known . . .

*Ner.* Thou dullard!  
I need the brains of them that know my will. 3011  
Now is no time for parley. Seneca,  
Speak what thou thinkest.

*Sen.* Cæsar, I am so much grieved that . . .

*Ner.* What's thy pain  
To mine? Speak, man!

*Sen.* Alas, what shall I say?



*Ner.* How hast thou guessed this thing without a word,  
And yet hast not foreseen it ?

*Sen.* Oh, is't then true ?  
The letter false ; the Augusta hither brought  
But to be drowned !

*Ner.* See if ye know it not.

*Sen.* Let her escape belie thy guilty purpose. 3020

*Ner.* Why, nay, the failure damns a thousand-fold  
More than her death—I am henceforth the man  
Who would have killed his mother, and could not.

*Sen.* Alas, alas !

*Ner.* Hast thou no word but that ?  
Thou that hast ever warned me, ay, and gone  
So far upon this path that thou hast sought  
To dull the natural feeling which so long  
Held off my hand, hast argued 'gainst repugnance,  
Crying, 'tis she that is the guilty one, 3029  
The dangerous one, there is no peace with her :  
And now the day the thing thou hast foreseen,  
Ay, and hast led me to, is done, thou'rt silent.  
Hast thou no word ?—Thou that wast ever ready,  
Hast thou no word ?—What strikes thee on a sudden  
Dumb ? Be my counsellor now that I need thee.  
Speak now ! Why, thou dost weep ! surely thou  
weepst !

Burrus, what sayest thou ?

*Bur.* This mischief, Cæsar,  
Being thus arisen is the Augusta's death.  
Though I bewail the occasion, yet I say  
'Twere most untimely justice to endanger 3040  
The public peace for her whose life hath been  
So long the shame of justice. Since the sentence  
We know is just, and that necessity  
O'errides the common forms, the less delay  
The better. Let her die.

*Ner.* I thank thee, Burrus.  
How were this best performed ?

*Tig.* Now, if none speak,  
I'll say that Burrus, being the advocate  
Of what is planned, and as pretorian prefect  
Possessed of means, is fittest for the work.

*Bur.* Look not on me, Seneca, as if to say 3050  
'Tis well ; as if 'twere thy thought that my office  
Covered this deed. I pardon Tigellinus,  
That, unacquainted with a soldier's honour,  
He thinks it passable in time of peace,  
Entering in private houses there to slay  
Defenceless citizens. But that the guards  
Would thus lay hands on one that bears the name  
Of Agrippina, that they could forget  
Their loved Germanicus, who would think this ?

To such a deed they would not follow me, 3060  
 Far less another ; and if Cæsar now  
 Look for it from me, lo, I here throw down  
 My prefecture to any man soe'er  
 Who durst with this condition take it up.

*Ner.* Nay, Burrus, I'll not ask thee that. Thou'rt  
 right.

And yet, if thou could'st do it— See here the man.

*Enter Anicetus in haste, Paris following.*

Thou hast been my ruin !

*ANICETUS.*

Pardon, Cæsar, pardon.

I am strangely foiled. Give me one hour, and yet  
 I'll make amends.

*Ner.* If thou canst make amends,  
 Come hither, speak with me. [*They go aside to front.*]

*Bur.* Is the thing known ?

*PARIS.*

Ay ay.

*Ner. (to Anic.)* What canst thou do ?

*Ani.* I have set a guard 3071

Around her villa, fearing lest the people  
 Should force their way within, or she escape.  
 Give me the word and I will slay her there.

*Ner.* Fool, I can give no word. Think when 'tis  
done,  
If I should punish thee less for that deed  
Than for thy late misdoing. What is this?

*Enter Officer of the Guard. Petronius follows.*

OFFICER.

The Augusta, Cæsar, sends a freedman hither,  
One Agerinus, with a letter.

*Ner.* (to *Anic.*)                      Now

What to do?

*Ani.*    Bid him enter : when he comes              3080  
I am prepared. Lend me thy dagger, friend (to *Tig.*).

[*Takes Tigellinus' dagger.*]

*Enter Agerinus, who runs to Cæsar.*

AGERINUS.

Lo, Cæsar, I am sent . . .

*Ani.*                                      Ha ! where's thy hand ?

Ay, as I thought, a dagger well concealed  
Under his cloak.

*Age.*                      Indeed, indeed, good sir,  
I have no dagger.

*Ani.*                      How no dagger ? See !  
Had I not caught thee ! Ho ! the guard, the guard !  
Take him to prison till he can be questioned.

*Age.* You do force treason on me. Cæsar! Cæsar!

[*He is borne off by Guards.*]

*Ani.* This villain having come, as he confessed,  
From the empress armed, will Cæsar leave the enquiry  
Now in my hands?

*Ner.* I do.

*Ani.* With me who will! 3091

*Tig.* I follow, lead the way.

[*Exeunt Anicetus and Tigellinus. Paris follows them. Exit Nero within doors.*]

PETRONIUS.

What will they go to do?

*Bur.* 'Tis thus: the Admiral  
Has gone to kill the Augusta.

*Petr.* Gods forbid!  
His orders?

*Bur.* Humph!

*Petr.* Why, men, what thing ye do!  
He is shamed for ever.

*Bur.* Ay, and were't not done  
Were shamed no less.

*Sen.* Alas! 'tis true, 'tis true.  
And thou wert right, Burrus; but dost thou well  
Permitting this?

*Bur.* I see 'tis necessary,

And am not shamed to say I think the thing 3100  
 Itself is good. As for the motives, Seneca,  
 Ay, and the manner of it, to defend them  
 I shall not meddle.

*Petr.* (to *Sen.*) And thou wilt take thy share?

*Sen.* 'Tis not my counsel.

*Petr.* 'Twill be held as thine,  
 And rightly, seeing that thou let it not.  
 I could have stayed it.

*Bur.* Nay, be not so sure.  
 And if thou could'st have let it, could'st thou too  
 Prevent the consequences?

*Petr.* But remember,  
 She is his mother. Oh, I thought him better.  
 Is it too late now think you, if I ran . . . 3110

*Bur.* They are there by now. Believe 'tis for the best.  
 If she should live but till to-morrow morn,  
 'Tis civil war. Consider what a party  
 Would stir upon the tale of Claudius' death,  
 Or to revenge Britannicus. I say  
 There's nought to gain.

*Petr.* Why, 'tis his mother, Burrus,  
 His mother. I'll be sworn he had not dared  
 Thus to commit himself had I been by.  
 He that should be a model to the world,  
 The mirror of good manners, to offend 3120

Thus against taste !

*Bur.* If 'twere no worse . . .

*Petr.* Why, see,

There are a hundred subtle ways by which,  
Had Cæsar done the thing, he had not been blamed.

This vulgar butchery displays to all

The motive, which so hurts your sense of right

That ye neglect the manner. Why, I say,

A just attention to the circumstance

Would hide the doing ; but thus done, the doing

Proclaims the deed. And is't not plain that ye

Must share the guilt? Seneca, look for that. 3130

*Sen.* 'Tis very well for you, Petronius,

To take upon yourself the criticism

And ordering of appearances, and say

'If aught goes ill, blame me.' You lay your hand

On any object you dislike, remove it,

Replace it as you will, can please yourself:

Nay, you can blame their taste who are not pleased.

But he who deals with men, and seeks to mould

A character to that high rule of right

Which so few can attain, he works, I say, 3140

With different matter, nor can he be blamed

By any measure of his ill success.

His best endeavours are like little dams

Built 'gainst the ocean, on a sinking shore.

Nature asserts her force—and the wise man  
Blames not himself for his defeat. For me,  
Much as my soul is grieved, ay, and my pride  
Wounded—tho' yet, I thank philosophy,  
I can be glad for that,—my hopes—for this  
I mourn—my hopes blasted ; yet, hear me say,  
I take unto myself no self-reproach, 3151  
Nay, not a tittle of the part of mischief  
A vulgar mind might credit to my score.  
I have done my best, and that's the utmost good  
A man can do ; and if a better man  
Had in my place done more, 'tis perverse Fortune  
That placed me ill. Thus far I argue with you,  
Who look on me askance, and think my heart  
Is tainted ; as if I would in such case  
Do such thing, as—poison my brother at table,  
Contrive to kill my mother : 'Tis so far 3161  
From possible, that to my ears the words  
Carry no sense : nay, and I think such crimes  
May seem more horrible to other men,  
Whose passions make them fear them, than to me  
Who cannot think them mine. As for the rest,  
I stand with you, and never from this hour  
Shall mix with Cæsar more with any hope  
Of good. Indeed I have hoped too long, and yet  
The end has come too soon. 3170



*Re-enter Anicetus, Tigellinus, and Paris.*

*Tig.* 'Tis done, 'tis done.

*Ani.* Where is Cæsar?

*Bur.* Within.

[*Anicetus and Tigellinus hurry within.*]

*Petr.* Paris, is it true?

*Par.* The Augusta lives no longer,  
Most brutally and miserably slain :  
Yet died she bravely.

*Petr.* And why wentest thou  
To soil thy hand?

*Par.* I went not to take part :  
But Fortune holding nature's ruffians up,  
I took their pattern.

*Sen.* Say, who did the deed?

*Par.* I'll tell thee what I saw. As forth we went,  
The coward Tigellinus, pale as death,  
In needless haste foremost where was no danger,  
Hurried us on so fast, that thro' the street 3181  
We scarce kept pace, but when he reached the wall  
Of the garden, and saw there the soldiers placed  
By Anicetus, knowing not their purpose,  
He shrank behind. These men being bidden seized  
The servants ; then we entered, and with us  
Came the centurion. Within the room  
Sat Agrippina with a single maid,

Who seeing the Admiral's sword fled past us out :  
At which the Augusta called to her, 'Dost thou,  
Fulvia, desert me too?' Then to the Admiral 3191  
She spoke. 'If here thou comest to enquire  
From Cæsar of my health, know I am well,  
Recovered from my shock, and little hurt.  
But if, as your men's looks would mean, ye are come  
Deeming that Cæsar wills that I should suffer  
The like I late escaped, know you mistake.  
'Twas not of his contrivance, and my foe  
In this is his.' None answered, and awhile  
Was such delay as makes the indivisible 3200  
And smallest point of time various and broad ;  
For Agrippina, when she saw her lie  
Fail of its aim, ventured no more, as knowing  
There was no wiser plea ; but let her eyes  
Indifferently wander round her foes,  
Counting their strength. Then looked I to have seen  
Her spring, for her cheek swelled, and 'neath her robe  
Her foot moved ; ay, and had she been but armed,  
One would have fallen. But if she had the thought  
She set it by, choosing to take her death 3210  
With dignity. Then Anicetus raised  
His sword, and I fled out beyond the door  
To see no more. First Tigellinus' voice,  
'To death, thou wretch!' then blows, but not a groan ;

Only she showed her spirit to the last,  
 And made some choice of death, offering her body,  
 'That bare the monster,' crying with that curse,  
 'Strike here, strike here!'

*Sen.* Alas, poor lady,  
 Was that the end of thy unscrupulous, 3219  
 Towering ambition? Thou didst win indeed  
 The best and worst of Fortune.

*Bur.* Give her her due,  
 Such courage as deserved the best, such crimes  
 As make her death seem gentler than deserved.

*Enter Nero between Anicetus and Tigellinus.*

*Ner.* My lords, 'tis done. Nay, look not grieved.  
 There's none  
 Suffers as much as I; all share the good.  
 And think not that to keep the world at peace  
 I grudge this sacrifice: the general care  
 I set before my own, and therefore bid  
 There be no public mourning, nay, to-morrow  
 We shall attend the spectacles and games, 3230  
 Appear as usual before the people:  
 Ay, and I partly look, my lords, to you  
 That I be well received. Good night to all!





