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Semiramis, and Other Plays

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SEMIRAMIS, AND OTHER
PLAYS ***

1 SEMIRAMIS AND OTHER PLAYS

BY
OLIVE TILFORD DARGAN



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8 CHARACTERS

NINUS, king of Assyria

HUSAK, king of Armenia

KHOSROVE, son of Husak

MENONES, governor of Nineveh

ARTAVAN, son of Menones

SUMBAT, friend of Artavan

VASSIN, officer of the king

HADDU, a guard

ARMIN, a guard

DOKAHRA, woman to Semiramis

SOLA, wife of Artavan

SEMIRAMIS, daughter of Menones

Officers, heralds, messengers, guards, soldiers, dancers, &c.

9 SEMIRAMIS

ACT I.

Scene: Within the tent of Menones, on the plain before Nineveh. Left, centre, entrance to tent from the plain. Curtains rear, forming partition with exits right and left of centre. The same at right, with one exit, centre. Couch rear, between exits. From a tent-pole near exit, right centre, hang helmet and a suit of chain armor.

Sola parts curtains rear, left, and looks out, showing effort to keep awake. She steps forward.

Sol. Hist! Armin! Haddo!

(Enter two guards, left centre)

Still no news?

Arm.

None, lady.

Sol. Oh, Artavan, what keeps thee?

Haddo.

He will come.

Sol. Semiramis is sleeping. I am weary,

But I'll not sleep.

10 Arm. Rest, madam; we will call you.

Sol. My lord shall find me watching, night or day!

Arm. Two nights you have not slept.

Sol.

Ten thousand nights,

I think, good Armin.

Had.

We will call you, madam.

Arm. With the first hoof-beat ringing from the north!

Sol. *(At curtains, drowsily)*

I'll be—awake.

(Goes in)

Had.

She'll sleep now.

Arm.

Ay, she must.

Had. And I'd not call her for god Bel himself!

Arm. Hark! *(Goes to entrance)*

'Tis a horseman!

Had.

(Following him) Two!

Arm.

Right! We must rouse

The lady Semiramis.

Had.

Make sure 'tis he. *(They step out)*

Voice without. Is this Menones' tent?

Arm.

(Without) Ay, Sir! The word!

Voice. God Ninus!

(Semiramis enters, through curtains right centre)

Sem.

Artavan! His voice!

(Enter Artavan, followed by Sumbat who waits near entrance)

Sem.

My brother!

Art. Semiramis! *(Embracing her)* Three years this kiss

Has gathered love for thee!

Sem.

Has 't been so long

Since I left Gazim?

Art.

Ay,—since Ninus called

Our father here, and Gazim lost her dove.

Sem. (*On his bosom, laughing softly*) The dove of Gazim,—so they called me then.

11 But now—(*proudly, moving from him*) the lioness of Nineveh!

Art. A warrior's daughter!

Sem. And a warrior's sister!

O, I have prayed that you might come! The king

Is gracious—loves the brave—

Art. Our father?

Sem. Ah!

Art. He's well?

Sem. Is 't day?

Art. Almost.

Sem. At dawn he meets

The Armenians on the plain.

Art. Then he is well!

Sem. He went forth well,—and brave as when he drove

The Ghees from Gazim with his single sword!

But—oh—he needs you, Artavan, he needs you!

(*Comes closer speaking rapidly*)

I'm with him night and day but when he battles—

I buckle on his arms—cheer him away—

And wipe the foe's blood from his mighty sword

When he returns! But I've a fear so strange!

At times he's moved quite from himself,—so far

That I look on him and see not our father!

If I dared speak I'd almost say that he

Who never lost a battle shrinks from war!

Art. (*Starting*) No, no! Not that! You borrow eyes of fear

And see what is not!

Sem. But I've felt the drops

Cold on his brow, and raised his lifeless arms

Whose corded strength hung slack as a sick child's!

O, it is true! And you must stand by him!

Fight at his side! I thought to do it! I!

12 See here, my armor!

(*Moving with him to where the armor hangs*)

When I had this made

And swore to wear it in the fight, 't was then

He yielded—said that you might come—

(Sound of trumpets at distance. They listen)

The charge!

Art. I go to him!

Sem. *(Taking a paper from her bosom)*

Take this! He 'll understand!

'Tis some direction later thought upon!

Art. My wife is safe—

Sem. With me! Three days ago

She came. And now she sleeps—

(Points to curtains, rear left)

Art. In there? One kiss—

Sem. Nay, nay, you go to battle, and should keep

Steel in your eye, not woman's tears!... Who comes

With you?

(Looks toward entrance where Sumbat stands)

O, Sumbat!

(He advances and drops on knee. She gives him both hands and he rises)

Welcome! But no time

For gallant greetings! We are warriors here!

(A roll of battle is heard)

Art. We go!

Sem. Ride! ride! The battle over, ye

Shall meet the king!

(Artavan and Sumbat hasten out. The noise of departure brings Sola to curtains)

Sol. What is it? Who was here?

Sem. *(Absorbed)* They 'll reach my father!

Sol. Not Artavan?

Sem. Ay—he.

13 Sol. And gone—my husband!

Without a word—a look!

Sem. The battle calls,

And he who wears ambition's spur must ride!

Sol. Ambition! O, you think of naught but war

And glory! Hast thou no heart, Semiramis?

Sem. I' faith, and love thee with it! *(kisses her)*

Sol. Trifle not!

Hadst thou a heart thou couldst not live a maid,

So beautiful, and never dream of love!

Thou 'rt some strange thing—

Sem. What, wilt be angry? Come!

I'll tell thee all he said—thy Artavan,—

Ay, every word, and how his eyes grew soft

With dimness sweeter than their vanquished light

When thou wert his dear theme!

(They move to curtains. Semiramis stops and listens)

Go in. I'll come. *(Sola goes in)*

Sem. *(Listening)* Is that a chariot? My father!... Nay!

He's safe with Artavan! Whatever comes

His son will be his heart and bear him up!

Safe, safe, Menones, and thy grizzled locks

Shall wear their laurels to an honored grave!

(Noise of approaching chariot)

It is a chariot! Can it be the king?

(Chariot stops without)

Armin, who is it comes?

Arm. *(Appearing at entrance)* The Lord Menones.

(Semiramis sways, steadies herself, and waits. Menones enters, livid and trembling. In form he is large and mighty, but is grey with age. He staggers over to couch and sits upon it, groaning heavily. Semiramis looks at him in silence. Then approaches and speaks in a low terrified tone)

14 **Sem.** You fled the battle!

Men. Oh!

Sem. You must go back!

Men. Too late!

Sem. *(Gaining courage and putting her hands sternly on his shoulders)*

No!

Men. We must fly!

Sem. Fly! Never!

Men. *(Rising)* Come!

The chariot! The king will leave my race

No blood on earth!

Sem. If it be coward's blood

'Tis better lost!

Men. Come, come! We yet can fly!

Sem. Back to the battle! There I'll go with thee!

Men. I can not! Oh, the terror's here—here—here!

It clutches at my heart!

Sem. Tear out thy heart

And keep thy honor whole!

(He falls on the couch, shaken with suffering. She kneels by him pleading)

passionately)

Sem. Up, father, up!

You must go back! You know not what you 've done!

Our Artavan—

Men. Praise Bel, he 's safe in Gazim!

Sem. No ... he is here ... he came, and rode to find you.

Men. He came? Gods, no!

Sem. Nay, true! He 's in the battle!

Now you will go! You will go back, my father!

He does not know the plan! He can not lead

Without your counsel! Come—your voice—his arm—

And all is safe!

(He rises; noise of battle; he sinks shuddering)

Men. No—I 'll die here—not there!

15 *(Semiramis stands in despair; then lifts her arms praying)*

Sem. O mighty Belus, give me back my father!

(She listens with sudden eagerness and goes to tent door)

False! false! They're verging south! North, north, ye cowards!

(Rushes to her armor and takes it down. Shakes the curtains right, and calls)

Dokahra! *(Throws off her robe and begins putting on armor. Enter Dokahra, right centre)*

Dok. Mistress!

Sem. Buckle here! Be quick!

Men. You shall not go!

Sem. You have no might or right

To stay me now!

Men. You will be lost!

Sem. Lost? No!

Did I not plan this battle? Haste, Dokahra!

Our lives are in your fingers! Courage, father!

(Going, Dokahra still adjusting armor)

The king has smiled on me—I do not know—

But there was such a promise in his smile—

And if the victory 's mine he will forgive!

Dok. This rivet, mistress!

(Noise of battle)

Sem. Artavan, I come!

(Rushes out. Sound of chariot rolling away. Dokahra looks stolidly at Menones for a moment, then turns through curtains, right. Menones presses his heart in pain, moans wretchedly, and draws a blanket over his body)

Men. Is this the form that bright Decreto loved?

But where the soul, O, gods! (*Lies shuddering*)

Voice without. The King!

16 (*Menones draws blanket over his face and becomes motionless. Enter the king, with Vassin*)

Nin. (*At entrance*) Stand here!

Godagon, haste! Ride to Menones; say

We wait within his tent; his messengers

Will reach us here.

(*A rider spurs off without. Ninus and Vassin advance within the tent*)

Vas. Your majesty, suppose

The Armenians gain, you 'll be in danger here.

Why come so near for news?

Nin. For news, good Vassin?

I had a better reason. Semiramis

Tents with her father.

(*Points to curtains*)

Vas. Ah!

Nin. The sun will break

Through there!

Vas. My lord—

Nin. She stirs! She comes! Wait—see!

(*Dokahra's gaunt figure appears at curtains*)

Vas. A false dawn, is it not?

Nin. Your mistress sleeps?

Dok. (*Abasing herself*)

No, mighty king!

Nin. She 's up? Then give her word

We're here.

Dok. She 's not within, my lord.

Nin. Abroad!

So soon? She 's on the general's business?

Dok. And yours, O king! She 's joined the battle!

Nin. She!

Vas. Ha! ha! Do you believe this?

Nin. Ay ... 'tis so.

I know her spirit. Here 's mettle for a queen!

17 (*Menones uncovers and half rises*)

Vas. You would not make her one, your majesty!

Though she should lead your troops to victory,

Still is she but your general's daughter, and
Assyria's crown is given of gods to gods!
Nin. And Ninus knows to keep his race untainted.
But all the jewels of a king, my Vassin,
Are not worn in his crown. Some in the heart
Are casketed, and there this maid shall shine
For me alone. Were she of heavenly race—

Men. (*Starting up*)

She is, my lord!

(*Ninus regards him in astonishment*)

Nin. What do you here, Menones?

Speak!

Men. (*Trembling*) I am ill.

Nin. Ill, sir? Ha! Now I know!

Your daughter leads while you couch safe in tent!

She sought to hide your shame! O, what a heart!

But you—

Men. I led, my lord, till illness seized—

Nin. Too ill to fight, but not too ill to fly!

Hound! hound! My troops are lost! I'd kill you now

But 'tis an hour too soon! First you must be

Of every honor stript!

Men. (*Kneeling*) My lord and king,

I know that I must die, but hear a prayer

For my brave daughter's sake! Betray her not,

Lest thou offend the gods that gave thee life,

For she, too, is of heaven!

Vas. Ha!

Men. I swear

'Tis true! My lord, Decreto was her mother!

She met me on the plains of Gazim when

This aged figure was called fair, and youth

Still fed its fire to manhood's prime;

18 Our babe she left upon a mountain crest

And sent her doves to tend it through a year,

Then bade me scale the mount and take my own.

I did, and named her for Decreto's dove—

Semiramis!

Nin. What precious tale is this?

Vas. He thinks to fright you from the maid, my lord.

Dok. (*Falling at the king's feet*)

O king, 'tis true! Ask thou in Gazim—

Nin. Go!

(*Dokahra vanishes through curtains left rear*)

Nin. 'T will take a better lie to save your head!

Men. My head? Thou 'rt welcome to it! 'Tis not that!

But she—my daughter—

Nin. We will spare her life.

Men. (*Calmly*) It is my prayer that she may die with me.

Nin. Not while we love. If e'er she lose her charm,

We may remember that you were her father.

Men. (*Furiously, forgetting himself*)

She has a brother yet!

Nin. A brother! So!

We 'll look to him as well! Thanks for your news!

Men. (*Towering up*) Though every god in heaven gave thee blood

Yet would I spill it!

(*Lifts his sword; suddenly drops it and falls, pressing his heart. Ninus and Vassin watch him silently until he is still*)

Nin. Dead?

Vas. (*Stooping*) Ay, dead, my lord.

Nin. I would have spared him though I threatened death.

19 **Vas.** Have spared the coward? Why, your majesty?

Nin. Semiramis has spirit passing woman's;

I have no hope to force her to my arms,

And I 'd have wrought her heart to tenderness

By mercy to her father. Love is my aim!

All else I can command—but that—Guards here!

(*Enter Armin and Haddo*)

Not you—my own! But wait—a word! Where sleeps

Menones?

Arm. (*Pointing*) There, O king!

(*The body of Menones lies behind the king and Vassin, unseen by the guards. Exeunt Armin and Haddo. Enter the king's guards*)

Nin. Take up this body.

Place it within.

(*Guards go in with Menones' body*)

Vas. What would you do, my lord?

Nin. You 'll know in time.

(*Re-enter guards*) Hark! You saw nothing!

Guards. (*Bowing to floor*) Nothing.

O mighty Ninus! (*Exeunt*)

Nin. I will have her love!

Vassin, this story of her goddess birth

Is true!

Vas. How knows your majesty?

Nin. It speaks

In all her motions. Every glance and grace

Revouches it. E'en your dull eye must know

Her beauty is immortal, though her life

Is forfeit to the clay and must have end.

Vas. Thou 'lt find another fair! Youth blooms and goes!

Nin. Not such as hers! Her brow 's a holy page

Where chiselling Time dare never set a mark!

20 The sun hath been her lover, and so deep

Hath touched her locks with fire no winter hand

May shake his kisses out!

Vas. Why, thou 'rt in love!

(*Confused voices without. A messenger runs in and falls at the feet of the king*)

Nin. Speak, sir!

Mes. Assyria wins! The Armenians fly!

They 've lost their leader—

Nin. Khosrove! Is he taken?

Mes. Taken or slain, I know not which, but know

He leads no more the enemy! They fly

Before Semiramis!

Nin. Semiramis!

Mes. Ay, all was rout until she reached the field

And spurred the—

Voice of herald without. Victory! A victory!

Ninus is god and king!

Cries. A victory!

(*Enter herald*)

Herald. Assyria triumphs o'er his enemies!

Nin. Is Khosrove taken?

Her. Slain, the people cry!

The soldiers hail Semiramis their chief,

Call her a goddess, drag her chariot,
And shout and swear by Belus' ruling star
To be her slaves forever!

Nin. So they shall.

Vas. Your majesty—

Nin. Peace, Vassin! Wait and see!

(Noise and cries without as Semiramis is drawn toward the tent in her chariot)

Nin. Ho! Guards!

(The king's guards enter. Ninus passes to right centre, facing entrance opposite. Guards station themselves 21 on each side of him and in his rear. Semiramis enters, followed by officers and soldiers. Her helmet is off, her hair falling)

Nin. Hail goddess!

(Semiramis looks at the king in astonishment then glances fearfully toward Menones' room)

Nin. Hail, Assyria's queen!

Sem. *(Faintly)* O king—

(Ninus advances to her. She kneels before him)

Nin. Kneel down, Menones' daughter! Rise,

The bride of Ninus, nevermore to kneel!

(Raises her)

This victory is proof, if proof I need,

That you are a true daughter of the skies,

Mate for the mightiest throne!

(To soldiers) Cry festival!

The feast of triumph and the wedding revel

We'll hold together! Go!

(Exeunt soldiers, cheering without)

Nin. *(Taking the hand of Semiramis)*

To-day thou'lt come?

Sem. *(Withdrawing her hand and bowing her head)*

I am my king's.

Nin. *(Passing to exit)* The royal chariot,

Within the hour, will take you from the tent

Unto our palace.

(Exeunt Ninus and attendants. Semiramis stands dazed. Sola comes out softly and looks at her)

Sem. *(In rapture)* Ah, my father's safe!

I'll tell him!

(Hurries toward curtains right, rear, and stops at exit)

No ... I'll wait. This joy is dead

If Artavan be lost!

(Sola springs toward her with a cry)

Sol. Be lost? Ah, no!

22 Where is he? Oh, not lost!

Sem. He pushed too far

Amid the flying troops.

Sol. And you—you stole

His last look from my eyes!

Sem. He may be saved.

For Sumbat followed him. He must be saved!

We'll hope till Sumbat comes.

Sol. O, you know naught

Of love!

Sem. I was his sister, Sola, ere

He made thee wife.

Sol. A sister! O, such love

Is nothing! Thou wilt smile at it

If ever thou 'rt a wife!

(Semiramis is removing her armor. She stops and looks questioningly at Sola; then shakes her head)

Sem. Nay, Sola, nay!...

Help me with this.... Somehow my heart is gone

And armor's for the brave.

(Putting on her robe) Now 't has come back.

But beats and whispers like a maiden's own.

I am but half a warrior.... Do not sob.

Sumbat will bring us news.... Ah, he has come!

(Enter Sumbat)

Sol. *(Rushing to him and looking into his face)*

Oh, lost! *(Flies, sobbing, through the curtains, rear left)*

Sem. Speak.... Is it true?

Sum. I fear it is.

I could not save him, and they bore him off.

Sem. Alive?

Sum. Alive!

Sem. A prisoner! Not slain!

Then we may hope! I've captured Husak's son!

23 **Sum.** Khosrove! Is he not under guard without?

A man most fair ... of lordly form, and young?

Sem. 'Tis he! Have him brought hither instantly!

To Husak word shall go on swiftest steed

That I will yield the prince for Artavan!

(Exit Sumbat)

He 's safe ... if there be time ... if there be time!...

Husak, the Fierce ... but he must love his son,

And will be merciful to save him. Ay....

So brave a son. Now I recall his face,

It would have made me pause had not my eyes

Been dim with triumph.

(Enter Sumbat, followed by officers with Khosrove. The officers fall back, leaving the captive before Semiramis. He is stripped of all armor, and clothed in a scant tunic revealing a figure of marked strength and grace. He stands erect, but with head bowed, and his arms bound to his sides)

Sem. *(Gazes at him)* Ah!... *(She advances a step)*

Armenian!

(At sound of her voice he lifts his head and looks at her with eager recognition)

Sem. *(Stepping back)* Armenian!

Khos. *(Proudly)* Armenia, by your leave!

I am my father's house.

Sem. I'm glad 'tis so.

Then he should value thee.

Khos. He does.

Sem. So much

That he will spare the life of Artavan

If we spare yours?

Khos. Who is this Artavan

Who evens me in price?

Sem. Menones' son.

Khos. Menones? Governor of Nineveh?

Who fled my sword, fear-cold, and pale with terror?

Insult not Husak with so poor a suit!

That coward's race—

Sem. Am I a coward, sir?

Khos. *(In sudden dejection)*

These fettered arms make answer, princess.

Sem. Nay,

I am Menones' daughter,—Artavan

My brother!

Khos. Not the Assyrian princess? O,

Forgive me, lady! I am proud to be

Thy brother's price!

Sem. What surety have I

That Artavan still lives?

Khos. My word.

Officer. His word!

O, noble madam, it is known to all

That Husak takes no prisoners of war.

They die before his tent.

Khos. Such is the custom—

Sem. O me, my brother!

Khos. But I can avouch

That Artavan still lives.

Off. Trust not the word

Of captive foes, my lady. By what means

Can he know this?

Sem. Speak, sir.

Khos. To you alone

I'll speak.

Sem. Nay—before all!

Khos. Unto no ear

But thine.

Sem. Wouldst save thy life?

Khos. Perhaps. Wouldst save

25 Thy brother?

Sem. Sumbat, wilt advise me?

Sum. Trust him,

And hear what he would say.

Sem. Out then, my friends,

I pray you.

(All go out but Semiramis and Khosrove.)

Now!

Khos. My father swore to me

Before I led his troops 'gainst Nineveh,

All captives should be held at my disposal

And bloody custom waived. I would not speak

'Fore all, lest I should rob fierce Husak's name

Of terror which is half his sword.

Sem. But now

He thinks you dead.

Khos. Not so. I've sent him word

By a sure mouth that I'm unhurt and held

A prisoner.

Sem. O then my brother's safe!

How gracious art thou, Heaven!

(Steps towards entrance) Sumbat!

Khos. (Stepping before her) Wait!

Sem. What more?

Khos. All—everything—there's nothing said!

Ninus will spare me not! 'Tis thou must save me!

Sem. I! No! The king!

Khos. Not he! Is Artavan

Grown dearer than his hate to Husak? Nay—

Sem. Sir, fear not Ninus. He will grant my suit.

Khos. He will? You—you—

Sem. I've saved his army!

Khos. (Relieved) Ah!

No more than that?

Sem. Enough!

26 **Khos.** No! 'T will not wipe

Revenge from out his heart,—and you have saved

But that your father threw away.

Sem. Peace, sir!

Khos. There's but one way for me—escape!

Sem. No more!

Nay—not another word!

Khos. I must escape—

Sem. Not one!

Khos. That word unsaid slays Artavan,

Spoken it saves him! Once in Ninus' power

I have no hope of life, and with me dies

Your brother.

Sem. (Scornfully) Do not fear!

Khos. I fear? By Heaven!

Think you this heart is not a soldier's own

Because 'tis captive to a woman's sword?

A woman's sword! O little had thy sword

To do with my defeat! Unarmed thou wouldst

Have taken me—for 't was thy beauty struck

My weapon to my side! (*rapidly and passionately*)

When I bore down
Upon your chariot, I could have swept you
With one arm from the world! But suddenly
A missile struck your helmet and dislodged
The glory of your face before my eyes,
Your hair ran gold, the shining East looked black
Behind the star you made upon its breast!
I knew thee for a goddess, and stood still
Meek captive to thy wish! O blest am I
To learn thou art not greater than myself,
But so much less that I may lift thee up!
Fly with me—be my queen—
(*Semiramis tries to speak*)

Go, call them in!

27 I'll shout above their heads to reach thine ears!
O, trust to me! In me thy brother lives!
Come, and thy fallen father shall be brave
Beneath Armenia's smile! Here thou mayst save
His life, but ne'er again will he know honor!
Help me to fly and save three lives in one!
Give me to Ninus—give me up to death,
And with a father and a brother lost,
Though thou wert worshipped 'mong thy country's gods
Still thou couldst not be happy!

Sem. Sir—

Khos. But come,
And they are safe!

Sem. (*Bewildered*) What do I hear?

Khos. O, come!

Dost know what love is, daughter of Menones?
It is the fire that dead puts out the light
On every hearth, living makes all the world
One altar feeding incense unto Heaven!
It gives the soul to life, breath to the soul,
Pulse to ambition, strength to warrior arms,—
(*Struggling with his fetters*)
Such strength that they may break all captive bonds

To clasp their own!

(Breaks his fetters and attempts to embrace her as she retreats gazing at him as if fascinated. She escapes him, and throws off her bewilderment. He drops to his knees holding out his arms to her)

And love I offer thee!

Sem. Sir, I forgive thee, for thou knowest not

To whom you speak!

Khos. Know not!

Sem. I who am now

Menones' daughter, ere the night shall be

The bride of Ninus, king of all Assyria!

28 *(Khosrove rises, bows before her, and stands with silent dignity)*

Sem. You—you—were saying—

Khos. Nothing, royal madam.

Have you not friends without?

(Semiramis hesitates, goes to door and calls)

Sem. Sumbat!

(To Khosrove) Thou 'rt safe!

Khos. *(Ironically)*

Assyria's queen should know!

Sem. She does!

(Re-enter Sumbat and officers)

Sum. Unbound!

Sem. Ay, he is free! We only wait the word

Of gracious Ninus. Guard him until then,

We charge you, Sumbat. Keep you nearest him.

(Exeunt Sumbat and officers with Khosrove)

Sem. My father now! He must have heard the shouts

Of victory, yet still he hides himself.

... The king asked not for love. He is Assyria.

I would not lessen him by love. Not yet....

'Tis my triumphant arms he weds. The heart

Must sleep....

Voice of guard at entrance. The king approaches!

Sem. Ah!... The king!

His word, and all is done. I'll speak to him

Before I see my father. Then I may say

'Thou art forgiven, and Artavan is safe!'

... And Khosrove ... safe.... The royal chariot!...

O, mother, send thy doves—I am once more

A babe!

(The king enters alone)

Nin. Art ready for thy king?

Sem. I am—

And yet—a word before I go! Thou know'st

That Khosrove is my prisoner—

Nin. Khosrove! He!

We thought him slain!

Sem. Nay, sir—

Nin. A prisoner!

O, welcome gift! We ask no other dower!

Sem. But, gracious lord—

Nin. *(Turning to entrance)* Ho, Vassin! Khosrove 's taken!

Go! Find him out and drag him straight to dungeon!

Bind him with chains until he can not move,

Till we 've devised some bitter way of death!

Vas. *(Without)* I haste, my lord!

Nin. At last my enemy is 'neath my feet!

(Returning to Semiramis)

And 'tis to thee we owe this gift of fortune!

... You're pale, Semiramis.

Sem. O king—

Nin. *(Taking her hands)* And trembling.

Dost fear my greatness? Nay, thou ledst my army—

Sem. O, if for that thou ow'st me aught, grant me—

Nin. Whate'er thou wouldst!

Sem. My brother, Artavan,

Is Husak's captive! Thou canst save him!

Nin. I?

Then he is saved! But how! Tell me the way!

Sem. Husak will yield him up for Khosrove!

Nin. What

Send Khosrove back alive! Not though the gods

Commanded it! Alive! 'T was Husak slew

My father, and his son shall die! Ten years

I've sought for this revenge! And give it up

For a green lad fresh from the fields of Gazim?

Sem. A warrior, sir, who 'll win thee many a battle!

And crest thy glory with meridian stars!

He 's worth the price though pity lent no coin!

30 Save him, my lord! A bridal boon I ask!

Give me my brother!

Nin. A bridal boon I 'll grant.

Thou lov'st thy father?

Sem. (*Choking*) You know—that he—

Nin. I know.

Sem. Great king—

Nin. One thou mayst save.

Sem. O gods!

Nin. Thy brother, or thy father? Thou mayst choose.

Sem. I know my duty, sir. I choose my father.

Nin. A noble choice. We are not harsh, my queen.

The people know Menones' life is forfeit,

And know how I have sought for Khosrove's death;

Did I spare both for your sake they would say

That Ninus' scepter is a woman's hand.

(*Shouts of rejoicing without*)

But come! The chariot waits. The people call.

Sem. First will I tell my father that he lives.

He 's waiting there the summons to his death.

Ah, I must thank you sir.

(*Takes the king's hand and kisses it. Goes through curtains, right, rear. Her cry is heard within. She returns.*)

Too late! He 's dead!

Cold, cold, my father! Oh!

(*Sobs, her hands covering her face*)

Nin. (*Removing her hands and putting his arm about her*)

Thou 'rt not alone,

My bride!

Sem. (*Withdrawing and kneeling to him, her hands upraised*)

O king, leave me my brother!

Nin. Nay!

Did you not have your choice? You ask too much.

31 Sem. (*Rising*) Ah, so I do! I should demand, not ask!

Nin. Demand!

Sem. Ay, king! ... 'Tis true I 'm not alone.

My goddess mother is again with me

As when this morn my heart exultant rode
The tides of triumph! When the heavens rolled
And like a stooping sea caught up my soul
Till ranged with the applauding gods it clapped
My courage on below! You offer me
A place beside your throne. I offer you
The hearts of all your subjects now my own,—
The love—the worship of your mighty army!
(*Cries without*)

They shout my name—not yours—great Ninus! Hear!

Shouts: Semiramis is queen! Semiramis!

Sem. I bring a hand, with yours inlocked, shall reach

O'er Asia's breadth and draw her glory in!

A heart ambitious with immortal beat

To make Assyria greatest 'neath the stars!

And in return I ask my brother's life!

Give me your promise Khosrove goes to Husak,

Or leave me where I stand—Menones' daughter!

Nin. (*Slowly, reading the determination in her face*)

I promise.

Sem. Swear!

Nin. I swear it!

Sem. (*Relaxes, falls at his feet, and reaches up, clasping his hands*)

O, god Ninus!

(CURTAIN)

32 ACT II.

The great hall in the palace of Nineveh. The rear is open, showing the sky and the towers of the city. Along the floor, which is high above the ground court, rear, are sculptured lions. On each side of hall where right and left reach open rear are large entrances, with steps leading up to hall, guarded by spearmen and archers. Within the hall, between winged bulls, are entrances to chambers, right centre and left centre. Near front, right, smaller entrance between figures of men with lion heads. The same opposite, left. The walls of the hall are lined with alabaster slabs on which are sculptured and colored the conquests of Assyrian kings.

Ninus alone. Enter Vassin, left centre.

Nin. (*As Vassin enters*)

You 've told her?

Vas. Ay, my lord.

Nin. What does she say?

Does she suspect we ordered Khosrove's torture?

Vas. I can not answer that.

Nin. Then answer this!

You're sure that he will die? You made good work?

Vas. Good work, my lord. He can not live a day.

Nin. A day! You 've hurried then! I bade you fill

His wounds with mortal but a lingering bane!

Go, have him brought within! He must not die

Without my foot upon his neck!

(As Vassin is going) What said

The queen?

33 **Vas.** She cried 'My brother 's lost!'

Nin. No more?

Vas. O, then her soul put sorrow's grandeur on,

And those about her saw a noble storm;

But yet so proud her royal eyes, each drop

That fell from them were worth a world

To him for whom they fell!

Nin. *(Aside)* He loves the queen!

(Enter Semiramis, left, centre)

Sem. Is this thing true my lord? O, surely Heaven

Will cry out 'No' though thou must answer 'Ay!'

Nin. *(To Vassin)* Go! *(Exit Vassin, right front)*

Sem. Is it true?

Nin. Too true, my queen!

Khosrove is maimed beyond all hope of life,

And thou must make thy husband heir to love

That was thy brother's.

Sem. Oh!

Nin. Thy grief is mine.

Sem. I will not weep, though I could shed such streams

As when the clouds from riven breast pour down

Their torrent agonies!... How strange, my lord,

The guards should venture so without your warrant!

Nin. I've had their heads for it!

Sem. *(Shocked)* Their heads!... Why, this

'Tis to be royal! Ah!

Nin. Put by these thoughts,

Semiramis. No theme to-day but love!

Sem. Love, sir?

Nin. Ay, that! Thou lov'st me, dost thou not?

Sem. Thou art great Ninus!

Nin. I'd be loved as man!

Forget my kingdom, and put arms about me

As doth the peasant maid her beggar lord!

34 Sem. (*Moving from him*) I thought thy greatness married my ambition

To make Assyria brave e'en to the gods!

I'll keep my promise ... howsoever thine

Is broken. Crowned, my glorious purpose beats

Higher than any dream my maiden heart

Could nourish! I will keep my word. But love?

If thou wouldst have it—win it!

(*Starts away, then turns back to him*)

Hast yet found

A governor for the city?

Nin. No.

Sem. Delay

At this unsettled time? Dost think it safe?

Nin. I've ordered every tower-watch redoubled,

Each gate close-locked, and keep the keys myself!

None goes or comes till I have found the man

For governor.

Sem. Would not Vassin serve?

Nin. (*With suspicion*) I've other use for him. Perchance he'll go

From Nineveh.

Sem. My lord, there's one from Gazim,

Sumbat, thou'lt find as true as thine own heart.

Who with some aid from me—

Nin. From you? So, so!

Sem. (*In surprise*) I was my father's head and hand, my lord.

Who knows the guardian locks and wards and plans

Secretive for thy safety but myself?

Whom thou dost choose must learn somewhat of me.

Nin. Ay, you'll nob heads together!

Sem. Sir?

Nin. Well, well—

I'll choose a man!

Sem. Strange ... but he is the king!

... Ah, Khosrove! Artavan!... Nay, I will think

Of nothing but my duty to the crown!...

... "And with a father and a brother lost—"

(*Enter Sola, left, front. She sees that Semiramis is alone and advances*)

Sem. "Though thou wert worshipped, thou couldst not be happy!"

Sol. Tell me! When does he come?

Sem. Who, child?

Sol. You ask?

My husband—Artavan!

Sem. He will not come.

Sol. Art thou not queen?

Sem. And Ninus king.

Sol. He will not save thy brother?

Sem. Nay, he can not.

Sol. O monster king!

Sem. Hush, Sola ... he forgave

My father.

Sol. Oh!—because he knew him dead!

Sem. He knew him dead!

Sol. Ah, I will tell you now!

(*Looks about guardedly, and speaks in a low tone*)

I saw your father die—and Ninus saw him!

Dokahra waked me—and unseen we watched!

The king came to the tent—discovered all—

Doomed him to death—you to dishonor! Then

Your father rose to strike him—and fell dead.

The king—

Sem. Go! Leave me, Sola! Leave me! Go!

(*Exit Sola, left, near front*)

Sem. (*Stands in silent horror, then speaks slowly*)

... I'll keep my oath ... and crown. Still will I make

36 Assyria great. Assyria is the army,

And I ... am queen of arms ... not love! Not love!

(*Re-enter Ninus*)

Sem. (*Softly, not seeing Ninus*)

"Dost know what love is, daughter of Menones?"

Nin. (*Advancing*) My bride!

Sem. (*Turning to him*) My lord, I would see Sumbat. Pray

Let him be summoned.

Nin. Nay, we 've sworn this day

Shall be for us alone!

Sem. 't was he I charged

With care of the Armenian prince.

Nin. My queen

Shall not be troubled.

Sem. 't will not trouble me,

My lord.

Nin. Enough it troubles me!

Sem. He 'd know

Of this foul fault, against your will—

Nin. Again

That theme! Forget it!

Sem. O, my lord, forget

That noble prince? So brave—so proud—so fair—

Nin. What do you say? O, you changed eyes with him!

Sem. My lord!

Nin. This is your grief! Your brother! Ha!

Sem. Your majesty—

Nin. Not majesty! Fool! Fool!

Ho, there! Bring in the Armenian! You shall see

This noble prince! So brave—so proud—so fair!

Her brother! O, fool, fool, fool!

Sem. This the king?

Nin. Why, I 'm a fool, my lady!

[37] (*Guards enter right front with a half lifeless body*)

Look on him!

He 's had some kisses since you saw him last

That struck full deep!

Sem. (*Staggering back*) Is that—

Nin. Ay, it is he!

Look on him! 'Tis your Khosrove! Your—

Sem. (*Majestically*) Peace Ninus!

When you have knelt to me I 'll hear you speak!

(*Exit left centre*)

Nin. (*Stares after her and becomes calm*)

Now I have ruined all. She 'll not forgive!

(Enter Vassin, left, rear)

Vas. My lord, the brother of the queen has come.

Nin. Not Artavan?

Vas. Ay, Artavan.

Nin. He 's here?

Vas. When Husak had your oath you 'd free his son,

Prince Khosrove, Artavan was sent at once

To Nineveh.

Nin. How could he pass

The gates?

Vas. He passed before your order fell.

Nin. We 'll welcome him.

(Looks toward the queen's room)

I 'll make my peace with this.

(Goes out with Vassin, left, rear. Semiramis enters hesitatingly, sees that Ninus is gone and advances fearfully toward the figure on the floor. The guards stand back, right front. She retreats, covering her eyes; then approaches and bends over the body. Searches his face, and throws up her hands in sudden joy)

Sem. Not Khosrove! O, it is not Khosrove!

(Leaves him and hurries to exit, trying to suppress her emotion. Returns to the body)

38 Where is the prince? Poor wretch! Can you not speak?

... Are these thy ways, ambition?

Voice without. Way! Make way!

(Semiramis hurries to her room. Enter the king, left rear, walking with Khosrove, and followed by Vassin and Sumbat)

Nin. Speak not of going, Artavan!

Khos. I must,

O king! I pray your leave to go at once

To Gazim. Sudden troubles urge me there.

I beg your kingly warrant I may pass

The gates—

Nin. Nay, you shall stay! We shall persuade you!

(To attendant) Summon the queen. Her voice we 'll add to ours.

Khos. My lord—

Nin. We like you, Artavan! By Bel,

We do! You're worthy of your sister queen!

No more—you 'll stay! ... See! This is Khosrove!

(Bends over body on the floor) Is—

Or was? ... He lives.... Think you these bones will hold

Until they reach old Husak? Now you 've come,

We must keep faith! Ha! ha!

Khos. And that—is Khosrove?

Nin. Truth, 'tis! ... Bear out the dog!

(Guards bear off body, right front. Enter Semiramis. Sumbat crosses to her)

Sem. My brother? Where?

Khos. Here! *(Advancing to her)*

Sum. *(To Semiramis)* Be not amazed

And Artavan is safe!

Nin. This welcome 's cold

Methinks. We gave him warmer greeting.

Sem. Sir,

Such sudden joy—My brother knows there 's none

39 I hold more dear.

Nin. How now? Not one?

Sem. *(Dropping her eyes from Khosrove)* Yes—one—

Perhaps.

Nin. *(Pleased, taking her hand)*

We are forgiven?

Sem. Indeed, my lord.

Nin. And for your brother, hear our royal word.

We make him governor of Nineveh!

Sem. *(In alarm)* No! no!

Nin. 'Tis done! Go, Vassin, bring the keys!

(Exit Vassin, right front)

And wear this ring, my general!

Khos. My lord,

I could not undertake—

Nin. You shall!—The queen

Will charge you with all duties.

Sem. No! I will not!

Nin. Ay, ay! We know we please you 'gainst your word

And not your will.

Sem. He is too young, my lord!

Nin. Menones was too old. And 't was yourself

Who taught us how to prize your brother.

(Re-enter Vassin with a chain of great keys, which the king takes)

Come!

(Throws chains about Khosrove's neck, and singles out the keys)

The citadel! The southern arsenal!

The northern wall—the secret passages—

And these the tunnel locks and river gates!
You 'll take command at once, and so relieve
The city which we 've shut fast as a tomb,
Fearing that spies from Husak's camp might creep
Into our bosom.

40 **Khos.** Wisely done, my lord.

Sem. O king, if 't must be so, I 'll map for him
My fathers safe division of the city.

Nin. To you we leave him.

(Talks apart with Vassin and Sumbat)

Sem. Sir, what do you mean?

Khos. *(Hurriedly)* When Vassin came to take me into charge,
Sumbat contrived another should be sent—

Sem. We know the rest! But how save Artavan?

Khos. When I have entered Husak's camp he 's free!
You trust me?

Sem. O, I must! I do! But not

To save my brother may I trust to you

The city's keys! You are Assyria's foe—

Khos. Not now! No more a foe, but truest friend!

For in my heart you are Assyria,

And you I 'd serve—

Nin. Cut short thy schooling, for

The city waits.

Sem. *(Aloud, mapping in her hand)* The river here divides
The eastern guard—*(lowers her voice)* I must not do this! No!
Risk every soul in Nineveh—

Khos. Did I

Not trust thee when I entered here? I knew

The face that shone upon me in the battle

Would not betray me! Who gives perfect trust

Is worthy of it! Thou dost know me true

By Heaven's sign that only souls may read!

I can not say what I would say because

Thou art a wife, but wert thou not a wife,

Though thou wert thousand times a queen, I 'd pour

Such worship to your ears you would believe

41 My heart would rend my body's walls and leap

Out of my bosom sooner than beat once
A traitor to your trust! Take Ninus' ring!
Give me this little one—(*slipping a ring from her finger*) that hath enclosed
The sovereign rose and ruby of thy veins
That dims his purple power—and thee I serve—
Your general—not his! Whate'er you would
I will! Command me now—

Sem. Enough! Go, go!

