Three Melodramas by Pietro Metastasio

Pietro Metastasio

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Joseph G. Fucilla
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Pietro Metastasio, whose real surname was Trapassi, was born of humble parentage in Rome in 1698. Quite early he showed literary precociousness by improvising and singing verses to audiences of children in the streets of the Eternal City. One day in the course of one of his improvisations (he was only ten at the time), he attracted the attention of Gian Vincenzo Gravina, eminent jurist, distinguished dramatist and critic, and one of the founders of the famous Arcadian Academy. Gravina obtained permission from the boy's parents to adopt him, and Hellenized his name to Metastasio, from metastasis, crossing, a translation of trapasso. He taught him Greek and Latin and sent him to Scalea in Calabria to study Cartesian philosophy under his own former teacher, Gregorio Caloprese. On returning to Rome the youth studied literature and law.

At fourteen Metastasio wrote his first play, a tragedy, entitled Il Giustino. It had been Gravina's ambition when he adopted the boy to make him the tragic poet that he believed was long awaited in Italy. The play, based on L'Italia liberata dai Goti by Trissino, one of Gravina's favorite authors, was the young man's first attempt to fulfill his patron's hopes. Despite its bombastic diction it is impressive as an early revelation of Metastasio's talent as a versifier. Gravina died in 1718 leaving the young man as the universal heir to a large fortune. During the same year he was admitted to membership in the famous Arcadian Academy under the pastoral name Artino Corasio, but soon afterwards he moved to Naples, where he became an apprentice in a law office.

In 1721, on commission from the viceroy, Marco Antonio Borghese, Metastasio wrote a dramatic fable entitled Gli orti esperidi in celebration of the birthday of Elizabeth, Empress of Austria. The role of Venus in the
performance was taken by Marianna Benti Bulgarelli, called La Romanina, one of the most talented singers of her day. She fell in love with the youthful poet, prevailed upon him to abandon his interest in law, and made him her protégé. It was for her that he wrote his first melodrama, La Didone abbandonata, in 1724. The play proved to be a sensational success which brought fame to its author and further triumphs to La Romanina. Metastasio now returned to Rome where in the course of a little more than five years he composed six more melodramas: Siroe (1726), Catone in Utica (1727), Ezio (1728), Semiramide (1729), Alessandro nell'Indie (1729), and Artaserse (1730). Of these, Didone is easily the finest. It is a stirring sentimental play in which the temperamental Dido, with her swiftly changing moods expressing pride, humility, anger, suspicion, jealousy, vengeance, mockery, and desperation, kept the Settecento audiences in a continual state of excited suspense. It is clear that its main source is Virgil’s Aeneid. In contrast to Siroe, which is a drama of intrigue, Didone is a drama of character, specifically of one character who dominates all the others and who has been aptly called the first living woman to appear on the Italian stage.

Metastasio's third play, Catone in Utica, is an approach to tragedy. In having Cato commit suicide on stage its author had undoubtedly counted on repeating the success enjoyed by the spectacular suicidal plunge of Dido into the burning ruins of the royal palace in the final scene of his first play. But the Roman theatergoers regarded this as a breach of decorum. A pasquinade was circulated in which the Compagnia della Morte was invited to go to the Teatro delle Dame, where Catone was being performed, to pick up Cato's corpse. Metastasio was forced to recant and reluctantly removed the scene from his second version. This experience caused him to return to plays of intrigue with happy endings. The three types of plays that he wrote between 1724 and 1730 show that this brief span represents an experimental phase in his theatrical production.

In 1729 Apostolo Zeno (1669-1750), who had occupied the post of poet and historian at the Viennese court, arranged to have Metastasio designated as his successor. The latter had dedicated Endimione, a dramatic piece written in Naples in 1721, to Marianna Pinelli di San-
gro, Contessa d'Althann. It was this second Marianna, then a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Elizabeth and soon to become Metastasio's devoted friend and adviser, who was influential in securing the appointment. The playwright arrived in the Austrian capital on April 17, 1730. From that time on, all of Metastasio's dramatic productions were first performed in the court theaters belonging to the imperial family.

The first decennium of his residence in Vienna was a period of intense literary productivity during which he composed eleven melodramas, all of them works of high excellence: Demetrio (1731), Adriano in Siria (1732), Issipile (1732), L'Olimpiade (1733), Demofoonte (1733), La clemenza di Tito (1734), Achille in Sciro (1735), Ciro riconosciuto (1736), Temistocle (1736), Zenobia (1740), and Attilio Regolo (1740). They differ from the plays of his first phase in exhibiting a greater simplification and tightening of plot, a more harmonious distribution of parts, and better elaborated characters. These qualities have been noted by a number of critics.

The change appears most discernibly in the well-structured and compact L'Olimpiade. In the course of its composition Metastasio allowed his own feelings to be more directly and poignantly involved with the fates of the protagonists than in other pieces. Much of the warmth of the play stems from this involvement. It is visibly brought out in his famous sonnet "Sogni e favole io fingo," written while he was at work on it. In translation its first quatrain reads as follows:

Whilst dreams and tales unreal I devise,  
and strive to deck them with poetic art,  
the self-sprung woes so touch my foolish heart,  
I melt in anguish and myself despise....

The play transports us into an idillico-sentimental world that reminds us of Tasso's Torrismondo and Aminta and, in the dénouement, of Guarini's Pastor fido. The excellent structuralization of its plot, finesse in the characterization of both its primary and its secondary personages, its moving arias—all fuse to make it a little masterpiece. Carducci remarked of it, "All the eighteenth century united in acclaiming the 'divine Olympiad' in which Italian melody [melica] and lyricism [melopea] have attained without any doubt an unsurpassed and unsurpassable perfection." Metastasio's argument
tells us that its plot is largely drawn from Herodotus and Pausanias. It is still considered his best work.

Two years earlier the court poet had written Demetrio, an attractive melodrama with similar idyllic sentimental subject matter copiously suffused with pathos. Its scenes wrung tears from the audiences. As Metastasio reported to La Romanina in a letter of January 12, 1732, he had seen even the "orsi" (bears: refractory spectators) weep during its performance. The action of the piece largely revolves around the shifting moods of Queen Cleonice. She prepares the audience for what is to happen early in the play in the arietta which she sings at the end of Act I, Scene 3:

Amid so many anguished thoughts
about my kingdom and my love,
my weary heart cannot decide
if it should fear, if it should hope.
I call to mind my royal cares
and the affections of my heart;
I make decisions, then repent
and then I change my mind again.

Demetrio bears some resemblance to Corneille's Don Sanché d'Aragon.

La clemenza di Tito was the most frequently performed Metastasian melodrama up to the nineteenth century. In it the theme of magnanimity is very appealingly presented. Though not without faults, the play is probably the most outstanding of his heroic works. Voltaire, among others, was enthusiastic in its praise. He was much impressed with the excellence of scenes 5 and 7 of Act III, which he declared to be "worthy of Corneille when he does not declaim and Racine when he is not weak." Another favorite heroic drama with strong appeal is Temistocle. But Metastasio's own favorite was Attilio Regolo, first staged in 1750. He had begun to write it nine years before and subsequently subjected it to frequent modifications and revisions. The story of Regulus's stoic sacrifice of himself for the good of his country represents the author's most serious attempt to produce a genuine tragedy. This piece differs significantly from Metastasio's other melodramas in that his characters are made to adhere more closely to historical tradition.

With the approach of mid-century came a noticeable
decline in Metastasio's artistic powers. The eight melodramas composed from 1744 to 1771 were *Ipermestra* (1744), *Antigono* (1744), *Il re pastore* (1751), *L'eroe cinese* (1756), *Nitteti* (1756), *Il trionfo di Clelia* (1762), *Romolo ed Ersilia* (1765), and *Ruggiero ovvero l'eroica gratitudine* (1771). The chief causes of this deterioration were the worsening of Metastasio's chronic hypochondria, the sudden death in 1751 of his dearest friend, the Contessa d'Althann, the unsettled state of affairs in the Austrian court created by the Wars of Succession, and, after the 1760s, the serious competition from the new type of libretto demanded by the musical innovations of Gluck and Mozart, as well as the rising vogue of the *opera buffa*. Added to these were problems with actors and staging that had been giving him serious trouble for some time— the refusal of actors to assume odious or unseemly roles, his restriction to the use of only five characters, and limits imposed on the length of the performances and number of scenes, arias, and even verses. Metastasio had had to face some of these obstacles from the beginning of his Viennese residence but had managed to overcome most of them, at least until 1740, when he finished the first draft of his *Attilio Regolo*. The decrease of his creative powers is evidenced in the slackened pace of his production of melodramas from that time on. It is further borne out by a critical examination of the plays of this third period, which reveals that he repeats himself unduly and that when, in the end, he turns to new exotic and chivalric themes, he fails to be impressive. Metastasio was, of course, keenly aware of his artistic decline and anticipated his critics in acknowledging it. In a letter to Antonio Giuseppe Pradi, dated March 7, 1771, he called his *Ruggiero* "the product of a poor wornout soil for so many years furrowed uninterruptedly by the plow." By 1772 he had become so disgusted with his incapacity to poetize as to imply that thereafter he would write only in prose. Nevertheless, five years later, in 1776, he did write an ode entitled "La deliziosa imperial residenza di Schönbrunn," prefaced by three pathetic apologetic stanzas in which he confesses once again that he is no longer capable of writing good verse. Carducci has accurately characterized the three periods of his dramatic career as "ascendent, culminant and descendant."
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With the exception of Ruggiero, which derives from the Orlando furioso, Metastasio drew upon Greek, Roman, and Oriental history and legend for the plots of his plays. To emphasize his originality he took pains to inform us in the argomenti (summaries) appended to Siroe, Ezio, and Catone in Utica that he has treated his sources with a good deal of freedom. Of Catone in Utica he writes: "All this [the general outline of the action] has been taken from the historians, the remainder has the semblance of reality [verisimile]." Aside from those who supplied him with his plots the authors who influenced him most were Tasso, Pierre Corneille, Racine, and Calderón. Metastasio remarked in several of his letters that he spent three months of hard work on most of his plays, by which he presumably meant the time necessary to complete his final draft. Attilio Regolo, as noted, is one exception; Achille in Sciro, which he finished under pressure in eighteen days, is another.

Anyone who has read the melodramas of Metastasio cannot have failed to note that they deal with powerful personal conflicts, such as love vs. duty, friendship vs. filial devotion, friendship vs. love, friendship vs. justice. One side of each duality arises from the instincts or emotions and the other from a sense of duty or righteousness. Throughout his long dramatic career he steadfastly applied the Horatian precept of the utile dulci dilectando to what he wrote.

Metastasio's protagonists are, on the whole, fairly well delineated and live and move in a psychological inner world of their own. But particularly in the case of the heroic personages — Regulus, Titus, Cato, Alexander, Themistocles — it becomes obvious early in the plays that Metastasio conceived of them more as abstractions than as real flesh-and-blood representations. With reference to Regulus he explicitly says in a letter addressed to Johann Adolf Hasse, the composer who first provided the music for the libretto, that his two dominant passions are fatherland and glory. In a high-flown rhetorical style the celebrated Roman consul weighs the effect that his self-exaltation is having upon his fellow Romans; in other words, he is conscious that he is acting. The same observation applies to protagonists in other plays, which makes it clear that our dramatist looks upon his dramatic production more as a stage presentation than as a slice of life. It might be
added that his stage heroes are not primarily the personages appearing in histories of the ancient past but figures transformed by centuries of tradition, exemplars worthy of imitation. While they succeed in transmitting their magnanimity to the other *dramatis personae*, they can have had only a superficial effect upon the members of a theater audience living in an epoch that was in a state of transition. As such, Metastasio's audience must have looked with awe and respect upon the heroic ideal which they had inherited but which they were no longer capable of emulating. Theirs was an anti-heroic spirit characterized by an Arcadian or idyllic mentality, with its sentimentality, its melancholy, its ingenuousness. Metastasio, who was very much a creature of his age, mirrors this spirit in his melodramas and makes his plots serve as vehicles for it.

In these plays the amorous motif prevails, as it does in the poetry of virtually all of the Arcadians. The main categories into which it is fragmented are expressions of jealousy, sadness, and the laments of jilted lovers and those who are absent from their beloved. They usually take the form of emotional outbursts or elegiac effusions. Metastasio's females are far more expressive than his males, so much so that if we could make the cumulative role of the women participants a unit of measure in assessing character, we should be disposed to agree with one critic who holds that they are the real heroes of the Metastasian theater.

Throughout the plays, thoughts and moods are highlighted by an abundance of crystallized precepts and psychological observations. They are very striking in the ariettas, the stationary parts in Metastasio's melodramas, which serve to condense in lyric form the conflicts generated in the recitatives. It is in the ariettas that the poet's *cantabile* style appears at its best.

It is perhaps needless to point out that the word *melodrama* in Italian differs in meaning from the term *melodrama* current in English and other languages. For Italians it is equivalent to *musica seria*. The first *melodrama*, with libretto by Ottavio Rinuccini and music by Jacopo Peri, was *Dafne* (1594). With Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) and Francesco Cavalli (1600-1676), the form reached imposing heights, but after them it degenerated noticeably through the overstress of spectacle.
and the intrusion of low comedy into its plot structure. Among those who exercised considerable influence in restoring it to good repute was Apostolo Zeno, Metastasio's predecessor as court poet in Vienna. In his plays he sought to adhere more closely to historical truth and to present virtuous and noble sentiments on the stage. He gave his dramas a classical form and fixed the rules for the recitative and the aria by placing the latter at the end of a scene. It was really Zeno who paved the way for Metastasio, who, in turn, built upon the new foundations laid by his predecessor but with significant innovations of his own in dramatic technique and pattern, such as the elimination of the prologue, the introduction of confidants who speak the thoughts of the protagonists, eavesdropping servants, and protagonists who unnecessarily repeat to themselves or to their confidants the story of their lives. One device that he has used effectively is to begin his plays *in medias res* with antecedent events briefly narrated by his protagonists.\(^{15}\) He is unique in having transformed musical drama into a work of poetry. After him, as one critic puts it, "rather than poets, we have had only librettists."\(^{16}\)

Metastasio's plays were performed countless times all over Europe and penetrated even as far as El Salvador, Brazil, and Chile. They were set to music by an extraordinary number of composers, among them the Italians Cimarosa, Galuppi, Jommelli, Piccini, Scarlatti, and Vivaldi, and such prestigious non-Italians as Johann Adolf Hasse, Handel, Johann Christian Bach, Gluck, and Mozart. More than eighty composers furnished music for *Artaserse* and *Alessandro nell'Indie*, more than sixty for *Didone*, some fifty for *L'Olimpiade*, and from fifteen to twenty provided the music for most of the remaining librettos. This does not take into account the intermezzi and numerous choreographic adaptations. Hasse, who was one of the best composers of his day, set almost all of Metastasio's dramas to music. It was he who "brought Metastasian opera to its highest musical dramatic pitch and thus expressed the spirit of his age to a finer degree than any of the contemporary writers of the *opera seria*."\(^{17}\) Frequent interpolations of the court poet's arias appeared in the librettos of pieces written by his numerous followers.\(^{18}\) Indeed, so admired were these solos that many studied Italian in order to recite them.
in the original. For more than fifty years the plays of Metastasio held virtually absolute sway on the musical stage, and they enjoyed a widespread popularity for many years more. Thus for much of the eighteenth century the terms Metastasio and melodrama can fairly be said to be synonymous, one spontaneously recalling the other.

The publication of forty editions of Metastasio's works from 1733 to his death in 1782 reveals an enormously large number of readers. Obviously they were also able to enjoy his melodramas as pure literature without musical accompaniment. Some who were also creative writers used them as models for their own dramas. In France, for instance, Le Franc de Pompignan imitated his Didone; Delrieux, his Artaserse; De Belloy, his Issipile and La clemenza di Tito; Lemierre, his Artaserse and Ipermestra; Dorat and Arnauld, his Attilio Regolo; Le Comte d'Estaing and Guyot de Merville, his Achille in Sciro; and Voltaire, his L'eroe cinese. The Abbé Desfontaines had Achille in Sciro translated so that it might serve as a model for the writers of his time.

By exception, Marmontel composed a Didon set to music by Piccinni and a Demophoon set to music by Cherubini.

In addition to the melodramas, Metastasio produced a large number of minor pieces—sonnets, odes, cantatas, octavas, azioni sacre or oratorios, epitalamia, mythological idylls, and canzonettas—many of which were set to music. Numerous poems, whose chief merits are flowing melody and stylistic elegance, were composed at the request of and for the pleasure of members of the Viennese court. As to Metastasio's oratorios, they involve biblical subject matter delicately blended with his own feelings. Special mention should be made of three most exquisite canzonette, "La libertà" (Freedom) (1733), "Palinodia" (1746), and "La partenza" (The Parting) (1746). "Addressed to a real or fictional Nice [they] are simple and yet just touched with individual reality, light-hearted and yet gently pensive and as singable as verse can be." The best known of the three, "La libertà," is a lover's joyous celebration of his freedom from the snares of a scheming, beautiful coquette. The "Palinodia" is a very clever recantation of "La libertà" which uses the same rhyme scheme, while "La partenza" is an unexcelled expression of sentimental musing. They have been imitated scores of times and translated into
all of the European languages. Incidentally, all three were set to music by Metastasio himself.

Metastasio did not limit himself to the verse medium in his writings. He also made some prose translations, contributed critical studies, and wrote several thousand letters. His treatise *Estratto dell'arte poetica d'Aristotele e considerazioni su la medesima*, finished in 1773, and the notes to his translation of Horace's *Poetics*, finished during the same year, are interesting for the light they cast on his theater and what he thought it ideally should be. In the former he voices among other things his preoccupation with the limitations imposed by Aristotle on the writing of tragedies, particularly those on the unities of time and place, and attempts to demonstrate that his musical dramas are a legitimate continuation of Greek tragedy.

His voluminous correspondence reveals Metastasio as an able prose writer. It furnishes us with a rich storehouse of information on his life and works, on many of his contemporaries, on social life during the eighteenth century, and on the history of the period, especially details relating to the Seven Years' War. It is interesting to know that during his lifetime Metastasio repeatedly refused to grant others permission to print any of his letters. The prohibition included Giuseppe Martinez, son of his landlord, who for many years had been making duplicates of letters sent to correspondents. What Metastasio really intended to do was to withhold them from the public until he had had the opportunity to correct and polish the texts in their missive form, and then to release only a selected number of them.24

The success of Gluck's reform of opera on the one hand and the popularity of the *opera buffa* on the other, both of which had challenged Metastasio's dominance of the musical stage while he lived, became stronger after his death on April 11, 1782, and eventually gained the upper hand. Much more damaging to his reputation, however, were the French Revolution and the political and social changes that resulted from it. The old aristocracy and the men and institutions which had prospered under it came to be looked upon with contempt, and with it our poet who had been so much a part of it. The reaction, which was particularly keen during the Romantic period, persisted through the nineteenth century and
well into our own. Intellectuals made little or no effort to appreciate the genuine artistic merit of the man as a writer, with the exception of a few who were able to place art above bias. These included such eminent names as Coleridge, Stendhal, Leopardi, Manzoni, and Carducci. Even the great De Sanctis, in the penetrating pages devoted to Metastasio in his *History of Italian Literature*, tends to be negative in stressing that the poet's weaknesses were ascribable to the age in which he lived. At the same time he reveals that he is impressed by the Settecentista's universal acclaim and feels certain that it must have had a *raison d'être*. "Never," he writes, "was a poet so loved by the people, never was there a writer who entered so intensely into the souls of the multitude. It is evident, then, that his dramas have an absolute value, superior to the passing moment, a value that even the dissolvent criticism of the nineteenth century has not destroyed."26

While not overlooking various imperfections that are visible in Metastasio's writings, a number of well-known twentieth-century critics have offered us their own interpretations of the "absolute value" seen by De Sanctis, among them M. Apollonio, Binni, Galimberti, Natali, E. Raimondi, Renucci, and Varese.27 Most critics, whether they are admirers of Metastasio or not, agree that he is essentially a lyric poet because of his melic qualities or his subjective personal expression or both. Sapegno holds that lyricism fills with itself the world of Metastasio's melodramas and permeates his three famous *canzonette*.28 He has, I believe, come closer than any other critic to finding the elusive "absolute value" inherent in so much of Metastasio's verse. Insofar as the cultured public is concerned, a very discernible interest is reflected by the publication of Brunelli's *Tutte le opere di Pietro Metastasio* (1943-1954), and anthologies edited by Bacchelli (1962), Sala Di Felice (1965), Fubini (1968), and Gavazzeni (1968). These are sure signs that a rehabilitation of the poet's reputation is now in progress.

NOTES

1. In commenting on the Dresden staging of the *Didone*, which omitted the flaming scene, Metastasio maintained that he had always believed that the popularity of the play could be attributed largely to it. See an undated letter to Algarotti,
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2. We know that Metastasio's recantation was short-lived, since on October 27, 1733, he requested his publisher, Bettinelli, to print the first version with the second that had just been sent to him (Brunelli ed., 3:95).

3. For dates of first performances, see Brunelli ed., notes on the individual melodramas.


5. Giosuë Carducci, Melica e lirica del Settecento (Bologna, 1908), pp. 82-83.

6. See Brunelli ed., 3:61. In an earlier letter to La Romanina, dated November 10, 1731 (ibid., 3:58) he wrote that the parting scene of Demetrio had caused the listeners to weep.


8. See letter of February 18, 1752, to Carlo Broschi, the celebrated male soprano better known as Farinello, an intimate friend of Metastasio and largely responsible for his great vogue in Spain (Brunelli ed., 3:714).

9. Brunelli ed., 5:73. Like a mournful refrain the same figure is repeated with slight changes in wording in letters to Francesco Grisi, August 1, 1771; to Marianna, daughter of the Contessa d'Althann, November 7, 1771; and to Mattia Damiani, February 13, 1772 (Brunelli ed., 5:101, 116, 138).

10. See letter to Tommaso Filipponi, dated October 5, 1772 (Brunelli ed., 5:429).


13. This subject has been discussed in a paper by Paul Renucci, "Irradiazione eroica e impostazione psicologica nei drammì del Metastasio," in Problemi di lingua e letteratura italiana del Settecento... (Wiesbaden, 1965), pp. 56-70. The study is an expansion of De Sanctis's observation in his Storia della letteratura italiana (Milan, 1917), p. 282.


15. These innovations have, I believe, first been noted by Giuseppe Guerzoni in Teatro italiano del secolo XVIII (Milan, 1876), p. 114.


19. See "L'Olanda vista da un banchiere lucchese nella se-
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Conda metà del secolo XVIII (Dalle lettere di Ottavio Sardi (1755-1774)) in Miscellanea lucchese di studi storici (Lucca, 1921), p. 333.


24. Confirmation can be found in a hitherto unknown letter which I recently published in "Una lettera ignorata sulla morte del Metastasio," Paideia 10(1955):105-08. It was sent by Martínez to Leopoldo Camillo Volta on May 20, 1782, and in it Martínez mentioned incidentally that he has already transcribed 1,579 letters "corrected and revised last year by their illustrious author." However, he did not follow through as planned and subsequently gave the letters to the Imperial Library in Vienna. The Abbé D'Ayala utilized them for his edition (Vienna, 1795). Other editions followed, but a virtually complete collection did not appear until the publication of the Brunelli edition. The last three volumes include 2,654 letters. Since the Brunelli edition a number of new letters have been found. See my three articles: "Avviamento per un nuova edizione dell'epistolario metastasiano," Delta (Naples), n.s.9(1956):51; "Nuove lettere inedite del Metastasio," Convivium 26(1958):586-93; and "A Miserere, Three Canons and a Letter by Metastasio," Romance Notes 6(1965):38-40. See also Umberto Casari, Una lettera inedita di Pietro Metastasio (Mirandola: Biblioteca comunale, 1964); and Mate Zorić, "Dieci lettere inedite di Pietro Metastasio," Studia romanica et anglica zagabriensia, no. 20-22(1966):331-36. Some letters, as might be expected, have either been lost or destroyed. Unfortunately, forever missing are what would have been the most precious items in the correspondence, the epistolary exchanges between Metastasio and La Romanina. In a letter to his brother Leopoldo, dated April 24, 1934 (Brunelli ed., 1:109), he says that just as he has burned her missives to him, he (Leopoldo) should, in turn, also burn letters by him addressed to her that still were in his brother's possession. He believed these could only serve as a source of embarrassment.

25. Most frequently quoted is the passage in volume 2 of the Zibaldone in which Leopardi writes, "It can be said...that unless it be Metastasio there has been no one since Tasso more

26. 2:840.


A Note on the Translations

La Didone abbandonata has been translated into blank verse for the recitatives and rhymed verse for the ariettas, as in the original. But whereas Metastasio in his employment of the first pattern alternates hendecasyllables and heptasyllables and occasionally shifts to rhyme, I have used pentametric blank verse exclusively and very little rhyme. I have also tried to keep as close as possible to the Italian wording and in the majority of instances have succeeded in reproducing it, even in hendecasyllabic lines that are split between two and sometimes three interlocutors. The rhymed translations of the ariettas have necessarily called for a certain amount of paraphrase instead of direct translation. In order to preserve at least a semblance of the poetic flavor of the Italian text, I have, in addition to meter, deliberately made use of a poetic or archaic word order and some poetic or archaic vocabulary. To a considerable extent I have followed the time-honored traditional approach. In its present form, Dido Abandoned represents a revised version of my translation privately printed by Valmartina in Florence in 1952. As already stated, the play was Metastasio's earliest theatrical success.

Most critics rate the other two melodramas presented here, Demetrio and L'Olimpiade, among the dramatist's masterpieces. The translation of the recitatives has been done in prose, which, while insuring greater literalness than blank verse, is apt to fall short in terms of melodic expression, at least to the extent that it can be reproduced in a verse version in another language. As for the ariettas, I felt they should be differentiated from the prose, and for this reason I have translated them in blank or accented verse. This has resulted in their being somewhat more exact but less poetical than rhymed verse might have been.
As for the licenze at the end of L'Olimpiade and Demetrio, it is clear that they are panegyrics, the first of them to Empress Elizabeth of Austria and the second to Emperor Charles VI. They have no connection with the plots. It is furthermore certain that they were omitted after the first performances in the court theaters. Nothing could be lost by omitting them in modern versions, especially translations. In this case I find myself in complete agreement with John Hoole. In his preface (p. xxvi) in the 1800 edition he writes, "Some of the dramas have in the Italian a kind of epilogue called 'Licenza,' annexed to them, which indeed is little more than a panegyric of the emperour, the empress or some person in the court. This being altogether local and temporary and from its nature incapable of being made in any degree interesting to the English reader, is omitted in this translation."

My translations are based on the 1780-1782 edition of Metastasio's works, printed in eleven volumes in Paris by the Veuve Hérissant. With the exception of the last volume, this edition was corrected and revised by Metastasio.

In making the translations it has been my purpose to make available to English readers interested in the European theater or in the history of music three of the finest melodramas of Metastasio. The fame he enjoyed in his day as well as his greatness as a poet make him deserving of a larger representation; these plays can, however, serve as an introduction to him. Those who desire to do so can extend their knowledge by using the free translations of John Hoole's two-volume The Works of Metastasio (London, 1767), or his second revised and enlarged edition in three volumes, Dramas and Other Poems (London, 1800). There are no other English versions.

My Northwestern University colleagues, Professors Frederick B. Stimson and William T. Starr, have been kind enough to read and criticize my two prose translations. Thanks to their suggestions, I have been able to make a number of improvements in them.
Three Melodramas
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

DIDO, queen of Carthage, in love with AENEAS
IARBAS, king of the Moors, under the name ARBACE
SELENE, sister of DIDO, secretly in love with AENEAS
ARASPE, confidant of IARBAS and in love with SELENE
OSMIDA, confidant of DIDO

The setting is Carthage

ARGUMENT

After her husband was killed by her brother Pygmalion, Dido, widow of Sichaeus, who was amply provided with wealth, fled to Africa where she built Carthage. There many asked for her hand, Iarbas king of the Moors being the most determined among them, but she always declined because she wished to remain faithful to her dead consort. At this time Aeneas was tossed by a storm on the shores of Africa. He was given shelter and restored to health by Dido, who fell passionately in love with him. While he was enjoying her affections he was commanded by the gods to resume his journey to Italy where they promised him a new Troy. Aeneas departed and Dido heartbroken killed herself.