A C H I L L E S  
IN  
S C Y R O S





## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

|                  |   |   |   |                               |
|------------------|---|---|---|-------------------------------|
| <i>THETIS</i>    | . | . | . | <i>Mother of Achilles.</i>    |
| <i>ACHILLES</i>  | . | . | . | <i>disguised as PYRRHA.</i>   |
| <i>LYCOMEDES</i> | . | . | . | <i>King of Scyros.</i>        |
| <i>ULYSSES</i>   | . | . | . | <i>Prince of Ithaca.</i>      |
| <i>DIOMEDE</i>   | . | . | . | <i>companion of Ulysses.</i>  |
| <i>ABAS</i>      | . | . | . | <i>servant to Ulysses.</i>    |
| <i>DEIDAMIA</i>  | . | . | . | <i>daughter of Lycomedes.</i> |

### *CHORUS of SCTRIAN MAIDENS.*

*The scene is on the Island of Scyros, in the gardens of the  
palace.*

*Thetis prologises.*



# ACHILLES



*THETIS.*

**T**HE deep recesses of this rocky isle,  
That far from undersea riseth to crown  
Its flowery head above the circling waves,  
A home for men with groves and gardens green,  
I chose not ill to be the hiding-place  
Of my loved son. Alas, I could not take him  
To live in my blue caverns, where the nymphs  
Own me for queen : and hateful is the earth  
To me, and all remembrance, since that morn,  
When, in the train of May wandering too far, 10  
I trafficked with my shells and pearls to buy  
Her fragrant roses and fresh lilies white.  
Accurst the day and thou, ah, wretched Peleus,  
Who forcedst me to learn the fears that women  
Have for their mortal offspring : who but I,  
Thetis, Poseidon's daughter, who alone

But I of all the immortals have known this,  
To bear and love a son in human kind?  
And yet not wholly ill is the constraint,  
Nor do I pity mortals to be born 20  
Heirs of desire and death, and the rich thought  
Denied to easy pleasure in the days  
That neither bring nor take; tho' more to me  
Embittered with foreknowledge of a doom  
Threatened by fate, and labour how to avert.

For to me, questioning the high decrees  
By which the sweetly tyrannous stars allot  
Their lives and deaths to men, answer was given  
That for my son Achilles there was ruled  
One of two things, and neither good; the better 30  
A long and easy life, the worse a death  
Untimely-glorious, which should set his name  
First of the Greeks;—for so must seem to me  
Better and worse, so even an earthly mother  
Had for him chosen, tho' for the right he died,  
And conquered all the gods that succour Troy.—  
But when I, thinking he must share my fear,  
Showed him the choice, he made a mortal plunge  
For glorious death, and would have straight gone forth  
To seek it; but in tenderness for me,— 40  
Whom without shame he honours, and in this  
My love repays,—he to my tears consented



To hide him from his fate ; and here he dwells  
 Disguised among the maidens like a maiden ;—  
 For so his beauty and youth permit,—to serve  
 The daughter of the king of this fair isle,  
 Who calls him Pyrrha for his golden hair,  
 And knowing not prefers him o'er the rest.  
 But I with frequent visitings assure me  
 That he obeys ; and,—for I have the power           50  
 To change my semblance,—I will sometimes run  
 In likeness of a young and timorous fawn  
 Before the maiden train, that give me chase  
 Far in the woods, till he outstrip them all ;  
 Then turn I quick at bay with loved surprise,  
 And bid him hail : or like a snake I glide  
 Under the flowers, where they sit at play,  
 And showing suddenly my gleaming eyes,  
 All fly but he, and we may speak alone.  
 Thus oft my love will lead me, but to-day           60  
 More special need hath brought : for on the seas  
 I met at dawn a royal ship of Greece  
 Slow stemming toward this isle. What that might bode,  
 And who might sail thereon, I guessed ; and taking  
 A dolphin's shape, that thro' the heavy waters  
 Tumbles in sport, around the labouring prow  
 I gambolled, till her idle crew stood by  
 To watch me from the wooden battlements.

And surely among them there full soon I saw,  
 Even as I feared, the man I feared, agaze 70  
 With hypocrite eyes, the prince of Ithaca,  
 That searcheth for Achilles: of all the Greeks  
 Whom most I dread, for his own endless wiles,  
 And for Athena's aid. Him when I saw,  
 Lest I should be too late, I hither sped  
 To warn my son, and here shall meet him soon,—  
 Tho' yet he hath not come,—for on these lawns  
 The damsels of the court are wont to play,  
 And he with them. Hark! see! even now. Nay, nay.  
 Alas! who cometh thus? Ah, by that gait 80  
 Crouching along, it is my persecutor,  
 Ulysses. Woe is me! I must fly hence.  
 Tho' he should know me not, I fear to face him,  
 My hated foe, alert, invincible  
 Of will, full of self-love and mortal guile. [Exit.

*Enter Ulysses from the bushes, followed by Diomedes, who  
 wears a Lion's skin.*

**DIOMEDE.**

We have made the circuit of the hill, and here  
 Into the gardens are come round again.  
 What now?

**ULYSSES.**

Hush thou! Look there! Some one hath seen us.

He flies.

*Dio.* I see not.

*Ul.*               Where the myrtle tops  
Stir each in turn. He goeth toward the shore.     90  
I must see him that seeth me. Bide thou.

[*Exit among the bushes.*]

*Dio.* Were I a dog, now, I might learn. Heigh ho!  
Two hours and more we have wandered on this moun-  
tain,

Round and round, up and down, and round again,  
Gardens, and lawns, meadows, and groves, and walks,  
Thickets, and woods, the windings of the glades,  
I have them all by rote. Each petty rill

We have tracked by rocky steps and paths about,  
And peeped into its dank and mossy caves.  
What sort of game should this Achilles be,     100  
That we should seek him thus? Ah! back so soon?  
What sport?

*Ul. (re-entering).* Well hit. 'Twas but a milk-white  
doe,  
Some petted plaything of the young princess,  
That fled our stranger steps.

*Dio.*                               And whither now  
Turn we to seek Achilles?

*Ul.*                               Hark, Diomedé:  
My plot is laid and ready for thine ears.

Thou madest offer of thine aid ; be patient,  
And hear me.

*Dio.* I will hearken.

*Ul.* First, thou knowest  
How since the day the Danaan kings took oath  
To avenge the wrong done by the Trojan Paris 110  
Against his host, the Spartan Menelaus,  
One oracle hath thwarted us, which said  
Our purpose should not prosper with the gods  
Unless Achilles the young son of Thetis  
Should lead our armies.

*Dio.* Certainly, so far  
I am with you.

*Ul.* Next, when he was sought in vain,  
Men looked to me ; ay, and to me it fell  
To learn that he was lurking in this isle  
Of Scyros, in the court of Lycomedes. 119  
The king denied the charge, adding in challenge,  
That I might come and make what search I pleased ;  
Now mark . . .

*Dio.* I listen, but thou tellest nothing.  
Why search we not the court if he be there,  
Instead of this old hill ?

*Ul.* 'Tis that I come to.  
King Lycomedes hath been one of those  
Who have held their arms aloof from our alliance,

On the main plea of this Achilles' absence.  
 What if he play the game here for his friends,  
 And hide the lad lest they be forced to fight ?

*Dio.* That well might be. And if the king would  
 hide him, 130

Thy hope would hit upon him thus at hazard ?

*Ul.* Call me not fool. Attend and hear my plot :  
 Nor marvel, Diomedes, to learn that he,  
 Whom the high gods name champion of the Greeks,  
 Lurks in the habit of a girl disguised  
 Amid the maidens of this island court.

*Dio.* That were too strange. How guess you that ?

*Ul.* My spies,  
 Who have searched the isle, say there's no youth  
 thereon,  
 Having Achilles' age of sixteen years,  
 But is well known of native parentage. 140  
 Now Thetis' son must be of wondrous beauty,  
 That could not scape inquiry ; we therefore look  
 For what is hid, and not to be disguised  
 Save as I guess.

*Dio.* If this be so, thy purpose  
 Is darker still.

*Ul.* I lead thee by the steps  
 I came myself to take, slowly and surely . .  
 And next this, that 'twere dull to ask the king

To help to find the thing he goes to hide :  
 Therefore the search must be without his knowledge.  
 'Twas thus I sent up Abas to the court, 150  
 Idly to engage him in preliminaries,  
 The while I work ; my only hope being this,  
 To come myself to parley with the maidens ;  
 Which to procure I brought with me aboard  
 A pedlar's gear, and with such gawds and trinkets  
 As tickle girlish fancies, I shall steal  
 Upon them at their play ; my hoary beard  
 And rags will set them at their ease ; and while  
 They come about me, and turn o'er my pack,  
 I spy. If then Achilles be among them, 160  
 The lad's indifference soon will mark him out ;  
 When, watching my occasion, I'll exhibit  
 Something that should provoke his eye and tongue.  
 If he betray himself, thou being at hand . . . .

*Dio.* Why, 'tis a dirty trick.

*Ul.*

Not if it wins.

*Dio.* Fie ! fie !

In rags and a white beard ?

*Ul.*

No better way.

*Dio.* The better way were not to lose the hour  
 Harkening to oracles, while our good ships  
 Rot, and our men grow stale. Why, you may see  
 Imperial Agamemnon in the eyes 171

Of all his armament walk daily forth  
 To take fresh note of sparrows and of snakes :  
 And if he spy an eagle, 'twill make talk  
 For twenty days. Would you have oracles,  
 Give me the whipping of the priests. Zeus help me !  
 If half the chiefs knew but their minds as I,  
 There'd be no parleying. I'll to war alone  
 And with my eighty ships do what I may  
 'Gainst gods and men. Ay, and the greater odds  
 The better fighting.

*Ul.* Now 'tis thou that talkest. 181

*Dio.* Tell me then why we are prowling on this hill.

*Ul.* Excellent reasons. First that when I come  
 I may know how to come, and where to hide  
 From them I would not meet : and thereto this,  
 That if Achilles fly, he should not take us  
 At too great disadvantage : thou mayst head him,  
 Knowing the ground about, while I pursue.  
 He must not scape. But hark, 'tis time the plot  
 Were put to proof ; already it must be noon ; 190  
 And I hear steps and voices. Let us return  
 To the ship. If they that come be those we seek, . . .  
 Hark, and 'tis they,—we can look back upon them.  
 I'll be amongst them soon.

*Dio.* 'Tis a girl's game.

[*Exeunt into the bushes.*]

*Enter Deidamia, Achilles as Pyrrha, with the chorus of maidens.*

*DEIDAMIA (without).*

Follow me, follow. I lead the race. [*Enters.*

**CHORUS.**

Follow, we follow, we give thee chase. [*Entering.*

*Deid.* Follow me, follow.

*Ch.* We come, we come.

*Deid.* Here is my home;

I choose this tree: this is the ground 200

Where we will make our play. Stand all around,

And let us beg the dwellers in this glade

To bear us company. Be not afraid,

(I will begin) sweet birds, whose flowery songs

Sprinkle with joy the budding boughs above,

The airy city where your light folk throngs,

Each with his special exquisite of love,—

Red-throat and white-throat, finch and golden-crest,

Deep-murmuring pigeon, and soft-cooing dove,—

Unto his mate address, that close in nest 210

Sits on the dun and dappled eggs all day.

Come red-throat, white-throat, finch and golden-crest,

Let not our merry play drive you away.

*Ch.* And ye brown squirrels, up the rugged bark  
That fly, and leap from bending spray to spray,



And bite the luscious shoots, if I should mark,  
 Slip not behind the trunks, nor hide away.—  
 Ye earthy moles, that burrowing in the dark  
 Your glossy velvet coats so much abuse;— 219  
 Ye watchful dormice, and small skipping shrews,  
 Stay not from foraging; dive not from sight.—  
 Come moles and mice, squirrels and skipping shrews,  
 Come all, come forth, and join in our delight.

*Deid.* Enough. Now while the Dryads of the hill  
 Interpret to the creatures our good will,  
 Listen, and I will tell you a new game  
 That we can play together.—As hither I came,  
 I marked that in the hazel copse below,  
 Where we so oft have hidden and loved to go  
 To hear the night-bird, or to take unseen 230  
 Our noontide walks beneath the tangled screen,  
 The woodcutter hath been with cruel blade,  
 And of the tasselled plumes his strewage made:  
 And by the mossy moots the covert shorn  
 Now lieth low in swathe like autumn corn.  
 These ere he lop and into bundles bind,  
 Let us go choose the fairest we may find,  
 And of their feathered orphan saplings weave  
 A bowery dome, until the birds believe  
 We build a nest, and are come here to dwell. 240  
 Hie forth, ye Scyrian maids; do as I tell:

And having built our bower amid the green,  
 We will choose one among us for a queen,  
 And be the Amazons, whose maiden clan  
 By broad Thermodon dwells, apart from man ;  
 Who rule themselves, from his dominion free,  
 And do all things he doth, better than he.  
 First, Amazons, your queen : to choose her now :  
 Who shall she be ?

*Ch.* Thyself, thou. Who but thou ?

*Deidamia.*

*Deid.* Where then were the play, 250  
 If I should still command, and ye obey ?

*Ch.* Choose thou for all.

*Deid.* Nor will I name her, lest  
 Ye say my favour sets one o'er the rest.

*Ch.* Thy choice is ours.