Lose no more time!

Khos. O, in some dream to come,

When innocence may wear what form it will
And on thy waking nature leave no blush,
May words I must not speak take life and pay
The debt they owe this hour!

Sem. I beg you go!

Assyria's in your hands!

Khos. Nay, in my heart!

Nin. Come, Artavan! No more delay! Your troops
Await before the citadel.

Khos. I go,

My lord.

(*Confusion without, left rear. Enter an officer*)

Off. Pardon, your majesty! A man
Who says he's brother to the queen, makes bold
To press before you!

Nin. Yet another brother?

Sem. No, no, my lord!

Off. He comes from Husak's camp.

Sem. It is some madman surely, or a spy
Who plays his wits are lost and takes this way
To force into the court!

Khos. I'll thrust him out!

He may mean danger to your person.

42 **Nin.** Nay,

We'll sport with him. Let him come in!

(*Exit Officer*)

Sem. My lord—

Nin. Your brother! Ho, ho, ho!

(*Enter Artavan*)

Art. My sister!

Sem. (*Staring*) Sir?

Art. Though queen, art thou not still my sister?

Sem. No!

Art. (*Bowing with scornful ceremony*)

Your majesty!

Nin. Ha! ha! His sister! Then

Thou wouldst be brother to the king?

Art. (*Bitterly*) My hope

Runs not so high, and even to her I now

Give up all claim. I'll own no blood but that

In my own veins keeps honor! So farewell!

Nin. Be not so fast! Whence comest thou, my man?

Art. From Husak's camp. When he received thy word

His son should go to him, he set me free.

Sem. Oh, set you free!

Art. And now, O king—

Sem. (*Seeing that the king is impressed*) My lord,

If he came from the camp how has he passed

The city gates?

Nin. Ah ... true ... he could not pass.

Sem. (*Mockingly*) Perhaps he scaled the hundred feet of wall,

And crossed the rampart 'neath the arrow watch

Of towers eighty-score!

Art. I found a way,

Proud woman!

Nin. How?

43 (*As Artavan speaks Sola enters left front, and is held aside by Sumbat*)

Art. This morning ere the battle

She who was then my sister gave me this.

(*Shows paper*)

'T was some direction sent unto my father,

The lord Menones. (*Turning paper*) On this side I found

A map whose secret key I knew, that marked

A passage 'neath the river. This I sought,

Found it unguarded—

Nin. By the seven winds!—

(*Enter an officer*)

Off. O king!

Nin. You're of the northern watch?

Off. I am,

O king! The Armenians advance upon

The northern wall, but come with lances down!

Art. They come in peace to meet the son of Husak!

Sem. O, haste, my lord! Haste, Artavan to duty!

Their rage when they shall learn the fate of Khosrove

May give them courage to assail our walls!

Go, brother!

Nin. Hold! This man speaks not as madmen!

Sem. Should I not know my brother, sir?

Nin. You should.

Choose which is he. The other we condemn

To death.

Art. (*Holding out his arms*)

Save me, Semiramis!

Khos. (*Holding out his arms*) Save me,

My sister!

Sem. (*Going to Khosrove's arms*)

Brother!

Nin. (*To Khosrove*) Haste thee to thy office!

Vassin, attend him! Sumbat, be his chief!

We trust where trusts the queen!

Sem. (*To Khosrove*) Give up the keys

44 To Sumbat!

(*Exeunt Khosrove, Vassin, Sumbat, left rear*)

Nin. (*To Artavan*) You to death! (*Signs to guards*)

Sem. My royal lord,

First would I question him alone, and learn

The truth about this passage. He may be

In league with traitors subtler than himself.

One moment, sir, I pray.

Nin. O, ever wise!

Bribe him with any promise death may keep

To tell you all. But do not linger, love;

We lose our bridal day!

(*Exit, right centre. Semiramis looks at Artavan with the greatest tenderness. He gazes coldly upon her, Sola clinging to him*)

Art. What would the queen?

Sem. To be again thy sister. Dost not guess?

That man—

Art. Who can he be you prize above

Your honor and my life?

Sem. The son of him

Who set you free on Ninus' oath, an oath

Broke in the heart ere it had left the lips!

Art. My brave Semiramis! You 've saved the prince,

And with his life my honor! O, pardon me!

Sem. He was escaping in your name when you

Arrived too soon—

Art. Forgive me that!

Sem. And now

To save my brother!

Art. Hope it not. Be glad

That one is safe. Had Khosrove lost his life

In Ninus' court, my oath had driven me back

To Husak—and to death. No power then

Had saved me. Now—

Sem. Now thou shalt live!

45 Art. Nay, see!

His guards watch well! There is no way.

Sem. No way

But through the will of Ninus. He shall save thee!

Art. O, for your own dear life, Semiramis,

Let Ninus know not I am Artavan!

Sem. He dare not touch me, for the army's mine!

(Goes into Ninus' chamber)

Sol. My love!

Art. 'Tis welcome and farewell, my Sola!

Sol. O, she will save thee!

Art. Teach me not to hope.

(A band of dancing maidens enter, left, and sing a bridal chorus before the doors of Ninus' chamber)

Love and Beauty now are one,

No more wandering away!

Love 's the sky to Beauty's sun,

From him she can not stray.

And he is bright by her fair light or none!

Love and Beauty dreaming lie,

Who shall say it is not meet?

Who shall say, O fie, O fie,

To the favor sweet

That Love will ask and Beauty not deny?

(Maidens dance out, right. Re-enter Semiramis)

Sem. He 's wild with rage! I can not calm him!

Sol. Oh,

To lose thee now!

(Enter Ninus. He advances upon Semiramis)

Nin. Who is he, then—that man—

If not thy brother? To whose arms you went

As you have never come to mine?

Sem. A man

Whose life you owed to me by holiest promise

46 And oath unto the gods! I saved your soul

When I so saved—

Nin. Speak! Who?

Sem. The son of Husak,

Prince Khosrove, of Armenia!

(Utter silence. Ninus stands choked and dumb; then moves to strike Semiramis)

Sem. Strike me

You strike your army!

(Ninus drops his hand and stares at her, livid and shaken, then turns fiercely upon Artavan)

Sem. *(Rushes before him and falls, clinging to his knees)*

Wait, O wait, my lord!

If thou dost Hope to know my love! Dost dream

Of bridal joy! Wouldst rest thy head in peace

Upon my bosom, say thou wilt forgive!

And I, too, will forgive! No more will ask

What thou hast done or not done! All thy past

Is fair as Heaven by this moment's sun!

I'll love thee as thou hadst been born this hour

That gives my brother life! O, speak the word,

And take me to thy heart—thy wife—thy slave—

Nin. By earth and heaven, he shall die—and now!

(Raises his dagger to strike. Enter Vassin)

Vas. *(Excitedly)* My lord, this is the strangest governor!

He ordered me with Sumbat to lead out
The city troops beyond the southern gate,
Then spurred to north! Sumbat obeyed, but I,
Not liking this, returned to you!

Nin. 'Tis Khosrove!

Vas. (*Staggered*) Then we are lost!

Nin. Pursue him! Fly! Call back
Our troops!

Vas. Too late! By now they're locked without

47 The southern wall, and Khosrove rides to open
The north to Husak!

Sem. (*Aside*) False! Down, slanderous thought
That darkens me not him! That face that looked
As Truth had chosen it to show her own
To man! That voice—each word the enchanted door
To holier worlds unspoken! No. I'll trust!
(*Enter an officer*)

Off. O, great Assyria, the Armenians come!
The Gazim traitor's sold thee unto Husak!
Thy foes are pouring through the northern gate
And bear down on the palace! Sumbat holds
Thy troops upon the southern plain And bars
All passage! There's no help!
(*Ninus listens speechless*)

Attendants. (*Running in*) O, we are lost!

Off. The city will be sacked! The palace guards
Are but a handful!

Sem. False? O, Khosrove! False?
Then there is no man true? E'en Sumbat lost
To thy sweet promises! False! false!
(*Enter a second officer*)

Off. (*Prostrating himself*) Oh Ninus!
Call on thy gods! Thy enemies are at thee!
The palace is enclosed, and every foe
Bears in his hand a torch that blazes death
To all within!

(*The inmates of the palace are running to and fro, rear, and looking fearfully out into the court below*)

Sem. O beauteous gods, is this
Your earth? Where Falsehood steals your garments, nay
Your smile, seduces with your voice, and stamps
Your semblance upon fiends?

Voices. Save us, O king!

(Ninus stands immovable, as if made deaf and dumb by impending disaster)

48 **Voice.** We burn! They cast the brands!

Another. Not yet! They wait!

Voices of prostrate figures. Save us, O king!

Voice. See! see! The leader speaks!

Another. His herald! Hear!

(A trumpet sounds below)

Voice of Khosrove's herald. Assyria, come forth!

(All within listen, silent, eager, fearful)

Hear thou, O Ninus! Hear the word of Khosrove!

He will depart with the Armenian troops,

And leave the city free of sword and fire,

If thou 'lt decree that Artavan shall live

Free and unharmed!

(The face of Semiramis illumines with joy)

Deny and Nineveh

Shall flame!

Nin. My herald there! Stand forth!

(The herald of Ninus takes station centre rear)

Decree

As Khosrove wills!

Her. of Khos. Appear, O Ninus!

Nin. No!

Her. of Khos. Appear, O Ninus!

(Ninus goes slowly to rear and stands by his herald)

Her. of Khos. Hear, all Nineveh!

Hear the decree of Ninus, king and god!

That Artavan, the brother of the queen,

Shall freely live, and die by no man's hand!

Her. of Ninus. *(Blows trumpet, then speaks)*

Hear the decree of Ninus, king and god,

That Artavan, the brother of the queen,

Shall freely live, and die by no man's hand!

(Silence. The voice of Khosrove below)

Khos. Assyria, speak!

Nin. I, Ninus, so decree!

49 (*Staggers back toward front as all press to rear to see the troops go out. Semiramis, Artavan and Sola stand together gazing out*)

Sem. O, Khosrove! See—he rides—away—away!

(*Leans forward waving her scarf. Ninus, alone in front, goes toward his chamber, falls on the steps overpowered with rage and lifts his clenched hands*)

Nin. O, vengeance! Vengeance for a king!

(CURTAIN)

ACT III.

Scene: The gardens over the lake. A wide bridge extends from the bank of the lake, left, to the gardens which are partly visible on the right. At the rear, right, is a garlanded archway. At the left, front, steps lead from the bridge to the bank and top of the bridge. Beyond the bridge, rear, clouds show that the sun is setting.

A score of spearmen, with lances down, march in right, front, and out through archway, right, rear.

Enter, right, front, the king and Sumbat. The king is royally clad and crowned; Sumbat in official robe.

Sumbat. Khosrove delays.

Nin. But do not doubt he 'll come.

I have his word, and couriers have seen

His horsemen on the plain.

Sum. How noble, sir,

To close the Feast of Peace with supreme revel

50 In honor of your foe!

Nin. Not foe, good Sumbat.

We have no foes. Our queen's triumphant arms

Have made glad subjects of all enemies

But one, and him we make our friend. To-night

Assyria and Armenia sup as one!

(*Turns toward right, rear*)

We 'll see if all 's prepared as we gave order.

(*Exeunt under the arch of garlands. Dancers enter, right, front, and pass out through arch. Following them, Semiramis with her women. All are in rich attire but the queen who wears simple white robe. A dove nestles on her bosom. She gives the women leave to pass on and they go out merrily through arch, right, rear. Semiramis lingers; comes to the railing of the bridge, centre, and leans upon it*)

Sem. Will Khosrove come? I do not doubt the king,—

And yet—I pray he will not come!

(*Re-enter Sumbat, through arch. He comes out to the queen*)

Sem. You, Sumbat?

Where is the king?

Sum. I left him in the garden,
Giving new orders for Prince Khosrove's honor.

Sem. Sumbat, you trust the king?

Sum. I do. You've wrought
Such noble change in him that drop by drop
He's mated all his blood unto your virtues.

Sem. I must believe it, lest a doubt should breed
The weakness it suspects. But is't not strange
Khosrove should trust him too?

Sum. He knows that you
Would warn him if there lay a danger here.

Sem. I warn him? But suppose the warning false?

51 'T would wrong the king, whose purpose seems so pure

It might have journeyed with his soul when first

It came from Heaven! No. I'll answer for him!

He could not counterfeit so deep my eyes

Would find no bottom to deceit!... But now

What hast thou heard of Artavan?

Sum. No word.

Sem. I fear—

Sum. He's safe. Be sure of that. No man

Would dare lay finger on him!

Sem. But to go

Without a word! Poor Sola grieves, and weeps

As though she'd drown her wits in tears.

(A boat glides from under the bridge and over the water beneath them)

See there!

'Tis she! Alone below!

(Sola alights from boat and runs up steps to the bridge)

I'll speak to her.

Go, Sumbat! *(Sumbat goes off right)*

Sister, stay.

(Stops Sola as she is passing)

Why do you run?

Sol. I'm running from the king!

Sem. The king, my love?

There's no king here.

Sol. Nay, he's below!

Sem. Below?

Sol. Under the bridge with Vassin!

Sem. Vassin? No.

The king has sent him out of Nineveh!

Sol. He did not go. I swear that he 's below!

Sem. What were you doing 'neath the bridge?

Sol. Ah me,

I seek in every place for Artavan.

52 I 'll save him from the king!

Sem. So kind a king?

Sol. O, kind! As death, or plague, or leprosy!

'Tis he has taken revenge on Artavan!

He 'll kill the prince, too, when he comes!

Sem. My child—

Sol. (*Pointing down*)

I heard them talking there!

Sem. Thy husband 's safe.

Bethink thee that the king's decree protects him.

Sol. Not from the king! From man, not from the gods,

And Ninus is a god, or dreams he is!

Sem. From man—not from—no, no! I will not say

Or think it! My poor child—

Sol. You 'll save the prince?

'Tis you he trusts, not Ninus!

Sem. Sweet, be calm.

You did not see the king.

Sol. Hear all, and save him!

When Khosrove takes the seat of highest honor,

Lord of the Revels by Assyria's favor,

The floor will part, the chair fall to the lake,

Where Vassin waits to slay him, while the king

Strikes down in wrath the master of the feast

For fault of accident!

Sem. Where are your wits?

See, yonder comes the king!

(*Re-enter Ninus through archway*)

Sem. (*As he approaches*) Is all prepared,

My lord?

Sol. (*To Semiramis*) 'Tis true—true—true!

(*Runs off, right*)

Nin.

Ay, all is ready

Except the queen. What means these simple robes,
Semiramis?

53 **Sem.** A compliment unto

Your majesty.

Nin. It shows more like affront!

I would have Khosrove see a splendor here
Unpainted in the daring of his dream,
And thou the star of it! A merchant's daughter
Would robe her handmaid with more care—lend her
A pearl or two—a bit of scarf—or scrap
Of tinsel sun—

Sem. My lord—

Nin. A compliment!

'Tis your disdain—

Sem. It grieves me, sir, that you

Should read in outward sign what never yet
Was in my soul. Our wars are done, my lord;
And exultation of the conquering hour
Calms into peace; as I laid armor by
For victor robes and symbol of my glory,
I now cast off the purple of the queen,
And but remember that I am a wife.

Nin. (*Embracing her*) Beloved Semiramis! Forgive thy slave!

No royal dye could shine so to my eyes
As this soft white put on for me alone!
Thy pardon, love, and thou shalt shortly learn
A king, too, knows how best to compliment!
An honor waits for thee—

(*Enter officer, left*)

Off. O king!

Nin. We hear!

Off. The Armenian approaches.

Nin. Khosrove comes?

(*Semiramis watches the king closely*)

Off. He comes, great Ninus!

Nin. Well, and more than well!

54 Summon our train. (*Exit officer, right*) But one is lacking here,

Our brother—Artavan.

Sem. My lord—you think—

Nin. Who would dare harm him? He is safe.

Sem. (*Coming very near him*) From man,
Not from the gods.

Nin. (*Stepping back*) What do you mean?

Sem. The truth!

Nin. (*Seizing her arm*) It is not so! I do deny it!

Sem. (*Calmly*) What,
My lord?

Nin. What meant you when you said 'the truth'!

Sem. That gods may work some harm to Artavan.

Nin. (*At ease*) True, love! Uncertain is their favor. Look!
He comes! (*Gazing off left*)

Sem. (*Aside*) He 's false! And if he 's false in this—then is—
O, Khosrove, thou art lured to death! And I
Have been thy traitorous star!

(*Enter Khosrove, left, attended by Armenians*)

Nin. Hail, Khosrove! Hail!

Assyrians. Hail to Armenia! Hail!

Khos. O, Ninus, hail!

Armenians. Hail to Assyria, greatest over kings!

Nin. Thou 'rt welcome, and we thank thee for thy trust,
Which we 'll betray when Heaven has no god
To damn our treachery! In proof of faith,
Wear thou the royal dagger with thy own.

(*Detaches his weapon, which he gives to Khosrove*)

Our queen—has she no word?

(*Khosrove bows low before Semiramis*)

Sem. Peace and long life

55 To Khosrove.

Nin. Now to revel! Sound the trumpets!

(*Exeunt officers through archway. Trumpets sound from the gardens. Dancing maidens in white robes, each with a dove resting on her hand, enter right front, reach the centre of the stage, and begin the dance of doves. As the maidens describe circles in the dance the doves rise and fly in similar circles above their heads, and re-align on their extended hands*)

Sem. (*Who has stood aside during the dance, apparently disturbed*)

It is not true! Were any man so vile

Nature would spurn him back to chaos ere

His mother had beheld him!

(The dance ends. The maidens pass out under arch. All move to follow when Ninus speaks)

Nin. Stay! Hear, all!

Before we feast in honor of our guest,
We would do honor to our noble queen,
Whose arms of might have brought our land to peace.
Whose looks of love have brought our heart to rest!
To-night we doff our crown that she may wear it!

(Removing crown)

And here decree her word shall be obeyed
Above our own.

(Puts crown on the queen's head)

Dost like our compliment?

Sem. It is too much, my king.

Nin. *(Kneeling)* Nay, nay, thy subject!

(Semiramis seems gay with a sudden resolve)

Sem. If it so please thee then I'll be the king!

Nin. *(Rising)* We have decreed. If any here refuse
To honor thy command, though thou shouldst doom
My death, himself that instant dies. *(To officer)* You, sir,

56 Take order for it, and if your own hand fail,
When we are king again we'll have your head!

Off. My arm be as your will, my lord!

Sem. O, then
I have a wish I did not dare to voice.

Nin. Command it now.

Sem. It hath much troubled me
That Khosrove should be honored over you,
Lord of the Revels.

Khos. *(Astonished)* Lady—

Sem. King, if 't please you!
I've laid my purple by, but I have still
The royal color in my heart. Think'st thou
To sit above Assyria, who wearest not
The brave investment of the gods? who hold'st
Thy sceptre still from warrior chiefs, not from
Anointed kings?

Khos. Because my race is proud!
Too proud to kneel to any earthly king

And take the sacred vestment from his hands!

Sem. You see, my lord, that even in his heart

He ranks himself above you!

Nin. But, my love—

Khos. Farewell! Thou didst me service once, and here

I thought to thank thee, but—

Nin. Stay, Khosrove, stay!

Khos. Farewell, with all my heart!

Nin. Nay—

Sem. O, my lord.

Let him depart. He mocks our glory, and bears

A challenge in his proud simplicity

That puts our splendor to defense.

Khos. Nay, madam!

I came to lay my duty at your feet,

57 And lift my eyes no higher than your hand

Without your royal leave! But now I 'll cast

My gaze upon the stars, forgetting that

You walk beneath them! (*Going*)

Nin. Stay, O prince!

(*To Semiramis*) A boon, your majesty! 'T would blot our honor

To send him from us thus! We shall be plunged

Anew in wars, for Husak will avenge it!

I am thy most unhappy subject, and

Thou 'lt hear my prayer!

(*Goes after Khosrove and leads him back*)

You 'll stay, O Khosrove?

Khos. Ay,

On one condition.

Nin. Name it!

Khos. That you will take

Our seat at feast.

Nin. Nay—

Sem. That is our command!

Nin. No, no!

Sem. We 'll have it so!

Nin. I 'll not consent!

Sem. It is our royal order! Guards for Ninus!

Nin. What do you mean?

Sem. To have our way! Guards here!

You shall not do this wrong to your high self!

We 'll look unto your honor! (*To guards*) Bear him in!

(*Guards stand in amazement*)

Did ye not hear the king's decree? I reign!

(*Guards take hold of Ninus*)

Nin. By Hut and Nim!

Sem. Place him in Khosrove's seat!

(*Guards draw Ninus through the archway. Khosrove [58] follows, then all but Semiramis, who lingers fearfully, runs toward front, then back and listens*)

Sem. 'Tis true! What have I done? Ye gods! 'tis true!

He would not so rebel if 't were not true!

But Vassin is below! He 'll know his king

And save him!

(*Kneels*) Belus, mighty Belus, pardon!

(*The sun has set, and red clouds show almost black over water, rear. The front of stage is nearly dark. Lights glimmer from the gardens, and a faint torch shows in the darkness under the bridge. Shouts and shrieks come from within. People rush out*)

Voices. The king! the king!

Sem. (*Retreating to railing, front*) 'Tis done!

Officer. (*Running across*) The king has fallen

Into the lake! Lights there! below! (*Runs down steps leading under the bridge*)

Other officers following. Lights! lights!

(*Torches flare under the bridge. Darkness above as the last light fades from the sky. A moment of noise and search, and officers appear on the bridge, right, rear, with Vassin. A guard bears torch which throws light on his face*)

Sem. (*Confronting him*)

You 've saved the king!

Vas. I have. For I have slain

His foe!

Sem. His foe? No—you have killed the king!

(*Falls back into the arms of her women. Complete darkness on stage. An instant later moonlight. Khosrove and Semiramis alone on the bridge, centre, front*)

Khos. (*Bowing ceremoniously*)

Farewell, Assyria!

Sem. O, not that name!

Not yet—not yet.

Khos. Does it not please your pride?

[59] **Sem.** My pride? 'Tis gone. Now I could lay my head

Upon the dust.

Khos. In truth! But you 'll not do it!

Humility 's a word the great think sweet

Upon the tongue, but near the heart they find

It loseth flavor!

Sem. Ah ... you do not know?

You think the words I spoke were born of pride?

So far from that—no, no—I will not tell,

And yet you wrong me, prince.

Khos. (*Eagerly*) Did you suspect

Some danger to me here, and seek to force

My angry leave? You did not care so much?

Sem. I cared so much that rather than betray you

I would have let you go believing me

A woman worth your scorn. Ah, there my pride

In truth did suffer!

Khos. O, Semiramis!

Thou art the same as when I saw thee last?

As when I rode away and left thy face—

The only face in Nineveh—nay—I—

Will go. Farewell, most noble queen!

Sem. Farewell!

(*He lingers*)

Sem. Why go in haste?

Khos. I left my father sick.

He will be troubled till I come again.

Sem. How dared you trust—

Khos. What would I not have dared

To look on thee again?... My horsemen wait....

(*Waving toward left*)

I come!

Sem. Farewell!... Armenia is my friend?

I'm sad.... The manner of this death.... It weighs

60 Upon me.

Khos. Let it not. Thou 'rt innocent

Sem. O, some may doubt!

Khos. But who wrongs Virtue puts

A crown upon her! If thou hadst foreknown

The accident—

Sem. The accident?

Khos. 't was not

Designed?

Sem. It was ... for you.

Khos. By Ninus?

Sem. Ay.

You were to die.

Khos. Then you—you knew—that he—

(Starts from her in horror)

Sem. What 's in thy mind? What thought doth paint thy face

In dreadful silence? Oh! you think that I—

(Looks at him with equal horror. Removes farther from him, regains composure, and speaks with haughty coldness)

This serves me well! Right well, Armenian!

Yes—yes—I knew—I knew the king would fall.

But knew, too, sir, that Vassin was below,

And, by my precious gods, I did not dream

He would not save his king! While you—my guest—

You would have gone to death!

Khos. Forgive me!

(Semiramis walks farther, not heeding him)

Oh,

I found a stream that ran from heavenly springs

And in it cast the soot of hell!

Sem. Well served—

Well served, Semiramis!... I was so sad ...

And would not be content to let him go ...

I wanted but a word ... a word to cheer me ...

61 And now I have it—murderess!

Khos. *(Who has advanced to her)* No, no,

I did not say it!

Sem. The tongue may well keep silent

When eyes speak lightning. I have heard too much!

'T were better I had let you die!

Khos. Ay, better ...

Better than this!

Sem. Now, now I am Assyria!

No more a woman! Softness to the winds!

And let my heart be as my armor—steel!

Khos. Thou canst not make it so by saying it.

There is no cold or heat may temper hearts

Away from their true nature. Mail thyself

From head to foot, thou 'rt still Semiramis!

Sem. A queen!

(An officer enters, left)

Off. Your majesty, an urgent hand

Brings this report.

(Gives paper to her, which she reads)

Sem. The Ghecs are in revolt!

Thank them for me! They could not show me favor

More to my heart!

(Exit officer, left)

I 'm sick of peace—this peace

That gives men time to brood and breed foul thoughts

And fouler deeds! Give me the open war whose blows

Rain down as free as moonbeams from the sun!

Who meets me there I know, at least, he 's brave,

And there—

Khos. Semiramis!

Sem. *(Proudly)* Armenia, speak!

You have our leave.

Khos. These Ghecs—my father is

Their ancient, sworn ally!

Sem. Well, sir?

Khos. His oath

Binds him to give them aid.

Sem. The braver then

The battle!

Khos. I am my father's son!

Sem. You mean

We 'll meet upon the field!

Khos. I can not take

The field against you!

Sem. No? Why not?

Khos. You know!

Because I love you!

Sem. Sir, I am Assyria!

Khos. Nay, but Menones' daughter! She whose heart

I touched—

Sem. You touched?

Khos.

Ere taint of pride or power

Or mad ambition had laid a canker there!

When she was maiden still, and knew no thought

She might not whisper in her father's ear!

Gentle as Spring when hushing the young dove,

But strong from virgin battle, with the flush

Of valorous purpose pure as goddess' dream

Starting the noble war-blood in her cheek!

'Tis she I speak to now—she that I love—

Not the proud queen grown bold in blood and triumph!

Love me, Semiramis! You shall have peace!

Not this sick peace that turns your heart to hate,

But peace that charms the beauty back to life

And new dreams to the soul! O, no more war!

Then lilies springing in thy steps shall say

What fairer grace went by! These fingers shall

Forget the sword whose music is men's groans,

63 And on sweet strings draw out the heart of love

To give the world the key of melody!

Ah, you shall war no more—

Sem.

Sir, you forget!

These Ghecs—

Khos.

Will not revolt if I become

Assyria's head! They trust me as their—

Sem.

You!

Assyria's head! You! you! O, now I see!

I'm not yet blind, although my heart was fast

Upstealing to my eyes to make me so!

Khos. O clear thy sight a second time, my queen,

And read me true!

Sem.

And you had almost moved me!

Khos. Melt, stony eyes—

Sem.

The magic 's left the earth

That had the power to soften them!

Khos.

Not so—

Sem. You'd keep me still the general's humble daughter

While you would wear the glory I have won!

Khos. Nay, by Mylitta's fire!—

Sem.

We 'd war no more.

For who has all may well hang by the sword!

Khos. By Heaven, I—

Sem. O, you are man as *he* was!

(*Looks toward the garden shuddering*)

I 'll trust no more! Who 's worthy trust will give it!

So saidst thou once! But thou couldst doubt—so dark

A doubt my soul—

Khos. Nay, that's not my offense!

You are a woman, and you must forgive!

But you are queen, too, and the queen in you

Guards her ambition from my honest love

Lest it divide her glory!

64 **Sem.** True, she guards it!

Out of Assyrian stone I 'll make a heart

And wear it in my bosom!

Khos. Do not say it!

I did not mean the words! They are not so!

Thou dost not know thyself! Hard are the lips

That never know a kiss, and thine were made

With softness of the rose! Though all the streams

Of power on earth poured to thy sovereign sea,

Still wouldst thou want, and empty be the heart

One drop of love would fill!

Sem. You speak

As to a woman!

Khos. Ay, for so thou art!

Be now thyself! Thy peace alone I plead!

I can bear all but thy unhappiness!

For love—true love—forgets itself and makes

But one prayer unto Heaven—prayer for the good

Of the beloved!

Sem. Thou wouldst not share my throne?

Khos. Thy throne?

Sem. Ay, so I said.

Khos. I care not for it,

But since 'tis thine, I could not be a man

Worthy thyself and take a place beneath thee.

I'd be thy husband, and I know thou 'rt not

A woman to look down and love!

Sem. O theft

In argument! To make my monarch soul

Speak from thy mouth against me!

Khos. Not against thee!

To beg thee yield to love is but to plead

Thy greater cause! Ah, days will come to thee

When all the maiden in thy heart will rise

And drown the queen's! Thou canst not call me back!

65 To-morrow is the battle! O, I lied

To say thou wert ambitious and ungentle—

Sem. No, thou didst not! 'Tis true! I am—

Khos. No, no!

I'll prove it is not so! See here—the dove—

That nestles at your breast! Why is it here?

Sem. Because I was a woman once—and dreamed

On foolish, woman things! (*Frees bird from her bosom*)

Fly! fly!

And as I pluck thee out I pluck away

All thought of mortal love, and stand alone

Beneath Assyria's crown!

Khos. (*Gazes at her in despair*) Then I'll be gone!

Sem. You've pleaded well, but my domains are broad,

And might give tongue to wilder eloquence

Without love's sweet excuse!

Khos. No more! I go!

(*Moves off, left. Near exit, turns*)

I lead my father's troops!

Sem. I lead my own!

(*Exit Khosrove. She looks after him without moving until he passes out of sight. The moonlight is less bright. Her dove flies over her head. She starts and looks after it. The bird alights. She watches it eagerly and waits. It circles about her, then darts to her bosom. With an exultant moan she clasps it to her breast*)

(CURTAIN)

66 ACT IV.

Scene: Within Husak's tent. Husak, Khosrove, Armenian lords and soldiers.

Husak. Bring in the widow!

(*Exeunt officers*)

Now, my son, thou 'lt see

Assyria at thy feet. Ay, she who scorned

To match her crown with thine, shall low as earth

Cry up for favor!

Khos. Sir, I would not see it!

Hus. Still in that humor? Well, I promise thee

She shall have mercy.

Khos. Mercy, father?

Hus. Ay.

Khos. What wilt thou grant?

Hus. Ask of thy heart,

(*Khosrove is about to speak*) Peace, boy!

For once we 'll be a father, not a soldier! Wait!

(*Khosrove kneels and kisses his father's hand as Semiramis enters between guards. She is robed and crowned, her arms fettered with golden chains, and holds herself proudly, not looking at Husak. She turns to Khosrove, who watches her eagerly*)

Sem. We meet again. Wert thou upon the field?

I saw thee not. Perchance thy father thought

'T were wise to find his health and lead his troops

Lest *Love* should blunt thy sword!

Hus. By Bel, his sword

67 Was sharp enough to find the heart of Sumbat,—

Your general!

Sem. Sumbat slain! (*Turns to Khosrove*) and slain by you!

Khos. I had my choice—to slay him or to die.

Sem. (*With bitter scorn*) And did the love that makes one prayer to Heaven

Rule in that choice?

Hus. These taunts, Semiramis—

Khos. Nay, father, she has cause to use me so.

Sem. Oh, you confess you played with me! Then, heart,

In with thy scorn for this outbraves thy own!

(*Turns away, folding her chained hands on her breast, and stands as if she would speak no more*)

Hus. You make no suit for mercy?

Sem. (*Turning to him*) What! from thee?

Who kill your captives ere your tent is struck,

Nor spare a guard to drive them from the field?

Hus. I grant what I would ask—death before serfdom!

You 'd keep them for your dogs and slaves!

Sem.

And when

Am I to die? Why breach thy custom now?

Hus. We like your spirit, but push not so far,

Or we shall break the bounds we 've set ourselves.

Have you not found us gracious to your rank?

You look not like a prisoner!

Sem.

No thanks

For that! This robe and crown, these chains of gold

Are compliments that Husak pays himself,

Proclaiming him a royal victory,

Though not a royal victor!

Hus.

What! Dar'st fling

Into my face that the Armenian kings

68 Rule unanointed? Dost think that I would sue

To Nineveh or Babylon for leave

To take my kingly emblems from their hands?

But thou—thou shalt owe thine to me! I wear

No proud insignia of the gods, and yet

My hands shall strip and clothe thee as I will!

(Tears off her robe and crown)

Khos. Father!

Hus.

By sun and moon—

Khos.

O, sir—

Hus.

Her pride

Insults my mercy, but I 'll keep my word.

Take these. *(Gives him the robe and crown)*

Now, woman, learn that Husak—ay,

Husak, the Fierce, can pity fallen glory!

Stand forth, my son! Look, captive, on this prince!

A man not made to sue to less than gods!

Make him thy husband-king, and from his hands

Receive thy purple and remount thy throne!

(All are astonished. Khosrove shrinks back in shame, which Semiramis misunderstands)

Sem. Methinks this lover makes no ardent suit,

King Husak! Why, the sun has not twice set

Since he did swear me dearer than my crown,

And now the crown 's too much if my poor self

Must burden it!

(Khosrove kneels before her, holding up the crown)

Hus. Rise, sir! You give, not sue!

(Semiramis looks down on Khosrove, then turns to Husak)

Sem. Thank, thanks,

Old man, for making me once more myself!

For by the blood that storms through all my veins

I know I 'm still a queen! Now all the pride

That lives in my lost crown, and all the scorn

69 Should meet thy fawning suit, be in my words,—

I do refuse your son! Assyria

Shall owe her throne to none!

(Khosrove springs up, trampling the robe)

Hus. Now thou wilt rise!

A prince who might have gone with gods to wive

Nor bated them in choice! This to my face!

I, Husak, fawn on woman! Out with her!

Drag her to death! To instant death! Out! out!

(Guards approach Semiramis)

Khos. To *instant* death?

Hus. *(Looks searchingly at him.)* Ha! ha! Not yet! She 's thine!

Choose thy revenge! Have now thy will!

Khos. Thou 'lt grant it?

Hus. Ay, ay, whate'er thou wouldst!

Khos. She is thy captive.

Hus. I make her thine! My conqueror's right I yield

To thee!

Khos. Dost swear it?

Hus. Doubt me not! I swear!

Khos. By Belus' star?

Hus. By Belus' star, whose beams

Are death to breakers of an oath! We ask

This crown—no more. *(Takes crown from Khosrove's hand)* You pause. Stand not, my son.

Thy vengeance waits. Do what thou wilt with her,

We 'll question not.

(Khosrove strikes off the chains of Semiramis)

Khos. Go free to Nineveh.

(Husak stands in amazed silence, then understands and burns with speechless anger. At last he speaks slowly with intense wrath)

Hus. All madmen in my kingdom die! Bind him!

Sem. Die? No! O, sir, you would not slay your son?

Hus. This loathsome thing is not my flesh!

Sem. Thy son!

Hus. We have no son. Armenia has no heir.

Bear him away!

Sem. (*Holding out her hands*) My chains! Dost think I'll owe

My life to him? Thou know'st not yet my pride!

Bind me and set him free!

Hus. (*Thunderingly*) No! Husak breaks

No oath! We're not a god as Nineveh,

And bold to mock at Heaven!

Khos. (*To Semiramis*) I knew the price,

And chose to pay it. 'Tis my wish. Farewell!

(*Guards bear him out*)

Hus. (*To Semiramis*) Go free to Nineveh!

Sem. No! O, kill me!

Hus. Nay, go! But go alone—on foot—and through

A hostile country!

Sem. Ah!

Hus. That subject who

Shall give thee food or drink dies in the act!

Proclaim it, all!... Come, friends, we've not yet held

The feast of victory. The slighted gods

Will snatch away their favor if we long

Delay our revels. Though we'll miss one face,

(*Suppresses a groan*)

We'll know this much—there'll be no traitor there!

(*All leave the tent but Semiramis*)

Sem. Alone ... on foot ... and through a hostile country!

I'll overtake thee, Khosrove, ere thou'st reached

Thy throne among the stars! Thou goest from love,

71 And wilt look back and weep from every cloud;

I on thy track shall pause not till our wings

Stir the same air and lock in kisses flying!

... So pay my scorn? How then hadst loved if heart

Had brought to heart its swelling measure? Then

Our rosy hours had been the pick of time,

And hung a flower 'mong withered centuries
When every age had brought its reckoning in!
O, why will we, some cubits high, pluck at
The sun and moon, when we have that within
Makes us the soul and centre of Heaven itself?
Ambition, thou hast played away my crown
And life. That I forgive thee, but not this—
Thou 'st robbed me of the memory of his kiss.
... Go, world! The conqueror's trump that closed my ears
Unto the angel in a lover's voice
Dies to a moan that fills but one lone heart.
And soon 'tis silent. Ah, though woman build
Her house of glory to the kissing skies,
And the proud sun her golden rafters lay,
And on her turrets pause discoursing gods,
Let her not dare forget the stanchion truth—
Immortal writ in every mortal face—
"Thou art the wife and mother of the world!"
(Sees Khosrove's cloak upon the floor, and kneels by it, taking it in her hands)
My Khosrove!... Methought a god struck off my chains
So strong and fair he seemed, yet strove to hide
The beauty of his act, as might a star
Shrink in its own sweet light!
(Buries her face in the folds of the cloak)

O, noble prince,

I might have kissed thy lips and not thy garment!

72 *(Rises and wraps the cloak about her. Spurns with her foot her own robe which has been left trampled)*

Thou purple rag, lie there! Love's vesture shall

Enfold me as I go!

(Starts out) Alone ... on foot ...

But I've not far to journey. Foes are kind....

The first one met ... well, I will thank him!... Cries?

It is the feast. A man may feast who had—

But has no son!... *(Startled)* 'Tis not the feast!... I know

That noise confused—hoarse shouts—shrieks—pawing steeds—

And rumbling chariots! Those are the tones

Of battle! O, the bloody work! 'Tis war!

Did it delight me once?... Assyrian cries!

My troops! my troops! They 've rallied! How they cheer!

What brave heart leads them on?

(Cries come nearer)

Poor creatures, they

Would save me knowing not I died with Khosrove.

I will not live—

(The rear of the tent is torn away by an onslaught. Assyrian troops enter, led by Artavan)

Art. Semiramis!

Sem. My brother!

You live!

Art. And you!

Sem. Praise Heaven there is one

Will comfort my sad kingdom!

Art. Nay, all 's well!

The death of Ninus freed me from my prison;

I gathered troops and pushed hard after you,

To hear you had been taken; then I planned

This rescue. Thank great Belus, I 'm in time!

73 Sem. In time? Nay, thou 'rt too late!

Art. Too late? When thou

Dost live?

Sem. I live? No! Thou 'rt deceived!

Art. O Heaven!

... She 's dazed! Her troubles have bewildered her.

All 's well, my sister! Husak has been taken.

Thy crown itself is in our hands ... The crown!

(A soldier hands it to him)

You see 'tis safe. *(She takes it idly)*

Sem. A crown. For such a thing

Wouldst give thy Sola?

