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LONDON: KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & Co.

GYCIA

A TRAGEDY

IN FIVE ACTS

by

LEWIS MORRIS

M.A.; HONORARY FELLOW OF JESUS COLLEGE, OXFORD

KNIGHT OF THE REDEEMER OF GREECE, ETC., ETC.

SECOND EDITION

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1886

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[Dramatis Personæ](#)

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PREFACE.

The following Drama was written with a view to Stage representation, and it is therefore rather as an Acting Play than as a Dramatic Poem that it should be judged by its readers.

It follows as closely as possible the striking story recorded by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his

work, "De Administratione Imperii." Nor has the writer had occasion (except in the death of the heroine) to modify the powerful historical situations and incidents to which it is right to say his attention was first directed by his friend the well-known scholar and critic, Mr. W. Watkiss Lloyd. The date of the story is circa 970 A.D.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

PEOPLE OF BOSPHORUS.

The KING OF BOSPHORUS.

ASANDER, *Prince of Bosphorus.*

LYSIMACHUS, *a statesman.*

MEGACLES, *a chamberlain from the Imperial Court of Constantinople.*

Three Courtiers, accompanying Asander and accomplices in the plot.

Soldiers, etc.

PEOPLE OF CHERSON.

LAMACHUS, *Archon of the Republic of Cherson.*

ZETHO, *his successor.*

THEODORUS, *a young noble (brother to Irene), in love with Gycia.*

BARDANES, *first Senator.*

Ambassador to Bosphorus.

The Senators of Cherson.

Two Labourers.

GYCIA, *daughter of Lamachus.*

IRENE, *a lady—her friend, in love with Asander.*

MELISSA, *an elderly lady in waiting on Gycia.*

Child, daughter of the Gaoler.

Citizens, etc.

GYCIA.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Bosphorus. The King's palace. The KING, in anxious thought. To him* LYSIMACHUS,
afterwards ASANDER

Enter LYSIMACHUS.

Lys. What ails the King, that thus his brow is bent
By such a load of care?

King. Lysimachus,
The load of empire lies a weary weight,
On age-worn brains; tho' skies and seas may smile,
And steadfast favouring Fortune sit serene,
Guiding the helm of State, but well thou knowest—
None better in my realm—through what wild waves,
Quicksands, and rock-fanged straits, our Bosphorus,
Laden with all our love, reels madly on
To shipwreck and to ruin. From the North,
Storm-cloud on storm-cloud issuing vollies forth
Fresh thunderbolts of war. The Emperor
Dallies within his closed seraglios,
Letting his eunuchs waste the might of Rome,
While the fierce Scythian, in a surge of blood,
Bursts on our bare-swept plains. Upon the South,
Our rival Cherson, with a jealous eye,

Waits on our adverse chances, taking joy
Of her republican guile in every check
And buffet envious Fortune deals our State,
Which doth obey a King. Of all our foes
I hate and dread these chiefly, for I fear
Lest, when my crown falls from my palsied brow,
My son Asander's youth may prove too weak
To curb these crafty burghers. Speak, I pray thee,
Most trusty servant. Can thy loyal brain
Devise some scheme whereby our dear-loved realm
May break the mesh of Fate?

3

Lys. Indeed, my liege,
Too well I know our need, and long have tossed
Through sleepless nights, if haply I might find
Some remedy, but that which I have found
Shows worse than the disease.

King. Nay, speak; what is it?
I know how wise thy thought.

Lys. My liege, it chances
The Archon Lamachus is old and spent.
He has an only child, a daughter, Gycia,
The treasure of his age, who now blooms forth
In early maidenhood. The girl is fair
As is a morn in springtide; and her father
A king in all but name, such reverence
His citizens accord him. Were it not well
The Prince Asander should contract himself
In marriage to this girl, and take the strength
Of Cherson for her dowry, and the power
Of their strong fleets and practised arms to thrust
The invading savage backward?

4

King. Nay, my lord;
No more of this, I pray. There is no tribe
Of all the blighting locust swarms of war,
Which sweep our wasted fields, I would not rather
Take to my heart and cherish than these vipers.
Dost thou forget, my lord, how of old time,
In the brave days of good Sauromatus,
These venomous townsmen, shamelessly allied
With the barbarian hosts, brought us to ruin;
Or, with the failing force of Cæsar leagued,
By subtle devilish enginery of war,
Robbed Bosphorus of its own, when, but for them,
Byzantium were our prey, and all its might,
And we Rome's masters? Nay; I swear to thee,
I would rather see the Prince dead at my feet,
I would rather see our loved State sunk and lost,
Than know my boy, the sole heir of my crown,
The sole hope of my people, taken and noosed
By this proud upstart girl. Speak not of it;
Ruin were better far.

5

Lys. My liege, I bear
No greater favour to these insolent townsmen
Than thou thyself. I, who have fought with them
From my first youth—who saw my father slain,
Not in fair fight, pierced through by honest steel,
But unawares, struck by some villanous engine,
Which, armed with inextinguishable fire,
Flew hissing from the walls and slew at once
Coward and brave alike; I, whose young brother,
The stripling who to me was as a son,
Taken in some sally, languished till he died,
Chained in their dungeons' depths;—must I not hate them
With hate as deep as hell? And yet I know
There is no other way than that Asander
Should wed this woman. This alone can staunch
The bleeding wounds of the State.

6

King. Lysimachus,
I am old; my will is weak, my body bent,
Not more than is my mind; I cannot reason.
But hark! I hear the ring of coursers' feet
Bespeak Asander coming. What an air

Of youth and morning breathes round him, and brings
A light of hope again!

Enter ASANDER from the chase.

Asan. My dearest sire and King, art thou thus grave
Of choice, or does our good Lysimachus,
Bringing unwonted loads of carking care,
O'ercloud thy brow? I prithee, father, fret not;
There is no cloud of care I yet have known—
And I am now a man, and have my cares—
Which the fresh breath of morn, the hungry chase,
The echoing horn, the jocund choir of tongues,
Or joy of some bold enterprise of war,
When the swift squadrons smite the echoing plains,
Scattering the stubborn spearmen, may not break,
As does the sun the mists. Nay, look not grave;
My youth is strong enough for any burden
Fortune can set on me.

7

King. Couldst thou, Asander,
Consent to serve the State, if it should bid thee
Wed without love?

Asan. What, father, is that all?
I do not know this tertian fever, love,
Of which too oft my comrades groan and sigh,
This green-sick blight, which turns a lusty soldier
To a hysterical girl. Wed without love?
One day I needs must wed, though love I shall not.
And if it were indeed to serve the State,
Nay, if 'twould smooth one wrinkle from thy brow,
Why, it might be to-morrow. Tell me, father,
Who is this paragon that thou designest
Shall call me husband? Some barbarian damsel
Reared on mare's milk, and nurtured in a tent
In Scythia? Well, 'twere better than to mate
With some great lady from the Imperial Court,
Part tigress and all wanton. I care not;
Or if the scheme miscarry, I care not.
Tell me, good father.

8

King. Wouldst thou wed, Asander,
If 'twere to save the State, a Greek from Cherson?

Asan. From Cherson? Nay, my liege; that were too much.
A girl from out that cockatrice's den—
Take such a one to wife? I would liefer take
A viper to my breast! Nay, nay, you jest,
My father, for you hate this low-born crew,
Grown gross by huckstering ways and sordid craft—
Ay, more than I.

9

King. It is no jest, my son.
Our good Lysimachus will tell thee all
Our need and whence it comes.

Lys. My gracious Prince,
Thus stands the case, no otherwise. Our foes
Press closer year by year, our widespread plains
Are ravaged, and our bare, unpeopled fields
Breed scantier levies; while the treasury
Stands empty, and we have not means to buy
The force that might resist them. Nought but ruin,
Speedy, inevitable, can await
Our failing Bosphorus' unaided strength,
Unless some potent rich ally should join
Our weakness to her might. None other is there
To which to look but Cherson; and I know,
From trusty friends among them, that even now,
Perchance this very day, an embassy
Comes to us with design that we should sink
Our old traditional hate in the new bonds
Which Hymen binds together. For the girl
Gycia, the daughter of old Lamachus,
Their foremost man, there comes but one report—
That she is fair as good.

10

Asan. My lord, I pray you,
Waste not good breath. If I must sell myself,

It matters not if she be fair or foul,
Angel or doubly damned; hating the race,
Men, maidens, young and old, I would blight my life
To save my country.

King. Thanks, my dearest son.
There spake a patriot indeed.

Servant. My liege,
An embassy from Cherson for the King.

Enter AMBASSADOR, *with retinue.*

Ambas. Sirs, I bring you a message from Lamachus, the Archon of Cherson.

Lys. Sirs, forsooth! Know ye not the dignity of princes, or does your republican rudeness bar you from all courtesy? I do not count myself equal to the King, nor, therefore, should you.

King. Nay, good Lysimachus, let him proceed.

Ambas. If I am blunt of speech, I beg your forgiveness. I bring to you a letter from the citizen Lamachus, which I shall read, if it be your pleasure.

King. Read on.

Ambas. "To the King of Bosphorus, Lamachus sends greeting. We are both old. Let us forget the former enmities of our States, and make an alliance which shall protect us against the storm of barbarian invasion which Cæsar is too weak to ward off. Thou hast a son, and I a daughter. Thy son is, from all report, a brave youth and worthy. My daughter is the paragon of her sex. I have wealth and possessions and respect as great as if I were a sceptred King. The youth and the maid are of fitting age. Let us join their hands together, and with them those of our States, and grow strong enough to defy the barbarians, and Rome also."

Asan. My liege, I am willing for this marriage. Let it be.

King. My son, we have not yet heard all. Read on, sir.

Ambas. "There is one condition which not my will, but the jealousy of our people enforces, viz. that the Prince Asander, if he weds my daughter, shall thenceforth forswear his country, nor seek to return to it on pain of death. I pray thee, pardon the rudeness of my countrymen; but they are Greeks, and judge their freedom more than their lives."

Asan. Insolent hounds!

This is too much. I will have none of them.

Take back that message.

King. Thou art right, my son.
I could not bear to lose thee, not to win
A thousand Chersons. Let us fight alone,
And see what fortune sends us.

Lys. Good my liege,
Be not too hasty. (*To Ambassador*) Sir, the King has heard
The message which you bring, and presently
Will send a fitting answer.

[*Exit Ambassador.*]

Nay, my liege,
I beg your patience. That these fellows make
Their friendship difficult is true; but think
How great the value of it, and remember
How easy 'tis to promise and break faith
With insolent dogs like these. This Lamachus
Is older than your grace, and feebler far.
He will not live for ever, and, he gone,
Will not the Prince Asander be as great,
The husband of his daughter and his heir,
As *he* is now, and sway the power of Cherson
For our own ends, and cast to all the winds
This foul enforced compact, and o'erturn
This commonwealth of curs? I will stake my life
That three years shall not pass ere he is King
Of Cherson in possession, and at once
Of Bosphorus next heir.
"The tongue hath sworn, the mind remains unsworn,"
So says their poet.

Asan. I'll have none of it.
I am not all Greek, but part Cimmerian,
And scorn to break my word.
Let us face ruin, father, not deceit.

King. My noble son, I love thee.

Lys. Good my liege,
And thou, my Lord Asander, ponder it.

Consider our poor country's gaping wounds,
And what a remedy lies to our hands.
I will die willingly if I devise not
A scheme to bend these upstarts to your will.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

SCENE II.—*Outside the palace.*

MEGACLES *and Courtiers.*

Meg. Well, my lords, and so it is all settled. We must all be on board in half an hour. His Altitude the Prince sails at once for Cherson, and with a view to his immediate marriage. Was ever such a rash step heard of? Not twenty-four hours to get ready the marriage equipment of a Prince of Bosphorus. Well, well, I dare say they would be glad enough to take him with no rag to his back. I dare say these rascally republicans would know no better if he were to be married in his everyday suit. 16

1st Court. I' faith, I should never have dreamt it. Asander, who is the boldest huntsman and the bravest soldier, and the best of good fellows, to go and tie himself to the apron-strings of a Greek girl, a tradesman's daughter from Cherson, of all places on earth! Pah! it makes me sick!