We learn all of this from Virgil, who with a felicitous anachronism links the time of the founding of Carthage to the wandering of Aeneas. In Book II of his Fasti Ovid tells us that Iarbas seized Carthage after
Dido's death and that Anna her sister (whom we shall call Selene) was also secretly in love with Aeneas. Because it is good theater we are imagining that Iarbas being curious to see Dido comes to Carthage as his own ambassador under the name of Arbace.
ACT I

ACT I

Scene 1

A sumptuously furnished room destined as an audience chamber, with a throne on one side of it. In the background the city of Carthage, which is in the process of being built.

AENEAS, SELENE, OSMIDA

AENEAS: No, princess, no, my friend.
   It is not wrath nor is it fear that stirs
   the Phrygian sails to bear me far away.
   I know that by Queen Dido I am loved;
   too well I know, nor do I doubt her troth.
   I worship her and never shall forget
   all that she's done for me: no ingrate I.
   But destiny ordains, the gods demand
   that once again I must expose my life
   to the despotic power of the waves.
   Yet so unfortunate am I it seems
   that I'm the one on whom the blame is placed
   for what should be imputed to the Fates.

SELENE: If after your long wand'ring rest you seek
   my sister, your great merit and our zeal
   will offer you a haven on this shore.

AENEAS: The heav'ns forbid that yet I should have rest.

SELENE: How can that be?

OSMIDA:
   And through what augury
   have the divinities made known their will?

AENEAS: Osmida, sleep ne'er brings unto my eyes
   its sweet oblivion but that I see
   my father stand before me with grave face.
   I hear him say, "My son, ungrateful son,
   is this the kingdom of fair Italy
   Apollo and myself asked you to gain?
   Sad Asia waits that in another land,
   thanks to your valor, Troy will be reborn.
   You promised it and on my dying day
   I heard the promise issue from your lips
   as you bent o'er to give my hand a kiss.
   And you the while ungrateful to yourself,
   your fatherland and me who am your sire,
   degrade yourself through shiftlessness and love?
   Bestir yourself. Go cut the cables which bind
your idle fighting ships. Untie the shrouds."
Then sullenly he eyes me and departs.
SELENE: I'm struck with horror.
[DIDO and her suite appear at the back of the stage]
OSMIDA: (I'm a happy man.
Aeneas gone, I have one rival less
to claim the throne that I would make my own.)
SELENE: If you abandon what has brought you joy
Dido will die (nor will Selene live).
OSMIDA: The queen approaches.
AENEAS: (What am I to say?)
SELENE: (I dare not bare the torment troubling me.)
AENEAS: (Defend yourself, my heart, this is the test.)

Scene 2

DIDO with her suite and the above

DIDO: My dear Aeneas, Asia's shining light,
beloved both by Venus and by me,
behold how visibly from day to day
our new-born Carthage higher lifts her head.
I know she's proud of your sojournment here.
Those arches there, those temples and those walls
are fruits attained through my unceasing toil,
but you, Aeneas, are more than they my pride.
You do not look at me nor say a word?
Is chilly silence all that I deserve?
Has Love obliterated from your heart
the image that it once had painted there?
AENEAS: That Dido's ever present in my thought
I'm ready to affirm by all the gods.
Nor yet can separation nor can time
diminish through forgetfulness my flame.
I swear this, too, by all the gods above.
DIDO: I stand convinced without the need of oaths.
These words are uttered needlessly, you know.
A glance from you suffices me, a sigh.
OSMIDA: (She goes too far.)
SELENE: (I do not dare to speak.)
AENEAS: If you are hoping to enjoy repose
think of your high repute and not of me.
DIDO: Think not of you? For you alone I live.
I find no happiness away from you.
AENEAS: Oh, God! What do I hear? Ill-timed words!
   You are too gen'rous to a thankless man.
DIDO: Aeneas thankless? Might I know the cause?
   Perhaps my love for you annoys you now?
AENEAS: Indeed, I never loved more tenderly,
   but —
DIDO: What?
AENEAS: My fatherland, the will of heav'n —
DIDO: Speak out.
AENEAS: Would that I could! Oh, God! — My love —
   I cannot talk. [To Osmida as he leaves] Osmida, you
   explain.

Scene 3
DIDO, SELENE, OSMIDA

DIDO: He goes! How can Aeneas leave me thus?
   What can this silence mean? What is my guilt?
SELENE: It's his intention to abandon you.
   Both love and glory struggle in his heart,
   and of the two I know not which will win.
DIDO: Abandon me? Will that win him renown?
OSMIDA: (She dupes herself.) Selene has not probed
   the secret springs within Aeneas' heart.
   Arbace from the palace of the Moors
   is coming as his Lord's ambassador.
DIDO: Indeed?
OSMIDA: The haughty king would seek your hand
   and that you yield to him Aeneas fears.
   Thus he by his departure will avoid
   the painfulness of seeing you again —
DIDO: I understand. Now go, dear sister, go,
   dispel the doubts Aeneas' heart may have.
   Make known to him that only death has pow'r
   of ever taking me away from him.
SELENE: (Oh, fate! do you condemn me to this, too?)
   I'll tell him of your faithfulness,
   you may repose your trust in me.
   Compassionate towards you I'll be
   and towards myself be merciless.
   The fond desires of your heart
   my lips to him will soon reveal.
   But, oh, my God! can I conceal
   the suffering that racks me so? [Exits]
Scene 4

DIDO and OSMIDA

DIDO: Arbace can come here just as he wills
with threats or with appeals: he comes in vain.
In his own presence ere the sun goes down
he'll see me to Aeneas give my hand.
Let Iarbas know that I love only him.

OSMIDA: Behold, Arbace now is drawing near.

Scene 5

IARBAS, under the name Arbace, ARASPE, and the above

[While to the accompaniment of the music of primitive instruments, IARBAS and ARASPE come forward, with a retinue of Moors and silent characters leading tigers, lions, and other gifts to present to the queen, DIDO goes to her throne escorted by OSMIDA, who stands to the right of it. Two Carthaginians bring out pillows for the African ambassador, and place them in front of the throne but at a little distance from it. IARBAS and ARASPE, stopping at the entrance, converse without being heard by the others.]

ARASPE: (You see, my king —)

IARBAS: (Hush, man, say not a word.
As long as the deception will endure
Arbace call me, think not of the throne.
Just now I am not Iarbas, not the king.)
Dido, the Moorish king has chosen me
to be the trusted bearer of his word.
According as you choose, I offer him
as your support or to bring of your ruin.
The things you see he sends to you as gifts —
gems, sundry treasures, men and wild beasts.
These tokens of his power he has brought
from lands of Africa o'er which he rules.
Learn who the giver is from what he gives.

DIDO: The presents which you offer I accept.
For them express my warm thanks to your lord,
but if he cannot act more prudently
I'll change to tribute what is now a gift.
(How haughty this man is!) Sit down and speak.
ARASPE: [In a low voice to Iarbas] My lord, how does she strike you?

IARBAS: [In a low voice to Araspe] (Proud yet fair.)
I wish, oh Dido! that you would recall the reason why your native Tyre you left, what desp'rate counsel brought you to this shore. Against your brother's greed and fierce desires this land of Africa was your defence. The spacious ground on which proud Carthage lies my master gave —

DIDO: You're wrong, the ground was bought.

IARBAS: Before you finish let me have my say.

DIDO: [In a low voice to Osmida] What boldness!

OSMIDA: [In a low voice to Dido] Bear with him.

IARBAS: Iarbas, my king, asked you to marry him but you refused. He felt resentment since you then swore that to Sichæus' memory you were true. Now all of Africa is well aware that from razed Asia here Aeneas came. It knows you welcomed him, that you love him, nor will he let a Trojan refugee oppose the love of its Moroccan king.

DIDO: His love or scorn are both of little avail.

IARBAS: Before you answer pray let me conclude. My king is kind and in the place of war, if you desire he will offer peace. In satisfaction for the harm you've done he craves your love, demands your nuptial bed, and that Aeneas lose his head, he asks.

DIDO: You've had your say?

IARBAS: I have.

DIDO: From Tyre I came to seek my freedom, not to be in chains. I gave for Carthage gold and precious stones. It's not a gift which from your king has come. I felt that to my spouse I should be true when Iarbas was denied my hand and heart, but now I am no more my former self.

IARBAS: If you have had a change of mind since then —

DIDO: Before you speak, permit me to reply. I feel no longer as I once have felt. Both time and chance make wise men change their minds. Aeneas offers pleasure to my heart.
I deem him necessary to my throne and want him as my husband.

IARBAS: But his head —

DIDO: An easy triumph it's not going to be; indeed, this refugee from Troy might cost the ruler of the Moors a heavy price.

IARBAS: If you should make my master wroth with you he'll see that all Getulia's warriors, Numidians and Garamantines, too, will come to Carthage to wage war on you.

DIDO: Aeneas being here, I'm undismayed. Let Garamantines come upon these shores, Numidians, Africa and all the world.

IARBAS: Am I to tell him, then —?

DIDO: You tell him this: that if inclined to love I do not heed him, I do not fear him if he grows irate.

IARBAS: Consider, Dido, what you say.

DIDO: I have. [They stand]

I am a queen and I'm in love, and I alone desire to rule o'er my affections and my throne. He bids in vain who would disclaim my right to love, my right to fame. These rights I never shall disown. [Exits]

Scene 6

IARBAS, OSMIDA, ARASPE

IARBAS: I want revenge, Araspe. [Starts to leave]

ARASPE: Lead the way.

OSMIDA: Arbace, wait.

IARBAS: (What can he want of me?)

OSMIDA: May I speak freely to you?

IARBAS: That you may.

OSMIDA: If you will but permit it, sir, I'll make it possible for you to wreak your wrath. Queen Dido trusts in me implicitly. Aeneas thinks that I'm his friend, and all the army's at my beck and call. I'm sure I could make smooth the path for your designs.

IARBAS: But who are you?

OSMIDA: I am a follower
of Tyre's queen. Osmida is my name.
In Cyprus I first saw the light of day,
and wish improvement of my present state.
IARBAS: Your offer I accept, and as reward
if you are faithful what you ask you'll have.
OSMIDA: Your king may take Queen Dido, but to me
dominion over Carthage he shall grant.
IARBAS: We are agreed, I promise it to you.
OSMIDA: But who knows if your master will accept
the daring proposition I have made?
IARBAS: Whate'er Arbace says so says the king.
OSMIDA: Well, then —
IARBAS: Our every move will here be watched.
We'll talk in a secure, more secret place.
Until such time you can withhold advice.
If Iarbas takes a wife, you may be sure
Osmida is the man who will be king.
OSMIDA: If you aid me in my great scheme,
to help attain I make a pledge
both your desire and your revenge.
Just so the little river gives,
while spreading slowly o'er the glade,
nutrition to the shrubbery
and moisture in return for shade. [Exits]

Scene 7
IARBAS and ARASPE

IARBAS: How gullible he is if he believes
I plan to keep the promise made to him.
ARASPE: But yet you did assure him that you would.
IARBAS: Towards those to others false no faith is due.
But go, beloved Araspe, strike a blow
fulfilling the revenge I long to take.
Aeneas must be killed. Every delay
adds torment to the fury in my heart.
ARASPE: I'll go, and soon as to his worth or mine
in single combat, Fate will be the judge.
IARBAS: No, stop. I do not wish to leave to chance
your honor and my hatred and revenge.
Attack him unawares; make use of fraud.
ARASPE: Use fraud! My birth makes me a subject, sir,
but not a traitor. Order me to go
defenseless mid the flames, against the sword; 
you are my master and my life is yours. 
No risk will I refuse on your behalf, 
but do not ask that I be treacherous.
IARBAS: You have plebian thoughts. I'm sure an arm 
more true than yours can easily be found.
ARASPE: Good heav'ns! Your virtue —
IARBAS: Virtue do you say? 
There is no virtue in this world of ours 
or virtue's what delights and benefits. 
*When one assumes a regal seat* 
one's faults are beautified. 
*There's no more horror in deceit,* 
*there's nothing one may chide.*
*Let the unhappy mortal who* 
*is born in slavery* 
doubt whether it is prudent to 
flee fraud through knavery. 

[Exits]

Scene 8

ARASPE alone

ARASPE: Oh, wicked man! How is it you don't feel 
the horror which remorse brings for a sin, 
or virtue's solace in adversity? 
Oh prop sustaining the great universe, 
the pride both of mankind and of the gods, 
I look, fair virtue, upon you as guide. 
*Amid the storms caused by the treacherous* 
*swell,* 
*no peace can ever in my conscience dwell* 
*unless you guide me from the firmament.*
*When life's at stake you teach me not to* 
*fear,* 
in misadventure you bid me take cheer. 
Through you alone do I receive content. 

[Exits]
Act I  29

Scene 9
Courtyard
SELENE and AENEAS

AENEAS: Selene, it is just as I have said:  
Osmida ill-interprets my intent.  
Ah, would that it were pleasing to the gods  
that Dido were untrue, or that I might  
for one brief moment feign that she were so!  
But feeling sure I am adored by her,  
to have to leave her racks me with great pain.
SELENE: Whate'er the cause impelling you to leave,  
please pause and to the shrine of Neptune go.  
My sister wishes there to speak to you.
AENEAS: Delay is irksome.
SELENE: Hear her and depart.
AENEAS: Am I obliged to bid a last goodbye  
to one I love?
SELENE: (It's painful not to talk.)
AENEAS: Selene weeps!
SELENE: Oh how, when you speak thus,  
can I keep tears from coming to my eyes?
AENEAS: Repress your sighs. It is the queen alone  
who can with reason grieve when I depart.
SELENE: One heart beats both in Dido and in me.
AENEAS: Are you distressed for her to such extent?
SELENE: Her life is mine and mine is also hers,  
and all her grief is naturally my grief.
AENEAS: Selene, you are noble and your sighs  
arouse in me a pity so intense  
that I forget my anguish seeing yours.
SELENE: If you could only look into my heart  
perhaps your pity for me would increase.

Scene 10
IARBAS, ARASPE and the above

IARBAS: I've wandered through the royal residence  
but cannot find Aeneas whom I seek.
ARASPE: Perhaps he's left.
IARBAS: This man? Can it be he?  
His garb is not that of an African.
[To Aeneas] Will you not tell me, stranger, who you are?

ARASPE: [Looking at Selene] (Oh, how that face is pleasing to my eyes!)

AENEAS: [After looking at Iarbas] Too much, my fair Selene —

IARBAS: [To Aeneas] Don't you hear?

AENEAS: [After looking at Iarbas once more] Too much you show for others sympathy.

SELENE: [Looking at Iarbas] (What arrogance!)

ARASPE: [Looking at Selene] (How beautiful she is!)

IARBAS: [To Aeneas] Declare your name to me else I —

AENEAS: What right have you to ask? How will it profit you?

IARBAS: Whatever pleases me I view as right.

AENEAS: It's not our practice to give heed to fools.

IARBAS: For this you'll feel the keenness of this blade.

[As he tries to draw his sword, Selene stops him]

SELENE: Before Selene such temerity, and in the palace of Queen Dido, too?

IARBAS: So little is Iarbas' messenger esteemed?

SELENE: The queen shall learn about your reckless pride.

IARBAS: I'm unconcerned. The while, contemptuously, I'll sever in her presence that proud head, which with Aeneas' head before the feet of my offended king I'll lay forthwith.

AENEAS: The task's more difficult than you believe.

IARBAS: Will you attempt to stop me or Aeneas, who dubs as triumphs all of his defeats?

AENEAS: Far fewer are his routs than victories.

IARBAS: For him you argue strongly. Who are you?

AENEAS: I'm one who does not fear you, that's enough.

When you my name will learn
you will not be so stern
nor speak so free.
The eager voyager
to leave the shore will pray,
but he may rue the day
when 'gainst the pilot's plea
he went to sea.    

[Exits]
Act I  31

Scene 11
SELENE, IARBAS and ARASPE

IARBAS: [Trying to follow him] Before he leaves —
SELENE: [Stopping him] What do you wish of him?
IARBAS: I want to know his name.

[SELENE: His name you'll know.]
IARBAS: There is no need of being so enraged.
SELENE: The man's in fact Aeneas whom you seek.
IARBAS: If that be true you've robbed me of a blow
which kindly heav'n had bid my arm to strike.
SELENE: But why such wrath? Pray, what is his offence?
IARBAS: He is in competition with my lord
for the affections of your sister, Dido:
you know it, yet you ask how he offends?
SELENE: Do you then think that an enamored one
may choose his idol just to suit his whim?
You're still untutored in the art of love.  [Exits]

Scene 12
IARBAS, ARASPE, then OSMIDA

IARBAS: No more shall I, Araspe, hide me thus.
Too much I've suffered.
ARASPE: What is now your plan?
IARBAS: I'll call upon my fighting men nearby,
left hiding in the woods when I came here,
to occupy this regal house by force.
This town I'll wreck, and pluck the wicked heart
of my unworthy rival.
[Enter OSMIDA]
OSMIDA: [In haste] Look there, sir.
The queen is going toward the Neptune shrine.
Unless you stop it she will soon bestow
upon the haughty Trojan her fair hand.
IARBAS: How brazen!
OSMIDA: There's no time for useless plaints.
IARBAS: Pray, what is the advice you have to give?
OSMIDA: That you act swiftly. I shall move ahead.
You should be daring and whate'er you do
you can depend on my supporting you.  [Exits]
Scene 13
IARBAS and ARASPE

ARASPE: Where are you going in such haste, my lord?
IARBAS: To kill my rival.
ARASPE: How can it be done?
As yet your soldiers do not know your will.
IARBAS: Deceit will reach where force does not avail.
ARASPE: Ah! Would you take your vengeance treacherously?
IARBAS: Araspe, my good will has made you bold.
I'd rather have you act with readiness
than be so prone to offer me advice.
Remember who I am and who you are.

I'm not unlike the humour-laden stream,
which made torrential by the melting ice
drags with it headlong and without a curb
the woods, the flocks, the herdsmen, and
their homes.
And if it sees it is restrained by dykes,
it scorns its bed, its margins overflows
and with disdainful rage unfettered roams.

[He leaves with Araspe]

Scene 14
The temple of Neptune with a statue of this god
AENEAS and OSMIDA

OSMIDA: Will Dido come to know through your own lips
that you are planning to abandon her?
I pray you not to tell her of your plan
and save her heart from writhing with this pain.
AENEAS: To tell her is an act of cruelty,
but not to tell I know is treachery.
OSMIDA: Although you are determined, let me hope
that at her weeping you will change your mind.
AENEAS: Her tears may well deprive me of my life,
but they cannot prevent my being true
to my own father and my fatherland.
OSMIDA: What noble words! To overcome one's love
surpasses every other glorious deed.
AENEAS: But yet how great the price of triumph is!
Scene 15

IARBAS, ARASPE and the above

IARBAS: [In a low voice to Araspe] My rival comes. He's unaccompanied by any of his many followers.

ARASPE: [In a low voice to Iarbas] You must consider —

IARBAS: [As above] Follow me and hush. The wrong he's done will —

[In attempting to strike Aeneas he is held back by Araspe. His dagger falls and Araspe picks it up]

ARASPE: [To Iarbas] Stop!

IARBAS: Oh, vile wretch!

Do you intend to aid my enemy?

AENEAS: [Seeing Araspe wield his dagger] You dare attack me, villain?

OSMIDA: (All is lost.)

Scene 16

DIDO with guards and the above

OSMIDA: [Affecting fright] We've been betrayed, oh, queen!

Today our brave Aeneas might have died a victim of a cruel, inhuman blow but for the ready help Arbace gave.

DIDO: Who is the traitor? Where can he be found?

OSMIDA: Behold him with a weapon in his hand. [He points to Araspe]

DIDO: What put this foul design within your breast?

ARASPE: My duty and the honor of my lord.

DIDO: But that's not true. Arbace disapproves —

ARASPE: I am aware that he condemns my act.

I fear his wrath, but mine was not a crime, and, therefore, I've no cause to feel regret.

DIDO: Do you not even blush for your vile deed?

ARASPE: I would repeat the same a thousand times.

DIDO: I shall prevent you. Guards, arrest this man.

[Araspe leaves between guards]

AENEAS: My gen'rous enemy, I did not think that I should find such virtuousness in you. Allow me to embrace you.
IARBAS: Stand aside! 
    Know that your living is Araspe's gift, 
    that I am Iarbas and I crave your blood. 
DIDO: Can you be Iarbas? 
AENEAS: You, the Moorish king? 
DIDO: You lie. Such wicked thoughts cannot find room 
    within the breast of one of regal birth. 
    Deprive him of his weapons. 
IARBAS: [Unsheathes his sword] I shall kill 
    whoever is so bold as to draw near. 
OSMIDA: [In a low voice to Iarbas] Submit until I muster 
    troops. Trust me. 
IARBAS: But must I be so base? 
AENEAS: Hold on, my friends, 
    I'll do the punishing. 
DIDO: Reserve your strength 
    until the need is greater. I insist 
    he'll yield or he will perish at my feet. 
OSMIDA: [In a low voice to Iarbas] Postpone your ven- 
    geance, sir. 
IARBAS: Here is my sword. 
    [He throws down his sword, which is picked up by the 
    guards, and leaves with them] 
DIDO: [To Osmida] To curb his haughty spirit is your 
    task. 
OSMIDA: You have good cause to place your trust in me. 
    [He leaves after Iarbas]

Scene 17 
DIDO and AENEAS

DIDO: Aeneas, you are safe from mortal wound. 
    For me the gods preserve your charming life. 
AENEAS: Oh, God! My queen! 
DIDO: Must I believe you are 
    perhaps uncertain of my love for you? 
AENEAS: More baneful is my luck. The fates decree — 
DIDO: Express your meaning with more clarity. 
AENEAS: They ask, alas! that I abandon you. 
DIDO: Abandon me! But why? 
AENEAS: My father's shade, 
    the call of Jove, my country, destiny, 
    my promise, duty, honor, good repute,
to the Italic shores now summon me.
   My long delay has moved the gods to wrath.
DIDO: And so till now, false one, you've hid your plan?
AENEAS: It was an act of mercy.
DIDO: Not at all.
Your lips mendaciously swore troth to me,
and meanwhile you were plotting in your heart
how far from me you would incline your steps.
Can I again pin faith in anyone?
[As if talking to herself]
When, wretched flotsam, he was cast ashore
I succored him, helped him regain his strength,
restored to him his scattered arms and ships,
and gave him seat within my heart and realm.
This is by no means all. On his account
I have enraged a hundred jilted kings.
This, then, is the reward that I receive?
Can I again pin faith on anyone?
AENEAS: Oh, Dido! just as long as I have life,
   I'll always have sweet memories of you.
   Nor should I ever leave but for the gods
   who will that I must wholly give myself
to the formation of a Latin state.
DIDO: It is, indeed, quite strange for one to see
the gods concerned about your fate alone.
AENEAS: If you desire that a wretched man
shall violate his oath, I shall not leave.
DIDO: Oh, no! I'd be beholden to your sons
to win the world for me if you should stay.
Go, then, and carry out your destiny.
Set sail in search of your Italian realm,
intrust your hopes both to the winds and waves.
But note: the gods will make the waves themselves
the willing instruments of my revenge.
Perhaps repentance then will be too late
for having trusted the mad elements,
and you will call your Dido all in vain.
AENEAS: If you could only look into my heart —
DIDO: I will not deal with traitors. Leave me now.
AENEAS: At least receive in a less wrathful mood
my last adieu.
DIDO: You are an ingrate. Leave.
AENEAS: I'm sure you have no right to censure me
so angrily.
DIDO: Unworthy one!
You once to me your troth did plight
and now you claim I have no right,
ungrateful man, to voice offense?

[To the ladies in the audience]
If you have shared like me such fate,
do not, fair ladies, hesitate
to speak on my behalf.

[To Aeneas]
I'm sure, you knave, you recognize
that treachery is not the prize
that I've deserved from you.

[Addressing the ladies once more]
Fair lovers, what greater torment can
be than the pain which is now afflicting me?

[She leaves]

Scene 18
AENEAS alone

AENEAS: Is this the recompense that I deserve
for having loved you so, my darling queen?
So much affection, liberality —
May Italy and all else in the world
be laid to waste; again let Troy be burned,
and may my name forever fade away
ere time will come when I'll abandon you.
What have I said, alas? Great sire, forgive
my amorous levity. I feel ashamed.
Aeneas did not speak, 'twas Love who spoke.
I must depart —. Yet will the wicked Moor
then freely press my treasure to his breast?
That must not be. But meanwhile shall a son
to his own father violate his oath?
Love, father, jealousy, divinities,
give me advice in this predicament.

Whether I remain on shore
or journey out to sea,
I stand accused of faithlessness
as well as cruelty.
In such a sad dilemma I
can neither linger nor depart,
and hence I suffer misery
should I make up my mind to stay
or else decide to go away.

ACT II

Scene 1

The royal apartment with a desk and a chair

SELENE and ARASPE

SELENE: Who was it that unloosed the scoundrel's chains?
ARASPE: You ask me, fair Selene, all in vain.
Though it is only a short time ago
that I was jailed and deemed a criminal,
I'm now released and wholly cleared of guilt.
But learning that my master is confined,
within the palace I direct my steps
intent on aiding him, and find him there.
SELENE: Against Aeneas there is some dark plot.
Defend his life.
ARASPE: He is my enemy,
but, nonetheless, if it be your desire
that I should ward Aeneas from a snare
I'll pledge myself to do it inasmuch
as it will bring no stain upon my name.
Let this suffice.
SELENE: I ask no more than this. [Starts to leave]
ARASPE: Do not, I pray, so soon deprive my eyes
of the delight of looking upon you.
SELENE: I do not see the meaning of your words.
ARASPE: I ought to hide the fact that I'm in love,
but your sweet face is guilty of my crime.
SELENE: I'm pleased, Araspe, with your bravery
your visage and your moral excellence,
but it's another flame that pains my heart.
ARASPE: How sad I am!
SELENE: Selene's even more.
If you're inflamed with love by my fair face,
you still may tell your woes and I shall list.
But I cannot conceal my hidden flame
nor do I dare it to the world proclaim.

ARASPE: At least permit me to express my love.
SELENE: You may, but do not seek reward from me.
If your nobility of soul permits
your loving on this basis, I accept,
but ask no more of me.

ARASPE: No more I ask.
SELENE: Be ardent in your love for me,
keep in your heart the dart,
but do not call it cruelty
if love I can't impart.

Your constancy and my own, too,
in this respect agree,
there is no hope that's left for you,
no mercy left for me. [Exits]

Scene 2

ARASPE

ARASPE: You say I'm not to nourish any hope,
but this is surely not enough for me;
our hope is always the last thing we lose. [Exits]

Scene 3

DIDO with a sheet in her hand, OSMIDA and then SELENE

DIDO: I know already that the Moorish king
has used Arbace's name as a disguise,
but be it as it may, he's insolent
and whether he's a subject or a prince
I'll sentence him to die without delay.

OSMIDA: I'll execute your orders faithfully.

DIDO: Your faithfulness will have its just reward.

OSMIDA: Reward, oh, queen! For you in vain
both brave and faithful I have strived to be,
but now I see Aeneas rules your heart.

DIDO: Do not recall that hated name to me.
He is an ingrate, a perfidious man,
word-breaker and a faithless soul as well.
Act II

I am extremely angry at myself that I’ve continued loving him till now.
OSMIDA: You will calm down when you see him again.
DIDO: See him again? I'll never want to see that wicked man as long as I shall live.
[Enter SELENE]
SELENE: Aeneas begs to have a word with you.
DIDO: Aeneas! Where is he?
SELENE: He's near at hand. He longs to look upon you once again.
DIDO: Rash man! Have him come in. [Selene leaves] Osmida, leave.
OSMIDA: Did I not tell you so? Aeneas steals from you the pow'r to act just as your choose.
DIDO: Depart: do not torment me anymore. [Osmida leaves]

Scene 4

DIDO and AENEAS

DIDO: You have not left as yet? These savage shores the presence of Aeneas still adorns? And yet I thought that having crossed the sea, you would in triumph ship to Italy defeated peoples, overpowered kings.
AENEAS: This bitter talk does not become you, queen. Solicitude for your good name and mine has brought me here. I know that you desire to punish the fierce pride of the fell Moor with death.
DIDO: His fate is written on this sheet.
AENEAS: My honor will not grant that I consent to thus avenge the wrongs he's done to me. If you wish to punish him on my account —
DIDO: On your account? You're very much deceived. No longer do I love you as before. My flame is dead, the bonds have been untied and scarcely does your name now come to mind.
AENEAS: The king's the false ambassador: beware!
DIDO: I do not know but think he is Arbace.
AENEAS: Oh, heavens! You'll incite all Africa against you should you put the Moor to death.
DIDO: I shall not brook any advice from you. You mind your kingdoms and I'll think of mine.
Without you until now I've made my laws; 
without you I have seen my Carthage grow.
Ah, happy me, if you had never come, 
ungrateful lover, to these sandy shores.