Art. She is dear to me,

But ay, by Heaven, I would!

Sem. You would? I know

A greater thing than this.

Art. What, sister?

Sem. *(Letting the crown fall)* Love.

Art. O, she is crazed! This is some evil work!

Bring in the captive Husak! He shall speak!

Sem. O, brother, once I thought thy love was truest

That ever husband gave to wife, but now

It showeth dark against my lover's truth!

Art. Semiramis ... sweet sister ... What dost mean?

... I'll know the cause of this! Call in the prince

With Husak!

Sem. Prince?

Art. Ay ... Khosrove, whom we found

In chains—I know not why—and I unbound him,

Recalling how he saved my life,—but now

I'll know what thou hast suffered at his hands!

Sem. You found him bound? I can not hear—or see!

Art. She swoons—she dies—O, true, we are too late!

Sem. No, brother, thou'rt in time! I live! I live!

I am Semiramis! Give me my crown!

Now this small circlet seems to me the world,

And it is mine—to wear—or give away!

Is 't not, good friends?

Voices. Ay, 'tis!

(Enter soldiers with Husak and Khosrove, Husak in fetters)

Sem. King Husak, hear!

Assyria and Armenia should be friends,

Joining true hands to bring a happy peace

O'er all the East. And in that dearest hope

I free thee. *(Unbinds him)* But thy son, the prince, must be

Again my prisoner.

Hus. O, queen, I've spent

One childless hour, and rather would I die

Than know another. Take my life for his.

Art. Dost thou forget, Semiramis, that once

He saved thy brother?

Sem. I remember all,

But will not change his doom. He must be bound,

Nor from my fetters may he go alive.

These are his chains—*(Putting her arms about his neck)* his prison deathless love,

And here I pray that he will wear this crown,

And hold with me the great Assyrian throne!

... *(calls)* My chariot!

Khos. My queen! my queen!

Sem. Wilt thou
Consent?

Khos. (*Kisses her lips*) I answer here.

(*The royal chariot appears, rear. They step in*)

Sem. (*Giving the reins to Khosrove*) To Nineveh!

(CURTAIN)

75 CARLOTTA

76

77 ACT I.

SCENE 1. Miramar.

SCENE 2. In the mountains of Mexico.

ACT II.

SCENE 1. Chapultaptec.

ACT III.

SCENE 1. Before the Imperial Theatre.

SCENE 2. Within the theatre.

ACT IV.

SCENE 1. Queretaro.

ACT V.

SCENE 1. The Tuileries.

SCENE 2. Miramar.

78 CHARACTERS

MAXIMILIAN, Emperor of Mexico

CARLOTTA, Empress of Mexico

LOUIS NAPOLEON, Emperor of France

EUGENIE, Empress of France

BENITO JUAREZ, President of Mexico

IGNACIO, nephew to Juarez

RAFAEL MENDORES, friend of Ignacio

ASEFFA, wife of Rafael

TREVINO, ESCOBEDO, GARZA, officers in the Liberal Army

MIRAMON, leader of the Imperial party

MARSHAL BAZAINE, head of the French Army in Mexico

MARQUEZ, MEJIA, MENDEZ, DUPIN, LOPEZ, of the Imperial army

ABBOT of Lacroma

ARCHBISHOP LABASTIDA, head of the Mexican church

PRINCE SALM-SALM, friend and officer of Maximilian

PRINCE ZICHY,

RUIZ, BERZABAL, ESTRADA, Mexican nobles

LADY MARIA, sister to Count Charles

PRINCESS SALM-SALM

PRINCESS ZICHY

PRINCESS METTERNICH

SEÑOR HURBET, GENERAL CASTLENAU, MARQUIS DE GALLIFET, in the service of Louis Napoleon

AUSTRIAN, BELGIAN, PRUSSIAN, and other foreign ministers at the court of Napoleon III.

Imperial soldiers, Liberal soldiers, guards, rabble, ladies of honor, officers of the court, etc., etc.

79 CARLOTTA

ACT I.

Scene I: Reception hall, castle of Miramar, near Trieste. Enter Count Charles, book in hand.

Char. Ah, books must be put by for swords, I wot,

When this wild journey to the West begins.

'T is change enough! O shifting, shuffling life!

Come, Shakespeare, magic mason, build me worlds

That never shake however winds may blow,

Founded on dream imperishable! (*Sits and reads. Enter Lady Maria*)

Mar. Charles!

Not reading! Dost know what day it is?

Char. Ay, sister!

A day to make a scholar tremble, and hug

His books in fever of farewell.

Mar. Didst see

The splendid carriages glittering up the drive?

80 And O, so many!

Char. They have arrived?

Mar. Arrived!

Why, all the Mexican deputies, arrayed

Like their own sunsets,—the ambassadors

From Austria, Belgium, France,—the princesses,

And countesses, now in the guest-room wait

The stroke of twelve to enter! 'T is nearly time,

And you sit here! Put by your Englishman!

Come, put him by, I say! He 's dead; we live.

He 's had his due and passed.

Char. Nay, his account

Is writ forever current. His book of praise

Time closes not, but waits some language new

To enter it, and at his monument

Fame yet stands carving.

Mar. (*Taking book and closing it*) So! She 's time enough!

We 've other work. (*Gently*) Is not the princess sad?

Char. I pray her heavy tears, weighing like stones,

Will hold her back from sea!

Mar. Hush, Charles! She comes!

(*Enter Carlotta, richly dressed*)

Car. Ah, cousins, trimming now your smiles to greet

The deputies?

Char. Nay, calling up our tears

To grace farewell to Miramar!

Car. No tears!

We 'll think but of an empire and a crown,

Not Miramar!

(*Enter Maximilian, dressed in the uniform of Vice-Admiral of the Austrian navy*)

Max. An empire and a crown?

At last I am out-rivalled in your heart!

81 **Car.** Nay, nay, thou know'st, my lord, thou art my empire!

Grant me so much as now I look upon

And I 'm as rich as Jove with Saturn's sceptre

New-swinging o'er the world!

Char. Then you risk much

For an unstable throne.

Car. Not risk!

Char. The men

Who 've governed Mexico, for the most part,

Have paid their heads for it.

Mar. O, Charles!

Char. 'T is true.

Car. Our safety is in the Emperor of France.

He 's the strong angel in this noble scheme!

Char. Safety in him? Nay, madam, by my soul,

The lightest smile that breaks upon his lips,

As though a breeze but touched there, hides a plot

May hang our hearts with lead!

Car. How you misjudge him!

In Paris when he pledged his faith to us

His eyes more than his words assured his heart

Unto our cause. I trust him, yea, I trust him!

Char. There is a woman on the throne of France!

She is the Eve to this slow-blooded Adam,

Dutch-born Napoleon, and holdeth up

The globe as 't were an apple for his hand.

She builds mock images of dreams that died

On Helena's lone rock, and teaches him

They are not ghosts of dream but dream indeed!

Mexico, burning with gold and sunset's fire,

Pouring the crimson of internal strife,

To her is but a jewel in crude bed

She 'd have you pick and polish for her crown!

Car. Had you but heard her sweet devoted voice

82 Pleading with us for sake of the true Church

To finish now this great emprise begun,

You would believe her holy.

Char. If she is holy,

And if Napoleon be true in this,

Then is he God's perfection of a man,

And she earth's sole and sainted paragon!

But wait—O wait and see ere you risk life

And honor!

Car. You're wrong—so wrong—but this is strange.

O why are we not happy? (*Turning to window and gazing out*)

Char. (*Following her*) Because, my cousin,

This is not Miramar as we have known it.

The scholar's home, the soldier's fair retreat,

The noble heart's sweet fane and altar spot,

But Miramar with great ambition's storm

Rolling its thunders 'gainst her peaceful walls!

Max. But to live idly is never to be born.

Shall we sit here at ease when God has found

The work for us? He with his pontiff finger

Points to the sea—

Car. (*Turning*) Sweet Miramar!

If God points to the sea, why gave he this?

This heaven-spot, this nesting place of love,

Hung like a garland 'tween the sea and rocks!

Ah, dear my lord, some curse will follow us

Who can desert this peace-embalméd place

To seek a glory fairer but in name!

I dare not do it!

Max. (*Taking her hands*) 'T is you shall say, my wife.

If to stay here 's your wish, that wish is mine,

Maybe I 've dreamed too much of deeds of good,

And visionary feats in that far land;

83 Then let it be your yea or nay, my love.

Car. O leave it not to me, for in a yea

My vanity will speak, and in a nay

My fear!

Max. A slander on these lips? A kiss

Were better! (*Kisses her. Enter Marquis Corio*)

Cor. The noble guests approach. Will 't please

Your Highnesses assume your places?

Max. Yea,

Or nay, Carlotta?

Mar. O, they come! they come!

Char. (*Hastily and earnestly*)

Nay, if you love your lord! That is a land

Of murder, treason, carnage and revolt!

The very air cries out 'go not! go not!'

E'en yon cloud-turbanned peak, that never moves

Whate'er the circling stars propound to vex

His silent wisdom, warns with forbidding nod!

O noblest cousin—

Car. (*In agitation*) An empire! Miramar!

(*Maximilian takes place centre. A table in front of him covered with maps and*

papers. Carlotta by him, Count Charles and Lady Maria in their rear. Enter Archduke of Austria, and nobles, who take position at some distance from Maximilian on his right. Enter Belgian Minister, Abbot of Lacroma, Princess of Metternich, Princess Zichy, Countess Kollonitz, and others. They stand at distance to left of Maximilian. Enter the Imperial delegate, Senor Hurbet, and General Frassart, Napoleon's Adjutant of the Field. The former takes place immediately at Maximilian's right, the latter at left of Carlotta. Marquis Corio at door. Enter the Mexican deputies, Estrada, Berzabal, Negrete, Ruiz, and a dozen others. Estrada, as president of the deputation, makes low salute)

84 **Max.** Welcome, my lords, to Miramar!

Est. Hail, Prince,
And fairest princess! The grace and hope of morning
Be ever on your lives!

Car. Must noble senors,
We give you thanks and greeting.

Max. Your presence here,
My lords, would move our hearts although you brought
No crown to guerdon welcome.

Est. O, gracious prince,
Our tongues but feebly bear the mighty love
The land of Montezuma bade us lay
Low at your feet. Your starry virtues draw
Her prayers and hopes and holiest desires
Across the sea in humblest supplication.
We make no weary tale of our misfortunes;
They are so great the world is heavy with them,
And Mexico means but calamity
To every ear.

Max. My dear and honored lords,
The heart is granite and the veins are ice
That will not stir at your deep miseries.

Est. Ah, sir, this crown is heavy, but you will bear
The golden weight as 't were the aureole
That seals the saint to God!

Max. But not without
Consent of every subject should I wear it.
Does Mexico send all her hearts with you?

Ruiz. (*Spreading paper on table*) Read here the proclamation now in force
In all our provinces.

Max. And this has been
By each assembly ratified?

Berzabal. Ay, prince!

It is a nation, not these dozen men,

85 That with a million voices prays to you!

Max. From childhood up I've sought to obey my God,
But never dreamed that he would bless my life
With such high sanction as I read herein. (*Lifting paper*)
Forgive a tear, my lords.... But we must ask
That crownéd Europe give a sacred oath
To guarantee our empire's permanence.

Archduke. Brother, I bring the word of Austria,
Whose prayers, whose arms, whose subjects' blood are yours,
While she has blood or arms to give!

Belgian Minister. For Belgium

I speak—the princess' true and royal father,
Whose little kingdom measures not his heart!

Senor Hurbet. And I, my lord, have here the signéd oath
Of Mightiest France, whose fifty-thousand men
Now guard the cradle of the new born peace
In Mexico! Read here what he will do.

Max. (*Reads*) Enough.... My lords, should I accept this crown,
'T would be with holiest expectation
To reign in love and peace, but your past struggles
Point to a term of danger and much risk
Ere our star shines above all factious spite.
Stood I alone I should not hesitate,
But here is one more dear than my own life,
Whom I must cherish more than my own life,
Within whose heart I must find out my answer;
And God be thanked her wisdom beams so true
Above the hesitations of my mind
That I can love her yea or nay as 't were
By Heaven spoke!

Est. Then to your mercy, princess,

86 We now commit our hope.

Car. Most worthy lords,
I am so proud that I would wear a crown,
So pitying I would weep my heart away
For your sad country, and so vain I think
The lord that married me might lead you from

Rebellion's night to civil-kissing hours;
But yet a woman bonded unto love,
Not my own mistress. The life bound up with mine
Is dearer than the peace of any state,
And looking deep into your country's heart
I read some cruel marks of history
That teach me fear for any precious thing
Consigned unto its love.

Est. If ever souls
Lay bare to human eyes, read now in ours
The loyalty which you will find in every subject!

Ruiz. Be merciful! Earth aches through her rock-ribs
With our old woes, and it is you may heal them!

Ber. Pity will teach thee soon to love our land!

Car. My lords, already I love Mexico,
And would forego the peace of Miramar,—
All happy days that from the future lean
To meet my smiles, as trifles whose light thought
Shames this great hour; but when in dream I see
My lord beset by foes in foreign land,
The help he needs beyond a three-months' sea,
My princess pride flags to a peasant fear
For one dear life!

Est. Wrong not yourself, your lord,
And Mexico, O gentlest lady—

Car. Nay—

Est. Say yea, and our expectant land will feel
The thrill of that affirmative across

87 The glad Atlantic! Yea—and France, whose name
Is in our hearts as God's, will bless thy tongue!
Say yea, and noble England, watchful Spain,
Who with great France began the holy work
Of blessed liberation will applaud
With happy echoes to the guardian skies!
Say yea, and the white spirit of the Church
Will take 'neath her soft wings our blood-drenched land,
That waits but for that word to hail thy lord

Regenerator, king!

Car. My lords, my lords,
We are but human! Mayhap we will not keep
The love that we have won!

Senor Hur. Fear not, O princess!
Behind your throne, with unretreating sword,
Will stand the first great power of all the world!
Thus speak I for the emperor of France!

Princess Metternich. (*Advancing*) I for the empress! Eugenie bade me speak
Her heart out here, and hail thee sister empress!
To ask when your young empire blooms above
The lily of old France, and lures the East
To pour her golden heart into your port,
And ocean blossoms with your argosies,
You 'll still remember that she loved you when
You were but princess and no farther ruled
Then stretch the gardens of small Miramar!

Car. O generous Eugenie! But the fear—
Abbot of Lacroma. To speak of fear in this is to doubt God!
He does not bless in vain a noble prince
With such rare qualities as crown the mind
Of Maximilian! 'T is for some purpose rare
He rounds such excellence with highest birth
And puts a sword of power in his hand!

88 From over seas unto your very feet
A nation comes to choose from all the world
One made by Heaven to be its sovereign lord,
Cool hearts of passion in his amity,
Make bitter eyes forget their ancient hate,
And proudest knees bow with old enemies
In worship of his star beneficent!
There pale and crushéd Peace
Shall take the color of the living rose,
Hearing the voice of his protecting love
That comes to lift her beauty from the dust
And on that ground volcanic nobly build
Her temple indestructible!
There shall his kingly mind find outward means

To write sublimity upon the world,
And like old Egypt speak in pyramids
To nations unbegot in dream of Time!
And can you shock the hour with hesitation?
Ask all the waiting world,—ay, even God,
To pause and count the heart-beats of a woman?

Car. (*Devoutly, with uplifted hands and eyes*)

Forgive me, Heaven, that I doubted thee!

(*Takes Maximilian's hands, turns with great dignity to the deputies, and speaks solemnly*)

Senors, we 'll wear the crown of Mexico.

(*Silence. The abbot of Lacroma advances; Carlotta and Maximilian drop to their knees as he extends his arms above them in blessing*)

Scene II: A camp in the mountains of Mexico. Night. Aseffa preparing food by a fire. She goes aside, listens, and returns.

Asef. O Mexico, thou traitress unto love,

Wilt trample every heart that's true to thee?

[89] (*Listens. Enter Miguel and Lerdo, very ragged and gaunt*) Miguel! Lerdo! Rafael not come? Where did you leave him?

Lerdo. Nowhere, Senora.

Asef. Oh!

Mig. Don't flutter, little bird. We mean that he left us. He set off as fresh as the morning to make the circuit of another mountain while we could barely creep up to camp.

Asef. You are hungry! I 'll give you Rafael's supper!

Ler. Hungry? No! I 've had two biscuits since yesterday, and sixty miles is n't far to go on that.

Mig. And as much good air and water as a soldier need want!

Asef. Here! Take it. 'T is good. Indeed it is!

Mig. Smoking meat! Ha! Who brought it? Has the Holy Virgin been in camp?

Asef. No, but I 've been down to the valley.

Ler. You?

Asef. Yes,—and I 've a little gold left, too!

(*Showing purse*)

Mig. You paid five pesos for that dish!

Asef. A good guesser would double the price.

Mig. And for Rafael's supper! No, I can go two more days yet. (*Puts food aside*)

Asef. But you shall not. Come, eat! I 'll feed you then, and you don't want Juarez' soldiers to be turned into babies, do you?

Mig. I 'll yield! In fact, there 's an orator within that speaks with a most convincing pinch. (*They eat*)

Asef. (*Watching*) Poor fellows! They 'll not leave him a mouthful!

Ler. Where is the general?

Asef. (*Pointing up the hill*) Asleep. Have you news?

90 **Ler.** None to bring good dreams. Let him sleep.

Mig. Lord, a meal a day like this and I could drive the whole French army into the sea! (*Rising*) Now if these rags could be turned back to their first fortunes, I'd be Don Miguel de Tejada again! You would n't think that these tags and tatters had waltzed with the president's niece at the capital, would you now?

Asef. You must let me mend your clothes as I do Rafael's.

Mig. Faith, Senora, you would have to begin too many months back. No, I'll hang out my banners as a knight of liberty should, and be Don Miguel de Tejada still. Asleep, my Lerdo? A good example, too. (*Lies down*) Good-night, Senora the Blessed!

Asef. Good-night, Don Miguel de Tejada! (*The soldiers sleep. She waits and listens. Runs aside and looks down the valley*)

Asef. Rafael! (*Steps approach. Enter Rafael*)

Raf. (*Embracing her*) Here 's Heaven for the weary!

Asef. So tired? And I have nothing for you! (*Looks toward soldiers*) They were so hungry.

Raf. They're welcome to it. (*Kissing her*) Here is my banquet,—my feast of beauty and my wine of love!

(*Staggeres to a rock and sits feebly*)

Asef. Oh! You 've been so far!—too far!

Raf. We rode all day, but made no terms for food. The people are afraid. Whoever gives us bread forfeits his life and home.

Asef. I bought some meat of a poor woman to-day. She needed the money.

Raf. And if the Imperials find her out they 'll murder her and set her hut in flames!

Asef. Oh! What shall we do?

Raf. We are an army. We 'll do as armies do. Take food where we can find it.

91 **Asef.** O, Rafael!

Raf. Yes, love, we 'll play the robber to fill the mouth of Liberty,—she 's fed too long on thistles.

Asef. She 's a stern mistress, Rafael.

Raf. But sweeter, love,

Her harshest frown that summer smiles of kings!

O, I reproach her not, even when I see

My dearest friends lie dying in her name!

A bed of stones is soft enough for me

If she but rock to sleep,—a crust to-day,

To-morrow none, and at her board I 'm fed.

But when I look on you, my traitor blood

Flies from her service. Oh, to see these hands

That plucked no beauty ruder than the rose,

So meanly laboring in the basest needs!

Your gentle body resting on cold earth,

Glad of a blanket 'tween you and the sod,

While in your bed the foreign robber sleeps!
This shakes my loyalty till I could hate
The fair, unspotted cause my sword is drawn in!
Asef. Stop, Rafael! O thank God these hands have known
That blessed of all fortunes,—to toil for love!
These eyes that sought for but a face more fair,
A flower more sweet, have found the stars that rise
Where Truth and Courage wander in the night!
In southern vales maybe we 'll hear again
The morning birds sing at our bowered windows,
But we will not forget the nobler song
Now borne by winds about these mountain peaks,—
The song of man made free!

Raf. We 'll not forget.
But will that sweet day come? Tell me, Aseffa,
You who are half a sibyl,—shall we go down
That valley to our home?

92 **Asef.** 'Tis not to gain
Our father's halls, and sit 'neath fig and vine,
We hide and starve and stagger in these hills,
But to keep noble the last hour of life,
That Death who gathers it may read thereon
The seal immortal of approving God.

Raf. Yes—dear Aseffa—but—(*Faints*)

Asef. Rafael! Rafael!
Ah dying! O my prating virtue 's gone!
I care for naught but that my love shall live!
O, Liberty, wilt spare me this one life?
... Ho! Miguel! Up!

Mig. Hey! What! Senora!... Ah!

Lerdo. What 's here?

Asef. There 's wine in the general's tent! Rafael!
My love, my love, look up!... O Mexico,
With all thy veins of gold thou art not worth
One dear drop of his blood!

(*Enter General Trevino*)

Trev. What 's this new grief?
Not Rafael!... He faints. 'Tis hunger ... hunger.

Miguel! Lerdo! Bear him to my tent.

Give him what food you find there. First the wine!

(Soldiers go out with Rafael. Aseffa follows. As she passes the general she drops to her knees and kisses his hands)

Trev. *(Alone)* Starvation now or plunder. We 'll quarter where

We can.... A horseman! If 't is Ignacio

We shall have news.

(Enter Ignacio, from riding)

Ig. Who 's here?

Trev. Ignacio?

Ig. *(Saluting)* Your pardon, sir!

Trev. You're from the capital?

93 **Ig.** Three days ago I left the city. I 've slept

On horseback since.

Trev. Your news!

Ig. We fight an empire.

The Austrian is crowned.

Trev. Impossible!

Where are our people? Salas? and LeVal?

Ig. They shouted at his welcome. At Vera Cruz

Began the unholy pageantry, that showed

As Christ had come again and all men knew him!

Each province drained its beauty by the way;

The mules that drew him caught the vanity

And picked their steps on flowers.

Trev. Tell me no more.

O Gratitude, thou hast no home on earth!

Twelve months did Juarez rule, and in twelve months

Did what no man can do but God is with him!

He healed contention's wounds, set up new schools,

Released the land from priestcraft's ancient grip,

Rebuilt our credit, destroyed by Miramon,

The robber president, who bonded the land

To France, then set the sword of Europe 'gainst us

Because we could not pay the unjust debt

From treasuries that his own hands had emptied.

O, 't was a crime too big for Heaven's eye,

And so God let it pass! France could not know—

But our own people knew—how Juarez toiled

To shape the nation to his noble thought!

Ig. Yes—yes—they knew!

Trev. We 'll break our swords, my boy.

We have no country.

Ig. Is my uncle yet

In Texas?

Trev. Ay, and we will go to him.

... Ungrateful ground that casts all goodness from it,

94 And sucks a gilded poison!

(Enter Rafael, Aseffa, Miguel, Lerdo, and others of the camp)

Raf. *(To Trevino)* Sir, you will miss

Your breakfast, but I pledge my sword you 'll have

To-morrow's supper!... Ignacio!

Ig. You here,

My Rafael! *(They embrace)* Aseffa too!

Asef. Dear friend! *(They greet affectionately)*

Raf. And Maximilian is crowned?

Ig. Yes ... crowned.

Raf. You saw him?

Ig. In the cathedral, with the empress.

Asef. The empress?

Raf. What looks he like? This Austrian duke

That with a stolen crown mocks majesty!

Ig. He looks like majesty, and yet is graced

With Nature's gentlest stamp; his countenance

Takes beauty from his smile; his smile, one thinks,

Takes sweetness from a heart that has its own

Nobility from heaven.

Trev. An enemy

Well praised!

Asef. The empress? She bewitched you too?

(Ignacio is silent)

Come, sir! The truth of her!

Ig. The truth? Go ask

The angels. They 've tongues for such sweet purpose.

Trev. What!

Ignacio turned squire o' the empire?

Ig. No.

But I can read a holy woman's face,
Though she by some strange counterfeit of truth
Would put an empress' foot upon our necks.

95 **Asef.** What is she like?

Ig. Like nothing but herself.

She is not gentle, for gentleness is but
Rude servant to that quality in her;
Gracious she's not, for grace herself doth serve
A poor handmaiden to her excellence;
Nor beautiful, for Beauty asks her name
To wear but that and know her own no more.

(In the silence that follows a rider rushes up and dismounts)

Messenger. Where is the general, Trevino?

Trev. Here.

Mess. Juarez approaches. *(Saluting)*

Trev. Juarez! Call up the camp!

Light all the beacons! Juarez! Build up the fires!

Shouts. Juarez! Juarez! Hurrah! El presidente!

Trev. We'll let him know the hearts he left i' the hills

Still beat with loyal blood!

Shouts. Juarez! Juarez! *(Enter Juarez. Silence)*

Jua. Trevino!

Trev. Your Excellency! *(They embrace)* You've heard?

Jua. I know.

Now monarchy has spread her gilded sails,
And from the East comes like another sun
To blind our eyes with wonder of a crown
While shackling us by hand and foot to earth.
But from these mountains will arise a queen,
The figure grey of ancient Liberty,
Mourning and wronged, but with the unpaling star
Of God's own favor set upon her brow:

These two shall meet—and that mock sun go down!

Trev. You still have hope when Mexico deserts us?

Jua. Dost read your country in the smile she shows

96 Her conqueror? She has a heart beneath!

Ay, sir, did she not prove it at Puebla?

Where dead fell on the dead with gun in hand

Still pointed to the French! Where, hope once lost,
And the enemy pouring through the shattered gates,
Our men blew up their city and themselves
To keep their souls free from Napoleon!
These men have brothers left, and sons,
And *they are Mexico!*

Soldiers. El presidente!

Liberty and Juarez!

A soldier. (*Waving his sword*) We 'll be revenged,

Or spill more blood than hell can drink!

Soldiers. Down with the empire! Death to Maximilian!

Jua. No, not revenge,—but justice. That's enough.

We 've but to wait—and strike. Yon mists now spread

Their fair illusion o'er the eternal mountains

'Till 't seems they are the world, and the great hills

Are naught. But by to-morrow's noon-sun see

Their fortunes faded as a dream of night,

While the rock peak looks up as if to say

From the foundation of the world I am!

So will this glamour o'er our godly cause

Pass as a breath, while all the world shall read

Our right and title to unbonded life

In our free bosoms founded and God-set!

A soldier. We 'll die for freedom!

Jua. Die? That's the one thing

We can not do. We may lie down in graves,

But from our living dust will spring new challenge

To make in noble minds continual war

Until our race be righted!

Trev. Many fly

From our misfortunes. Amaldo and LeVal—

[97] **Jua.** Call 't not misfortune that teaches us our friends.

Now are we sifted and the chaff is known!

... LeVal! ... But Diaz is true?

Trev. On yonder mountain

His fires make answer for him.

Jua. (*Looking into distance*) Forgive me, comrade!

I know you true, and sooner will yon moon

Make her last change and fall than you change once
From the full circle of a complete man....

(Turns and sees Ignacio)

My nephew here?

Ig. Just from the capital.

Jua. Where you must back again. Rafael, too!

Both my young soldiers! My right arm and my left,—

Though which is which I know not. Ignacio,

You saw the Austrian? No matter. He 's but

The drift-piece of a rotten monarchy

That thinks to graft upon the living tree

Of our new-sprung republic! We 'll shake him off

As a June oak a spray of winter wreck,

Nor ever know he clung upon our boughs!

Ig. The church is powerful yet, and seeks to join

Her cause with his.

Jua. The church? Say not the church,

But mockers in Christ's name, who steal the land

And drain its fruitage into Satan's purse,

Keeping the poor a race of hopeless slaves

Who worship their own shackles! O, Ignorance,

Thou art the great slave-master! Thy very chains

Are vital and beget themselves; and he

Who strikes them seems the monster of the earth

To the poor serf who thinks it is himself

That bleeds! The church be with our foe, with us

Be God, we 'll ask no more. Hear me, my men!

The great republic of the North 's our friend.

98 When her own war is done you 'll hear her speak

To France in cannon tones that will make quake

Napoleon on his throne! That great mock-god.

Who seeks to free all men that he may fit

Their necks to his own yoke! *(With growing intensity)* That adder who

Would coil about the world! That serpent scuffed

With white deceit and low ambition's slime,

That crept into the garden of my dream

And cankered bud and root, nursed by my toil,

Fed with my dearest blood! Ay, he will quake,
And cry for mercy to a stony Heaven
Whose pity drops long since were drained upon
The woe that he hath made! Ay, he—

Trev. *(Touching him)* But now,
My friend?

Jua. *(Composed)* You're right. No more of that. Nephew!

Ig. Here, sir!

Jua. Your place will be the capital.
We must have eyes there, and a heart to serve us.

This hour set out. Here are instructions. *(Gives papers)*

Trev. Sir,
He 's had no rest.

Jua. True ... true....

Ig. And need none when
Juarez commands.

Jua. *(Taking his hand)* Thou 'rt still my son. My house
Will not fall down when I no longer prop it.

Raf. May I not beg this office, sir?

Trev. Send him!

His heart is in the hills, and he 'll come back.

Ignacio 's yet unanchored. Trust him not

To high tides of a court.

Jua. I trust them both.

But my own blood I know. *(To Ig.)* Kneel for the oath.

(Ignacio kneels. Murmurs around, then silence. Juarez takes a crucifix from his bosom and holds it over Ignacio)

Jua. By this true image of the bleeding Christ,
May you be damned to everlasting fire,
Nor prayers of saints lift up your soul from hell,
If you prove false in what you undertake
This night for Mexico!

Ig. By Christ's own blood.

I swear, and may that blood be powerless
To save me from the damned if I prove false!

Jua. The stars that hold
The witness angels of the Lord have heard
Thy oath.

Ig. *(Rising and looking up)*

Let them record it.

Asef. (Fearfully) Ah!

Trev. (Holding out a brand) The brand!

Jua. Not that!

Ig. (Baring his arm) I choose it!

(Trevino quickly brands his arm with a cross. Juarez, too late, dashes the brand from his hand)

Ig. (Throwing up his arm) Sealed to the cause!

(Hurries to go)

Jua. My boy! (Ignacio returns for Juarez' embrace)

Ig. (Going) Liberty and Juarez!

Soldiers. Juarez!

Liberty and Juarez!

(All but Juarez follow Ignatius out, cheering)

Hurrah! hurrah!

(Juarez draws his grey mantle about him and stands silent. The fires die down. The moon clouds. He looks up invoking)

100 **Jua.** Spirit of Montezuma, be thou here

And on thy son drop wisdom out of Heaven,

That these thy children he may lead to peace,

And this thy country give again to him

Who set his iron in the earth and said

"Man, make thy weapon; there shall be no slaves!"

(CURTAIN)

ACT II.

Scene I: Palace of Chapultepec. Hall adjoining ball room. Gaily dressed women, and men in glittering official costumes passing doors. Marquez and Mejia talking.

Mar. You 've caught Trevino!

Mejia. Rafael Mendorez too.

Mar. Still better. You 'll have them shot at once?

Mejia. They 've too many friends. I must have the emperor's warrant.

Mar. He will sign the decree to-night.

Mejia. The Lord be thanked! I 'm tired of risking life and men taking prisoners that his majesty may have the pleasure of pardoning them.

Mar. If he signs the decree he will be sure to reserve the right to pardon. You must try my method.

Mejia. And that?

Mar. Shoot on the spot, and report no captures.

(Enter from the ball room Maximilian, Marshal 101 Bazaine, General Miramon, and Count Charles)

Mir. Your majesty will sign the law to-night?

Max. These men wear the brave name of soldiers; fight
Beneath a flag, and claim the rights of war.

Baz. They borrow war's fair name to kill and plunder!

Max. It was my dream when I took up this crown
To claim each subject of the land my own.

Mir. And so you may, your majesty. 'T is true.

These men are subjects to no law or nation;

They are not Mexico's; they are not God's;

But from the heavenly and the human pale

They have outbarred themselves. Our honest land

Has cast them out as venom to her health!

Nurse not this canker in your realm, my lord!

Max. I do not know ... but here 's my head and heart,

(Touching Prince Salm-Salm and Count Charles)

And they may answer. Prince, what do you say?

Prince Salm. As friend and soldier to your majesty,

I must advise the passage of the law.

Max. You, Charles?

Char. My lord, if as you say, these men

Fight 'neath a flag, and for supposed rights,

You violate the law of noble nations

In sentencing to death the prisoners

Of recognized war.

Baz. *(Sneering)* Sir, recognized?

Char. Does not the United States still call Juarez

The president of Mexico?

Baz. Why, count,

You 'd best consult those books of yours again!

Juarez has fled and given up his cause.

These men are robbers! Your majesty will sign?

102 **Max.** Forgive me, friends, if I again say no.

Mir. Your majesty, 't is we should ask your pardon

For having failed to lustre as we should

This seeming-dark decree,—so wise, so just,

And as undoubtedly your duteous act

As though some stern necessity of the stars

Enjoined it.

Max. (*Uneasily*) Press it not now. The people wait.

(*All but Marquez go into ballroom*)

Mar. Some fools have sat on crowns but not for long.

He 'll sign. The Liberals must be dispatched

Fast as we capture them, for we 've short time.

The United States will soon be free again

To turn to us, and what we wish to do

Must be well done ere that. Dispatch! Dispatch!

Use Maximilian and the French to crush

The Liberals, then with the church unite

To pull down Maximilian and set up—

Marquez!... The Empress—and Ignacio!

One I suspect,—a half-breed full of pride!

Who 'd have the court forget his Indian mother

And bear in mind his father was a noble!

(*Goes aside.*)

Enter Carlotta and Ignacio, followed by Prince and Princess Zichy, Prince and Princess Salm-Salm, Princess Josefa de Varela, Colonel Lopez, making merry with a fortune teller. The Empress steps apart with Ignacio)

Car. Ignacio! I 've met strange looks to-night!

Ig. But not unkind ones, noble madam?

Car. O, such

As can not be distinguished by a word,

Cold, warm, or dark or fair, bitter or kind!

Ah, looks that will not advertise the heart,

And yet betray too much!

103 **Ig.** Your majesty—

Car. A little coldness that might melt to love,

A little pity that might soon be hate,

A fair 'God with you' shaping to a curse—

Ig. What eye can harbor evil meeting yours

Where lies a grace that turns all ill to virtue?

Car. Would all were true as you, Ignacio!

(*Looks to ballroom and shudders*)

Those eyes! Would I looked not so deep in eyes!

... You love my lord?

Ig. I do, your majesty.

Car. Above all other men? (*He is silent*) Nay, do not answer!

'T was wrong to ask, for you have kinsmen maybe,

Brother, or uncle, some one dear in blood
Whom Heaven bids you cherish. But you will guard
Your Emperor! You 'll watch with me for foes?
For foes? He has none! How the thought
Blasphemes his excellence! But 't is a world
Where whitest merit draws the darkest souls
To prey upon it, while mere indifferent good
Escapes!... Ignacio, is it true, Juarez
Is not in Mexico?

Ig. O, madam!

Car. Ah!

Is 't true the Liberals are disbanded?

Ig. True?

Car. You do not answer, sir!

Ig. It is not true.

Car. You know it! You? And they still hope?

Ig. They do.

Car. Then we are playing with an enemy!

How do you know?... You traitor, too!... O Heaven!

'T is time now to be up or treachery

Will take us all asleep! (*Goes from him*)

104 **Ig.** (*Following her*) O madam! madam!

My heart is all your own!

Car. (*Turning to him*) Forgive me, friend,

And I will wrong no more these honest eyes.

But there is danger here, and we must strike!

We hold a nation's future in our hands,

And now defence is virtue, patience crime!

Ig. Your majesty—

Car. (*Not heeding*) Shall we stand here and smile

Till rebel blows have shattered life and throne?

... Dupin shall drive these desperate people back—

This law be signed—

Ig. (*With horror*) Dear Christ!

Car. What do you mean?

Ig. Will Maximilian pass a law of death,

Condemning patriots to a robber's grave?

O, Empress, sue upon your knees that he

Do not this thing, for every act of his
Not marked with justice to his enemies
Will rob him of the pity they would show
When victory is theirs! He writes his doom
As certainly as he doth set his name
To that black law, and gives Dupin his will
Among our helpless people!

Princess Zichy. (*From group about the gipsy, as all laugh*)

Your majesty,

You heard?

Car. I heard. (*To Ignacio, much disturbed*) Go join them! Go! (*Ignacio joins group*) He's true!

My lord in danger!

Princess de Varela. Now mother, my hand next!

(*Gipsy scans her hand*)

Car. 'Rob him of pity!' 'When victory is theirs!'

I know the pity given to the fallen

In this blood-drunken land! There's but one way...

105 We must not fall!... 'T is war, then,—war! Not for

An empire, no,—but Maximilian's life!

And we must use the weapons in our hands!

Gip. (*Reading*)

Days of brightness, days of smiles,

Read I here or Fate beguiles!

Princess S. O these fortunes are like lines from a fairy book! Surely we are not all going to be happy!

Gip. I'll read for you, madam.

Princess S. But let not your change of song begin with me, dark mother!

Gip. (*Reading*)

Days of darkness, days of moan!

A friend shall sigh, a friend shall fall,

And wring thy bosom more than all

The sorrow that thou yet hast known!

Princess S. O think better of it, mother!

Gip. Your sweet eyes deserve a better portion than tears, and I read too,

But ere thy last hour be nigh

Sorrow from thy breast shall fly!

Princess S. A friend, you say? I thank you, 't was not my husband!

Gip.

And yet a husband he,

And many tears thou 'lt see!

Car. (*Aside*) A friend—a husband—and a fall!

Gip. Shall I read for her majesty?

106 **Car.** No! no!

Lopez. She has peeped into Fate's urn, madam, I assure you!

Car. Nay, I 'm content. What I choose for myself I will abide, and what I choose not is the gift of God and I 'll abide that too!

Prince Zichy. I congratulate you! Majesty is not always able to show such noble indifference to the future, and lesser mortals—never!

Gip. Please the stars, may I read for you, sir?

Prince Zichy. I give you a proxy,—Senor Ignacio. If the fortune be fair, I take it, if not, I leave it with him.

Ladies. O, hear Ignacio's fortune! (*They crowd about him and the gypsy*)

Car. (*To Lopez*) A favor, sir! Will you take a message to his majesty?

Lopez. I am twice blest—to bear your message—and bear it to the emperor. (*They talk apart*)

Gip. Here 's a secret matter, sir. Shall I speak it out?

Ig. O spare me! Come aside!

Ladies. Nay, nay, Ignacio! You heard our fortunes!

Ig. But yours were fair and innocent, and mine is dark and guilty—maybe with crime!

Ladies. Oh! A crime!

Ig. Come, witch! (*They go aside, near where Marquez is stationed unseen*) Aseffa!

Asef. Rafael is prisoner at Savarro! Trevino is taken, too!

Ig. O Heaven! (*To ladies*) Stay back! 'T is crime indeed!

Ladies. Villain!

Asef. Help me to Maximilian! O, I must see him! You called him gentle! When I tell him what Rafael is—the 107 fairest soul man ever called a foe—

Ig. Softly, Aseffa! You can not see the emperor to-night.

Asef. I must! To-morrow 't will be too late! He dies at sunrise!

Ig. Rafael! My friend! my brother!—

Asef. Quiet! quiet! Smile, Ignacio! Ha! ha! I 'll pray it be not true, sir!

Ig. But you can see Count Charles. He 's Maximilian's very heart, and once you win him the Emperor is won. Go in! Go in! I 'll bring you to the count! Be light of heart! Our Rafael is safe!