2nd Court. But I hear she is beautiful as Artemis, and—Well, we are all young or have been, and beauty is a strong loadstone to such metal as the Prince's.

3rd Court. Nay, he has never set eyes on her; and, for that matter, the Lady Irene was handsome enough in all conscience, and a jovial young gentlewoman to boot. Ye gods! do you mind how she sighed for him and pursued him? It was a sight to please the goddess Aphrodite herself. But then, our good Asander, who had only to lift up his little finger, was so cold and positively forbidding, that I once came upon the poor lady crying her eyes out in a passion of mortified feeling. 17

1st Court. Ay, she was from this outlandish Cherson, was not she? Aphrodite was a Greek woman also, remember.

2nd Court. So she was. I had quite forgotten where the lady came from. Well, if she is there now, and cannot get her Prince, and would like a gay, tolerably well-favoured young fellow for a lover, I suppose she need go no further than the present company.

Meg. My lords, I pray you leave these frivolities, and let us come to serious matters. Think, I beg you, in what a painful position I am placed. I am to go, without proper notice, as Master of the Ceremonies of the Court of Bosphorus, to conduct an important Court-ceremonial with a pack of scurvy knaves, who, I will be bound, hardly know the difference between an Illustrious and a Respectable, or a Respectable and an Honourable. I must do my best to arrange all decently and in order, and as near as may be to the Imperial model, and all these matters I have to devise on shipboard, tossed about on that villanous Euxine, with a smell of pitch everywhere, and sea-sickness in my stomach. And when I get to Cherson, if ever I do get there alive, I have not the faintest idea whom I am to consult with—whether there is a Count of the Palace or anybody, in fact. I dare say there is nobody; I am sure there is nobody. A marriage of the heir apparent is a very serious affair, let me tell you. What a comfort it is that I have got the last edition of that precious work of the divine Theodosius on Dignities! If it were not for that, I should go mad. 18

1st Court. My good Megacles, I warn you the Prince cares as little for etiquette as he does for love-making. 19

Meg. Very likely, and that makes my position so difficult. Just reflect for a moment. When we go ashore at Cherson, I suppose we shall be received by the authorities?

2nd Court. Surely, good Megacles.

Meg. Then, how many steps should Prince Asander take to meet his father-in-law Lamachus—eh? And how many steps should Lamachus take? You never gave the matter a thought? Of course not. And these are questions to be settled on the spot, and scores like them.

3rd Court. I dare say it won't matter at all, or very little.

Meg. Matter very little, indeed! very little, forsooth! Why, in the name of all the saints, do not alliances fall through for less? Are not bloody wars fought for less? Do I not remember the sad plight of the Grand Chamberlain, when the Illustrious Leo, the Pro-Consul of Macedonia, had a meeting at Court with the Respectable the Vice-Prefect of Pannonia? Now, the Pro-Consul should have taken four steps forward, as being the most noble, the Vice-Prefect five. But, the Vice-Prefect being a tall man, and the Pro-Consul a short one, the Grand Chamberlain did not sufficiently measure their distances; and so when they had taken but four steps each, there were the two Dignitaries bolt upright, face to face, glaring at each other, and no room to take the fraction of a foot pace more. 20

1st Court. Faith, a very laughable situation, good Megacles. Was it hard to settle?

Meg. I should think it was hard to settle. No one could interfere; the Book of Ceremonies was sent for, and was silent. There was nothing for it but that the Emperor, after half an hour, broke up the Court in confusion, and those two remained where they were till it was quite dark, and then they got away, no one knows how. But what came of it? For fifteen years there was war and bloodshed between the provinces, and but for the invasion of the Goths, there would be to this day. Matter little, indeed! Why, you foolish youngster, ceremony is everything in life. To 21

understand Precedence aright is to know the secrets of nature. The order of Precedence is the order of Creation. It is, in fact, a very cosmogony. Oh, a noble science! a noble science!

1st Court. Right, good Megacles, to magnify your office. Bravery is nothing; goodness is nothing; beauty is a foolish dream. Give us Ceremony, Ceremony, more Ceremony; it is the salt of life.

Meg. A very intelligent youth. But here comes the King.

Enter the KING, ASANDER, and LYSIMACHUS.

22

Asan. My liege, I do your will,
Though with a heavy heart. Farewell, my father.
If I must bid farewell to this dear City,
Which nourished me from childhood, 'tis to save it,
Not otherwise, and thou my sire and King.
From thee I do not part, and oftentimes,
If the saints will, I yet shall welcome thee,
When all our foes are routed and our troubles
Fled like some passing storm-cloud, to my hearth,
And set thy heir upon thy knees, a Prince
Of Bosphorus and Cherson.

King. Good, my son.
I pray God keep you, for I dimly fear,
So dark a presage doth obscure my mind,
That we shall meet no more.

Lys. My honoured liege,
These are the figments of a mind which grief
Hath part disordered. Thou shalt see thy son,
Trust me for it; I swear it. One thing more
Remains. I know what 'tis to be a youth
As yet untouched by love; I know what charm
Lies in the magic of a woman's eyes
For a young virgin heart. I pray you, sir,
Swear to me by the saints, that, come what may,
For no allurement which thy new life brings thee,
The love of wife or child, wilt thou forget
Our Bosphorus, but still wilt hold her weal
Above all other objects of thy love
In good or adverse fortune.

23

Asan. Nay, my lord,
There is no need for oaths; yet will I swear it,
Here on this soldier's cross.

[Makes a cross with the hilt of his sword.]

Farewell, my father,
I mar my manhood, staying.

24

King. Farewell, son.
Let my old eyes fix on thee till thou goest
Beneath the farthest verge. Good Megacles,
And you brave gentlemen, be faithful all
To me and to your Prince.

Lys. My Lord Asander,
Remember!

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

25

SCENE I.—*Lamachus' palace, Cherson.*

GYCIA and IRENE.

Gycia. Sweetest Irene,
What joy it is to see thee once again
After so long an absence! We had grown
Together on one stalk so long, since first
Our girlish lives began to burst to flower,
That it was hard to part us. But methinks
That something of the rose from off thy cheek
Has faded, and its rounded outline fair

Seems grown a little thinner.

Ire. Gycia,
The flower, once severed from the stalk, no more
Grows as before.

26

Gycia. Thou strange girl, to put on
Such grave airs! Ah! I fear at Bosphorus
Some gay knight has bewitched thee; thou hast fallen
In love, as girls say—though what it may be
To fall in love, I know not, thank the gods,
Having much else to think of.

Ire. Prithee, dear,
Speak not of this.

Gycia. Ah! then I know 'tis true.
Confess what manner of thing love is.

Ire. Nay, nay, I cannot tell thee (*weeping*), Gycia;
Thou knowest not what thou askest. What is love?
Seek not to know it. 'Tis to be no more
Thy own, but all another's; 'tis to dwell
By day and night on one fixed madding thought,
Till the form wastes, and with the form the heart
Is warped from right to wrong, and can forget
All that it loved before, faith, duty, country,
Friendship, affection—everything but love.
Seek not to know it, dear; or, knowing it,
Be happier than I.

27

Gycia. My poor Irene!
Then, 'tis indeed a misery to love.
I do repent that I have tortured thee
By such unthinking jests. Forgive me, dear,
I will speak no more of it; with me thy secret
Is safe as with a sister. Shouldst thou wish
To unburden to me thy unhappy heart,
If haply I might bring thy love to thee.
Thou shalt his name divulge and quality,
And I will do my best.

Ire. Never, dear Gycia.
Forget my weakness; 'twas a passing folly,
I love a man who loves me not again,
And that is very hell. I would die sooner
Than breathe his name to thee. Farewell, dear lady!
Thou canst not aid me.

28

[*Exit* IRENE.]

Gycia. Hapless girl! Praise Heaven
That I am fancy-free!

Enter LAMACHUS.

Lama. My dearest daughter, why this solemn aspect?
I have glad news for thee. Thou knowest of old
The weary jealousies, the bloody feuds,
Which 'twixt our Cherson and her neighbour City
Have raged ere I was born—nay, ere my grandsire
First saw the light of heaven. Both our States
Are crippled by this brainless enmity.
And now the Empire, now the Scythian, threatens
Destruction to our Cities, whom, united,
We might defy with scorn. Seeing this weakness,
Thy father, wishful, ere his race be run,
To save our much-loved Cherson, sent of late
Politic envoys to our former foe,
And now—i' faith, I am not so old, 'twould seem
That I have lost my state-craft—comes a message.
The Prince Asander, heir of Bosphorus,
Touches our shores to-day, and presently
Will be with us.

29

Gycia. Oh, father, is it wise?
Do fire and water mingle? Does the hawk
Mate with the dove; the tiger with the lamb;
The tyrant with the peaceful commonwealth;
Fair commerce with the unfruitful works of war?
What union can there be 'twixt our fair city
And this half-barbarous race? 'Twere against nature

To bid these opposite elements combine—
The Greek with the Cimmerian. Father, pray you,
Send them away, with honour if you please,
And soothing words and gifts—only, I pray you,
Send them away, this Prince who doth despise us,
And his false retinue of slaves.

30

Lama. My daughter,
Thy words are wanting in thy wonted love
And dutiful observance. 'Twere an insult
Unwashed by streams of bloodshed, should our City
Scorn thus the guests it summoned. Come they must,
And with all hospitable care and honour,
Else were thy sire dishonoured. Thou wilt give them
A fitting welcome.

Gycia. Pardon me, my father,
That I spoke rashly. I obey thy will.

[*Going.*

Lama. Stay, *Gycia.* Dost thou know what 'tis to love?

Gycia. Ay, thee, dear father.

Lama. Nay, I know it well.
But has no noble youth e'er touched thy heart?

Gycia. None, father, Heaven be praised! The young Irene
Was with me when thou cam'st, and all her life
Seems blighted by this curse of love—for one
Whose name she hides, with whom in Bosphorus
She met, when there she sojourned. Her young brother,
The noble Theodorus, whom thou knowest,
Lets all the world go by him and grows pale
For love, and pines, and wherefore?—For thy daughter,
Who knows not what love means, and cannot brook
Such brain-sick folly. Nay, be sure, good father,
I love not thus, and shall not.

31

Lama. Well, well, girl,
Thou wilt know it yet. I fetter not thy choice,
But if thou couldst by loving bind together
Not two hearts only, but opposing peoples;
Supplant by halcyon days long years of strife,
And link them in unbroken harmony;—
Were this no glory for a woman, this
No worthy price of her heart?

Gycia. Tell me, I pray,
What mean you by this riddle?

32

Lama. Prince Asander
Comes here to ask your hand, and with it take
A gracious dower of peace and amity.
He does not ask thee to forsake thy home,
But leaves for thee his own. All tongues together
Are full of praise of him: virgin in love,
A brave youth in the field, as we have proved
In many a mortal fight; a face and form
Like a young god's. I would, my love, thy heart
Might turn to him, and find thy happiness
In that which makes me happy. I am old
And failing, and I fain would see thee blest
Before I die, and at thy knees an heir
To all my riches, and the State of Cherson
From anxious cares delivered, and through thee.