*Deid.* If then I gave my voice  
 For Pyrrha ?

*Ch.* Pyrrha, Pyrrha is our choice.  
 Hail, Pyrrha, hail ! Queen of the Amazons !

*Deid. (To Ach.).* To thee I abdicate my place, and  
 give  
 My wreath for crown. Long, my queen, mayst thou  
 live !

Now, fellow-subjects, hie we off at once.

## ACHILLES.

Stay, stay! Is this the privilege of the throne? 260  
 Am I preferred but to be left alone?  
 No guard, no counsellor, no company!  
 Deidamia, stay!

*Deid.* Thy word must be  
 My law, O queen: I will abide. But ye  
 Forth quickly, as I said; ye know the place.

*Ch.* Follow me, follow: I lead the race.  
 Follow, we follow, we give thee chase.  
 Follow me, follow.

We come, we come. [*Exeunt Chor.*]

*Ach.* I could not bear that thou shouldst strain thy  
 hands 270

Dragging those branches up the sunny hill;  
 Nor for a thousand honours thou shouldst do me,  
 Making me here thy queen, would I consent  
 To lose thy company, even for an hour.  
 See, while the maids warm in their busy play,  
 We may enjoy in quiet the sweet air,  
 And thro' the quivering golden green look up  
 To the deep sky, and have high thoughts as idle  
 And bright, as are the small white clouds becalmed  
 In disappointed voyage to the noon: 280  
 There is no better pastime.

*Deid.* I will sit with thee

In idleness, while idleness can please.

*Ach.* It is not idleness to steep the soul  
In nature's beauty : rather every day  
We are idle letting beauteous things go by  
Unheld, or scarce perceived. We cannot dream  
Too deeply, nor o'erprize the mood of love,  
When it comes on us strongly, and the hour  
Is ripe for thought.

*Deid.* I have a thought, a dream ;  
If thou canst keep it secret.

*Ach.* I am thy slave. 290

*Deid.* Suppose—'tis more than that, yet I'll but say  
Suppose—we played this game of Amazons  
In earnest. What an isle this Scyros were ;  
Rich and wellplanted, and its rocky coast  
Easy of defence : the women now upon it  
Could hold it. Nay, I have often thought it out :  
The king my sire is threescore years and more,  
And hath no heir : suppose that when he dies,—  
The gods defer it long, but when he dies,  
If thou and I should plan to seize this isle, 300  
Drive out the men, and rule it for our own . . .  
Wouldst thou work with me, Pyrrha, the thing could be.  
Why shouldst thou smile ? I do not say that I  
Would rate my strength with men ; but on the farms  
Women are thicker sinewed ; and in thee

I see what all might be. I am sure for speed  
 No man could match thee, and thou hast an arm  
 To tug an oar or hurl the heaviest spear,  
 Or wrestle with the best. Why dost thou smile ?

*Ach.* When thou art queen, I'll be thy general.

*Deid.* That was my thought. What dost thou think ?

*Ach.* I think

That Fate hath marked me for a general. 312

*Deid.* Nay, but I jest not.

*Ach.* Then shall I forecast  
 And weigh impediments against thee ? as men  
 Will in like case, who think no scheme mature  
 Till counsel hath forestalled all obstacles.

*Deid.* If thou canst think of any.

*Ach.* First is this,  
 Whence shall we get our subjects when our isle  
 Is peopled but by women ?

*Deid.* Fairly asked,  
 Had I not thought of it. We shall import them 320  
 From other isles. Girl children everywhere  
 Are held of small account : these we will buy,  
 Bartering for them our fruits and tapestries,  
 And chiefly from the country whence thou comest ;  
 For there I think the women must be taller  
 And stronger than with us.

*Ach.* And who will act

Persuader to the maidens of the isle  
To banish all their lovers ?

*Deid.* O Pyrrha, shame !

Man's love is nothing ; what knowst thou of it  
To magnify its folly ? 'Tis a mischief 330  
To thwart our good : therefore I banish it.  
A woman's love may be as much to woman  
As a man's love can be. 'Tis reasonable  
This, and no dream. 'Tis my experience.  
When I am with thee, Pyrrha, I want nothing.  
No woman sitting by her silly lover  
Could take such pleasure from his flatteries  
As I from thy speech. When thou lookest on me  
I am all joy ; and if 'tis so with thee,  
Why need we argue ? Tell me, when I am with thee  
Dost thou lack aught, or wish I were a man ? 341

*Ach.* In truth nay, but . . .

*Deid.* A wretched but : I know  
What that would say ; this thing cannot be done  
Because 'twas never done. But that's with me  
The reason why it should be done.

*Ach.* I see.

Yet novelty hath no wear. Remember too  
We must grow old. The spirit of such adventure  
Tires as the body ages.

*Deid.* For that I think

I make the best provision. Nay, I have seen  
 Full many an old dame left in last neglect, 350  
 Whose keen gray eye, peaked face, and silver hair  
 Were god-like set beneath a helm of brass.

*Ach.* Here be the maids: ask them their mind at  
 once.

*Deid.* Nay, for the world no word.

*Enter Chorus, with flowers.*

Why run they breathlessly in merry fear?  
 What have ye seen? What now?

*Ch.* The king. Fly, fly!

*Ach.* Why should we fly the king?

*Ch.* A man is with him, and they come this way.

*Deid.* Who is it?

*Ch.* Nay, we know not.

*Deid.* What hath happed?

*Ch.* We went forth as ye bade, and all together  
 Ran down the hill, the straightest way we might,  
 Into the copse, and lo! 'twas as thou saidst; 362  
 The hazels are all felled, but on the ground,  
 That 'neath the straight trunks of the airy trees  
 Lies in the spotted sunlight, are upsprung  
 Countless anemones, white, red, and blue,  
 In the bright glade. Forgetting why we came,  
 We fell to gathering these. I chose the blue,

As ye may see, loving blue blossoms best,  
That are content with heaven.

*2nd Speaker.*                      And I the red,                      370  
Love's passionate colour ; and the love in these  
Is mixed with heavenly to a royal purple.

*3rd.* And I the white : whose praise I will not tell,  
Lest it should blush.

*4th.*                      And I have mixed together  
The red and white.

*5th.*                      And I the red and blue.

*6th.* And I the blue and white.

*Deid.*                      Well, but the matter.  
What happened next, tell me ?

*Ch. (1st.)*                      Still at this game,  
Like to a hungry herd that stops and feeds,  
Snatching what tempts it on, we made advance  
To the entrance of the combe ; and then one cried,  
Look up ! Look there ! And from the open brow,  
Whence we looked down upon the sea, we saw     382  
A great war-ship in the harbour : and one said,  
She comes from Athens ; and another, nay,  
Her build is Rhodian : when as there we gazed,  
Counting her ports, and wondering of her name,—  
We heard men's voices and beheld the king  
Mounting the hill-side, with a stranger clad  
In short Greek robes. Then ran we back to thee,



Ere we were seen, in haste ; that we may hide, 390  
And not be called within to attend the guests.

*Deid.* So did ye well, whoe'er it be, and best  
If 'tis the prince of Melos, as I fear :  
Who late my father said would come to woo me :  
But he must find me first. [*Going.*]

*Ach.* I'll be thine eyes  
And take his measure. Let me lurk behind,  
I'll learn his height, the colour of his beard,  
And bring thee word.

*Deid.* I pray, no beards for me.  
Those that love beards remain. The rest with me.

Follow me, follow : I lead the race. [*Exit.*]

*Ch.* Follow, we follow. We give thee chase—  
Follow me, follow— 402  
—We come, we come. [*Exeunt Chor.*]

*Ach.* I wish I had had Apollo for my sire ;  
Or that old Cheiron, when he taught me arms,  
Hunting the beasts on bushy Pelion,  
Had led and trained me rather, as well he knew,  
In that fair park of fancy and delight,  
Where but the Graces and the Muses come.  
For he could sing : and oft took down at eve 410  
From the high pillar of his rocky cave  
The lyre or pipe, and whiled the darksome hours.

Which would I had learned, to touch the stops and  
 strings,  
 Nor only harked thereto: for nought he sang,  
 Whether of gods or men, of peace or war,  
 Had any theme of sweetness to compare  
 With my new world, here, where I am king, and rule  
 The sweetest thing in nature. Had I skill  
 To give translation to my joy, I think  
 I could make music that should charm the world.  
 O Deidamia, thou Queen of my heart, 421  
 I would enchant thee and thine isle. Alas!  
 How wilt thou learn thou art mine? How can I tell  
 And with the word not lose thee? Now this suitor  
 Threats my betrayal . . . He comes. I'll watch. Yet  
 not  
 With jealous eyes, but heedful of my fate.

[*Hides in bushes.*

*Enter Lycomedes and Abas.*

**LYCOMEDES.**

'Tis folly and impertinence. I say it  
 With due respect unto the prince, thy master,  
 Who am as much his elder as the king  
 His father is. He ne'er would so have wronged me,—  
 The mild and good Laertes.—In this isle 431  
 Think'st thou 'twere possible a man should hide,

And I not know it?

*ABAS.*

My Lord Ulysses, sire,  
Bade me assure your majesty he came  
More with the purpose to acquit your honour,—  
Which suffers greatly in the common tongue,—  
Than with a hope to find what he pretends  
He comes to seek.

*Lyc.* Why should he come at all?

*Ab.* Taking your invitation in the sense  
That I have spoken . . .

*Lyc.* Thinks he, if I chose 440  
To hide the man in Scyros, that a stranger  
From Ithaca could find him?

*Ab.* Nay . . .

*Lyc.* It follows  
Your search can never quit my honesty,  
Where I am held accomplice; but no less  
Must put a slight upon my wits, implying  
Me the deceived.

*Ab.* Your invitation, sire,  
Covers that charge.

*Lyc.* My invitation, sir,  
Was but my seal of full denial, a challenge  
For honour's eye, not to be taken up.  
Your master hath slipped in manners: yet fear not

But I will meet and treat him as his birth      451  
 And name require. Speak we no more of this.  
 What think'st thou of our isle?

*Ab.*                                          The famed Ægean  
 Hath not a finer jewel on her breast.

*Lyc.* Come, come! you overpraise us: there's no  
 need.

We Scyrians are contented.—Now we are climbed  
 Above the town to the east; and you may see  
 The western seaboard, and our other port.  
 The island narrows here to twenty stades,  
 Cut like a wasp; the shoulder where we stand      460  
 Is its best natured spot: It falls to the sun,  
 And at this time of the year takes not too much.

*Ab.* 'Tis strange how in all points the lie of the land  
 Is like our Ithaca, but better clothed.

*Lyc.* And larger, is't not?

*Ab.*                                          Past comparison.—

*Lyc.* What navy bring ye to the war?

*Ab.*                                          Ah, sire!

We have no ships to boast of—with our own  
 Zakyntus, Cephallenia, and the rest,  
 Joining their numbers, raise but ten or twelve.

*Lyc.* And these your prince commands?      470

*Ab.*                                          Such as they be.

*Lyc.* Tidings come slowly to us here. I pray you

Tell me the latest of your preparations.  
 The thing must drag : there was some talk awhile  
 Of coldness 'twixt the chiefs : 'twould be no wonder.  
 They that combine upon one private grudge  
 May split upon another.

*Ab.* Still their zeal

Increases : 'tis as fire spread from a spark.

*Lyc.* A spark ? well—Menelaus. At this time  
 What numbers hath he drawn, and whence ?

*Ab.* The ships

Number above a thousand : a tenth of these 480  
 Are sent by Corinth, Sicyon and Mycenæ ;  
 Sixty are Spartan, and king Agamemnon  
 Provides as many as these all told together.  
 Then from Ægina, Epidaurus, Argos,  
 And Tiryns Diomedes brings eighty : Nestor  
 Ninety from Pylos ; from Bœotia  
 Come eighty ; Phocis and Phthiotis each  
 Send forty ; Athens fifty ; and Eubœa  
 Forty ; from Salamis Ajax brings twelve ;  
 Oilean Ajax with the Locrians 490  
 Forty more ; from our neighbours in the west,  
 Dulichium and Ætolia, eighty sail ;  
 Again as many from hundred-citied Crete  
 Under the king Idomeneus, and nine  
 From Rhodes : All these, with others that escape

My hasty summing, lie drawn up at Aulis.  
 'Tis such a sight as, I am bold to say,  
 If but your majesty could see it, would move you  
 To make a part of the splendour.

*Lyc.* Nay, I have seen them.

*Ab.* Your majesty hath been at Aulis?