Asef. Ignacio, the Empress is all you said.

Prayers on their way to Heaven meeting her

Would think their journey ended. Can you be true?

Ig. (*Touching his arm*)

I bear the seal.

Asef. God help thee!

Ig. Go!

(*To ladies*) 'T is done!

I know my sins!

Princess de V. But what a smiling sinner!

Princess Salm. A cloud is hovering. Come, sir! I shall know it!

(Takes his arm. Mexican national dance begins. All go into ballroom, the Empress with Lopez)

Mar. Ignacio a Liberal! And branded!

He 's finished! But I 'll pick my hour for it!

Mendorez safe! Ay, if he 's bullet-proof!

(Re-enter Carlotta with Archbishop Labastida)

Lab. I thank your Highness for this gracious moment!

Most holy Empress—

Car. Not holy, sir, and yet

I hope with touch of God's anointment on me.

Lab. Did it but rest with you His love would soon

108 Like cloud of rose veil Mexico in beauty.

Car. But rest with me?

Lab. Ay, noble lady, you.

I bear a letter from his Holiness,

In which he says his Empress daughter's zeal

Is jewelled in his heart,—but urges me

To speak to Maximilian of his strange

Reluctance to fulfill his promise.

Car. Promise?

Lab. To give the Church the olden glory that

She shone with here! Restore her rights—

Car. 'T is true

He promised that, and he has kept his word

As an account with God. He is convinced

The rights claimed by the Church are stolen rights

She wrung from ignorance for her earthly glory,

And he 's resolved to maintain Juarez' law

So far as it accords with justice.

Lab. Madness!

Call back Juarez to power! Yield the throne

To the republican! For 't will so end

If Maximilian scorns us and our help!

Car. He does not scorn you, sir, but seeks to find

Where the division comes 'tween you and Christ

And set himself upon the side of Heaven.

Lab. You will divorce the favor of the pope,
Without whose help you may not hope to stand.
Plead with your lord again to probe our claim,
And find therein some wise and prudent reason
To give us aid,—and thereby keep his crown.

Car. Yes, I will speak; but I shall not forget,
Whate'er I say, he is an Emperor! (*Exit*)

Mar. (*Coming forward*) A pair of fools are jiggling with a crown.

Lab. You heard, Marquez?

109 **Mar.** And knew before I heard.

Lab. And you are patient?

Mar. Maximilian
Means France, and France we must keep ours,—at least
Till we have finished with the Liberals,—

Lab. And then?

Mar. We need not go so far to make
A wiser choice.

Lab. (*Looking at him meaningly*)

Not far indeed!

Mar. I thank you.

But that's hereafter. Come with me, your grace.

I'd speak of something more immediate.

(*Exeunt left*)

(*Enter from ballroom General Miramon, Marshal Bazaine and Colonel Dupin, the last a large, vain, blustering man, gorgeously and expensively arrayed from head to foot. A sombrero wonderfully trimmed with gold and silver is carried in his hand and used in sweeping salutations*)

Dup. At last I am called to court! I thought his majesty would soon or late have need of my experience in throat-cutting.

Mir. But, my dear Dupin, it is not in your capacity of throat-cutter that we introduce you. These towns that have given aid to the Liberals must be punished without the Emperor's knowledge. You will make an example of them?

Dup. Will I? Hear him, Marshal! Will I?

Mir. But not a word to the Emperor!

Dup. Softish, eh?

Mir. His spongy heart is filled with water of compassion. Touch it anywhere it pours!

Baz. I'm not going to throw away the lives of any more Frenchmen just to give him a chance to play at 110 clemency! An emperor should be a sort of vitalized stone, capable of action but incapable of impression.

Dup. Then I'm the man for emperor! I've always suspected my qualifications for the part. By the lord, I've made women who were hungry enough to eat their own children watch my soldiers throw bread into the sea! And when I was with the French and English in old Chinees—well, they've called me the 'Tigre' since then. You've heard about that! (*Struts and sings*)

I'm the tigre of the East,

*Got my claws in old Peking
When the yellow kids we fleeced
And held up the mandarin!
O we caught him by the queue,
As he from our captains flew,
That quaking little, shaking little mandarin.
And we dragged him out to view
By that most convenient queue,
When we sacked the summer palace at Peking!*

My friends, if you will excuse me, there are several dozens of ladies in the ball room waiting for a dance with the costume par excellence of the evening. I am not always sure of a welcome for my face, but my costume is never in doubt. Ah, sweet woman! you can please me twice. I can dance with you—and I can kill you! When the Emperor asks for me I shall not decline an introduction,—though he was not born an emperor and I was born Dupin! (*Exit*)

Baz. Is he as villainous as his conversation?

Mir. His talk is but the mildest prologue to his deeds.

Baz. Then he 's the man for us. We shall never drive back the Liberals but by methods of unmitigated severity.

111 **Mir.** There is no barbarity too great for the intimidation of these towns.

Baz. The only absolutely safe plan is to raze them from the earth.

Mir. Trust Dupin! (*They go into ballroom. Enter, right, Count Charles and Aseffa. Her disguise is thrown back revealing her beauty*)

Asef. You help me though a Liberal and your foe!

Char. A foe! Dear lady, when you besought my aid

Methought it was divinity that spoke,

So sacred sweet seemed the request. I'll save

Your brother.

Asef. Ah, dearer than a brother, sir.

It is my husband!

Char. Husband!

Asef. Yes, my lord.

And dearer than—You have a wife?

Char. No, lady.

Asef. O, then you can not know! But you have loved?

Char. I love.

Asef. A lover—not a husband. Ah!

Add to thy love a thousand dearer loves

And take their sum a thousand times a thousand,

'T will be the smallest part divisible

Of my dear love for Rafael! You'll save him?

Char. Yes—I will save him. Do you trust me?

Asef.

Trust you?

As I would Heaven! (*Kisses his hands and goes out, right*)

Char.

Gone! Aseffa! Gone?

No, never gone! Her kisses here! O lips

That swept like drifting roses o'er my hands—

Both hands,—sweet equity! Still are they warm

As they were dipped in summer, though her touch

112 Was maiden light nor robbed him of a jot

Who should have all. Her husband—'t was a word

She used to slay me with!... Even in sorrow

She is more fair than any other fair

Met on a holiday. But when she smiled

She seemed like Fortune giving away a world.

So gracious was her splendor. Thou art revenged,

O little demon god so long my scorn!

Would I had given my heart by piecemeal out

Since I was ten than to have lost it so,

For going all at once it takes my life

And I must lose my life or follow it.

Ah, love should come like waves unto a shore,

Soft creeping up and back and up again.

Till taught to stand receptive we are firm

When the last, highest wave envelops us.

... May God restore me!... O her beauty burns

As she were limned by lightning on the night!

Her eyes are torches that Eternity

Lends life to read her dreams! Her cheek

Is June within a bud! Her veins have caught

The falling sun that in them strives to rise

To a new dawn!... And I must save him—save him!

This unknown man that holds the flaming sword

Above my paradise!... If this decree

Is signed she will be widowed ... (*Stops in horror*)

I am mad!...

... She will be free ... Away, sweet hell, whose face

Is masked like heaven!... Let solid earth be air,

The air be lead, light change to dark, and dark

Be as the sun, 't will be no miracle

When murder finds a welcome in my heart!

(Enter Maximilian, Bazaine, Miramon, Dupin, Berzabal, Ruiz, Estrada, Ignacio)

Max. *(To Dupin)* We're glad to welcome you. 113'T will be your charge to guard the unprotected towns now suffering from the raids of Liberals.

Mir. Of men, your majesty, who steal that title to grace a brigand's life!

Max. So we're assured.

Dup. I'll see to it, sir, that these towns play no love-tricks with the enemy!

Baz. Sh!

Max. No danger that way. Your duty is to protect them!

Dup. No offense, I hope. But treason is a lively beast and hard to keep low. As your majesty's officer I must cudgel it down wherever I find it.

Max. If unhappily you find it, sir—

Dup. I'll cut the throat of every man dog of 'em!

Max. Sir? *(Turns to Bazaine)* The Colonel's speech is very figurative, good Marshal. *(To Dupin)* All instances of treason, (and God forbid there should be one!) will be reported to me for careful investigation.

Dup. A thousand pardons, your Highness! I was swept away by my devotion to your majesty! I shall remember that you wish me to observe the mildest temperance in dealing with your majesty's enemies. *(As the emperor looks questioningly at Bazaine, Dupin snarls, then repeats suavely)* The mildest temperance in dealing with your majesty's enemies.

Max. That is our wish. The mildest temperance. And this decree, Colonel Dupin? Would you advise its passage?

Dup. I should be so hot to sign it, sir, my zeal would boil the ink in the bottle!

Max. Very figurative, Marshal! *(To Dupin)* As yet we have not reconciled the matter with our conscience.

114 *(Lopez enters and comes up to the Emperor)*

Lop. *(Handing him a slip of paper)* Your majesty, the Empress sends you this.

(Maximilian reads aside:) 'Sign the decree.'

Max. *(Aside)* What has she heard?

Dup. *(At a distance, in rear of Maximilian, folds his hands meekly on his breast and whistles softly)*

'When we sacked the summer palace at Pekin!' *(Mimics)* 'As yet we have not reconciled the matter with our conscience.' Does he think he can govern Mexico with a prayer-book? Put him in his cradle and sing by-lo-baby!

Max. *(To Miramon, who has spoken to him)* There 's only one left to oppose it—Charles.

Mir. My lord, you 'd set a scholar's word against

A general's in matters of the field?

The count's opinion, born within a closet,

Would die in open air but for your nursing.

Max. Come, Count, defend your cause.

Char.

My cause, my lord?

Max. You are but one against the government.

Canst talk above so big a head? If not,

I fear we 'll pass this law of blood. Come, come!

Be eloquent! My heart would have you win!

Char. (*Very pale and hesitating*)

Your majesty—I beg—

Max. Goes it so deep

To your good heart?

Mir. My lord—

Max. Forgive me, Charles,

For pressing you so much. We 'll rest to-night.

To-morrow there 'll be time.

Char. (*Hastily*) No! Not to-morrow!

Sign the decree! Sign it to-night!

115 (*Maximilian looks with the greatest astonishment at his now flushed face and eager manner, then thinks he understands*)

Max. Ah, Charles,

This tender heart of yours will kill you yet.

No more of this. I 'll keep you at your books.

Char. (*Recovering, proceeds with suavity, completely sold to his desire*)

My mind has cleared with deeper thought, my lord,

Discord, the ancients tell us, was at first

So small a gnat did give her birth, but grew

So great her feet o'erturned proud cities while

Her head upset the gods in council. So this

Small trouble may o'ercast your destiny—

And is 't not better, sir, to pass a law,

However dreaded, 'gainst the rebel few

Than that the nation trusted to your care

Should be broad cursed with civil slaughter?

Max. Better?

If such a danger threatens 't is a crime

Not to forbend it!

(*Enter Marquez and Archbishop Labastida*)

Lab. Gracious sovereign!

Max. Most reverend father, you would counsel us?

Lab. We would, your majesty. If yet the wish

Of Heaven has power over you; and Christ

Be your most high example, you will prove

A careful guardian to your trusting people,

And crush this villainous and robber race

Now preying on the true and innocent,
Swelling each day more poisonous and foul!

Max. We are decided. Are we not, good Charles?

Mar. (*Hastily*) Nay, sire—

Max. We are decided—to pass this law.

Convinced that 't is the honest course.

116 (*All surprised and relieved but Ignacio, who starts with horror*)

Ig. My God!

Mir. Blest majesty, we thank you!

Lab. You do but set

Your name where Heaven's seal already shines.

Ig. The seal of Hell! O noblest man that breathes

This corrupt air, take back that word of death

Ere it is stamped in black upon your soul!

Mir. (*After a silence*) An Aztec, sire, and nephew to Juarez.

Max. You think that is a sin? Among our friends

Are many whose nearest kinsmen nobly served

The lost Republic. Hear us, Ignacio.

This law is subject to a firm condition:

Each officer shall make report to us,

And every captive who deserves not death

Shall have our pardon.

Ig. Then, you 'll pardon two

Now at Savarro, Trevino and Mendorez,

Both doomed to die at sunrise!

Mir. Ravagers!

Brigands! Ay, murderers!

Ig. No! Patriots!

Soldiers! And martyrs if they die! My lord,

If they have plundered, 't was to feed an army;

If they have killed,—that is the aim of war.

They are your foes, but noble ones,—and men,

Not creatures to be caught in traps and shot

Like beasts!

Max. We 'll look to this. Marquez, at once

Send a dispatch commanding they be held

As prisoners of war until we 've time

To examine them.

Mar. I will, your majesty.

117 **Ig.** My lord, at Callovala when the French
Had routed the Republicans, there came
At night some student priests into the field
To help the wounded and to cheer the dying.
This man, Marquez, set on them with his troop
And made them prisoners. The morning sun
Beheld each saintly minister shot dead.
And you would trust this devil with the life
Of captive foes? A man whose hands are red
With God's own blood?

Mar. He lies! Your majesty,
I'll prove him traitor to your very eyes!

Ig. Traitor?

Mar. Ay, sir, and spy! Lay bare his arm,
And see the branded cross!—the sacred mark
Of those who 've sworn to die in Juarez' cause!
(Snatches at Ignacio's arm as if he would expose it)

Ig. Liar and devil! do not touch me!

Mar. Spy!

Lop. The proof is easy, sire. Expose his arm!

Ig. I scorn such proof! And with my sword I'll meet
Who dares lay hand upon me!

Lab. Justice, sire!

Command him to lay bare his arm!

(Silence. Maximilian approaches Ignacio slowly and lays his hand on his arm)

Max. *(Turning to Marquez, his hand still on Ignacio)*

You are a soldier, able and honorable.

I trust you with my captives.... Ignacio,

You are no traitor,—and I trust you with

My confidence. Both are deceived. 'Tis I

Must study how to heal this sad division.

... But now, we'll sign this necessary law.

Come in with me, my friends. *(Exeunt all but Ignacio)*

118 **Ig.** Too noble soul!

Too gentle heart! O foul, most foul betrayal!

He dooms himself. O, Maximilian,

We go on different ways, but each to death!

The truest heart about thee is my own,
And I 'm a spy—death-vowed to be thy foe!
I 'll warn the empress!... No. Sealed to the cause.
Dead I may guard her. Death alone may give
Me to her service. There 's no oath can bind
The disembodied spirit. (*Takes paper from his pocket*) Here 's set down
All I have learned of the Imperial plans.
(*Burns paper in candle flame*)
'T is fixed in memory, and if I live
Juarez shall hear it all,—and—if I die—
The grave is asked no questions. (*Suddenly*) Rafael!
This signed to-night, to-morrow Rafael dies.
Marquez will cut off all reprieve. One way
Is left.... I 'll go. With life already lost
Who would not fling the corpse to save a friend?
My honor 's bound to freedom and Juarez,
My heart bound to the Empress and her lord.
O, love, while I have life thou must command me,
Then to save honor ... let me die!... Ah, could
I save thee too, Carlotta! O, what woe
Awaits thy heart, madonna, saint ... and love!
Might I but say farewell before I go,
Then I could spur to death with happy heart,
And I must travel fast to reach Savarro.

(*Takes a lady's glove from his bosom*)

My treasure, come!

(*Enter Carlotta*)

Car. It must be signed ... it must ... (*Sees Ignacio*)

Ig. O, little finger casements, do you mourn

119 Your pretty tenants lost?—five rose-sweet nuns

That pray at one white shrine! (*Kisses glove*)

Car. (*Advancing*) I hope, my friend,

She 's worthy of your noble love.

Ig. O, madam,

In her doth Heaven on earth make sweet beginning.

And aspirations tend her from the skies.

Car. And she is beautiful as good?

Ig. O, fair

As olden marble walking down to us.

Or that immortal Helen on whose lip

Poets still feed the dream that's never fed!

Car. She must be fair indeed. I hope she loves

As much as she's beloved.

Ig. Nay, she dreams not

Of my poor worship.

Car. You must tell her, sir.

Ig. With her I have no tongue, and can not woo.

To see her is to think in hurrying dreams

That move about some new desire of God.

Nay, she's the picture finished, vision complete,

That perfect stands where dream no farther goes

And shuts the gates to prophecy!

Car. Would you

But woo her thus you'd win her, never fear!

We women would be beautiful, and love

The tongue that makes us so. Go, talk to her

As you have talked to me.

Ig. 'Tis not the same.

There's something in your smile inviteth speech.

Were she but you then would I kneel and say, (*kneels*)

O rest me 'neath the heaven of your eye

That gathers blessings as the sun his dews

To give again to earth, and let your heart

Throb once with pity sweeter than the love

120 That other women give, and yet be dumb,

That this sweet moment's balm may wrap my heart

Till death bids it be still. O, love me not,

But on my head lay thy madonna hand,

And bless me as a mother would her child

Who goes to death in going from her eyes!

Car. (*Laying her hand on his head*)

And I will bless thee, too, as she would do,

True knight of love, gentle Ignacio!

And yet I hope you will ask more of her,

And she will grant it.

Ig. (*Rising*) More is too much. Farewell.

I leave the court to-night,—but go content,—

Ay, happy! (*Exit*)

Car. He leaves the court!... What a strange youth!

But very true and noble, and well deserves

The fairest woman's love. (*Picks up glove dropped by Ignacio*) He's lost her glove.

I'll send it after him. (*Calls attendant*) Andorro!... Ah!

It is my own! Yes ... yes ... the same ... here is—

My own indeed!... And that is why he leaves

The court!... Poor youth! (*She drops glove. Enter Andorro*) Ignacio just passed out.

He dropped this glove. His lady's favor maybe.

I'm sure 't is prized. Haste, take it after him.

And. (*Picks up glove*)

Your pleasure, royal madam! (*Going*)

Car. No—that way.

(*Exit Andorro*)

... Unhappy boy!... I'm glad I sent the glove.

(*Enter Maximilian and ministers*)

Car. (*Going to him and taking his arm*)

'T is signed?

121 **Max.** 'T is signed, my love. Come, friends! This act

Of wisdom passed gives me a lighter heart!

(*All but Marquez go into ballroom*)

Mar. The great death-warrant's signed. Ere its black list

Be full, there'll be an emperor on the roll!

(*National music. Dancers seen through doors, the emperor and empress among them*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT III.

Scene I: Before the Imperial Theatre. Brilliant lights. Crowd confusedly assembled. All talking.

Shouts. Long live the Empire!

Citizen. O you mob, you puppet throat, that whistles as you're squeezed!

A Mob Orator. My friends, to-day we gloriously celebrate the birthday of the most glorious empire—

Cit. Long live the Republic! Hail to Juarez!

Voices. To dungeon with him! The traitor! Tear him to pieces!

(*Guards dash upon citizen and drag him off*)

1st Officer. Don't tell me the Republic is dead when a man is willing to die just to

give one shout for it.

2d Officer. Three-fourths of the Mexicans have hearts of that color. But the Empire stands. Miramon is a miracle. How does he manage it?

1st Off. He understands the use of the bayonet. 122As our friend over the water says, you can do anything with bayonets but sit on them.

2d Off. Is n't this a rabble? Motley 's the only wear in Maximilian's court. He might succeed in running this country if so many people had n't come along to help him do it. You ask a French question and you get a Dutch answer. You give an order in Prussian and it 's obeyed in Irish,—

Voices. He comes! Make way! Make way! Hail to Maximilian!

Chief Guard. Back, all of you! The Emperor will greet you yonder! We 've orders to clear the plaza! Back! Back! His carriage stops! Go, get your places! Out! out!

(Guards drive mob out)

1st Guard. If all the Empire's birthdays are to be like this I hope it will never come of age. It 's work, I tell you! I 'm dripping like a squeezed cloud!

2d Guard. If it had pleased the Empire to spend a little of the money it has wasted to-day for the widows and orphans it has made—

1st Guard. Sh! We're paid for our muscle, not our opinions. *(Shouts outside)*

2d Guard. And the mob is paid for its lungs!

1st Guard. Yes. Miramon sees to that.

2d Guard. Only the Emperor's carriage approaches the door?

1st Guard. None but his.

2d Guard. If I were he I would n't make such a glittering show of myself in that Milan carriage—all gold and silver and tortoise shell, and an angel at every corner—while there are so many hearts breaking in sound of it.

1st Guard. Ph! He knows nothing of the breaking hearts! Miramon sees to that.

123 **2d Guard.** He 'll have to know soon, or Juarez will tell him in the capital.

1st Guard. Not a word! On your life! *(Shouts without)* Here they are! By Jesu! The fools have taken the mules from the carriage and draw it themselves! Now I wonder how much a head Miramon pays for that!

(Enter rabble of shouting citizens drawing carriage in which sit the Emperor and Empress. They are followed by a brilliant party of ladies and gentlemen. General and Madam Miramon, Princess de Varela, Prince and Princess Zichy, Prince and Princess Salm-Salm, Lopez, Count Charles, Marquez, Archbishop Labastida, Estrada, Berzabal, and others)

Max. *(To citizens)* My friends, though I protest against this honor,

I thank you from my heart for such kind proof

Of your affection. *(Alights)*

Voices. Long live Maximilian!

One of the rabble, awkward and ignorant. Long live the President of the Empire!

Max. *(Smiling)* I 've no objection to that title, friend, but I fear it would be criticised in Europe.

(Crowd passes out shouting and dragging carriage)

Max. *(To Carlotta, as he looks at theatre)*

A noble building! Fair and magnificent!

Car. How yonder gardens gleam beneath the lights

Like some soft dream of worlds we do not know!

Max. And all is yours, my sweet,—all planned by you!

O love, you shall be mistress of a land

The fairest ever smiled up to the sun!

What say you, Charles? Does not this hour repay

Even the sacrifice of Miramar?

Car. (*Smiling*) Nay, he longs still for the old nooks and books.

124 **Char.** Let me admit it. This mistress Pleasure, sir,

Though she is fair is not so wondrous fair

As goddess Knowledge. Beautiful as bride

To her lord's eye is she to worshippers,

Who seek and woo her till she yieldeth up

Her locked virginity—the Truth!

Max. (*Affectionately*) Ay, Charles,

Get knowledge if thou canst, and yet despair not,

For none so poor but virtue may be his;

And though your knowledge is earth's silver key

That opens man's and nature's heart,

'Tis golden virtue opens Heaven and shows

The God among his stars.... But, come, dear friends!

Pleasure is a true goddess too. We 'll show

Her fair respect. (*All go into theatre but Charles, who drops back unnoticed*)

Char. He constantly un.masks me

And knows it not. Knowledge! 'Tis withered leaves

Amid a world of dewy boughs! Knowledge!

To one school will I go—one book I 'll read,

The school of love, the page of woman's eye,

And I 'll know more than sages and divines

Who study stars and Scripture!...

'For none so poor but virtue may be his'

O noble soul, had I been true to thee

I now could open thy deceived eyes.

Crime seals my lips. I can but pray

This empire built on blood may stand. We are

The creatures of our deeds, more bound to them

Than slave to master, for the terms of service

Are fast indentured in the soul and know

No razure!... But I will find Aseffa! Then,

Though sin should set a darkness on my life

To draw each night out to a winter's length

That constant storms from fallow leaf to green,

125 Still love's sweet lamp shall light me! In my heart

'T will be as day!

(Enter Aseffa veiled, her dress covered with a black cloak. An attendant following. She tries to cross over to side entrance of theatre. A guard stops her)

Asef. I am a singer.

Guard. Show

Your pass.

Asef. Here, sir.

(Guard signs for her to pass on. She sees Charles and stops. Steps before him, throwing back her veil)

Asef. You swore to save him!

Char. You!

Aseffa! Blest—

Asef. You swore it!

Char. And would have died

To keep my oath could I have kept it dying.

Asef. The Emperor refused you? *(He bows his head)* Demon! Oh!

(Turns to go, moaning)

Char. *(Aside)* I lose her!... Stay! Is there no hope for grief?

Asef. Not mine! Can you not read it here?

Char. Too well.

Thy sorrow is a veil through which thy beauty

Burns like a shrouded sun.

Asef. You pity me?

Char. As Heaven knows!

Asef. Then you will help me, sir?

Char. I'll give my life to do it!

Asef. Ah, you will?

Then get me access to the Emperor.

Char. O sweet Aseffa, you ask a miracle,

And I am sadly mortal.

Asef. I knew! I knew!

126 My misery is your plaything!

Char. His ministers

So hedge him with their care—

Asef. O spare excuse!

But I shall see him, sir! Ay, face to face!

Char. Why would you see him? He can not call the dead.

Asef. The dead! Thou hast but daggers for me! Ah!

Char. Aseffa—

Asef. Yes, I'll see him! What think you?

Should I go shouting 'murderer' through that hall,

Would he arise and answer to his name?

Char. You're mad, Aseffa!

Asef. Thank Heaven I am! 'T would be

The shame of woman to know all that I know

And not be mad!

Char. You must not go in there.

Asef. (*Fiercely*) Must not! (*Suddenly calm*) Nay, sir! Why see, I go to sing

A welcome to the noble Emperor. (*Throws back her cloak*)

As this dark cloak now hides my gay apparel,

So shall my gay demeanor hide my woe.

Char. You would not harm the Emperor?

Asef. No need!

Yon moon is worshipped for her borrowed gold,

Though charred and cold without a leaf to dower

Her black sterility. So Maximilian.

Napoleon's favor is the sun that gilds

His worthless crown. But now the French are going—

Char. What?

Asef. Ah! The French are going.

Char. No!

Asef. And Maximilian shall fade to air,

Unheeded as the moon no eye could find

127 Without her sun!

Char. But hearts can live and love

Though Maximilian falls.

Asef. Can live—and love!

You torture me!

Char. Forgive me. But the share

Must rip the glebe before the corn may spring.

Asef. What do you mean, cold Austrian?

Char. Austrian! No!

Your southern sun has poured into my veins

A life that makes me new! I feel as you

Those throbs that shake the stars until they fall
Into the heart and make it heaven! My lips
Can move toward lips as haste rose-gloried clouds
To swoon into the sun!

Asef. Ah, yes—I know—
You told me that you loved. But why say this
To one who has lost all?

Char. I'd have you learn
That you must live, Aseffa, and life for you
Means love. Your eyes, your lips, your hands, your hair,
Like coiled sweetness of the night, and all
Your swaying, melting body, gather love
As roses gather smiles, as waves draw down
The heart-flood of the moon and hold it deep
And trembling.

Asef. Sir, your roses, waves, and smiles,
Are poet-nothings. You play with them as shells,
Stirring chance colors for an idle eye.
It is your way of saying, is it not,
That I shall love again?

Char. You must! you must!

Asef. Such words are like bright raindrops falling in
Another world. They glitter, but I hear
No sound, grief has so closed my ears. Take back
128 Your comfort. You would be kind, but noble count,
You talk of what a man can never know,—
A woman's sorrow for a husband loved.
So high no height can reach it, so great and deep
The sea can not embrace it, and yet her heart
Can hold it all. O strangest of all love,
That makes her rather stoop in beggar rags
To kiss the happy dust where his foot pressed
Than from a throne lean down to give her lips
Unto a kneeling king!

Char. Aseffa, grief
Is not for you. You must—you must be happy!
The shy and tender Dawn creeps up in fear
That Night has laid some blight upon the world,

But finding all is well, steps forth, and lo!
Out of her courage the great sun is born.
So doth the heart look outward after grief
To find the world all dark, but nay, the light
Is more of heaven than it was before,
Because a face is shining from the clouds.
You dim your loved one's eyes in paradise
With your earth-tears. He mourns your splendor paled,—
Though 't must be beautiful to the last tint,
As sunset clouds that bear the heart of day
Into the night.

Asef. You but offend my grief.

Sir, keep your flattery for her you love!

Char. I flatter thee? It is not possible!

Who dares to add fire to the sun, or bring
The Spring a flower? Be angry if you will.

The morning's eye is not more glorious

Rising above a storm! I flatter thee!

When but to praise thee as thou art would put

A blush on Poesy that ne'er has rhymed

As I would speak! E'en thy defects would make

129 Another fair, and were they merchantable

Women would buy thy faults to adorn themselves!

O, sweet—

Asef. (*Shrinking in horror*) What do you mean?

Char. (*Seizing her hands*) You know!

O, all my life has been but dreams of you,

And when I saw you first, my love!—my love!—

As lightning makes the midnight landscape speak

The language of the day, your beauty flashed

O'er all my years and made their meaning clear!

'T was you made sweet the song of every bird,

'T was you I found in every book I loved,

'T was you that gave a soul to every star!

I can not speak it! Kiss me once—but once—

And you will understand!

Asef. What thing is this?

It is not man, for man respecteth sorrow,

Nor brute, for it doth speak!

Char. O look not down!

Thou canst not guard thee! Every silken sweep

Of thine eyes' soft defence but whets assault!

You shall not go! You are the element

In which I breathe! Go from me and I fall

A lifeless thing! Aseffa, pity me!

'Tis I who die, not you! (*Drops her hands and kneels*) O blame me not

That I must worship here—

Asef. Ah, Rafael,

I'll live an hour to pray this wrong away

Before I meet thine eyes! (*Goes. Charles grasps her cloak*) Beast! Claw me not!

(*Goes in. Charles gazes after her in a bewildered way. Tries to steady himself, and goes into theatre by main entrance*)

(CURTAIN)

130 *Scene II: Within the theatre. Gay decorations. Part of stage shown, on which chorus is assembled. The Emperor and Empress in royal box. Imperial cabinet and friends in boxes adjoining. Part of pit shown, filled with brightly dressed people.*

Max. (*To Carlotta*) O, this is welcome! Are you not happy now?

There's not a wrinkle on these smiling brows

Where discontent may write her annals dark!

My empire now is fixed, and strength and love

Are gathering to my side. I can not put

My hand out but 't is clasped by some new friend.

Car. And true?

Max. And true. You are too fearful, sweet.

Car. And you too trustful.

Max. Nay, we can not trust

Too much. Brutus spoke noblest when he said

'My heart doth joy that yet in all my life

I found no man but he was true to me.'

And I would hope as much.

Car. (*Aside*) None, none are true!

Even I am false who fear to speak my fears

And ease his own when I should quicken them!

(*Chorus from stage*)

Hail, ye royal pair, O hail!

Like two souls within one star

May your heavenly light ne'er fail.

Empress and great Emperor!

Hail to thee who ruleth mild

As the manger-cradled child!

Hail to her who long may be

Guardian of us and thee!

131 *Hail, O hail, ye pair divine!*

As two souls within one star

May your light forever shine,

Empress and great Emperor!

(Estrada appears on stage in front of chorus)

Est. Great Majesties, forgive our feeble welcome.

We are in all things spotted and imperfect

Save in affection for your Highnesses.

Max. *(Rising)* No, no! My friend—and friends—had you not hearts

That turn to virtue as the flowers to sun,

We had not made such progress to an hour

When all the Empire wears the smile of peace,

And we may rest like Love with folded arms

Round his desire.

Est. 'Tis you have led us, sire.

Pardon this mockery of what we 'd do

To celebrate this day had we but means.

We shout thy name, but not above the clouds;

We send up fires, but lightnings higher reach:

We have adorned the city and ourselves,

But India and the sea keep back the pearls

We would pour here!

Max. Enough—and more, my friends.

O, far too much! None mourn now but the gods

Who are made indigent by this display

Of wealth and joy!

Est. *(Making low obeisance)* We thank your majesty.

This land shall e'er be called the happy land,

And he who rules it—

Asef. *(Stepping wildly from chorus)* Prince of Murderers!

The happy land! O land where widows' cries

132 Choke Heaven, and mothers' tears make each new day

A flood!

Mir. Guards there! Take her away! The guards!

Max. No! Let her stay! We 'll answer her!

Mir. My lord—

Max. Madam, we seek your country's love.

Asef. How do you seek it? By killing her dear sons!

Setting your tigers loose among her children!

Mejia from your very breast makes fire

On patriot virtue! Dupin wets his teeth

By day and night in infant and mother's blood!

Maximilian,

In brave Trevino's name, Salazar's name,

In name of all as noble and as dear

To Mexico as they, who daily die

Beneath their country's flag the death of dogs,

Shot down by your black law—signed by your hand—

In name of him as dear to me as thou

To that proud woman who shall know what 't is

To clasp a ghost where throbb'd her living love,—

I tell thee—die!

(Leaps from stage to Emperor's box attempting to stab him. As she leaps Carlotta springs before the Emperor)

Car. This heart—not that!

(Aseffa drops her dagger and stands bewildered. An officer seizes her. Utter confusion in theatre. Maximilian goes onto the stage. Silence)

Max. My friends,—

All you who love me see me here unhurt,

And you who love me not, if any 's here,

(Cries of "none, none!")

Take aim now as you will.

(Cries of "No! no! no! no!")

A Voice. Long live the Emperor! Maximilian!

Max. Then if you love me, friends, I beg you 'll leave

133 This place of song and go to the Cathedral.

There pray for me to Him who spared my life,

And, if you will, pray that He yet may spare it

To work His will and yours.

(Crowd goes out silently)

Mar. *(To Labastida)* That was well done.

Lab. Sincerity is once a diplomat.

Car. (*To Princess Salm-Salm*) Princess, take this poor creature to your care.

(*Officer releases Aseffa, who goes out as in a dream with Prince and Princess Salm-Salm and several ladies*)

Mar. (*Approaching Maximilian*) Your Majesty, let me congratulate—

Ill, sire?

Max. Sick, sick, O sick of compliments!

If I've a friend here let me hear the truth!

What did that creature mean? The truth, I say!

(*Silence*) You, Miramon? Lopez? (*Silence*) Trevino 's dead?

Lop. He is.

Max. And Rafael Mendorez?

Lop. Dead.

The woman is his widow.

Max. Oh!... And this! (*Taking out message*)

This from Dupin! 'All quiet in Savarro.'

It means—

Lop. The town is ashes.

Max. O God! O God!

You ministers! Ay, ministers of hell!

Didst think ye served the devil?

Est. O, my lord—

Max. No friend! Not one! Charles! Charles! you must have known!

These foreign hearts have their excuse, but you—

The tower of confidence between us two,

134 Built part by part by faithful mason hours,

Is shaken to atoms!

Char. I will build it o'er!

Max. First will the wind-strewn rose upgather all

Her petals from the dust, and cheek by cheek,

Hang them new-smiling on the nodding bough!

Mir. Your Majesty, what we have done was done

To save our country and your beloved life.

Your noble heart was blind to your great danger,

And 't was our duty and our work of love

To save you from your fatal tenderness.

Lop. (*Kneeling*) O gracious sovereign, had I but known

You did not know, I would have dared the wrath

Of all the court, and spoken to you but truth!

Max. (*Lifting him up*) And 't was your tongue at last that broke the silence,

I must forgive you.

Mar. By your necessity,
Your Majesty, we may all hope for pardon.
Juarez, encouraged by the United States,
Is roused again to war. We have appealed
For compromise and terms of friendly union,
But his one answer for us all is—death!
Yet are we faithful to you, sire.

Max. O Heaven!
What poisonous opiate have you fed me with
And called it peace? But war is not the worst!
Oh, Miramon, did you not swear to me
All prisoners taken by that cruel law
Should be reported day or night to me
That I might pardon or remit their sentence?

Mir. O, sir, you knew not your extremity,
Nor could you know it though we told it you,
The hearts of Mexicans once turned to hate
135 Are far too deep for sincere eyes to pierce.
But I thank God we knew the danger, sire,
And struck the serpent raised even at your life.
When you, all gentleness, could not have given
The necessary blow. Ay, God be thanked, although
You cast me from your heart. 'T will be my comfort
To know I served you better than you dreamed.
And 't is the penalty of over-love
To suffer by the hand that (*kneels and kisses Maximilian's hand*) it would kiss!

Max. Must I forgive him, Heaven?

Lab. Ay, sir, you must,
For his deceit was but the greater truth
That served your blind necessity.

Est. O, sir,
Do not desert us! If now the Empire falls
'T is death to all that have been true to you.
Juarez will give no quarter to your friends.

Max. The Liberals advance?

Mar. Each day they're nearer;

And towns and provinces fall by the way.

Berz. Without you, sir, our cause will die in blood,

And Mexico be but a grave for those

Who 've loved and served you!

Mar. The United States has ranked

Full sixty thousand men on our frontiers,—

But we have France—

Max. I am awake! At last!

From now no man shall risk his life for me

But I take equal chance with him! Ah, this

Is war, not murder!

Mar. You will lead our troops?

Max. I will.

Mar. Then Mexico is saved! The way

To win the southern hearts is but to trust them.

136 Leave at your capital the foreign troops

And lead your native soldiers 'gainst the foe!

Car. (*Aside*) No! Never! Never! Alone with those dark hearts!

(*Enter Marshal Bazaine with envoy from France, Comte de St. Sueveur, Marquis de Gallifet, and General Castlenau*)

Baz. My lord, we bring new messages from France.

Gen. Cast. Your majesty, we beg your gracious pardon

For this unseemly pressure.

Max. You have it, sir.

What says Napoleon?

Cast. He greets you, sire, with my unworthy tongue,

And sends this letter. (*Maximilian reads*)

Max. My eyes, I think, turn wizards

And conjure 'gainst the truth that must be here.

For I read false. (*Puzzled*) What does he mean? Not this—

Baz. My lord, my letters make the import clear.

I have instructions here to counsel you

To make immediate abdication.

Max. No!

Car. What? Abdication?

Baz. Ay! That is the word.

Car. A word for fear and weakness, not for strength,

And Maximilian is as strong as France

While great Napoleon respects his oath!

His troops are ours—

Baz. Nay, princess—

Mir. (*Fiercely*) Her Majesty!

Baz. (*Sneers*) You prize the feather when the cap is lost?

137 (*To the Empress*) Pardon a slipping tongue, your Majesty.

Those troops you speak of go with me to France.

Such is my order—such the firm demand

Of the United States.

Car. Is France a province

Of the United States? Napoleon

Page, lackey, footboy to America?

Is she an Empire, he an Emperor?

Or have we dreamed he is Napoleon?

Max. (*Recovered from his bewilderment*)

Withdraw his troops! He can not—dare not do it!

'T would blister history's page to set it down,

And 't is his burning wish to be the star

Of human chronicles. I 'll not believe it,

Though all my senses brand confirming yea

Upon my mind. O shout it in my ears,

And let me see the troops go marching out,

Still I 'll believe it is my eyes and ears

That mutiny, not France turned traitor!

Baz. Your Majesty, you must believe the truth,

And make you ready for a swift departure.

'T will not be safe here let a moon go by.

Max. If danger 's here, then here I stay to share it.

Dost think I 'll leave my friends to die alone

While I by flight dishonor Majesty?

Baz. 'T is death to stay. You would not be so mad.

Mir. Hail to our new-born king! New-born thou art

Unto our love. Nay, we did love before,

But now we 'll worship thee.

Car. Napoleon!

You shall not do this monstrous thing! You shall not!

Baz. The crown of France doth ask consent of none.

Car. I 'll go to him and say such words that from

138 His shame-marked brow his outraged crown will fall

In horror. I will go! Take out the troops,
Bazaine. Ay, take them out! He will be glad
To send them back and purchase with his blood
Redemption from such shame. He 'll empty France
To do it! I will go. But I 'll not kneel.

A thousand years my blood has run through kings,

And he 's the *third* Napoleon! (*Sinks, exhausted with emotion. Ladies attend her*)

Mir. The traitor!