Gycia. Father, we are of the Athenian race,
Which was the flower of Hellas. Ours the fame
Of Poets, Statesmen, Orators, whose works
And thoughts upon the forehead of mankind
Shine like a precious jewel; ours the glory
Of those great Soldiers who by sea and land
Scattered the foemen to the winds of heaven,
First in the files of time. And though our mother,
Our Athens, sank, crushed by the might of Rome,
What is Rome now?—An Empire rent in twain;
An Empire sinking 'neath the unwieldy weight
Of its own power; an Empire where the Senate
Ranks lower than the Circus, and a wanton

33

Degrades the Imperial throne. But though to its fall
The monster totters, this our Cherson keeps
The bravery of old, and still maintains
The old Hellenic spirit and some likeness
Of the fair Commonwealth which ruled the world.
Surely, my father, 'tis a glorious spring
Drawn from the heaven-kissed summits whence we come;
And shall we, then, defile our noble blood
By mixture with this upstart tyranny
Which fouls the Hellenic pureness of its source
In countless bastard channels? If our State
Ask of its children sacrifice, 'tis well.
It shall be given; only I prithee, father,
Seek not that I should with barbaric blood
Taint the pure stream, which flows from Pericles.
Let me abide unwedded, if I may,
A Greek girl as before.

34

Lama. Daughter, thy choice
Is free as air to accept or to reject
This suitor; only, in the name of Cherson,
Do nothing rashly, and meanwhile take care
That nought that fits a Grecian State be wanting
To do him honour.

Gycia. Sir, it shall be done.

35

SCENE II.—*Outside the palace of LAMACHUS.*

MEGACLES *and* Courtiers.

Meg. Well, my lords, and so this is the palace. A grand palace, forsooth, and a fine reception to match! Why, these people are worse than barbarians. They are worse than the sea, and that was inhospitable enough. The saints be praised that that is over, at any rate. Oh, the intolerable scent of pitch, and the tossing and the heaving! Heaven spare me such an ordeal again! I thought I should have died of the smells. And here, can it be? Is it possible that there is a distinct odour of —pah! what? Oils, as I am a Christian, and close to the very palace of the Archon! What a detestable people! Some civet, good friends, some civet!

1st Court. Here it is, good Megacles. You did not hope, surely, to find republicans as sweet as those who live cleanly under a King? But here are some of their precious citizens at last.

36

Enter Citizens hurriedly.

1st Citizen. I pray you, forgive us, gentlemen. We thought the Prince would take the land at the other quay, and had prepared our welcome accordingly.

Meg. Who are these men?

1st Court. They are honourable citizens of Cherson.

Meg. Citizens! They will not do for me. The Count of the Palace should be here with the Grand Chamberlain to meet my Master.

1st Cit. Your Master? Oh! then you are a serving man, as it would seem. Well, my good man, when comes your Master?

Meg. Oh, the impertinent scoundrel! Do you know, sir, who I am?

1st Cit. Probably the Prince's attendant, his lackey, or possibly his steward. I neither know nor care.

37

Meg. Oh, you barbarian! Where is the Count of the Palace, I say?

1st Cit. Now, citizen, cease this nonsense. We have not, thank Heaven, any such foolish effeminate functionary.

Meg. No Count of the Palace? Heavens! what a crew! Well, if there is none, where are your leading nobles? where the Respectable and Illustrious? You are certainly not Illustrious nor Respectable; you probably are not even Honourable, or if you are you don't look it.

1st Cit. What, you wretched popinjay of a serving man! You dare address a Greek citizen in that way? Take that, and that!

[*Beats him.*

1st Court. Draw, gentlemen! These are ruffians!

[*They fight.*

Enter ASANDER.

38

Asan. Put up your swords, gentlemen. Why, fellows, what is this? Is this your hospitality to your guests?

1st Cit. Nay, sir; but this servant of yours has been most insolent, and has abused and insulted our State and its manners. He told us that we were not men of honour; and some of us, sir, are

young, and have hot blood, and, as Greek citizens of Cherson, will not bear insults.

Asan. Insolent upstarts, you are not worthy of our swords! Come, my Lord Megacles, heed them not. Here is their master.

Enter LAMACHUS and Senators.

Lama. We bid you heartfelt welcome, Prince, to Cherson.
That we have seemed to fail to do you honour
Comes of the spite of fortune. For your highness,
Taking the land at the entrance of the port,
Missed what of scanty pomp our homely manners
Would fain have offered; but we pray you think
'Twas an untoward accident, no more.
Welcome to Cherson, Prince!

39

Asan. Methinks, my lord,
Scarce in the meanest State is it the custom
To ask the presence of a noble guest
With much insistance, and when he accepts
The summons, and has come, to set on him
With insolent dogs like these.

Lama. Nay, Prince, I pray you,
What is it that has been?

Asan. Our chamberlain
Was lately, in your absence, which your highness
So glibly doth excuse, set on and beaten
By these dogs here.

Lama. Nay, sir, they are not dogs,
But citizens of honour; yet indeed
Wanting, I fear, in that deep courtesy
Which from a stranger and a guest refuses
To take provoked offence. My lord, indeed
I am ashamed that citizens of Cherson
Should act so mean a part. Come, Prince, I pray you
Forget this matter, and be sure your coming
Fills me with joy. Go, tell the Lady Gycia
The Prince is safe in Cherson.

40

Meg. My Lord Asander, remember what is due to yourself and Bosphorus. Remember, when this merchant's daughter comes, you *must* not treat her as an equal. Courtesy to a woman is all very well, but rank has greater claims still, especially when you have to deal with such people as these. Now, remember, you must make *no* obeisance at all; and if you advance to meet her more —(*Enter GYCIA, IRENE, MELISSA, and Ladies. IRENE, seeing ASANDER, faints, and is withdrawn, GYCIA supporting her. Confusion.*)—than one step, you are lost for ever. These are the truly important things.

41

Asan. Good Megacles,
Forewarned I am forearmed.
(*Aside*) Thou fluent trickster!
Fit head of such a State! I would to Heaven
I had never come!

Re-enter GYCIA.

Nay, nay, I thank the saints
That I have come. Who is this peerless creature?
Is this the old man's daughter?

Lama. Prince Asander,
This is my daughter, Gycia. Of the prince
Thou hast heard many a time, my daughter.

Gycia (confused). Ay!—
Indeed I—

Lama. Come, my girl, thou art not used
To fail of words.

Asan. Nay, sir, I pray you press her not to speak.
And yet I fain would hear her. Artemis
Showed not so fair, nor with a softer charm
Came Hebe's voice.

42

Gycia. Nay, sir, I did not know
A soldier could thus use a courtier's tongue.

Asan. If being bred in courts would give me power
To put my thought in words, then would I fain
Be courtier for thy sake.

Gycia. Ah, sir, you jest.

The ways of courts we know not, but I bid thee
Good welcome to our city, and I prithee
Command whatever service our poor Cherson
Can give whilst thou art here. (*To MEGACLES*) Pray you, my lord,
Accompany his Highness and our household
To the apartments which our serving men
Have now prepared. They are but poor, I know,
For one who lives the stately life of kings;
But such as our poor means can reach they are.

43

Meg. My lady, I have lived long time in courts,
But never, in the palaces of Rome,
Have I seen beauty such as yours, or grace
More worthy of a crown. (*To MELISSA*) To you, my lady,
I bow with most respectful homage. Surely
The goddess Heré has not left the earth
While you are here, I humbly take my leave
For the present of your Highness with a thousand
Obeisances, and to your gracious father
Humbly I bend the knee. My Lord Asander,
I do attend your Highness.

Mel. What a man!
What noble manners! What a polished air!
How poor to such a courtier our rude Court
And humble manners show!

Asan. Good Megacles,
Get me to my chamber—quick, ere I o'erpass
All reasonable limits. I am sped;
I am myself no more.

44

Lama. Farewell awhile.
We will welcome you at supper.

[*Exeunt all but LAMACHUS and GYCIA.*]

Lama. Well, my daughter,
What think you of this hot-brained youth? I' faith,
I like his soldier's bluntness, and he seemed
To be a little startled, as I thought,
By something which he saw when thou didst come.
Perchance it was the charm of one who came
Among thy ladies took him.

Gycia. Nay, my father,
I think not so indeed.

Lama. Ah! well, I am old,
And age forgets. But this I tell thee, daughter:
If in my youth I had seen a young man's gaze
Grow troubled, and he should start, and his cheek pale,
A young girl drawing near, I had almost thought
Him suddenly in love.

45

Gycia. Oh, nay indeed!
Who should be favoured thus? There is no woman
In our poor Cherson worthy that his gaze
Might rest on her a moment.

Lama. Ah, my girl,
Is it thus with thee? They say that love is blind,
And thou art blind, therefore it may be, Gycia,
That thou too art in love. Tell me how it is.
Couldst thou love this man, if he loved thee?

Gycia (*throwing herself on her father's neck*). Father!

Lama. Say no more, girl. I am not so old as yet
That I have quite forgotten my own youth,
When I was young and loved; and if I err not,
I read love's fluttering signals on thy cheek,
And in his tell-tale eyes. But listen! Music!
We must prepare for supper with our guests.

46

SCENE III.—*A street in Cherson.*

MEGACLES; *afterwards* MELISSA.

Megacles. Well, it is time for the banquet. Somehow, this place improves on acquaintance, after all. Poor, of course, and rude to a degree. But truly the Lady Gycia is fair—as fair, indeed, as if she was the Emperor's daughter. She is a beautiful creature, truly. But give *me* that delightful

lady-in-waiting of hers, the Lady Melissa. What grace! what rounded proportions! I like mature beauty. She is as like the late divine Empress as two peas, and I thought—I dare say I was wrong, but I really thought—I made an impression. Poor things! poor things! They can't help themselves. We courtiers really ought to be very careful not to abuse our power. It is positive cruelty. The contest is too unequal. It makes one inclined sometimes to put on the manners of a clown, so as to give them a chance. Nay, nay, you might as well ask the Ethiopian to change his skin as a courtier his fine manners. By all the saints! here she comes in *propriâ personâ*.

47

Enter the LADY MELISSA.

Mel. Heavens! it is the strange nobleman. I am sure I am all of a flutter.

Meg. (*advancing with formal bows*). My lady, I am enchanted (*bows again; then takes several steps to the right, then to the left, and bows*). What a wonderful good fortune! Ever since I had the honour to see you just now, I have only lived in the hope of seeing you again.

Mel. (*curtsying*). Oh, my lord, you great courtiers can find little to interest you in our poor little Court and its humble surroundings.

Meg. Madam, I beg! not a word! I was just thinking that you exactly resembled the late divine Empress.

Mel. Oh, my lord, forbear! The Empress! and I have never been out of Cherson! You flatter me, you flatter me, indeed. That is the way with all you courtiers from Constantinople. Now, if you had said that my Lady Gycia was beautiful—

48

Meg. My dear lady, I do not admire her in the least. She has no manners, really—nothing, at any rate, to attract a man of the great world; a mere undeveloped girl, with all the passion to come. No, no, my good lady, give me a woman who has lived. We courtiers know manners and breeding when we see them, and yours are simply perfect, not to say Imperial.

Mel. What a magnificent nature! Well, to say the truth, the Lady Gycia is not at all to my taste. It is a cold, insipid style of beauty, at the best; and she is as self-willed and as straitlaced as a lady abbess. I suppose she is well matched with the Prince Asander?

Meg. Well, he is a handsome lad enough, and virtuous, but weak, as youth always is, and pliable. Now, for myself, I am happy to say I am steadfast and firm as a rock.

49

Mel. Ah, my lord, if all women saw with my eyes, there would not be such a run after youth. Give me a mature man, who has seen the world and knows something of life and manners.

Meg. What an intelligent creature! Madam, your sentiments do you credit. I beg leave to lay at your feet the assurance of my entire devotion.

Mel. Oh, my lord, you are too good! Why, what a dear, condescending creature!—the manners of a Grand Chamberlain and the features of an Apollo!

Meg. Permit me to enrol myself among the ranks of your humble slaves and admirers (*kneels and kisses her hand*). But hark! the music, and I must marshal the guests to the banquet. Permit me to marshal you.

[Exeunt with measured steps.