AENEAS: If you despise the danger that you face, 
give him to me, for him to you I plead.

DIDO: In truth, I owe my kingdom and myself 
to the great merit which you have displayed. 
In view of pleas from such a gracious man, 
of those from such a lover firm and true, 
of those from such deserving go-between, 
I'm sure there's nothing that can be denied.

[She goes to the desk]
Barbarian, tyrant! I must warn you that 
the day has come when you'll see me no more. 
Arbace seems to be your sole concern, 
but not the least concern you show for me. 
I have not seen you shed a single tear, 
nor heave a sigh, nor cast an anxious look; 
no sign of pity do I find in you. 
And you ask me for favors, nonetheless? 
Must I reward you for so much abuse? 
Though you may want him saved I want him dead.

[She writes]

AENEAS: My idol, for in spite of destiny 
you are my idol and will always be, 
what can I say to you, and why renew 
with all these sighs the sorrow that you feel? 
If ever you have felt within your heart 
some tender inclination towards me, then 
placate your wrath and calm your troubled look. 
Aeneas begs you whom one day you called 
your dear, your sweetheart, whom till now you've loved 
more dearly than your life, more than your throne.

You see how much I still adore you, wretch. 
Do you still dare betray me and depart? 

My handsome idol, do not leave 
my heart so full of woe. 
How can I anyone believe 
if you deceive me so? 
My life will surely pass away 
on bidding you goodbye.
Act II 41

I cannot suffer such dismay
and wish only to die. [Exits]

Scene 5
ANEAS, then IARBAS

ANEAS: I feel my perseverance vacillate
in the proximity of such great love;
I save another man yet lose myself.

[Enter Iarbas]
IARBAS: Here comes our brave Aeneas. On his face
there still appear the signs of his past fright.
ANEAS: (Is Iarbas free?) Who gave you liberty?
IARBAS: Osmida has permitted me to range
within the palace, but to safeguard you
he orders me to stroll without my sword.
ANEAS: Does thus Osmida break the queen's command?
IARBAS: Pray, what is it you fear? That I escape?
Unluckily for you too long I'll stay.
ANEAS: I do not have the slightest fear of you,
but I feel pity for your present state.
IARBAS: From such a pity you should spare your heart.
As lover of the queen wreak harm on me,
arouse your anger to a fever pitch.
Your heroes can employ no other means
than these in order to avenge their wrongs.
ANEAS: Read this. Our regal lady on this sheet
has signed the sentence that will mean your death.
[Hands him the sheet]
If I, Aeneas, were an African
King Iarbas would soon be among the dead.
Uncouth and savage brute, from this you'll know
how I avenge the wrongs you've done to me.
[He tears up the sheet and leaves]

Scene 6
IARBAS alone

IARBAS: I do not understand such strange events,
I find compassion in my enemy
and in my follower find faithlessness.
Against me both of them perhaps conspire,  
but what they do does not give me concern.  
Let my antagonist feign charity  
and let my friend conceal his faithlessness,  
I am not apt to show that I'm afraid.  

Whether clouds the sun obscure,  
or whether skies are bright and gay,  
my heart from change remains secure,  
my mind not subject to dismay.  

I've learned to face long long ago  
the strange vicissitudes of fate,  
so that no matter what the blow  
I can withstand its weight.  

[Exits]

Scene 7  
Atrium

AENEAS, then ARASPE

AENEAS: My heart still fluctuates within my breast  
in doubt between my duty and my love.  
Alas! my bravery has only served  
to aid the power of a pretty face.  
Oh, may the hero overcome at last  
the inclination of a loving heart!  

[Enter ARASPE]  

ARASPE: Within the palace I have searched for you.  
AENEAS: Allow me to embrace you, my good friend.  
ARASPE: Beware, Aeneas! I'm your enemy.  
Unsheathe, unsheathe your sword, for it is strife  
not friendship that I want to have with you.  
AENEAS: You've saved me from your master's arrogance  
and now not amity but strife you seek?  
ARASPE: You're wrong, Aeneas: I did then defend  
the honor of my king and not your life.  
It's now my duty to make possible  
by fighting honorably the just revenge  
which he on my account could not then take.  
AENEAS: I'm loathe to be obliged to raise my sword  
against a man who has defended me.  
ARASPE: Come now! Why do you hesitate to fight?  
AENEAS: My life's a gift that I've received from you.  
If you would take it I shall be content.
But that my hand be raised to do you harm,
you hope in vain, my brave and gen'rous foe.
ARASPE: You'll either draw your sword or otherwise
I shall with reason call you coward, vile.
AENEAS: This shameful threat against a manly heart
Aeneas will not tolerate. Well, then,
to give you satisfaction I'll unsheathe.
But first let men give ear to what I say,
and may the gods heed, too. I am Araspe's friend.
I owe my life to his courageousness.
Yet since I stand accused of cowardice,
to give you satisfaction I'll unsheathe:
I'd rather be an ingrate than be base. [Prepares
to fight]

Scene 8
SELENE and the above

SELENE: Such boldness in the palace? Ho, there! Stop!
[To ARASPE] Is this the way that you are true to me?
Is this the way that you, perfidious wretch,
are seeking to defend Aeneas' life?
ARASPE: No, princess, in Araspe's heart there is
no room for any kind of treachery.
SELENE: I'm not inclined to place my trust in one
who ministers to Iarbas, king of Moors.
ARASPE: No one but you, Selene fair, could dare
say this to me.
SELENE: Be silent and be gone.
ARASPE: I'll hush if that is what you wish,
but you impugn my loyalty
in holding me to be untrue.
When far away my steps will be
you will be thinking oft of me.
Ah, then 'twill be too late to rue. [Exits]

Scene 9
SELENE and AENEAS

AENEAS: Araspe merely sought to aid the cause
of Iarbas when he challenged me to fight.
In trying to condemn this virtuous act you quite unjustly give the man offense.

SELENE: That may be true, but this is not the time to talk of him. The queen would speak to you.

AENEAS: I've lately left her royal residence. If she again requests that I remain upon these shores our woes will needlessly be multiplied.

SELENE: Can you, dear heart, forsake one who amid such anguish loves you so?

AENEAS: Selene speaks of me as her "dear heart"?

SELENE: It's not Selene, it's the queen who speaks.

AENEAS: If for your sister you show such concern return to her, enjoin her not to grieve, but yield to fate, and smooth her ruffled brow.

SELENE: Ah, no! Do change, do change your mind, my dear.

AENEAS: Do I hear you addressing me as "dear"?

SELENE: It's not Selene, it's the queen who speaks. Come, won't you hearken to her words. It is the only comfort she implores of you.

AENEAS: This is the customary subterfuge of hearts that are in love. They seek relief but in its stead find only racking grief.

There are no crueler sufferings, no tortures with more bitter stings, than the occasion sad which wrings and cleaves the heart in two.

One's anguish is beyond belief that from it there is no relief. I hope, Selene, that this grief will never come to you.

[Exits]

Scene 10

SELENE alone

SELENE: Fool that I am! For whom do I heave sighs? In losing hope I lose my peace of mind. But who obliges me to sigh in vain? Let's choose a heart responsive to our wish, let's choose a face more worthy of our love, let's choose — but, oh! — the choice is not our own. It is not beauty, talent, bravery,
that causes us to love. Indeed, at times we love the least attractive, the most dull. Then in his mind each person conjures up a charming flame, but it is seldom real.

There is no lover who will not protest that beauty is the causer of the wound which so acutely racks his troubled breast.

And yet it is not so.

It's a desire, which, coming unforseen, is painted in our hearts in charming light.

One feels it is the source of great delight,

but why, one does not know. [Exits]

Scene 11

An inner apartment with seats

DIDO, then AENEAS

DIDO: Uncertain of my fate I feel I've lost my zest for life. But now the hour has come to test Aeneas for the final time. If telling him about my sufferings, and if compassion is of no avail, let jealousy be the decisive test. [Enter AENEAS]

AENEAS: I come, oh, queen! to hear your reprimands. I know you wish to call me ingrate, wretch, word-breaker, perjurer, perfidious man. Upbraid me as you will, and vent your wrath.

DIDO: I'm not indignant. You will not be called unfaithful, ingrate, perjurer, and wretch. I've no intention to recall our flame. I merely seek advice from you, not love. Sit down. [They sit]

AENEAS: (What will she say to me?)

DIDO: You know, Aeneas, that my nascent kingdom is surrounded by my enemies. Till now, it's true, both threats and anger I have scorned. But Iarbas is offended, and when I
shall be deprived of your support he'll take
my life and kingdom from me in revenge.
In such a plight all remedies are vain.
I'm doomed to die or else must give my hand
to the proud African. In either case,
this leaves me sad and very much confused.
Since I am but a woman after all,
alone, and distant from my native skies,
I am disheartened, and it's no surprise
that I cannot decide. You counsel me.

AENEAS: Excepting death or fateful nuptial tie
could we not find alternatives less harsh?
DIDO: One was, alas! at hand.
AENEAS: Pray, what was that?
DIDO: If you, Aeneas, had not jilted me
all Africa from the Arabian strands
to the Atlantic sea I should have seen
adoring me in Carthage as its queen.
From Troy and Tyre we two could have renewed—
But why say more? I know my mind conceives
pure fantasies, and that I've gone insane.
Advise me what to do. Courageously,
according to the wish you will express,
King Iarbas I shall choose or else my death.

AENEAS: King Iarbas you will choose or else your death?
And must I tell you what you ought to do?
To see the woman that I so adore
clasped tightly in my rival's arms,
the one—

DIDO: If it distresses you so much
that I should marry Iarbas, I'll desist.
But to be safe from insults I must die.
Unsheathe your sword and kill your faithful one.
It's merciful to Dido to be cruel.

AENEAS: I, kill you? I would rather that the wrath
of heaven fall upon me. May the gods
increase your days by shortening my own.

DIDO: I'll give myself to Iarbas, then. Ho, there!

[A page comes on the stage]
AENEAS: Please, stop. You're too intent on causing
grief.

DIDO: Then kill me.
AENEAS: No. Let's yield to destiny.
To Iarbas give your hand. So you may live
I'll be content to lose my peace of mind.
DIDO: Since you would have me take another man
I shall arrange to satisfy your wish.
Call Iarbas. [To the page, who leaves]
You see now to what extent
I am obedient to you.
AENEAS: Goodbye, queen! [Both get up]
DIDO: Where are you going? Wait. It's my desire
that you be present at the marriage feast.
(He can't resist.)
AENEAS: (Be firm, be firm, my heart.)

Scene 12
IARBAS and the above

IARBAS: Why do you seek me, Dido? If you think
that I am daunted by your wrath and threats,
you lack good sense. My heart will never change.
AENEAS: (What arrogance!)
DIDO: Placate your wrath, good sir.
By hiding from me both your rank and name
you gravely jeopardized your dignity
and I — but sit down here and placidly
heed what I say to you.
IARBAS: I listen. Speak.
[IARBAS and DIDO sit]
AENEAS: With your permission I must —
DIDO: Wait, sit down.
You will not be delayed too long a time.
(He can't resist.)
AENEAS: (Be firm, be firm, my heart.)
IARBAS: Oh, let him leave. This fellow must depart
if you wish Iarbas to remain with you.
AENEAS: (Am I to suffer this?)
DIDO: In him you'll find
a friend and not a rival as you thought.
He's spoken in your favor frequently.
On his advice I love you. [To Aeneas] If you think
my lips are capable of telling lies,
you tell him so yourself.
AENEAS: Yes, it is true.
IARBAS: Is there no other merit in the Moor
than the recommendation which he gives?
DIDO: No, Iarbas. It's the valor on your face,
so regal-like that pleases me so much.
I am in love with that brave heart of yours
which looks on perils and on death with scorn,
and if the gods intend that I shall be
your wife and your companion—

AENEAS: Queen, goodbye!
It is enough for me that until now
I've done your wish.

DIDO: It is not yet enough.
Be seated. (He begins to vacillate.)

AENEAS: (I am in agony!) [He sits down again]

IARBAS: You realize
too late, oh, Dido! what your duty is.
But I'll ignore all insults done to me
in virtue of your charm.

AENEAS: (What suffering, oh gods!)

IARBAS: As token of your faith give me your hand.

DIDO: I'm glad to do so. [Slowly, interrupting her
words in order to observe their effect on
Aeneas] I could not be joined
by kindly Love to a more welcome yoke.

AENEAS: I cannot suffer more. [He gets up excitedly]

DIDO: You're piqued, Aeneas?

AENEAS: Why not, I ask? Is not the suffering
my constancy has undergone enough?

DIDO: Pray, hush.

AENEAS: Why hush? I've hushed sufficiently.
It is my rival that you want to choose.
It is your wish that I should counsel it.
All this I'll do for you: do you want more?
You want me, too, to see him in your arms?
Tell me you want me dead but not to hush.

DIDO: Please, listen. You've no right to be enraged.
You know that to obey you— [She gets up]

AENEAS: This I know:
I am the traitor, the ungrateful one;
you are the faithful woman who for me
would give up both your kingdom and your life.
But so much faithfulness I do not want. [Exits]
Scene 13

DIDO and IARBAS

DIDO: Please, listen!

IARBAS: Let him leave. [He gets up]

DIDO: I wish to calm his agitation.

IARBAS: What is it you fear?

Give me your hand and leave revenge to me.

DIDO: The time to think of marriage is now past.

IARBAS: But why?

DIDO: Do not insist.

IARBAS: I want to know.

DIDO: Since you demand it, this is my reply.

Because I'm not at all in love with you.
Because you have no favor in my eyes.
Because you're hateful to me, and because I like Aeneas more though he be false than I like Iarbas even though he's true.

IARBAS: Am I, perfidious queen, your laughing stock?

Do you know Iarbas? Know with whom you deal?

DIDO: I know you are a brute, but have no fear.

IARBAS: Though to abuse me you are free,

one day repentant you will be.

If then for pity you will sue,

you'll find I'll not give it to you.

That brutal man whom you so hate

your many charms will not placate,

nor will he ever henceforth be misled by your duplicity. [Exits]

Scene 14

DIDO alone

DIDO: And yet my heart finds peace amid this storm.

Of Iarbas I am not afraid. I like Aeneas in his rage and love in him, as the effect of love, his wrathfulness.

Who knows? Recall, oh gods! that you one day have been enamored just as I am now, and may your hearts take pity upon mine.
Love keeps on deceiving
my unsuspecting heart.
It tells it "You are happy"
perhaps to salve my smart.
My consolation is short-lived
since soon my pain returns
more bitter than before.
Thus only for a moment brief
can my sad heart find some relief. [Exits]

ACT III

Scene 1

The seaport with ships ready for the embarkation
of Aeneas

AENEAS, with a retinue of Trojans

AENEAS: Invincible companions trained to bear
the harshness and the wrath of sky and sea,
arouse your courage, for the time has come
once more to sail upon the restless waves.
Let's go, my friends, and let the winds and storms
fume round our Trojan ships. Our risks will be
our glories, and it will, indeed, be sweet
for us one day to call them back to mind.

Scene 2

IARBAS with his retinue of Moors, and the above

IARBAS: Where goes our fleeing hero, where does he
intend to take his fighting ships and arms?
Does he desire to elsewhere wage a war
or try in flight to find escape from me?
AENEAS: I had not counted on this obstacle.
IARBAS: Your ships can for a moment stay near shore.
        If you have pluck I challenge you to fight.
AENEAS: Agreed. Remain, my friends, for to deflate
his rashful pride my valor will suffice.
I am your man. What are you thinking of?
IARBAS: I'm thinking that your death will scarcely be
revenge enough to satisfy my ire.
AENEAS: To think so and to do are not the same.
To arms.
IARBAS: To arms.
While they fight and Iarbas yields, his Moors come
to his aid and attack Aeneas
AENEAS: Let all your kingdom come.
IARBAS: Defend yourself.
AENEAS: I have no fear, oh, wretch!
The companions of Aeneas come to help him and
attack the Moors. Aeneas and Iarbas exit fighting.
The fray between the Trojans and Moors continues.
The Moors flee and are pursued. Aeneas and Iarbas
come out fighting again. The latter falls.]
You've fallen. You are vanquished. Either yield
or I shall pierce your heart.
IARBAS: A vain request.
AENEAS: If you do not entreat your conqueror
for mercy —
IARBAS: Mete out your penalty on me.
AENEAS: Yes, die — Did I say die? No, live. In vain
you try to rankle me with your mad pride.
I do not want to mar my victory. [He leaves]
IARBAS: I'm conquered but I am not crushed. At least,
inconstant fate, I shall not be alone
the object of your wrath. My fall will cause
a kingdom to be crushed entirely.

Scene 3
Woods between the city and the port
OSMIDA alone

OSMIDA: In order to help Iarbas hordes of Moors
have now arrived before the city walls.
The moment of triumph has drawn near.
I do not blush at my disloyalty
to this ungrateful woman. In this way
I'll punish the injustice she has done,
for ne'er has she repaid my love with hers.
Scene 4

IARBAS, hurriedly, with his retinue and the above

IARBAS: Come, comrades, to the royal residence.

[He passes in front of Osmida without seeing him]

OSMIDA: Your troops are ready, sir. It's time at last
for you to take revenge against affronts.

IARBAS: Friends, come. [Paying no attention to Osmida]
My fury will not brook delay.

OSMIDA: Pray, stop!

IARBAS: What is your wish?

OSMIDA: Do not forget
that a reward for my fidelity
is due me for the vengeance you will take.

IARBAS: Quite right. Indeed, let your reward precede
my vengeance.

OSMIDA: Gen'rous monarch —

IARBAS: Ho, there, troops!

Disarm and bind this man, then take his life.

OSMIDA: Is this Osmida's lot? I am amazed —

IARBAS: This compensation is a traitor's due. [Leaves,
followed by his men, with the exception of a few who
remain to carry out his command]

Scene 5

AENEAS, with a following of Trojans and the above

[When Aeneas comes upon the stage the Moors run away
leaving Osmida tied to a tree]

AENEAS: At last we've all assembled. Not one man
is missing of our scattered partisans.
Well, then, let all deferment disappear,
the sky is calm, the air and waves are clear.
Let's sail away. To sea, to sea let's go.

OSMIDA: Brave hero —

AENEAS: What has happened?

OSMIDA: In this state

King Iarbas, the barbarian —

AENEAS: I see.

Friends, set Osmida free. [The Trojans free Osmida]
By one from whom
he least expects it, let the wretch be helped,
Act III

and virtue let him learn from his remorse.

OSMIDA: [Kneeling] Oh, noble-minded hero! allow me to demonstrate my gratefulness to you.

AENEAS: You may stand up and elsewhere turn your steps.

OSMIDA: In gratitude to such a virtuous man—

AENEAS: If you desire to show me gratitude, learn how to be more faithful from now on.

OSMIDA: Ere I'll again ungrateful be, the stream that rises on the height will flow back to it from the lea.

And may the night as day be clear if to forget I should appear the man that gave life back to me. [Exits]

Scene 6

AENEAS and SELENE, who hurries by

AENEAS: Where are you running, princess? Why such haste?

SELENE: I run to you. Attend to what I say.

AENEAS: If once again you mean to speak of love I tell you, you exert yourself in vain.

SELENE: But what will Dido do?

AENEAS: All her alarm will cease when I depart. My presence here seems only to enrage her enemies. King Iarbas offers her his throne. Let her give him her hand and she will be consoled. [Starts to leave]

SELENE: If you take your departure you will kill not only Dido but Selene, too.

AENEAS: Will you explain?

SELENE: My love for you began the day on which I first laid eyes on you. A timid lover, love I kept concealed, but close to death compassion I now ask, compassion out of pity if not love.

AENEAS: Selene, speak no more about your flame, nor of your sister's passion. I am now again a fighting man and love no more. I am returning to my former ways, and shall consider as my enemy whoever would restrain my glorious deeds.
A pleasant sense of duty calls
and spurs me on to victory.
Already in myself I see
that honor triumphs over love.
Amid disasters and grave risks
aflame with noble eagerness,
I'll hasten now my locks to dress
with garlands new. [Exits]

Scene 7
SELENE alone

SELENE: To scorn my flame and to deprive my love
of every shred of hope might be a boast
of one who prates about his constancy.
But if you do not even suffer that
a loving heart pour out its misery,
that is not firmness, it is cruelty.
For love, alas! I'm pining,
but you to me deny
the comfort of lamenting
and then to let me die.

Yet what would it have cost you
had you listened to my cry,
and if for so much suffering
you heaved a tender sigh? [Exits]

Scene 8
The royal mansion with a view of the city of Carthage
in the background. The city is later set on fire
DIDO, then OSMIDA

DIDO: My torment grows. Of it I am aware
but do not understand the cause of it.
Oh, justice-dealing gods! what can it be?
OSMIDA: Your mercy, please, oh, queen!
DIDO: What ails you, friend?
OSMIDA: Ah, no! such charming name is undeserved
by one who is a traitor and besides
has hated you, Aeneas and your love.
Act III

DIDO: What do you mean?

OSMIDA: I hoped I should obtain possession of the Carthaginian realm, and hence I offered Iarbas my support. It was accepted; he made use of me, and then as my reward the scoundrel tried to kill me, but Aeneas rescued me.

DIDO: You're guilty of such crimes and yet you present yourself to me?

OSMIDA: My queen, I do. It is not pardon that I hope from you, I only ask to suffer for my crime.

DIDO: You may stand up. Misfortunes multiply! Alas, for me! mine was an ill-starred birth. There's lacking in those I most trust—

Scene 9

SELENE and the above

SELENE: At last Aeneas—

DIDO: Has he left?

SELENE: Not yet, but he is going to sail away quite soon. Just now I've seen him lead his warriors in the direction of the fleeing ships.

DIDO: What infidelity! What thanklessness! A wretched man, a begging foreigner—Oh, tell me gods! Have you a crueler heart yet seen? And you, unkind Selene, you see him depart and do not stay his flight?

SELENE: My every effort has, alas! been vain.

DIDO: Osmida, go and see if for a while you can induce Aeneas to remain. When he has listened to me he may leave.

OSMIDA: I'll hasten to apprize him of your wish. [Exits]

Scene 10

DIDO and SELENE

SELENE: You are much too confiding, queen. As yet you do not know Osmida.
DIDO: Him I know
    too well, but still my cruel fate
    has reached such an extreme that I must ask
    a man who has betrayed me for some help.
SELENE: Save for yourself you have not other hope.
    Betake yourself to him and beg and weep.
    Who knows? Perhaps you'll cause him to relent.
DIDO: Must Dido condescend to pleas and tears,
    the Dido who from the Sidonian strands
    has dared to face the anger of the waves
    in search of other lands and other climes?
    It's I who also decked this Afric land
    with cities new. It's I who've kept my pomp
    amid the battles, risks and frequent snares.
    And you tell me to stoop to this base act?
SELENE: You must forget your rank or give up hope,
    for love and rule are incompatible.

Scene 11

ARASPE and the above

DIDO: Araspe on my threshold!
[In the distance one begins to see flames issuing
from the buildings of Carthage]
ARASPE: Here I've come
    to warn you of the danger that you face.
    The angry king has set afire and wrecked
    the dwellings of your city. See, oh, queen!
    the distant flames the wind is stirring up.
    If you delay in quieting his wrath
    a single moment more, you're bound to lose
    your kingdom and your life this very day.
DIDO: Could there be any more disasters left
    to render me unhappy?
SELENE: Luckless day!

Scene 12

OSMIDA and the above

DIDO: Osmida!
OSMIDA: Fire rages all around —
DIDO: I know. About Aeneas I ask you. What have you learned from him?

OSMIDA: He's gone and is already far away from shore. When I arrived there I could only glimpse the fleeting sail-yards of the moving ships.

DIDO: Ah, foolish me! I have myself conspired to speed his flight. When he first came to me I should have jailed him. Go, Osmida, back, run, fly to shore, assemble combatants and arms and ships. Pursue the faithless man, tear up his canvasses, submerge his ships, convey that traitor to me bound in chains, and if you cannot bring him here alive, I still would have him even if he's dead.

OSMIDA: While you are thinking of revenge the flames are spreading rapidly.

DIDO: It's true. Let's flee. I wish — ah, no — Remain — But our home will — I'm all confused — Have you not left as yet?

OSMIDA: I'll carry out your bidding. [Leaves]

Scene 13
DIDO, SELENE, ARASPE

ARASPE: Of your risk, oh, Dido, think.

SELENE: And of avoiding harm.

DIDO: I suffer too much pain to think or act. Go you, my dear Selene, in my stead. Provide what's needed, order and assist. If you love me, do not abandon me.

SELENE: Ah, I am more disconsolate than you. [Leaves]

Scene 14
DIDO and ARASPE

ARASPE: Do you remain here still? Do you not fear the fire that advances dangerously?

DIDO: As I have lost all hope I do not fear.
In human breasts both fear and hope are born together and together they will die.

ARASPE: It's my desire to save you. I am grieved that you should be exposed to such a risk.

DIDO: I beg, Araspe, to be left in peace.

[Araspe leaves]

Scene 15

DIDO, then OSMIDA

DIDO: The great misfortunes that have come to me will pass as legends in the course of time and on the tragic stage my sufferings become recitals pitiable and sad.

OSMIDA: All hope is lost.

DIDO: Have you returned so soon?

OSMIDA: In vain, alas! I've tried from here to reach the shore. The army of the faithless Moor is swarming over Carthage in huge waves. Amid the shrieks and noise these wicked men our sanctuary doors have opened wide and heaped abuse upon the virgins there. No longer is there any pity shown for children or the aged and infirm.

DIDO: Must then my fall come irretrievably?

[One begins to see flames in the royal mansion]

Scene 16

SELENE and the above

SELENE: Escape, oh queen! Your guards are overcome. We can resist no more. The fire spreads beyond the flaming town to your abode.

DIDO: Let's go and elsewhere try to find some help.

OSMIDA: But how?

SELENE: But where?

DIDO: Join me, faint-hearted souls. If you have pluck, learn how to die from me.
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Scene 17

IARBAS, with guards and the above

IARBAS: Stop there!
DIDO:  Alas!
IARBAS:  Where go you so confused?
 Perhaps you're hastening to give your hand
to your trustworthy Trojan? Go to him,
move fast your steps, for o'er the nuptial bed
you'll find the bridal torches burning bright.
DIDO: I know this is the time for your revenge.
 Give vent to your disdain now that the fates
have robbed me of all means of getting aid.
IARBAS: Aeneas is defending you, you're safe.
DIDO: I hope that you are now well satisfied.
 You wished me sad? Behold me all alone,
without Aeneas, without friends and realm,
betrayed, abandoned. Did you wish me weak?
Behold Queen Dido forced at last to weep.
Is not all this enough? Would you make me
a humble suppliant as well? Oh, yes,
I beg of Iarbas solace for my ills,
I plead with him that he put me to death.
IARBAS: (My anger softens.)
SELENE: (Mercy, holy gods!)
OSMIDA: (I pray for help.)
IARBAS: But yet, fair Dido, yet,
 I'm not so savage as you think I am.
 I've pity for your tears, now come with me.
 I'll pardon all your slights, and as my spouse
I'll lead you to the bridal couch and throne.
DIDO: I, married to a tyrant, to a cruel
 and wicked man, a traitor destitute
 of loyalty, a man who does not know
 what duty means and honor casts aside?
 I should have cause to weep were I so base.
 No, my misfortune has not gone that far.
IARBAS: In such a wretched state you still insult?
 Ho, there! be off my faithful followers:
stir up the flames, let Carthage be destroyed,
 let not a single footprint there be found
of the inhabitants who tread on it.