We have no need of him! To France, Bazaine,
And tell your Emperor our Emperor
Needs not his fickle strength to stand upon!

Sire, we have men, and money in our banks—

Lab. A mighty church whose power is untold

If you restore her rights, as now we hope,

And thus united we shall defy the world!

Max. And Heaven, too? For that is what we do

When we set up the church in her old wrongs.

Nay, keep your aid, and I will keep my soul.

Lop. Your virtuous angel strives to make you god.

Max. No, but to keep me honest.

Mar. (*Aside to Lab.*) Yield to him.

'T is not the hour to cast him off.

Lab. My lord,

Your virtue conquers, and unto your hands

I yield the power o' the church.

Max. I thank your grace,

Nor for myself, but Mexico.

Baz. I go to France.

What message have you for Napoleon?

Max. Tell him that he has placed me here between

Death and dishonor—and my choice is made.

(*Bazaine and French ambassadors turn slowly and go out*)

139 **Max.** (*Quietly to Miramon*) We 'll join you at the door.

(*Exeunt all but Carlotta and Maximilian. He holds out his arms, and she goes silently to his embrace*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV.

Scene I: Queretaro. Plaza La Cruz before church and convent. Grey light before dawn. Occasional distant firing of guns. Maximilian comes out of church and walks about plaza.

Max. Carlotta! Where dost thou pray to-night? In all

Our fearful scanning of prophetic heavens

No swart star showed us this—our separation.

Thou wert the all of me, the breath, the soul!

Nature conceived thee when her blood was young,

And May was in her spirit, but stayed thy birth

Till Time had taught her skill in all perfections!

... I will not weep.... Yon stars have memories too,

And tell old tales of grandsire suns that shook

Their locks and fell ere they were young who now

Are eld of all!... (*Walks*) To lie so low.... O man,

Who in the heavens carvest out redemption,

Laying thy golden streets in very skies,

Making the stars but eyets of thy port,

Must thou compact thee to a little earth,

Displace some few small tenants of the sod,

140 And find thou 'st room enough?... (*Looks up*) City of dream!

Time's far ghost inn! Eternity's mirage!

Desire's dim temple fashioned out of prayer,

Builed and jointured by no carpenter

But captious Fancy!... O Carlotta, wife!

Thou wert my Christian heart! Faith, faith, my God!

Death to the unbeliever is to land

Upon a coast dumb in the moonless dark,

Where no hands wave a welcome, no eyes shine

With promise of sweet hours, no voices call

The greeting that makes every shore a home.

(*Listens*) My officers! I can not see them yet.

(*Goes in. Enter Colonel Lopez in close talk with Lieutenant Garza who is disguised as an Imperial officer*)

Garza. I'm satisfied.

Lopez. This hill is the key to the city.

Gar. Yes.

Lop. And yours on terms we have considered.

Gar. Here 's Escobedo's guarantee. (*Gives paper*)

Lop. This to my pocket, and Queretaro to the Liberals!

Gar. 'T is heavy business. You do it lightly, colonel.

Lop. The world 's a feather.

Gar. If we but think so.

Lop. At dawn my troops are yours.

Gar. And you command the Empress' regiment.

Lop. Yes. The pick of Maximilian's soldiers.

Gar. One other question. The southern gate—Hist!

Lop. The nuns. (*They draw aside and converse. Two nuns come out of convent and cross plaza*)

1st Nun. The good Emperor is not out yet. He is often here long before day walking and thinking, 'T is then, they say, his mind is on the blessed Empress who has gone across the sea to get help for him. By day he 141 never speaks her name, but thinks only of our poor country.

2d Nun. Hark! The enemy's guns! They can not reach us.

1st Nun. Can not? A shell broke here yesterday. The Emperor stood just there.

2d Nun. Holy mother! What did his Majesty do?

1st Nun. He smiled, and said he might have chosen his place better; then moved to the very spot where the ball had burst, as though he hoped another would follow it.

2d Nun. Blessed virgin! Would he die?

1st Nun. I 'm sure he would not live. Come, sister. Ah, we have but one loaf this morning.

2d Nun. Let us be glad we can give that,—for many are hungry.

1st Nun. Many are starved—dead.

2d Nun. But the good Emperor! It is so sad to think of him without food.

1st Nun. He will give this to his officers. Yesterday I saw Prince Salm-Salm and the general Miramon each with a bit of white bread that can not be found in all Queretaro outside of our convent.

2d Nun. The good man! Holy Mother bless and keep him! (*They go into the Cruz*)

Lop. What will you do with Maximilian?

Gar. Make a Liberal of him.

Lop. Ha! How?

Gar. Shoot him!

Lop. Shoot him?

Gar. Yes. The grave 's the great republican senate house,—where each man has the floor.

Lop. (*Laughing*) And you will introduce him!

Gar. Hark!

Lop. The Emperor! Go! (*Exit Garza. Enter Maximilian and Prince Salm-Salm*)

142 **Max.** (*Greeting Lopez affectionately*) You're early out, my boy.

Lop. Your majesty, I am the officer of the day.

Max. Yes,—I remember. Who was your friend?

Lop. Ramirez, of Dupin's regiment.

Salm. Ramirez! He 's much changed if that was he.

Lop. Shall I call him back, your majesty, that the prince may convince himself that his memory of faces is not infallible?

Max. Nay, my trusted two! (*Puts an arm about each*) Would you might love each other as I love you both. My prince, whose courage is the very heart of my army, and my young hussar, dear for your own sake—dearer still because—she trusted you!

(*Blasio, the Emperor's secretary, comes out of the Cruz*)

Blasio. Your majesty, I have finished the letters.

Max. Good. There will be no more to write. (*Stumbles over something*) What 's this?

Blasio. A fallen Christ.

Max. You mean a fallen figure of the risen Christ.

Lop. Here is the crown of thorns.

Max. Give it to me. (*Holds it meditatively*) How well it suits my fortunes!

Salm. Nay—

Max. Ay, better than my golden one. (*Gives it to Blasio*) Hang it above my bed. My Queretaro crown!

Salm. Do not, your majesty!

Max. (*To Blasio*) Take it. (*Exit Blasio*) Why, prince, 't is something to have won a crown. My first was given me. (*Firing and falling of shells*)

Salm. I beg you, sire, to move your quarters to a safer station. This is death at any moment!

143 **Max.** Death at any moment—(*Regretfully*) And I have been here sixty days.

Lop. Courage, sire! Marquez will come!

Max. (*Eagerly*) Has there been news?

Lop. Not yet, your majesty.

Max. Not yet! What does it mean? You heard him take the oath to bring me help or die. 'T was here he swore—before us all. Vowed to return with troops in fifteen days! Ah, he is dead.

Salm. No, your majesty.

Max. But if he lives?

Salm. He is a traitor.

Max. You heard his oath—

Salm. A traitor's oath!

Lop. He 's true, your majesty. His messengers are murdered.

Salm. He 's false!

Max. But that means—death.

Salm. Or flight.

Max. Not flight!

(*Enter Miramon and Mendez*) You're welcome, gentlemen. Your eyes bring news.

Mir. Your majesty, Metz has returned.

Max. At last!

News of Marquez! He comes! I know he comes!

Men. O, sire,—

Max. The faithful Metz! Where is he?

Metz. (*Entering*) Sire! (*Kneels*)

Max. Rise, sir.

Metz. O pardon me, your majesty!

I bring but wintry news.

Max. Marquez—

Metz. Is false.

Max. Oh, no, no, no! He comes! I know he comes!

144 **Metz.** He 's leagued with Labastida,—for the church

Deserts you too.

Max. The church gone with him! No! no! I can't believe it!

Metz. You do not doubt me!

Max. Not you! But in my ear

The tale turns miracle! And I must doubt,

Though on your tongue 't is truth!

Metz. 'T is truth indeed!

The troops he was to bring you from the city,

He led for his own glory against Diaz,

Thinking to make himself the conqueror

And president of Mexico.

Max. My troops!

What then?

Metz. Porfirio Diaz routed them

To the last man. Marquez himself escaped

Alone,—fled unattended from the field.

Max. My troops! my troops!... And this is friendship! O God,

Give me but enemies!

Salm. Your Majesty—

Max. Who calls me majesty? There 's none in me.

I am a riven oak whose leaf-light friends

Fly with misfortune's Autumn. (*Steps away, bowed in grief*)

Salm. (*Following him*) I love you, sire.

Lop. (*Eagerly*) So do we all! Your majesty, believe us!

Mir. Canst not spare one who have so many true?

Max. Forgive me, friends. This treachery 's the night

Wherein your hearts of gold beat out like stars!

Lop. My life is yours, my lord!

145 **Max.** Thanks, dear Lopez. (*Takes his hand*)

In friendship lies the joy superlative,

And nearest Heaven. We touch God's hand whene'er

We clasp a friend's.

... But now we must take counsel.

Salm. No, sire, we must take action. Pardon me,
But our sole hope of safety lies in flight.

Max. What! Leave the town to sack and ruin? No!
Desert the poor inhabitants, so long our friends?
And all our wounded, sick and dying? Never!

Salm. But if you stay, my lord, you sacrifice
The living with the dying.

Max. Oh, Heaven, Heaven!

Lop. Your Majesty, this counsel is not wise.
It is not honor!

Salm. Honor will lead the flight!
To stay were crime! Sire, give the order now.
At once! The firing to the north has ceased.
All night I've reconnoitered. The way is clear
For the last time. We'll arm the citizens

To cover flight, and in an hour—

Lop. We'll be
Attacked on every side! A madman's counsel!

Salm. O, sire, lose not a moment!

Mir. Lopez is right.
To fly from death is not dishonor, but who
That values honor throws away one chance
Of victory?

Salm. There is no chance. Not one!
My word is fly, and I'm no coward, sire.

Max. You've led our troops where every track was blood,
And in the throat of battle, hand to hand,
Have fought with Death! We know you'll dare a fight

146 As far as any man while there's a hope
Of victory.

Salm. But I'll not make my folly
The captain to defeat.

Lop. 'Tis not defeat!
The Liberals are at their fortune's ebb.
They're sick with fear, and tremble in their rags.

Mendez. Let's fight it out, my lord!

Max. With starving men?

Lop. We're starving, but our foes are starved.

Our ammunition fails, but theirs has failed—

(A shell breaks near them)

Salm. That, sir, unspeaks your words.

Lop.

Not so. One shell

But tells how few they are, for yesterday

They fell in numbers. And to the north, you say,

The guns are silent.

Salm.

Sire, a moment lost

May mean the loss of all.

(Enter Dupin with two prisoners. Lopez goes to meet him)

Dupin. What did you mean by your infernal order to bring these men here? Don't you know old Saint-face won't let them be shot?

Lop. Keep quiet. They are my captives, not yours.

Dup. I 've plugged just ninety-eight this week, and it 's too bad not to make an even hundred.

Max. *(Approaching)* Prisoners?

Dup. Deserters, your majesty. They have confessed it. I 've brought them here for sentence. Will you have them shot at once, or wait till sunrise?

Max. None shall be shot. Not one. How often must we say it? If things go well here, good; if not, still is my conscience clear of blood. *(To deserter)* You 've been with the enemy?

147 **1st Des.** Yes, curse the day! Your pardon, blessed majesty!

Max. How fare our foes?

1st Des. The best of them as bad as the worst with us.

Lop. You note that, prince?

2d Des. We have a little food, but they have none. The country is eaten bare. Diaz is trying to reach them with supplies, but at present there is n't enough meal in ten miles of the army to make an ash-cake.

Lop. More proof for the prince, your majesty.

Max. Their powder fails?

2d Des. Yes, sire. 'T would be all the same if it did n't, for they 've hardly strength left to stand on their toes and fire the guns.

Max. Poor fellows!

Lop. You can not doubt, my lord, that we shall win with the next assault.

Mir. Cast fear to the winds, your majesty!

Salm. Who spoke of fear?

Mir. Not I! Fear is the devil's magic-glass

He holds before us to swell out our vision,

Turn hares to lions, stones a lamb might skip

To beetling cliffs that ne'er knew human foot,

And slightest obstacles, that do but make

The mind's fair exercise and moral zest,

To barriers, high as heaven, to success!

Lop. (*Sneering*) And Juarez' men of rags to glittering armies!

Max. We 'll hazard battle.

Salm. I beg your majesty—

Max. We know your courage, prince, for it is writ

In many a scar; but you are wrong in this.

Lop. You 'll hear no more of flight, my lord?

Max. No more.

148 **Lop.** Then I 'll to duty, knowing all is well.

(*Exit Lopez*)

Dupin. (*Aside*) And I 'll go find a breakfast for my little man-eater. (*Clapping his weapon*) There 's never anything to be done around his saintship. (*Exit*)

Mir. In half an hour?

Max. Yes. The plans will then be ready. (*Turns to go in*) You, prince, with me. Though I 've dismissed your head from service, I still must have your heart. (*Goes into church with Salm-Salm*)

Mir. (*To Mendez*) What do you think of it?

Men. Why, sir, I 'd rather die fighting than running. And there 's a chance for us. The Liberals are beggared. There 's hardly a uniform in camp. If Marquez had kept true, we should have saved the empire.

Mir. Don't speak of him! Hell's throne is empty while he 's on earth!

(*Exeunt Mendez and Mir.*)

1st Des. Well, comrade, here 's promotion fast enough. We that were prisoners are captains of the field. Lead on!

2d Des. Be sure the Tigre is not around. He 's got a long claw. Ugh! I feel shaky yet.

(*Exeunt. It grows lighter. Guard comes out of the Cruz and takes station by door. Enter Princess Salm-Salm, Aseffa, and women of Queretaro*)

Princess S. (*Excitedly*)

Admit me to the emperor!

Guard. Your pardon.

He must not be disturbed.

Princess S. Oh, but he must!

The pity of it that he must!

Guard. Nay, madam—

Princess S. Admit us, sir, or I will beat the door!

(*Maximilian comes to door*)

149 **Max.** Some trouble here? The princess! Always welcome!

Princess S. But such unwelcome news, your majesty!

You know I 've rooms at Senor Barrio's house.

I 've long suspected him. Last night he lodged

Two men whose conference I overheard.

All was not clear, but part was clear enough.

One of your trusted officers is false,

And you to-day—this hour—will be betrayed

Unto your foes.

Max. Impossible!

Princess S. O, sire,

Be blind no longer. This lady heard the men

As I did. There 's no doubt!

Lady. 'T is certain, sire,

That they were officers in the Liberal army,

And spoke of things that set me all aghast.

Max. Good women, I thank you, but you are deceived.

There 's not a man about me whose true face

Is not the table where fidelity

Writes him my own.

Princess S. O, sir, 't is one whose hand

Is in your bosom.

Max. Nay—

Princess S. That much I know,

Though I know not his name.

Max. Bold Miramon

Is staunch as death. Mendez would in his breast

Receive the bullet meant for me. Dupin

Has been too cruel to the enemy

To hope for life even at treason's price.

And Lopez is my own created love,

The Empress' guard,—the only Mexic heart

I 've taken a very brother's to my own.

150 **Princess S.** What shall I do? This moment you must fly!

Stand not, your majesty! 'T will be too late!

(Prince Salm-Salm comes to door)

Thank God, my husband! His majesty 's betrayed!

You 've never doubted me!

Prince Salm. Betrayed?

Max. No, prince,—

Prince Salm. I 'll visit every post!

Princess S. You but lose time.

(The prince hurries out)

Oh God! Oh God!

Max. Sweet princess, be not troubled.

There is no cause.

Princess S. Ah, we are lost!

(The bells of the city begin to ring)

Max. You hear?

The bells! The enemy has raised the siege!

O joyous news!

Princess S. No, no, your majesty.

That is the traitor's signal of success.

Oh Heaven!

Max. What madness! 'T is impossible!

Princess S. Those bells proclaim that every Imperial post

Is in a Liberal's command. We're lost!

(Enter citizens and soldiers in confusion)

1st Cit. What mean the bells?

2d Cit. That Escobedo's fled!

3d Cit. Marquez has come!

1st Soldier. No, no! The city's taken!

2d Soldier. Juarez is here! The Liberals are on us!

(Confused talking and shouts continue. Re-enter Prince Salm-Salm)

Max. What is it, prince?

151 **Prince Salm.** O dearest majesty—

Max. The worst!

P Salm. 'T is treachery. We are surrounded!

Max. Those bells—

P Salm. Ring out the enemy's success.

Each post is captained by a Liberal.

Max. *(Calmly to princess)* Forgive me. You were right. *(To Prince Salm-Salm)* Who is the traitor?

P Salm. Ask not, I beg you.

Max. His name!

P Salm. Lopez.

Max. Lopez? *(Staggers)*

Unsay that word—and take my crown!

P Salm. O, would

I could, your majesty! It is too true!

Max. Lopez! Carlotta's chosen officer!

And heaped with favors high enough to make

A pyramid to faith!... Is this the world,

Or some strange fancy spinning in my eyes?

P Salm. My dearest liege—

Max. Who would not leave a life

Where such things be, though death were sleep eternal?

... Lead me 'mong shells and bayonets. But not

To kill. My God, there 's blood enough been shed.

Bid all surrender. Let no more lives be lost.

Farewell, my prince.... Now for a friendly shell!—

Just here! (*Striking his heart, rushes out*)

Princess S. O save him! I am safe! Go! go! (*Exit Salm-Salm*)

1st Woman. We shall all be butchered!

Aseffa. Juarez is no butcher.

2d Woman. 'T is Escobedo leads,—and many have bled by him.

Aseffa. Be not afraid. I know the Liberals.

152 **Voices.** They come! they come!

(*Miramón and Dupin rush in*)

Mir. Where is the Emperor?

Dup. Emperor dunce-cap! We must look to our own skins.

(*Enter a score of ragged Liberals led by Rafael. Aseffa stares at him, speechless*)

Mir. Too late for that!

Raf. You are our prisoners. (*Liberals take Dupin and Miramón*)

Soldiers. Shoot them! Shoot them! Miramón and Dupin! The butchers! The dogs!

Raf. Hold! You are soldiers! Not murderers!

Dup. (*To soldiers*) You rags and bones! Go wash and eat before you touch a gentleman!

Sol. You 'll not be so nice to-morrow when the worms are at you!

Asef. Raphael! (*Flies to him*)

Raf. You here! O blessed fortune! My love! my love!

Asef. O, is it true? You are alive! Alive!

I too am resurrected, for I was dead,

Slain with the news that you were murdered!

Raf. I 've news too bitter for so sweet a moment.

Ignacio bribed my guard—stood in my place—

And died.

Asef. (*Recoiling*) You let him die for you?

Raf. No, no!

He carefully deceived me. I thought he planned

His own escape with mine.

Asef. O noble friend!...

Juarez! He knows?

Raf. Not yet.

Asef. What grief for that

Great heart!... But you are here—my Rafael!

153 **Raf.** By all these kisses—yes!

Asef. These are your lips—

Your eyes—your hands—alive! I hear your heart!

Your arms are round me, yet this is the earth!

My country and my husband safe!

Raf. God gives

Some moments out of Heaven, and this is one!

(Enter a soldier)

Sol. The Emperor is captured by Escobedo!

Princess S. Not killed! not killed! Thank Heaven for that!

Sol. 't was strange

To see him stand like this *(folds his arms)* among the shells!

Asef. Now I could pity him, for he must die.

Princess S. Die, woman! Die? You know not who he is!

Why all the outraged world would rise and raze

This devil's country from the face of earth

Were Maximilian slain! Let Juarez dare

To harm this son of kings and he will learn

His beggar's power is but an infant's breath!

Asef. Good madam, you have been my noble friend.

I would not wound you, but would have you know

That better men than Maximilian

Have died for lesser crimes.

(Enter Juarez with soldiers. Dawn has gradually opened and it is now broad sunlight)

Voices. Juarez! Juarez!

El Presidente! El Presidente!

Jua. My men,

The town is ours, and with it Mexico.

Citizens of Queretaro. I give you back

More than your homes,—your liberated country.

Voices. Long live the Republic! Liberty forever!

(Enter Escobedo)

154 **Esc.** Your Excellency will see the prisoner?

Jua. The illustrious duke? Ay, bring him here.

Esc. He comes.

(Enter Maximilian under guard)

Jua. Great duke, I grieve that I have cause for joy

To see you thus. What wishes would your grace
Prefer to us?

Max. I have but one request,
Your excellency. If more blood must be spilt,
Let it be mine alone.

Jua. We grant it, sir,
With two exceptions justice doth demand.
Dupin and Miramon must die with you.
Dupin, who put to most ignoble death
The noblest prisoners of righteous war.
Dark Miramon, whose cowardly ambition
Has sunk his country in her own dear blood,
And would do so again did life permit
Him opportunity. And you, my lord,
Who signed the foulest, most inhuman law
Writ down since Roman Sulla's hand grew cold.

Princess S. O spare him! Spare him, sir! He was deceived
By treacherous ministers!

Jua. His ministers
Were but his many hands, and for their deeds
His heart must answer.

Princess S. O could you know that heart!

Max. Dear lady, peace.

Princess S. Beloved majesty,
I speak for her who prays beyond the sea.
... O, sir, you can not mean that he must die!
Help me, Aseffa! Help me plead for him!
Does not your Rafael live?

Asef. He lives because

155 Ignacio is dead. (*Juarez starts*) I must be just.

Princess S. What has a woman's heart to do with justice?

'T is mercy is its heavenly quality!

Jua. Is this thing true? My boy.... Speak, Rafael.
... Tears in your eyes. You need not speak. My boy ...
Ignacio.... Unto God I give thee!...

Princess S. 'T is right
That they who would be gods to others' woe
Should be proved human by their own.

Jua. (Not hearing her) And this

Is what so many hearts have borne since first

The Austrian came.

Princess S. O mercy, mercy, sir!

By your own woe show pity unto those

Whose hearts must bleed if Maximilian dies!

Be merciful! These tears of mine are but

The first few drops of the unbounded tide

That weeping as the sea weeps round the world

Shall drink thy hated land if this good man

Dies by your word! Be Christ, not man, and spare him!

Juarez. Madam, it is the people and the law

Demand this expiation, not Juarez.

I grieve to see you on your knees before me,

But did each queen of Europe—ay, and king,—

Kneel in your place, I could not spare that life.

(Silence. Sobs. Juarez signs to Escobedo, who leads prisoners away. Dupin's broad hat is pulled low. Miramon steps proudly. At exit Maximilian turns and salutes the people)

Max. Mexicans! Long live Mexico!

(CURTAIN)

156 ACT V.

Scene I: Audience chamber, the Tuileries. Louis Napoleon alone.

Lou. Succeed or fail! However men may run

The goal is marked. Yet will we race with Fate

In forgone match. Some free of foot and hand,

Some stumbling with huge empires on our backs

Less certain than the overburdened ant

Housing a winter crumb.... Victoire!

(Enter Secretary)

Sec. My lord.

Lou. If any dispatch from the West arrives

Bring it at once.

Sec. Yes, sire. *(Exit)*

Lou. America!

Thou strange, new power where each man is a king,

I have obeyed thy will. Pulled down my empire,

Built up that France might the Atlantic stride
And stand firm-footed in two worlds. This slap
Upon the cheek imperial insults
All monarchy, yet Europe shrugs and smiles,
When she should blush to ruddy rage of war.
... The West must go ... but here I'll be supreme.
Austria and Prussia I urge again to conflict,
And promise aid to each, but in my dream
They both are doomed and France shall reign alone.

(Enter Chamberlain)

Chamb. Your majesty, the Marechal Bazaine.

157 Lou. Bazaine! Admit him.

(Exit Chamberlain)

'T is penance night with us,
And this man is the mirror of our conscience,
Showing its foulest spots.

(Enter Bazaine)

Baz. Sire, I salute you.

Now Paris is the star that all eyes seek.
The Exposition draws the world to you,
Who glitter here as you were made for heaven.

Lou. Ay,

Here we would shine that none may see our star
I' the West grow dark!... Now Maximilian?

Baz. He will be shot.

Lou. No jests! I ask you, sir,
What terms he may arrange for freedom.

Baz. None.

Lou. You speak not to a fool.

Baz. I trust not, sire.

Lou. You know the Mexicans. Tell me the truth.

Baz. I know the Mexicans. He will be shot.

Lou. God, no! That noble man!

Baz. Pray, sir, what fate

Had you in mind for Maximilian
When finding him too true to Mexico
For your proud aims, you sent such covered word
To one Bazaine he could but read therein
A revolution and the Emperor's fall?

Lou. I would have spared his life.

Baz. (*Taking out paper*) Then what means this?

(*Reads*) 'France weeps no death that brings her better fortune.'

Lou. You 'd spy a warrant in the alphabet

Did you but wish to find one! Think you that

Meant—death?

158 **Baz.** (*Closer*) I know it.

Lou. What dare you?

Baz. Anything—

With this safe in my pocket. (*Puts up paper*)

Lou. Beware, Bazaine!

Baz. When one so mighty as your Majesty

Is my protector?

Lou. You—

(*Enter Chamberlain*)

Chamb. The Count von Ostein

Beseeches word with you.

Lou. He 's welcome to it.

(*Exit Chamberlain*)

Adieu, le marechal.

Baz. My lord—

Lou. Adieu,

Le marechal. (*Exit Bazaine*)

Prussia's ambassador.

Now for our role of cheat and crowned dissembler.

O for a throne where Truth might keep her head!

(*Enter the Prussian Minister*)

Welcome, my lord.

Prus. Most gracious majesty,

The foreign ministers have come in body

To speak congratulations and confirm

The triumph of the Exposition.

Lou. They have our truest thanks. But first, my lord,

A word in private with you. Is 't Prussia's wish

That we withhold our aid from Mexico?

Prus. A question, sire. You know that Austria threatens.

Is France in this the friend or enemy

To Prussia? There 's not an inch of middle ground

To stand on. If our foe, then pour your strength

159 To Mexico. If friend, keep it at home,

Ready for Prussia's need.

Lou. To be your friend

May cost some blood to France.

Prus. I've heard it said

The left bank of the Rhine is a fair country,

And worth a little blood.

Lou. Enough, my lord.

Let Prussia know she has a friend in France,

And with your sanction cover our retreat

From Mexico.

(Enter Chamberlain)

Chamb. Pardon, your majesty.

The Empress of Mexico begs audience.

Lou. Carlotta? No!

Chamb. She presses urgently

To enter.

Lou. Here?... We sent our word to her

At Miramar!... And yet—she comes—she's here.

... Admit the deputation, and summon, too,

Our Empress.

Chamb. The Empress comes.

(Enter Eugenie attended. Exit Chamberlain. Enter guards)

Eug. I hear the ministers

Have come to us with state congratulations,

And though unbidden, I'll not leave my chair—

The co-seat of imperial dignity—

Vacant at such a time.

Lou. Welcome, Eugenie.

We were about to summon you.

Eug. Thanks even

For tardy courtesy.

Lou. But we have more

Than compliments to hear. Carlotta waits

Our audience.

160 **Eug.** Carlotta! I can not see her! *(Rises)*

Lou. Nay, it was you first cast ambitious eye

To Mexico. Now see the end.

Eug. My lord—

Lou. Be seated, madam.

Eug. You command me, sir?

Lou. We do.

Eug. (*Going*) Come, ladies!

Lou. (*To guards*) Let no one pass out!

Eug. France, sir, shall know this outrage!

Lou. When you wish

To make it known.

(*Enter ambassadors, Austrian, Russian, Italian, Belgian, and others*)

Rus. Most glorious Majesty!

Belg. Mighty France!

It. Italy's savior!

Aus. Christendom's king!

Lou. I thank you, my good lords; but we're too sad

To smile at compliments; Carlotta comes

To beg our power to uphold her throne,

Though Heaven has decreed her empire's fall.

We ask you hear our open clear defence,

And help set forth our duty, that the Empress

May see our wisdom through our tears.

It. We 'll lend

Your Majesty what voice we can.

Lou. I thank you.

(*Aside to Austrian*) My lord, a word. The Prussian talons creep

Toward Austria. France is your friend.

Aus. O, sire!

Lou. If you would have her strong pray that no sword

161 Of hers be lost in Mexico.

Aus. I will,

My lord.

(*Enter Carlotta, attended by Count Charles, Count de Bombelles, her priest, and women. She goes to Louis and would kneel. He takes her hand*)

Lou. An Empress must not kneel.

Car. I'm still

An Empress, sir?

Lou. Once to have worn a crown

Is always to be queen.

Car. Sire, mock me not.

Didst mean no more than that?

Lou. Lady, you come

To beg your empire?

Car. I do not beg, Napoleon.

I come to ask you keep your sacred oath,

But do not make a beggar of me, sir,

Who was a princess in my cradle.

Lou. Nay,

Royal Carlotta, if beggar here must be,

See one in us who sue your gentle patience.

While strength was ours to give we gave it you,

But now is France grown needy of her troops,

With Europe surging to a conflict round her.

Car. My lord—

Lou. America turns baying on us.

Should we make war on one who twice o'ercame

Our island neighbors when she was but child

To what she now is grown?

Prus. Your majesty,

'T would be a folly for a clown, not king.

Car. America? Easier to stop her now

Than it will be when she wears Mexico

Like sword at her right side. Austria, Prussia,

162 Strike you no more at neighbor throats, but come

And win a fight for God. Napoleon, come!

There lies a world that's worth the price of war.

Whose swelling breasts pour milk of paradise,

Whose marble mountains wait the carver's hand,

Whose valley arms ne'er tire with Ceres' load,

Whose crownless head awaits the diadem

That but divine, ancestral dignity

May fix imperishably upon it! A bride

For blessed Rome! And will you give her up

To ravishers? To enemies of the Church?

To unclean hands ne'er dipped in holy chrism?

Aus. The time 's not ripe for our united swords

To ransom her.

Car. The time is always ripe

For a good deed. Napoleon, you will come!
And though you fail, failure will be majestic.
Withdraw like frightened schoolboy and you make
Your throne a penance stool whereon you sit
For laughter of the nations. But come, and though
You fail, when time has brought America
To her full, greedy strength, these scornful kings
Will then unite in desperate endeavor
To give your great conception form and face,
And at your tomb they 'll lift their shaken crowns
And beg a pardon from your heart of dust!

Prus. (*Aside*) He 'll yield to her!... Most noble lady, we—

Car. I speak, sir, to Napoleon.

Lou. What help

Can Austria give?

Aus. Sire, she has many troubles.

The clouds of war threat her with scarlet flood,

And little strength has she to spare abroad

When foes besiege at home.

163 **Car.** And Austria's chief

Is Maximilian's brother! It was not so

That day at Miramar when three proud crowns

Took oath to serve him in an hour like this.

Austria powerless! And Belgium—dead.

But France—Ah, France, she will prove noble, loyal

To God and honor!

Lou. My honor, dearest lady,

Permits me not to risk my country's life

That you may wear a crown in Mexico.

I can not save your empire.

Car. Then let it fall,

But save—my husband's life!

(*Astonishment and silence*)

Lou. You speak but madly.

America has sent us guaranties

She will demand that Maximilian

Be held but as a prisoner of war.

The Mexicans dare not proceed against him

Contrary to the mighty government

That is sole friend unto their scarce born state.

Car. America demands with paper words

That can be torn and laughed at. Would she save him?

Let her demand his life with cannon turned

Upon his murderers. Then, sire, I'll trust

To their obedience. Till then I'll plead

With you. All hope is here.

Lou. Not so, dear lady.

Italy, Austria, and your Belgium,

Have sent their ablest counsel to defend him.

Car. Troops, troops, my lord, not wordy men of law,

Are his sole need. Should God send angels there

He'd choose but those who bear the flaming sword.

... Here, here, my lords! Look here! His guaranties,

In his own hand set down! Here he vows faith

164 To Maximilian—and to Heaven! Hear!

'I, Louis Napoleon, take solemn oath

Upon the honor of a man and king—'

Shall I go on, my lord? Have you forgot?

Then let my tongue be as a burning pen

To write it new upon your heart!

Lou. No! no!

In God's name, no!

Aus. Dear lady, this is torture.

Car. Torture for you?—for him? Then what is it

For me, my lord?

Prus. Wouldst have his majesty

False to his country to be true to you?

Aus. The oath he took was, by the courtesy

Of nations, subject to the change that time

Visits on countries as on men.

Car. You'd win

His sword from me that you may use it! Sirs,

He plays you 'gainst each other as the eagle

Sets ospreys in contention over prey

That he may filch the prize!

Lou. Carlotta!

Car.

Be warned!

He 'll know no ease till in your capitals

He has re-crowned the great Napoleon!

Lou. Nay—

Car. Stop me not! Here you shall stand as bare

To these men's eyes as you do to my own!

Lou. My lords, you will not let her troubled mind

Weaken your trust in me?

Prus. Your majesty,

We know you noble.

Car. Noble! Napoleon,

This wondrous city is aflame with joy,

The blazing fires now dart aloft and write

165 In golden light your name upon the skies,

But in your heart will burn a torch of hell

Unquenchable, if you deny me aid!

Lou. Dear madam, pray believe that I am helpless.

Car. You are as strong as France, Eugenie, help me!

If e'er you held a dear head on your breast—

You have!—for you 've both son and husband! Ah,

I have no child. My lord is all to me.

O put your two in one and you will know

What now I plead for! By the kisses dropped

Upon your baby's cheek, and by the hope

That you will see him grow up at your side,

Another self with heart-strings round your own,

I pray you, lady, soften that stone heart!

I kneel to you, an empress though my crown

Has fallen, as yours I pray will not,

And at your footstool beg my husband's life!

(Eugenie rises)

By your child's love, I beg you for one word!

Help me, Eugenie, or the day will come

When you will know a crown is but a band

Of metal cold, and one warm kiss more dear

Than all such circling glory! When you will grow

Mad with the longing but to touch the hand

Now lies in yours as it would never part,

Strain for the face whose beauty fed you once
Until your madness builds it out of air
To gaze with sweet unhuman pity on you
Yet come not near for kisses! O, even now
I look through sealed up time unto a night
When sleep will fly from your woe-drownéd eyes,
And you will cry to Heaven for blessed death
To lead you from the midnight desolation!
Eugenie, save thyself! For thy own sake

166 Show pity unto me, and in that hour

Receive the mercy that thou now dost give!

Eug. (*Going*) Help me! I 'm ill! (*Her women assist her out*)

Car. Gone! Gone? And yet a woman!

Ah, there 's a God will suffer not this wrong!

... Napoleon—

Lou. Nay, madam, we 've said all.

I can not cast my country into war.

You but fatigue yourself.

Car. O Heaven! Fatigue!

Canst think of that when Maximilian

Is facing bayonets for honor's sake?

Lou. Believe me, he is safe!

Car. I tell you no!

To-day the guns from Mont Valerien

Pealed out your glory! Your arm was in the arm

Of Prussia's monarch, and Waterloo forgot!

You laughed with Austria's chief, as though the duke

Of Reichstadt were not dead! The bloody snows

Of Moscow melt in Alexander's smile!

Edward's in France, St. Helena 's a myth!

And all the world is trooping here to feed

Your monstrous vanity! But let the morn

Bring news of Maximilian's death,

These kings will shudder from you as from plague,

The conscious earth refuse your feet a base

For shame to bear you! Then will begin your fall.

Down, down you 'll creep to an unpitied death,

And winds that shriek around your exile bed

Will cry me prophetess!

Lou. (*After a silence*) Your audience

Is over. Pray go and rest. You need much sleep.

Car. A woman sleeps not till her heart is safe.

My eyes shall not be closed till I've your answer.

167 **Lou.** You have it, lady, and we beg you leave us.

Car. Leave! leave! O sir, it is a lie I hear! (*Falls at his feet*)

You did not say it! See! I kiss your feet! O sir—

Lou. (*Withdrawing*) You put us to discourtesy.

Since you will not withdraw, we leave you.

Car. (*Leaping up*) Coward!

Then, Louis Napoleon, Emperor of France!

Thou art a murderer, and I have kissed

The devil's hoof! (*Exit Napoleon*)

(*Carlotta stands dazed, looking after Napoleon. Puts her hand over her eyes. Count Charles goes to her*)

Char. Dear madam, come with me. (*She looks about bewildered*)

One of her women. Your majesty,

We pray you come.

Car. (*Strangely*) Yes—yes— I'll go. Away!

(*Exit with her attendants*)

Aus. A gloomy business, truly.

Prus. 't has wrought upon me.

(*Re-enter Napoleon*)

Lou. My lords, believe me grateful for your help

In this most wretched business.

(*Enter Secretary*)

Sec. A dispatch, sire, from Mexico.

Lou. We'll hear it.

All here should share this news with me.

Sec. 'T is short,

Your majesty.

Lou. The sooner read. We wait.

Sec. (*Reads*) 'By order of Juarez, the Austrian duke, Ferdinand Maximilian, has been shot.'

(*Silence. Napoleon groans*)

It. It can't be true!

Bel. 'T is false! I'll not believe it!

168 **Prus.** Grieve not, your Majesty. This is a mock

Dispatch.

Aus. A noble archduke! Bound by ties
Of blood and love to every court of Europe!
Believe this not, my lord!

Sec. Your Majesty,
This second message from America
Confirms the other.

Lou. 'T is true! My God, 't is true!

It. Carlotta! Who will tell her?

Lou. None shall do it!
She must not know.

Rus. Pardon me, sire, she must.

Lou. Then his death bullet has not stopped its flight.

'T will end but in her heart.

(Re-enter Count Charles. Napoleon silently gives him the despatch, which he reads with great agitation)

Char. *(To himself)* O terrible! And yet

No news to me—to me.

Lou. You 'll tell her, sir?

Char. There is no need, my lord. Her reason 's fled.

She 's mad.

Bel. 'T is Heaven's mercy!

It. Unhappy woman!

Char. She is not wild, but gentle, and thinks, my lord,
You 've granted her request.

Lou. Noble Carlotta!

My lords, forbear awhile. I 'd be alone.

It. God grant you rest.

(All go out but Napoleon)

Lou. These kings I 've called here to a dance must lead
A funeral. What can I say to them?

169 To Austria—his brother! England—his own cousin!

To Belgium—*her* brother! Spain— O, all

The *world*, that loved him!... An Emperor—and shot.

(Musical procession passes in street. Shouts of 'Vive l' empereur! Vive l' empereur!')

He too heard shouts like those—saw fires ascend

To write his triumph—ay—and he is cold—

Quite cold—shot dead.... Carlotta! prophetess!

I feel—I know—thy oracle 's from God!

(Falls at the foot of the imperial chair)

(CURTAIN)

Scene II: Miramar. A balcony overlooking the sea. Lady Maria alone.

Mar. Here they went out together—arm in arm,—

Sweet, healing spirits to a bleeding land.

Down yonder terrace to the sea they passed,—

He unto death, and she—to—*(Sighs deeply)*

Car. *(Without)* Cousin!

Mar. Ah!

(Turns smiling to greet Carlotta who enters carrying flowers)

So early out? What treasures have you there?

Car. The sweetest flowers that ever peeped up head.

They grow along the path in that dear wood

Where Maximilian took me gypsying

When we grew weary of the world.

Mar. I 'm sure

That was not often.

Car. True. We loved too well

Our work among the people to hide ourselves

In little corners of delight. But oh, those times!

170 How he would catch me as I ran and say

His little wild-girl with her flower crown

Was dearer than his princess ermine-gowned.

And so I 'll wreath these buds into my hair,

And meet him as he loved me best.

(Goes to edge of the balcony and looks to sea)

To-day!

This blessed, beauteous day our eyes shall see him!