50

SCENE IV.—*The garden without the banqueting-room. Moonlight. The sea in the distance, with the harbour.*

ASANDER and GYCIA *descend the steps of the palace slowly together. Music heard from within the hall.*

Asan. Come, Gycia, let us take the soft sweet air
Beneath the star of love. The festive lights
Still burn within the hall, where late we twain
Troth-plighted sate, and I from out thine eyes
Drank long, deep draughts of love stronger than wine.
And still the minstrels sound their dulcet strains,
Which then I heard not, since my ears were filled
With the sweet music of thy voice. My sweet,
How blest it is, left thus alone with love,
To hear the love-lorn nightingales complain
Beneath the star-gemmed heavens, and drink cool airs
Fresh from the summer sea! There sleeps the main
Which once I crossed unwilling. Was it years since,
In some old vanished life, or yesterday?
When saw I last my father and the shores
Of Bosphorus? Was it days since, or years,
Tell me, thou fair enchantress, who hast wove
So strong a spell around me?

51

Gycia. Nay, my lord;
Tell thou me first what magic 'tis hath turned
A woman who had scoffed so long at love
Until to-day—to-day, whose blessed night
Is hung so thick with stars—to feel as I,

That I have found the twin life which the gods
Retained when mine was fashioned, and must turn
To what so late was strange, as the flower turns
To the sun; ay, though he withers her, or clouds
Come 'twixt her and her light, turns still to him.
And only gazing lives.

Asan. Thou perfect woman!
And art thou, then, all mine? What have I done,
What have I been, that thus the favouring gods
And the consentient strength of hostile States
Conspire to make me happy? Ah! I fear,
Lest too great happiness be but a snare
Set for our feet by Fate, to take us fast
And then despoil our lives.

Gycia. My love, fear not.
We have found each other, and no power has strength
To put our lives asunder.

Asan. Thus I seal
Our contract with a kiss.

[*Kisses her.*]

Gycia. Oh, happiness!
To love and to be loved! And yet methinks
Love is not always thus. To some he brings
Deep disappointment only, and the pain
Of melancholy years. I have a lady
Who loves, but is unloved. Poor soul! she lives
A weary life. Some youth of Bosphorus
Stole her poor heart.

Asan. Of Bosphorus saidst thou?
And her name is?

Gycia. Irene. Didst thou know her?

Asan. Nay, love, or if I did I have forgot her.

Gycia. Poor soul! to-day when first we met, she saw
Her lover 'midst thy train and swooned away.

Asan. Poor heart! This shall be seen to. Tell me, Gycia,
Didst love me at first sight?

Gycia. Unreasonable,
To bid me tell what well thou knowest already.
Thou know'st I did. And when did love take thee?

Asan. I was wrapt up in spleen and haughty pride,
When, looking up, a great contentment took me,
Shed from thy gracious eyes. Nought else I saw,
Than thy dear self.

Gycia. And hadst thou ever loved?

Asan. Never, dear Gycia.
I have been so rapt in warlike enterprises
Or in the nimble chase, all my youth long,
That never had I looked upon a woman
With thought of love before, though it may be
That some had thought of me, being a Prince
And heir of Bosphorus.

Gycia. Not for thyself;
That could not be. Deceiver!

Asan. Nay, indeed!

Gycia. Oh, thou dear youth! I weary for the day
~~When~~ we our mutual love shall crown with marriage.

Gycia. Not yet, my love, we are so happy now.

Asan. But happier then, dear Gycia.

Gycia. Nay, I know not
If I could bear it and live. But hark, my love!
The music ceases, and the sated guests
Will soon be sped. Thou must resume thy place
Of honour for a little. I must go,
If my reluctant feet will bear me hence,
To dream of thee the livelong night. Farewell,
Farewell till morning. All the saints of heaven
Have thee in keeping!

52

53

54

55

Asan. Go not yet, my sweet;
And yet I bid thee go. Upon thy lips
I set love's seal, thus, thus.

[*Kisses her. They embrace.*

Good night!

Gycia.

Good night!

[*Exit GYCIA.*

Enter IRENE unperceived.

Asan. Ah, sweetest, best of women! paragon
Of all thy sex, since first thy ancestress
Helen, the curse of cities and of men,
Marshalled the hosts of Greece! But she brought discord;
Thou, by thy all-compelling sweetness, peace
And harmony for strife. What have I done,
I a rough soldier, like a thousand others
Upon our widespread plains, to have won this flower
Of womanhood—this jewel for the front
Of knightly pride to wear, and, wearing it,
Let all things else go by? To think that I,
Fool that I was, only a few hours since,
Bemoaned the lot which brought me here and bade me
Leave my own land, which now sinks fathoms deep
Beyond my memory's depths, and scarce would deign
To obey thee, best of fathers, when thy wisdom
Designed to make me blest! Was ever woman
So gracious and so comely? And I scorned her
For her Greek blood and love of liberty!
Fool! purblind fool! there is no other like her;
I glory being her slave.

56

57

Irene. I pray you, pardon me, my Lord Asander.
I seek the Lady Gycia; is she here?

Asan. No, madam; she has gone, and with her taken
The glory of the night. But thou dost love her—
Is it not so, fair lady?

Ire. Ay, my lord,
For we have lived together all our lives;
I could not choose but love.

Asan. Well said indeed.
Tell me, and have I seen thy face before?
A something in it haunts me.

Ire. Ay, my lord.
Am I forgot so soon?

Asan. Indeed! Thy name?
Where have I seen thee?

Ire. Where? Dost thou, then, ask?

Asan. Ay; in good truth, my treacherous memory
Betrays me here.

58

Ire. Thou mayest well forget
My name, if thou hast quite forgot its owner.
I am called Irene.

[*Weeps.*

Asan. Strange! the very name
My lady did relate to me as hers
Who bears a hopeless love. Weep not, good lady;
Take comfort. Heaven is kind.

Ire. Nay, my good lord,
What comfort? He I love loves not again,
Or not me, but another.

Asan. Ah, poor lady!
I pity you indeed, now I have known
True recompense of love.

Ire. Dost thou say pity?
And pity as they tell's akin to love.
What comfort is for me, my Lord Asander,
Who love one so exalted in estate
That all return of honourable love
Were hopeless, as if I should dare to raise
My eyes to Cæsar's self? What comfort have I,
If lately I have heard this man I love

59

Communing with his soul, when none seemed near,
Betray a heart flung prostrate at the feet
Of another, not myself; and well I know
Not Lethe's waters can wash out remembrance
Of that o'er-mastering passion—naught but death
Or hopeless depths of crime?

Asan. Lady, I pity
Thy case, and pray thy love may meet return.

Ire. Then wilt thou be the suppliant to thyself,
And willing love's requital, Oh, requite it!
Thou art my love, Asander—thou, none other,
There is naught I would not face, if I might win thee.
That I a woman should lay bare my soul;
Disclose the virgin secrets of my heart
To one who loves me not, and doth despise
The service I would tender!

60

Asan. Cease, I pray you;
These are distempered words.

Ire. Nay, they are true.
And come from the inner heart. Leave these strange shores
And her you love. I know her from a child.
She is too high and cold for mortal love;
Too wrapt in duty, and high thoughts of State,
Artemis and Athené fused in one,
Ever to throw her life and maiden shame
As I do at thy feet.

[*Kneels.*

Asan. Rise, lady, rise;
I am not worthy such devotion.

Ire. Take me
Over seas; I care not where. I'll be thy slave,
Thy sea-boy; follow thee, ill-housed, disguised,
Through hardship and through peril, so I see
Thy face sometimes, and hear sometimes thy voice,
For I am sick with love.

61

Asan. Lady, I prithee
Forget these wild words. I were less than man
Should I remember them, or take the gift
Which 'tis not reason offers. I knew not
Thy passion nor its object, nor am free
To take it, for the vision of my soul
Has looked upon its sun, and turns no more
To any lower light.

Ire. My Lord Asander,
She is not for thee; she cannot make thee happy,
Nor thou her. Oh, believe me! I am full
Of boding thoughts of the sure fatal day
Which shall dissolve in blood the bonds which love
To-day has plighted. If thou wilt not take me,
Then get thee gone alone. I see a fire
Which burns more fierce than love, and it consumes thee.
Fly with me, or alone, but fly.

62

Asan. Irene,
Passion distracts thy brain. I pray you, seek
Some mutual love as I. My heart is fixed,
And gone beyond recall.

[*Exit.*

Enter THEODORUS unseen.

Ire. (*weeping passionately*). Disgraced! betrayed!
Rejected! All the madness of my love
Flung back upon me, as one spurns a gift
Who scorns the giver. That I love him still,
And cannot hate her who has robbed me of him!
I shall go mad with shame!

Theo. Great Heaven! sister,
What words are these I hear? My father's daughter
Confessing to her shame!

[*IRENE weeps.*

Come, tell me, woman;
I am thy brother and protector, tell me
What mean these words?

63

Ire. Nay, nay, I cannot, brother.
They mean not what they seem, indeed they do not.

Theo. They mean not what they seem! Thou hast been long
In Bosphorus, and ofttimes at the Court
Hast seen the Prince. When he to-day comes hither,
Thou swoonest at the sight. I, seeking thee,
Find thee at night alone, he having left thee,
Lamenting for thy shame. Wouldst have me credit
Thy innocence? Speak, if thou hast a word
To balance proofs like these, or let thy silence
Condemn thee.

Ire. (after a pause, and slowly, as if calculating consequences). Then do I keep silence, brother,
And let thy vengeance fall.

Theo. Oh, long-dead mother,
Who now art with the saints, shut fast thy ears
Against thy daughter's shame! These are the things
That make it pain to live: all precious gifts,
Honour, observance, virtue, flung away
For one o'ermastering passion. Why are we
Above the brute so far, if we keep still
The weakness of the brute? Go from my sight,
Thou vile, degraded wretch. For him whose craft
And wickedness has wronged thee, this I swear—
I will kill him, if I can, or he shall me.
I will call on him to draw, and make my sword
Red with a villain's blood.

Ire. (eagerly). Nay, nay, my brother,
That would proclaim my shame; and shouldst thou slay him,
Thou wouldst break thy lady's heart.

Theo. Doth she so love him?

Ire. Ay, passionately, brother.

Theo. Oh, just Heaven!
And oh, confusèd world!
How are we fettered here! I may not kill
A villain who has done my sister wrong,
Since she I love has given her heart to him,
And hangs upon his life. I would not pain
My Gycia with the smallest, feeblest pang
That wrings a childish heart, for all the world.
How, then, to kill her love, though killing him
Would rid the world of a villain, and would leave
My lady free to love? 'Twere not love's part
To pain her thus, not for the wealth and power
Of all the world heaped up. I tell thee, sister,
Thy paramour is safe—I will not seek
To do him hurt; but thou shalt go to-night
To my Bithynian castle. Haply thence,
After long penances and recluse days,
Thou mayst return, and I may bear once more
To see my sister's face.

Ire. Farewell, my brother!
I do obey; I bide occasion, waiting
For what the years may bring.

Theo. Repent thy sin.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*Cherson, two years after. The palace of LAMACHUS.*

ASANDER and GYCIA.

Gycia. What day is this, Asander? Canst thou tell me?

Asan. Not I, my love. All days are now alike;

64

65

66

67

The weeks fleet by, the days equivalent gems
Strung on a golden thread.

Gycia. Thou careless darling!
I did not ask thee of the calendar.
Dost think a merchant's daughter knows not that?
Nay, nay; I only asked thee if thou knewest
If aught upon this day had ever brought
Some great change to thee.

68

Asan. Sweetest, dearest wife,
Our marriage! Thinkest thou I should forget,
Ay, though the chills of age had froze my brain,
That day of all my life?

Gycia. Dost thou regret it?
I *think* thou dost not, but 'tis sweet to hear
The avowal from thy lips?

Asan. Nay, never a moment.
And thou?