*Lyc.* Nay, 500

Nor yet at Aulis: but the tale thou tellest  
 Coming unto my ears a month ago,  
 Some of my lords and I one idle morn  
 Crossed to Eubœa,—'tis a pleasure trip,  
 On a clear day scarce out of sight of home—  
 We landed 'neath Œchalia by noon,  
 And, crossing o'er the isle on mules, were lodged  
 That night at Chalcis. The next day at dawn  
 I played the spy. Twas such a breathless morning  
 When all the sound and motion of the sea 510  
 Is short and sullen, like a dreaming beast:  
 Or as 'twere mixed of heavier elements  
 Than the bright water, that obeys the wind.  
 Hiring a fishing-boat we bade the sailors  
 Row us to Aulis; when midway the straits,  
 The morning mist lifted, and lo, a sight  
 Unpicturable.—High upon our left  
 Where we supposed was nothing, suddenly  
 A tall and shadowy figure loomed: then two,

And three, and four, and more towering above us :  
But whether poised upon the leaden sea           521  
They stood, or floated in the misty air,  
That baffling our best vision held entangled  
The silver of the half-awakened sun,  
Or whether near or far, we could not tell,  
Nor what : at first I thought them rocks, but ere  
That error could be told, they were upon us  
Bearing down swiftly athwart our course ; and all  
Saw 'twas a fleet of ships, not three or four  
Now, but unnumber'd : like a floating city,       530  
If such could be, with walls and battlements  
Spread on the wondering water : and now the sun  
Broke thro' the haze, and from the shields outhung  
Blazed back his dazzling beams, and round their prows  
On the divided water played ; as still  
They rode the tide in silence, all their oars  
Stretched out aloft, as are the balanced wings  
Of storm-fowl, which returned from battling flight  
Across the sea, steady their aching plumes  
And skim along the shuddering cliffs at ease :   540  
So came they gliding on the sullen plain,  
Out of the dark, in silent state, by force  
Yet unexpended of their nightlong speed.

Those were the Cretan ships, who when they saw us  
Hailed for a pilot, and of our native sailors

Took one aboard, and dipping all their oars  
Passed on, and we with them, into the bay.

Then from all round, where the dark hulls were  
moored

Against the shore, and from the tents above  
A shout of joy went up, re-echoing 550  
From point to point; and we too cheered and caught  
The zeal of that great gathering.—Where man is met  
The gods will come; or shall I say man's spirit  
Hath operative faculties to mix  
And make his gods at will? Howe'er that be,  
Soon a swift galley shot out from the rest  
To meet the comers. That was Agamemnon's,  
They told me; and I doubt not he was in it,  
And gave his welcome to Idomeneus,  
And took him to his tent. On such a day 560  
Our little boat rowed where we would unmarked:  
We were but Chalcian pilots. So I saw  
Whate'er I wished to see, and came away  
Across the strait that night, and the next day  
Was home by sundown.

*Ab.* All this could you see  
Without the wish to join?

*Lyc.* I say not that;  
For wish I did that I was young again.  
Then, sir, I would have left whate'er I had,



My kingdom to another, for the pride,  
Of high place in such war ; now I am old. 570

*Ab.* But older men than thou have joined us, sire.  
War needs experience.

*Lyc.* Concerning war  
I am divided in opinion, Abas :  
But lean to think it hath a wholesome root  
Supportive to our earthly habit. I see  
The noblest beasts will love to fight, and man  
Is body as well as spirit : his mind that's set  
In judgment o'er those twain must oft admit  
The grosser part hath a preponderant claim.  
But I regret this, and my discontent 580  
Puts me this question, Shall man never come  
To a better state with his desire ? What think you ?  
What if our race yet young should with the time  
Throw off the baser passions, as I find  
Myself by age affected ? I know not . . .  
I have a little statue in my house,  
Which, if you look on't long, begets belief  
Of absolute perfectionment ; the artist  
Should have been present when man's clay was mixed.  
Prometheus, or whoever 'twas that made us, 590  
Had his head turned with natural history :  
All excellent contrivance, but betraying  
Commonness and complexity. Well ! well !

No need of my philosophies in Scyros—  
 War must have motive, and the men I rule  
 Are simple and contented with their lot.  
 None in my land would wish an atom changed :  
 Were even Achilles here 'twould be no wonder  
 If he had caught our temper.

*Ab.* All men witness  
 To thy good rule, O king : but in the wars 600  
 Fame may be won.

*Lyc.* Nor do I ask for fame.  
 Come that to whom it will ; to Agamemnon,  
 To Ajax or Ulysses or Achilles.

*Ab.* To Achilles no : 'tis not in the gods' grace  
 To succour pigrity. To him, a lad,  
 The prize of honour above all the Greeks  
 Was offered : by the poor effeminacy  
 With which he hath rejected it, he is judged  
 Meanest of all. But since we cannot win  
 Without him, we must have him. Little glory 610  
 To him, except to be Fate's dullest tool.

*Lyc.* Maybe. Now come we on. I had thought to  
 find  
 My daughter and her train. I'll take thee round  
 Another way to the palace : thither no doubt  
 She is now returned. [Exeunt.]

*Enter Achilles from the bushes.*

*Ach.* Villain, I thank the gods that sent thee hither.  
 But thou wast near thy death. Walk off secure,  
 Not knowing that I heard. *Effeminate!*  
*The meanest of the Greeks!* were he the best,  
 I'd slay him in this garment. Yet he is but 620  
 A tongue to troll opinion of me, a slave,  
 Fetcher and carrier of others' tales, and doth  
 The drudgery honestly; for that I'll thank him  
 And profit by his slander. Ay, so I'll do—  
 Now in good time—I'll get me a man's dress  
 And meet them here, ere they suspect me:—or, stay!  
 I can outwit them better. I'll take a boat,  
 Cross o'er to Aulis, like good Lycomedes,  
 This very night, and there to Agamemnon  
 Declare myself; and men shall never know 630  
 How I was hid, nor whence I came.

*Enter Thetis.*

*Th.* My son!

*Ach.* My goddess mother, welcome! yet I am  
 shamed  
 That thou shouldst find me thus.

*Th.* How art thou shamed?

*Ach.* This dress. O thou canst help me: thou art ready  
 At every need. And here hath been a man

Who, thinking not I heard, spake to the king  
 Of thy Achilles with such scorn, that I  
 Should have leaped forth upon him in my rage,  
 And strangled him, but that he seemed to be  
 Another's servant. 640

*Th.* Then thou hast seen them, son?

*Ach.* Who are they?

*Th.* Those I came to warn thee of;  
 Ulysses and his friends. Knowst thou 'tis they  
 Are come unto the isle to seek thee?

*Ach.* Ay.

But thou art ready to outwit their wile.  
 As thou didst bring me hither on that night  
 When all thy nymphs, assembling 'neath the moon  
 Upon the Achæan shore, bore me away  
 Across the sea, even so to Aulis now  
 Convey me secretly, and set me there,  
 Ere men know whence I come.

*Th.* What hear I, son? 650  
 To Aulis? to thy foes?

*Ach.* A thousand ships  
 Moored idle in the bay wait but for me:  
 And round the shore the captains of the Greeks  
 Impatient in their tents but call for me.  
 Be they my foes to speak or wish me ill,  
 'Tis only that I come not. I must go.

*Th.* There let them tarry till the sea-worm bore  
 Their ships to rottenness ; or, sail they forth,  
 Let them be butchered by the sword of Hector,  
 Ere thou be snared to serve their empty pride. 660

*Ach.* But louder than their need my honour calls :  
 Hast thou no thought of this in all thy love ?

*Th.* Who then is honoured more or more desired  
 Than thou art now ? but they, if once they had thee,  
 Would slight thee, and pretend they were the men.

*Ach.* But those are honoured best that hear their  
 praise.

*Th.* Is not high Zeus himself, holding aloof,  
 Worshipped the more ? Let the world say of thee,  
 When these have perished, that they went their way  
 Because the son of Thetis would not aid them. 670

*Ach.* But if 'twere said because he feared to die ?

*Th.* Fearst thou reproach of fear that fearst not  
 death ?

*Ach.* I fear not, but by proof would shun reproach.

*Th.* Men, son, are what they are ; and thou art brave.  
 'Tis asked of poor and questionable spirits  
 To prove their worth.

*Ach.* I prove myself a coward.

*Th.* How ! when it needed heavenly prayers and  
 tears,  
 The force of duty and a goddess' will

To keep thee back from death ! when all the joys  
 That I have set about thee, and a love 680  
 More beautiful than Helen's cannot hold thee !

*Ach.* Fate, that from men hideth her pitiless face,  
 Offered to me this kindness, that my will  
 Should be of force in predetermined deeds :  
 Allowing me to take which life I would  
 Of two incomparable lots ; I ever  
 Leaned one way, the other thou ; and still at heart  
 I hold to my first choice.

*Th.* O child of man,  
 Though child of mine, wouldst thou know wisdom's  
 way,  
 Learn it of me. If I had said to thee 690  
 Thou being a mortal shouldst love death and darkness ;  
 For in the brief date of thy heedless term  
 'Tis vain to strive with evil : and since the end  
 Cometh the same, and at the latest cometh  
 So soon, that there's no difference to be told  
 'Twixt early and late, 'tis wisdom to despair :  
 Then would thy tongue have boldly answered me,  
 And said, Man hath his life ; that it must end  
 Condemns it not for nought. Are rivers salt  
 Because they travel to the bitter sea ? 700  
 Is the day dark because the gorgeous west  
 Must fade in gloom, when the ungazeable sun

Is fallen beneath the waves? Or hath the spring  
 No charm in her pavilions, are her floors  
 Not starred, for that we see her birth is slow  
 Of niggard winter, and her blossoms smirched  
 By summer's tyranny? Hadst thou said this,  
 And that Earth's changeful pride, the life of man,  
 Is exquisite in such a quality

To make the high gods envious could they guess :  
 Then had I found no answer : but when I 711  
 Told thee of joy, and set thee in the midst,  
 That thou shouldst argue with me that 'tis best  
 To die at once, and for an empty name  
 Pass to the trivial shades ; then must I fear  
 I have as thankless and unwise a son,  
 As disobedient.—Yet when first I taught thee  
 Thou gav'st me promise to be wise.

*Ach.* But never

Wilt thou then free me from my promise given?

*Tb.* Not to thy hurt. 720

*Ach.* See now what shame I bear !

*Tb.* Why make so much of shame? If thou despise  
 The pleasure of the earth, why not the shame?

*Ach.* I wrong, too, this old king.

*Tb.* His daughter more,  
 If thou desert her.

*Ach.* But 'twould hurt her less

To lose me now than know me when disgraced.

*Tb.* I plead not in her name, nor charge thee, son,  
 With loving her in my contempt. A dream  
 Of mortal fancy or honour may becloud  
 Thy mind awhile, but ne'er canst thou forget  
 Thy bond to me; the care that never left thee 730  
 Till thou wert out of hand; the love that dared  
 To send thee from my sight when thou wast able,  
 And to strange lands; my secret visitings  
 There, and revisitings; the dreams I sent thee,  
 Warnings of ill, and ecstasies of pride;  
 The thousand miracles I wrought to save thee,  
 And guard thee to thy prime;—and now men say  
 Thou art the first of the Greeks: their homaged kings  
 The gods condemn to death if thou withhold 739  
 Thy single arm. Why so? What hast thou done?  
 Where have men seen thee? Hast thou ruled like Nestor?  
 Conquered like Agamemnon, fought like Ajax?  
 What is thy prowess, what thy skill but this,  
 That thou art son of Thetis? Disobey not,  
 Nor question now my bidding. Must I kneel,  
 Embrace thy knees, or melt before thy face  
 In supplicating tears? O if thy birth  
 Did cost the tenderest tears that god e'er shed,  
 Make not those bitter drops to have flowed in vain.  
 Whate'er fate portion thee my joy is this— 750



That thou dost love me. Dost thou cease to love,  
I am most miserable.

*Ach.* O fear not that,  
Mother and goddess! Pardon me, weep not.  
Let all men curse me, be my name abhorred,  
Rather than thou be grieved. 'Twas anger moved me :  
I will forget this, and obey thee. Say  
What I must do, how best avoid these men :  
And how refuse their call if I be found.