[Two guards leave]
The prosp'rous state you raised to fame
will soon to ashes fall.
No more will Carthage be a name
that travellers will recall.
 If death less harsh appears to be
than freedom might have been,
you do not merit sympathy
nor aid from me, proud queen.  [Exits]

Scene 18
DIDO, SELENE and OSMIDA

OSMIDA: Give up to Iarbas, Dido.
SELENE: Save our lives together with your own.
DIDO: I wish to live only if on the prime cause of my ills,
the false Aeneas, I can take revenge.
Ah, may the wind at least, and may the gods accomplish the revenge I mean to take,
and thunderbolts and storms and hurricanes make wind and wave calamitous for him.
May he roam aimlessly and all alone,
and may his fate turn out to be so harsh that he will be obliged to envy mine.
SELENE: Please moderate your wrath. I love him, too,
but bear my torment.
DIDO: You, too, love him?
SELENE: I do, but for your sake —
DIDO: Disloyal one!
are you a rival in my love?
SELENE: If so,
you have no cause —
DIDO: Retire from my sight.
Do not augment the pangs of a crushed heart.
SELENE: Oh, wretched queen, your fate is sad, indeed.

[Leaves]
OSMIDA: The flames increase. Do you not care to flee?
DIDO: Are there more enemies to add to these?
Aeneas leaves me and Selene's false,
Iarbas abuses me, Osmida tricks.
Inhuman deities, what have I done?
Your holy altars I have never tried
to desecrate with offerings unclean,
nor have I ever caused an impure flame
to burn on them in disrespect toward you.
Why is it then that both heaven and hell
are leagued against me through no fault of mine?
OSMIDA: Do not provoke the gods, think of yourself.
DIDO: What gods? They're either empty, worthless forms,
incongruous fancies, or they are unjust.
OSMIDA: I flee, aghast at her impiety.
[He leaves. Shortly afterwards one sees some
structures falling, and flames spreading within the
royal mansion]

Final Scene
DIDO alone

DIDO: Ah me! what have I said? But, oh, my God!
the horror grows. No matter where I look
I see advancing towards me death and fear.
The palace shakes and is about to fall.
Selene and Osmida, all of you,
you all concur in my unhappy fate.
Not one remains from whom I can have help,
and no one will consent to take my life.
I go — But where? Oh, God! I stay — but then —
what can I do? Am I then doomed to die
without my finding pity anywhere?
And is there so much baseness in my breast?
No, no, let's die, and in our destiny
let false Aeneas have an augury
that balefully will haunt him in his path.
Let Carthage fall, and let my palace burn
and with its ashes furnish me a tomb.
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[Saying these last words Dido, desperate and frantic, runs to hurl herself into the burning ruins of the royal palace, and disappears amid the globular masses of flames, sparks, and smoke that rise following her leap.

At the same time on the distant horizon the sea, followed by the tumult of a boisterous symphony, begins to swell and to advance slowly towards the palace, which is darkened by dense clouds. On drawing near the conflagration, the violence of the waters increases in proportion to the greater resistance of the fire. The furious succession of the waves, their breaking and foaming in their encounter with the opposing ruins, the crash of thunder, the intermittent lightning flashes, and a continuous seaborning represent the stubborn struggle between the two enemy elements.

When the conquering waters everywhere triumph at length over the dying flames, the sky suddenly becomes bright again, the clouds disappear, the ugly symphony becomes gay, and from the depths of the waves already stilled and calmed rises the rich and luminous mansion of Neptune. In the midst of the latter seated on his luminous couch, drawn by marine monsters and surrounded by festive bands of nereids, sirens, and tritons, the god appears who, leaning on his large trident, speaks as follows:]

NEPTUNE: Benignant stars of the Iberian sea,
if you today observe the elements
repeating the discordance they once had,
be not surprised. Alike in excellence,
a friendly competition for acclaim
makes rivals out of us. If Vulcan here
displays his flames before you, on what grounds
must I, the god of waters, be denied
the right to join him out of rivalry?
Why should I yield to him? If on the field
of battle he pours forth his thunderclaps
from hollow bronzes, acting faithfully
as the executor of your fierce ire,
I likewise am the tried executor
of acts of justice which you may decree,
because to worlds remote I bear your laws
and carry back your vows. So hence with cause
I have constrained the storms in my defense in this most noble contest that you've seen.

Be still, oh storms of mine,
as you approach this seat,
now that my rival owns defeat
and yields to me the palm.

So with the joyous flash
of stars o'er Spanish lea,
let all the kingdoms of the sea
return to peace and calm.

THE END
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Demetrius

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CLEONICE, queen of Syria, loved by ALCESTES
ALCESTES, who is revealed later as DEMETRIUS, king of Syria
PHENICIUS, nobleman, tutor of ALCESTES, and father of OLINTHUS
OLINTHUS, nobleman and rival of ALCESTES
BARSENE, confidante of CLEONICE, secretly in love with ALCESTES
MITHRANES, captain of the royal guards and friend of PHENICIUS

The action takes place in Seleucia

ARGUMENT

After being ejected from his own kingdom by the usurper Alexander Bala, Demetrius Sotere died in exile among the Cretans, who were the only friends he had left during the period of his adverse fortune. Before his flight, however, he handed over his son Demetrius to Phenicius, his most loyal vassal, to rear him as his eventual avenger. The royal prince grew up unaware of who he was under the false name Alcestes. For a time he lived in the woodlands where the prudence of Phenicius hid him from the search of the above-mentioned usurper Alexander, and later in Seleucia on the estate of Phenicius, who through acts of generosity was able to give skillful
expression to the trust that had been placed in him.

Before long the supposed Alcestes was admired throughout the kingdom, hence he was promoted to the highest ranks in the militia of his enemy Alexander, and was loved ardently by Cleonice, Alexander's daughter, a princess worthy of a father more noble than he. When it appeared opportune to him the diligent Phenicius began to test the feelings of Alexander's subjects by cunningly spreading the rumor that Demetrius was living incognito. On hearing the rumor the Cretans proclaimed themselves as defenders of the legitimate prince. Alexander tried to quench the fire before it spread further but was defeated and killed.

By virtue of his high military rank the young man had perforce to participate in this battle, nor, furthermore, was there in Seleucia information concerning him for some time. The death of Alexander so much desired by Phenicius consequently came at a time that did not favor his plan both because Alcestes was not in Seleucia and because he realized that many of the nobles who aspired to the crown would try to have the legitimate heir pass as an imposter. Therefore, being anxious for his return, Phenicius secretly sought the aid of the Cretans. Meanwhile the aspirants to the crown agreed that princess Cleonice, now recognized as queen, should choose a husband from among them. For a long time she put off her choice by making various excuses while waiting for the return of Alcestes, who opportunely came back when the troubled queen was about to choose. Therefore, when it was learned that Alcestes was the real Demetrius, the young man was allowed to regain the paternal crown.
ACT I

ACT I

Scene 1

A lighted study, and on one side a chair and a small table with a scepter and crown on it

CLEONICE, seated with her arms leaning on the table, and OLINTHUS

CLEONICE: Enough, Olinthus, say no more. In a little while the restless people will see me appear at the appointed place. Do they want me to choose a husband, a king? A husband and a king will be chosen. I am asking only for a brief time to think it over. Why this importunate and indiscreet lack of restraint? How can you, my subject, be so disrespectful? Is it because you have raised me to the throne in order to make a slave of me or because you are ashamed of being ruled by a woman? Yet Cleonice is not the first example of a female monarch. The Scythians have given homage and obedience to Thalestris and Thomyris without feeling ashamed, and in other lands, Babylonia to Semira and Africa to Dido.

OLINTHUS: Pardon me, oh queen! you do wrong in complaining of us. Has not Syria already recognized your worth? It elevated you to the throne soon after your father died. It has left the choice of its king to you. It is allowing you time for mature deliberation; it anxiously waits for the arrival of the moment when you promised to reassure it. And you complain of us? Your complaint is unjust.

CLEONICE: Very well, if my subjects trust me so much, let them not refuse me a few more minutes' delay.

OLINTHUS: Good heavens, queen! Our hopes have been deceived so many times that it is only reasonable that we should be apprehensive. Seleucia has granted you two whole months for the expression of your deep mourning for your father. The end of the third month is now near and you have not yet come to a decision. As reason for your procrastination at times you blame a foreboding dream, at times an ill-omened day; now you say that you have seen lightning flashes to the right of you; now that you have seen a flame rise obliquely from the altar; now that the melancholy song of a nocturnal bird has disturbed
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your sleep; now that tears have fallen suddenly and
involuntarily from your eyes.
CLEONICE: My fears have been justified.
OLINTHUS: After making all these weak pretenses you have
finally promised to announce your choice today.
With impatience as well as joy all the assembled
kingdom looks forward to it. Everyone is preparing
himself and is planning to appear before you lavishly
dressed. Some will wear silken mantles on which
the Sidonian handmaids have labored long and hard,
some, red woolens dyed in Tyre. On some you will
see quivering the sumptuous feathers of rare birds
entwined in their long veils. On the foreheads of
still others you will see large and unusual strands
of Hindu pearls. Still others will adorn the rich
trappings of their Parthian steeds with gems and
gold. Syria is exhibiting all of its costliest ob-
jects, even the precious treasures which misers have
kept concealed for fear that they might be stolen.
CLEONICE: This in no way relieves my anxiety.
OLINTHUS: But why so much concern, why so much cautious-
ness? Why have you made the people wait in vain for
your arrival from dawn to midday, from midday to
evening and to this late hour of the night? Irreso-
lute and uncertain, you doubt and seem bewildered.
Your suspicions make every delay seem too short and
insufficient. Yet you complain of us? Your com-
plaint is unjust.
CLEONICE: It is unavoidable. I must, unfortunately,
submit to this harsh necessity. Go; precede my com-
ing. I shall make the Syrians happy; I shall an-
nounce the choice of a spouse.
OLINTHUS: Please remember that your faithful subject,
Olinthus, has been your admirer; that my blood —
CLEONICE: I know: the blood of illustrious heroes
courses through your veins.
OLINTHUS: Add to this the merits of Phenicius.
CLEONICE: I am aware of them.
OLINTHUS: You know about his wise counsel —
CLEONICE: I know the value of it: I appreciate the worth
of his fidelity. I have considered everything,
Olinthus; I know all already.
OLINTHUS: You do not know all. I have been secretly in
love with you for a long time, consumed by the lov-
ing torches of your shining eyes —
CLEONICE: Please stop talking and leave.
OLINTHUS: What do you mean "stop talking"?
CLEONICE: Is this the time, Olinthus, to be speaking to me of love? [She gets up]
OLINTHUS: Why become angry if in asking for compassion—
CLEONICE: I repeat: stop talking and leave me.
OLINTHUS: I see no reason for your wrath;
I do not deem it an offense
to speak to you about my love.
For this it's you who are to blame;
your comely face has been the cause
of giving freedom to my lips
and making of my heart a slave. [Exits]

Scene 2

CLEONICE and then BARSENE

CLEONICE: Alcestes, beloved Alcestes, where are you? Can't you hear me? In vain I call you; I wait for you in vain. [To Barsene who arrives at the moment] Barsene, are you perhaps bringing me good news? Can it be that my Alcestes has returned?
BARSENE: Would to heaven that it were so! I have come to urge you to make haste. The people are grumbling and fuming over your tardiness in making your appearance. You can no longer delay without peril.
CLEONICE: Woe is me! Let us go, then [She starts to go and then hesitates] to choose my spouse. Alas, Barsene! I do not have the courage to do so. I feel that my doubting heart and dragging feet are struggling with my reason. Is there anyone who has ever been more afflicted, confused and agitated than I? [She sits down again]
BARSENE: Why do you torment yourself with so many imagined misfortunes?
CLEONICE: Is it a figment of my imagination that I will become for as long as I live the servant of a man I do not love, a man who, pretending he is in love with me, asks for my hand and at the same time complains that he is paying a heavy price for the throne?
BARSENE: All this may be true, yet the sacred bond of
Demetrius

marriage, mutual obligations toward one's offspring, time, and sharing common experiences are apt little by little to change into love or at least into friendship whatever discord may have previously existed between husbands and wives.

CLEONICE: But should Alcestes on returning find me in the arms of another spouse, what would become of him, what would become of me? I tremble to think of it. I should sorely repent my having been untrue to him. He would suffer the intolerable pain of finding me unfaithful. I should then read on his face his just laments, his agitation, his jealousy, anguish, all of his hidden thoughts and all the emotions of his heart.

BARSENE: How can you expect him to return? Several months have already passed since your father fell mortally wounded amid the Cretan squadrons. You know that Alcestes always fought at his side and that there has been no further news of him. He is either bound in chains or else was drowned or killed in battle.

CLEONICE: No, my heart tells me Alcestes is alive. He will return.

BARSENE: When he does return you will be all the more unhappy. If you offer yourself to him you will insult a hundred other deserving suitors, and if you do not, his presence at this critical moment will surely lead to his death. His return will expose you to the risk of being cruel to one and unjust to many others.

CLEONICE: I want him to return. If he is near me I shall find some way —

Scene 3

MITHRANES and the above

MITHRANES: What makes you tarry, queen? Danger is impending. Long and patient waiting on the part of the people is little by little degenerating into tumult. It can only be avoided by your presence.

CLEONICE: Is this, Barsene, the announcement of Alcestes' return? — I must go. [She rises]

BARSENE: Have you determined on your choice?
CLEONICE: No, I have not.
BARSENE: What do you intend to do?
CLEONICE: I don't know.
BARSENE: Are you then going to run the risk of making such an important decision without knowing your own mind?
CLEONICE: I am going where fate wills, where harsh necessity directs me, without the benefit of the advice of others and without an escort. Amid so many anguish thoughts about my kingdom and my love, my weary heart cannot decide if it should fear, if it should hope. I call to mind my royal cares and the affections of my heart; I make decisions, then repent and then I change my mind again. [Exits]

Scene 4
BARSENE and MITHRANES

BARSENE: Unhappy queen! How much I pity her!
MITHRANES: Is it possible for Barsene to feel so much pity for her and so little for me?
BARSENE: If you are asking for nothing more than pity, you can have it. If you hope for love you are vainly deluding yourself.
MITHRANES: Am I not miserable enough already? Why do you want to deprive me even of hope?
BARSENE: Miserable you cannot be since you can reveal your grief. Though unable to rouse love you can at least find sympathy. Miserable instead am I who, fallen in a secret snare, loves silently and hopelessly, one who ignores my love for him. [Exits]
MITHRANES: Futile sympathy!

PHENICIUS: Friend Mithranes, where is Cleonice?

MITHRANES: Since she has finally been obliged to do it, she is on her way to announce her choice.

PHENICIUS: This means that all of my efforts have been wasted.

MITHRANES: In what way?

PHENICIUS: Trusting in your loyalty, I wish to confide a deep secret to you. Do not divulge it, but give me advice.

MITHRANES: Trust me, I pledge my word of honor.

PHENICIUS: You will recall that the barbarous Alexander, Cleonice's father, deprived Demetrius, our king, of his throne.

MITHRANES: That happened almost thirty years ago; I still remember.

PHENICIUS: You likewise know that as the result of extreme privation Demetrius died in exile, and you may have heard that his infant son died with him.

MITHRANES: I remember that he too was called Demetrius.

PHENICIUS: I wish to inform you, friend, that the royal heir is still alive and not unknown to you.

MITHRANES: Are you telling me the truth, or is this a fairy tale?

PHENICIUS: There is even more to tell you. He lives in the person of Alcestes.

MITHRANES: Heavens! What do I hear!

PHENICIUS: On fleeing, his father placed him in my arms. He enjoined me to call him Alcestes. As he embraced me, and as he alternated his kisses between his son and me, he became tearful and said: "Take good care of my dear child for his father's sake, for the sake of vengeance, and for the sake of my kingdom."

MITHRANES: I now understand the reason for your solicitude toward him. But for what reason have you kept him hidden until now?

PHENICIUS: I did not wish to expose his precious life to danger. Artfully I spread the report that Demetrius was alive. I did not reveal that he was Alcestes. You know that this rumor was enough for Crete to take up arms against Alexander. You know that the
tyrant died in the struggle that ensued. But the
name of Demetrius is producing a different effect in
Syria. Here the ambitious nobles refuse to believe
the rumor, so that outside help is needed to place
him on the throne. The Cretans are ready to give
it, but I fear it will arrive too late. Alcestes is
far away; I don't know whether he is still alive.
Cleonice, meanwhile, is about to choose her consort.
MITHRANES: Allow Cleonice to announce her choice. As
soon as he returns, Alcestes, with the help of
Crete, can take revenge.
PHENICIUS: This, Mithranes, was not my intention. By
his marriage with Cleonice, I had hoped that one day
Alcestes might recover his kingdom without taking it
away from her. That exalted woman is worthy of re-
main ing as its queen. With this in mind, I have en-
couraged them in their love affair, and if fate —
But I am wasting my time in complaining. I call
upon you, friend, to share my concern with me. Only
if time can be gained will our efforts bear fruit.
Let us go, let us try to prevent the choice from
being made. If forced to extremes, we shall reveal
the secret. You can support me, and if it is neces-
sary to use arms, you can help me with them.
MITHRANES: I am ready to shed my blood for him. It
could not be shed for a better cause. To die for
one's king is a noble sacrifice. Such a death is
to be envied.
PHENICIUS: Most generous vassal! Let me embrace you.
Your words bring tears to my eyes; I feel my hopes
revive, and see a ray of the favor of the gods in
your courage.

With virtue as my guide;
with reason at my side;
with glory in my breast,
undaunted I outride
the storms of treachery.

My virtue makes me true;
my reason makes me strong,
my glory is a shield
against my second death
on leaving earthly life. [Exits]
MITHRANES: An Alcestes could not have been born in a hovel; his face, his every movement, every word spoken by him, would have been enough to reveal his gentle blood even when he was dressed in humble garb.

A noble soul that's born to rule, emits some ray or shows some sign indicative of majesty despite its woodland rearing.

Just so, the flame that is contained at no time fully hides its light.

Just so, when narrowly confined, great rivers overflow their banks. [Exits]

Scene 7

A magnificent setting, with a throne on one side and benches in front of it for the nobility of the kingdom. In the background a view of the great port of Seleucia with its pier. Lighted ships to solemnize the choosing of a new king

CLEONICE, preceded by the nobility of the kingdom, followed by PHENICIUS and OLINTHUS, guards and people

CHORUS: May all the gods and goddesses be present when the time arrives revealing who is our new king.

FIRST CHORUS: Let Mars descend without his sword, let Love without blindfold appear.

SECOND CHORUS: Let Hymen come with torch in hand as well as Peace with olive branch.

FIRST CHORUS: And let Almighty Jove come down accompanied by Chance and Fate.

SECOND CHORUS: But let us hope that on these shores his thunderbolts will not be brought.

CHORUS: May all the gods and goddesses be present when the time arrives revealing who is our new king.
While the chorus is being sung, Cleonice, attended by Phenicius, takes her seat on the throne.

OLINTHUS: From your lips, oh queen, all Syria waits to hear the name of its ruler. In respectful silence everyone looks forward to this great moment.

PHENICIUS: (I don't know what to do!)

CLEONICE: You have raised me to the throne; I am grateful to you for your devotion. But the burden of responsibility you have attached to the privilege is very great. In the presence of so many men equal in merit and birthright, who would not remain uncertain as to whom to favor? Full of doubt and indecision, I reject and choose now one, now another, and, in the course of my deliberations, change my mind many times. At the very moment that I have come to choose, I am still uncertain.

PHENICIUS: In that case, oh queen! you should take more time to think it over.

OLINTHUS: What do you mean?

PHENICIUS: Be silent. [Then to Cleonice] Syria is not so inconsiderate of you. We all realize the difficulty you face.

OLINTHUS: Is the space of three months too short a time to act? In this way, Cleonice, you can always promise and never decide.

PHENICIUS: Rash young man! What has made you so bold?

OLINTHUS: My zeal, justice, the danger to which she is exposed. If Syria is going to be disappointed today, there is no telling what limits its intolerance will reach.

PHENICIUS: It might perhaps repent of its undisciplined behavior. Those who sit on the throne need not submit to laws. If old age has diminished my strength, it has not deprived me of courage. I shall give my last drop of blood for the queen's freedom—

CLEONICE: Please, Phenicius, I beg you not to stir up new quarrels. Of what good is it to delay? I should always be uncertain. Hear me, I shall choose—

PHENICIUS: You must not. (We must risk revealing the secret.)

CLEONICE: [Seeing Mithranes approach] What news is Mithranes bringing in such a hurry?
MITHRANES: Alcestes arrived in a small boat a little while ago.
CLEONICE: (Heavens!)
PHENICIUS: (I feel relieved.)
CLEONICE: Where is he?
MITHRANES: [Pointing in the direction of the port] He is on his way here.
CLEONICE: [She stands and all stand with her] Phenicius, Olinthus, (I am at a loss as to what to do) go and embrace our approaching friend (I had almost forgotten that I am a queen). [She sits down again. Phenicius and Mithranes go to meet Alcestes, who has come to shore in a small boat, and they embrace him]
OLINTHUS: (What an inopportune arrival!)
CLEONICE: (My beloved is here. [Going toward Alcestes, who is drawing near] Oh my heart, how you throb! You recognize the chains that bind you.)
ALCESTES: Fate at last has granted me the pleasure, long yearned for, of being at your feet, oh queen! At last heaven allows me to bring you with my own lips the tribute of my faithfulness. I should be most happy if, amid the cares of your rule, my tribute is deemed worthy of your royal glance.
CLEONICE: Whether my status be that of a private citizen or a sovereign, you will find me to be the same Cleonice. You have at last arrived after being so long expected, yearned for, and even lamented as dead. Oh Alcestes, how glad I am that you have come! I have grieved and wept for you so much.
PHENICIUS: (I begin to hope again!)
CLEONICE: But what misfortune can have taken you away from us for so long?
OLINTHUS: (This is unbearable!)
ALCESTES: You already know about my departure with the king, your father —
OLINTHUS: We know, Alcestes, about the battle, the storms, his death, and the events that followed —
CLEONICE: I am interested to know the rest. Go on.
OLINTHUS: (How distressing!)
ALCESTES: After Alexander fell, we were all demoralized. Enemy squadrons had leapt aboard our ships; we who
were vanquished suffered terrible slaughter. Death took on a thousand different forms. Some died by drowning, some died transfixed, and as many in the water as by the sword. I, an unfortunate survivor amid so much destruction, cursing the day I was born, exposed to a thousand shafts, fought for a long time on the prow of the shattered ship until, at last, bleeding from a thousand wounds, I lost consciousness and collapsed, weakened by the loss of blood.

CLEONICE: (I am moved to pity!)
ALCESTES: I do not recall how long after that I drifted in the boat at the mercy of the waves. On opening my eyes, I no longer saw the damaged ship but instead found myself lying on a roughhewn bed and under a rustic roof. The walls were covered with fish traps and nets, and bending over me was a compassionate, white-haired fisherman.

CLEONICE: What shores had you reached?
ALCESTES: Crete, and the fisherman was a Cretan. He had found me half dead on the beach and, moved to pity, had carried me to his home. He quickly applied dittany to my wounds. It was he who, after the long period of my recovery, provided a small boat for my return.

PHENICIUS: What strange happenings!
OLINTHUS: He has finished his story at last. I think it is time—
CLEONICE: I know what you are going to say, Olinthus. I shall choose my spouse; let everyone be seated and listen to me.

[Phenicius, Olinthus, and the other nobles sit down]
ALCESTES: (I have returned just in time for the occasion.) [In attempting to sit down, Alcestes is prevented by Olinthus]
OLINTHUS: Stop, there! Whatever are you doing?
ALCESTES: I am obeying the royal bidding.
OLINTHUS: What does this mean? Is Syria going to see a lowly shepherd seated next to me?
ALCESTES: Syria has already made a distinction between Alcestes and the shepherd. Alcestes put aside his former self when he changed from a shepherd into a warrior.
OLINTHUS: Nevertheless, plebian blood still flows through his veins.
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ALCESTES: In my veins everything has been entirely renewed: I changed all when I shed my blood for the defense of Syria.

OLINTHUS: But which of your ancestors has prepared the way for you to aspire so high?

ALCESTES: My courage, my right hand, and my sword.

OLINTHUS: So then —

PHENICIUS: You be silent once and for all.

OLINTHUS: We should at least be informed as to the nobility of his ancestors.

PHENICIUS: It ends in you while beginning with him.

CLEONICE: Enough; at my behest, let Alcestes be ennobled.

OLINTHUS: In this place, the right to be seated is given only to those of the highest rank.

CLEONICE: Well, then, let Alcestes be seated as commander-in-chief and keeper of the royal seal. Is that enough for you, Olinthus?

[Alcestes sits down and Olinthus gets up]

OLINTHUS: That is too much. Give yourself to him, too. Everyone knows what you are aiming at.

PHENICIUS: Rash young man! Is this the way you answer? My queen, leave in my hands the responsibility of punishing the madcap.

CLEONICE: In virtue of his merits as well as his youthful inexperience, I shall pardon everything. But let him hold his peace henceforth.

PHENICIUS: [To Olinthus] Sit down and control your violent temper by at least holding your tongue. Do you hear me?

OLINTHUS: I shall obey. (I am fuming with rage.) [He sits down again]

CLEONICE: I have already chosen in my heart, but before I reveal my thought, I should like another assurance from you. I want everyone to swear to accept the rule of the new king whether he be from Syria, a foreigner, or whether his blood be illustrious or obscure.

OLINTHUS: (How can I be silent!)

PHENICIUS: On my word of honor, I swear.

CLEONICE: It is your turn, Olinthus.

PHENICIUS: Aren't you speaking?

OLINTHUS: Allow me to keep silent.

CLEONICE: Perhaps you wish to refuse.
OLINTHUS: I have good reason to do so, nor am I the only one opposed to swearing. There are others—

CLEONICE: Very well, then: let someone else rule on the throne. [She stands and the others do likewise] I do not want the burden of a servile sovereignty.

PHENICIUS: Oh, queen! Pay no attention to the wrangling of a small minority while in the presence of so many vassals who show respect for you.

CLEONICE: In my presence I am not going to tolerate the coldness of a few. [She descends from the dais] The grand council is free to decide the matter. I must either be allowed to choose without restriction or I shall vacate the throne I was asked to occupy. Then at least I can dispose of my heart as a private citizen; then, at least, I can turn my affections where my heart inclines me, and imagine that I am a queen.

If not allowed to act in ways I please, if I'm to be a servant on the throne, no longer do I wish to wear a crown.

Whoever is a servant while he rules discovers that his servitude is real and that his rule is nothing but a sham.

[Cleonice leaves, followed by Mithranes, nobles, guards, and the people]

Scene 9

PHENICIUS, OLINTHUS, ALCESTES

PHENICIUS: Must I always be blushing at your excesses? Won't the counsel and example of the wise ever make you mind your ways?

OLINTHUS: Father, you are doing me an injustice. You could raise me to the throne but instead you act against me.

PHENICIUS: Truthfully, in you Syria would have a worthy king — turbulent, rash, violent, excitable —

OLINTHUS: In contrast, your dear Alcestes would be peaceful, humble, generous, prudent — Ah! Who can teach me how to win the affection of a father!

PHENICIUS: Do you want to be deserving of it? Imitate Alcestes.
The zealous peasant when he sees
a sapling growing sturdily,
takes pains in order that it thrive.
But when he sees it is a mass
composed of twigs and useless leaves
bereft of any fruit and bloom,
he turns his steps away from it. [Exits]

Scene 10

OLINTHUS and ALCESTES

OLINTHUS: My father wishes me to learn virtue from you.
Very well, then, Alcestes, begin to teach me. May
heaven make my mind eager and apt so as not to make
such a great teacher blush.
ALCESTES: Sir, I can suffer these biting words only from
you. Without fear of harm the son of Phenicius can
say what he wills.
OLINTHUS: It is true that I have spoken indiscreetly to
my king. Pardon me, sir, if in you I offend the
majesty of the throne.
ALCESTES: Olinthus, farewell! I do not want my patience
to be tried further. You speak to me in jest, you
insult and deride me and rely too much on my respect
for you.

The pilot will make jests at times
about the breeze that starts to stir,
but it may turn into a storm
the sight of which makes him grow pale.
A cloudlet causes small concern
when noticed by the wanderer,
yet when he's least prepared for it
the sky is filled with thunderclaps.

[Exits]

Scene 11

OLINTHUS alone

OLINTHUS: Those who are unaware of this man's humble
origin might think from his words that he belonged
to the progeny of Pelops and Alcides, yet despite
his rustic birth, Alcestes is a great rival of Olinthus.