Gycia. Nay, never for a passing thought.
I did not know what life was till I knew thee.
Dost thou remember it, how I came forth,
Looking incuriously to see the stranger,
And lo! I spied my love, and could not murmur
A word of courtesy?

Asan. Dost thou remember
How I, a feverish and hot-brained youth,
Full of rash pride and princely arrogance,
Lifted my eyes and saw a goddess coming—

69

Gycia. Nay, a weak woman only.

Asan. And was tamed
By the first glance?

Gycia. What! are we lovers still,
After two years of marriage?

Asan. Is it two years,
Or twenty? By my faith, I know not which,
For happy lives glide on like seaward streams
Which keep their peaceful and unruffled course
So smoothly that the voyager hardly notes
The progress of the tide. Ay, two years 'tis,
And now it seems a day, now twenty years,
But always, always happy.

[*Embraces GYCIA.*

Gycia. Yet, my love,
We have known trials too. My honoured sire
Has gone and left us since.

70

Asan. Ay, he had reaped
The harvest of his days, and fell asleep
Amid the garnered sheaves.

Gycia. Dearest, I know
He loved thee as a son, and always strove
To fit thee for the place within our State
Which one day should be thine. Sometimes I think,
Since he has gone, I have been covetous
Of thy dear love, and kept thee from the labour
Of State-craft, and the daily manly toils
Which do befit thy age; and I have thought,
Viewing thee with the jealous eyes of love,
That I have marked some shade of melancholy
Creep on when none else saw thee, and desired
If only I might share it.

Asan. Nay, my love,
I have been happy truly, though sometimes,
It may be, I have missed the clear, brisk air
Of the free plains; the trumpet-notes of war,
When far against the sky the glint of spears
Lit by the rising sun revealed the ranks
Of the opposing host, the thundering onset
Of fierce conflicting squadrons, and the advance
Of the victorious hosts. Oh for the vigour
And freshness of such life! But I have chosen
To sleep on beds of down, as Cæsar might,

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And live a woman's minion.

Gycia. Good my husband,
Thou shouldst not speak thus. I would have thee win
Thy place in the Senate, rule our Cherson's fortunes,
Be what my father was without the name,
And gain that too in time.

Asan. What! You would have me
Cozen, intrigue, and cheat, and play the huckster,
As your republicans, peace on their lips
And subtle scheming treaties, till the moment
When it is safe to spring? Would you have me cringe
To the ignorant mob of churls, through whose sweet voices
The road to greatness lies? Nay, nay; I am
A King's son, and of Bosphorus, not Cherson—
A Scythian more than Greek.

Gycia. Nay, my good lord,
Scythian or Greek, to me thou art more dear
Than all the world beside. Yet will not duty,
The memory of the dead, the love of country,
The pride of the great race from which we spring,
Suffer my silence wholly, hearing thee.
It is not true that men Athenian-born
Are of less courage, less of noble nature,
More crafty in design, less frank of purpose,
Than are thy countrymen. They have met and fought them,
Thou knowest with what fate. For polity
I hold it better that self-governed men
Should, using freedom, but eschewing license,
Fare to what chequered fate the will of Heaven
Reserves for them, than shackled by the chains
The wisest tyrant, gilding servitude
With seeming gains, imposes. We are free
In speech, in council, in debate, in act,
As when our great Demosthenes hurled back
Defiance to the tyrant. Nay, my lord,
Forgive my open speech. I have not forgot
That we are one in heart and mind and soul,
Knit in sweet bonds for ever. Put from thee
This jaundiced humour.
If State-craft please not, by the headlong chase
Which once I know thou lovedst. Do not grudge
To leave me; for to-day my bosom friend,
After two years of absence, comes to me.
I shall not feel alone, having Irene.

Asan. Whom dost thou say? Irene?

Gycia. Yes, the same
She was crossed in love, poor girl, dost thou remember,
When we were wed?

Asan. *Gycia,* I mind it well.
Send her away—she is no companion for thee;
She is not fit, I say.

Gycia. What is't thou sayest?
Thou canst know nought of her. Nay, I remember,
When I did ask thee if thou knewest her
At Bosphorus, thou answeredst that thou didst not.

Asan. I know her. She is no fit mate for thee.

Gycia. Then, thou didst know her when thy tongue denied it.

Asan. How 'tis I know her boots not; I forbid
My wife to know that woman. Send her hence.

Gycia. Nay, nay, my lord, it profits not to quarrel.
Thou art not thyself. Either thou knew'st her name
When we were wedded, or unreasoning spleen
Doth blind thy judgment since. Thou canst not know her
Who has been absent.

Asan. Ask no more, good wife;
I give no reason.

Gycia. Nay, indeed, good husband,
Thou hast no reason, and without good reason
I will not spurn my friend.

Asan. Gycia, forgive me;
I spoke but for our good, and I will tell thee
One day what stirs within me, but to-day
Let us not mar our happy memories
By any shade of discord.

Gycia. Oh, my love,
Forgive me if I have seemed, but for a moment,
To fail in duty. I am all, all thine;
I have nought but thee to live for. Childish hands
And baby voices lisping for their mother
Are not for me, nor thee; but, all in all,
We joy together, we sorrow together, and last
Shall die, when the hour comes, as something tells me,
Both in the selfsame hour.

Asan. Nay, wife, we are young;
Our time is not yet come. Let us speak now
Of what I know thou holdest near thy heart.
I do remember that it was thy wish
To celebrate thy father's name and fame
By some high festal. If thy purpose hold
For such observance, the sad day which took him
Returns a short time hence; I will employ
Whatever wealth is mine to do him honour,
And thee, my Gycia. Honouring the sire,
I honour too the child.

Gycia. My love, I thank thee
For this spontaneous kindness, and I love thee;
I am all thine own again. Come, let us go;
Nor spare the wealth wherewith his bounty blest us
To do fit honour to the illustrious dead.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—*The same.*

MEGACLES, COURTIERS; *afterwards* ASANDER.

Meg. Well, my lords, two years have passed since we left our Bosphorus, and I see no sign of our returning there. If it were not for that delightful Lady Melissa, whose humble slave I am always (*Courtiers laugh*), I would give all I am worth to turn my back upon this scurvy city and its republican crew. But my Lord Asander is so devoted to his fair lady—and, indeed, I can hardly wonder at it—that there seems no hope of our seeing the old shores again. I thought he would have been off long ago.

1st Court. A model husband the Prince, a paragon of virtue.

2nd Court. Well, there is no great merit in being faithful to a rich and beautiful woman. I think I could be as steady as a rock under the like conditions.

3rd Court. Well, mind ye, it is not every man who could treat the very marked overtures of the fair Lady Irene as he did. And he had not seen his wife then, either. No; the man is a curious mixture, somewhat cold, and altogether constant, and that is not a bad combination to keep a man straight with the sex. Poor soul! do you remember how she pursued him at Bosphorus, and how she fainted away at the wedding? They say she is coming back speedily, in her right mind. She has been away ever since, no one knows where. That solemn brother of hers conveyed her away privily.

1st Court. I hate that fellow—a canting hypocrite, a solemn impostor!

2nd Court. So say we all. But mark you, if the Lady Irene comes back, there will be mischief before long. What news from Bosphorus, my Lord Megacles?

Meg. I have heard a rumour, my lord, that his Majesty the King is ailing.

1st Court. Nay, is he? Then there may be a new King and a new Queen, and we shall leave this dog-hole and live at home like gentlemen once more.

3rd Court. Then would his sacred Majesty's removal be a blessing in disguise.

2nd Court. Ay, indeed would it. Does the Prince know of it?

Meg. I have not told him aught, having, indeed, nothing certain to tell; but he soon will, if it be true. But here his Highness comes.

Enter ASANDER.

My Lord Asander, your Highness's humble servant welcomes you with effusion.

[*Bows low.*]

Asan. Well, my good Megacles, and you, my lords. There will be ample work for you all ere long. The Lady Gycia is projecting a great festival in memory of her father, and all that the wealth of

Cherson can do to honour him will be done. There will be solemn processions, a banquet, and a people's holiday. Dost thou not spy some good ceremonial work there, my good Megacles? Why, thou wilt be as happy as if thou wert at Byzantium itself, marshalling the processions, arranging the banquet, ushering in the guests in due precedence, the shipowner before the merchant, the merchant before the retailer. Why, what couldst thou want more, old Trusty?

[Laughs.]

Meg. Ah, my Lord Prince, your Highness is young. When you are as old as I am, you will not scoff at Ceremony. This is the pleasantest day that I have spent since your Highness's wedding-day. I thank you greatly, and will do my best, your Highness.

Asan. That I am sure of, good Megacles. Good day, my lords, good day.

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[Exeunt MEGACLES and Courtiers.]

Enter Messenger.

Mess. My Lord Asander, a messenger from Bosphorus has just landed, bringing this letter for your Highness.

Asan. Let me see it. (*Reads*) "Lysimachus to Asander sends greeting. Thy father is failing fast, and is always asking for his son. Thou art free, and must come to him before he dies. I have much to say to thee, having heard long since of a festival in memory of Lamachus to be held shortly. I will be with thee before then. Be ready to carry out the plan which I have formed for thy good, and will reveal to thee. Remember."

My father ailing?

And asks for me, and I his only son
Chained here inactive, while the old man pines
In that great solitude which hems a thro
With none but hirelings round him. Dearest father,
I fear that sometimes in the happy years
Which have come since, my wandering regards,
Fixed on one overmastering thought, have failed
To keep their wonted duty. If indeed
This thing has been, I joy the time has come
When I may show my love. But I forget!
The fetters honour binds are adamant;
I am free no more. Nay, nay, there is no bond
Can bind a son who hears his father's voice
Call from a bed of pain. I must go and will,
Though all the world cry shame on my dishonour;
And with me I will take my love, my bride,
To glad the old man's eyes. My mind is fixed;
I cannot stay, I cannot rest, away
From Bosphorus. (*Summons Messenger*) Go, call the Lady Gycia.
(*Resumes*) Ay, and my oath, I had forgotten it.
I cannot bear to think what pitiless plot
Lysimachus has woven for the feast.
What it may be I know not, but I fear
Some dark and dreadful deed. 'Twere well enough
For one who never knew the friendly grasp
Of hands that once were foemen's. But for me,
Who have lived among them, come and gone with them,
Trodden with them the daily paths of life,
Mixed in their pleasures, shared their hopes and fears
For two long happy years, to turn and doom
Their city to ruin, and their wives and children
To the insolence of rapine? Nay, I dare not.
I will sail at once, and get me gone for ever.
I will not tell my love that I am bound
By her father's jealous fancies to return
To Bosphorus no more. To break my oath!
That were to break it only in the word,
But keep it in the spirit. Surely Heaven
For such an innocent perjury keeps no pains.
But here she comes.

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Enter GYCIA.

Gycia. Didst send for me, my lord?

Asan. Gycia, the King is ill, and asks for me;
He is alone and weak.

Gycia. Then, fly to him
At once, and I will follow thee. But stay!
Is he in danger?

Asan. Nay, not presently;
Only the increasing weight of years o'ersets

His feeble sum of force.

Gycia. Keeps he his bed?

Asan. Not yet as I have known.

Gycia. Well then, dear heart,
We yet may be in time if we should tarry
To celebrate the honours we have vowed

To my dead father. This day sennight brings
The day which saw him die.

Asan. Nay, nay, my sweet;
'Twere best we went at once.

Gycia. My lord, I honour
The love thou bearest him, but go I cannot,
Until the feast is done. 'Twould cast discredit
On every daughter's love for her dead sire,
If I should leave this solemn festival
With all to do, and let the envious crowd
Carp at the scant penurious courtesy
Of hireling honours by an absent daughter
To her illustrious dead.

Asan. (earnestly). My love, 'twere best
We both were far away.

Gycia. My lord is pleased
To speak in riddles, but till reason speaks
'Twere waste of time to listen.