*Tb.* Kiss me, my son. By the gods' life, I love thee :  
My grief is to deny thee. But there's need 760  
Of counsel, for the day is critical  
And glides apace. And first if they should find thee,  
Then 'tis thy fate to go : I cannot stay thee.  
And since to bear thee hence were sure betrayal,  
I urge thee to be true to thy disguise.  
And better to escape thy foes, learn now  
Whom most to dread. Of all the Argives shun  
Ulysses ; come not near him in the halls ;  
And should he speak to thee, answer no word.  
Him thou wilt know by his preëminence : 770  
In person he is beardless yet, and smooth  
Of face and tongue, alluring, gentle in voice  
But sturdy of body, and 'neath his helm his locks  
O'er a wide brow and restless eye curl forth  
In ruddy brown ; nor less for his attire

Notable is he, wearing the best of all,  
His linen broidered, and broad jewels to hold  
A robe of gray and purple.

*Ach.* He shall not spy me.  
But if by any warning from the gods  
He know and call to me, how then to escape 780  
The shame of this Ionian skirt?

*Th.* That chance  
I can provide for, and shall give thee now  
A magic garment fitting to thy body,  
Which worn beneath thy robe will seem as weft  
Of linen thread, but if it meet the light  
'Twill be a gilded armour, and serve well  
In proof as show. Come, I will set it on thee.

[*Exeunt.*]

*Enter Deidamia and Chorus.*

*Deid.* The ground is clear, we have deceived them  
mightily,  
Running around.

*Ch.* Where is our queen?

(2) Not here.

*Deid.* I'll call her. Pyrrha!—Call all together.

*Ch.* Pyrrha!

*Deid.* She will come presently.—Did ye not mark  
How resonant this glade is? that our voices 792  
Neither return nor fly, but stay about us?

It is the trunks of the trees that cage the sound ;  
 As in an open temple, where the pillars  
 Enrich the music. In my father's hall  
 The echo of each note burdens the next.  
 'Twould be well done to cut a theatre  
 Deep in some wooded dale. Till Pyrrha come,  
 Alexia, sing thou here.

*Cb.* What shall I sing? 800

*Deid.* There is a Lydian chant I call to mind  
 In honour of music-makers : it beginneth  
 With praise of the soft spring, and heavenly love—  
 'Twill suit our mood, if thou remember it.

*Chorus.*

The earth loveth the spring,  
 Nor of her coming despaireth,  
 Withheld by nightly sting,  
 Snow, and icy fling,  
 The snarl of the North :  
 But nevertheless she prepareth 810  
 And setteth in order her nurselings to bring them forth,  
 The jewels of her delight,  
 What shall be blue, what yellow or white ;  
 What softest above the rest,  
 The primrose, that loveth best  
 Woodland skirts and the copses shorn.

## 2.

And on the day of relenting she suddenly weareth  
 Her budding crowns. O then, in the early morn,  
     Is any song that compareth  
 With the gaiety of birds, that thrill the gladdened air  
     In inexhaustible chorus                     821  
     To awake the sons of the soil  
 With music more than in brilliant halls sonorous  
     (—It cannot compare—)  
     Is fed to the ears of kings  
     From the reeds and hirèd strings?  
     For love maketh them glad;  
     And if a soul be sad,  
     Or a heart oracle dumb,  
 Here may it taste the promise of joy to come.   830

## 3.

For the Earth knoweth the love which made her,  
     The omnipotent one desire,  
     Which burns at her heart like fire,  
     And hath in gladness arrayed her.  
     And man with the Maker shareth,  
     Him also to rival throughout the lands,  
     To make a work with his hands  
     And have his children adore it:

The Creator smileth on him who is wise and dareth  
 In understanding with pride : 840  
 For God, where'er he hath builded, dwelleth wide,—  
 And he careth,—  
 To set a task to the smallest atom,  
 The law-abiding grains,  
 That hearken each and rejoice :  
 For he guideth the world as a horse with reins ;  
 It obeyeth his voice,  
 And lo ! he hath set a beautiful end before it :

## 4.

Whereto it leapeth and striveth continually,  
 And pitieth nought, nor spareth : 850  
 The mother's wail for her children slain,  
 The stain of disease,  
 The darts of pain,  
 The waste of the fruits of trees,  
 The slaughter of cattle,  
 Unbrotherly lust, the war  
 Of hunger, blood, and the yells of battle,  
 It heedeth no more  
 Than a carver regardeth the wood that he cutteth away:  
 The grainèd shavings fall at his feet, 860  
 But that which his tool hath spared shall stand  
 For men to praise the work of his hand ;

For he cutteth so far, and there it lay,  
And his work is complete.

## 5.

But I will praise 'mong men the masters of mind  
In music and song,  
Who follow the love of God to bless their kind :  
And I pray they find  
A marriage of mirth—  
And a life long 870  
With the gaiety of the Earth.

*Ch.* There stands an old man downbeneath the bank,  
Gazing, and beckoning to us.

*Deid.* He is a stranger,  
That burdened with some package to the palace  
Hath missed his way about, and fears to intrude.  
Go some and show him. [Some run out.]

Meanwhile what do we ?

We have no sport when Pyrrha is away.  
Our game is broken. Come, a thought, a thought !  
Hath none a thought ?

*Ch.* We have never built the bower.

*Deid.* Ye idled gathering flowers. Now 'tis too late.

*Ch.* Let us play ball.

*Deid.* The sun is still so high. 881  
I shall go feed my doves.

(*Re-enter one of Chorus.*)

*Ch.* The old man saith  
That he is a pedlar, and hath wares to sell  
If he may show them. Shall he come?

*Deid.* Now Hermes,  
The father of device and jugglery,  
Be thanked for this; 'tis he hath sent him.—Call him.  
His tales may be good hearing, tho' his pack  
Repay not search. But be advised: beware,  
Lest he bear off more than he bring: these fellows  
Have fingers to unclasp a brooch or pin 890  
While the eye winks that watches. There was one  
Who as he ran a race would steal the shoes  
Of any that ran with him. The prince of all  
Was merry Autolycus.

*Enter, with those who had gone out, Ulysses as a  
pedlar.*

Good day, old man.  
Come, let us see thy wares.

*Ul.* I have no breath left,  
Wherewith to thank you, ladies; the little hill  
Has ta'en it from me.

*Deid.* Rest awhile, and tell us  
Whence thou art come.

*Ul.* In a Greek ship this morn.

I pray you, that I lack not courtesy,  
Art thou the princess of this isle?

*Deid.* I am. 900

*Ul.* My true and humble service to your highness.

*Deid.* In turn say who art thou, and whence thy ship.

*Ul.* Fair, honoured daughter of a famous king,  
I have no story worthy of thine ear,  
Being but a poor artificer of Smyrna,  
Where many years I wrought, and ye shall see  
Not without skill, in silver and in gold.  
But happiness hath wrecked me, and I say  
'Tis ill to marry young; for from that joy  
I gat a son, who as the time went on, 910  
Grew to be old and gray and wise as I;  
And bettering much the art which I had taught him  
Longed to be master in my place, for which  
He grew unkind, and his sons hated me:  
And when one day he wished me dead, I feared  
Lest I should kill myself; and so that night  
I made me up a pack of little things  
He should not grieve for, and took ship for Greece.  
There have I trafficked, lady, a year and more,  
And kept myself alive hawking small ware 920  
From place to place, and on occasion found  
A market for my jewels, and be come here  
Making the round of the isles in any ship



That chances : and this last I came aboard  
 At Andros, where I was : but whence she hailed  
 I have even forgot. May it please thee see my wares?

*Deid.* Thy tale is very sad. I am sorry for thee.  
 Why would thy son, being as thou sayst so skilled,  
 Not ply his trade apart?

*Ul.* My house in Smyrna  
 Was head of all the goldsmiths : 'twas for that, 930  
 Lady, he envied me. See now my wares.

*Deid.* What beauteous work! I'm glad thou'rt  
 come. I'll buy  
 A trinket for myself, and let my maids  
 Choose each what she may fancy. Hear ye, girls?  
 I'll make a gift to each.

*Ch.* O thanks.—To all?—  
 And may we choose?

*Deid.* Yes.

*Ch.* Anything we please?

*Deid.* Why, that is choosing.

*Ch.* O we thank thee.

*Ul.* Now

I see, princess, thou'rt of a bounteous blood,  
 To make all round thee happy.

*Deid.* What is this brooch?

*Ul.* If for thyself thou fancy a brooch, I'll show thee  
 The best jewel in my box, and not be shamed 941

To say I have no better.

*Cb.* See, oh, see!

What lovely things!—A rare old man!

*Ul.* Here 'tis.

What thinkest thou?

*Deid.* Is't not a ruby?

*Ul.* And fine!

*Deid.* I think thy son will have missed this.

*Ul.* Nay, lady:

I had it of a sailor, who, poor fool,  
Knew not its worth; and thou mayst buy it of me  
For half its value.

*Deid.* May I take these two  
To view them nearly?

*Ul.* All take as ye will.

Ye do me honour, ladies.

*Deid.* Hear ye, girls, 950  
Make each her choice. I will o'erlook your taste  
When all is done.

*Ul.* Come, buy my wares: come buy.  
Come, come buy; I've wares for all,  
Were ye each and all princesses.  
Clasps and brooches, large and small,  
Handy for holding your flowing dresses.

*Cb.* What is this little box for?

*Ul.* Open it.

*Ch.* What is this vial?

*Ul.* Smell it. Buy, come buy!  
 Charms for lovers, charms to break,  
 Charms to bind them to you wholly. 960  
 Medicines fit for every ache,  
 Fever and fanciful melancholy.

*Ch.* O smell this scent.—Here be fine pins.—See this!

*Ul. (aside).* I spy none here to match my notion yet.

*Ch.* I have found amber beads.—What is it is tied  
 In little packets?

*Ul.* Toilet secrets those,  
 Perfumes, and rare cosmetics 'gainst decay.

*Deid. (to one apart).* Alexia, see. I will buy this  
 for Pyrrha.

'Tis pity she is not here. What thinkest thou of it?  
 He said it was his best. This other one 970  
 I'll give to thee if thou find nothing better.

Go see. I will seek Pyrrha. [*Exit.*]

*Ul.* Buy, come buy!  
 Tassels, fringes, silken strings,  
 Girdles, ties, and Asian pockets,  
 Armlets, necklaces and rings,  
 Images, amulets, lovers' lockets.

*Ch.* Pray, what are these, good man?

*Ul.* Of soft doe-skin

These gilded thongs are made for dancers' wear,  
To tie their sandals.

*Ch.* And is this a pin,  
This golden grasshopper?

*Ul.* Ay, for the hair. 980  
The Athenian ladies use nought else. See here  
This little cup.

*Ch.* Didst thou make that?

*Ul.* Nay, ladies.

*Ch.* Show us some work of thine which thou didst  
make

Thy very self.

*Ul.* See then this silver snake.  
Fear not. Come near and mark him well : my trade is,  
Or was, I should say, in such nice devices.  
'Twill coil and curl, uncoil, dart and recoil. [*Showing.*

*The Chorus crowd about him, when enter unperceived  
by him Achilles and Deidamia.*

*Deid.* Come, come, there never hath been one like  
him here.

Hark! see the girls : they crowd and chatter round  
As greedily as birds being fed. I bade them choose  
Each one a present, but I took the best, 991  
This ruby brooch. Look at it : 'tis for thee.  
Let me now put it on thee. I'll unclasp

Thy robe and set it in the place of the other.

*Ach.* Nay, Deidamia, unfasten not my robe!

*Deid.* Why, 'twould not matter if he looked this way.

*Ach.* Nay, prithee.—

*Deid.* Well, thou must take my gift.

*Ach.* Then must I give thee somewhat in return.

*Deid.* But 'tis my will to-day to give to all.

*Ach.* Then let me take my choice, some smaller  
thing. 1000

*Deid.* Come then ere all is ransacked.

*Ach. (aside).* I scarce escaped

The uncovering of my magic coat.—[*They go to Ulysses.*

*Ul.* Come buy,

Needles for your broideries rare,

Dainty bodkins silver-hafted.

Pins to fix your plaited hair,

Ivory-headed and golden-shafted.

*Ach.* What hast thou in thy pack for me, old man?

*Ul.* There's nought but trifles left me, lady, now,  
As dice and dolls; the very dregs of the box.

*Deid.* Athenian owls. And who's this red-baked lady  
Clothed in a net?

*Ul.* Princess, 'tis Britomartis, 1011

The Cretan goddess worshipped at Ægina.

*Deid.* This little serpent too?

*Ul.* Nothing to thee:

But the Erechtheidæ use to fasten such  
 About their children's necks. Nay, not a babe  
 Is born but they must don him one of these,  
 Or ever he be swaddled or have suck.

*Deid.* This blinking pygmy here, with a man's body  
 And a dog's head, squatting upon a button . . .  
 What's he?