What worth to me is nobleness of birth if ups and downs of fickle Fate have made a rustic swain contender for the throne? Blind deity, your gifts mean naught to me when you bestow such favors on his caste.  

[Exits]

Scene 12

An interior garden in the royal palace

CLEONICE, BARSENE, then PHENICIUS

CLEONICE: So, because I adore him, today everyone is an enemy of Alcestes? It is precisely this opposition that is making my love grow stronger.

BARSENE: Perhaps at this moment the council has decided in your favor. It is good to know in advance —

CLEONICE: I know too well the power of envy. Perhaps by this time my rule will have been over. But not on this account will the malice of others make me wretched. I consider the heart of Alcestes a big enough kingdom for me.

BARSENE: (Jealousy consumes me!)

CLEONICE: [To Phenicius as he comes on the stage] Has the council decided, Phenicius?

PHENICIUS: It has.

CLEONICE: I can guess what has happened. My reign has ended.

PHENICIUS: Cleonice, you ought to know Syria better. Your vassals have more respect and affection for you than you think. You are free to raise whomever you please to the throne whether he be a man of noble lineage or one of obscure ancestry. Everyone will worship him; they all swear to it.

CLEONICE: How can they have changed their minds so soon? PHENICIUS: You do not know how much devotion your subjects have for you. It has been amply demonstrated in the great assembly. Some have praised the beauty of your face, some your goodness. There have been some who offered their blood in your defense, and in the midst of this outburst of enthusiasm the name of Cleonice frequently rang out.
CLEONICE: (Unhappy love of mine!) Go, convey this message to the council. Tell it that my heart is not insensitive to these tokens of devotion and that I shall see to it that the kingdom will not regret the trust it has placed in me. Tell it that I am grateful.

PHENICIUS: (Now Alcestes shall be the true heir to the throne.) [He leaves]

BARSENE: You see how fate has granted your prayers. Behold your wishes completely fulfilled and all your suffering over.

CLEONICE: Oh heavens!

BARSENE: You sigh? I see no reason for it. At this moment you gain the man you love, and yet you are unable to bring calm to your sad and troubled eyes?

CLEONICE: Unfortunately, my dear Barsene, I know now that I have lost Alcestes.

BARSENE: What do you mean "lost"?

CLEONICE: Would you have my vassals be more generous than I? Is what I desire then to be the measure of another's merit? Heedless of the illustrious blood of so many, am I to place a young shepherd on the throne and make him the arbiter of the kingdom? How can I have such courage and such daring? It is unthinkable. Regard for my dignity has until now made it possible for me to overcome the envy of others. Now, however, it calls upon me to overcome myself.

BARSENE: What will Alcestes say?

CLEONICE: If Alcestes loves me, he will hold my fair name dear. He will be proud to see his Cleonice standing above the vulgar crowd of the other lovers.

BARSENE: I doubt that in his presence you will reason thus.

CLEONICE: I am going to avoid this temptation, my friend. Otherwise I do not know whether I would have the strength to conquer myself as I have said. My heart is much too accustomed to loving him. If I am to win out, I must no longer see his face.
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Scene 13

MITHRANES and the above, then ALCESTES

MITHRANES: Alcestes has asked to be admitted.
CLEONICE: Heavens, Barsene!
BARSENE: Now is the time for firmness.
CLEONICE: [To Mithranes] Go: I must not just now —
MITHRANES: He is approaching. [He leaves]
CLEONICE: (I hope I can resist.)

[Enter ALCESTES]

ALCESTES: At last I am again free to admire my beautiful
queen at close range. I can now tell you that I have never found peace while away from you. I can
tell you that you alone are the pleasing object of my thoughts, my love, my glory, and my life.
CLEONICE: I beg you not to address such terms to me.
ALCESTES: How can it be that the sincere expression of my love, which has pleased you at other times, now
disseases you? Good heavens! Can it be possible that I am in the presence of the Cleonice I used to know? Am I the one so long awaited, yearned for, and lamented?
CLEONICE: (How agonizing!)
ALCESTES: I understand, I understand. My absence for a few months has caused your love to cool.
CLEONICE: Would to heaven it were so!
ALCESTES: "Would to heaven!" What guilt or fault have you found in me? If I have offended you, may fate take away whatever your bountiful hand has given me. May your beautiful eyes, arbiters of my heart and life, be always angry at me. Look upon me. Speak.
CLEONICE: (Ah, I can't resist.) Farewell! [Exits]

Scene 14

ALCESTES and BARSENE

ALCESTES: Gods above! What can have happened? Her puzzling words, her pallor, her sighs make me tremble. Barsene, what is the reason for this sudden change? Does it stem from envy of someone? Is it due to her own inconstancy? Is it the injustice of the stars? Is it my fault?
BARSENE: Your distraction touches me. Perhaps you would be happier with another love?

ALCESTES: Ah, may I die before I love another. I intend to love her even at the price of never finding peace of mind. I would prefer to suffer for my Cleonice than be made happy by a thousand beauties.

*Her noble semblance first aroused my love,*
*a love that will endure until I die.*

*Her charm and beauty are superior to all the other women in the world.*

[Exits]

Scene 15

BARSENE alone

BARSENE: Unhappy heart of mine! what great disenchantment are you waiting for? In vain do you hope to win the love of Alcestes. And yet who knows? Patience, time, perhaps will conquer him. The natural hardness of rocks is weakened by the steady fall of a small trickle. The sturdy oak is felled by the steady blows of the axe. Yet I may be mistaken. I fear that in being true to his first love, my idol is more resistent than rock or plant.

*Despite all efforts made to break the chains that bind my captive heart,*
*you hold me back, alluring hope.*
*You were the first one to be born and you will be the last to die.*

*You offer no relief from pain but rather serve as nourishment to my naive and love-sick brain.*
ACT II

Scene 1
An arcade
ALCESTES and OLINTHUS

ALCESTES: Why are you blocking my entrance? I must appear before her royal highness. [Moving forward]
OLINTHUS: It is not allowed; the queen forbids it. Olinthus can vouch for it.
ALCESTES: I shall wait until I am permitted to appear before her.
OLINTHUS: My words should be sufficiently clear to you. You must never again appear before Cleonice. She will not admit you to the royal chamber, nor does she want to see you any more. Do you understand now?
ALCESTES: She does not want to see me? Heavens! This wrings my heart!
OLINTHUS: I see, Alcestes, that her injunction terrifies you.
ALCESTES: No, if you will pardon me, Olinthus, I do not believe you. My queen cannot be so unjust toward me. There is no reason why she should condemn a faithful lover to so much suffering. You have either allowed yourself to be deceived or are deceiving me.
OLINTHUS: Do you presume to doubt my word?
ALCESTES: Whether I do so or not, I shall learn it directly from her. [As he starts to enter the chamber he comes face to face with Mithranes]
OLINTHUS: Stop!

Scene 2
MITHRANES and the above

MITHRANES: Alcestes, where are you going?
ALCESTES: Do not detain me. I am going to see Cleonice.
MITHRANES: My friend, to you admittance to her royal presence is forbidden.
ALCESTES: Can this be true?
MITHRANES: Unfortunately, it is.
ALCESTES: Please! I beg you, Mithranes, intercede for me. Go back to her; tell her I shall not be able to withstand the shock; that someone is deceiving her; that I have done no wrong and that, if she believes me guilty, I shall be able to clear myself in her presence.

MITHRANES: I cannot obey you. The queen has ordered us not to talk about you. Even the mere mention of the name Alcestes is considered an offense.

ALCESTES: But what can the reason be?

MITHRANES: She has not disclosed it to me.

ALCESTES: Ah, I have been betrayed. An infamous calumny has made me appear guilty to her. But let the traitor tremble, whoever he may be. He will not remain hidden from my resentment for long. I am so desperate that I should not hesitate to pierce his heart even on the altar.

OLINTHUS: These threats are useless, Alcestes.

ALCESTES: Alas! my friends, pardon the ravings of a troubled heart. In this sad state I am deserving of compassion and I ask it of you. May you be moved to see Alcestes forced to confide his misfortunes to you.

The man who shows no sympathy for a poor wretch devoid of blame about to lose his lady-love, displays excessive cruelty.

If I am guilty may the gods give me the death that I deserve, but let them not keep me apart from the dear one who is for me the soul I harbor in my breast. [Exits]

Scene 3

OLINTHUS and MITHRANES

OLINTHUS: Alcestes' fall will at last, Mithranes, assure me of the scepter. I hopefully anticipate the pleasure of possessing it.

MITHRANES: Those who are wise should not trust too much in hope. When an expected benefit does not come, it afflicts one much like something that has been lost.
Besides, you are deluding yourself if you expect to become happy in this way. If the attainment of the throne could curb your headstrong passions, reigning would doubtless bring happiness; then on wearing the royal mantle there would be nothing more to desire. But another desire is likely to sprout from the one that has already been satisfied and this new objective will be pursued just as vigorously. If just now you are unable to find peace of mind as a private citizen, you will also be unhappy as a ruler.

OLINTHUS: Don't you consider the pleasure of ruling happiness?

MITHRANES: As soon as a benefit is acquired, its meaning diminishes. Every hoped-for pleasure looms greater than the one obtained. You do not appear to understand how burdensome a crown is and how much effort the art of ruling requires.

OLINTHUS: Ruling is in itself training on how to rule.

MITHRANES: That is true; one always learns by erring. The slightest mistake is magnified when committed by a king.

OLINTHUS: This kind of thinking, Mithranes, is beyond my comprehension. I have been taught to wield the sword and spear. The probing of human passions is not for me. To understand them fully requires maturity and attendance at the temples of Egypt and the Porches of Athens.

MITHRANES: There is really no need to learn the wisdom of Egypt and Athens in order to remain faithful. Have you not loved Barsene until now?

OLINTHUS: I still love her.

MITHRANES: And since you love her, will you permit yourself to lose her merely for the pleasure of gaining a throne?

OLINTHUS: Can you compare the loss of a loved one to the gain of a kingdom?

MITHRANES: This is the kind of test that distinguishes the faithful lover from others.

OLINTHUS: There is no such thing as fidelity in love. Lovers everywhere boast of it but do not practice it.

*The constancy existing between lovers can be compared with the Arabian Phoenix. Nearly all maintain that it exists but no one can locate its whereabouts.*
In case you know where it is to be found, where it dies, and where its second birth, apprize me of it and I promise you forever to be constant in my love.

[Exits]

Scene 4

MITHRANES, then CLEONICE and BARSENE

MITHRANES: The wind of fortune, variable as it blows, has been sufficient to raise high hopes in that frivolous man. Olinthus wants the royal scepter and pictures himself on the throne. When in the grip of human passions, how weak are human minds!

[Enter CLEONICE and BARSENE]

CLEONICE: Page! I wish to write a letter. Leave me, Mithranes.

MITHRANES: I shall obey your order. [He starts to leave]

CLEONICE: Is it true, Mithranes, that Alcestes does not want to see me again?

MITHRANES: On the contrary, queen, he wants to see you very much, but the unhappy man—

CLEONICE: Leave me, that is enough. [To Mithranes, who starts again to leave] What has he told you?

MITHRANES: He vows that he is true to you, that someone is deceiving you, that one with such a noble heart cannot be thought as tyrannous. He hopes you will be mollified when, victim of unhappy love, you see him dying at your feet. [Exits]

Scene 5

CLEONICE and BARSENE

BARSENE: Here, Cleonice, is the sheet of letter paper. Make known to Alcestes what is on your mind.

CLEONICE: Alas! In doing this I am going to be too cruel to him as well as too cruel to my own person. Nevertheless, I wish to control myself and intend to remove him from my sight. My kingdom expects it,
honor advises it, heaven wills it. This I shall do. But I should at least like him to learn it from my own lips. It is wrong to announce this cruel piece of news by means of a letter. My friend, no other solace remains for two faithful lovers who are forced to separate than to mutually lament, to listen mutually to the final expressions of tenderness of a love which has lasted for so long, and, while saying our last farewell, to weep together.

Barsene: Do you call this solace? It is clear that you are lured by the desire of seeing Alcestes. You must not expose yourself again to such a risk. You have done enough by resisting once. You will lose the fruits of your first victory if you make a second attempt. I see you weaker than before and the enemy stronger. Your vassals trust in you. Your honor depends on your ability to overcome the dilemma that distresses you.

Cleonice: Tyrannical honor! Because of you must I forever be deprived of what I hold most dear? It is barbarous but I shall yield to it. We'll write. [She goes to the table to write]

Barsene: (Fortune, it seems, is smiling on me. I do not despair about Alcestes.)

Cleonice: [Writing] "Beloved Alcestes—"

Barsene: (I can hope to be happy if the high regard she has for her honor can for a few moments overcome the dictates of her heart.)

Cleonice: [Writing] "Fate does not wish us to be happy—"

Barsene: (My hopes are growing stronger. But, heavens! she has stopped writing and is covering her face with her hand. She has again fallen prey to her first affections.)

Cleonice: Poor Alcestes! [Speaking, after which she resumes writing]

Barsene: (I am afraid she will succumb. In her place I am not sure what I would do.)

Cleonice: [Writing] "May you live long, my love, but not for my sake." I have finished, Barsene.

Barsene: (At last I have reached port!) Heaven could not have destined a more noble soul than yours for the throne.

Cleonice: Here it is, and see to it that— [About to hand her the sheet]
Scene 6

PHENICIUS and the above

PHENICIUS: Have pity, Queen Cleonice!
CLEONICE: For whom?

PHENICIUS: For Alcestes. I have found him half-dead and almost beside himself from sorrow. The harsh order that he must not see you any more is a blow that has pierced his heart, deprived him of his reason, and made him want to die. He raves, he sighs, he pleads, he threatens, and in his anguish mentions only you. He constantly repeats your name. His sorrow would wring pity from a stone.

CLEONICE: Ah cruel Phenicius! From you my vacillating and insecure virtue expected some support and not incitement to fall. Why do you return to inflame cruelly the deep wound in my heart?

PHENICIUS: The fervor of my paternal love makes my outburst pardonable. Alcestes is my son, the son of my choice, the son for whom I have made great sacrifices, a flourishing plant nourished by my care and counsel, reared under the auspicious rays of your regal favor, hope of the kingdom, the hope and prop of my declining years.

BARSENE: (This fervor comes at the wrong time.)

PHENICIUS: Would you have such a splendid hope wither away in a moment? My queen, on account of my advanced age I do not feel sufficiently strong and vigorous to survive the blow another day.

CLEONICE: What am I to do? What does Alcestes want? What consolation does he ask of me to relieve his suffering?

PHENICIUS: To see you once more and then to die.

CLEONICE: Oh, God!

PHENICIUS: I see that you are moved. Have pity on him, have pity on me. These gray hairs, my long years of service, my unblemished loyalty, are such that I deserve consideration.

CLEONICE: It is no longer possible to resist. Tell him to come. [She tears up the sheet and gets up]

BARSENE: (My hopes have died again.)

PHENICIUS: (She only needs to see Alcestes and Alcestes will have won.)

[As he starts to leave he meets Olinthus]
Act II

Scene 7

OLINTHUS and the above

OLINTHUS: Father, queen, Alcestes is no longer in Seleucia. On my advice he has already departed.
CLEONICE: How so?
PHENICIUS: Why?
OLINTHUS: He persisted in wanting to see you at all costs, but, in your name, I ordered him to leave.
CLEONICE: When did you receive this order from me?
Heavens! Guards! [Some guards come on the stage]
I want Alcestes to be sought, overtaken, and brought back to us. [The guards leave]
PHENICIUS: Alas for me!
CLEONICE: [To Olinthus] If the search should prove in vain, beware, you will pay the penalty for your recklessness.
OLINTHUS: I thought I was being of service to you by removing a dangerous obstacle to your decorum.
CLEONICE: And who has made you such a zealous guardian of my decorum? Could you ever have foreseen this misfortune, Phenicius? Everyone is conspiring to do me harm.

I have been born with anguish in my breast,
and from my childhood days relentlessly cruel fortune has pursued me until now.

What firm resolve I've had has disappeared.

My love has made a weakling out of me.
but yet I feel no pity for my shame.

[Exits]

Scene 8

PHENICIUS, OLINTHUS, and BARCENE

OLINTHUS: Sir, I have never seen a more changeable temperament than that of Cleonice. She hates and loves at the same time. Now she asks to see Alcestes, now she rejects him, and then blames others for her insensate actions.

PHENICIUS: Is it thus, rash youth, that you respect your
sovereign? Learn at least how to be silent once and for all. Alas! I despair of making you mend your ways.

BARSENE: Wisdom increases with the years, but Olinthus is still too young and inexperienced.

PHENICIUS: Barsene, I too was once young, and my hair, now gray and sparse, was once thick and blond. Then, oh happy age! carefree youths lent a less disdainful ear to the advice of the wise. The world is degenerating and growing worse as it grows older.

[Exits]

Scene 9

OLINTHUS and BARSENE

OLINTHUS: In order to live in conformity with the strange austerity of our elders, must we begin to act like heroes from the time we are babes in arms? Barsene, our age calls for other thoughts. Tell me whether Olinthus is still living in your heart.

BARSENE: You are trying to poke fun at me, sir. You have exchanged the chains with which I had bound you for more attractive bonds. Barsene has taken second place to the queen.

* I know you ask me for my love in sport,
* but getting rid of one who is untrue
* costs little grief and hardly any tears.

To someone else unknown to you
I have till now been faithful in my love.
For him my amorous flame will always burn.

[Exits]

Scene 10

OLINTHUS

OLINTHUS: The scorn of Barsene, the wrath of Cleonice, what has happened to Alcestes, and the severe reproaches of my father might cause others to be dismayed, but not by this will Olinthus be deterred. Great gains require great courage, hence one must not fear danger nor shirk toil. After all, Fortune favors the bold.
Let not the man who pales and fears on merely looking at the sea trust to tempestuous waters his reckless ship. Nor should one venture forth in battle who trembles when the bugles sound or weapons flash. [Exits]

Scene 11
A room with chairs
CLEONICE and MITHRANES

CLEONICE: (The critical moment of seeing Alcestes for the last time has come, Cleonice. Will you yourself have the courage to announce to him your cruel decision that he abandon and forget you? How much better it would have been not to have prevented his departure!)

MITHRANES: Queen, Alcestes is here. He impatiently waits to see you after having come back to life in the wake of so many vicissitudes.

CLEONICE: (My heart throbs!)

MITHRANES: Phenicius has talked with him. He reassured him by telling him how much he means to you, and at that moment he resembled a flower which, shriveled by frost, is revived by the rays of the sun. The wrinkles disappeared from his forehead, his pale face took on its natural color, he appeared changed. He is full of hope, and because of the sudden pleasure he has received, happiness and love shine in his face.

CLEONICE: (And must I lose him then?) Go, Mithranes, tell him to come. I shall be waiting for him in this chamber.

MITHRANES: Fortunate Alcestes! [He leaves]

CLEONICE: Magnanimous thoughts of decorum and sovereignty, where have you gone? What has put you to flight? In self-defense against the deep emotions that I feel, I look for you in my heart and do not find you. This is a crucial moment for me. How can I trust you if, frightened by the mere name of my idol, you desert me? I entreat you to come back
to me; cluster around my heart so that I can withstand the last assault of love.

Scene 12
ALCESTES and the above

ALCESTES: Adored queen! I no longer believe that anyone can die of sorrow. It is a foolish mistake to say that suffering hastens the coming of the last fatal hours of life. If that were true, Alcestes would not be alive. If, therefore, my affliction has produced this reward, what I have suffered is more than compensated.

CLEONICE: (Cruel expressions of tenderness!)
ALCESTES: If I mean as much to you as you to me, if I can expect anything from you, pray tell me what wrong I have done to deserve such harsh treatment from you.

CLEONICE: You shall know all, Alcestes. Be seated and listen.
ALCESTES: I shall do your royal bidding.
CLEONICE: (I feel numb from fear.)
ALCESTES: (I feel consoled and hopeful.) [He sits]

CLEONICE: Alcestes, do you really love your queen, or is what attracts you the illustriousness of her birth, the honor of her ancestors, and her regal fortune?

ALCESTES: Can you believe Alcestes to be guilty of baseness, or do you wish with your insinuations to reproach me for my rustic rearing? Back in the woods where I was born and brought up, I have either left such thoughts behind or have never had them. In Cleonice I adore a beauty that is not subject to changes of fortune and time. I love her heart, I love her beautiful soul, which, adorned by itself and its virtues, sheds a greater light on the scepter and crown with its merits than it derives from them.

CLEONICE: Can I then expect a magnanimous effort from such a worthy lover?
ALCESTES: I shall faithfully obey whatever you demand.
CLEONICE: You promise a great deal.
ALCESTES: I shall comply with all you command. There is
no danger that will not be easy to overcome for your sake. I shall go forth unafraid to challenge the waves. If you demand it I shall face my foes unarmored.

CLEONICE: I am asking for much more than that. You must leave me.

ALCESTES: Leave you? Good heavens! What are you saying?

CLEONICE: Yes, leave me forever, and live without me under other skies.

ALCESTES: Who imposes such a barbarous command?

CLEONICE: My decorum, the desire of my vassals, justice, duty, my good repute, that virtue in me that has so pleased you, that virtue which, with its merits, confers a greater light upon the royal crown than it receives.

ALCESTES: Do you really insist that I abandon you?

CLEONICE: Ah, you do not know—

ALCESTES: I know you do not love me, I know it too well. [He gets up] Soothe your sense of dignity, satisfy your vassals, submit to your virtue, bear to the throne the charge of faithlessness. In my woodland dwelling I shall bear in my heart the vivid memory of the love you have betrayed if it be that my sorrow will leave me alive. [Starting to leave]

CLEONICE: Please do not leave yet.

ALCESTES: I am too concerned about your decorum. By remaining any longer, a lowly shepherd would bring dishonor to your royal lineage.

CLEONICE: You are scoffing at me, ungrateful Alcestes.

ALCESTES: Ungrateful, indeed! I abandon you! I sacrifice to pomp faith, vows, promises, love! Ah, barbarous, inhuman, and perjured woman!

CLEONICE: From your lips I am willing to suffer all. If you have more to say do not hesitate. But when you are through insulting me at least allow me to speak briefly.

ALCESTES: Ingrate! what can you say in your defense? Do you intend perhaps to cover up the guilt of your outrageous faithlessness?

CLEONICE: Do not condemn me yet. Remain seated and listen.

ALCESTES: (Heavens! how confident she is of her own power!) [He sits down again]

CLEONICE: If you recall, Alcestes, that for ten whole
years you have been the sweetest thought of all my thoughts, you would realize how cruel my suffering will be on having to be separated from you. But since, under pressure from her people, Cleonice is obliged to choose a king, she can no longer take counsel with her heart; she must, alas! make a sacrifice of all her affections for the sake of propriety and the peace of others.

ALCESTES: Has not the Council granted you freedom of choice?

CLEONICE: That is true. I could abuse that freedom and lead you to the throne. But do you believe that so many so unjustly cast aside would suffer the slight done to them? Secret plots, open insults, and internal disorders would agitate my kingdom, Alcestes, and myself. My weakness, your lowly birth, would supply envy with weapons. Throughout Asia our names would be the subject of scorn on thousands upon thousands of lips. My dear Alcestes, let the maligners tell lies, but to others let our virtue serve as an example. Let the onlooking world regard with indulgence and admiration this noble act. Let the sad lot of two tender lovers, who of their own volition are ready to untie the knots of such a just and longlasting love, bring tears to many.

ALCESTES: Why, cruel gods! have you made me a shepherd?

CLEONICE: Go. Let us yield to fate. May you live happily away from me. Mitigate your sorrow. You need have little to regret about my unfaithfulness to you, my dear one. It is from this moment on that I begin to die. The tears that I am shedding now are perhaps the last. Farewell! Call me no more faithless and perjured.

ALCESTES: Forgive me, noble soul, I pray you, forgive me. My queen, reign, live on, keep your decorum unblemished. [He gets up and kneels] I am ashamed of my emotional outburst. It makes me happy to learn virtue and perseverance from lips so dear.

CLEONICE: Rise and leave if it is true that you love my virtue.

ALCESTES: Upon the hand that no longer will be mine, first permit me to place a kiss and then I'll leave you.

THE TWO IN UNISON: Farewell!

ALCESTES: I cannot keep from shedding tears,
my dear, on bidding you goodbye,
but yet not all are out of grief.
Amazement, hope, repentance, love
and other feelings can be found
together clustered round my heart. [Exits]

Scene 13
CLEONICE, then BARSENE and PHENICIUS

CLEONICE: You should at last be satisfied, my mad ambitious thoughts. Behold me abandoned, inconsolable. What ill-disposed deity has sown among us mortals this thirst for honor? Of what good is this tyrannical decorum if it is at the price of so much anguish, a living death?

BARSENE: Cleonice, is it true that you have been able to triumph over your own affections even in the presence of the man you love?

PHENICIUS: Is it then true, oh queen! that your heart has been so cruel against yourself, against Alcestes?

CLEONICE: It is true. It is true.

PHENICIUS: I did not think you capable of so much cruelty.

BARSENE: I expected no less firmness from you.

PHENICIUS: Whoever is inclined to be compassionate will detest this inhuman action.

BARSENE: It is a sublime action that those who feel the spur of virtue will admire.

PHENICIUS: Oh, how much you have lost as the result of your rigor!

BARSENE: Oh how much honor you have gained!

PHENICIUS: Please revoke —

BARSENE: No, resist —

CLEONICE: Be silent, I beg you. Why afflict me further? Whatever do you want?

PHENICIUS: I should like to show you the fallacy of your decision.

BARSENE: And I, to help you triumph in your resolve.

CLEONICE: Both of you, meanwhile, are killing me. In my mind I detest both the suffering and the remedy, and those who are trying to help me are hastening my death.
A flame which is about to die
despite its fitful flickering
collapses speedily.

You know I cannot be consoled.
Then why upset me, why attempt
to magnify my grief?  

[Exits]

Scene 14

PHENICIUS and BARSENE

PHENICIUS: I am unable to understand your excessive zeal. You are allowing yourself to be overly concerned about Cleonice's decorum. I cannot imagine such stern principles in the heart of a young woman. Beneath these fallacious ideas of honor you must be hiding another motive in your breast. But do I see you blushing and keeping silent? Speak. Can it be that you are a rival of Cleonice? There have been times when I have seen you furtively turn your eyes towards Alcestes and sigh. But you cannot be so ungrateful. Your queen might justifiably complain of you.

BARSENE: If I love him, Phenicius, is it my fault?

To be enslaved by love would be a joy instead of torment were it possible for one's captive heart to choose its chains.

But when one falls in love, he thinks he loves
and yet some doubt remains that it is real.
It's only then that he becomes aware
that he's unable to throw off his yoke.

[Exits]

Scene 15

PHENICIUS alone

PHENICIUS: What will you do, Phenicius? Everything is opposed to your noble desire. Merciful gods, defenders of the rights of kings, you see what is in
my heart. I do not wish a scepter for myself. This selfishness would make me unworthy of your assistance. I am only asking for help and protection for a suffering prince. Who knows! Perhaps a sunlit day will follow a dark dawn.

At times the desperate voyager about to drown
in stormy waters under threatening black skies,
has had the luck of reaching shore alive,
and now and then he, in a happy mood,
expresses it by visiting the beach,
and points out to his friends who happen there
the mortal danger that he once passed through.

ACT III

Scene 1

The portico of the royal palace facing the seashore,
with a boat and sailors ready for the departure of ALCESTES

OLINTHUS and then ALCESTES and PHENICIUS

OLINTHUS: At last I shall be without a rival. At last I shall see Alcestes leave this shore. Nevertheless, his delayed departure worries me. Can Cleone have repented? I should not like—But no, perhaps the last farewells of his friends are the cause of it.

[Enter ALCESTES and PHENICIUS]

ALCESTES: [To Phenicius on leaving] Sir, it is useless to try to detain me further.

OLINTHUS: The sailors and the ship are ready, the wind is favorable, and the sea is calm.

PHENICIUS: [To Olinthus] Importunate youth, be silent.
[Then to Alcestes] At least postpone your leaving for a little while. I am not asking for it in vain. Remain. You will not repent of my advice. Till now, you know I've been a friend and father to you.
OLINTHUS: (To think that my father should be trying to prevent this fellow from leaving!)

ALCESTES: Ah, but the orders of my queen run counter to your advice.