(Drops flowers in trance of happiness)

Mar. Sweet Empress—

Car. Empress? No! To-day I am

His little wild-girl with her wreath of flowers.

O, I must make my crown! Now, now, how careless!

(Picks up flowers, sits and weaves them)

You see this flower?

Mar. 'T is very beautiful.

What is it?

Car. I 've seen it only in our wood.

Maximilian says it grows but for my hair. (*Sings*)

In a young, sweet hour of Spring

I sat 'neath an old tree to sing

Of love, only love!

The little brook took up my tune

And to his soft green banks did croon,

The green grass rippled to the tree

And every leaf shook melody

Of love, only love!

And then the birds that flitted by

Told it the clouds that told the sky,

And all the world to song did start

With what I sang but to my heart!

Ay, all the world sang back to me

A little maiden 'neath a tree

Of love, only love!

(*Puts down flowers and goes to Lady Maria*)

171 Ah, cousin, do you think he 'll be delayed?

Mar. Dear madam, I fear me so.

Car. These ships! these ships!

How slow their wings when they do bear our loved ones!

The wandering treasures of our empty arms!

The western waters must have sirens too,

And will not let him pass.

Mar. Indeed they would not,

Did they but know what majesty is in him.

Car. (*Embracing her*) O help me love him, dear. My heart 's too small.

(*Enter Count Charles*)

Char. A message.

Car. Oh! a message! I do not want

A message.

Char. The admiral of the port has word

The Emperor's ship 's delayed.

Car. Why, we 'll not weep....

'T is but a day.... (*Goes forward, looking out*) To-morrow, then—to-morrow!

(*To Lady Maria*) Why do you weep? A day 's not worth a tear.

See, I can smile!... But my poor flowers will fade.

I plucked them all.... No more grow by the path....

(Suddenly) Cousin, why wear you black?

Mar.

(Confused) I—madam—I—

Car. Such sable hues for this so rosy day?

Go dress your body like our happy hearts!

Dost think a coffin comes across the sea?

A coffin—*(Shudders)* Go! I can not bear this black!

(Exit Lady Maria)

I am displeased. Have I not reason, Charles?

'T was very wrong of her to dress in black

When Maximilian comes. I will go in.

I'm tired—but I am very happy. Ah! *(Exit)*

172 **Char.** O wounded heart! Thus every day she hopes,

And every day begins her hope anew.

It is my penance now to watch her sorrow,

To guard perfection's wreck in her sad body,

And hear the name of Maximilian fall

Each moment from her lips. O, God, remember

When once I am in hell, I've suffered here!

(Re-enter Carlotta)

Car. I can not stay away. This is my place.

Here will I catch the first light on his sail.

O Charles, dear Charles, to-morrow we shall see him!

Look in his noble eyes,—ah me, what eyes!

Dost not remember? Talk of him, cousin.

It brings him faster to me. My heart! my heart!

This waiting breaks it though 't is but a day!

An hour that keeps him from me lengthens like

The drawn out ages 'tween the ends of time!

But oh, to-morrow! Let me think of that!

Then will the small globe of mine eye contain

The wide and complete world of my desires!

... Have you forgot Aseffa? You do not speak;

But you have not forgot. She said—Oh, cruel!—

That he, my Maximilian, should lie cold

While yet my arms were warm and reaching for him.

How could she say it? But you stood by him—you—

His faithful friend. You knew 't would ne'er be true!

... Do you remember, Charles, the winter day

He climbed to Valtelina's ice-bound huts

To bear the starving people food?

Char. Yes—yes!

'T is my sole virtue to remember his!

Car. And when the flooding Ambro left her banks,

Rolling a very sea o'er farm and town,

Who was the first to ride the dangerous waves,

A rescuing angel saving man and child?

173 **Char.** 'T was Maximilian!

Car. Yes, our Maximilian.

I feared the Mexicans would take his life.

Was not that foolish, cousin? I should have known

God could not spare him from His world. Hast heard

The men of Licio tell how he was first

To bring them aid when all their silkworms died

And silence struck the looms that gave them food?

This man will say 'I have a son alive

Because of Maximilian!' And that will say

'I have a daughter now to tend my age,

Because the Lombard governor brought bread

Unto her cradle.' ... And he is coming back.

... Beautiful Miramar! We 'll never leave thee,

Though stars should beckon to a golden world!

To-morrow he 'll come! Maximilian!

(Holds out her arms toward the sea, looking radiantly into distance)

Charles! *(Turns suddenly, laying her hand on
his arm)*

Look! What men are those? Do you not see them?

Char. There 's nothing, cousin,—nothing but the sea.

Car. Oh, look! They wear the Mexican dress!

Char. Come in,

Sweet princess!

Car. Ah yes, they're Mexicans.

Char. Come!

You 've had some fever. 'T is a sick-room vision.

Car. No, no! I 'm well! Ah, never in such health!

I see like God! O look! A score of them!

Moving but silent as death! Where are they marching?

The sun gleams on their guns! O see, Charles, see!

There is a prisoner! Poor man! poor man!

I can not see his face. He walks most sadly,—

And proudly too! An upright soul, I know!

174 **Char.** Dear cousin, come away!

Car. He 's humbly dressed,

And but for that I 'd think he might be royal,

Ah, royal as Maximilian! O Charles,

I am so glad he 's safe upon the sea!

Safe—safe—and coming to me!

Char. (*Most pleadingly*) Come, wait within,

Dear princess! Come!

Car. I will not leave him! No!

The poor, sad prisoner! Those cruel weapons!

I fear—I fear—he is condemned to die.

... Perhaps he has a wife. Ah me, I pray not.

Then would be tears! He is a noble man,—

But still his face is from me.... They reach the field.

The soldiers halt and lift their guns. O how they gleam!

... I can not see.... Why is the face so dim?

Will no one save him? Let us pray for him!

We can do that! Down on our knees and pray!

O men, men, men! What sin beneath the sun

Can give excuse for such a deed as this?

O, Heaven, are you looking too? A man

So noble! Oh, he turns—he turns—his breast

Is to the weapons! Now they fire! He falls!

His face! (*Gives a wild cry*) Oh God! 't is Maximilian!

(*Falls forward on her face*)

(CURTAIN)

175 THE POET

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177 ACT I.

SCENE 1. Helen's room, Truelord house, New York.

ACT II.

SCENE 1. Exterior of Clemm cottage, near Richmond.

ACT III.

SCENE 1. Interior of Clemm cottage.

SCENE 2. The Same.

ACT IV.

SCENE 1. An old book store, New York.

SCENE 2. Poe's cottage, Fordham.

ACT V.

SCENE 1. Poe's lodging, Baltimore.

SCENE 2. A bar-room.

178 CHARACTERS

EDGAR ALLAN POE

VIRGINIA CLEMM

MRS. MARIA CLEMM

HELEN TRUELORD

MRS. TRUELORD

ROGER BRIDGMORE

NELSON CLEMM

MRS. DELORMIS

DOCTOR BARLOW

MRS. SCHMIDT

GEORGE THOMAS, Barkeeper

HAINES, JUGGERS, SHARP, BLACK, gamblers

BOOKSELLER

MUM ZURIE, TAT, BONY, servants at Clemm cottage.

Gertrude, Mabel, Annie, Sallie, Dora, Gladys, Ethel, Alma, Allie, friends of Virginia.

179 THE POET

ACT I.

Scene: Room in the Truelord House. Helen lies on a couch before large windows, rear, reading by light from a small lamp on table near couch. She wears a loose robe over night-dress.

A light knock is heard at door, left centre.

Hel. *(Sitting up)* Mamma?

Voice. Yes, dear.

Hel. *(Kissing book and closing it)* Good-bye, my poet! *(Drops book on couch and goes to door)*

Voice, as Helen opens door. I saw your light. (*Enter Mrs. Truelord*) Forgive me, love. I could not rest. (*Helen is closing door*) No! Kate is coming.

Mrs. Delormis. (*In door*) Yes, I'm here, too, Helen.

Hel. Come in, Cousin Catherine.

(*All three advance*)

Mrs. Del. Madela had a feminine version of the jim-jams—tea-nerves, you know—so must get us both up.

180 Hel. (*Drawing forward a huge chair for Mrs. Truelord while Mrs. Delormis takes a smaller one*) I was not in bed.

Mrs. Tru. (*Looking toward bed in alcove, right*) But you have been! You could not sleep either. Ah!

(*Sighs deeply*)

Hel. (*Goes to couch*) Now, mamma!

Mrs. Tru. (*Embarrassed by Helen's straightforward look*) Helen—I—I've just got to have it out to-night. You are only my step-daughter, but I've loved you like my own.

Hel. (*Quaintly*) Yes.

Mrs. Tru. Have n't I always treated you as if you were my daughter born?

Hel. (*Slowly*) You have indeed!

Mrs. Tru. And I can't bear for you to—to—O, I just can't bear it, I say!

Hel. Bear what, mamma?

Mrs. Tru. This—this man—

Mrs. Del. Edgar Poe, Helen.

Mrs. Tru. You are going to give up Roger—Roger who has worshipped you since you were a baby, who has lived under the same roof and been a brother to you since you were two years old—you are going to give him up for a strange man—a man without a penny—a man you have seen but once—(*Almost shrieking*)—but once—(*Rising*)

Hel. (*Crosses, and stands before her, speaking calmly*) We know angels at first sight, mamma.

Mrs. Tru. (*Grabbing Helen by the shoulders and staring at her*) You have done it already! (*Falls to chair as if fainting*)

Hel. Soothe her, Catherine. I will get some wine. (*Exit*)

Mrs. Tru. (*Sitting up, at once recovered*) She's **181** made up her mind. When her eyes shine like that it's no use to argue. And all of Roger's fortune in Mr. Truelord's hands! We've considered it a family resource for years!

Mrs. Del. What a fool Roger was to bring Edgar Poe to the house!

Mrs. Tru. He's crazy about the man. Says he's a genius, and all that stuff.

Mrs. Del. Well, he is. But to introduce him to a girl like Helen! They'll be off before morning!

Mrs. Tru. Oh-h! Don't, Kate! Roger actually wants me to ask him to stay in the house.

Mrs. Del. Idiot! He deserves to lose her.... But your guest! (*Laughs*) Poor Madela! How he would upset your nice, comfortable theories of life! Why, you could n't hand him a cup of tea without feeling the planet quake.

Mrs. Tru. But what are we to do? Kate, you *must* help me.

Mrs. Del. I'm going to. You can't tell her father, because Helen must be persuaded, not opposed. And don't speak about the money. If she loved a beggar she would trudge barefoot behind him.

Mrs. Tru. (*Despairingly*) O, don't I know it?

Mrs. Del. Now you leave this to me, Madela. I will say a few things to Helen about meeting Mr. Poe in Europe—and—you know—

Mrs. Tru. (*Kissing her violently*) O, Kate! Tell her all—and more, if necessary! Don't think about your reputation if you can save Roger's fortune—

Mrs. Del. Sh!—

(*Enter Helen, with wine and a glass*)

Mrs. Tru. (*Feebly*) Thank you, dear, but I 'm better now. (*Rising*) I 'll try to rest. (*Goes to door*)

Hel. I would see you to your room, mamma, but 182 I 'm sure you would rather have Catherine. (*Mrs. Delormis makes no move to go*)

Mrs. Tru. O, I am quite well—I mean—I need no one—no one at all! Goodnight, my dears! (*Exit*)

Hel. (*Politely*) And is there anything which you must have out to-night, cousin Catherine?

Mrs. Del. Sit down, Helen. (*Helen takes a chair*) You have never loved me, but I have always had a warm heart for you, little girl. And you will take a warning from me in good part, won't you?

Hel. A good warning, yes.

Mrs. Del. I told you about meeting Mr. Poe last summer in Normandy. But—I did not tell you how often I met him. (*Helen rises, then Mrs. Delormis rises*) Helen, I prove my love for you by saying what it is so hard to utter to your pure self. My life has not been—all you would wish it to be—and Mr. Poe knows more about it than any other man.

Hel. You lie! I have seen his soul!

(*She goes to door and opens it for Mrs. Delormis to pass out. Mrs. Delormis sweeps through with an attempt at majesty*)

Hel. (*Motionless with clenched hands*) Wicked, wicked woman!... (*Goes to window, rear, opens it, draws long breaths as if stifling, and turns back into room*) Edgar! My love! I was a thing of clay. One look from your eyes has made me a being of fire and air.... (*Lies down on couch and takes up her book*) ... I can not read ... or sleep ... or pray. There 's too much whirling in my heart for prayer.... (*Starts*) What moan is that?... (*Rises, takes light from table, goes to window, leans out, casting the rays down*) Nothing.... I 'm fanciful.... The moon is rising. (*Goes back, putting light on table*) O, Edgar! God help me to be what love must be to thee. Love that can look 183 on miracles and be sane. What a face when he said goodnight! Like an angel's whose immortality is his wound.... Poor Roger!... What will my father say?... (*Moonlight floods the window*) Welcome, soft nurse of dreams! (*Extinguishes lamp*) A little rest.... Ah, I know *he* does not sleep.... (*She lies on couch in the moonlight, her eyes closed. Poe enters by window, gazes at her, and throws up his arms in gesture of prayer*)

Hel. (*Looking up, and springing to her feet*) Edgar! My God, you must not come here!

Poe. Is this love's welcome?

Hel. Go! go!

Poe. I was dying out there.

Hel. Leave me!

Poe. Life was passing from my veins. Only your eyes could draw back the ebbing flood.

Hel. I will light the lamp! (*Turns hastily*)

Poe. And put out Heaven's! (*She drops her hand*)

Hel. Go, O go at once!

Poe. Again I am alone! The twin angel who put her hand in mine is flown!

Hel. Edgar, be calm!

Poe. Calm! With such a look from you burning me as if I were a devil to be branded? Such words from you hissing like snakes through my brain?

Hel. O, I beg you—

Poe. I would but touch the hand that soothes my blood—look in the eyes that wrap my soul in balm—and you cry out as though some barbarous infidel had trampled you at prayers!

Hel. My father—Roger—they will not understand.

Poe. O, you would bring the world in to say how and when we shall love! Take note of the hour, and kiss by the clock! Great love is like death, Helen. It ¹⁸⁴ knows no time of day. If a man were dying at your gates would you keep from him because 't was midnight and not noon, and you were robed for sleep? It was your soul I sought. Must you array that to receive me? O, these women! On Resurrection day they 'll not get up unless their clothes are called with them from the dust! 'Excuse me, God, and send a dressmaker!' Ha! ha! ha! (*Walks the floor in maniac humor*)

Hel. Edgar, for love's sake hear me!

Poe. Speak loud if you would drown the winds!

Hel. Listen!

Poe. (*Turning upon her*) If my body bled at your feet you would stoop to me, but when my spirit lies in flames you cry 'Don't writhe! Don't be a spectacle!'

Hel. (*Putting her hands on his shoulders and speaking steadily*) The spirit does not murmur. Only the body cries.

Poe. (*Calming*) Forgive me, Helen!

Hel. Yes, love. (*Draws him to couch and sits by him soothingly*) ... O, your forehead is on fire.

Poe. No wonder, when I have just come out of hell.... Keep your cool hand over my eyes.... O, this is peace!... (*Takes her hand from his forehead and holds it*) I made you a song out there, in the darkness. I was fainting for one gleam of light when you opened the window and stood as beautiful as Psyche leaning to the god of love. Listen ... and believe that my heart was as pure as the lines. (*Sings softly*)

Helen, thy beauty is to me

Like those Nicean barks of yore

That gently o'er a perfumed sea

The weary, wayworn wanderer bore

To his own native shore.

¹⁸⁵ *On desperate seas long wont to roam,*

Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,

Thy Naiad airs, have brought me home

To the glory that was Greece

And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo, in yon brilliant window-niche

How statue-like I see thee stand,

An agate lamp within thy hand,—

Ah! Psyche, from the regions which

Are holy-land!

(*Drops his head to her hand and kisses it gently*)

Hel. Edgar, my life shall be my song to thee. (*They are silent for a second. His hand touches her book*)

Poe. A book! Who could write for such an hour? (*Holds book in moonlight*) Shelley! Lark of the world! You would know!... You will give me this book, Helen?

Hel. It is precious. You will love it?

Poe. Always! (*Kisses book, and puts it inside his coat. Taking her hand*) O, all our life shall be a happy wonder! Wilt lie with me on summer hills where pipings of dim Arcady fall like Apollo's mantle on the soul? Dost know that silence full of thoughts?—and then the swelling earth—the throbbing heaven? Canst be a pulse in Nature's very body? (*Leaping up*) Take forests in thy arms, and feel the little leaf-veins beat thy blood?

Hel. (*Rising*) Yes—yes—I know. Come to the window, love. The soft Spring air begins to stir.

(*They move to window*)

Poe. O, what a night! 'T is like a poem flowing to the sea. Here I shake death from my garments. Oh, had my soul a tongue to trumpet thought, men from yon planets now would stare and lean to earth with listening [186] ears!... Hark! 'T is music!

Hel. (*Looking down*) A serenade.

Poe. Canst call it that? I hear nothing that comes not from the stars. 'T is Israfel! The angel whose lute is his own heart!

If I could dwell

Where Israfel

Hath dwelt, and he where I,

He might not sing so wildly well

A mortal melody,

While a bolder note than his might swell

From my lyre within the sky!

Some day we shall live there, Helen, and then I will sing to thee!

Hel. But now—my love—you must rest—you must sleep.

Poe. Sleep! Nothing sleeps but mortality!

Hel. And you are mortal, Edgar.

Poe. I! Nay, thy love has given me kinship with the deities! Sleep? Ay, when Nature naps, and God looks for a bed! When yonder moon forgets her starry whirl and nodding falls from heaven! When Ocean's giant pulse is weary and grows still! When Earth heaves up no seasons with their buds! No, no, we will not sleep! But see—there gleams the river—and yonder rise the hills touched new with Spring! Wilt go there with me, Helen? Now!

Hel. Now?

Poe. To-night!

Hel. To-night?

Poe. Why not? You say it as though night and day were not the same to the soul—except that night is more beautiful! Why not go?

[187] **Hel.** I will tell you, love. (*Drawing him back to the large chair*) Come, listen. (*She sits in chair, and he kneels by her, the moonlight covering them*) Because I love you more than you love beauty, God or night, and you must live for me. And to live means—rest—sleep—

Poe. Do you love me so much? O, 't is like cool waters falling about me to hear you say it.

Hel. I will help you, Edgar. Already I feel my strength. Where I may serve you I'll not meekly go, but go exultant. The thorns and stones so harsh to human feet, I'll press as they were buds, and leave my blood for kisses.

Poe. Oh, go on.

Hel. Yes, I've more to tell you. It is—that you must help me, too. To-day—before you looked at me the first time—I was dying. Ah, more,—I was about to set the seal of death on my soul. My mother, who died at sea when I was born, gave me a heritage with winds and waves and stars. But I was nursed by hands through whose clay ran no immortal streams. Cradled in convention, fed on sophistries, I wove a shroud about my soul, and within that hardening chrysalis it was dying away when you called it forth in time to live—dear God, in time to live! Now you see how much you are to me, Edgar. I must not lose you. But you must be careful and patient with me, for my newly-bared soul shrinks from the wonders so familiar to you, and I may fly back to my chrysalis to escape the pain.

Poe. I am not afraid. Would a mother leave her babe? And I am a child now, Helen. This strange, new rest you give me is like a gentle birth. I have been old all my life. Now the longing comes for a little of the childhood that was never mine. The years fall from me, and I have no wish but to lie on a mother's bosom and hear her voice prattling above me.

188 **Hel.** (*Archly, leaning over him as he sits at her feet*) Does my little boy want a story?

Poe. (*Smiling*) About the fairies, mama?

Hel. About the fairies—and a big giant—and a little girl lost in a wood—

Poe. And a little boy too?

Hel. Yes, a little boy, too! And the little girl was crying—

Poe. And the little boy found her?

Hel. Yes, and he told her not to cry, that he could kill the big giant, and he hid the little girl in a cave—

Poe. Was it a dark cave, mama?

Hel. No-*o-o!* It was a cave—with—windows in it! And by and by he heard the giant coming—

Poe. Oh! (*Hides his face on her breast. She holds him to her, her hands on his hair*) And when the little boy heard the leaves rustling closer and closer he climbed a great tree—

Poe. (*Lifting his head*) But he was n't afraid, mama?

Hel. O, *no-o!*

Poe. Because that little boy was me!

Hel. Yes. And when you got to the top of the tree—

Poe. O, what did I do then?

Hel. Why, you see this was the biggest giant that *e-v-e-r* lived—and his head was just as high as the top of the tree—so when he came by—

Poe. I know! I know! I just out with my sword, and off went his head!

Hel. So it did! And then you climbed down from the tree—

Poe. And the little girl came out of the cave—

Hel. And you went off together happy ever after!

Poe. What was that little girl's name, mama?

189 **Hel.** Why, I don't think you ever told me that, did you?

Poe. I was just thinking—

Hel. What, darling?

Poe. That I wish you were n't my mama, so you could be that little girl!

Hel. O, I can, dear. For there were the fairies. We forgot the fairies. They gave me this pretty ring, so that when I put it on I can be whoever I please, and I please to be just whoever my little boy likes best.

Poe. (*Rises, and speaks in his own manner*) Madonna, Oh, Madonna! You will save me. (*Kisses her forehead*) Good-night. To-morrow I will tell you about my work—our work. There are miracles yet to be. And Poesy shall speak them.

Hel. But do not try to write out all your soul, Edgar. That cannot be. Poetry is but one gate. The soul goes out by a thousand ways.

Poe. True. And we will find those ways together, Helen. We will gather truth in every path,—truth that flowers out of the struggle and carnage of life like the bloom of song on the crimson of war.

Hel. But we may not know all. Man's greatest knowledge is but the alphabet of the eternal book. We must be content with the letters, and not unhappily strive to read.

Poe. I will remember. But what mortal can attain shall be mine. Already thoughts that fled my agony come to me as gently as the alighting of birds. Truths open about me like the unfolding of roses yet warm with God's secret. Good-night. (*Takes her hand*) I am not the greatest genius, Helen, for I can not stand alone. (*Drops her hand and goes to window. Hesitates and turns back*) One kiss. (*Kisses her*) O, look at me! I lose divinity when you close your eyes! Look at me, and I can not fall for Heaven bears me up!

190 **Hel.** (*In sudden alarm*) I hear a step!

Poe. (*Looking at her reproachfully*) Listen better, you will hear God's footfall.

Hel. Some one is up.

Poe. And do you care? Would you put a stain upon this hour? This flower of love blown perfect from the skies?

Hel. Ah, it is gone.

Poe. (*Wildly*) O, you will leave me, Helen! You can not stay! For I will play the madman to thy sense when I am sanest, and like a shivering Atlas shake thy world when most thou wouldst be still. This body wraps more lives than one, my girl. When I was born no pitying angel dipped my spirit-fire in Lethe. I weep with all the dead as they my brothers were, and haunt the track of time to shudder with his ghosts. Wilt fare with me, brave Helen? Wilt tread the nadir gloom and golden paths of suns? Canst gaze with me into the fearful, grey infinitude—

Hel. That grey infinitude is yet the circle of your being. The mind can not leave itself. You are always in your own country. Why should you fear?

Poe. The mind that can not leave itself knows nothing. Not the 'I am' but 'Thou art' is God. O, there is a realm of which imagination is but a shadow—where the mind is burnt away in His vision's fire, and thought becomes celestial angel of itself! And you turn back with the first step—already I am alone—

Hel. No! I, too, have hung upon the boundaries of the world to catch God's flying dreams! O, trust me! Thou shalt fling no lance but I will cast it on to gleam in a farther sun! Bring me roses from Jupiter, I'll bring thee lilies from Uranus! O,—

Poe. Mine, by Heaven! (*Catches her to him*) Here we 'll begin the immortal pilgrimage! We need not wait for death! From world to world—

191 **Hel.** (*Springing from him*) It is a step!

Go, Edgar! Go!

Poe. No! By the god in my bosom, you are mine from this moment!

Hel. My father! my father! He will tear me from you—You do not know him!

Poe. I know he's mortal. Heaven could not part us. I will not move!

(*He is standing in the window. She hastily draws the curtain before him*)

Hel. Then keep your word!

(*A knock at the door. Helen is silent*)

Voice. Helen?

Hel. It is you, Roger? Come in.

(*Roger enters, carrying a lamp. Looks about and sees Helen.*)

Rog. I heard voices.... Who was with you, Helen?... I could not be mistaken.... (*puts lamp on a table, and comes nearer Helen.*) Look at me, Helen.... I am your brother. Who was here?... I know that Love has laid his mighty hand upon you, but yet you are an angel. I thought—it was—his voice.... Tell me what this means.... *He* was not here! O, I shall die when I learn that you are but a woman!

Poe. (*Leaping out*) I am here, sir, to defend that lady's honor!

Rog. (*Staggers back, regains composure, and bows ironically*) I rejoice to hear it, sir, for you alone can do it. It is wholly in your keeping. (*Turns to go*)

Hel. Roger!

Rog. Madam.

Hel. You forsake me?

Rog. You have forsaken yourself.

Hel. Oh! (*Swoons. Poe bends over her wildly affectionate. Roger stands apart, proud and despairing*)

192 **Poe.** Helen! Speak! Speak to me!

Hel. Leave me! Leave me!

Poe. It is I, Helen! Your lover! Edgar!

Hel. You, you, I mean! (*Rising*) Thou wing of hell across my life! Away from me!

(*Poe stands back speechless with bewilderment. Roger goes to Helen, takes her hand, and leads her from the room*)

Poe. Lost! lost! lost! (*Looks about the room*) This place!... O, I was mad to come here!... She will never forgive me! (*Falls on the couch and lies motionless. After a moment enter Mrs. Delormis.*)

Mrs. Del. Where is the wild man?... Oh, he has fainted! The wine! (*Goes to the table and pours wine*)

Poe. Oh!

(*Mrs. Delormis turns to him. He rises ceremoniously, with effort*) Well?

Mrs. Del. Well, indeed! Here I am to your rescue, and you reward me with a 'well' (*mimicking*) up to ceiling.

Poe. What are they saying to her? I must go to her! I must!

Mrs. Del. Must *not*! Listen! (*Grasps his arm to detain him*)

Poe. (*Releasing his arm and bowing stiffly*) Mrs. Delormis.

Mrs. D. (*Copying his manner*) Mr. Poe!... Mr. Truelord has not yet been roused. No one will wake him unless you choose to do it yourself by increasing the hubbub. Roger defends you to Mrs. Truelord—says you are ill—out of your senses—and other complimentary things. Both of them are soothing and mothering Helen, and—(*dropping into tenderness*) I wanted you to have a little mothering, too—

Poe. Do you really want to help me?

193 **Mrs. Del.** O, if you would only let me be your friend!

Poe. You may! Stay here with me till she comes! I know she will come. She can not let me go without one word. It would be too terrible. She can not! Stay till she comes. Talk to me. Do not let me think!

Mrs. Del. I 'll make myself comfortable then, and we 'll have a good chat. You know I 've been told that I talk my best between two and three in the morning.

(*Takes pillow from couch to make herself cosy in chair*)

Poe. Do not touch that pillow!

Mrs. Del. (*Dropping into chair*) Well!

Poe. Do not sit in that chair!

Mrs. Del. (*Rising*) May I stand on the carpet, or shall I take off my slippers before the burning bush of your love?

Poe. Forgive me! Don't you see that I have lost her?

Mrs. Del. Well, you *were* out of your senses to come here and think Helen would understand it.

Poe. I was not! She did understand! The vision that led me to her feet was as clear as an archangel's! It is now that I am mad, and see everything gross and darkened with earth and flesh! (*Overcome, sinks on couch. She hastily brings wine*)

Mrs. Del. Drink it. You must.

Poe. No! You offer me hell! And you know it. Put it down. If you want to help me, go to her and bring me one word.

Mrs. Del. Drink this for me, and I will.

Poe. (*Taking glass*) You will?... No! (*Puts glass down*)

Mrs. Del. My dear boy, you are too weak to stand! It's that old habit of not eating. I don't believe you have tasted food for days.

194 **Poe.** True ... but.... (*Faints. Mrs. Delormis gives him wine. He rouses*)

Mrs. Del. Now will you kill me?

Poe. (*Brightening*) No. You were right. 'T was what I needed. 'T will keep life in me till she comes. Go to her now. Tell her I will leave her—I will go away for a year—a thousand years—if she will only say I may come back some day. I will live in a desert and pray myself to the bone! Bring me one word from her—a curse—anything!

Mrs. Del. (*Pouring wine*) A little more of this then, so I shall be sure to find you alive when I return.

Poe. (*Drinks eagerly*) 'T is life! Life! I've drunk of Cretan wines against whose fragrant tide the Venus-rose poured all her flood in vain, but never thrilled my lips till now with drop so ravishing! And you brought it to me! Helen left me to die ... cruel ... cruel ... cruel.... (*Sits on couch, taking his head in his hands. Looks up*) Florimel!

Mrs. Del. My Calidore!

Poe. You are a very beautiful devil.

Mrs. Del. (*Pouring wine*) Thanks. I'm glad you like my style. (*Sips wine*) It *is* good, is n't it?

Poe. 'T is an enchantment to pilot grief to new and festal worlds! Another cup! (*Drinks*) O, 't is a drink to rouse the drooping soul for warrier quest till on the conquered shores of dream man strides a god!... (*Pours another glass*) Again? No ... no more!... (*Sinks down*) O, my bird of Heaven, come quickly, or I am lost!... Florimel!

Mrs. Del. My knight of Normandy!

Poe. Since we are going to hell let us be merry about it.

Mrs. Del. At last you are sensible.

Poe. Wine! wine!

195 **Mrs. Del.** (*Holding glass*) I mean to have my price for this.

Poe. Take my soul!

Mrs. Del. Something better—a kiss!

Poe. 'T is yours! (*Kisses her*) Why not? For but a kiss did Jove forsake the skies, and jeopard his high realm!

Mrs. Del. For but a kiss did Dian leave her throne and waste her goddess dower on shepherd lips! (*Sits by him*) Now you are going to tell me something. Why did you fly from Normandy, and not a word, not a word to me? Come, my Calidore! Why did you fly from me?

Poe. (*Momentarily sober*) Because—a woman shall never become less holy than God

made her through me. (*Rises and walks away*) Helen ... my amaranth, I may not pluck thee!... (*Staggers*) One cup more ... one.... (*Pours wine, and holds up glass apostrophizing as Roger and Helen enter unnoticed*) O, little ruby ocean that can drown all mortal sighs! Call buried hope to put life's garland on, and limping woes to trip like Nereids on a moonlit shore! For thee, frail sickness casts her pallid chrysalis and blooms a rosy angel! For thee, Death breaks his scythe and owns Life conqueror! (*Drinks*) Were this Antonius' cup.... Ha! Are you there, my devil? Another kiss, sweetheart! (*Throws his arm about Mrs. Delormis. Helen cries out. Poe turns and faces her*)

Hel. (*To Poe, speaking slowly and mechanically*) I came, sir, to ask you to forgive me. (*Turns to Roger*) It is to you, Roger, that I make my plea.

(*Poe looks at her helplessly, then understands, and with a terrible face, turns and leaps through the open window. Helen, with a sob, droops, and Roger takes her in his arms*)

(CURTAIN)

196 ACT II.

Scene: Lawn in front of Clemm cottage, near Richmond. Bony and Tat on a side porch shelling peas.

Tat. Sho' Mars Edgah come in good time! Pea-vines jes a hangin' low, an' sweet as honey!

Bony. Mars Edgah hab peas ebry day wha' he came f'om! Big city hab ebryting!

Tat. Dey can't hab ebryting when it don' grow!

Bony. Sho', dey hab it when it don' grow same lak when he do grow!

Tat. You nebah did hab no sense!

Bony. I ain't got no sense? Take dat, Tatermally Clemm! (*Strikes at her. They scuffle and bring Zurie to side door*)

Zu. Dem chillun' jes kill me! Why de Lawd make ol' Zurie bring dem two twins to dis heah worl' she nebah could tell! Dey haint shell 'nuf fo' a hummin' bird's stomach, an' de pot bilin' mad fo' 'm dis minute! Wha' yo' do, yo' black niggahs? Come in heah! I make yo' sit still an' do nuffin' an' yo' ol' mammy wu'kin' hussef to def! (*Picks up basket and drives children into the kitchen. Calls after them beamingly*) Wha' yo' reckon yo' ol' mammy cookin' in dat ubbin fo' two little no 'count niggahs?

Children. (*Within, scampering with delight*) Cherry cobblah! Cherry cobblah!

Zu. (*Shutting the door*) Don' want dat wind blowin' on my poun' cake! It 'll fall sho'!

197 (*Virginia comes out at the front door of cottage, and walks across the lawn to the shade of a bay tree where Poe lies in a hammock as if asleep. A book on the ground. She goes up softly and sits on a garden chair near him. He opens his eyes*)

Vir. O, I have waked you!

Poe. No, little houri. I was not asleep. I would not give one breath of this sweet world to cold, unconscious sleep.

Vir. You are happy, cousin Edgar?

Poe. No, Virginia. This is all too delicious to be called happiness. Too calm, like the stilling of a condor's wings above sea-guarding peaks. He flies when he is happy. When more than happy, it is enough to pause in the blue and breathe wonders.

Vir. Is it wonderful here, Edgar? It has always seemed so to me, but I have been afraid to tell anyone. It seems like a great fairy house with God in it. Is it wonderful, cousin?

Poe. You are wonderful.

Vir. O, no, no, no! I want to tell you too, Edgar, I have never felt that I quite belong here. It is all too good for me—so beautiful, and I am not beautiful.

Poe. (*Rising*) Why, my little aspiring Venus, let me tell you something. I have wandered somewhat in life—at home and over sea—and I have never looked upon a woman fairer than yourself.

Vir. (*Springing up in delight*) O, I am so happy! You would not flatter me! You are the soul of truth!

Poe. It is no flattery, little maid, as the world will soon teach you.

Vir. I have nothing to do with that world, Edgar. My world is the circuit of our mocking-bird's wing. O, where is he? (*Calls*) Freddy! Freddy! He is not near or he would come. But he never goes farther than 198 the orchard. Freddy!... He has not sung to me this morning. You have n't heard his finest song yet. O, 't is sweeter than —

Poe. (*Picking up book*) Than Spenser?

Vir. Yes—than Spenser. Though he makes music too, and we were just coming to the siren's song. Shall I read?

Poe. Do! I knew not how to love him till he warbled from your tongue.

Vir. 'T is where the mermaid calls the knight.

(*Reads*)

*O, thou fair son of gentle faery,
That art in mighty arms most magnifyde
Above all knights that ever battle tried,
O, turn thy rudder hetherward awhile!
Here may the storm-bett vessel safely ride;
This is the port of ease from troublous toil,
The world's sweet inn from pain and wearisome turmoyle!*

Poe. No more—no more!

Vir. Why, cousin?

Poe. I shall have the water about my ears presently. I thought I was drowning on a mermaid's bosom. Read no more, Virginia. One nibble at a time is enough of Spenser. He ought to be made into a thousand little poems. Then we should have a multitude of gems instead of a great granite mountain that nobody can circuit without weariness.

Vir. You know so much, Edgar. Will you teach me while you are here, if I try very hard to learn?

Poe. (*Plucking a flower*) My little girl, what lore would you teach this bud? God makes some people so. Be happy that you are a beautiful certainty and not a struggling possibility.

199 **Vir.** But the rose has no soul, Edgar—no heart, as I have. It does not sigh to see you look so pale, and read these lines of suffering here, (*touching his brow*) but I—it kills me, cousin! (*He hides his face*) Forgive me! O, I am so unkind!

(*Mrs. Clemm comes out of cottage and crosses to them. She gently takes Poe's hand from his face and kisses him*)

Mrs. C. My dear boy!

Poe. (*Seizing her hand and holding it*) Don't—don't be so kind to me, aunt! It tells too much of what has never been mine. Curious interest—passing friendship—love born in a flash and dead in an hour—these I have had, while my heart was crying from its depths for the firmly founded love that shakes but with the globe itself.

Mrs. C. (*Taking his head on her breast*) My dear Edgar! You will be my son—Virginia's brother!

Poe. (*Lifting his face smiling*) I will be happy! No more of that solitude lighted only by the eyes of ghouls! Here I have come into the light. I have found the sun. I see what my work should be—what Art is. She is beauty and joy. Her light should fall on

life like morning on the hills. The clouds of passion and agony should never darken her face. O, I can paint her now ready for the embrace of the soul!

Mrs. C. I can not see things with your rapturous eyes, Edgar, but I know that your work will be noble, and I love you.

Poe. O, aunt, you and this little wonder-witch have enchanted me back to happiness. I promise you never again shall you see a tear on my face or a frown on my brow. (*Virginia, looking toward the road, bows as to some one passing*)

Poe. Blushing, cousin? Who is worth such a rosy 200 flag? (*Stands up and looks down the road*) Brackett! I do believe!

Mrs. C. You know him, Edgar? He is staying with my brother-in-law, Nelson Clemm, for a short time, and has asked to call on us—on Virginia, I mean, for of course I don't count, now that my little girl is suddenly turned woman.

Poe. Don't for Heaven's sake!

Mrs. C. You don't like him, Edgar?

Poe. Like him! We were at West Point together. He refused to accept a challenge after slandering me vilely, and I was obliged to thrash him. That's all. (*Turns suddenly to Virginia*) And you were blushing for him!

Vir. It was not because I like him, Edgar.

Poe. (*Looking into her eyes*) You are a wise little piece.

Mrs. C. This is painful, Edgar. Of course he must not call.

Poe. Call! Let him but look toward the house again, and I'll give him a drubbing that will make him forget the first one! The coward! He would n't meet me—after—

Vir. How about the frowns, Edgar?

Poe. (*Smiling*) Let him go!

Mrs. C. You should not make such bitter enemies at the beginning of life, my boy.

Poe. He can not touch me. He is not of my world.

Mrs. C. We are all of one world, Edgar, and never know when we may lap fortunes with our foes. Mr. Brackett is going into literature too.

Poe. Yes. The trade and barter part of it. I shall be in the holy temple while he keeps a changer's table on the steps. (*Shrugging*) Brackett! Pah!... But goodbye for half an hour. I'm going to the orchard 201 to take counsel with the birds on my new philosophy. (*Starts away*) Come, (*turning to Virginia*) my mocking bird, there won't be a quorum without you! (*Virginia goes to him. Zurie puts her head out of a window and calls.*)

Mum Zurie. Mars Nelson comin' up de lane!

Mrs. C. Come back, Virginia, you must see your uncle. Edgar, won't you wait and meet him?

Poe. Thank you aunt, but I don't think it would give him any pleasure. (*Exit*)

Vir. (*Coming back reluctantly*) O mama, we *will* make him happy!

Mrs. C. We'll try, my dear. But you must get ready for the picnic. The girls will be here soon. Is Edgar going with you?

Vir. No, mother. He said he would go to a picnic only with nymphs and naiads.

Mrs. C. Here is uncle.

(*Enter, from the road, Nelson Clemm*)

Mr. C. How d' do, Maria! Howdy, girl! Go get your hat.

Mrs. C. What now, Nelson?

Mr. C. Nothin'. Only I'm tired o' foolin' and talkin' about that girl's education. I've come to take her this time.

Vir. To send me to school?

Mr. C. High time, ain't it? I could n't make up my mind before whether 't was to be the seminary at Bowville or Maryburg. But I had a letter this morning which settled it for Bowville. Suits me exactly—suits me *exactly*. So get your hat and come along. I drove across the ridge and left my trap at Judge Carroll's.