*Ul.* 'Tis an Egyptian charm, to ban 1020  
 The evil spirits bred of Nilus' slime.

*Deid.* And this?

*Ul.* That. See, 'tis a Medusa, lady,  
 Cut in an oyster-shell, with flaming snakes.

*Deid.* These are all nothings. Thou must have the  
 brooch.

See, now 'tis thine; thou hast it. (*Pins it upon Achilles'*  
*robe.*) (*To Ul.*) What is its price?

(*To Ach.*) Nay, be content.

*Ul.* To thee I'll sell it, lady,  
 For a tenfold weight of gold.

*Ach.* Oh! 'tis too much.  
 Spend not such store on me. And for the ruby,  
 'Tis dark and small.

*Ul.* The purple is its merit:  
 Were it three times the size and half the tint, 1030  
 'Twere of slight cost.

*Ach.* So might I like it better.

And that—what's that, which thou dost put aside?  
Is that a toy?

*Ul.* Nay, lady; that is no toy.

'Tis a sharp sword. But I will show it thee  
For its strange quality: the which methinks  
Might pass for magic, were't not that an Arian,  
Late come to Sardis, knows the art to make it.  
Tho' wrought of iron, look ye, 'tis blue as flint,  
And if I bend it, it springs back like a bow:  
'Tis sharper too than flint; but the edge is straight,  
And will not chip. Nay, touch it not; have care!

*Ach.* Pray, let me see it, and take it in my hand.

*[Takes it and comes to front.]*

*Ul. (aside).* This should be he.

*Ach. (aside).* My arm writhes at the touch.

*Ul.* There is a hunter, with his game, a lion,  
Inlaid upon it: and on the other side 1045  
Two men that fight to death.

*Ach.* 'Tis light in the hand.

*Deid. (to Ach.).* Canst thou imagine any use for this?

*Ach. (to Deid.).* Not when thy father dies?

*Ul.* Ladies, have care.  
For if the sword should wound you, I were blamed.

*Ach.* Why, thinkest thou 'tis only bearded men  
Can wield a sword? The queen of the Amazons  
Could teach thee something maugre thy white hair.

*Ul. (aside).* The game hath run into the snare ;  
He is mine.

*Ach.* See, Deidamia, here's my choice ; buy this  
If thou wilt give me something ; thou dost like 1055  
The ruby ; if thou wilt let me give thee that,  
Thou in return buy me this little sword.

*Deid.* Such presents are ill-omened, and 'tis said  
Will shrewdly cut in twain the love they pledge.

*Ach.* But we may make a bond of this divider.

*Deid.* Wilt thou in earnest take it for thy choice ?

*Ach.* If thou wert late in earnest, thou couldst do  
No better than arm all thy girls with these.  
The weapon wins the battle, and I think  
With such advantage women might be feared.  
(*To Ul.*) Old man, I like thy blade ; and I will have it.  
I see 'twould thrust well : tell me if 'tis mettle  
To give a stroke. Suppose I were thy foe,  
And standing o'er thee thus to cut thee down  
Should choose to cleave thy pate. Would this sword  
do it ? 1070

*Ul. (aside).* He knows me !

[*Pulling off his beard and head-dress and leaping up,*

Achilles !

*Deid. and Ch.*

Help ! help ! treachery !

[*They fly.*



*Diomedes comes out of bushes where he stands unseen  
by Achilles.*

*Ach.* Beardless—and smooth of face as tongue :  
In voice

Gentle, but sturdy of body : ruddy locks,  
And restless eye . . . Ulysses !

*Ul.* Thou hast it.

*Ach.* I knew that thou wert here, but looked to  
meet thee

1075

Without disguises, as an honest man.

*Ul.* Thou needest a mirror, lady, for thyself.

*Ach.* (*suddenly casts off his long robe and appears in  
shining armour, still holding the sword*).

Behold! . . . . Be thou my mirror !

*Ul.* If I be not,

'Tis shame to thee, the cause of my disguise.

*Ach.* I own thee not. I knew thee for a prince,  
But seeing thee so vilely disfigured . . .

*Ul.* Stay! 1081

We both have used disguise : I call for judgment  
Upon the motive. Mine I donned for valour,  
And care for thy renown ; thine was for fear.

*Ach.* Fear ! By the gods : take up thy beard again,  
And thy mock dotage shield thee.

*Ul.* Nay, Achilles ;

If I spake wrong I will recall the word.

*Ach.* Thou didst unutterably lie. Recall it.

*Ul.* Wilt thou then sail to Aulis in my ship?

*Ach.* I can sail thither and not sail with thee.

*Ul.* But wilt thou come?

*Ach.* I answer not to thee

Because thou questionest me : but since I know

What will be, and hear thee in ignorance

Slander fair names, I tell thee that Achilles

Will come to Aulis.

*Ul.* Wherefore now so long 1095

Hast thou denied thyself to thy renown?

*Ach.* Thou saidst for fear; nor hast recalled the  
word.

*Ul.* 'Twas first thy taunt which drew my mind  
from me :

But, if it wrong thee, I recall the word.

*Ach.* I think thou hast judged me by thyself, Ulysses.

When thou wast summoned to the war,—who wert

Not free to choose as I, but bound by oath

To Menelaus to help him,—what didst thou?

Why thou didst feign; and looking for disguise

Thy wit persuaded thee that they who knew thee

Would never deem that thou wouldst willingly

Make mock of that: so thou didst put on madness,

Babbling and scrabbling even before thy friends:

And hadst been slaving on thy native rocks

Unto this day, had not one fellow there 1110  
 Lightly unravelled thee, and in the furrow,  
 Which thou with dumb delusion, morn and eve,  
 Didst plough in the sea sand (that was thy trick),  
 He placed thy new-born babe. That thou brok'st down  
 Then in thine acting, that thou drav'st not on  
 The share thro' thine own flesh, is the best praise  
 I have to give thee.

*Ul.* Distinguish! if I feigned,  
 'Twas that I had a child and wife, whose ties  
 Of tenderness I am not ashamed to own.

*Ach.* I say thou wentest not unto this war 1120  
 But by compulsion, thou, that chargest me  
 With fear. 'Tis thou that art the stay-at-home,  
 Not I; my heart was ever for the war,  
 And 'gainst my will I have been withheld: that thou  
 Mistakest in this my duty for my leaning,  
 Is more impeachment of thy boasted wits,  
 Than was thy empty husbandry. Are not  
 The Argive chiefs more subject, one and all,  
 To this reproach of fear? Why need they me  
 A boy of sixteen years to lead them on? 1130  
 Did they lack ships or men, what are my people  
 In number? who am I in strength? what rank  
 Have I in Hellas? Where's the burly Ajax?  
 Where is the son of Herakles? and Nestor

The aged? Teucer and Idomeneus?  
Menestheus, Menelaus? and not least  
Where's Diomede?

*Dio.* (*coming forward*). By chance he's here.

*Acb.* Ah! now

I hear a soldier's voice. Brave Diomede,  
I give thee welcome, tho' thou comest behind.

*Dio.* Hail, son of Thetis, champion of the Greeks!

*Acb.* Anon, anon. What dost thou here? Wert  
thou

1141

Sat in an ambush or arrived by chance,  
As thou didst say?

*Dio.* By heaven I cannot tell.

I serve Ulysses, and he serves the gods:  
If thou'rt displeas'd with them, gibe not at me.

*Acb.* I see the plan—The pedlar here in front,  
The lion behind. And so ye thought to seize me.

*Ul.* Have we not done it?

*Acb.* Nay.

*Ul.* Thou canst not scape.

*Acb.* I give that back to thee.

*Ul.* What wilt thou now?

*Acb.* Diomede and I have swords: thou mayst  
stand by

1150

Until 'tis time thou show me how to escape.  
I'll drive you to your ship.

*Ul. (aside to Dio.).*

Answer him not. He cannot leave the isle :  
When the king learns of our discovery  
He must deliver him up. Let's to the palace.

*Dio. (to Ul.).* Nay, I must speak—

*Ul.* Thou wilt but anger him.  
He will yield better if we cross him not.

*Dio. (to Ach.).* Brave son of Thetis, I'd not yield  
to thee

In any trial of strength, tho' thou be clad  
In heavenly armour ; but I came not here 1160  
To fight, and least with thee : put up thy sword.  
And since I heard thee say thou wilt to Aulis,  
Our mission is accomplished, nought remains  
But to renounce our acting, and atone  
For what we have ventured. First I speak thee free  
To follow thine own way. Unless the king  
Or other here be in thy secrecy,  
None know but we, nor shall know : be it thy will,  
My lips are sealed, and in whatever else  
Thou wilt command me, I shall be glad to obey.

*Ach.* Thank thee, good Diomedes. What saith  
Ulysses ? 1171

*Ul.* I'll do whate'er will knit thee to our cause.  
(*Aside.*) Yet shall men hear I found thee.

*Ach.* Return then to your ship ; and when Ulysses

Is there restored proceed ye to the court,  
 But what in the surprise and consequence  
 Of my discovery to the king, as well  
 As to some others may arise, I know not ;  
 Nor can instruct your good behaviours further.  
 Time grants me but short counsel for myself. 1180

*Ul.* We too should study how to meet the king.

*Ach.* Stay yet, Ulysses. Thou hast parted here  
 With goods appraised to them that meant to buy.  
 I have a full purse with me. Be content,  
 Take it. I'd give as much for the little sword.  
 Now let me do this favour to the ladies.

*Ul. (taking).* 'Tis fit, and fairly done. I did not think  
 To go off robbed. The sword is worth the gold.  
 We part in honest dealing. Fare thee well. 1189

*Dio. (aside).* Thrashed like a witless cur !

*(To Ach.)* Farewell, Achilles.  
 An hour hence we will meet thee at the palace.

[*Exeunt Ul. and Dio.*]

*Ach.* In spite of warning taken in a silly trap,  
 By the common plotter ! Thus to be known Achilles—  
 To have my wish forced on me against my will  
 Hath rudely cleared my sight. Where lies the gain ?  
 The dancing ship on which I sailed is wrecked  
 On an unlovely shore, and I must climb

Out of the wreck upon a loveless shore,  
 Saving what best I love. 'Tis so. I see  
 I shall command these men, and in their service  
 Find little solace. I have a harder task 1201  
 Than chieftainship, and how to wear my arms  
 With as much nature as yon girlish robe :  
 To pass from that to this without reproach  
 Of honour, and beneath my breastplate keep  
 With the high generalship of all the Greeks  
 My tenderest love. 'Tis now to unmask that,  
 And hold uninjured. I'll make no excuse  
 To the old king but my necessity,  
 And boldly appease him. Here by chance he comes.

*Enter hurriedly Lycomedes and Abas.*

*Lyc.* Was it not here, they said? 1211  
 An insolent ruffian : Let me come across him !  
 By heav'n, still here ! And armed from head to foot !  
 (*To Ach.*) Young man,—as now thou'lt not deny to be—  
 Thou'st done—ay, tho' thou seem of princely make—  
 Dishonour and offence to me the king  
 In venturing here to parley with the princess  
 In mock disguise, for whatsoever cause,  
 Strangely put on and suddenly cast off,  
 I am amazed to think. I bid thee tell me 1220  
 What was thy purpose hither.

*Ach.* O honoured king,  
Tho' I came here disguised I am not he  
Thou thinkest.

*Lyc.* Nay I think not who thou art.  
All wonders that I have seen are lost in thee.

*Ach.* Thou takest me for Ulysses.

*Lyc.* Nay, not I.

*Ach.* I am Achilles, sire, the son of Thetis.

*Lyc.* Achilles! Ah! Thou sayst at least a name  
That fits thy starlike presence, my rebuke  
Not knowing who thou wert. But now I see thee  
I need no witness, and forget my wonder 1230  
Wherefore the Argives tarry on the shore  
And the gods speak thy praise. Welcome then hither,  
Achilles, son of Thetis; welcome hither!  
And be I first to honour thee, who was  
Most blamèd in thine absence.

*Ach.* Gracious sire,  
Thy welcome is all kingly, if it bear  
Forgiveness of offence.

*Lyc.* To speak of that,  
Another might have wronged me, but not thou.  
Tho' much I crave to learn both how and why 1239  
Thou camest hither. Was't in the Argive ship?

*Ach.* Nay, king, I came not in the Argive ship:  
Nor am I that false trespasser thou seekest.



*Lyc.* Whether then hast thou mounted from the deep,  
Where the sea nymphs till now have loved and held  
thee

From men's desire; or whether from the sky  
Hath some god wrapt thee in a morning cloud,  
And laid thee with the sunlight on this isle,  
Where they that seek should find thee?