OLINTHUS: Alcestes, in my opinion, is more than right.

PHENICIUS: You have decided to abandon me? You want to leave? Don't you realize what you are doing to Phenicius? I had expected you to be more grateful in view of the great attachment I have shown for you.

ALCESTES: Oh, dear father, for so I can call you thanks to your loving care, do not call me an ingrate. In doing so you pierce my heart. I too realize that you should not have expected such a poor compensation for all your efforts. I too had hoped that on growing up I might some day bring to your eyes tears of joy, not sorrow. But who can oppose the will of the stars? Allow me to leave, and perhaps in so doing I shall be less ungrateful. At times the companionship of unhappy men adds to their misfortunes. At least, since I am so hateful to the gods, let them affect only me. Let all the wrath of Fortune be mine and none be left to harm you.

PHENICIUS: Son, do not speak thus. You do not know the value of your life, while mine, if it cannot be useful to you, is a worthless burden to me.

ALCESTES: You are weeping, sir. Alcestes does not deserve your tears. I must not prolong your sorrow.

OLINTHUS: (The gods be praised!)

ALCESTES: Friends, I commend my afflicted queen to you. She will need your support in this crisis. Who knows how much her virtue costs her, how her poor heart must be upset! To find herself alone, to despair of seeing me, to recall memories, how we passed the time, the places—Oh God! Console her, friends. Goodbye!

[As he leaves he encounters Cleonice]

Scene 2

CLEONICE and the above

CLEONICE: Do not leave, Alcestes.

ALCESTES: Heavens!
OLINTHUS: (Another obstacle to his departure has appeared.)

ALCESTES: Why, oh queen! are you attempting to revive our grief?

CLEONICE: Phenicius, Olinthus, leave me alone with Alcestes.

OLINTHUS: I consider it my duty to stay with my friend.

CLEONICE: You can return for the last goodbye.

OLINTHUS: I shall return (but that he will leave, that I do not believe).

[Exits]

PHENICIUS: You are arriving opportune, Cleonice. It is not by chance that heaven has prolonged his stay; there is still time for you to make him happy.

You must admit that you are cruel if you deprive him of your love.
You must admit you live in him just as, in turn, he lives in you.
You should recall that tender flame which used to be a source of joy.
You should recall the purity and trueness of his love.

[Exits]

Scene 3

CLEONICE and ALCESTES

CLEONICE: It is easier, Alcestes, to plan than to carry out undertakings. As long as you were present I believed it easy to achieve victory over myself, and under such circumstances it seemed to me that love should give way to the claims of decorum. But when you are absent from me my will weakens, and the claims of decorum yield to love.

ALCESTES: What do you mean to tell me by this?

CLEONICE: That I cannot live without you. If the rigors of fate, so baneful to me, do not permit me to enjoy both Alcestes and my kingdom, let my kingdom be forsaken so that I may not lose Alcestes.

ALCESTES: I do not understand.

CLEONICE: I must not remain on these shores. I shall come with you to breathe a happier air.

ALCESTES: You come with me! But where? It would be easy for me to comply with your desires, my love,
if I had inherited subjects and a throne from my ancestors. But the subjects and kingdom which cruel fate have given me as my heritage are a few flocks and a lowly hovel.

CLEONICE: In your poor dwelling I shall enjoy that peace that under a royal roof and away from you my heart does not enjoy. There I shall not have a guard who with his vigilance insures my rest. There jealous suspicion will not bring interrupted sleep to my calm nights. There the dining tables will not steam with rare foods contained in receptacles of shining gold, and the fruits picked from the trees with my own hands will not, sprinkled with some unknown poison, unexpectedly cause my death. I shall go from hill to mead but with Alcestes at my side. I shall roam through the forests, but Alcestes will be with me. The sun on setting and embellishing the west will always leave me with you and will find me with you when it returns.

ALCESTES: Beloved Cleonice, in these dreams of happiness, the tender effusion of a noble soul filled with love, oh how clearly one can see the beauty of your heart! But they are vain delusions resulting from a passionate desire.

CLEONICE: Vain delusions! Don't you believe me capable of giving up my kingdom?

ALCESTES: And are you capable of thinking that I will permit it? You should have hidden your virtue better and made me less attached to your decorum. I expose you to living in the woods! Great souls have not been made to be buried in languid idleness. I should be depriving Asia of the peace it expects from your actions and decisions in the midst of so many vicissitudes. Please, let us not forget the lesson we have learned from our tears and sorrow. You, my love, have been the one who has taught me to love you thus. Posterity will not forget the story of our ardent affection, but it will be conjoined with that of our virtue, and if we are not permitted to live happily together until our dying hours, at least our names will survive together.

CLEONICE: Oh, why isn't all Asia assembled here? In you it might find some excuse for the passion it condemns in Cleonice. I have wavered, but you, my dear, restore my virtue, and in your words that...
selfsame virtue seems more beautiful to me. Depart, but first note in me the effect of your for- titude. Alcestes, you will see how I follow your example. Come with me to the palace. From me you will learn the name of my new spouse. I want you to be present at the royal nuptials.

ALCESTES: You are expecting too much firmness from me.
CLEONICE: In mutually emulating one another, together we can resist.

ALCESTES: Alas! you do not know the cruel torment to which a true lover is subjected when he is forced to be jealous of the loved one to whom he is not allowed to aspire.

CLEONICE: I understand what suffering a jealous heart can undergo, and want to set your mind at ease. Have confidence in me, I beg.

You'll know much better who I am when we are forced to separate, and my inconstancy will then appear to you as proof of love. [Exits]

Scene 4

ALCESTES and then OLINTHUS

ALCESTES: The words of Cleonice puzzle me. She wants me to see her in the arms of another spouse, and then she says she is thinking of my peace of mind. This is tantamount to her wanting me to die before I leave. But I shall obey her. I am ready to suffer any affliction for her sake. I do not wish to question her command.

[Enter OLINTHUS]

OLINTHUS: At last you have been left alone. Now no one will further delay your departure. As a token of friendship, permit Olinthus to give you a last em- brace.

ALCESTES: The noble impulse that comes from your heart does honor to my departure, but this will not take place yet.

OLINTHUS: Why, and for what reason?

ALCESTES: It is because the queen demands it.
OLINTHUS: You change your mind from one moment to another.

ALCESTES: She has changed her order, therefore, I too change.

OLINTHUS: What can Cleonice want? Is it her intention to choose you as king?

ALCESTES: I do not expect that much.

OLINTHUS: If that is not so, then she must want you to be a witness at her nuptials with another man. It is a barbarous bidding that you should not obey.

ALCESTES: You are mistaken. I am willing to go to the limits of suffering. Whatever it may be, my lot will be borne gladly if it is for her sake.

No matter if it give me life
or whether it be death it gives,
the striking beauty of her face
arouses passion in my heart.

No one can genuinely love
unless submissive to the sway
of the fair lady that he woos.    [Exits]

Scene 5

OLINTHUS

OLINTHUS: I had foreseen it. In order to quiet the tumults, Cleonice has put on a false show of virtue. She is trying to secure the throne for herself and for her dear Alcestes. Because of the harsh curbs to which my father has subjected me, they pay little attention to me, and this gives reassurance to this presumptuous pair. Ah, if I could for once shake off my servile yoke, I should see to it that fortune takes on a different complexion, and be able to combine all my vengeance into one.

The captive lion inured to chains
appears no longer brave or fierce,
but if one day he breaks his bonds
his old ferocity returns.

And when he bellows his first roar
he sees turn deathly pale and quake
the man who had mistreated him.    [Exits]
Act III  105

Scene 6
The ground floor apartments of Phenicius inside the palace

PHENICIUS, then MITHRANES

PHENICIUS: Never before have I been more confused. Cleonice orders me to return to my rooms and wants me to wait here until it pleases her to ask for me. I have impatiently inquired about Alcestes and she has assured me that he has not yet left. What is the mystery that the queen has not revealed contrary to her wont. I am very much afraid that all my loving care has been wasted.

[Enter MITHRANES]

MITHRANES: Take heart, sir. The Cretan squadrons are near port. From the roof of the palace I have seen the sea grow white beneath a thousand prows.

PHENICIUS: Friend, this is the help we have been waiting for. We can at last reveal the identity of the real successor to the throne of Syria. Find Alcestes; bring him to me. Assemble as many of your followers as you can. My dear Mithranes, I now ask you for decisive proof of your loyalty.

MITHRANES: I shall go at once to execute what you direct. [Starts to leave]

PHENICIUS: But listen. Proceed cautiously, and do not reveal why these many squadrons —

Scene 7

OLINTHUS and the above

OLINTHUS: Father, I am the bearer of important news.
PHENICIUS: What can it be?
OLINTHUS: Cleonice has chosen her husband.
PHENICIUS: Is it Alcestes, perhaps?
OLINTHUS: He expected it, but in vain.
PHENICIUS: What a sudden and strange blow this is!
Scene 8

ALCESTES and two nonspeaking characters bearing a cloak and crown, and the above

ALCESTES: Permit me to pay homage to you. [Kneeling]

PHENICIUS: Alcestes, for heaven's sake! what are you doing, what do you wish?

ALCESTES: You are our king.


ALCESTES: Sir, through me our prudent Cleonice sends you this royal insignia. Wearing it, you are expected to go to the temple to celebrate the royal marriage. You cannot disappoint Alcestes, the bearer of the happy announcement. I know that the messenger, the giver, and the gift are dear to Phenicius.

PHENICIUS: Hasn't the queen taken into consideration the great disparity between her age and his?

ALCESTES: She has taken into consideration that she could not find greater wisdom and loyalty in any other man. Through this choice the magnanimous woman has accomplished many things: she rewards your merits, she gives the lie to maligners, she makes provision for the kingdom, and she frustrates the vain hopes of so many ambitious pretenders.

MITHRANES: Besides, she has calmed in part the jealous tempests in the suspicious heart of the troubled Alcestes.

PHENICIUS: I must say that this is one of the few happenings for which I was unprepared.

OLINTHUS: Everyone longs to see his king. Satisfy your impatient friends, the loyal populace, all of Seleucia, which thrills with joy.

PHENICIUS: Olinthus, precede me to the temple. Tell the people that they will shortly see their ruler. Let Mithranes and Alcestes remain with me for a moment.

OLINTHUS: (Provided Alcestes is not favored, I shall be happy.) [He leaves]

PHENICIUS: Gods in heaven, merciful gods! I did not expect as much of you. All my sacrifices have been rewarded. Alcestes, at this moment I cease to be your father. Hereafter I shall no longer clasp you in my arms as a son. This is my last expression of tenderness. [He embraces him]
ACT III

Alcestes: Through what fault of mine have I lost your affection?

Phenicius: I am your vassal and you are my king. [He kneels]

Alcestes: Rise! What are you saying?

Mithranes: What a high-minded man!

Phenicius: [Addressing Alcestes] You should at last know who you are. The true heir of Syria lives in you. I have reared you in anticipation of this happy day. If you do not believe me, you can believe yourself, your royal bearing, your magnanimous heart. Believe the care I have taken in rearing you, my refusal of a proffered crown, and, finally, believe these tears of joy that are running down my cheeks.

Alcestes: But till now, sir, why have you kept my identity secret?

Phenicius: You shall know all. Allow me to catch my breath for a moment. My heart, stirred by this unexpected happiness, makes it difficult for me to keep my self-control.

Just gods, my zeal does not need further recompense.
Since I have done my duty I can die in peace.
Adversity I do not fear nor wish for joy, nor can the spectacle of death cause me to pale.

[He leaves, followed by those who bear the royal insignia]

Scene 9

Alcestes and Mithranes

Alcestes: Am I dreaming? Am I awake?

Mithranes: For my part, I wish to give you the first proof of my loyal vassalage. [He starts to kneel]

Alcestes: Beloved Mithranes, do not speak to me at present. Leave me alone. I am still in doubt.

Mithranes: You now can fill your mind with happier thoughts.

Now Fortune offers you its lock to seize. It's time at last for you to breathe again.
Since you have lived disconsolate so long,
you dread the sea while you are still
ashore.               [Exits]

Scene 10
ALCESTES and then BARSENE

ALCESTES: I, Demetrius! I, the heir to the throne of
Seleucia! and so unknown even to myself till now!
How many different changes in personality have taken
place in me! On this day alone, while doubtful of
my fate, I am monarch and shepherd, exile and
spouse. Who will assure you, Alcestes, that fatuous
Fortune will not make you a shepherd a second time?
[Enter BARSENE]
BARSENE: So Phenicius is king!
ALCESTES: Our illustrious Cleonice has chosen him for
the throne.
BARSENE: I sympathize with you on your loss, but since
you can no longer wed the queen, I do not despair
of your turning your thoughts towards Barsene.
ALCESTES: Towards Barsene?
BARSENE: I have hidden my love until now. A throne and
a queen have been rivals that were too much for me.
But at last I see Cleonice already married, Phenicius king, and your hopes dashed. Hence, in making
known that I love you, I could not choose a more
opportune moment than this.
ALCESTES: Barsene, your choice has been ill-made.
   If you could read my mind
or scrutinize my heart,
perhaps you would not speak
of love as you do now.
Do not feel offended
if your plea has failed,
for my heart is elsewhere
even as I speak to you.  [Exits]
Act III 109

Scene 11
BARSENE alone

BARSENE: It would have been better for me to have remained silent. I had at least hoped that once I made my love known to Alcestes he would accept it. Now this slim hope is completely gone. Alcestes knows about my love and rejects it.

The guileless unsuspecting turtle dove,
unwary of the peril that is near,
in trying to avoid the falcon's claws,
falls as it flies into the huntsman's lap.

I also want to flee from the distress occasioned by a love concealed till now and find myself disdained and put to shame by a rebuff. [Exits]

Scene 12
A large temple dedicated to the Sun with an altar and an image of the same in the center and a throne on one side

CLEONICE with her retinue, and PHENICIUS accompanied by two members of the nobility, who are carrying on trays the royal mantle, the crown, and the scepter

PHENICIUS: Believe me: I am not deceiving you. Alcestes is the legitimate heir of Syria. The royal insignia belongs to him.

CLEONICE: While in his presence I always had a feeling that he must be of kingly stock.

PHENICIUS: I know that it has been wrong for me to show so much solicitude for one of your enemies, but I hope that a foe so dear to you and my refusal of the crown will serve to excuse and pardon me.

CLEONICE: How many miracles has fate brought together in a single day! Just when I was expecting to lose my peace of mind —

PHENICIUS: Demetrius is arriving.
ALCESTES, who is met by CLEONICE and PHENICIUS; MITHRANES and guards

ALCESTES: [To Cleonice] This is the first time that I appear before you without the fear of seeing you blush for our love. Among the many blessings enjoyed by those who rule, this is the greatest that I shall ever find upon the throne.

CLEONICE: Sir: we have already changed roles. You are the king and I your subject. The fear in your heart has passed to mine. Go, Demetrius. Behold the throne of your ancestors. I return it to you with the same pleasure that I should once have given it. Enjoy it more happily than has been my lot. As long as I have had it, it deprived me of contentment and now I feel happy that I am losing it.

MITHRANES: Noble souls!

ALCESTES: I shall mount the throne, but let your hand guide me, and let it be the reward of my love.

CLEONICE: Such a gracious command takes away from me the merit of obeying.

[They go to the altar and clasp hands]

PHENICIUS: How my heart is filled with joy!

ALCESTES, CLEONICE: Forever shine propitiously, oh god of light!

ALCESTES: Just as I am now in love, you fell in love in shepherd's garb on the Thessalian river bank.

CLEONICE: As I am faithful so are you in the fair habit you've preserved of being true to laurel plants.

ALCESTES, CLEONICE: Forever shine propitiously, oh god of light!

PHENICIUS: There is thunder in the sky to our left.

Scene 14

BARSENE and the above

BARSENE: Oh, queen! All of Seleucia is in tumult.

ALCESTES: Why?

BARSENE: You know that the ambassador from Crete arrived
a short time ago, and has with him a hundred ships. CLEONICE: Very well, I shall soon hear what he has to say.
BARSENE: At the same time Olinthus, who cannot bear to see Alcestes rule, has joined the ambassador. He is spreading the news among the people that Phenicius has deceived them and that he will prove the truth of his words, and that the true Demetrius is known to him.
CLEONICE: Alas, Phenicius!
PHENICIUS: Do not fear. Ascend the throne in confidence. We shall see who is lying.

Final Scene

OLINTHUS, bearing a sealed sheet in his hand, the Cretan ambassador, retinue of Greeks, people, and the above

OLINTHUS: [To Cleonice and Alcestes as they walk toward the throne] Stop, I warn you! The heavens will not suffer deception. On this sheet you will discover the identity of the heir to the dead Demetrius. He wrote it before dying while living in exile in Crete. The sheet is sealed by the royal seal. This man [pointing to the Cretan ambassador] saw him write it. He bears it in obedience to public demand, and has with him the entire army of Crete to uphold the honor of his regal blood.
CLEONICE: Heavens!
PHENICIUS: [To Olinthus] Have the sheet read.
OLINTHUS: Alcestes, this will put an end to your pride. [Olinthus unfolds the sheet and reads] "Syrians, my son is living incognito among you. The day will come when he will make himself known to you. If you cannot recognize him by other means, know that Phenicius has reared him under the assumed name of Alcestes. Demetrius."
CLEONICE: I breathe once more.
PHENICIUS: [To Olinthus] I had been expecting you to come to this.
OLINTHUS: (I am turned to stone!)
MITHRANES: This foolhardy fellow has been struck dumb.
OLINTHUS: [To Alcestes] In you, sir, I recognize my king and repent of my rashness.

ALCESTES: I wish only to remember that you are Phenicius' son.

PHENICIUS: Allow me to see you on the throne as the final fulfillment of my prayers.

ALCESTES: Whatever I have I owe to your loyalty. Let all the world learn it from my lips.

PHENICIUS: And let the world learn from your virtue how glory and love can unite in a single heart.

[Alcestes and Cleonice ascend to the throne]

CHORUS: When it descends into a noble heart, a sweet affection comes as a companion and not as virtue's rival.

We bid you feel at ease, oh happy souls! and may the gods be as propitious toward you as fate has been adverse.

THE END
The Olympiad

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CLISTHENES, king of Sicyon, father of ARISTEA

ARISTEA, his daughter, in love with MEGACLES

ARGENE, a Cretan garbed as a shepherdess, under the name LYCORIS, and in love with LYCIDAS

LYCIDAS, supposed son of the king of Crete, lover of ARISTEA and friend of MEGACLES

MEGACLES, lover of ARISTEA and friend of LYCIDAS

AMYNTAS, tutor of LYCIDAS

ALCANDER, confidant of CLISTHENES

The action takes place on the plains of Elis, near the city of Olympia, on the shores of the River Alpheus

ARGUMENT

Clisthenes, king of Sicyon, is the father of the twins Philinthus and Aristea. On being warned by the Oracle of Delphi that he would be killed by his son, the king on the advice of this Oracle had the boy exposed. The girl he reared. She grew up to be a beautiful young lady, loved by Megacles, a noble and brave youth who had been a winner a number of times at the Olympic games. Because her father, who hated Athenians, would not consent to their marriage, he left for Crete in despair.
There, having been attacked and almost killed by highwaymen, his life was saved by Lycidas, thought to be a son of the king of the island. On this account he came to form a tender and indissoluble friendship with his liberator. For some years Lycidas had loved Argene, a noble Cretan woman whom he had secretly pledged to marry. But when their love affair was discovered the king, resolved not to permit such an unequal marriage, persecuted the unfortunate Argene so much that she felt obliged to abandon her country and to flee incognito to Elis where under the name of Lycoris and dressed as a shepherdess she lived hidden from the hatred of her relatives and the harsh treatment of the king. The flight of his Argene made Lycidas disconsolate and after some time, in order to find relief for his sadness, he decided to go to Elis so as to be present during the Olympic games, which were repeated every four years with the participation of all of Greece. He went there leaving Megacles in Crete and learned that Clisthenes, having come from Sicyon to Elis to preside over the aforesaid games, had chosen to offer as the prize to the victor his own daughter Aristea. Lycidas saw her, admired her, and forgetting the misfortunes of his earlier love, passionately fell in love with her. However, he despaired that he could win her because he was not at all skilled in the athletic games in which there was competition. On this account he decided to make up for his lack of skill by resorting to trickery. He recalled that his friend had been the winner in contests of this kind and, without knowing about the former love of Megacles for Aristea, he resolved to make use of him by having him participate under the assumed name of Lycidas. Upon the strong urging of his friend, Megacles then came to Elis but he was so late in arriving that Lycidas began to despair. It is from this point that the beginning of this dramatic composition starts. The ending or rather the main action is the reappearance of that Philinthus whom the threats of the oracles caused his father Clisthenes to expose. This is the dénouement that is imperceptibly brought about through the amorous frenzy of Aristea, the heroic friendship of Megacles, the inconstancy and madness of Lycidas, and the unstinting compassion of the most faithful Argene. (Herodotus, Pausanius, Natale Conti, etc.)
ACT I

Scene 1

A wooded section of a dark and narrow valley, shaded from above by large trees whose branches spread over the two hills between which it lies

LYCIDAS and AMYNTAS

LYCIDAS: I have already made up my mind, Amyntas. I do not want any more advice.

AMYNTAS: Lycidas, listen to me. Please control your violent and unruly temper.

LYCIDAS: On whom can I rely except upon myself? Megacles, yes, Megacles, has deserted me when I most need him. Look at what comes from trusting a friend too much.

AMYNTAS: Still, you should not blame him. No short distance separates Elis, where we are now, from Crete, where he lives. After all, Megacles does not have wings on his feet. Perhaps your servant has not been able to find him immediately. Perhaps the sea dividing us is delaying his coming. Be patient; he will arrive in good time. The hour for the Olympic games is set for late afternoon, and it is still early morning.

LYCIDAS: You must know that everyone competing for the Olympic prize is to appear at the temple in the morning to announce his rank, name, and native province, and to swear before the altar of Jupiter that he will not resort to fraud during the contest.

AMYNTAS: I know.

LYCIDAS: You must also know that whoever arrives late for this solemn ceremony is barred from the contest. Don't you see the crowd of competing athletes? Don't you hear the festive bustle of the country folk? Must I then continue waiting and hoping?

AMYNTAS: But what do you intend to do?

LYCIDAS: To appear before the altar with the others.

AMYNTAS: And then?

LYCIDAS: And at the appropriate time fight with the others.

AMYNTAS: You?

LYCIDAS: Yes, me. Don't you think I am brave enough?
AMYNTAS: I do not mean that, prince. But it is of no avail here to know how to wield a sword. This is a different kind of contest requiring other weapons and other skills. Games we know nothing about — cestus, discus, wrestling — have for a long time been the habitual exercises of your rivals. At the first encounter, you might repent of your youthful daring.

LYCIDAS: If Megacles had arrived in time, expert as he is in such contests, he would have fought in my stead, but since he has not come, what must I do? In Olympia today, Amyntas, they are not competing for the usual wreath of wild olive leaves. The prize is to be Aristea, the royal daughter of the indomitable Clisthenes and the most attractive of Greek damsels, the only beauty that has inflamed my heart, even though the flame is new.

AMYNTAS: But what of Argene?

LYCIDAS: I do not expect to see her again. Love can no longer survive when hope is dead.

AMYNTAS: Yet you have sworn many times —

LYCIDAS: I understand what you are driving at. You would like to detain me with these fairy tales until it is too late. Farewell!

AMYNTAS: Please listen.

LYCIDAS: No, no.

AMYNTAS: See him coming —

LYCIDAS: Who?

AMYNTAS: Megacles.

LYCIDAS: Where is he?

AMYNTAS: Among the trees I think I —. No, it is not he.

LYCIDAS: You are poking fun at me and I deserve it. I have been overly blind to rely upon Megacles. [About to leave]

Scene 2

MEGACLES and the above

MEGACLES: Megacles is joining you.

LYCIDAS: Thank God!

MEGACLES: Prince!

LYCIDAS: Friend, let me press you to my heart. Behold my failing hopes revived!
MEGACLES: Can it be true that heaven is at last offering me the opportunity to show you my gratitude?
LYCIDAS: You can give me both peace of mind and life, if you so wish.
MEGACLES: In what way?
LYCIDAS: By fighting under my name in the Olympic arena.
MEGACLES: But aren't you known in Elis by now?
LYCIDAS: No.
MEGACLES: What is the object of this scheme?
LYCIDAS: To be relieved of worry. Let us not lose time. This is the hour when the list of names of the contending athletes is being prepared. Oh, hasten to the temple. Say that you are Lycidas. Your coming will have been in vain if you linger any longer. Go, you shall learn everything when you return.
MEGACLES: I shall forever proudly bear imprinted on my brow and heart, the letters of your loving name. One day in Greece it will be said alike we shared in thoughts and deeds, in love, and even in our names. [Exits]

Scene 3
LYCIDAS and AMYNTAS

LYCIDAS: Generous friend! Faithful Megacles!
AMYNTAS: You did not speak of him thus a short time ago.
LYCIDAS: At last Aristeia will be mine. Go, make all the arrangements, Amyntas. I intend to depart with my new wife before sunset.
AMYNTAS: Not so hasty, oh prince, happiness is not yet yours. There is still much to be feared. The deception might be discovered; Megacles might succumb during the contest. I know he has been the winner at other times, but I also know that an unexpected turn of events can overwhelm both those who are weak and those who are strong. Nor does courage invariably insure success.
LYCIDAS: Oh, you are indeed importunate with your annoying and perpetual doubting. Do you expect me to fear shipwreck while near port? Those who would lend credence to your doubts cannot distinguish between daylight and dark.
As to its stable it draws near,  
the horse accelerates its gait  
unmindful of the painful bit  
and heedless of his master's voice.  
Just so my mind is full of hope,  
fears naught and yields to no advice,  
and in its fancy it conjures  
an image of approaching joy.    [Exits]

Scene 4

A wide space on the lower slope of a hill with a scattering of shepherd huts. A rustic bridge over the River Alpheus composed of tree trunks clumsily joined together. A view of the city of Olympia in the distance, broken by a few trees that embellish the plain but do not clutter it.

ARGENE, disguised as a shepherdess under the name Lycoris, weaving garlands. CHORUS of nymphs and shepherds engaged in pastoral chores, then ARISTEA with her retinue.

CHORUS: Hail, forests dear to us!  
Hail, happy liberty!  

ARGENE: Here our pleasures are enjoyed.  
In them falsehood has no part.  
Faithfulness and love, instead,  
vie in cultivating them.

CHORUS: Hail, forests dear to us!  
Hail, happy liberty!  

ARGENE: Here with little each is content  
yet each thinks that he is rich.  
Peaceful living is secure;  
avarice does not exist  
since it clearly lacks allure.

CHORUS: Hail, forests dear to us!  
Hail, happy liberty!  

ARGENE: Here the guileless love of nymphs —  
[She rises] Oh! Aristea is here.

ARISTEA: Continue, Lycoris.  
ARGENE: Have you come to bring happiness again to my humble dwelling, princess?
ARISTEA: Would that I could run away from myself as I am running away from others! My friend, you do not realize what a tragic day this is for me.

ARGENE: This is a glorious day for you. What surer proof of your beauty could posterity have? To win your hand all the flower of Greek manhood is taking part.

ARISTEA: But the man I yearn for is not present. However, let us talk of something less sad. [She sits down] Sit down, Lycoris. Resume your interrupted chores and speak. You once began to tell me about your life. This is a favorable time for you to continue your story. Soothe my sorrow, and, if you can, soften my torment by telling me of yours.

ARGENE: If it can have such good effect, my sufferings will not have been without their reward. [She sits down] I have already told you that Argene is my name, that I was born in Crete of noble blood, and that the object of my affection was a man of nobler birth than I.

ARISTEA: This much I know.

ARGENE: My woes begin at this point. Lycidas, heir to the royal throne of Crete, is the man with whom I fell in love and he with me. We prudently concealed our mutual affection for a time, but, as our love grew stronger, our prudence weakened—as frequently happens. Some guessed the meaning of our glances and told others. Gossip spread from mouth to mouth until the king found out. He was angry, rebuked his son and forbid him to see me any more, but the effect of the prohibition was to increase his passion, like the wind which adds flames to flames or the stream that is made more turbulent by the dykes that hem it in. Lycidas, intoxicated with love, fumed with anger and made plans to abduct me and run away with me—he explained this in a letter. The bearer betrayed his trust and brought it instead to the king, on which account my poor lover has been confined in a well-guarded building. I was ordered to give my hand to a foreigner. I refused him. This made everyone turn against me. The king threatened, my friends condemned me, my father wanted me to consent to the proposed marriage. In my predicament I could find no other remedy than in flight or death. I considered the less drastic solution best, and put
it into execution. I have come incognita to Elis. I have decided to live in these woods. Here among the shepherds, I have passed myself as a shepherdess and am now known as Lycoris. But in Lycoris beats the faithful heart of Argene, which is reserved for the man she loves.