Asan. Nay, my wife,
Such words become thee not, but to obey
Is the best grace of woman. Were I able,
I would tell thee all, I fear, for thee and me,
But cannot.

Gycia. Then, love, thou canst go alone,
And I must follow thee. The Archon Zetho
Comes presently, to order what remains
To make the solemn festival do honour
To the blest memory of Lamachus.
Doubtless, he will devise some fitting pretext
To excuse thy absence.

Asan. Nay, thou must not ask him;
Breathe not a word, I pray.

Gycia. My good Asander,
What is it moves thee thus? See, here he comes.

Enter ZETHO and Senators.

Gycia. Good morrow, my Lord Zetho! We were late,
Debating of the coming festival,
And how my lord the Prince, having ill news
From Bosphorus, where the King his sire lies sick,
Can bear no part in it.

Zetho. I grieve indeed
To hear this news, and trust that Heaven may send
Swift comfort to his son, whom we all love.

Asan. I thank thee, Archon, for thy courtesy;
And may thy wish come true.

Gycia. And meantime, since my husband's heart is sore
For his sire's loneliness, our purpose is
That he should sail to-morrow and go hence
To Bosphorus, where I, the festival
Being done, will join him later, and devote
A daughter's loving care and tender hand
To smooth the old man's sick-bed.

Zetho. Nay, my daughter,
I grieve this cannot be. The Prince Asander,
Coming to Cherson only two years gone,
Did pledge his solemn word to thy dead father
That never would he seek, come foul or fair,
To turn from Cherson homewards, and I marvel
That never, in the years that since have passed
Amid the close-knit bonds of wedded lives,
He has revealed this secret. We who rule

Our Cherson know through what blind shoals of fortune
Our ship of state drives onward. And I dare not,
Holding the rule which was thy father's once,
Release him from the solemn pledge which keeps
Our several States bound fast in amity,
But each from the other separate, and each
Free from the perils tangled intercourse
Might breed for both. Indeed, it cannot be;
I grieve that so it is.

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Gycia. My Lord Asander,
Are these things so indeed?

Asan. They are, my wife.
A rash and heedless promise binds me fast,
Which, in all frankness, I had never dreamt
Could thus demand fulfilment. Who is there
More loyal to the State than I? Who is there
Bound by such precious chains of love and faith
As is thy husband? If I said no word
Of this before, it was that I would fain
Forget this hateful compact. Sir, I beg you
Let me go hence, and when the old man's sickness
Is done, as Heaven will have it, take my word
That I will be a citizen of Cherson
Again, whate'er may come.

Zetho. If the King dies,
Then art thou straightway King of Bosphorus,
Knowing the strength and weakness of our State,
And having bound to thee by closest friendship
Our chiefest citizens. Nay, nay, I dare not
Relieve thee from the pledge.

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Asan. Thou hoary trickster,
Speakest thou thus to me?

[*Draws.*

Gycia (interposing). Great heavens! Asander,
Knowest thou what thou dost? (*To ZETHO*) Pardon him, sir.
He is not himself, I think, but half distraught,
To bear himself thus madly.

Zetho. Daughter, the State
Knows to protect itself from insolence
And arrogant pride like this, and it is certain
'Twas a wise caution led thy honoured father
To stipulate that such ungoverned passion
Should be cut off from those conspiring forces
From which combined came danger.

Asan. Gycia,
Hearest thou this schemer? Dost thou know indeed
That I am prisoned here, while my loved father
Lies on the bed of death? Dost thou distrust me,
That thou dost speak no word?

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Gycia. My lord, I cannot.
The measure which my father's wisdom planned
For the safety of the State, I, a weak woman,
Am too infirm to judge. Thou didst not tell me,
Asking that I should fly with thee, the bonds
By which thy feet were fettered. Had I known
I never had consented. Had I gone,
Breaking the solemn ordinance of State,
I should have left with thee my former love,
And sailed back broken-hearted. That thou grieveest
There is none knows as I, but oh, my love!
Though it be hard to bear, yet is grief lighter
Than broken vows, and blighted honour, and laws
Made to sustain the State, yet upset
By one man's will. Dearest, we cannot go—
Nor thou; the State forbids it. I will pray
Thy father may grow strong again, and sit
Here at our hearth a guest; but this is certain—
To Bosphorus we go not. And I pray you
Make to my lord, who fills my father's place,
What reparation thy ungoverned rage
And hasty tongue demand.

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Asan. Thou cold Greek woman!
Of this, then, 'twas they warned me—a smooth tongue
And a cold heart; a brain by logic ruled,
And not at all by love. Thou hast no pity,
For pity shapes not into syllogisms;
Nor can affection ape philosophy,
Nor natural love put on the formal robe
Of cold too-balanced State-craft. Hear me, old man,
And thou too, wife. 'Twere better, ay, far better,
That I should get me gone, and my wife with me,
Than be pent here unwilling; but were it better
Or were it worse, be sure I will not stay
When duty calls me hence. Wife, wilt thou come?

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Gycia. My lord, I cannot.

Asan. Then, I go alone.

Zetho. Nay, thou shalt not. Ho there! arrest the Prince.

[Guards *arrest* ASANDER.

Asan. Unhand me. At your peril.

[*Draws.*

Gycia. Oh, my husband!

[*Weeps.*

SCENE III.—*A room in the palace.*

IRENE; afterwards GYCIA.

Ire. What! am I mad, or does some devilish power
Possess me heart and soul? I once loved Gycia;
I love Asander with o'er-mastering love,
And yet these frequent rumours of dissensions
Marring the smooth course of their wedded life
Bring me a swift, fierce joy. If aught befell
To separate those lovers, then might Fate
And Chance open for me the golden doors
That lead to Love's own shrine; and yet I know not
If any power might melt to mutual love
That too-cold heart. But still, no other chance
Is left but this alone: if I should force
Those loving souls apart, then 'twere my turn.
Am I a monster, then, to will this wrong?
Nay, but a lovesick woman only, willing
To dare all for her passion. Though I loathe
Those crooked ways, yet love, despite myself,
Drives me relentless onward.

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Enter GYCIA.

Dearest lady,
Why art thou thus cast down? Some lovers' quarrel,
To be interred with kisses?

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Gycia. Nay, Irene,
This is no lovers' quarrel.

Ire. Tell me, Gycia,
What was the cause?

Gycia. The King of Bosphorus
Is ailing, and desires to see his son,
Who fain would go to him.

Ire. And thou refusedst
To let thy lover go?

[*Laughs mockingly.*

Gycia. Nay, 'twas not so;
But politic reasons of the State forbad
The Prince's absence.

Ire. Well, whate'er the cause,
The old man fain would see his son, and thou
Deniedst.

Gycia. I denied him what the State
Denied him, and no more.

Ire. The State denied him!
What does it profit thee to be the daughter
Of Lamachus, if thou art fettered thus

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In each wish of thy heart? If it were I,
And he my love, I would break all bonds that came
Between me and my love's desire.

Gycia. Irene,
Thou know'st not what thou say'st.

Ire. It may be so;
I do not love by halves.

Gycia. I do not need
That thou shouldst tutor me, who am so blest
In love's requital. I have nought to learn
From thee, who bearest unrequited love
For one thou wilt not name.

Ire. Wouldst thou that I
Should name him? Nay, it were best not, believe me,
For me and thee.

Gycia. Why, what were it to me,
Thou luckless woman?

Ire. What were it to thee?
More than thou knowest, much.

Gycia. And therefore 'tis
That thou dost dare to tutor me to deal
With the man I love, my husband.

Ire. Gycia,
Love is a tyrannous power, and brooks no rival
Beside his throne. Dost thou, then, love indeed,
Who art so filled with duty?

Gycia. Do I love?
Ay, from the depths of my enamoured heart!
I am all his own to make or break at will.
Only my duty to the State my mother
And the thrice-blessèd memory of my sire
Forbids that I should sink my soul in his,
Or, loving, grow unworthy. But, indeed,
Thou pleadest his cause as if thyself did love him.

Ire. As if I loved!—as if!

Gycia. Indeed, 'tis well
Thou didst not, were he free, for he, it seems,
Has known of thee, and speaks not kindly words.
I know not wherefore.

Ire. Did he speak of me?

Gycia. Ay, that he did.

Ire. And what said he?

Gycia. I think
'Twere best thou didst not know.

Ire. Tell me, I prithee;
I can bear to hear.

Gycia. 'Twas but a hasty word,
And best forgotten.

Ire. But I prithee tell me,
What said he?

Gycia. That 'twere best I were alone
Than commercing with thee, since thou wert not
My fit companion.

Ire. Said he that, the coward?

Gycia. I am his wife, Irene.

Ire. What care I?
I have loved this man too well, before he saw thee.
There, thou hast now my secret. I have loved him,
And he loved me, and left me, and betrayed me.
Was it for him to brand me with this stain?
Unfit for thy companion! If I be,
Whose fault is that but his, who found me pure
And left me what I am?

Gycia. What! dost thou dare
Malign my husband thus? I have known his life

From his own lips, and heard no word of thee.

Ire. He did confess he knew me.

Gycia. Ay, indeed,
Not that he did thee wrong.

Ire. My Lady Gycia,
Did ever man confess he wronged a woman?
If thou believe not me, who am indeed
Disgraced, and by his fault, thou once didst love
My brother Theodorus—send for him.
He is without, and waits me. Ask of him,
Who has long known my secret.

Gycia. I will ask him.
Thou wretched woman, since thou art polluted,
Whate'er my love may be, go from my sight,
And send thy brother. Then betake thyself
To a close prison in the haunted Tower,
Till I shall free thee. Out of my sight, I say,
Thou wanton!

[*Exit* IRENE.]

What have I done, how have I sinned, that Heaven
Tortures me thus? How can I doubt this creature
Speaks something of the truth? Did he not say
At first he never knew that wanton's name?
Did he not afterwards betray such knowledge
Of her and of her life as showed the lie
His former words concealed? And yet how doubt
My dear, who by two years of wedded love
Has knit my soul to his? I know how lightly
The world holds manly virtue, but I hold
The laws of honour are not made to bind
Half of the race alone, leaving men licensed
To break them when they will; but dread decrees
Binding on all our kind. But oh, my love,
I will not doubt thee, till conviction bring
Proofs that I dare not doubt!

Enter THEODORUS.

Theo. My Lady Gycia,
I come at thy command.

Gycia. Good Theodorus,
Thou lovedst me once, I think?

Theo. I loved thee *once!*
Oh, heaven!

Gycia. I am in great perplexity
And sorrow, and I call upon thy friendship
To succour me, by frank and free confession
Of all thou knowest.

Theo. I can refuse thee nothing,
Only I beg that thou wilt ask me nought
That answered may give pain.

Gycia. Nay, it is best
That I know all. I could not bear to live
In ignorance, and yet I fear to grieve thee
By what I ask. Thy sister late has left me——

Theo. Ask not of her, I pray; I cannot answer.

Gycia. Nay, by thy love I ask it. Answer me.

Theo. Have me excused, I pray.
That answered may give pain.

Gycia. Then, I am answered.
My husband, she affirms, betrayed her honour
In Bosphorus, and now denies the crime.
Thou knowest it true.

Theo. Alas! I cannot doubt it.
I have known all for years.

Gycia. Ye saints of heaven!
Is there no shame or purity in men,
Nor room for trust in them? I am a wife
Who thought she did possess her husband wholly,

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Virgin with virgin. I have thought I knew
His inmost heart, and found it innocent;
And yet while thus I held him, while I lay
Upon his bosom, all these happy hours
The venom of a shameful secret lurked
Within his breast. Oh, monster of deceit,
Thou never lovedst as I! That I should give
The untouched treasure of my virgin heart
For some foul embers of a burnt-out love,
And lavish on the waste a wanton left
My heart, my soul, my life! Oh, it is cruel!
I will never see him more, nor hear his voice,
But die unloved and friendless.

104

[Weeps.