*Acb.* A god it was  
Brought me, but not to-day: seven times the moon  
Hath lost her lamp with loitering, since the night  
She shone upon my passage; and so long 1251  
I have served thee in disguise, and won thy love.

*Lyc.* So long hast thou been here! And I unknowing  
Have pledged my kingly oath—The gods forbid—

*Acb.* Yet was I here because a goddess bade.

*Lyc.* Have I then ever seen thee?

*Acb.* Every hour  
Thou hast seen me, and sheltered me beneath thy roof.  
But since thou knewest me not, thy royal word  
Was hurt not by denial.

*Lyc.* Who wert thou? Say.

*Acb.* I was called Pyrrha. 1260

*Lyc.* O shame.

*Acb.* Yet hearken, sire!

*Lyc.* Wast thou the close attendant of my daughter,  
Her favoured comrade, and she held it hid

'Neath a familiar countenance before me,  
So false unto her modesty and me ?

Alas ! alas !

*Ach.* O sire, she hath known me but as thou, and  
loved

Not knowing whom.

*Lyc.* Thou sayst she hath not known ?

*Ach.* For 'twas a goddess framed me this disguise.

*Lyc.* And never guessed ?

*Ach.* Nay, sire. Nor blame the goddess  
Whom I obeyed : nor where I have done no wrong,  
Make my necessity a crime against thee. 1271

*Lyc.* Can I believe ?

*Ach.* 'Tis true I have loved her, sire :  
And by strange wooing if I have won her love,  
And now in the discovery can but offer  
A soldier's lot,—she is free to choose : but thee  
First I implore, be gracious to my suit,  
Nor scorn me for thy son.

*Lyc.* My son ! Achilles !  
This day shall be the feast-day of my year,  
Tho' I be made to all men a rebuke  
For being thy shelter, when I swore to all 1280  
Thou wert not here. Now I rejoice thou wert.  
Come to my palace as thyself : be now  
My guest in earnest : we will seal at once

This happy contract.

*Ach.* Let me first be known  
Unto the princess and bespeak her will.

*Lyc.* She is thine, I say she is thine. Stay yet; that  
pedlar,

Was he Ulysses?

*Ach.* So he stole upon us;  
And when I bought this sword he marked me out.

*Lyc.* I cannot brook his mastery in deceit.  
Where is he now?

*Ach.* I sent him to the ship, 1290  
To find a fit apparel for thy sight.

*Lyc.* Would I had caught him in his mean disguise!

*Ach.* So mayst thou yet. Come with me the short  
way

And we will intercept him.

*Lyc.* Abas, follow.  
Thou too hast played a part I cannot like.

*Ab.* My liege, I have but unwittingly obeyed.  
I have no higher trust.

*Lyc.* Now obey me. [Exeunt.]

*Enter Deidamia and Chorus.*

*Deid.* Pyrrha, where art thou, Pyrrha?

*Ch.* She turned not back.—

They are not here.—She would not fly.—

*Deid.* Pyrrha, Pyrrha! 1300

*Ch.* She hath driven the ugly pedlar and his pack  
Home to his ship—would we had all been by!

Would we had joined the chase!

*Deid.* He was no pedlar: I could see his face  
When he pulled off his beard.

*Ch.* There as she stood,  
Waving the sword, I feared  
To see a mortal stroke—  
He hath fled into the wood—  
Had he no sword too, did none spy, 1310  
Beneath his ragged cloke?

*Deid.* Alas, alas!

*Ch.* What hast thou found?

*Deid.* Woe, woe! alas, alas!

Pyrrha's robe torn, and trampled on the ground.

See! see! O misery!

*Ch.* 'Tis hers—'tis true—we see.

*Deid.* Misery, misery! help who can.

*Ch.* I have no help to give.—

I have no word to say. 1320

*Deid.* Gods! do I live

To see this woe? The man

Like some wild beast hath dragged her body away,  
And left her robe. Ah, see the gift she spurned,  
My ruby jewel to my hand returned;

When forcing my accord  
She chose the fatal sword.

The fool hath quite mistook her play.

*Cb.* He will have harmed her, if she be not slain.

Ah, Pyrrha, Pyrrha! 1330

Why ran we away?

*Deid.* Why stand we here?

To the rescue: follow me.

*Cb.* Whither—our cries are vain.

Maybe she lieth now close by

And hears but cannot make reply.

'Tis told how men have bound

The mouths of them they bore away,

Lest by their cry

They should be found.— 1340

Spread our company into the woods around,

And shouting as we go keep within hail.—

Or banding in parties search the paths about:

If many together shout

The sound is of more avail.

Once more, together call her name once more.

(*Calling.*) Pyrrha—Pyrrha!

*Thetis (within).* Ha!

*Deid.* An answer. Heard ye not?

*Cb.* 'Twas but the nymph, that from her hidden grot

Mocks men with the repeated syllables 1350

Of their own voice, and nothing tells.  
Such sound the answer bore.

*Deid.* Nay, nay.

Hark, for if 'twere but echo as ye say  
'Twill answer if I call again.

(*Calls.*) Pyrrha, come! Pyrrha, come!

*Thetis (within).* I come, I come.

*Deid.* Heard ye not then?

*Ch.* I heard the selfsame sound.

*Deid.* 'Twas Pyrrha. Why she is found.

I know her voice. I hear her footing stir. 1360

*Ch.* True, some one comes.

*Deid.* 'Tis she.

*Enter Thetis.*

Pyrrha! O joy.

*Tb.* Why call ye her?

*Deid.* Pyrrha! Nay.

And yet so like. Alas, beseech thee, lady  
Or goddess, for I think that such thou art,  
Who answering from the wood our sorrowing call  
Now to our sight appearest,—hast thou regard  
For her, whom thou so much resemblest, speak  
And tell us of thy pity if yet she lives 1368  
Safe and unhurt, whom we have lost and mourn.

*Tb.* 'Tis vain to weep her, as 'twere vain to seek.  
Whom think ye that ye have lost?

*Deid.*

Pyrrha, my Pyrrha.

As late we all fled frightened by a man,  
 Who stole on us disguised, she stayed behind :  
 For when we were got safe, she was not with us.  
 So we returned to seek her ; but alas !  
 Our fear is turned to terror. Lady, see !  
 This is her garment trampled on the ground.

*Tb.* And so ye have found her. There was never  
 more

Of her ye have callèd Pyrrha than that robe.  
 The golden-headed maiden, the enchantress, 1380  
 And laughter-loving idol of your hearts  
 Had in your empty thought her only being.  
 When ye have played with her, chosen her for queen,  
 And leader of your games, or when ye have sat  
 Rapt by the music of her voice, that sang  
 Heroic songs and histories of the gods,  
 Or at brisk morn, or long-delaying eve,  
 Have paced the shores of sunlight hand in hand,  
 'Twas but a robe ye held : ye were deceived ;  
 There was no Pyrrha. 1390

*Ch.*

What strange speech is this ?

Was there no Pyrrha ? What shall we believe !

*Deid.* Lady, thy speech troubles mine ear in vain.

*Tb.* 'Tis then thine ear is vain ; and not my speech.

*Deid.* My ears and eyes and hands have I believed,

But not thy words. A moment since I held her.  
What wilt thou say ?

*Tb.* That eyes and hands and ears  
Deceived thy trust, but now thou hearest truth.

*Deid.* Have we then dreamed, deluded by a shade  
Fashioned of air or cloud, and as it seems  
Made in thy likeness, or hath some god chosen  
To dwell awhile with us in privy 1401

And mutual share of all our petty deeds ?  
Say what thy dark words hint and who thou art.

*Tb.* I Thetis am, daughter of that old god,  
Whose wisdom buried in the deep hath made  
The unfathomed water solemn, and I rule  
The ocean-nymphs, who for their pastime play  
In the blue glooms, and darting here and there  
Checquer the dark and widespread melancholy  
With everlasting laughter and bright smiles. 1410  
Of me thou hast heard, and of my son Achilles,  
By prescient fame renowned first of the Greeks :  
He is on this island : for 'twas here I set him  
To hide him from his foes, and he was safe  
Till thou betray'dst him—for unwittingly  
That hast thou done to-day. The seeming pedlar,  
To whom thou ledest Pyrrha, was Ulysses,  
Who spied to find Achilles, and thro' thee  
Found him, alas ! Thy Pyrrha was Achilles.



*Chorus.*

O daughter of Nereus old, 1420  
 Queen of the nymphs that swim  
 By day in gleams of gold,  
 By night in the silver dim,  
 Forgive in pity, we pray,  
 Forgive the ill we have done.  
 Why didst thou hide this thing from us ?  
 For if we had known thy son  
 We had guarded him well to-day,  
 Nor ever betrayed him thus.

For though we may not ride 1430  
 Thy tall sea-horses nor play  
 In the rainbow-tinted spray,  
 Nor dive down under the tide  
 To the secret caves of the main,  
 Among thy laughing train ;  
 Yet had we served thee well as they,  
 Had we thy secret shared :  
 Nor ever had lost from garden and hall  
 Pyrrha the golden-haired,  
 Pyrrha beloved of all. 1440

*Th.* (to *Deid.*). Dost thou say nought ?

*Deid.* Alas, alas ! my Pyrrha.

*Th.* Art thou lamenting still to have lost thy maid ?

*Deid.* I need no tongue to cry my shame ; and yet  
Thy mockery doth not grieve me like my loss.

*Tb.* I came not here to mock thee, and forbid  
Thy grief, that doth dishonour to my son.

*Deid.* Nay, nay, that word is mine : speak it no more.

*Tb.* Weepest thou at comfort ? Is deceit so dear  
To mortals, that to know good cannot match  
The joy of a delusion whatsoe'er ? 1450

*Deid.* What joy was mine shame must forbid to tell.

*Tb.* Gods count it shame to be deceived : but men  
Are shamed not by delusion of the gods.

*Deid.* Then ye know nothing or do not respect.

*Tb.* Why what is this thou makest ? the more ye  
have loved

The more have ye delighted, and the joy  
I never grudged thee ; tho' there was not one  
In all my company of sea-born nymphs,  
Who did not daily pray me, with white arms  
Raised in the blue, to let her guard my son. 1460  
And for his birthright he might well have taken  
The service of their sportive train, and lived  
On some fair desert isle away from men  
Like a young god in worship and gay love.  
But since he is mortal, for his mortal mate  
I chose out thee ; to whom now were he lost,  
I would not blame thy well-deservèd tears :

But lo, I am come to give thee joy, to call  
 Thee daughter, and prepare thee for the sight  
 Of such a lover, as no lady yet 1470  
 Hath sat to await in chamber or in bower  
 On any wallèd hill or isle of Greece ;  
 Nor yet in Asian cities, whose dark queens  
 Look from the latticed casements over seas  
 Of hanging gardens ; nor doth all the world  
 Hold a memorial ; not where Ægypt mirrors  
 The great smile of her kings and sunsmit fanes  
 In timeless silence : none hath been like him ;  
 And all the giant stones, which men have piled  
 Upon the illustrious dead, shall crumble and join  
 The desert dust, ere his high dirging Muse 1481  
 Be dispossest of the throne of song.

Await him here. While I thy willing maids  
 Will lead apart, that they may learn what share  
 To take in thy rejoicing. Follow me !

*Ch.* Come, come—we follow—we obey thee gladly—  
 We long to learn, goddess, what thou canst teach.

[*Exeunt Th. and Chor.*]

*Deid.* Rejoice, she bids me. Ah me, tho' all heaven  
 spake,  
 I should weep bitterly. My tears, my shame  
 Will never leave me. Never now, nevermore 1490  
 Can I find credit of grace, nor as a rock

Stand 'twixt my maids and evil ; even not deserving  
 My father's smile. Why honour we the gods,  
 Who reckon not of our honour ? How hath she,  
 Self-styled a goddess, mocked me, not respecting  
 Maidenly modesty ; but in the path  
 Of grace, wherein I thought to walk enstated  
 High as my rank without reproach, she hath set  
 A snare for every step ; that day by day,  
 From morn to night, I might do nothing well ; 1500  
 But by most innocent seeming be betrayed  
 To what most wounds a shamefast life, yielding  
 To a man's unfeignèd feigning ; nay nor stayed  
 Until I had given,—alas, how oft !—  
 My cheek to his lips, my body to his arms ;  
 And thinking him a maid as I myself,  
 Have loved, kissed, and embraced him as a maid.  
 O wretched, not to have seen what was so plain !  
 Here on this bank no later than this morn  
 Was I beguiled. There is no cure, no cure. 1510  
 I'll close my eyes for ever, nor see again  
 The things I have seen, nor be what I have been.