ARISTEIA: In truth, you move me to compassion. I do not, however, approve of your flight. For a young woman to leave home without a chaperon, to abandon —

ARGENE: Should I then have given my hand to Megacles?

ARISTEIA: Megacles! (That name surprises me.) Of what Megacles are you speaking?

ARGENE: He is the husband the king had destined for me. Could I then fail to remember —

ARISTEIA: Can you tell me the name of his native land?

ARGENE: Athens.

ARISTEIA: How was it he came to Crete?

ARGENE: As he himself informed us, love had drawn him there, an afflicted fugitive. On arriving he was waylaid by a band of highwaymen, and, tortured by them, was about to lose his life. Lycidas happened there by chance and rescued him. From then on they became intimates. As a friend of his son, Lycidas came to know Megacles' father, and because he was an outsider he was by royal mandate chosen for me.

ARISTEIA: Do you still remember how he looked?

ARGENE: I have not forgotten. He had blond hair, dark eyebrows; his lips, a bit thicker than normal, were red; his look, calm and tender; he blushed frequently; his voice was soft —. But, princess, you are changing color. What has happened?

ARISTEIA: Oh, heavens! The Megacles you describe is the man I idolize.

ARGENE: What are you telling me?

ARISTEIA: The truth. He, who had been my secret lover for a long time, was on account of his Athenian birth denied me by my father, who did not even once try to know or to listen to him. Megacles, in despair, left me. I have not seen him since and only now have learned from you what has befallen him.

ARGENE: What is happening to us is almost incredible. ARISTEIA: Ah, if he only knew that today they are competing for me here!

ARGENE: Order one of your servants to go in haste to
Crete for him, and meantime, see if you can have the games postponed.

ARISTEA: How?

ARGENE: Clisthenes is, after all, your father. His authority is absolute in these matters; he can, if he chooses —

ARISTEA: But he will not.

ARGENE: What harm is there in trying, princess?

ARISTEA: Very well! I shall go to see Clisthenes. [She gets up]

ARGENE: It won't be necessary. He is here.

Scene 5

CLISTHENES with his retinue, and the above

CLISTHENES: Daughter, all the preparations have been made. The names of the participants have been chosen; the sacrificial victims have been killed; the hour for the great contest has been set; the games can be delayed no further without offending the gods, the expectations of the public, and my honor.

ARISTEA: (Alas, for my hopes!)

CLISTHENES: I should give you cause to be proud, if I mentioned all those who are competing in the tournament for you. There is Olinthus from Megara, Clearchus from Sparta, Atys from Thebes, Erylus from Corinth, and, finally, Lycidas, who has come from Crete.

ARGENE: Who?

CLISTHENES: Lycidas, the son of the Cretan king.

ARISTEA: He, too, would like to win me?

CLISTHENES: He has come to compete with the others.

ARGENE: (Ah, he has forgotten Argene!)

CLISTHENES: Accompany me, daughter.

ARISTEA: Father, please postpone the games!

CLISTHENES: You are asking for the impossible. I have explained why. I do not see the occasion for such a request.

ARISTEA: There is always time for us women to submit to marriage. The yoke is a heavy one. Even without it, we suffer a great deal in our unhappy servile state.
CLISTHENES: That is what all of you women say, but you are not telling the truth.

Do not complain about your fate
if it subjects you to us men.
You really are, though you lament,
our rulers in your servitude.

We may be strong, but you are fair.
Invariably you always win
whenever beauty vies with strength.

[Exits]

Scene 6

ARISTEA and ARGENE

ARGENE: Princess, have you heard what has just been said?

ARISTEA: My friend, goodbye: I must leave with my father. Ah you who are able to do so, if you are as merciful as you are beautiful, I beg you to bring me some news of him.

Please ascertain if you can
where my lover can be found.
Learn if he still cares for me
and if he talks about me still.
Ask if he ever heaves a sigh
whene'er he hears my name pronounced
and if in talking to himself
he has at times repeated it. [Exits]

Scene 7

ARGENE, alone

ARGENE: So my ungrateful Lycidas has already forgotten me! Poor Argene! to what have your angry stars exposed you? Learn from me, inexperienced maidens. This is typical of flattering lovers. Everyone calls you darling, his life, his treasure; every gallant swears that he dreams of you during the day, and lies awake at night on your account. These flatterers have the knack of weeping and growing
pale. At times it seems that they are about to die from their love pangs right before your eyes. Beware, it is nothing but deceit.

Among a thousand men in love, those constant are no more than two, and yet all swear that they are true. Indeed, the vice has gone so far that faithful lovers' constancy is now considered idiocy. [Exits]

Scene 8

LYCIDAS and MEGACLES, approaching each other from opposite sides of the stage

MEGACLES: Lycidas!
LYCIDAS: Friend!
MEGACLES: I am at your disposal.
LYCIDAS: Have you carried out —
MEGACLES: All, sir. Using your name, I have already appeared at the temple and soon I shall take part in the competition. Now, then, while waiting for the customary signal to be given announcing the beginning of the contest, can you explain to me the reason for your scheme?
LYCIDAS: Oh, if you are the winner no lover in the kingdom of Love will be happier than I!
MEGACLES: May I ask why?
LYCIDAS: A royal beauty is to be given as a prize to the winner. Though I have hardly seen her, I am burning with love for her. But with my ineptitude for athletics —
MEGACLES: I understand. I am to win her for you.
LYCIDAS: Yes, and following that, ask for my life, my blood, and my kingdom. I offer you all I have and all will be a meager compensation.
MEGACLES: A grateful servant, a true friend, does not need so many allurements, oh prince. I am extremely appreciative of your gifts to me. I am mindful that you have saved my life. You shall have her as your spouse, that you may expect. I am not a stranger to the arena of Elis. I have strenuously fought in it many times, and the wild olive wreath is not an
unaccustomed ornament around my forehead. I have never been more certain of winning. The desire for honor and the stimuli of friendship make me stronger. I long to be, indeed, it seems that I am already in the arena. I already feel my rivals near me, I see myself forestalling them, and with my hair and face covered with Olympic dust. I hear the applause of the onlooking crowd.

LYCIDAS: Oh, cherished friend! [Embracing him] Oh, dearly beloved Aristea!

MEGACLES: What are you saying?

LYCIDAS: I am calling my treasure by her name.

MEGACLES: And is her name Aristea?

LYCIDAS: Precisely.

MEGACLES: Can you tell me more about her?

LYCIDAS: She was born near Corinth on the banks of the Asopus and is the only child of Clisthenes.

MEGACLES: (Heavens! she is the woman I love.) Is it for her that we shall be competing?

LYCIDAS: For her.

MEGACLES: Is she the one I must win for you in the contest?

LYCIDAS: She is.

MEGACLES: Is Aristea your only hope and consolation?

LYCIDAS: Only Aristea.

MEGACLES: (This is killing me!)

LYCIDAS: Do not be surprised. When you see her face perhaps you will bear with me. The gods themselves would not be ashamed to love her.

MEGACLES: (Would that I had never known this!)

LYCIDAS: If you win, who could be happier than I? Megacles himself will be most glad. Tell me, will you not rejoice at my rejoicing?

MEGACLES: Very much.

LYCIDAS: And the moment my marriage tie with Aristea takes place, will it not be a happy one for you?

MEGACLES: Very happy. (Oh, gods!)

LYCIDAS: Would you not like to lead me to my nuptial bed as my groomsman?

MEGACLES: (How agonizing!)

LYCIDAS: Speak.

MEGACLES: Yes. Just as you wish. (What strange kind of martyrdom and hell is this!)

LYCIDAS: How long the day seems to me! Under the cir-
cstances, you cannot conceive or understand what torture it is for me to wait.

MEGACLES: I can conceive and understand.
LYCIDAS: Believe me, friend, I can already visualize what the future has in store for me; I already possess my sweet wife in my fancy.
MEGACLES: (This is too much!)
LYCIDAS: And it seems to me—
MEGACLES: [Vehemently] Hush, you have said enough. As your friend, I know my duty, but then—
LYCIDAS: You are losing your temper. Have I offended you?
MEGACLES: (I have been imprudent.) [He calms down] My outburst stems from my desire to serve you. I have arrived tired, following a long journey; I am to take part in the contest; I have little time to rest and you deprive me of it.
LYCIDAS: And what has prevented you from speaking out till now?
MEGACLES: My regard for you.
LYCIDAS: Would you like to rest, then?
MEGACLES: Yes.
LYCIDAS: Would you like to come with me to another place?
MEGACLES: No.
LYCIDAS: Do you prefer to remain here in the shade?
MEGACLES: Yes.
LYCIDAS: Should I stay, too?
MEGACLES: No. [He sits down impatiently]
LYCIDAS: (A strange wish!) Very well, rest. Farewell.

While sleeping, may the God of Love increase the pleasure of your dreams imagining the joy that's mine.
Less swiftly may the river flow, may every gentle breeze be stilled.

[Exits]

Scene 9

MEGACLES, alone

MEGACLES: Eternal gods! What have I just heard? What sudden thunderbolt has struck me! Must the one I
love belong to another? And I am to place her in my rival's arms? But that rival is a dear friend. It seems that fate is determined to unite the two names in order to torture me. The laws of friendship cannot be this rigid. Begging the pardon of my prince, I am still a lover. To ask me to yield Aristea to him is no different than asking me to yield my life. But does not my life belong to Lycidas? Has he not restored it to me? Am I not alive because of him? Ungrateful Megacles! Could you have any doubt of it? Oh, if she sees you with this infamous and cruel taint on your face, Aristea, too, will have good reason to hate you! No, she will not see me go so far. I shall listen only to you, obligations of friendship, pledges of loyalty, gratitude, and honor. I fear nothing except the sight of the woman I love. I shall try to avoid this terrible confrontation. In her presence, poor me, what would I do? I am shaking and perspiring only by thinking of it; I feel dazed, benumbed, confused, and am trembling from fright. No, I could not —

Scene 10
ARISTEA, MEGACLES, then ALCANDER

ARISTEA: [Without seeing Megacles' face] Stranger!
MEGACLES: [Recognizing Aristea] Good heavens!
ARISTEA: Megacles, hope of my life! Can it be you? Can I be seeing you again? Oh how overjoyed I am! I am breathless with emotion. Oh, dear one, longed for, lamented and invoked in vain! You have finally taken notice of poor Aristea. You have returned, oh how opportunely you have returned! Oh, merciful Love! Oh, suffering repaid with joy! Oh tears and sighs that have not been in vain!
MEGACLES: (What a cruel predicament is mine!)
ARISTEA: Beloved Megacles, you do not answer? Why are you silent? What is the meaning of such change of color? Why, nervous and confused, do you look at me and, with difficulty, hold back your tears? Am I no longer loved by you? Perhaps —
MEGACLES: What are you saying? Always — you should
know - I am. I can't express myself. (What a cruel predicament is mine!)

ARISTEAEA: You dumfound me. Tell me, don't you know that I am to be the prize in the contest?
MEGACLES: I know.
ARISTEAEA: Haven't you come to compete for me?
MEGACLES: Yes.
ARISTEAEA: Why, then, are you so sad?
MEGACLES: Because - (Cruel gods! What a hellish torture this is!)

ARISTEAEA: I see, someone has made you doubt my constancy. If this is what afflicts you, you are wrong. From the time you left me, dear one, I have not been guilty of any thought of infidelity. I have always heard your voice within me; I have always had your name on my lips, and the image of your face in my heart. I have never been in love with another man, nor shall I ever be. I would rather -
MEGACLES: Say no more, I know.

ARISTEAEA: I would rather die than be unfaithful to you for a single moment.
MEGACLES: (My torment is unbearable!)

ARISTEAEA: But look at me, speak, tell me -
MEGACLES: What can I say?

ALCANDER: [Rushing on the stage] Sir, make haste, if you have come to fight. The signal has been given, calling the competitors to the contest. [Exits]
MEGACLES: Help me, gods! Farewell, my love!
ARISTEAEA: And will you leave me thus? Go, I'll pardon you if you will only return as my husband.
MEGACLES: Ah, such a good fortune is not for me. [About to leave]

ARISTEAEA: Tell me. Do you love me still?
MEGACLES: As much as my own life.
ARISTEAEA: Do you believe me faithful?
MEGACLES: Yes, as much as I believe you beautiful.
ARISTEAEA: Enough to win me in the contest?
MEGACLES: I so desire, at least.
ARISTEAEA: Are you still as fearless as you used to be?
MEGACLES: I believe so.
ARISTEAEA: And will you win?
MEGACLES: I hope so.

ARISTEAEA: Then, my dear, will I not be your wife?

MEGACLES: My love, farewell! In your happy days, remember me.
ARISTEA: Why do you say these things, my darling? May I know why?
MEGACLES: My beauteous idol, hush.
ARISTEA: Speak to me, my sweet love.
MEGACLES: Alas! by speaking...
ARISTEA: Alas! by being silent...
BOTH: You are piercing my heart.
ARISTEA: (I see the man that I adore languishing for love, and am perplexed.)
MEGACLES: (Jealousy is killing me yet I cannot speak.)
BOTH: Has anyone ever suffered crueller pain?

ACT II

Scene 1

ARISTEA and ARGENE

ARGENE: Isn't the outcome of the games yet known?
ARISTEA: No, beautiful Argene. The regulations forbidding us women from being spectators are unnecessarily harsh.
ARGENE: Nevertheless, it would perhaps be a severer punishment to see one's love in such great danger, and, without being able to help him, be present —
ARISTEA: I feel as though I am present even if far away; in fact, my brain conjures up what has perhaps not occurred. If you could only see the state of my heart! Within it, my friend, within it a struggle is taking place, and there more than elsewhere the conflict is fierce. I see before me Megacles, the arena, the judges, his rivals. His rivals I imagine stronger, and the judges biased. I feel doubly in my heart what my beloved is now suffering — clashes, jolts, insults, threats. If I were present the sight of what is actually taking place would terrify me. But since I am not, my mind makes me fear both the false and the real.
ARGENE: [Looking across the stage] I see no one coming yet.
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ARISTEA: [Disturbed] No one —. Heavens!
ARGENE: What has happened?
ARISTEA: Oh, how I am trembling! I am shaking all over.
ARGENE: For what reason?
ARISTEA: My fate has been decided. Look, Alcander is coming.
ARGENE: Alcander, hurry. Set our minds at ease. What news are you bringing?

Scene 2

ALCANDER and the above

ALCANDER: Joyful news. The king has sent me to announce good tidings and I —
ARISTEA: Have the games ended?
ALCANDER: Yes. Listen. Waiting impatiently —
ARGENE: [To Alcander] We wish to know the name of the winner.
ALCANDER: I shall tell all. Waiting impatiently the multitude of onlookers —
ARISTEA: [Sternly] This is not what I am expecting of you.
ALCANDER: assembled according to the classes to which they belong —
ARISTEA: [Angrily] Tell me only who has won.
ALCANDER: Lycidas has won.
ARISTEA: Lycidas!
ALCANDER: Precisely.
ARGENE: The prince of Crete!
ALCANDER: Yes, he had landed on these shores shortly before.
ARISTEA: (Unfortunate Aristea!)
ARGENE: (Poor Argene!)
ALCANDER: [To Aristea] Oh, lucky woman! What a fine husband fate has given you!
ARISTEA: Alcander, leave.
ALCANDER: The king is waiting for you.
ARISTEA: Leave. I shall follow.
ALCANDER: The crowd gathered in the great temple is waiting —
ARISTEA: [Angrily] Are you not going to leave?
ALCANDER: Is this my reward, ingrate? [Exits]
Scene 3

ARISTEA and ARGENE

ARGENE: Tell me, princess, is there anyone under heaven who can say that he is more miserable than I?
ARISTEA: Yes. I am that person.
ARGENE: May love never let you experience my grief. You do not know how great my loss is. You do not know how dearly the heart you are stealing costs me.
ARISTEA: And you do not feel or sufficiently understand my torment.

Your suffering is great, indeed.
It's true you're losing your beloved,
but you are mistress of yourself.
You can seek pity, you can weep.
I am, instead, oppressed by fate,
my lover lost, I've lost myself.
Nor is the joyless freedom mine
of shedding tears to vent my grief.

[Exits]

Scene 4

ARGENE, then AMYNTAS

ARGENE: Is there no way for me to find help or compassion?
AMYNTAS: [Aside, as he comes on the stage] (Eternal gods! That woman must be Argene!)
ARGENE: Vengeance; I ask for vengeance! [About to leave]
AMYNTAS: Argene, you here in Elis unchaperoned? You dressed in such coarse garments?
ARGENE: Have you, too, come to aid the prince in his dark schemes? The king of Crete has indeed entrusted the care of Lycidas to a wise guardian. Behold the beautiful fruits of your teachings!
AMYNTAS: (She already knows everything.) Not because of my advice —
ARGENE: Enough —. After all, there is justice in heaven for everyone, and it can sometimes be found even on
earth. I shall seek it from both men and gods. Since he is faithless, I feel free to act. I want Clisthenes, Greece, and the whole world to know he is a traitor, so that his infamy will trail him wherever he goes; so that everyone may loathe and avoid him, and, in disgust, point him out to those who do not know him.

AMYNTAS: These are thoughts unworthy of Argene. Though it may be just, anger is an unreliable counsellor. If I were you, I should employ milder means. Try to have him see you again, speak to him, remind him of his promises. It is always better to regain him as a lover than to harass him as an enemy.

ARGENE: Do you think, Amyntas, that he might return to me?

AMYNTAS: I hope so. He has idolized you. He used to pine for you; he was madly in love. Don't you recall that many, many times —

ARGENE: To my sorrow, I recall everything.

What honeyed words did he not say to me?
By what divinities did he not swear?
How could it be that he has proven false?
For him I've given everything I have,
but find today that I have lost him, too.
My poor affections! How I pity you!
And this, oh Love! is the reward you give?
[Exits]

Scene 5

AMYNTAS, alone

AMYNTAS: Foolhardy youths! Whenever I see you exposed to the passions of Love, I take comfort in my old age and laugh. From the shore it is always pleasant to look upon one about to be shipwrecked. Not because harm to another pleases us, but only because the sight of a calamity we ourselves are not suffering gives us a feeling of relief. Yet does not old age also have its tempests? It has, indeed, and it is not free of other fears. There are various kinds of folly, some form of which afflicts every one of us. Hatred or love, cupidity or wrath can sway us as they will.
We are as ships abandoned on the waves;  
our passions are the stormy winds that blow;  
our daily pleasures represent a reef.  
The life we lead is not unlike a sea;  
our reason is a pilot guiding us,  
but it is often subject to the sway  
of surging pride.  

[Exits]

Scene 6

CLISTHENES preceded by LYCIDAS, ALCANDER, MEGACLES crowned with an olive wreath. CHORUS of athletes, guards and people

CHORUS: A name more famed than Lycidas'  
the borders of the Alpheus  
have never echoed up to now.

PART OF CHORUS: A nobler sweat has never bathed  
Olympic sands.

ANOTHER PART: He has Athena's arts of war,  
the wings of Love, Apollo's handsome-ness,  
the strength and daring of a Hercules.

CHORUS: Such merit and such valor will dispel  
the shadows which are cast by passing time.

CLISTHENES: Brave young man, standing humbly amid so much glory, allow me to kiss your honored brow and to press you to my heart. Fortunate is the king of Greece to have such a son. If my Philinthus had lived, he would, perhaps, have been like you. Can you remember, Alcander, with what sorrow I placed him in your charge? But yet —

ALCANDER: [To Clisthenes] This is not the time to recall misfortunes.

CLISTHENES: (It is true.) [To Megacles] Aristea is to be the prize earned by your valor. If Clisthenes can give you more, ask. You can never ask for as much as I should like to give you.

MEGACLES: (I must summon all my courage.) Sir, I have a loving father. Any happy experience that I do not share with him loses its enjoyment. I should
like to be the first to tell him of my good fortune, to ask him to approve my marriage, and to be present in Crete at the ceremony when I am joined in wedlock to Aristea.

CLISTHENES: Your desire is reasonable.

MEGACLES: If you will permit me, I shall leave without further delay. Allow this young man [Introducing Lycidas] to remain in my place as a servant, a companion, and a guide.

CLISTHENES: (Who can this person be? On looking at him I feel my veins tingle with a strange emotion.) Who is he and what is his name?

MEGACLES: His name is Egisthus; Crete is his fatherland. He is also of royal lineage. More than by blood, we are bound together by friendship, and our desires so much in accord that we share each other's joys and sorrows to such an extent that Lycidas and Egisthus can be said to be one and the same person.

LYCIDAS: (What an ingenious expression of friendship!)

CLISTHENES: Very well, he will have the responsibility of escorting your bride-to-be to Crete. But Lycidas must not leave without first seeing her.

MEGACLES: That I cannot do. It would increase my agitation. I should feel like dying the moment I had to leave her. Even now I suffer away from her —

CLISTHENES: Look! She is approaching.

MEGACLES: (Unhappy me!)

Scene 7

ARISTEA and the above

ARISTEA: [Not seeing Megacles] (I am coming to the hateful nuptials like a victim before the altar.)

LYCIDAS: (Soon this beautiful woman will be mine.)

CLISTHENES: Draw closer, daughter; this is your future husband. [Holding Megacles by the hand]

MEGACLES: (Ah, that is untrue!)

ARISTEA: My husband! [She is surprised to see Megacles]

CLISTHENES: Yes, a more beautiful tie could not be formed in heaven.

ARISTEA: (But if Lycidas has won the competition how is it that the man I love?... My father must be deceiving me.)
LYCIDAS: (She believes Megacles is to be her husband and is upset.)

ARISTEA: Father, is this man the winner? [Pointing to Megacles]

CLISTHENES: Do you need to ask? Don't you recognize him from his dust-covered face, from the well-earned stains of perspiration on his brow, from the wreath which is the ornament of those who triumph?

ARISTEA: Is this what you have told me, Alcander?

ALCANDER: I have told the truth.

CLISTHENES: Let there be no more doubt. He is the mate to whom heaven will join you; my paternal love could not have acquired from the gods a more worthy partner.

ARISTEA: (How happy I am!)

MEGACLES: (What martyrdom!)

LYCIDAS: (Won't this day ever end?)

CLISTHENES: [To Megacles and Aristea] You do not speak? what is the reason for your silence?

MEGACLES: (Heavens! How shall I begin?)

ARISTEA: I should like to speak, but —

CLISTHENES: I understand. My presence is ill-timed. Stern looks, austere majesty, a domineering father, are hindrances to lovers. I still recall how disagreeable they used to be to me. I admire the modest blush that makes you reticent.

MEGACLES: (My situation is growing worse and worse.)

CLISTHENES: I know that Love is but a boy averse to consort with old age. It is amusement that he seeks. He looks askance at all restraints. Respect and license seldom live on peaceful terms. [Exits]

Scene 8

ARISTEA, MEGACLES, and LYCIDAS

MEGACLES: (Torn between friendship and love, what am I to do?)

LYCIDAS: [In a low voice to Megacles] It is time to make myself known to my idol.

MEGACLES: Wait! (Oh, heavens!)
ARISTEA: My bridegroom, do not hide from your bride what afflicts you.
MEGACLES: (How painful! Would that I were dead!)
LYCIDAS: [To Megacles as above] My dear friend, love will brook no delay.
ARISTEA: Your silence, my dear, torments me and drives me to despair.
MEGACLES: (Take courage, oh my heart! The hour of my death is near.) [Aside to Lycidas] Withdraw, prince.
LYCIDAS: Why?
MEGACLES: [Aside to Lycidas] Go, trust in me. I must explain all to Aristeia.
LYCIDAS: But may I not be allowed to be present?
MEGACLES: [As above] No, this matter is much more delicate than you think.
LYCIDAS: Very well, since you wish, I'll go. I shall withdraw only a short distance. You need merely beckon and I shall come. Weigh what you are going to say and about whom. If ever I have done you a favor, if you are grateful and devoted to me, show it now. My peace of mind and life depend upon your loyal help. [Exits]

Scene 9
MEGACLES and ARISTEA

MEGACLES: (Oh cruel memories!)
ARISTEA: At last we are alone! Now without restraint I can be lavish in the expression of my gladness and call you my hope, my beloved, the light of my eyes.
MEGACLES: No, princess. These tender names are not for me. You should reserve them for a more fortunate lover.
ARISTEA: Is now the moment to speak like this to me? Has the time come —. But how stupid of me! You are joking, my dear, and I am worrying foolishly.
MEGACLES: Alas! You have good reason to be worried.
ARISTEA: Then explain.
MEGACLES: Listen, but do not be dismayed, Aristeia. Brace yourself for the final test of your fortitude.
ARISTEA: Speak out! What do you want to tell me? My heart throbs!
MEGACLES: Have you not told me a thousand times that you love my grateful heart, my sincerity, and the flame of honor burning within me more than my physical appearance?
ARISTEA: That is so. You have seemed all this to me and as such I know and adore you.
MEGACLES: And if Megacles were one day different from what you say, if unfaithful to his friends, untrue to his oath, to his gods, if having become ungrateful to his benefactor, he should cause his death in return for having saved his life, would you still love him? Would you give him your love? Would you receive him as your lover? Would you accept him as your husband?
ARISTEA: How is it possible for me to imagine my Megacles so cruel?
MEGACLES: Then be informed that, if by decree of fate he will become your husband, Megacles is what he has just said.
ARISTEA: How can that be?
MEGACLES: I shall reveal all the mystery to you. The prince of Crete is madly in love with you. He has saved my life and now asks for my help. Tell me, princess, can I deny it to him?
ARISTEA: But you have fought —
MEGACLES: For him.
ARISTEA: You deliberately want to forsake me —
MEGACLES: Yes, in order to be worthy of you.
ARISTEA: Must I then —
MEGACLES: You must help me to carry out my plan. Yes, noble-minded and adored Aristea, share in the dictates of your lover's conscience. Allow Lycidas henceforth to be for you what I have been till now. Love him. My dear friend is worthy of such great good fortune. I, too, live in his heart, and if he wins you, I shall not altogether lose you.
ARISTEA: What a strange transition this is! From the stars I descend into the abyss. A better solution could have been found. Alas! without you, life is not life for me.
MEGACLES: Beautiful Aristea, do not you too conspire against my virtue. It has been difficult for me to prepare myself for this important step. It would
be easy for your tender feelings to wreck my de-
signs.

ARISTEAEA: You have resolved to forsake me?

MEGACLES: I have resolved to do so.

ARISTEAEA: You have so resolved? And when?

MEGACLES: This (I feel I am dying), this is my last
farewell.

ARISTEAEA: The last! Ingrate! Come to my aid, oh gods!
My legs are shaking, a cold sweat bathes my face,
and I feel a cold hand oppressing my heart. [She
leans against a tree trunk]

MEGACLES: (I feel my courage leaving me. The more I 'de-
lay my departure, the harder it is to do so. I must
nerve myself.) I am leaving, Aristea. Goodbye!

ARISTEAEA: How can this be? You are already forsaking me?

MEGACLES: It is necessary, darling, for us to be sepa-
rated once and for all.

ARISTEAEA: You are going to leave?

MEGACLES: I am leaving never to return. [About to de-
part]

ARISTEAEA: Listen. But, no —. Where are you going?