Mrs. C. Her clothes, Nelson! There 's nothing ready—

Mr. C. You mean to say! When we 've been talkin' [202] this thing a whole year? And you a thrifty woman tell me her clothes ain't ready? Well, she 'll come without 'em, that's all. You can send 'em along afterwards. I 've got it all fixed up, I tell you. My brother's child shall have her chance—she shall have her chance, so long as I 've got a dollar in my pocket and she walks exactly to please me—walks *exactly* to please me. It 's for you to say, Maria, whether you 'll stand in the way o' your own flesh and blood or not.

Mrs. C. Of course, Nelson, I am very grateful, and do not dream of depriving Virginia of this opportunity, only—

Mr. C. That's all there is to it then. No onlys about it. Go get your hat, girl. (*Virginia goes slowly into the house. At the door she meets Zurie who turns back and goes in with her*)

Mrs. C. Now, Nelson?

Mr. C. It 's just this. My brother's child shan't stay another hour in the same house with Edgar Poe. That's the plain tale of it, Maria.

Mrs. C. Nelson Clemm!

Mr. C. O, I 've been hearin' things—I 've been hearin'! He did n't cover all his tracks at West Point—or New York either!

Mrs. C. Lies! All lies! Every one of them! He is the soul of honor! Already Virginia loves him like a brother! I trust her instinct! I trust my own!

Mr. C. O, I 'm not arguin', I 'm just doin'. You can't turn him out, of course. Would n't do it myself. Nobody 'll ever say Nelse Clemm was an inhospitable dog! But I can look out for Virginia, and I will. She goes with me now, or I 'm done with you and yours—and you know that mortgage ain't paid off yet.

Mrs. C. Yes, she *shall* go. She ought to be in school and again I thank you for helping us. But you are [203] wronging my nephew,—one of the noblest of men. You don't know him!

Mr. C. It 's plain enough *you* don't!

Mrs. C. Has Mr. Brackett—

Mr. C. Mr. Brackett is a guest in my house. Now, Maria, say what you please. (*Virginia comes out of cottage carrying a small satchel*) That's a good girl! We 'll fix up a fine trunk and send it after her, won't we, mother?

Vir. (*Putting her arms about her mother's neck*) He—was n't in the orchard, mama. Won't you say goodbye to him for me?

Mr. C. Come, come now! (*Leads her away*) Don't worry, Maria. I 'll drive you over to Bowville every Sunday Doctor Barlow does n't preach. (*Half turning*) By the by, I saw him down the lane at the widow Simson's. Reckon he 'll be along here pretty soon. Seems to be on his widow's route to-day. Good morning! (*Exeunt*)

Mrs. C. (*Looking after them*) I shall go to her myself to-morrow. My little daughter! A stately woman now, but always my little daughter! (*Starts into the house, pausing on steps*) Poor Edgar! How he is misjudged! (*Goes in*)

(*Zurie, Tat following, comes out of the side door and sets to work digging up a shrub*)

Zu. (*Muttering*) Wha' Mis' Clemm gwine ter say ter all dem young ladies comin' heah fo' de picnic? An' who gwine ter eat dem pies Zurie been two days makin'? An' sech a poun' cake! It ought to be a weddin' cake, deed it ought! (*Bony comes out of kitchen with a knife in his hand*) Heah, niggah, gimme up dat knife an' don' be so slow-back! Dis heah bush done grow an' bloom till yo' get heah!

(*Enter Poe, left, singing*)

[204] *Old winter is a lie*

As every spring doth prove,

And care is born to die

If we but let in love—

Hey Mum Zurie, what are you doing?

Zu. I 's diggin', honey.

Poe. That rosebay is the most graceful shrub in the yard. You kill one leaf of it, if you dare!

Zu. Miss Virginia she say how her bru'r Edgah lub dis heah tree, an' she want it under her window.

Poe. Oh! Can't I help you, Zurie? Tenderly now!

Zu. Miss Babylam' ax me to move it yistiddy but I don't git no time, an' I ain' gwine to leab it now jes cause she 's gone away.

Poe. Gone away?

Zu. O Lawd, I forgot you don' know! Why, honey, Mars Nelson he come jes now an' frisk her off to school. Zip! an' Babylam' gone! An' law, ef you seen dat po' chile cryin'!

Poe. She cried, Zurie?

Zu. Deed she did, and she ax me twenty hundred times to tell her bru'r Edgah goodbye.

Poe. Virginia gone?

Zu. I done tol' yo, Mars Edgah! Sho' yo' don't think ol' Zurie know how ter tell lies, does yo', honey?

Poe. No, Zurie, I know she is gone. The birds have all stopped singing.

Zu. Law, Mars Edgah, dey jes be a chipperin'! Heah dat now?

Poe. That is not a song, Zurie. It is a wail from Stygian boughs.

Zu. O, yo' go way!

Poe. Gone! I 'll not permit it! My aunt must bring her back! (*Hurries into house*)

Zu. Wha' make him ac' so now? An' wha' make Miss Babylam' cry hussef sick when she 's gwine away ter be a fine lady? Mars Nelson he mighty good to gib her eddication, but true fo' sho he might jes' well gib it to my Tatermally fer all de thanks he 's gittin'. Ol' Zurie reckon it a sin to cry ober de goodness ob God!

(*Mrs. Clemm and Poe come out of cottage, both disturbed*)

Poe. But, aunt, how are we going to live without her?

Mrs. C. My dear Edgar, we must not let our affections root so deep in mortal things.

Poe. Mortal? Virginia mortal! She is a sister to Psyche, immortal as the breath that blew her into beauteous bloom!

Mrs. C. While I am glad, my son, to see you so devoted to your sister—

Poe. Sister! Thank Heaven she is not my sister! Aunt, Virginia must be my wife!

Mrs. C. (*Bewildered*) Are you mad, Edgar?

Poe. No. Sane at last. I have been mad until now. I have drunk loneliness and death. Here I breathe, grateful, glad as a flower! My breast swells and falls as a bird's throat with happy song! O, aunt, help me to accept this fair new life—the only real life! Do not drive me back to gloom and the devils! Give me your Virginia!

Mrs. C. A child, Edgar! A child!

Poe. To you—only to you. She has her full dower of beauty—womanhood's portion.

Mrs. C. She has a right to her education. I can not wrong my child.

Poe. I will teach her—teach her more than she will ever learn at the great mess table

of knowledge where the genius must take his treacle and the blacksmith his ambrosia! O, aunt, you will give her to me?

206 **Mrs. C.** Edgar, I love you dearly,—but—my little girl—my Virginia—

Poe. (*Bitterly*) There is a difference then. She is yours, I am not.

Mrs. C. Do not be cruel. I am a distracted mother!

Poe. My dear aunt!

(*Virginia runs into yard and flings her arms about her mother*)

Vir. O, mama, uncle had to stop at Judge Carroll's and they got into an argument and Mrs. Carroll said they would be at it for hours—she knew by the way the judge was filling his pipe—and told me to run back if I wanted to—Mama! Edgar! What is the matter?

Mrs. C. Edgar does not want you to leave home, dear.

Poe. Tell her all, aunt. (*Mrs. Clemm is silent. Poe takes Virginia's hand*)

Poe. Virginia, you who have the face of a houri, the form of a sylph, and the heart of an angel, will you be my wife?

Mrs. C. Edgar!

Poe. My gentle one, can I not teach you to love me?

Vir. Teach me? Ah, I love you now, Edgar!

Mrs. C. Virginia!

Vir. I do! I do, mama! And oh, what happiness beyond my dream—to be—his wife!

(*Poe embraces her gently and draws her toward the garden, right. They go out slowly. Mrs. Clemm turns toward the cottage, weeping. At the step she hesitates, looks toward the garden, and slowly goes after them, murmuring distractedly*)

Zu. (*Who has observed the scene with growing horror*) Fo' de Lawd, fo' de Lawd, bless dem two babies! O, 207 de signs am all wrong! Miss Babylam' came back when she done start away! An' Freddy bird hop right on my ol' wool dis mawnin', kase why, he want tell me sumpin gwine happen to Babylam'. An', oh, dis po' ol' niggah is kilt, kase dis is de day Miss Babylam's fadder done die! De missus she go 'bout cryin' dis mawnin, an' I allus 'member she do dat dis bery day! Wha' make Mars Nelson come fo' Babylam'? O, fo de Lawd, fo de Lawd! (*Tat and Bony stare at their mother in terror as she proceeds*) I see de black hawk what flies outen de dead swamp! Ooo! I see knives a drippin' an' guns a poppin'! Oooooooo! I see de coffin, de coffin—an' it's all dark night, an' de rain comin' down de chimney—an' de wind—de wind—it say "Oooooooo!" (*Bends her knees and body, and stares moaning. Tat and Bony cling to her skirts. She turns on them with a scream, at which they tumble to the ground*) Wha' yo' doin' heah, yo' black no 'count niggahs?

(*Enter from the gate the old minister, Doctor Barlow*)

Doctor B. Good morning, Mum Zurie. You seem to be agitated. Can I help you?

Zu. Lawd, no! beg yo' pahdon, sah! I's jes so mighty tickled! Dese heah two niggahs so comicky like! Lawd, no, I was n't alligated at all, beg yo' pahdon, sah!

Doctor B. I'm glad to hear it, Zurie. Is your mistress at home?

Zu. Yes, sah. Dey all be in de gahden.

Doctor B. I'll just take a walk in there then.

(*Exit, right*)

Zu. Wha' make me le'm go in de gahden? My brain it jes all wool and no sense at all! Wha' now he fin' Mars Edgah kissin' Miss Babylam'? Well, ain't dey gwine ter be married? Married! O, lawd! (*Throws her apron over her head and sits on the ground. Re-enter 208 Mrs. Clemm and Doctor Barlow. He carries his hat in one hand and mops his brow with the other*)

Doctor B. Well, well, well! Upon my word! Your nephew—pardon me—is possessed of a rather impetuous spirit—rather impetuous, pardon me!

Mrs. C. O, Doctor Barlow, what must I do? You heard him! He wants to be married

now—this hour!

Doctor B. Trust me, Mrs. Clemm, I shall perform no ceremony without your full consent.

Mrs. C. O, I am sure of that! But must I consent? If I refuse him he may take her away from me. And Nelson will make trouble if we wait. Edgar will let no one oppose him.

Doctor B. I should not attempt it, Mrs. Clemm.

Mrs. C. If it *is* to be, it is better to let it be now. What makes me so helpless is the fact that Virginia is against me. She loves him.

Doctor B. Naturally, Mrs. Clemm, naturally.

(They enter the cottage)

Zu. Wha' dat man talk so now? He better quit preachin' ef he can't hep folks no more 'n dat! Sho', ol' Zurie hussef know dat much!

(Enter from the road a swarm of girls. They wear graceful organdie gowns, and large ricestraw hats trimmed with bows and streamers. Some carry baskets, which they drop, and all troop about the yard)

Gertrude. Where 's Virginia, Mum Zurie?

Zu. *(Hesitating)* She wa' in de house 'bout so long ago.

Ger. I'll see!

Zu. Wait a minute! Mis' Clemm she an' de minister talkin' on impo'tant business. Maybe it 's dat mortgage, I dunno! *(Grimaces)*

Ger. We 'll go into the garden then. *(All start, right)*

209 **Zu.** Law, you jes oughter see dat cherry tree hangin' full by de back gate!

Girls. O! O! O! *(They rush off, disappearing behind the cottage. Re-enter Poe and Virginia from the garden as Mrs. Clemm appears at the front door)*

Vir. O, 't is too sweet to be true! How have I won you, Edgar?

Poe. By beauty, that speaks loudest when most silent. *(Mrs. Clemm meets them)* God bless you, aunt. I see 'yes' in your eyes. You could not deny me.

Mrs. C. No.

Poe. Run, Virginia, and put on your fairy's dress! I want you to look as if you were leaping out of a flower into my heart! *(Virginia goes in)* O this beautiful world! Just to live, my aunt! Is it not enough? Literature is disease! The sick-robe of the soul! Who can write that does not *live*—and who that *lives* would write! But I must do it—I must work for her. Not a wind shall blow upon my Virginia! I will find the fairy paths for her feet! Not a satyr shall leer from the wood! She will be ready soon. I shall wait for her in the orchard. I would not see her again until she is mine—all mine!

(Exit, left, singing)

'Come, Apollo's pipes are merry—'

(Mrs. Clemm goes in)

Zu. *(Rising)* I don' reckon it make no difference 'bout dis heah bush now! *(Goes to side door and sits on step disconsolately. The girls come running back)*

Mabel. Here 's the finest cherry on the tree for the prettiest mouth! Open, who gets it! *(Girls open their mouths. Mabel eats cherry)*

Gertrude. O, vanity!

210 **Mab.** No, I just took it for Virginia.

Annie. Let 's play *Ant'ny Over* while we're waiting! Where 's a ball? Bony, get a ball!

Bony. Can't do it, missis! Y' all los' it las' time yo's all here!

Dora. Marlow Bright then! Half with me and half with Mabel! *(Girls divide, the two companies taking opposite bases some distance apart)*

Dora. Marlow, marlow, marlow bright!

How many miles to the old turnpike?

Mab. Three score and ten!

Dora. Can we get there by candle light?

Mab. Yes, if your toes are tripping light!

Dora. Any robbers on the way?

Mab. Three blind witches, so they say,

And Robin Hood with all his *men*!

(With the last word the girls exchange bases, the travellers, with Dora, trying to reach the opposite base without being caught by the robbers with Mabel. Virginia comes to the door of cottage)

Annie. There 's Virginia! *(Girls stop playing as Virginia joins them)*

Gert. How pretty you look!

Mab. You're a *real* nymph!

Annie. Come, let 's be off now! *(Picks up a basket)*

Vir. Girls—I—there is n't going to be any picnic.

Girls. No picnic!

Vir. But a wedding.

Girls. A wedding! Where? Where?

Vir. Right here—under the bay tree.

Girls. Who? Who?

Vir. Why—cousin Edgar—and—

Girls. You! you! *(All talk at once in excited babble. Virginia breaks from them and runs into the house. Girls keep tumultuous talk partly distinguishable)*

211 **Gert.** He 's so handsome!

Sallie. He 's a prince!

Annie. Too young to be married!

Ethel. He 's twenty!

Gladys. Older!

Mab. No!

Mamie. Virginia is a baby!

Alma. She 's taller than any of us!

Annie. But younger!

Sallie. Yonder 's Allie Kirby!

Mamie. Won't she be surprised! I was n't one bit!

Annie. Nor I!

Other Girls. Nor I! Nor I!

Ethel. I 'll tell her!

Annie. No, let me!

Other Girls. I will! I will!

(As Allie enters all the girls rush to her and talk at once, trying to tell her the news.)

Mrs. Clemm and Virginia come out of the house and join them)

Mrs. C. My little yard never held so many flowers before.

Allie. Is it true, Mrs. Clemm?

Annie. Of course it is! But you're not going to let him take her away from us!

Mrs. C. No, my dears. She will be one of you still.

Vir. Where is Edgar?

Bony. 'Deed, he wah in de orchard 'bout two drecklys ago.

Vir. He does n't know I'm ready. I'll go tell him!

Girls. Do! do!

Mrs. C. Daughter!

Girls. Do let her go, Mrs. Clemm!

Mab. We'll all go! What fun!

Gert. We'll play 'hunt the bridegroom!'

(Girls run off, disappearing in various directions)

212 Mrs. C. What will Doctor Barlow think? *(Goes in. Allie, the last of the girls, pauses as she passes to the side door where Zurie is sitting)*

Allie. Why, Mum Zurie, you look as if Miss Virginia were going to be buried instead of married.

Zu. *(Jumping at the word 'buried')* Sho' now, can't Zurie hab de toothache whenever she please, missus?

Allie. Toothache? O, I'm sorry, Mum Zurie.

Zu. Mars Edgah he 's a mighty fine young man! Yo' won't see no sech grow up roun' heah!

Allie. But what a pity he is n't rich!

Zu. Rich? Wha' fo' Mars Edgah want to be rich? All he got to do is jes scribble, scribble on a piece o' papah, an' de go! come rollin' down de chimney! Rich! Yo' better say yo' prayers yo' get a Mars Edgah too!

Allie. I'll get you to pray for me, Mum Zurie.

(Runs away laughing)

Zu. Wha' fo' now she say I look lak Miss Babylam' gwine ter be buried? O, de good Lawd hep ol' Zurie!

(Goes in. Enter Poe, left. He is moody and disturbed)

Poe. I feel it—a wind from out that solitude. It calls me back ... it calls me back....

Vir. *(Without, calling)* Edgar!

Poe. Sweet voice from the fields of the sun! *(Prays)* Jehovah, guide thou me! *(Virginia peers around a shrub)* Who could lock life's door on such a face? It is God's gift. I take it. *(Virginia comes to him slowly. He takes her in his arms. Mrs. Clemm and the minister come out of the house and pause on the steps looking at them. The girls come rushing back laughing and shouting, and at sight of Poe and Virginia become suddenly silent)*

(CURTAIN)

213 ACT III.

Scene I: Interior of Clemm cottage. A large room simply furnished. Low fire burning in fireplace. Poe at table writing. Suddenly drops pen and picks up two letters)

Poe. I must destroy these. She must not know.... My wife.... (*drops letters absentmindedly*) ... Married. Married? What spirit so subtly fine can mingle here?... Back, back, ye troops of devils damned or angels blest—I know not which to call ye—summoning me to those lone regions of the mind where none may follow! None?... Helen could tread those airy worlds with me!... Helen!... Far, far as zenith stars that ride the blue meridian thou art, and I, deep, deep, to nadir sink! (*Drops his head to the table*)

Virginia. (*Without*) Edgar! (*He lifts his head smiling as she enters*)

Vir. (*Holding out a book*) O, I know the alphabet! I can say it all! (*Gives him the book*) Watch now, and see if I make a mistake!

Edgar. (*Smiling.*) I'll hardly need the book, dear.

Vir. (*Pouting.*) O, I forget that you know everything!

Poe. Not everything. (*Taking her face between his hands as she sits on his knee, the book falling at their feet*) I do not know how to be happy when this beautiful face is gone. My wife is the fairest lady in all the world.

214 **Vir.** Then what does it matter about this old Greek, Edgar? (*Touching book with her foot*)

Poe. Just this. You can not always be young and beautiful, and when you are no longer the fairest I want you to be the wisest.

Vir. And if I am you will love me always?

Poe. Always.

Vir. Give me the book! (*Picks it up*) O, I will eat Greek! I will breakfast with the heroes, dine with the bards, and sup with the gods! But what a pity one must begin with the alphabet to end with—what were those lovely lines I found in your book yesterday?

And Helen on the walls rose like a star,

And every Trojan said 'she 's worth our blood,'

And every Greek ploughed new his way to her—

Go on, Edgar! I'm sure you know them!

(*As she repeats the lines he presses her head to his shoulder and puts his hand over her eyes. His face is full of agony, but there is only sweetness in his voice.*)

Poe. Not now, my little wife. Some other time.

Vir. Helen is such a beautiful name. I wish I had been named Helen.

Poe. Thank God you are not!

Vir. (*Looking up hastily*) Why—

Poe. I mean that I want you to be just as you are—my Virginia—nothing else!

Vir. (*Seeing he is troubled*) I am keeping you from your work. You should have sent me away. I'll be angry with you, Edgar, if you let me disturb you. Now I'm going to find the last rose of summer for you.

Poe. But you have n't said your lesson.

Vir. O! (*begins*) Alpha, beta,—now if I say them right you are to give me a kiss for reward!

Poe. And if you miss one, I'll give you a kiss for encouragement.

215 **Vir.** (*Seeing letter*) O, a letter from New York! You've made me your secretary, you know, and of course I must read your letters! (*Picks it up and glances at it*) He says Mr. Willis will certainly give you a place on his paper. (*Drops letter and looks at him quietly*) It is your chance for fortune.

Poe. I am not going, love.

Vir. If you go now it means success, if you wait failure.

Poe. I shall not go, Virginia.

Vir. If you were not married you would go.

Poe. Then I am glad I can not go.

Vir. But you *can* go, Edgar.

Poe. My darling, I will never take you away from your mocking birds and roses. Don't you think any more about it. Run away now and find me a flower. You will have to look sharp under the leaves, for the wind is whistling to-day. Our little sham winter has begun to bluster. (*Exit Virginia*) She shall not suffer. She shall not! Though my heart surges like a prisoned sea hers shall not move her bosom's alabaster!... Why did n't I burn that letter. (*Throws it into the fire. Take up the other one*) I must keep the lawyer's. I shall need it. (*Puts it in his pocket*) Now work—work—work—(*Resumes writing*) '*The Kingdom of the Sun is peopled with beings whose distinguishing attribute is color instead of form as with us. This color varies with each thought of the spirit that it invests, and also with the eye that beholds it. There is no need to pellet the ear with rude words, for the most refined meanings and emotions are conveyed by these subtle variations of color coming and going like breathing light. Were—*' (*Enter Mrs. Clemm*)

Mrs. C. Edgar, dear, your breakfast has been waiting two hours.

216 Poe. O, thank you, aunt. Don't trouble about me this morning. I shall want nothing.

Mrs. C. But, Edgar, my son, I must speak. You do not sleep and eat as people should who wish to live long for those who love them.

Poe. Dear aunt, pray—we'll talk about it some other time. I *must* work now!

Mrs. C. I am sorry to disturb you, love, but there is one question I must ask you. Have you heard from the lawyer? (*Poe is silent*) A letter came. I thought you would tell me, and not force me to ask about what I must know. Is the place sold?

Poe. No.

Mrs. C. But it will be? We must lose our home?

Poe. No, darling mother! I am going to pay off everything! This very article I am writing will bring me fame if I finish it. So please help me by not worrying one bit, and don't let our Virginia suspect anything.

Mrs. C. It would kill her! O, Edgar, I have been wanting to tell you how grateful I am to you for your gentleness to her. Though she looks so strong, she has been frail from her birth. I know that she must die early. I ought to have told you—that day—but I could think of nothing. You will forgive me, Edgar? She is such a child. I wonder at your patience. But you will never be impatient with her, Edgar?

Poe. If I am, may God that moment end my villain's life! Go now, sweet mother, for I must work, and remember that you are to be troubled about nothing. (*Exit Mrs. Clemm, right, rear*) Goodbye, Art! Thou pure chrystalline dream! I must turn my brain into a mint and coin money! O, Poesy, thou only divine mistress given to man, some day I will return to thee! (*Writes*) '*Were zephyrs made visible by means of ever changing hues—*' (*Bony and Tat rush into the room.* **217** *Poe glares at them with a face of fury. They turn to fly panic-stricken. Tat trips on a chair and lies moaning. Poe goes to her*)

Poe. (*Gently*) Are you hurt, Tatsy?

Bony. (*At door, turning back, suddenly impudent at sound of Poe's softened voice*) She jes sullin', Mars Edgah. She play possum like dat wid me!

Poe. Get out, you little imp! (*Bony vanishes*) Where are you hurt, Tatsy? (*She moans bitterly*) Poor little girl! Her foot is twisted. A sprain perhaps. (*Picks her up and carries her to sofa*) Never mind! I've got a fairy in a bottle will cure that in a jiffy. Just rub it on, and ho, Tatsy is well again!

(*Enter Zurie, Bony clinging to her*)

Zu. Wha' my chile? Lawdy God, my chile sho' 'nuf hurt! (*Goes to Tatsy*)

Poe. It's the foot, Zurie. Be careful!

Zu. Yas, I's seen dat foot befoh! (*Gives foot a yank*) Dat's her ol' trick, Mars Edgah. She jes foolin' yo'! Don' yo' be so soft hearted next time. Yo' jes take her by de back

ob de neck and wring her head off!

Poe. I certainly will!

(Exit Zurie, drawing Tat. Poe goes back to his work. Groans, and looks with desperation at his manuscript)

Poe. O, if this eludes me! I must not lose it now! *(Writes)* 'In this Kingdom of the Sun there is a central creating light that plays upon these color-beings with its own transmuting—'

(Re-enter Mrs. Clemm, bearing a tray)

Mrs. C. My dear, I've brought you some toast and an egg.

Poe. *(Jumping up and staring at her)* They don't eat toast and eggs in the Kingdom of the Sun!

Mrs. C. Edgar!

218 Poe. Forgive me! It's just something I'm writing here. But for God's sake take the stuff away!

(Mrs. Clemm turns to go, the tray trembling in her hands. Poe runs to her and kisses her) You sweetest and best of mothers, don't you see that if I eat this I'll spend the next two hours digesting toast and eggs, and if I don't eat it I'll be making our fortune, putting a roof over our heads, and keeping our Virginia happy!

Mrs. C. I only meant to be kind, Edgar.

Poe. I know you did, and you're my darling mother,—but don't be kind any more.

(Exit Mrs. Clemm. Poe sits despairingly at table. Enter Ethel and Annie)

Eth. O, Edgar, where is Virginia? We want her to go nutting with us.

Annie. We shall have her now! You shan't keep her all to yourself just because you've married her!

Poe. Take her by all means!

Eth. You need n't be vicious about it. Where is she?

Poe. I don't know,—and pardon if I say that just at this moment I don't care!

(Gathers up papers and goes toward stairway in corner of room)

Annie. You need n't run from us. I'm sure we're glad to go. I'll find Virginia.

Eth. And I'll write that note to Gladys while you're gone. *(Seats herself in Poe's chair. Exit Annie, left, rear)* Come back, if you want to, Edgar. You won't disturb me at all. *(Writes. Poe pauses on stairway and looks at her. Ethel lifts her eyes)* You need n't look so far to see me. I'm not the North Pole! What are you thinking of, Edgar?

Poe. Of what Anacreon said to a fly that lighted on his brow when he was composing an ode to Venus.

219 Ethel. O! What was it?

Poe.

Away, thou rude and slight impertinence,

That with thy puny and detested bill

Dost think to feed on immortality.

(Goes upstairs)

Ethel. Beast! *(Writes)* Virginia spoils him. If I had him now I'd soon make a nice comfortable husband out of him!... An envelope?... Yes.... *(Takes one)* Stamp?... Yes.... *(Takes one)* I'll get Bony to mail this for me.

(Exit, right, rear. Poe comes down stairway)

Poe. Gone? Deliverance! It's too chilly for work upstairs. *(Coughs)* What shall I do here this winter with only one comfortable room in the house? Keep warm by the fire

in my brain, I suppose. (*Sits and writes. Virginia is heard without, humming a song. She enters, left, front, with a rose in her hand*)

Vir. Darling, I found it deep under the leaves—Oh! (*Starts out softly. Poe writes on without looking up. At the door she turns and throws the rose towards him. It falls onto the table and upsets ink over papers*)

Poe. (*Leaping up*) By every fiend in hell!

(*Mrs. Clemm rushes in, followed by Zurie, Tat and Bony*)

Mrs. C. My son, what is the matter?

Poe. See what that child has done!

Mrs. C. (*With dignity*) Your wife, Edgar.

Poe. My wife! Great God! O, Helen! Helen! (*Rushes from the room, left rear*)

Bony. I tol' yo' he wah mad! I done tol' yo' Mars Edgah gone mad! He look at me jes so! (*Mimics*)

Tat. (*Looking through window*) Dah he go now troo de orchard jes a runnin'!

220 **Bony.** Obah de fence!

Tat. An' no hat on!

Zu. Stop yo' mouf an' come out o' heah, yo' wussless niggahs! I make yo' know wha' yo' b'longs!

(*Takes them out*)

Mrs. C. O, Virginia! What an hour for you!

Vir. What an hour for *him*, mamma!

Mrs. C. Strange child! Not to think of yourself!

Vir. How can I, when he is suffering so?

Mrs. C. My angel daughter!

Vir. (*Kissing her*) We will be brave, my mother. I hear the girls. Go to them one moment—do! (*Exit Mrs. Clemm*) ... Helen! Dear God above! (*Drops on her knees by a chair. After a moment of agony, rises, goes to table and looks at papers*) What is it I have ruined? (*Reads silently*) O, what beauty!... I think I can make this out and copy it for him. But now he may never finish it. The heavenly moment is gone ... and I robbed him of it.... I, who should guard him and keep the world away. That is my little part—too little, God knows! O, if I could really help him!

(*Enter Ethel and Annie*)

Eth. O, Virginia, now that we're rid of that troublesome husband let 's have one of our good old-fashioned times! We 'll sit by the fire and tell tales. It 's too cold anyway to go to the woods.

Vir. (*Absently*) Edgar is there.

Annie. And there let him stay! I 'm sure it 's better for both of you. You hang about him too much, Virginia. He 'll quit loving you, mamma says he will, if you're not more sensible. Help me draw up this sofa, Ethel. (*They pull sofa to the fire. Annie settles herself comfortably*) I feel just like giving you a lecture, Virginia. You must make Edgar go out more. Anybody will get queer shut up here. The other day when mamma 221 asked him to come to our party he was n't more than half polite when he refused, and we were going to have Mr. Melrose Libbie to meet him too. Said his work would keep him at home! Now you know, Virginia, that poetry is n't work. It 's just dash off a line now and then, and there you are! Mr. Libbie said so. O, he had the sweetest thing on the woman's page in last Sunday's paper! Did you see it? You 'd better call Edgar's attention to it. Mamma read it to all of us at the breakfast table, and—

Eth. O, stop your chatter, Annie, and let Virginia tell us one of her fairy stories just as she used to do. We 'll forget all about Edgar and make believe she is n't married at all.

Vir. (*Painfully*) Forgive me, dear girls, but I 've some work that I must do to-day.

Mabel. Must do! Who ever heard the like?

Vir. I was wrong. It is some work that I choose to do—that it will be my happiness to do.

Ethel. For Edgar?

Vir. Yes.

Annie. You are a little fool!

Vir. Yes ... I am a little fool.

Ethel. O, there 's help for you if you know it!

Vir. If I were not a little fool I could be of more help to Edgar.

Ethel and Annie. Oh!

Annie. (*Jumping up*) Then we can't stay to-day!

Vir. I am so sorry—but—

Annie. O, we might as well give you up first as last! (*Exeunt girls*)

Vir. (*Sits at table and stares at the papers*) ... A little fool ... a little fool.

(CURTAIN)

222 *Scene II: Same room as before. Night. Virginia sits motionless in the dim firelight. Mrs. Clemm comes softly down the stairs)*

Mrs. C. Virginia?

Vir. Naughty mamma! You said you would sleep. What a story to tell your little girl!

Mrs. C. (*Advancing*) The rain—wakes me. (*Comes to fire*) Did Edgar take his cloak, dear?

Vir. No, mother.

Mrs. C. Are you not cold in that dress, darling?

Vir. O no—quite comfortable—and Edgar likes me in white, you know. (*A window rattles. Both look anxiously toward the door*)

Mrs. C. What a gust!... I wonder what winter is like at the north. (*Virginia looks at her quickly, and both drop their eyes*) ... To think of him out on a night like this! And he has not been well lately. Had he no purpose? Did he say *nothing* when he went out?

Vir. He said he was going to seek Truth.

Mrs. C. And what does he mean by truth, Virginia?

Vir. O, I don't know. When he is talking I understand, but when he is gone it all fades and I know nothing about it.

Mrs. C. Nor does Edgar, mark me, dear. He is trying to know things that the wise God decreed should remain unknown to mortals. That is what makes him so unhappy.... Did he eat his breakfast this morning, Virginia?

Vir. No, mamma.

Mrs. C. Did he take any food yesterday?... Tell me, daughter. I can not help you if I do not know. (*Virginia begins to sob*) There! there, darling! A little patience and we 'll get him over this.

Vir. O, mother!

Mrs. C. Come here, my little girl. (*Takes Virginia **223** in her arms*) Now tell me! Don't let the heart go heavy when mother ears are waiting.

Vir. He ... goes out at night ... and I follow him because it kills me to think of him wandering alone. We were on Burney hill last night.

Mrs. C. Five miles!... Then that is what these pale cheeks and dark eyes mean! And Edgar let you go!

Vir. No! I *go*! I am not a child, mother. Ah, I knew you would not understand!

Mrs. C. Yes, yes, I do, Virginia. I know he suffers, but you—

Vir. Don't speak of me! You shame me! Were I to lie down on those coals my torture would be less than his. Remember that, mother. When you doubt, as you surely will, remember that I told you, and I know. His mind is a *living* thing, throbbing through his body and leaving him no shield of flesh. O, mamma, help him! Promise me! You will never forsake him?

Mrs. C. Never, my love.

Vir. I would not have told you, but my strength is gone, and somebody must know,— somebody who is strong. (*A gust shakes the window*) O, my darling! Out in that blackness alone! And if I were there I could say nothing. That is the pity of it, mamma. I have no words, and thought without tongue is nothing so long as we are mortal and wear these bodies. Some day it may be enough just to *be* a soul, but not now—not now!

Mrs. C. O, my daughter!

Vir. Promise me, mamma, that if I die you will find Helen. *She* could help him!

Mrs. C. (*Rising*) Virginia, if you say another word like that I shall think you are mad—or I am! (*Bursts into weeping*)

Vir. Darling, darling mother! Now I have given 224 you all my burdens you will grow weak under them, and I want strength, strength by my side!

Mrs. C. (*Calm*) You must go to bed, dear. I will wait for Edgar.

Vir. No, no!

Mrs. C. I will coax him to eat something.

Vir. (*Smiling sadly*) Coax him, mamma?

Mrs. C. Yes, dear. Go now.

Vir. I can not.

Mrs. C. I command you, my daughter.

Vir. Please do not command me. You have never had to pardon disobedience in me.

Mrs. C. Nor shall I have cause now. Obey me, Virginia.

Vir. Would you send me into hell, mother?

Mrs. C. Daughter!

Vir. That is what a bed is to me when Edgar is out like this.

Mrs. C. You make too much of these wanderings. Night and day are alike to him.

Vir. Ah, it is not the night that I fear!... Go, mamma! It is you who must rest. O, how we need these strong arms—this clear head! I shall nod in my chair for the thought of you getting your needed rest will bring the winks to my own eyes. Come! (*Draws her toward stairway*) I promise you that I will sleep in the big chair as snug and tight as kitty herself. (*Kisses her*)

Mrs. C. (*On the stairs*) I can not leave my sick child to watch. You ask me to do an inhuman thing, Virginia. I will not go.

Vir. Mother!... Do not let me hurt you ... the dearest, the most unselfish of mothers ... but it is better for me to meet my husband alone.

(*Mrs. Clemm turns and goes slowly upstairs. Virginia goes back to fire*)

225 **Vir.** Watch and pray! I can but watch and pray!... He said 't was love he wanted ... and I brought him that ... love that shakes but with the globe itself. But it does not help ... 't was all wrong ... all wrong! (*Weeps. Rises, and busies herself about an oven on the hearth*) Three times I have prepared his supper that it might be fresh enough to tempt him. But now ... I am so tired. I must try to keep this warm. The sight of it

may make him angry ... but I must try. (*Arranges some clothes on a chair*) He will be so wet with the rain. Ah, I can do nothing ... nothing. (*Looks toward door*) He is coming! Strength, strength. O my God!

(*Poe throws door open. Turns and speaks as if to companions outside*)

Poe. Goodnight, goodnight, brave Beauty's fearless angels! (*Comes in*) Well, Dame Venus, what thoughts for your hobbling Vulcan?

Vir. (*Brightly*) My Hermes, you mean. I'm sure you're feather-footed, you go so far and fast.

Poe. Why, sweet-mouth, a kiss for that! (*Kisses her*)

Vir. O, my love, you are dripping with the rain.

Poe. Well, and so are the trees. Not a leaf out there but is shaking her pearls. Who flies from Nature but man? Let her be terrible, glorious, worthy of his eyes and his heart, and forthwith he takes to his hole.

Vir. I hate her to-night. She kept me from following you.

Poe. Virginia! (*Seizes her hands, crushing them in his, and gazing at her with fierce earnestness*) Never do that again! Never again! (*Lets her hands fall, and turns toward door as if he must go out. Her eyes follow him eagerly, but she tries to speak carelessly*)

Vir. Here are your dry things, dear, and I've kept something hot for your supper.

226 **Poe.** (*Turning*) Yes ... this is a very valuable skin of mine. Make it comfortable. But what of me, Virginia? That something here burning with fires that would brighten Olympos' head! Have you no welcome for me? (*Virginia is silent*) Why are you so pale? Light all the lamps! You should not sit in the dark. There are no stars in this den!

Vir. (*Hurriedly lighting lamp*) I'm sorry, love, but last night you wanted the dark—don't you remember?

Poe. No, I don't remember. Memory is a hyena, always scratching up our dead selves! You must not remember, Virginia!

Vir. Yes, dear.

Poe. Forgive me, love. O, I am driving myself mad! Selling myself to the devil of prose that I may bring in that fool's litter—money, money, money—and for what? That we may feed the flesh that devours our souls, and hang such rubbish as this on our backs! (*Sweeps garments from chair*) O, Virginia, if you were brave enough we would forget these rags of the body and go like spirits to meet our brothers of the night! They are all out there! Will you go with me, my bride?

Vir. O, Edgar!

Poe. Ha! You would rather ask them in to have something dry and something hot! But I must have the air! (*Throws door open. Lightning flashes on falling rain. Virginia shrinks from the wind*) Hear those winds! Gathering lost souls to the bosom of Night! Feel those drops! Every one of them the tear of a fallen god! O, is it nothing but rain? Ha! ha! ha! (*Virginia coughs. Poe closes the door hastily. She coughs again*)

Poe. Don't, Virginia!

Vir. Yes, dear.

Poe. My angel! (*Embraces her. She coughs*) O, 227 it is these wet clothes! (*Throws off coat, picks up dressing gown from the door and puts it on hurriedly*)

Vir. (*Eagerly*) Your slippers too, dear!

Poe. Yes, yes, my slippers! (*Puts them on. Sits in big chair, taking her on his knee, and embracing her tenderly*) What made you cough, Virginia?

Vir. O, 't was nothing, dear. 'T is all right now. Everything is all right.

Poe. Is it, little wisdom? O, ye gods!

Vir. (*Concealing anxiety*) Darling?

Poe. What, my beautiful earth-bird?

Vir. You will take your supper now?

Poe. (*Impatiently*) No, no! Is there any wine in the house?

Vir. Yes, love, but—

Poe. I must have it! Quick! I shall faint.

Vir. (*Rising*) No, Edgar. It is food you need.

Poe. (*Rising*) Where is it?

Vir. O, my dearest!

Poe. Tell me, Virginia! (*Goes toward a closet*)

Vir. (*Getting before him*) If you were reaching for a cup of poison, Edgar, I would risk my life, ay, risk your love, to dash it from you. And wine is your poison. I can not let you drink death.

Poe. Death! It is all the life that is left to me, and you deny it!

Vir. Be quiet, love. You will wake our mother.

Poe. Down, gods, and let the lady sleep!

Vir. She is not well, Edgar.

Poe. But she will be well to-morrow, and I—I am immortally sick and you deny me a drop of wine.

Vir. O, my poor boy! I 'm so sorry for you!

Poe. And is that all, O Heaven? I 'm her poor boy, and she is so sorry for me! Why, here 's a heart that loosens in its throbs the birth-song of new stars! Come, 228 strike thy chime with mine, and though all bells upon the planet jingle, in us will still be music!

Vir. O, Edgar!

Poe. Well?

Vir. I can not speak.