Theo. (kneeling at her feet). Dearest Gycia,
Thou canst not want a brother, friend, and lover
While I am living. Oh, my love, my dear,
Whom I have loved from childhood, put away
This hateful marriage, free thee from the bonds
Of this polluted wedlock, and make happy
One who will love thee always!

Enter LYSIMACHUS *unperceived.*

Gycia. Rise, Theodorus.
I have no love to give. I am a wife.
Such words dishonour me.

Theo. Forgive me, Gycia.
I know how pure thy soul, and would not have thee
Aught other than thou art.

Gycia. I do forgive thee.
'Twas love confused thy reason; but be brave.
Set a guard on thy acts, thy words, thy thoughts.
'Tis an unhappy world!

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[THEODORUS *kisses her hand and exit.*

Lys. Most noble lady,
Forgive me if at an unfitting time,
Amid the soft devoirs of gallantry,
I thus intrude unwilling; but I seek
The Prince Asander.

Gycia. I have nought to hide
My husband might not know.

Lys. Then, thou art, doubtless,
His wife, the Lady Gycia. Good my lady,
With such a presence to become a crown,
We would you were at Bosphorus.

Gycia. 'Tis clear
Thou art a stranger here, or thou wouldst know
That never would I leave my native city
To win the crown of Rome.

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Lys. Madam, 'tis pity.

Gycia. Sir, this is courtly talk. You came to see
My husband; I will order that they send him
At once to you.

[Exit GYCIA.

Lys. That was indeed good fortune brought me hither
When her lover knelt to her. I do not wonder
That kneel he should, for she is beautiful
As Helen's self. There comes some difference
Between her and Asander, and 'twere strange
If I might not so work on't as to widen
The breach good fortune sends me, and to bind,
Through that which I have seen, the boy her husband
To execute my will.

Enter ASANDER.

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Asan. Lysimachus,
I am rejoiced to see thee.

Lys. Good my lord,
How goes the world with thee? Thou art in mien
Graver than thou wast once.

Asan. I am ill at ease!
I am ill at ease! How does the King my father?

Lys. Alas! sir, he is ailing, and I fear
Will never mend.

Asan. Is he in present danger?

Lys. Ay, that he is. A month or less from this
May see the end.

Asan. Keeps he his bed as yet?

Lys. Nay, not yet, when I left him; but his mind
Turns always to his absent son with longing,
And sometimes, as it were 'twixt sleep and waking
I hear him say, "Asander, oh, my son!
Shall I not see thee more?"

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Asan. Oh, my dear father!
And dost thou love me thus, who have forgot thee
These two long years? Belovèd, lonely life!
Belovèd failing eyes! Lysimachus,
I must go hence, and yet my honour binds me.
O God, which shall I choose? They do forbid me—
The ruler of this place and that good woman
Who is my wife, but holds their cursèd State
More than my love—to go.

Lys. My prince, I come
To find a way by which thou mayst go free
From that which binds thee fast. This festival
To the dead Lamachus will give the occasion
To set thee free. If thou dost doubt to break
Thy word, yet doth a stronger, straiter chain
Bind thee—thy oath. Thou hast not forgot thy oath
To Bosphorus?

109

Asan. Nay, I forget it not.
But what is it thou wouldst of me?

Lys. Asander,
The night which ends the festival shall see us
Masters of Cherson.

Asan. Nay, but 'twere dishonour
To set upon a friendly State from ambush—
'Twere murder, and not battle.

Lys. Art thou false
To thy own land and to thy dying father?

Asan. That I am not; but never could I bear
To play the midnight thief, and massacre
Without announcement of legitimate war
Whom daily I have known. My wife I love
With all the love of my soul. If she seem cold
When any word is spoken which may touch
The safety of the State, think you she would love
The husband who destroyed it? All my heart
Is in her keeping.

110

Lys. It is well indeed
To have such faith. Doubtless the Lady Gycia
Returns this pure affection.

Asan. I would doubt
The saints in heaven sooner than her truth,
Which if I doubted, then the skies might fall,
The bounds of right and wrong might be removed,
The perjurer show truthful, and the wanton
Chaste as the virgin, and the cold, pure saint
More foolish than the prodigal who eats
The husks of sense—it were all one to me;
I could not trust in virtue.

Lys. Thou art changed
Since when thy ship set sail from Bosphorus;
Thou didst not always think with such fond thought
As now thou dost. Say, didst thou find thy bride
Heart-whole as thou didst wish? Had she no lover
Ere yet thou camest?

111

Asan. Nay, nay; I found my wife

Virgin in heart and soul.

Lys. My Lord Asander,
Art thou too credulous here? What if I saw her
On that same spot, not half an hour ago,
In tears, and kneeling at her feet a gallant
Noble and comely as a morn in June,
Who bade her break, with passionate words of love,
Her hateful marriage vows, and make him blest
Who must for ever love?

Asan. Thou sawest my wife
Gycia, my pearl of women, my life, my treasure?
Nay, nay, 'tis some sick dream! Thou art mistaken.
Who knelt to her?

Lys. She called him Theodorus.

Asan. Irene's brother! Who was it who said
He loved her without hope? Lysimachus,
What is it that thou sawest? Come, 'tis a jest!
Kneeling to Gycia, praying her to fly!
Nay, nay, what folly is this?

112

[Laughs.

Lys. My lord, I swear
It is no jest indeed, but solemn earnest.
I saw him kneel to her; I heard the passion
Burn through his voice.

Asan. And she? What did my lady?
She did repulse him sternly?

Lys. Nay, indeed,
She wept; was greatly moved, and whispered to him,
"I am a wife."

Asan. Peace, peace! I will not hear
Another word. How little do they know thee,
My white, pure dove! My Lord Lysimachus,
Some glamour has misled thee.

Lys. Well, my lord,
I should rejoice to think it, but I cannot
Deny my eyes and ears. Is not this noble
The brother of the lady who was once
At Bosphorus at Court, and now attends
The Lady Gycia?

113

Asan. Ay, indeed he is.

Lys. Well, she is near at hand; if thy belief
Inclines not to my tale—which yet is true—
Couldst thou not ask of her if ere your marriage
Her brother was enamoured of your wife,
And she of him?

Asan. That might I do indeed.
But, sooth to say, I would not speak again
With her you name; and it may be indeed,
Since well I know her, that the Lady Gycia,
Who is angered with her for what cause I know not,
Might well resent the converse.

Lys. Prince Asander,
There is no man so blind as he who closes
His eyes to the light and will not have it shine,
As thou dost now.

114

Asan. Then will I see this lady,
Though knowing it is vain.

[Exit ASANDER.

Lys. I do not know
What he will hear, but this at least I know:
That woman loves him, and will lie to sow
Dissension 'twixt these lovers—which accomplished,
The rest is easy, and I hold this Cherson
In the hollow of my hand. Ha! a good thought.
I will send a message to the Lady Gycia
Which shall ensure't. If she dislikes her friend,
It is odds of ten to one some jealous humour
Has caused it, or may grow of it.

"Dear lady,
Thou art wronged; the Prince Asander presently
Is with Irene alone. Seek them, and wring
Confession of their fault."

115

[Summons a Messenger.]

Ho there! convey
These to the Lady Gycia, but stay not
To tell her whence they come.

Mess. I go, my lord.

SCENE IV.—IRENE'S *prison*.

IRENE; afterwards ASANDER and GYCIA.

Ire. To think that once I loved that haughty woman!
Ah, that was long ago, before love came
To tear our lives asunder. Though her power
Can pen me here a prisoner, yet I know
That I have pierced her heart. Oh, it is sweet
To be revenged, and know that vengeance brings
Victory in its train! If I had power
To make Asander jealous of this wonder,
Then all were easy. But I know no means
Whereby from this strait prison I might sow
Suspicion of her who has never given
A shadow of cause.

116

Attendant. The Lord Asander comes.

Enter ASANDER.

Asan. Lady, I grieve that thou art in this place,
And fain would set thee free. Tell me what cause
Has brought thee hither.

Ire. Ask me not, my lord;
I cannot tell thee.

Asan. Nay, but know I must,
To plead thy cause.

Ire. 'Twas too great love of thee,
The love which thou didst spurn, that brought me here.

Asan. But how should that be so?

Ire. The Lady Gycia,
Holding thee to thy promise that thou wouldst not
Go hence—no, not to close thy father's eyes—
Took umbrage that I spoke with scant respect
Of such unreasoning and unnatural bond
As that which she approves.

117

Asan. Then am I grateful
For thy good-will, and grieve that it should bring thee
To pine a prisoner here, and will essay
What reason can to free thee.

Ire. Thanks, my lord,
I would that *thou* wert free. I knew the King,
And did receive much fatherly affection
From that most reverend man. I grieve to hear
That he lies sick, and would rejoice to tend him
As if I were a daughter.

Asan. Gentle lady,
No other voice of sympathy than thine
Have I yet heard in Cherson, and I thank thee
For thy good-will.

Ire. 'Tis always thine, my lord,
And more, though I should end my wretched days
In prison for thy sake.

118

Asan. I thank thee, lady,
And fain would ask of thee a greater kindness:
I would that thou wouldst tell me of thy brother.

Ire. My brother Theodorus? What of him?

Asan. This only. Did he, ere I knew my wife,
Bear towards her a great though innocent love?

Ire. A great though innocent love? Ay, a great love,
For certain. Spoke she not of it to thee?

Asan. No word!

Ire. Ah! yet, maybe, 'twas innocent—Nay,
I believe it, though she spoke not of it,
And 'tis the wont of wives to laugh and boast
Of innocent conquests.

Asan. Nay, she spoke no word.

Ire. And did no other of thy friends at Cherson
Tell thee? Why, 'twas the talk of all the city
How close they grew together, till thy coming
And the necessities of Cherson turned
Her eyes from him to thee.

Asan. And does he still
Bear love for her?

Ire. And does he still bear love?
Ay, passionate love. The heart which truly loves
Puts not its love aside for ends of State,
Or marriage bonds, or what the dullard law
Suffers or does not suffer, but grows stronger
For that which seeks to thwart it.

Asan. And did she
My wife return this love?

Ire. Ay, so 'twas said.
Ask me no more, I pray!

Enter GYCIA unperceived.

Asan. Nay, by the love
Thou bearest to me, speak!

Gycia. My Lord Asander,
What dost thou with this woman thus alone?

Asan. 'Twere best thou didst not ask.

Gycia. I have a right
I will be answered. First, thou didst deny
Thou knewest aught of her; then said her nature
Was such I might not call her friend, or live
With her within four walls; and now, her fault—
Which she herself proclaimed—penning her here
In a close prison, thou my husband comest
To comfort her, 'twould seem—to travel o'er
Again the old foul paths and secretly
To gloat on the old passion.

Asan. Nay, I came
Not for this cause, but one which I will tell thee.
I came to question of thy former love.

Gycia. To question *her* of *me*?

Asan. To know the cause
That made my wife, scarce one short hour ago,
Within my home, when hardly I had left her,
Receive alone a lover kneeling to her
With words of passionate love, and whisper to him,
"I am a wife."

Gycia. Hast thou no shame, Asander,
To speak such words to me before this woman,
Who knows her brother's life?

Ire. Nay, prithee, madam,
Appeal not to me thus; I could say much
On which I would keep silence.

Gycia. Thou base woman,
And thou poor dupe or most perfidious man,
It were to honour ye to make defence
Against a wanton and her paramour;
But thee, Asander, never will I take
To my heart again, till thou hast put from thee
This lying accusation, and dost ask
Pardon that thou hast dared with this base wretch
To impugn my honour.

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Asan. Thou hast said no word
Of answer to my charge; thy bold defiance
Argues thy guilt.

Gycia. My guilt? And canst thou dare
To say this thing to me? I will speak no word;
Denial were disgrace. Sir, I will have you
Leave this place quickly.

Asan. Madam, I obey you.

[*Exit.*

Gycia. And I too go.