MEGACLES: To breathe my last, my dear, far away from
you. [Megacles starts to leave resolutely and then
turns around]

ARISTEAEA: Help! I am dying. [Fainting, on a rock]

MEGACLES: Woe is me! What do I see? She has been over-
come with grief. [Going to her] Hope of my life,
beautiful Aristea, do not lose heart. Megacles is
here. I shall not leave. You will be —. But what
am I saying? She cannot hear me. Ill-fated stars!
have you more misfortunes in store for me? No, this
is to be my last. Who will give me advice? What
shall I decide? What can I do? Leave? It would
be cruelty, tyranny. Remain? What is the good of
it? Perhaps in order to marry her? Yet would the
deceived king, my betrayed friend, my loyalty and
honor permit it? I might leave later. But, alas!
then my terrible predicament will be renewed. At
this point it is merciful to be cruel. Goodbye, my
life, goodbye! [He takes her hand and kisses it]

Goodbye, my lost hope! May heaven make you happier
than I. Eternal gods! May you preserve your beau-
tiful creation and give her the days of my life
that you will have taken from me! — Where can he
be? Lycidas! [Looking across the stage]
Scene 10
LYCIDAS, MEGACLES, and ARISTEA

LYCIDAS: Has Aristea listened to all you have had to say?
MEGACLES: To everything. Hurry, prince, bring help to your bride. [About to leave]
LYCIDAS: Alas! What do I see? [To Megacles] What has happened?
MEGACLES: A sudden illness has caused her to faint.
[Starting to leave again]
LYCIDAS: You are leaving me?
MEGACLES: I am going -. [Turning back] Take care of Aristea. [Leaving] (What will she say when she recovers consciousness?) [Stops] I cannot forget her frenzy. Listen, Lycidas.

In seeking him, if she should ask,
"My dearest friend, where can he be?"
reply to her that I am dead.

But no, such news would cause her grief. Instead, reply: "He left in tears."
What pain it is to leave one's love and never see her anymore when she most needs to have his help.

[Exits]

Scene 11
LYCIDAS and ARISTEA

LYCIDAS: This is bewildering. I do not understand.
Aristea, on the verge of death — Megacles, grief-stricken.
ARISTEA: Oh, dear!
LYCIDAS: She has already recovered consciousness. Open your beautiful eyes, princess, my love.
ARISTEA: [Without seeing him] Faithless bridegroom!
LYCIDAS: Ah, no, do not call me that. As a pledge of my constancy here is my right hand. [He takes hold of one of her hands]
ARISTEA: At least -. Heavens! [She notices it is not Megacles and withdraws it] Where is Megacles?
LYCIDAS: He has left.
ARISTEA: Has the ingrate left? Has he had the heart to abandon me in this crisis?
LYCIDAS: But your husband-to-be has remained.
ARISTEA: [She gets up in a fit of temper] Have then humaneness, loyalty, love, and compassion disappeared? Celestial deity, what good are your thunderbolts in heaven, if they are unable to reduce these wretches to ashes?
LYCIDAS: I am beside myself. Tell me what has offended you, my dear? Speak. Is it vengeance you desire? Your future husband is here, Lycidas—
ARISTEA: Gracious! Are you that Lycidas? Get out of my sight; hide yourself from me. Because of you, perfidious man, I find myself in this extremity.
LYCIDAS: What wrong have I done? I am dumfounded.
ARISTEA: Barbarian, you are killing me.
By you I from myself am torn.
From you comes all the grief I feel; it comes to me because of you.
Do not expect me to forget.
I hate your cruel deceitful heart.
I'll always dread the sight of you.
[Exits]

Scene 12
LYCIDAS and then ARGENE

LYCIDAS: She calls me "barbarian!" Gods above! I, a "perfidious man"! I shall follow her and try at least to find out what this strange enigma is.
[Enter ARGENE]
ARGENE: Stop, traitor!
LYCIDAS: [Recognizing Argene] Am I dreaming or am I awake?
ARGENE: No, you are not dreaming. I am the deserted Argene. Ungrateful fellow! Behold that face which gave you pleasure for so long if, despite my misfortunes, there remain on it any visible signs of what it was.
LYCIDAS: (Where can she have come from and at what a critical time she surprises me! If I delay any longer, I won't be able to overtake Aristea.) Beau—
tiful damsel, I do not understand your words. I shall give you the opportunity to express yourself more fully at another time. [About to leave]

ARGENE: [Holding him back] Undeserving man! Listen!

LYCIDAS: (Alas for me!)

ARGENE: You do not understand me? I, on the other hand, am well aware of your treachery. I have learned all about your new love affair, your deceit, and, to your shame, will inform Clisthenes of everything. [Starts to leave]

LYCIDAS: [Stopping her] Please listen, Argene! Do not be angry; forgive me. Do not be angry if I have been slow in recognizing you. I remember your past love for me, and if you will not talk to Clisthenes, perhaps — who knows?

ARGENE: Could one suffer a crueler insult than this? "Who knows?" you say to me. It is certainly not I who am guilty. The small tokens of your kindness are not enough for me to pardon you.

LYCIDAS: Listen. What I meant — [He tries to take her hand]

ARGENE: [Shoving him away] Leave me, ingrate! I do not want to listen to you.

LYCIDAS: (I am desperate!)

ARGENE: I am no longer lured by hope.
Revenge I'll take, not ask for love.
I'm willing to submerge my grief
so your false heart will not rejoice.

[Exits]

Scene 13

LYCIDAS and then AMYNTAS

LYCIDAS: I have never before been in greater anguish. All will be ruined if Argene talks. I must catch up with her — placate her. But in the meantime who will detain the princess? My only friend might — Where can he have gone? Let us look for him. At least Megacles will advise and console me. [Starts to leave]

[Enter AMYNTAS]

AMYNTAS: Megacles is dead.

LYCIDAS: What are you saying, Amyntas?
AMYNTAS: What I am saying is, unfortunately, true.
LYCIDAS: How! Why! What wretch has cut short his young life? Let his assassin be found. He will serve as a glaring example of my vengeance.
AMYNTAS: Prince, do not look for him. You are his killer.
LYCIDAS: I! You are talking wildly.
AMYNTAS: Would to heaven that I were! Listen: I was just now coming in search of you; I heard a sudden moan; I stopped; I turned in the direction of the sound and saw a man lying prone with his sword turned against himself. I rushed to him; I placed one hand on his chest and with the other turned away the sword. But when I saw it was Megacles, you can imagine how surprised I was. After a few moments of astonishment, I was about to say to him: "Ah, what madness has made you desire death?" but he anticipated me, saying in words that came from the depths of his heart: "Amyntas, I have lived enough. Without Aristea I cannot live nor do I want to. For ten years I have lived only for her. Lycidas, alas! is killing me and does not know it. Yet he does not intend to offend me. My life has been a gift received from him; let him take it back again."
LYCIDAS: My dear friend! And then?
AMYNTAS: Having said this, he ran away with the speed of a Parthian arrow. Do you see that cliff that hangs over and shades the river Alpheus below it? He climbed it in a flash and then flung himself into the stream. I shouted in vain. The water, after shooting up, opened as he struck it, then in swift circles closed up again and hid him. The sound made by the impact and my shouts were echoed on the shore. Then I saw him no more.
LYCIDAS: [He acts as if he were stunned] Ah, that horrifying spectacle stands out before my eyes!
AMYNTAS: We should at least look for the body that harbored such a noble soul. This is the final service which his sad friends can render him. [Exits]
LYCIDAS, then ALCANDER

LYCIDAS: Where am I? What has happened to me? Heaven has heaped all its wrath upon my head. Megacles, Megacles, where are you? What shall I do in this world without you? Unjust gods! restore my friend to me. You have taken him from me; I want him returned. If you refuse my pleadings, cruel creatures, I shall take him by force, wherever he may be. I am not afraid of your thunderbolts. I have the courage to follow the footsteps of Hercules and Theseus through the paths of death.

[Enter ALCANDER]

ALCANDER: Hello there!

LYCIDAS: Who dares to interrupt my delirium?

ALCANDER: I am the royal minister.

LYCIDAS: What does the king wish?

ALCANDER: That you go far away from here in dishonorable exile. If you are still in Elis by sunset, you will be condemned to death.

LYCIDAS: Such a sentence for me?

ALCANDER: You must learn what it means to lie about your name, to violate your trust, and to deceive the king.

LYCIDAS: What? Do you dare, insolent —

ALCANDER: Enough, prince, this is my duty. I have fulfilled it; you do the rest. [Exits]

Scene 15

LYCIDAS alone

LYCIDAS: [He unsheathes his sword] With this blade, unworthy man, I shall pierce your heart. But this is madness. What am I saying? What am I doing? At whom am I angry? I am the guilty one; I am the wretch. I should more properly pierce my own veins with it. Yes, die, unfortunate Lycidas —. Ah, my hand trembles. What is holding it back? This is, indeed, the height of misery. I hate life; death terrifies me, and meantime I feel my heart torn to pieces bit by bit. Rage, vengeance, tenderness,
friendship, repentance, pity, shame, and love vie in torturing me. Who has ever seen a soul so torn by so many conflicting emotions! I myself do not understand how it is possible to tremble while threatening, to burn while freezing, to weep while wrathful, to desire death and be afraid to die.

I weep and rage in the same breath.
The light of day has turned to night.
A hundred spectres circle me.
A hundred furies jam my breast.
Megaera with her red-hot torch
subjects my heart to caustic fire.
Alecto fills my every vein
with her congealing poison dose. [Exits]

ACT III

Scene 1

A partition formed by the ruins of an old hippodrome, once covered almost completely with ivy, thorns, and other wild plants

MEGACLES held back by AMYNTAS on one side, and, on the other, ARISTEA held back by ARGENE. The couples do not see each other.

MEGACLES: Leave me alone! It is useless to try to stop me.

AMYNTAS: Friend, come to your senses! You will not always have in readiness the hand of the fisherman who just now has saved you from drowning. Heaven tires of helping those who affront it.

MEGACLES: It is cruel and inhuman to deny death to a man who is a living corpse. Amyntas, please leave me alone!

AMYNTAS: I shall not.

ARISTEA: Leave me alone, Argene.

ARGENE: Unthinkable!

MEGACLES: Without Aristea I cannot, I must not, live any longer.

ARISTEA: I want to die where Megacles has died.
AMYNTAS: [To Megacles] Wait!
ARGENE: [To Aristea] Listen!
MEGACLES: Why wait?
ARISTEA: Why listen?
MEGACLES: Nothing can console me.
ARISTEA: There is nothing in the world for me to hope for.
MEGACLES: To keep me alive —
ARISTEA: To prevent my death —
MEGACLES: Your efforts are useless.
ARISTEA: Your attempt is of no avail.
AMYNTAS: Stop! [Trying to hold back Megacles, who runs from him]
ARGENE: Listen to me, unhappy woman! [Trying to hold back Aristea]
ARISTEA: [Running into Megacles] Heavens!
MEGACLES: [Running into Aristea] Holy gods!
ARISTEA: Ingrate! How can you hate me so much as to flee from me? How, when I seek death in order to be united with you, can you bear to go on living?
MEGACLES: See the extremes my misfortune has reached, adored Aristea. I cannot die; I find blocked all the paths along which one passes to the City of Dis.
ARISTEA: But what compassionate hand —

Scene 2

ALCANDER and the above

ALCANDER: Oh sacrilegious, insane, and execrable effrontery!
ARISTEA: Have more disasters taken place, Alcander?
ALCANDER: Your father came back to life a short time ago.
ARISTEA: How is that possible?
ALCANDER: Had heaven not prevented it, what horror, ruin, and mourning might have enveloped us!
ARISTEA: Why?
ALCANDER: You already know that, in accordance with an ancient custom, this solemn day is ended with a sacrifice. Now, when Clisthenes came with his attendants to celebrate the sacred ceremony — why, I do not know, nor from where — Lycidas impetuously crossed our paths. I have never seen a more ter-
rible sight. He held a sword, had no helmet, his cloak was tattered, his hair disheveled. His flaming eyes were wild, and, on his cheeks showing signs of recent tears, fury was evident. He shoved and knocked over the surprised attendants, and rushed at the king, shouting full of rage: "Die" as he faced him with his profanatory blade upraised.

ARISTEA: How shocking!

ALCANDER: The king did not move nor show fear. Instead, he said sternly, staring at him: "Foolhardy youth. What are you doing?" Don't you see that heaven looks after those who are kings on this earth? The fierce youth was stunned by these words. He drew back his arm just as he was about to deal the blow. He looked at the king dumfoundedly and grew pale. He began to tremble; his sword dropped, and from his eyes, which had appeared so threatening, tears burst forth.

ARISTEA: I breathe again!

ARGENE: The madman!

ALCANDER: Reckless young man!

ARISTEA: And then what did my father do?

ALCANDER: He has had the culprit bound in chains.

AMYNTAS: (We must try to save the distraught prince.)

[He leaves]

MEGACLES: What did Lycidas say?

ALCANDER: He refused to answer any questions. He is deserving of the death punishment, but it appeared that either he was unaware of it or did not care. He wept continually and called for his Megacles. He first asked for him of everyone and then demanded him from each of us. Megacles was continually on Lycidas' lips, as if he was unable to say anything else.

MEGACLES: I can stand no more. Who will be compassionate enough to lead me to my dear friend?

ARISTEA: Imprudent man! What can your plan be? My father knows you have deceived him; he knows that you are Megacles. Instead of saving him, you will condemn yourself to death on appearing before the king.

MEGACLES: At least I shall be condemned together with my prince. [Starts to leave]

ARISTEA: Listen! Don't you think it would be much better for me to attempt to placate my offended father?
MEGACLES: I cannot expect so much of you.
ARISTEA: Yes, for your sake I'll do this, too.
MEGACLES: Oh, generous, noble, and compassionate Aris-tea! May the gods long preserve the beautiful soul within your beautiful body. I was right in saying when I first saw you that you were not a mortal be-ing. You are my comfort, go!
ARISTEA: Say no more. There is no need. A mere glance from you makes me desire what you desire.

By virtue of my love for you,
I feel the stirring of your heart.

Should you be grieved, I too am grieved.
Should you rejoice, I too rejoice. [Exits]

Scene 3

MEGACLES and ARGENE

MEGACLES: May you favor Aristea in her act of mercy, oh gods! Perhaps through her, her father will be ap-peased. He is more than justified in punishing Lycidas, it's true. Nevertheless, his love for his daughter should prevail. But if it does not? Oh, would that I could observe how he listens to her! Argene, I want to follow her, keeping at a distance.
ARGENE: Do not be so concerned about Lycidas. You have seen how heaven has tired of him. Abandon him to his fate.
MEGACLES: I leave my friend! I am not so base.

I followed him in happiness
in former times when skies were clear,
and now that tempests round him rage,
he'll find me with him once again.

Just as the glowing flame reveals
impurities contained in gold
our mishaps bare those false to us. [Exits]
ARGENE, then AMYNTAS

ARGENE: I must admit that I too feel pity, in spite of myself. I make a show of anger and with good reason, but in the midst of my wrath, as my lips utter words of threat, my heart sighs for Lycidas. Can you, Argene, be so weak? Ah, no! He is a perjurer, an ingrate; it cannot be. I detest my pity. I no longer want to look at his deceitful face. I hate him. I want to see him punished. If he should fall before me stabbed to death, I should not shed a single tear.

[Enter AMYNTAS]

AMYNTAS: Woe is me! Where can I flee? Oh, fateful day; oh, unhappy Lycidas!

ARGENE: Perhaps the traitor is dead?

AMYNTAS: No, but soon he will be.

ARGENE: Don't you believe it, Amyntas. The wicked have many companions, so that they never lack help.

AMYNTAS: You delude yourself. There is nothing more to be hoped for. The laws cry out against him; the people conspire; the priests are enraged, an offense proffered against majesty calls for blood. Because of his guilt in interrupting the sacrifice, the culprit will inevitably be the victim. Public clamor has already demanded that he be punished. He is to die on the altar of Jove. The king will be present to hand the sacrificial axe to the priest.

ARGENE: Would it not be possible to revoke the decree?

AMYNTAS: How? They have already attired the guilty man in the white robes required for the ceremony. I have seen him going towards the temple with his head wreathed with flowers. Perhaps he has already arrived. Perhaps at this moment, Argene, the fatal two-edged axe is opening his veins.

ARGENE: Oh, no! Poor prince! [She weeps]

AMYNTAS: What good does it do to weep?

ARGENE: I wonder what has happened to Aristea? Has she not arrived?

AMYNTAS: She has arrived, but has accomplished nothing. Either the king does not want to give her satisfaction or it is not within his power to do so.

ARGENE: And Megacles?
AMYNTAS: He was stopped by the guards who were looking for him. A short time ago, just after he was shackled, I heard him ask to be allowed to die for his friend, and if he too had not been guilty he would have had his wish. But one guilty man is not permitted to die for another.

ARGENE: The brave and noble-hearted man has at least made an attempt. What you say makes me blush with shame. Has friendship stronger ties than those of love? I too feel inspired to emulate his virtue. I too wish to win renown with him and have the world forever speak of us. Let my action cause amazement and compassion, and let there be no one in all the universe who repeats my name without weeping.

An occult flame descends upon my heart, an inspiration coming from the gods, which make me feel superior to myself.

Keen axes, swords, and withes, and chains, now I can look at you but without fear.

[Exits]

Scene 5

AMYNTAS alone

AMYNTAS: Flee, save yourself, Amyntas. Everything upon these shores has changed to horror and death. But where can I go without Lycidas? I have labored hard to rear him; I have raised him from lowly birth to royalty. Could I leave without him now? No, I'll go back to the temple; I shall face the wrath of the outraged king. Let Lycidas allow me to share in his guilt. I shall die of grief but beside him.

I am not unlike a shipwrecked passenger compelled to swim in order to escape from drowning in the waters of the deep. At times he is about to be submerged; at times he cannot see a guiding star. At last he is obliged to give up hope and lets himself sink down into the sea.

[Exits]
Act III 149

Scene 6

An exterior view of the great temple of the Olympic Jove, from which one can descend a long and magnificent staircase divided into different planes. A clearing in front of the same with a burning altar in the center. A woods of sacred wild olives all around, from which the wreaths of the victorious athletes have been gathered.

CLISTHENES, who descends from the temple, preceded by a large crowd, by his guards, by ALCANDER, and by the CHORUS of priests, some of whom carry on golden trays the instruments of sacrifice.

CHORUS: Great father of the gods, hold back your thunderbolts, the cause of fright and awe in mortal men. Pray, lay them down, oh god of earthly kings!

PART OF CHORUS: May the temple be steamed with the blood of a blasphemous, foolhardy young man who has outraged, Omnipotent Jove, an image of you on this earth.

CHORUS: Great father of the gods, hold back your thunderbolts, the cause of fright and awe in mortal men. Pray, lay them down, oh god of earthly kings!

PART OF CHORUS: May he bear, as he crosses the waters of Lethe, the grave burden of fear and the burden of shame for his crime.

CHORUS: Great father of the gods, hold back your thunderbolts, the cause of fright and awe in mortal men. Pray, lay them down, oh god of earthly kings!

CLISTHENES: Unfortunate youth, the last moment of your unhappy end is drawing near. You arouse so much compassion in me (and may Jove punish me if I hide the truth); you arouse so much compassion in me that I do not dare to look at you. Would to heaven that
I could condone your guilt! But I cannot, son. I am the custodian of the regal code. Others have entrusted it to me unsullied, and I must deliver it unsullied to my successors. This unavoidable obligation of a ruler at times makes it painful not to be merciful. Yet, except your life, if you desire anything, make it known. I swear I shall faithfully execute what you desire. Let me know whatever you would like, son, and then close your eyes in peace.

LYCIDAS: Father—for indeed, your words are more in keeping with those of a father than of a judge or king—I do not deserve nor expect pardon, nor do I request or want it. Fate has so afflicted my existence that I would far rather be dead than alive. My only wish is to see my friend again before I die. Since he is still among the living, I implore the final favor of embracing him, after which I shall gladly submit to death.

CLISTHENES: Your wish will be granted. Guards. [Calling to them] Bring Megacles to me.

ALCANDER: Sir, you are weeping. What great emotion stirs your heart?

CLISTHENES: Alcander, I confess it, I am astonished at myself. The face, the look, and the voice of this young man have produced in my heart a sudden palpitation that vibrates through all my veins. I try to find the reason for it, but cannot. Just gods! What can this excitement mean?

_I do not know from where my tender feelings come,_
_a new and unfamiliar stirring in my heart,_
_a chilling stark sensation running through my veins._

_Compassion in itself could not have brought about_
_this raging conflict taking place within my breast._

Scene 7

MEGACLES among the guards, and the above

LYCIDAS: Ah, come to me paragon of true friendship, come my beloved, my dear Megacles.
MEGACLES: Alas! in what a state I find you, poor prince.
LYCIDAS: Seeing you alive will make death sweet for me.
MEGACLES: What good to me is my life which, in vain, I try to exchange for yours? But you will not depart from it long before me, Lycidas; as inseparable friendly spirits we shall cross the final ford of the beyond together.
LYCIDAS: Oh, sweet companion of my joys and sorrows for as long as it has pleased fate, we must now be separated. Since this is the last time we can be together, give me your right hand and listen. I both entreat and command you to continue living; this is my desire. Merciful friend, close my eyes with your own hands; remember me. Return to Crete to my father. Poor father, you will be unprepared for this cruel blow. Please soften the sad tale when you tell it. Sustain, assist, and console my afflicted parent: I commend him to you. If he weeps, you dry his tears; and in you, if he wants a son, give him back a son.
MEGACLES: Say no more, your words are killing me.
CLISTHENES: Alcander, I cannot bear it any longer. Look at those faces. Notice those repeated embraces, those tender sighs, and their parting kisses mingling with their tears. I pity them.
ALCANDER: Sir, the hour set for the sacrifice has passed.
CLISTHENES: It is true. Holy ministers, take charge of the victim, and you, guards, separate him from his unhappy friend.
[They are separated by the priests and guards]
MEGACLES: Barbarians! you have torn out my heart.
LYCIDAS: Alas! my dearest friend!
MEGACLES: My dearest prince!
LYCIDAS and MEGACLES: [Looking at each other at a distance] Farewell!
CHORUS: Great father of the gods,
hold back your thunderbolts,
the cause of fright and awe
in mortal men.
Pray, lay them down, oh god of earthly kings!
[While the chorus is singing, Lycidas kneels at the foot of the altar, next to the priest. Clisthenes takes the sacrificial axe handed him on a tray and,
in giving it to the priest, sings the following verses to the accompaniment of grave instrumental music]

CLISTHENES: Oh, father of the deity and men. Great Jove, whose mere command moves sea and earth and sky, and from whose hand both cause and consequence are hanging on an interlocking chain, receive the sacred victim offered you. May he restrain the fatal thunderbolts that glisten in your hand!

[In handing the axe to the priest, he is interrupted by Argene]

Scene 8

ARGENE and the above

ARGENE: Stop, oh king! Stop, ministers!
CLISTHENES: What insensate boldness! Don't you realize, young lady, the importance of the rite you are interrupting?
ARGENE: On the contrary, I have come to make it more acceptable to Jove. I bring to you a voluntary and innocent victim that has the courage and desire to die in place of the guilty man.
CLISTHENES: Who is this person?
ARGENE: It is I.
MEGACLES: (What a beautiful demonstration of love!)
LYCIDAS: (How ashamed I feel!)
CLISTHENES: You should know that the weaker sex is not permitted to die in place of the stronger.
ARGENE: But it is not forbidden that a wife die for her husband. So, I am informed, Alcestis preserved the life of the Thessalian Admetus, and I know that since then other women have followed her example.
CLISTHENES: What do you infer by this? Are you perhaps the wife of Lycidas?
ARGENE: As proof of it he has given me his hand and plighted his troth.
CLISTHENES: Lycoris, in listening to you I think I am more insane than you. How could a lowly shepherdess claim to be the wife of a regal heir?
ARGENE: I am not of lowly birth, nor am I Lycoris; the ancient glory of Crete has been made famous by my forebears. Let Lycidas declare whether or not he has plighted his troth to me.
CLISTHENES: Lycidas, speak.
LYCIDAS: (This is the time when it is merciful to lie.) No, it is not so.
ARGENE: How can you deny it? Look at me, ingrate! Recognize your gifts, if you do not want to recognize me. This is the golden necklace you gave me at the fatal moment you claimed me as your wife. At least remember that you yourself put it around my neck with your own hands.
LYCIDAS: (It is only too true!)
ARGENE: Examine it, oh king!
CLISTHENES: Take this woman away from here. [To the guards who try to take her away by force]
ARGENE: People, friends, holy priests, eternal gods, if any gods are present at this unjust sacrifice, I protest to you that I am the wife of Lycidas and want to die for him, nor—. Princess, come to my aid, your father does not want to listen to me.

Scene 9

ARISTEA and the above

ARISTEA: Believe me, father, she is worthy of pity.
CLISTHENES: You would oblige me to join you in your ravings? [To Argene] Speak, and let your words be brief.
ARGENE: These jewels will speak for me. [She hands the necklace to Clisthenes] I shall be silent. Do the young women of Elis wear such ornaments?
CLISTHENES: [Looks at it and becomes upset] Heavens! what do I see? Alcander, do you recognize this necklace?
ALCANDER: Do I recognize it? It is the one your infant son was wearing when I exposed him to the waves.
CLISTHENES: Lycidas! (Good Lord! I am trembling from head to foot.) Lycidas! stand up. Is it true that you gave it to this woman?
LYCIDAS: But she must not die in my place. My promise to marry her was secret and did not take effect.
We have not been joined in marriage by a solemn rite.
CLISTHENES: I am asking only if this is your gift.
LYCIDAS: Yes.
CLISTHENES: How did it come into your possession?
LYCIDAS: Amyntas gave it to me.
CLISTHENES: And who is this Amyntas?
LYCIDAS: The man in whose care my father put me.
CLISTHENES: Let this Amyntas be found.
ARGENE: As it happens, here he is.

Final Scene

AMYNTAS and the above

AMYNTAS: Lycidas! [He starts to embrace him]
CLISTHENES: Calm down! Answer and do not lie to me.
Where did you obtain this necklace?
AMYNTAS: I received it as a gift from an unknown person more than twenty-five years ago.
CLISTHENES: Where were you living then?
AMYNTAS: Near Corinth where the muddy Asopus flows into the sea.

ALCANDER: [Looking fixedly at Amyntas] I can detect in his features some trace of the face I have seen before. I cannot be mistaken. Without a doubt it is he. [Kneeling] Sir, I have been guilty of a transgression committed long ago. I beg you to pardon me. I shall tell all.
CLISTHENES: Stand up and speak.
ALCANDER: I did not leave the child in the sea as you had ordered. Compassion overcame me. This man, a stranger, unknown to me, happened to come by, and I gave him the infant hoping that he might take him away to a remote shore.
CLISTHENES: And the boy, Amyntas, what became of him? What did you do with him?
AMYNTAS: I? (Must I reveal the secret?)
CLISTHENES: You have turned pale. Speak, wretch, tell me what became of him. In being silent you add new guilt to the old.
AMYNTAS: He is before you, sir. That man is Lycidas.
CLISTHENES: Is not Lycidas the prince of Crete?
AMYNTAS: The real prince died in infancy. I, having
just then returned to Crete, offered him to the sor-
rowing king. On my advice, he reared him as the
heir to the throne in place of the dead boy.

CLISTHENES: Merciful gods! This is Philinthus, my son.

[Embracing him]

ARISTEA: Heavens!

LYCIDAS: I, your son?

CLISTHENES: Yes, you and Aristea are twins. The Del-
phian oracle, warning that you were to murder me,
ordered me to leave you abandoned in the sea.

LYCIDAS: I now understand the horror that chilled me
when I raised my sword to strike you.

CLISTHENES: Now I understand the overflowing affection
I felt in my heart when I looked at you.

AMYNTAS: Happy father!

ALCANDER: Today you can make many happy at the same
time.

CLISTHENES: This is what I desire. I want Argene to
marry Philinthus, my son, and Megacles, Aristea.
But my son Philinthus is guilty of death.

MEGACLES: Being your son he is no longer guilty.

CLISTHENES: Is granting pardon for transgression per-
missible in one of my royal blood? Everyone here
has displayed courage; must I be the only example
of weakness? The world shall not hear this about
me. Priests, stir up the fire on the altar. Go,
son and die. I too will soon be dead.

AMYNTAS: What inhuman justice!

ALCANDER: What cruel virtue!

MEGACLES: Sir, stop! You cannot condemn him. You are
king in Sicyon, not in Olympia. The day on which
you have presided has expired. The guilty man is
now subject to the judgment of the public.

CLISTHENES: Very well, let the verdict of the public
be heeded. I do not pretend to plead, command, or
advise in favor of the guilty youth.

CHORUS OF PRIESTS AND PEOPLE:

We want the guilty man to live
to save from useless punishment
his father, who is free from blame.

We do not want such shocking thought
to mar the gladness of this day
nor disturb the sacred rite.

THE END
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**BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL STUDIES IN ENGLISH**


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