Poe. Virginia, Virginia! I pour out my soul to you! I keep back no drop of its sea! From the infinite, shrouded sources of life I rush to you in a thousand singing rivers, only to waste, to burn, to die on the sands of silence! (*She remains motionless, her head bowed*) ... It is so still upon the eternal peaks. Will you not come up with me and be the bride of my dreams? You need not speak ... you need not say a word. Only put the light of poesy in your eyes and let me *see* that through the channel of their beauty course the mysteries that begin with God and end not with time! (*She looks at him. He gazes into her eyes*) ... Tears ... only tears. (*Turns away*) Can a soul's eyes be dumb? (*She sits, weeping silently*) ... Come then ... talk of what you will. Only talk! You have read a little Byron to-day? The new magazine came? And you have made me a handkerchief? (*She sobs. He looks at her remorsefully, crosses the room, gets her harp and brings it to the fireside*) Come ... sing to me, Virginia. You can do that.

Vir. (*Taking harp*) What shall I sing, dear?

Poe. Something to charm the very heart of Æolus! That will turn a tempest into a violet's breath!

Vir. Ah, my love!

Poe. O, sing—sing anything!

Vir. (*Sings*)

Great and calm, cool-bosomed blue,

Take me to the heart of you!

Not where thy blue mystery

Sweeps the surface of the sea,

229 *Leaving in a dying gleam*

*Living trouble of a dream;
Not where loves of heaven lie
Rosy 'gainst the upper sky
Burning with an ardent touch
Where an angel kissed too much;
But where sight and sound come not,
All of life and love forgot,
All of Heaven forfeited
For thy deep Nirvana bed.
Wide and far enfolding blue,
Take me to the heart—*

(Her voice breaks suddenly)

Poe. Virginia! (*She coughs*) Don't! (*Her cough increases. She puts her handkerchief to her lips. Poe takes it from her hand and looks at it.*) Blood! (*Throws handkerchief into the fire, and stands as if paralyzed, gazing at Virginia. Falls at her feet and begins kissing her skirt*) My angel! my angel! I have killed my little bride!

Vir. (*Urging him gently up*) No, dear. I was marked for this from birth. My doom was written by Heaven, not you.

Poe. Not doom, my Virginia! (*Rising*) I will save you, my darling! You shall have everything! With the sickle of a wish you shall harvest the earth! We will sail southern seas! We will follow the Spring as she flies! I will knock at the orient gates and bring thee the health of morning! I 'll make the world so bright for thee, Hyperion's self shall wear new gold and shame remembered suns from chronicle! Spring from perfection's heart shall pluck her buds, and set such gloss on Nature she may laud her old self in one violet's requiem! O, I 'll ²³⁰ sing the world into a flower for thy bosom! My love, my love, my love! (*She coughs restrainedly. He hides his face till she stops*) Even the senseless oak velvets its rude sides to the tender vine! But I—a man—O, beast too vile for hell! too low to be damned!

Vir. Edgar!

Poe. Do not touch me! is not the mark here? (*Touching his brow*) O, where shall I hide it?

Vir. (*Drawing him to her*) On my bosom, Edgar. (*Presses him to the large chair and sits on the arm of it, caressing him*) This forehead is as pure as heaven-lit ivory of angels' brows!

Poe. O, golden heart! (*Kisses her over her heart*) I will work so hard, Virginia! We shall be rich, and I will take you to some wonderful land where beauty can not die! Will you forgive me then when you are bright and strong in some happy isle of roses?

Vir. I will forgive you now, dearest, if you will do one thing for me.

Poe. O, what, my darling?

Vir. Eat the poor little supper I have cooked for you.

Poe. Yes—yes—I 'll eat it though it be hell's coals!

Vir. Now that's a compliment to your cook, is n't it? (*Takes food from oven and puts it on table. Poe eats, at first reluctantly, then hungrily*)

Poe. It is late—so late! O, my Lenore, you kept up for me! Your weary eyes would not close until they had found their lover! O, can you forgive me, and take me back to your heart? You will love me again?

Vir. Ah, Edgar, if love were enough we should always be happy.

Poe. Love me, love me, dear! I want no more! And this cough ... we shall stop all that, darling! O, how weary you must be, and you tried to have everything so

231 beautiful for me! How pretty your dress is! You look like a Naiad smiling out of a lily. But it 's too cold! Here, I will wrap you! (*Puts shawl about her*) Ah, little wife, little wife, what evil power locked your gentle heart with mine? Bear with me, love. It will all be different soon. I shall try so hard the gods for pity will not let me fail! See how I have eaten! You may give me more, love. You did not cook this, I know. You stole it from Jove's kitchen.

Vir. (*Getting food*) Yes, I did, and Jove caught me, but he let me go when I told him it was for a poet.

Poe. Little witch! (*Kisses her*) How happy we shall be, Virginia, as soon as I have money. I shall go to New York for a year. It will take only a year. Then I shall come back bringing the lady Fame with me, and you must not be jealous of her.

Vir. (*Slowly*) You—would not—take me?

Poe. Why, the north-wind would blow the Spring from my little girl's cheek! Just a year! That is the first step—a cruel one—but we shall be happy when it is over. Just a year, sweetheart! I must take no chances now! I *must* win!

Vir. You shall not leave me! A year will not hurt me, Edgar! But it would kill me to be left here ... and not know ... every minute....

Poe. Do you care so much, Lenore? Then we will both stay here. It will take longer, but I will work harder—

Vir. Enough for to-night. We are too happy for to-morrows, Edgar. Now you must have a long, long sleep—

Poe. No, no! No bed for me to-night! I must work!

Vir. No bed, indeed! I did not say bed, my lord! You are going to sit down here (*Places him on footstool*) 232 and I shall sit here, (*settles in chair*) and your head in my lap—my hands on your head—and the crooningest of little songs will bring you the sweetest snatch of sleep that you ever, ever had!

Poe. O, 't is heaven, Virginia! But you are too tired, my angel. *You* must sleep.

Vir. And so I shall when my lord shows me the way.

(*Poe drops his head on her lap. She turns down light. He falls asleep as she sings softly*)

Like a fallen star on the breast of the sea

My lover rests on the heart of me;

The lord of the tempest hies him down

From his billow-crest to his cavern-throne,

And 't is peace as wide as the eye can see

When my lover rests on the heart of me.

(*Silence. Virginia droops in sleep. No light but dull red coals.*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV.

Scene I: An old bookstore, New York. Bookseller arranging books. Helen at one side looking over shelves. Poe enters. He wears a military cloak and jaunty cap. Throws book on table and whistles carelessly.

Bookseller. (*Looking book over doubtfully*) Forty cents.

Poe. (*Loudly*) Forty devils! (*Helen turns and recognizes him. He does not see her*) Look at that 233 binding. You can't get a Shelley put up like that for less than ten dollars.

Hel. (*Aside*) My book!

Bookseller. It's badly marked.

Poe. Marked! Of course it's marked. And every mark there worth its dollar. In ten years you'll wish the marks were as thick as the letters.

Bookseller. Say fifty, and strike off. Not a cent more.

Poe. Take it.

Hel. To sell my book! (*Moves slowly to door*) How pale he is! But he is neatly dressed. He can not need fifty cents. To sell my book! I'll speak to him and see if he is past shame. (*Steps before Poe as he turns to go out*)

Hel. Mr. Poe! Don't you remember me? 'Tis delightful to meet an old friend.

Poe. (*Bowing low*) Mrs....

Hel. Yes, I am Mrs. Bridgmore.

Poe. My dear Mrs. Bridgmore! The pleasure of years gathers in this happy moment. Are you making holiday purchases?

Hel. No ... just poking about. I love these old stores. I see you've made a sale. 'Tis a relief to get rid of old books when we've lost our love for them, isn't it? They take up good room on our shelves pretty much as people do in our lives long after we have ceased to care for their friendship. But what one is weary of another is ready to take up. (*To bookseller*) May I see the book the gentleman has just disposed of? (*To Poe*) Anything you have liked will be sure to please me.

Poe. O, you are mistaken! I am simply leaving the book to be duplicated if possible for a friend of mine who has taken a fancy to my copy. (*Gesticulates to bookseller*) One glance, Mrs. Bridgmore, will tell you that the book is not for sale.

234 **Hel.** Ah ... of course not. Pardon the mistake. It seems to be my fate to blunder where you are concerned. (*Icily*) Good morning, Mr. Poe.

(*As she is going out she drops her purse. Poe hastens to pick it up and restores it to her with a bow. In doing so he forgets his shabby coat and throws back his cloak over his arm, exposing a badly worn sleeve. He becomes suddenly conscious of her observation, and straightens up in his most dignified fashion*)

Hel. Thank you. (*Goes out*)

Poe. (*Turning to bookseller*) Here! Take your damned silver! Give me my book!

Bookseller. A bargain's a bargain, sir.

Poe. Bargain! bargain! Do you call that theft a bargain? You parasite! you bookgnat! You insect feeding on men's brains! You worm in the corpse of genius! My book, I say, or by Hector I'll tear your goose-liver from your body, you pocket-itching Jacob!

Bookseller. Here! take it!

Poe. There's your Judas' blood! (*Throws down money and starts out with the book. Enter Brackett*)

Brackett. (*Stopping Poe*) Mr. Poe, I believe.

Poe. Right, sir. And Brackett, I think your name was when I knew you.

Bra. Quite right, Mr. Poe. I saw you coming in here, and though you have changed somewhat with the help of years I was sure it was you.

Poe. And how, Mr. Brackett, may that knowledge be of interest to you?

Bra. Well, perhaps it does concern you more than myself.

Poe. Kindly tell me in what way that I may regret it.

Bra. Your pen has been supplying matter for *The Comet*, I believe.

235 **Poe.** If you have any doubt of it a perusal of that magazine's issues for the past two years will satisfy you.

Bra. The returns therefrom have contributed somewhat to your comfort, I suppose.

Poe. Do you?

Bra. Ah, I am mistaken? Then I have less hesitation to tell you that the articles recently submitted are unavailable.

Poe. You tell me! What have you to do with it? Who are you?

Bra. I am the present editor of *The Comet*.

Poe. You!

Bra. I! You see I am in a position to speak with authority,—and it is only just to tell you that your articles will meet with no further recognition in that quarter.

Poe. Brackett ... I have been very ill. I wrote those things on what I believed to be my death bed. My wife....

Bra. I should say then that you are in great need of money.

Poe. God help me, I am! You know I am not one to beg!

Bra. But it 's beg or starve with you, eh? (*Poe looks at him silently*) Well, I should advise you to make application without loss of time to some one who does not know you quite so well as the new editor of *The Comet*. Good morning.

Poe. (*Calling to him as he stands in door*) I say, Brackett! (*Brackett turns*) I should advise you to change the name of *The Comet* as well as its editor. Suppose you call it *The Falling Star*? Ha! ha! (*Exit Brackett*) Curse me for a whining dog—but Virginia—

(*Goes out*)

236 **Bookseller.** (*Arranging books*) Queer chap. We public men get to know all sorts. That book will be mine yet. It 's a good seller at ten dollars, and blest if I would n't like to help the wretch out with fifty cents. He 'll be back.

(*Enter Helen*)

Hel. I wish to buy the book the gentleman has just left with you.

Bookseller. Why ma'am, he 's gone and took it with him.

Hel. Took it with him?

Bookseller. Yes, ma'am, and thereby I 've lost time and trade. (*Aside*) She 'd give fifteen!

Hel. He needed money?

Bookseller. Well, I should *guess* so, ma'am. That's the last book he had. He told me about it before. He 's been bringin' them all here. I *think* he 'll be back, ma'am, and I 'll keep the book for you.

Hel. Thank you. (*Turns to go. Sees letter on the floor and picks it up*) Why, 't is ... he dropped it! I wonder if I may ... he is suffering ... that shabby coat ... and he is so proud. I think I ought to read it. I must know where to find him. (*Looks at letter*) Fordham! (*Reads*)

My Dear Son: One last prayer the mother of your Virginia makes to you. She is dying. Come and sit by her and she will carry a smile to her grave. Do not stay away because you can not bear to witness her suffering,—because you have nothing to give her. Come, and by your loving presence lessen her pain. God bless you! Your devoted mother,

MARIA CLEMM.

(*Helen stands trembling and holding the letter*) ... And I hurt him ... I hurt him....

(CURTAIN)

237 **Scene II:** *Poe's cottage, Fordham. A room almost bare. Virginia sleeping on bed. Poe's cloak over her. Mrs. Clemm kneeling in prayer beside her. Poe enters, carrying a bundle of broken sticks which he lays down softly, one by one, on the hearth, looking anxiously toward the bed. Mrs. Clemm rises and comes to the fire*

Mrs. C. My child, you have been out in the snow without your cloak! (*Brushes snow from his shoulders*)

Poe. Could I take the least warmth from yon shivering angel?

Mrs. C. You forget that you, too, are ill. O, my boy, be careful, or I shall soon be childless in the world. One is already lost....

Poe. Not lost. See how she sleeps! She is better. I know she is better.

Mrs. C. Since you came. We will hope so, dear.

Poe. If she would only speak to us! O, why does she not speak? Not once to-day.

Mrs. C. She is very weak, my son.

Poe. I could bear it so long as she could tell us there was no pain ... but now she only looks at us.... Oh—

Mrs. C. You will control yourself for her sake.

Poe. Yes, yes, for her sake.

Mrs. C. It will take her last breath to see you disturbed.

Poe. I know! I know! Have no fear, mother. I am strong now.

Vir. Edgar! (*He flies to the bed*)

Poe. My darling!

Vir. I am better, dear. Mamma! (*Mrs. Clemm goes to her*) I feel so rested, mamma.

Poe. I told you! She is better! And you will sit up a little now, dear? I will carry you to the fire.

Mrs. C. My boy!

Poe. O, mother, don't you see how well she is? 238 Look at her cheeks—her eyes—how beautiful!

Vir. (*Smiling*) Hear him, mamma! How proud he is! He must always have it that his wife is beautiful.

Poe. But it is so true, my dearest!

Vir. Let me believe it, for it is sweet to think that I have been that, at least, to you.

Poe. O, my darling, you have been everything!

Vir. You think so now, dear, and I love to hear you say it.

Poe. And you will get well for me?

Vir. No, O no! That would bring all your troubles back. You will live a great life, Edgar, when you have left this little care-bundle of a wife behind you.

Poe. O, don't, Virginia! I shall do nothing without you!

Vir. You will do everything. I am the wise one now, Edgar. And, dear, while I can talk ... I must ask you ... must beg you ... I must hear you say that you forgive me.

Poe. Forgive you!

Vir. Yes, dear. I was so young ... I thought I could help you ... and so I let you marry me. I did not know. I thought because I loved you so much that I could make you happy. But women who can only love are not the women who help. They must be wise and strong too, and oh, so many other wonderful things. If they are not, then all the love only hurts and makes things go wrong.

Poe. O, little angel!

Vir. Yes ... little angel ... when I ought to have been a brave, great angel who could bear heaven on her wings. Long ago I knew it, Edgar. When the truth came I looked every way and there was no help. Then when I found I was to die, it seemed that God had pitied and helped me. For that was the only way.... O, 239 these little women who can do nothing but love! I wish I could take them all with me. These tears are for them, not for myself, darling. O, I am happy, but they must wait ... they can not die. How you shiver! You must take your cloak. I am warm now. Indeed, I am quite comfortable.... Don't—don't weep. You must be happy because I am. Let us smile the rest of the time, darling,—it—is such a little while.

Poe. (*Brokenly*) Yes ... yes.... O little flower, little flower, dropping back to God's bosom, how have I dared to touch thee!

Vir. (*Rubbing her hand on his arm*) 'T is damp! You have been out? O, my dear, you must, must take your cloak! I am quite, quite warm! See, feel my hands! (*Smiling*)

Poe. (*Taking her hands*) Little icicles!

Vir. You have been out! O, save yourself for the great things ... now I am going out of your way. Don't let my death be as vain as my life. Let that count for something, Edgar. O, promise me you will live for your genius' sake, you will be true to your heavenly gift! Kneel by me and promise!

Poe. I ... promise.

Vir. Dear husband ... I.... (*faints*)

Mrs. C. O, she is gone!

Poe. No! She faints! My beautiful idol! O, some wine! Heaven and earth for some wine!

Mrs. C. She looks at us! My daughter!

Poe. O, do not try to speak! Let your beautiful eyes do all the talking!

Mrs. C. She looks toward the fire. She would have you go, Edgar, and try to keep warm. Come, dear. (*Poe kisses Virginia gently, and goes to fireside, looking back adoringly*) Do not look at her, and she will sleep again.

240 Poe. Ah, God! It will take more than sleep to help her. And I can give her nothing—nothing!

Mrs. C. Don't, Edgar! Remember your terrible illness—how you worked for her when fever was burning your brain—until your pen fell from your hand.

Poe. I brought her to this land of ice and snow!

Mrs. C. No. Destiny brought her. We lost our home. Your work was here—and she would not stay behind you.

Poe. A *man* would have saved her!

Mrs. C. O, my boy, do not take this burden on your soul! For once spare yourself!

Poe. I can not even give her food!

Mrs. C. (*Restraining him*) My son, she sleeps.

Poe. Yes ... sleep ... let me not rob her of that too! Be quiet ... just be quiet ... while she dies. (*Seats himself with strange calmness*) Come, mother, let us be cheerful. Take this chair. Let us be rational. Let us think. Death is strange only because we do not think enough. God must breathe. Life is the exhalation, death the inhalation of deity. He breathes out, and the Universe flames forth with all her wings—her suns and clusters of suns—down to her mote-like earth, the butterfly of space, trimmed with its gaudy seasons, and nourishing on its back the parasitical ephemeran, Man!

Mrs. C. My love—

Poe. Be calm, mother. Be calm. Then the great inbreathing begins. The creative warmth no longer goes out. The parasites vanish first, then the worlds on which they ride, and last the mighty suns,—all sink into the still, potential unity, and await the recurrent breath which may bear another universe, unlike our own, where the animate may control the inanimate, the organic triumph over the inorganic,—(*rising*) ay, man himself may dominate nature, control the relentless ecliptic, **241** and say to the ages of ice and fire 'Ye shall not tread on me!'

Mrs. C. Edgar!

Poe. I beg your pardon. We must be calm. (*Resumes his seat*) But God will not stop breathing (*with bitter sarcasm*) though your daughter—and my wife—is dying. (*Mrs. Clemm weeps. He turns to the window*) Do you know that elephants once nibbled boughs out there where the snow is falling? They ran a mighty race—and died—but no tears were shed. In the records of the cosmos, if man is written down at all, I think he will be designated as the 'weeping animal.'

Mrs. C. Are you human?

Poe. I regret that I belong to that feeble and limited variety of creation, but with the next self-diffusion of the concentrated Infinite I may be the Sun himself!

Mrs. C. O, my mother-heart!

Poe. Think a little more and you will forget it. The heart makes the being there on the bed your daughter—my wife—but the mind makes her a part of the divine force which has chosen her shape for its visible flower. The heart is wrung by the falling of the bloom, for it is endeared to that only, but the mind rejoices in its reunited divinity. Come.... (*Moves a step toward the bed*) I can look on her now ... and be quiet. Sweet rose, I can watch your petals fall. But they fall early ... they fall early ... blasted in the May. Not by the divine breath drawing you home, but by my mortal, shattering hand! I promised you sun and dew.... I have given you frost and shadows. O God! O God! let me *not* think! Keep me a little, weeping child!

Mrs. C. Dear son, cast out this bitterness. Only your love and devotion have kept her alive so long.

Poe. No! I touched her like a wing of doom, and 242 she fell blasted! (*She tries to soothe him*) No, no! Call devils from hell to curse me!

(*A knock at the door. Mrs. Clemm opens it and a basket is delivered to her. Poe, deep in agony, does not notice. She takes things from the basket*)

Mrs. C. O, Edgar! Wine, and soft blankets!

(*He looks up, and rushes across to her*)

Poe. Wine! wine! O, spirit that bendest from pitying clouds, a mortal thanks thee! Quick, mother, these drops of strength will give her back to us!

Mrs. C. She sleeps, my son, which is ease more precious than these drops can give.

Poe. (*Taking bottle*) Give it to me!

Mrs. C. Edgar, Edgar, do not wake her!

Poe. Lenore, Lenore, out of thy dream, though 't were the fairest ever blown to mortal from Elysium! This will put thee to such smiles that dreams—

Mrs. C. Be quiet, for God's sake!

Poe. Quiet! 'T is a word for clods and stones! You 'd hold me from her when my hand brings life? (*Rushes to cupboard and gets a glass which he fills*)

Mrs. C. Just a little, Edgar. Too much would—

Poe. She shall drink it all, by Heaven! I will save her!

(*Mrs. Clemm sinks to a chair, helpless and sobbing. A knock at the door which neither hears. Enter Helen. As Poe turns to approach the bed he faces her, stares, and lets the glass drop shivering*)

Poe. You!

Hel. I, Edgar. You see I can remember my friends—and I 've come to scold you for not—letting me know—

Poe. It was you who sent—

Hel. Some blankets soft as summer clouds for the most beautiful lady in the world? And wine delicate enough for a fairy's throat? I knew you would not 243 have it else. (*Turns to Mrs. Clemm*) You do not know me, but—

Mrs. C. (*Taking her hand*) I know you are a good woman reaching a hand to me in my sorrow.

Hel. (*Embracing her*) No ... my arms!

(*Poe goes to bed and kneels by Virginia. Speaks softly to her, then rises and brings a little wine*)

Poe. Just a drop, dear,—a butterfly's portion.

(*Virginia drinks*)

Hel. (*To Mrs. Clemm*) How is she?

Mrs. C. She will have but one more word for us—goodbye.

Hel. Can I—may— O, you must let me do something for her—for you! Do not make me miserable by saying there is nothing I can do.

Mrs. C. There is ... something. I have never begged—

Hel. Do not use such a word. It is you who give—make me happy.

Mrs. C. But I will beg this. Some linen for her last robe.

Hel. God bless you for telling me!

Poe. (*Rising from his knees by Virginia*) Helen, Virginia would speak to you.

Hel. O, save the precious breath! (*Approaches bed*) Ah ... how lovely ... I understand....

Vir. (*Lifting her head*) Helen ... help my Edgar. (*Sinks back. Poe lays his head on her pillow. Helen stands with her arm about Mrs. Clemm. Curtain falls, and rises on same room at night. Virginia's body lies on the bed. Poe watches alone. A candle burns on table*)

Poe. (*Standing by bed*) ... So low in sleep, little girl?... I took thee mid thy roses. O, broken gentleness, little saint-love, move but a hand, a finger, to tell ²⁴⁴me thou art still my pleading angel!... Not one breath's life. Still ... quite still. O, might such rest be mine! (*Turns away*) I'll write. (*Goes to table*) I promised. Yes ... I'll write. Behind the glorious chancel of the mind still swings the incense to the deathless gods!... (*Sits and writes*) ... No. (*Rising*) No rhymes—for Poesy must mourn to-night. (*Goes toward bed*) Too much of her is dead. (*Gazes at Virginia*) Cold ... cold. What art thou death? Ye demons of a mind distraught, keep ye apace till I have fathomed this!... Ha! What scene is that? (*Stares as at visions*) A valley laid in the foundations of darkness! The unscalable cliffs jut to heaven, and on the amethystine peaks sit angels weeping into the abyss where creatures run to and fro without escape! Some eat, some laugh, some weep, some wonder. Now they make themselves candles whose little beams eclipse the warning stars ... and in the pallid light they dance and think it sun! But on the revel creeps a serpent, fanned and crimson, with multitudinous folds lapping the dancing creatures in one heaving carnage! The candles die.... The stars cannot pierce the writhing darkness.... Above on the immortal headlands sit the angels, looking down no more, for the dismal heap no longer throbs.... I must write this! Now! While I see it! That moaning flood ebbing to silence ... those rosy promontories lit with angel wings ... and over all as large and still as heaven, the cold, unweeping eyes of God!... (*Writes.... A tapping at the door. He does not hear. Another tapping. He looks up*) Who's there?... This is my vigil. Nor devil nor angel shall share it!... (*Listens. Tapping. He goes to door and throws it open*) ... Nothing ... nothing ... but darkness. (*Stands peering, and whispers*) Lenore!... (*Closes door, bolts it, returns to table and writes silently. Utter stillness, then a rattling at the window. Poe leaps up*) ²⁴⁵What's that? (*The shutter is blown open. Poe stands watching. A raven flies in and perches above door*) Out, you night-wing! (*He looks at raven silently*) You won't? Why, sit there then! You're but a feather! (*Sits and writes. After a moment rises and reads*)

Out—out are the lights—out all!

And over each quivering form,

The curtain, a funeral pall,

Comes down with the rush of a storm—

And the angels all pallid and wan,

Uprising, unveiling affirm

That the play is the tragedy 'Man!'

And its hero the Conqueror Worm!

Ah! the thought pales from these lines like light from dying cinders. Poetry is but ashes telling that a fire has passed. (*Sits gloomily. Suddenly remembers the raven, turns and stares at it*) You bird of damnation, leave me in peace with my dead!... O, dreaming fool, 't is nothing.... My mind's a chaos that surges up this fancy. (*Tries to write, stops, goes on, trembles, and looks up*) ... Can I know fear? I, the very nursling of dreams? Who have lived in a world more tenanted with ghosts than men? I can not be afraid.... (*Tries to write. Drops pen. Shudders, looking with furtive fear at the raven*) ... I am ... I am afraid.... Virginia! (*Creeps toward bed*) Stay with me, little

bride. My little rose-bride! (*Fingers along coverlet, looking at raven*) Do not leave me. Quick, little love! Give me life in a kiss! (*Touches her hand, shrinks, and springs up*) Dead!... (*Leans against foot of bed, wildly facing the raven*) Speak, fiend! From what dim region of unbodied souls hast come? What hell ungorge thee for her messenger? What sentence have the devils passed [246] upon me? To what foul residence in some blasted star am I condemned? Speak! By every sigh that poisons happy breath!—by every misery that in me rocks and genders her swart young!—by yonder life that now in golden ruin lies!—I charge thee speak! How long shall I wander without rest? How long whirl in the breath of unforgiving winds? Or burn in the refining forges of the sun? When will the Universe gather me to her heart and give me of her still, unthrobbing peace? Speak! When—O when will this driven spirit be at home?

(*Silence. Poe listens with intense expectation and fear. The raven flies out*) It spoke! (*Hoarsely*) It spoke! I heard it! (*Whispers*) Nevermore! (*He falls in a swoon. Candle flickers in the wind and goes out. Darkness*)

(CURTAIN)

ACT V.

Scene I: Poe's lodging, Baltimore. Small room. Cot, table, and one chair. Poe writing)

Poe. (*Pressing his temples*) Throb—throb—but you shall finish this. (*Writes*) You, too, rebel, old pen? On, on like a lusty cripple, and we'll scratch out of this hole. (*Lifting pen*) Why, old fellow, this will buy bread. O, bread, bread, bread, for one sweet crumb of thee to feed an angel here! (*Touching his forehead*) Gordon will not fail me. His letter will come to-day. [247] And with his help I'll get on good ground once more. And then!... (*Writes. Drops pen with a groan*) ... Gordon's letter *must* come to-day. O, I would live, would live, for seeds are gendering in my mind that might their branches throw above the clouds and shake immortal buds to this bare earth!... (*Looks at writing*) Words! Ye are but coffins for imagination! No more of you! (*Crushes paper*) Eternity's in labor with this hour! (*Leaps up*) I could make Time my page to carry memories from star to star! O Heaven, wouldst thou vouchsafe thy visions to these eyes, then fill them with cold clay? Pour to these ears thine own philosophies, then send the crawling worm to pluck their treasure out? (*Falls to chair. Enter Mrs. Schmidt*)

Mrs. S. (*Holding out letter*) Here it is, sir.

Poe. (*Rousing*) What, Smidgkin?

Mrs. S. The letter's come, sir.

Poe. Thank you. (*Takes letter. Mrs. Schmidt waits expectantly*) If you will be so good, Smidgkin—I mean if you will be so cruel as to bereave me of your presence while I break this very personal seal—very personal, I assure you—

Mrs. S. No, sir. I stay to see what's inside o' that!

Poe. Since you desire it, madam. (*Starts to open letter and hesitates*) I—hope you are well, my good Smidgkin.

Mrs. S. Always am. Had n't you better see what's in it?

Poe. To be sure.... I hope you have a good fire in your room this chilly weather, Smidgkin.

Mrs. S. Always do. I'll break it for you, Mr. Poe.

Poe. O, no, no! I could n't think of troubling you. The rain beats very heavily. I hope your-er-roof will not be injured.

[248] **Mrs. S.** Law me, I had every leaf tinkered up them sunny days last week. I believe in preparin' for a rainy day, I do, Mr. Poe.

Poe. Indeed, yes,—if only we were all so wise, but, alas, my dear Smidgkin, some of us build so high that the angels have to come down and tinker our roofs ... and when they won't, Smidgkin ... when they won't (*Lays letter on the table*) ... I hope you have no errands to take you from your cheerful fireside in weather like this, Mrs. Smidgkin.

Mrs. S. My name is Schmidt, Mr. Poe.

Poe. Pardon me, madam.

Mrs. S. Air you a goin' to open that letter or air you not?

Poe. Why, good woman, to be sure I am. I did not know you were particularly interested. Excuse me. Here goes—and God mend the devil's work. (*Opens letter and reads*) 'I have talked with Brackett—' Brackett! (*Drops letter and sits dumb*)

Mrs. S. He sent you the ten dollars, hey? Where is it, hey? Seems to me that's white paper with mighty few marks on it! Not much like a ten dollar bill! Where is it, I say? Lost in the mailbags, I reckon! It will come by next post! You're certain—quite certain, Smidgkin! I tell you, Mr. Poe, this is once too often!

Poe. A bare, unfurnished room like this—

Mrs. S. Is worth just a dollar a week to me, which is exactly a dollar more than you can pay!

Poe. Mrs. Smidgkin, there is a legend in the world that pity never wholly leaves the breast of woman.

Mrs. S. Shame to your tongue, Mr. Poe, that says I have n't been as kind to you as your own mother—sister! Have n't you had this room nigh to a month since I've seen a cent for it? Did n't I give you stale bread a whole week, an' coffee a Sunday mornin'? An' you [249]dare say I'm not a Christian, merciful woman? You come out o' here, or I'll put hands on you, I will!

Poe. Mrs. Smidgkin, Mrs. Smidgkin, are you aware that the rain pours outside like the tears of the Danaides on their wedding night? And speaking of weddings, Smidgkin—

Mrs. S. Schmidt! As you 'll find on my good man's tombstone, an' some day on my own, bless God!

Poe. O, don't talk so, I beg you!

Mrs. S. Why now, Mr. Poe! Law me, who 'd a thought you could be so softhearted—about a tombstone, too!

Poe. As I said, my dear madam—speaking of weddings—pray take this chair. 'T is all I have to offer. Gladly will I stand before you, though I am but slightly bolstered within for the attitude. Speak to me, madam. Let one thought fly from thy caging brow to me a beggar vile.

Mrs. S. O, Mr. Poe!

Poe. Thanks for the burden of those syllables.

Mrs. S. My dear Mr. Poe!

Poe. Again? You overwhelm me? Dare I speak? You have suspected? You know why I linger in this dear room—dear as the barrier that staves off guttery death? This kindness is sincere? I may trust it and speak?

Mrs. S. You may, Mr. Poe.

Poe. Well then, sweet Smidgkin, will you open the broad gates of genial widowhood to admit a fallen wretch to the warmth of your bosom and hearthstone—particularly the latter?

Mrs. S. (*With dignity*) I presume, Mr. Poe, that I am addressed by an offer of marriage. I have had offers before, Mr. Poe,—one an undertaker who drove a good business, but he looked for all the world like one of [250] his own corpses an' what is business says I to a woman in good circumstances with a longin' heart? I don't mind sayin' it, Mr. Poe, a nice lookin' man always did take my eye, an' you 'll be a pretty figure when you're plumped out a bit, indeed you will, but your addresses of this offer is somewhat unusual, an' if you 'll give me time—

Poe. The weather, madam, will admit of no delay. Since you are so determined, I must give up hope and seek shelter under Jove's great canopy.

Mrs. S. O, don't go there, Mr. Poe—it 's a bad place, that Canpy house, an' I've heard Jove talked about for a vile barkeep! I guess since you're so impetus I 'll say yes to these addresses of marriage, Mr. Poe.

Poe. Ha! ha! ha!

Mrs. S. What do you mean, Mr. Poe? My dear Eddie, I should say!

Poe. I mean, madam, that death loves a joke.

Mrs. S. O, my sweet Eddie, don't be talkin' about death. You're so pale I don't wonder—and a'most starved out I 'll venture my word for it. But you won't know yourself in a week. I've got the sweetest room downstairs—all in blue an' white, with a bed three feet o' feathers, soft as a goosebreast, I warrant, an' I 'll tuck you in an' bring you a toddy that 'll warm you to your toes, it will, an'—

Poe. Ha! ha! ha! Well, why not? I seize this wretched plank or sink with all that in me is. Men have done it. But not Edgar Poe! Sell my soul for a broth-dish—a saucepan—a feather-bed—

Mrs. S. O, he 's out of his mind, sure he is! My sweet Eddie, he 's loved me distracted!

Poe. Can this be woman?

Mrs. S. Law me!

251 **Poe.** The sex that knew a Virginia—that knows a Helen? No! there are men, women ... and angels!

Mrs. S. Look here, Mr. Poe, don't you mention no women 'round me! O, Eddy, my Eddy! (*Offers to caress him*)

Poe. Away! You wench from Venus' kitchen! (*Going*) This weather ... once I could have braved it with the wildest wing that ever flew. But now.... (*coughs wretchedly*)

Mrs. S. No rent an' no husband either!

Poe. Up, heart, we go! Henceforth I live by spirit-bread! Lead me, ye unseen comrades, to immortal feasts! (*Exit*)

(CURTAIN)

Scene II: An hour later. A bar-room. Door in center, rear. Four men at table, left, rear, playing cards.

Haines. Was afraid you would n't show up to-night, Juggy.

Juggers. Nothing like a stormy night for a good game. Never miss one. Rain brings me luck.

Black. Then, by Jacks, you 'll have it all your way to-night. It 's pouring hogsheads. Your deal, Sharp. (*They play in silence. Poe enters, rear, walks uncertainly across the room and takes a seat, right, front. There seems to be life only in his eyes, their burning light revealing a soul struggling free from a corpse. He sits unnoticed for a short time*)

Sharp. (*To barkeeper*) Say, Thomas, I thought this was a gentleman's house. What 's that in the corner? Looks like a coffin might 'a' spilt it on the way to the graveyard.

Bark. (*In lower tone*) He 's one o' these writin' 252 fellers in hard luck. I've let him hang around here a good deal, for he 's always quiet and gives me no show for kickin' him out. But say the word and he goes.

Haines. Looks more like a sick man than a bum.

Sharp. Bah! He can drink till he wets his boots. I know that sort of a face.

Bark. Never drinks anything 'round here.

Sharp. Good reason. You don't wear a charity medal.

Jug. Let him stay for luck.

Sharp. Whose luck? You're doing all the winning to-night, Juggers. He 's a Jonah for the rest of us. I want his eye off me, I say.

Black. O, let him alone. I'd ask a burglar to have a seat in my house a night like this—'pon honor, I would. Play up. (*They play on*)

Poe. What a noble palace is here! How the gleaming vault reaches to heaven and mocks the stars! What resplendent lights! As though the master had taken burning

planets for his candles! How far they throw their beams—around the world and into the nether sea!

Jug. (*To Haines, who is looking at Poe*) Mind your play there, Haines.

Poe. I know this place. It is the poet's house of dream that all my life I've sought to reach. I am dying now, and they let me in, because I have been true to them. The master will read it in my face. I have not eaten of the flesh-pots! I have beggared my body, but I have not beggared my soul!

Sharp. Curse it, Juggers! It's yours again!

Haines. Take your medicine, Sharp. A man must know how to lose as well as win.

Poe. Yonder is the master, arrayed all in white and gold and sapphire. Those angels that attend him are 253 poets wrapped in fires of love. They talk about me now, and ask if I am worthy to come in. O, I have loved ye well, immortal dead! Through noons that burnt the world I've tracked your dewy shadows! No day died in my eyes but ye were whispering priests! And midnight stars have learned your names of me!

Sharp. (*Throwing down cards*) It's that hoodoo in the corner!

Poe. How wonderful their voices! They speak a strange language, but I can interpret it.

Sharp. I'll not play another card until he goes!

Poe. He says that by the trembling of the planet-lights an earth-soul come this way. He sees me!

Black. Well, by Jacks, I've got a dollar for his supper and bed.

Poe. He says that 't is a strange creature carrying a burning brand in his bosom.

Sharp. You can afford to be a fool. You've helped Juggers rake in.

Poe. Not a brand, he says, but an immortal star.

Sharp. Thomas, set that oil painting outside, will you?

Poe. They ask the master if they may come to meet me. (*Barkeeper approaches Poe*) Ah, the master comes himself, for I am one of the chosen.

Barkeeper. Get out o' this!

Poe. (*Rising slowly*) Thou mighty one, thy servant hears thee!

Bark. Eh?

Poe. I'll be the humblest round thy throne.

Bark. Look here, I was a little soft about you, but now you just shove along!

Poe. I beg your pardon,—may I ask the name of this planet?

Bark. Eh?

254 **Poe.** Is it—the earth?

Bark. (*Shaking him*) None o' your squibs!

Poe. (*Recognizing and throwing him off with momentary strength*) Do not touch me, George Thomas. I will go.

Black. (*Flinging him a piece of silver, which falls to the floor*) There's a bed for you.

Poe. I dare not touch it, sir, lest I be infected, for the angels who look upon us know that I shall be in health when fever shall sit on your bones and agues make their bed in your marrow!

Jug. A gentleman can't stand that jaw. Kick him out, Thomas, or I will.

Poe. Do not touch me! You walking clay! who button your coats about three meals a day and think you have belted in the universe! Go listen to the sea lapping rock and bone to her oblivious mill, and know your hearts shall sleep as sand within her shells! By the dead worlds that drift in yonder void, and long have sung the swan-song of their deities, this too shall pass, and ere it passes flesh shall learn its impotence! Grey stalkers from the past shall clutch the throat of days! All wrongs shall rise and

gather their revenge! And man—

Sharp. Here you crazy Tom! That's just enough!

(Tries to take hold of Poe)

Poe. Off! See what I see! The Conqueror Worm! Fold on fold the red-fanged monster creeps! Look! your doom, ye swine with sodden eyes fast shut against sublimities! Ye

Jug. *(Taking Poe by the throat)* I'll stop your croaking!

(Haines and Black pull Juggers from Poe, who falls to seat utterly exhausted)

Haines. Can't you keep your hands off a sick man?

255 **Jug.** Sick! He's the devil!

Haines. Then you might as well make his acquaintance.

Poe. 'T is here ... death ... and all is yet to say. O, I have chattered as a babe! Now, I could speak, and dust is in my mouth!... Helen, you told me to be content with the letters.... I have tried to read ... to steal God's book. He has punished ... but death pays my bond. Soon I shall read with His eyes and be at peace. Peace! *(Gives a dying shudder)* Nevermore!... *(Rises, staggers to door and opens it wide)* O, Night, with thy minstrel winds, blow gently on me dead ... for I have been thy lover! *(Looks back at the men who are gazing at him intently, and speaks lowly, erect and godlike)* In His own image created He man!... *(Turns and steps into the darkness.)*

(CURTAIN)

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