[*Covers her face weeping.*]

*Enter Achilles.*

*Ach.* The voices that were here have ceased. Ah,  
 there !

Not gone. 'Tis she, and by my cast-off robe  
 Sitting alone. I must speak comfort to her,  
 Whoe'er I seem. O Deidamia, see!  
 Pyrrha is found. Weep not for her. I tell thee  
 Thy Pyrrha is safe. Despair not. Nay, look up.  
 Dost thou not know my voice? 'Tis I myself. 1519  
 Look up, I am Pyrrha.—Ah, now what prayer or plea  
 Made on my knees can aid me—If thou knowst all  
 And wilt not look on me? Yet if thou hearest  
 Thou wilt forgive. Nay, if thou lovedst me not,  
 Or if I had wronged thee, thou wouldst scorn me now.  
 Thou dost not look. I am not changed. I loved thee  
 As like a maiden as I knew: if more  
 Was that a fault? Now as I am Achilles  
 Revealed to-day to lead the Greeks to Troy,  
 I count that nothing and bow down to thee  
 Who hast made me fear,— 1530  
 Let me unveil thy eyes: tho' thou wouldst hide me,  
 Hide not thyself from me. If gentle force  
 Should show me that 'tis love that thou wouldst hide . . .  
 And love I see. Look on me.

*Deid.* (*embracing*). Ah Pyrrha, Pyrrha!

*Ach.* Thou dost forgive.

*Deid.* I never dreamed the truth.

*Ach.* And wilt not now look on me!

*Deid.* I dare not look.

*Ach.* What dost thou fear? A monster! I am not  
changed

Save but my dress, and that an Amazon  
Might wear.

*Deid.* O, I see all.

*Ach.* But who hath told thee?

*Deid.* There came one here much like thee when  
we called, 1540

Who said she was a goddess and thy mother.

*Ach.* 'Twas she that hid me in my strange disguise,  
Fearing the oracle.

*Deid.* She praised thee well,  
And said that thou wouldst come. . .

*Ach.* What didst thou fear,  
Hiding thine eyes?

*Deid.* I cannot speak the name.  
Be Pyrrha still.

*Ach.* Be that my name with thee.  
Yet hath thy father called me son Achilles.

*Deid.* He knows?

*Ach.* There's nought to hide: but let us  
hence.

He is coming hither, and with him my foe.  
Let them not find us thus, and thee in tears. 1550

[*Exeunt.*]

*Enter Lycomedes, Ulysses, Diomedes, and Abas.*

*Lyc.* It may be so, or it may not be so :  
You have done me an honest service 'gainst your  
will,

And must not wrest it to a false conclusion.  
I bid you be my guests, and with your presence  
Honour the marriage, which ye have brought about.  
Ye need not tarry long.

*Ul.* Each hour is long  
Which holds the Argive ships chained to the shore.  
This is no time for marriage.

*Lyc.* There's time for all ;  
A time for wooing and a time for warring :  
And such a feast of joy as offers now 1560  
Ye shall not often see. Scyros shall show you  
What memory may delight in 'twixt the frays  
Of bloody battle.

*Dio.* I am not made for feasts.  
I join the cry to arms. But make your bridal  
To-night, and I'll abide it.

*Lyc.* I'll have't to-night.  
So shall Achilles' finding and his wedding  
Be on one day. And hark ! there's music tells me  
That others guess my mind.

*Enter Chorus with Ach. and Deid. following.*

*Chorus.*

Now the glorious sun is sunk in the west,  
 And night with shadowy step advances : 1570  
 As we,—to the newly betrothed our song address,  
 With musical verse and dances,  
 In the order of them who established rites of old  
 For maidens to sing this song,—  
 Pray the gifts of heaven to gifts of gold,  
 Joy and a life long.

*Ach.* Good king and father, see thy daughter come  
 To hear thee call me son.

*Lyc.* Son if I call thee,  
 I understand not yet, and scarce believe 1579  
 The wonders of this day. And thou, my daughter,  
 Ever my pride and prayer, hast far outrun  
 My hope of thy good fortune. Blessed be ye both :  
 The gods have made your marriage ; let the feast  
 Be solemnized to-night ; our good guests here  
 Whose zeal hath caused our joy, I have bid to share it.

*Chorus.*

We live well-ruled by an honoured king,  
 Beloved of the gods, in a happy isle ;  
 Where merry winds of the gay sea bring  
 No foe to our shore, and the heavens smile



On a peaceful folk secure from fear,           1590  
 Who gather the fruits of the earth at will,  
 And hymn their thanks to the gods, and rear  
 Their laughing babes unmindful of ill.  
 And ever we keep a feast of delight,  
 The betrothal of hearts, when spirits unite,  
 Creating an offspring of joy, a treasure  
     Unknown to the bad, for whom  
     The gods foredoom  
     The glitter of pleasure,  
     And a dark tomb.                                   1600

Blessèd therefore O newly betrothed are ye,  
 Tho' happy to-day ye be,  
 Your happier times ye yet shall see.  
     We make our prayer to the gods.

The sun shall prosper the seasons' yield  
 With fuller crops for the wains to bear,  
 And feed our flocks in fold and field  
 With wholesome water and sweetest air.  
 Plenty shall empty her golden horn,  
 And grace shall dwell on the brows of youth,  
 And love shall come as the joy of morn,   1611  
 To waken the eyes of pride and truth.

Blessèd therefore thy happy folk are we.  
 Tho' happy to-day we be,

Our happier times are yet to see.

We render praise to the gods ;

But chiefest of all in the highest height  
To Love that sitteth in timeless might,  
That tameth evil, and sorrow ceaseth.

And now we wish you again,                   1620  
Again and again,  
His joy that encreaseth,  
And a long reign.

*Ach.* Stay, stay! and thou, good king, and all here,  
hear me.

I would be measured by my best desire,  
And that's for peace and love, and the delights  
Your song hath augured : but to all men fate  
Apportions a mixed lot, and 'twas for me  
Foreshown that peace and honour lay apart,  
Wherever pleasure : and to-day's event                   1630  
Questions your hope. I was for this revealed,  
To lead the Argive battle against Troy :  
Thither I go ; whence to return or not  
Is out of sight, but yet my marriage-making  
Enters with better promise on my life  
Thus hand in hand with glorious enterprise.  
After some days among you I must away,  
Tho' 'tis not far.

*Ul.* Well said! So art thou bound.

*Dio.* The war that hung so long will now begin.

*Lyc.* I ask one month, Achilles: grant one moon:  
They that could wait so long may longer wait. 1641

*Chorus.*

1.

Go not, go not, Achilles; is all in vain?

Is this the fulfilment of long delight,

The promise of favouring heaven,

The praise of our song,

The choice of Thetis for thee,

Thy merry disguise,

And happy betrothal?

We pray thee, O we beseech thee, all,

Son of Thetis, we counsel well,

1650

Do not thy bride this wrong.

2.

For if to-day thou goest, thou wilt go far,

Alas, from us thy comrades away,

To a camp of revengeful men,

The accursed war

By warning fate forbidden,

To angry disdain,

A death unworthy.

We pray thee, O we beseech thee, all,  
 Son of Peleus, we counsel well, 1660  
 This doom the oracle told.

*Lyc.* What said the oracle?

*Ach.* It darkly boded

That glory should be death.

*Lyc.* And so may be :

Nay, very like. Yet men who would live well,  
 Weigh not these riddles, but unfold their life  
 From day to day. Do thou as seemeth best,  
 Nor fear mysterious warnings of the powers.  
 But, if my voice can reckon with thee at all,  
 I'll tell thee what myself I have grown to think :  
 That the best life is oft inglorious. 1670  
 Since the perfecting of ourselves, which seems  
 Our noblest task, may closelier be pursued  
 Away from camps and cities and the mart  
 Of men, where fame, as it is called, is won,  
 By strife, ambition, competition, fashion,  
 Ay, and the prattle of wit, the deadliest foe  
 To sober holiness, which, as I think,  
 Loves quiet homes, where nature laps us round  
 With musical silence and the happy sights  
 That never fret ; and day by day the spirit 1680  
 Pastures in liberty, with a wide range

Of peaceful meditation, undisturbed.

All which can Scyros offer if thou wilt.—

*Ul.* This speech is idle, thou art bound to me.

*Ach.* I hear you all: and lest it should be said  
I once was harsh and heedless, where such wrong  
Were worse than cowardice, I now recall  
Whate'er I have said. I will not forth to Troy:  
I will abide in Scyros, and o'erlook  
The farms and vineyards, and be lessoned well 1690  
In government of arts, and spend my life  
In love and ease, and whatsoever else  
Our good king here hath praised—I will do this  
If my bride bid me. Let her choose for me;  
Her word shall rule me. If she set our pleasure  
Above my honour, I will call that duty,  
And make it honourable, and so do well.  
But, as I know her, if she bid me go  
Where fate and danger call, then I will go,  
And so do better: and very sure it is, 1700  
Pleasure is not for him who pleasure serves.

*Deid.* Achilles, son of Thetis! As I love thee,  
I say, go forth to Troy.

*Ach.* Praised be the Gods,  
Who have made my long desire my love's command!

*Ch.* Alas! We have no further plea. Alas!  
Her ever-venturous spirit forecasts no ill.

*Lyc.* Go, win thy fame, my son ; I would not stay thee.

Thou art a soldier born. But circumstance  
Demands delay, which thou wilt grant.

*Ach.*

And thus

To-night may be the feast. To-morrow morn 1710  
Do thou, Ulysses, sail to Aulis, there  
Prepare them for my coming. If, Diomede,  
Thou wilt to Achaia to collect my men,  
The time thou usest I can fitly spend,  
And for some days banish the thought of war.

*Dio.* I will go for thee, prince.

*Lyc.*

'Tis settled so.

Stand we no longer here : night falls apace.  
Come to the palace, we will end this day,  
As it deserves, never to be forgot.



# NOTES

## THE FIRST PART OF NERO

THIS play was not intended for the stage, as the rest of my plays are. It was written as an exercise in dramatic qualities other than scenic; and had its publication been contemplated, I should have been more careful not to deserve censure in one or two places: these however I have not thought it worth while to erase or correct. Owing to its inordinate length I have found it necessary, so that the volumes of this series might be of uniform size, to couple with it the shortest of the other plays. Hence

### ACHILLES IN SCYROS

is here out of order. Instead of standing second it should come fifth, that is after *The Christian Captives*. The following note is taken from the first edition.

*Note to Achilles in Scyros.*—After I had begun this play I came by chance on *Calderon's* play on the same subject, *El Monstruo de los Jardines*. The monster is



*Achilles*; the gardens the same. Excepting an expression or two I found nothing that it suited me to use, and I should not have recorded the circumstance, if it were not that *Calderon's* play seemed to me to contain strong evidence that he had read *The Tempest*. This observation cannot be new, but I have never met with it; so I offer it to my readers, thinking it will interest them as it did me.

*El Monstruo de los Jardines* opens with a storm at sea, and shipwreck of royal persons, similar as it is inferior to *Shakespeare's* (but compare also the Devil's shipwreck in the second act of *El magicio prodigioso*, which may be read in *Shelley's* translation). *Stephano* has his counterpart,

*Un cofrade de Baco, que ha salido,  
Por no hacerle traicion, del mar á nado  
Pues el no beber agua le ha escapado,*

and the whole play is then on a supposed desert island, which turns out to be strangely peopled. There is the monster *Achilles*, who in many respects remembers *Caliban*, and is even addressed as *Señor monstruo*: 'Monsieur Monster.' There is *Thetis*, who is to her nymphs as *Prospero* to his spirits; with musical enchantments, and voices in the air, and even a *fantastico bajél*. *Calderon* has moreover hit

upon the same device of imitative fancy as tempted *Dryden* in like sad case, and pictured a man who had never seen a woman. The island is wandered on by the prince and his suite, and one of them says of it *Republica es entera*, &c. A curious reader might find more than I have here noticed: but *Calderon* is as far from sympathy with *Shakespeare*, as he is from the Greek story, with his drums and trumpets and *El gran Soft*.

There is a passage in my *Achilles* (l. 518 and foll.) which is copied from *Calderon*: but this is after *Muley's* well-known speech in the *Principe Constante* (see note to *The Christian Captives*); which is quoted in most books on *Calderon*. In my short play, which runs on without change of scene or necessary pause, I have had the act and scene divisions indicated by greater and lesser spaces in the printing.\*

R. B., 1890. 69

\* Not followed in this edition. 1901.