[*Exit.*

Ire. I hold these hapless fools
In the hollow of my hand.

123

SCENE V.—*Outside the palace.*

LYSIMACHUS *and three Courtiers; afterwards ASANDER.*

Lys. My lords, what have you to report? Have the men arrived?

1st Court. For a week past they have been arriving at the rate of fifty a day. The ships anchor in due course. At dead of night, when everything is still, the merchandise is landed and conveyed well disguised to the great storehouses of Lamachus' palace, with good store of arms and provisions.

2nd Court. Yes, and by the day of the festival we shall have more than five hundred well-armed men within the walls, who, while the people are feasting, will bear down all opposing forces and open the gates to the larger body, who will lie concealed in the grain-ships in the harbour.

Lys. Does no one suspect, think you, as yet?

1st Court. Not a soul. The merchandise is landed at dead of night.

124

3rd Court. Does the Prince know?

Lys. Not yet, not a word. I can't trust him with his blind love for his wife.

3rd Court. What if he will not be of us?

Lys. Then he shall be put under hatches at once for Bosphorus, and may take his wife with him if he pleases.

1st Court. But will he pardon the deed?

Lys. The lad is a good lad enough, but weak as water. The world always pardons successful enterprises. Besides, I am in great hopes that he has so quarrelled with the ruler of Cherson, and may be, moreover, so out of conceit with his wife, that we can do as we will with him.

2nd Court. But be prudent, my Lord Lysimachus, I beg, for we know not how far he is with us, and if he is against us now, it may take more than we know to keep our heads on our shoulders.

Lys. My lords, you shall not lose a drop of your blood. But here is my Lord Asander. He looks cast down enough, in all conscience.

125

Enter ASANDER.

Well, Prince, hast thou seen the lady?

Asan. Speak not to me of her, I pray. I must leave this accursed place at once and for ever, and must take my wife with me. Once in Bosphorus, I may know again the happiness which is denied me here. I will not stay here a day. Is there any ship from Bosphorus in harbour? Get me away to-night secretly, and the Lady Gycia with me.

Lys. My lord, there are many ships here from Bosphorus, but none empty or which can be spared now; but it wants but two days to the festival, and if thou wilt tarry until then, it may be we can so arrange that either thou mayst set sail for Bosphorus at your will or bring Bosphorus hither at will.

Asan. What do these words mean? You speak in riddles. I care not what becomes of me, but remember my honour, Lysimachus, my honour! If any scheme against the State of Cherson is in your mind, I will have none of it. I want nothing of these people, only to be allowed to turn my back upon them and their intrigues for ever, and to carry the wife whom I love far away from the air of chicane and base deceit which makes this Cherson a hell.

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Lys. My Lord Asander, thou hast not forgot
Thy oath which thou didst swear ere first you left
Our Bosphorus, that, come what fate should come,
Thou wouldst not forget her. Now, as Fate would have it,
These gentlemen and I, hearing report
Of the grand festival which now approaches,
Have ta'en such measures as may make our city
Mistress of this her rival. Day by day
Ships laden deep with merchandise cast anchor

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By Lamachus's palace, and unload
At dead of night their tale of armèd men,
And by to-morrow night, which is the eve
Of the feast, five hundred men-at-arms or more
Will there lie hid. These, when the festival
Has spent itself, and the drowsed citizens,
Heavy with meat and wine, are fast asleep,
Will issue forth at midnight and will seize
The guardians of the gates, and throw them open
To an o'erwhelmmg force which fills the ships
Which lie within the harbour. For the rest,
Cherson is ours, thou free to go or stay,
King if thou wilt; but this, my lord, know well—
If thou hast even no reverence for thy oath,
No power on earth can free thee from thy bonds
Or speed thee hence, if still this cursèd State
Keeps its free power. Therefore, look well to it.

Asan. I cannot do this thing. I am no thief
Or midnight murderer, but a prince and soldier.
Place me in open battle, and I care not
For bloodshed; but this murderous intrigue,
I will have none o't.

Lys. Nay, my lord, in sooth,
Why think of bloodshed? If our scheme go right
(And nought can mar it now), what need of blood?
These smooth knaves, though they fight behind their walls
With cunning enginery, yet when they see
Our army in their streets, will straight grow prudent
And hug discretion. But, indeed, my lord,
We have gone too far to pause, and if thou like not
Our scheme, which makes for thee and for our State,
We cannot risk that thou denounce our plan,
And therefore, if thou wilt not join with us,
The safety of ourselves and of the State
Holds thee a prisoner pent in durance vile
Till victory is ours, and thou mayst take
The fruit of others' daring, while thy wife
Deserts her doubting and dishonoured lord
For one who dares to act and play his part
As a man should.

Asan. (after hesitation). I do not hold with you,
That a man's oath can bind him to his God
To do what else were wrong. Yet, since you swear
Your purpose is not bloodshed, and my will
Is impotent to stay your choice, and chiefly
Because I am cast down and sick at heart,
And without any trust in God or man,
I do consent to your conspiracy,
Loving it not.

Lys. There spoke my lord the Prince.
We will succeed or die.

Asan. I would sooner die.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*Cherson. Irene's prison.*

IRENE; *then the Gaoler's Child; afterwards* GYCIA.

Ire. Ah me! The heaviness of prisoned days!
Heigho! 'Tis weary work in prison here.
What though I know no loss but liberty,
Have everything at will—food, service, all
That I should have, being free—yet doth constraint
Poison life at its spring; and if I thought
This woman's jealous humour would endure,
I would sooner be a hireling set to tend
The kine upon the plains, in heat or cold,
Chilled through by the sharp east, scorched by the sun,
So only I might wander as I would
At my own will, than weary to be free

128

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131

From this luxurious cell. Hark!

[*The tramp of armed men is heard.*]

What was that sound?
I could swear I heard the measured tramp of men
And ring of mail, yet is it but illusion.
Last night I thought I heard it as I lay
Awake at dead of night. Mere fantasy
Born of long solitude, for here there are
No soldiers nor mailed feet.

[*Again heard.*]

Hark! once again.
Nay, I must curb these fancies.

Enter Child.

Child. Gentle lady.

Ire. Speak, little one. Come hither.

Child. Gentle lady,
My father, who is Warder of this tower,
Bade me come hither and ask thee if thou wouldst
That I should hold thy distaff, or might render
Some other service.

132

Ire. Ay, child; a good thought.
Bring me my spinning-wheel.

[*Child brings it.*]

Ire. (spinning). The light is fading fast, but I would choose
This twilight, if thou wilt not be afraid
Of the darkness, little one.

Child. Nay, that I am not,
With one so good as thou.

Ire. Nay, child, it may be
I am not all thou think'st me.

Child. But, dear lady,
Are not all noble ladies good?

Ire. Not all,
Nor many, maybe.

133

Child. To be sure they are not,
Else were they not imprisoned.

Ire. Little one,
Not all who pine in prison are not good,
Nor innocent who go free.

Child. The Lady Gycia,
Is she not good?

Ire. It may be that she is.
'Tis a vile world, my child.

Child. Nay, I am sure
The Lady Gycia is as white and pure
As are the angels. When my mother died
She did commend me to her, and she promised
To keep me always.

Ire. But she sent me here.

Child. Ah! lady, then I fear thou art not good.
I am sorry for thee.

Ire. So, my child, am I.

134

[*The tramp of armed feet is heard again.*]

Child. Ah! lady, what is that? I am afraid.
What means that noise?

Ire. What didst thou hear, my child?

Child. A tramp of armèd men and ring of mail.

Ire. Then, 'tis no fancy of my weary brain.
If it comes again I must inquire into it.
'Tis passing strange. Be not afraid, my child.
'Twas but the wind which echoed through the void
Of the vast storehouses below us. Come,

[*Spinning.*]

Let us to spinning. Twirl and twirl and twirl;

'Tis a strange task.

Child. Lady, I love it dearly.
My mother span, and I would sit by her
The livelong day.

Ire. Didst ever hear the tale
Of the Fates and how they spin?

Child. I do not think so.
Wilt tell me?

Ire. There were three weird sisters once,
Clotho and Lachesis and Atropos,
Who spun the web of fate for each new life,
Sometimes, as I do now, a brighter thread
Woven with the dark, and sometimes black as night.
Until at last came Atropos and cut
The fine-worn life-thread thus.

[*Cuts the thread; the head of the spindle rolls away.*]

Child. And hast thou cut
Some life-thread now?

Ire. My child, I am no Fate,
And yet I know not; but the spindle's head
Rolled hence to yonder corner. Let us seek it.
Hast found it?

Child. Nay, there is so little light.
I think that it has fallen in the crevice
Beneath yon panel.

Ire. Stoop and seek it, child.
Perchance the panel slides, and then, it may be,
We shall let in the light.

[*Draws back the panel and discovers a bright light, files of armed men, and ASANDER in the midst.*]

Child. Ay, there it is;
We have it, we have found it.

[*Sliding panel back again.*]

Ire. What have we found?
What have we found? Yes, little one, 'tis found!
Run away now—I fain would be alone—
And come back presently.

[*Kisses Child, who goes.*]

These were the sounds
I heard and thought were fancy's. All is clear
As is the blaze of noon. The Prince Asander
Is traitor to the State, and will o'erwhelm it
When all the citizens are sunk in sleep
After to-morrow's feast. Well, what care I?
He is not for me, whether we call him King
Or Archon; and for these good men of Cherson,
What is their fate to me? If he succeed,
As now he must, since no one knows the secret,
'Twill only be a change of name—no more.
The King and Queen will hold a statelier Court
And live contented when the thing is done,
And that is all. For who will call it treason
When victory crowns the plot? But stay! a gleam
Of new-born hope. What, what if it should fail
As I could make it fail? What if this woman,
Full of fantastic reverence for the dead,
And nourished on her cold republican dream,
Should learn the treason ere 'twas done and mar it?
Would not Asander hate her for the failure?
And she him for the plot? I know her well.
I know her love for him, but well I know
She is so proud of her Athenian blood
And of this old republic, she would banish
Her love for less than this. Once separated,
The Prince safe over seas in Bosphorus,
His former love turned to injurious pride,
I might prevail! I would!

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Re-enter CHILD.

Nay, little one,
We will spin no more to-day. I prithee go

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And seek the Lady Gycia. Say to her,
By all the memory of our former love
I pray that she will come to me at once.
Lose not a moment.

[Exit Child.

Hark! the tramp again;
Again the ring of mail. I wonder much
If she shall hear it first, or first the eye
Shall slay her love within her.

Enter GYCIA.

139

Gycia. Thou dost ask
My presence; wherefore is it?

Ire. Gycia,
Thou dost not love me, yet would I requite
Thy wrong with kindness. That thy love was false
To thee, thou knowest, but it may be still
There is a deeper falsehood than to thee,
And thou shalt know it. Dost thou hear that sound?
[The tramp of men again heard.
What means it, think you?

Gycia. Nay, I cannot tell.
'Tis like the tramp of armèd men.

Ire. It is;
And who are they?

Gycia. Young citizens of Cherson,
Maybe, rehearsing for to-morrow's pageant
And the procession.

140

[Going.

Ire. Stay, thou stubborn woman,
Canst bear to see, though the sight blight thy life?

Gycia. I know not what thou wouldst, but I can bear it.

Ire. Though it prove thy love a traitor?

Gycia. That it will not!

Ire. Then, make no sound, but see what I will show thee.
Look now! Behold thy love!

[Draws back panel, and discovers ASANDER with the soldiers of Bosphorus marching. ASANDER'S
voice heard.

Asan. At stroke of midnight
To-morrow night be ready.

Soldiers. Ay, my lord.

[GYCIA tottering back. IRENE slides back the panel, and GYCIA sets her back against it, half fainting;
IRENE regarding her with triumph.

Gycia. Was that my husband? and those men around him
Soldiers of Bosphorus, to whom he gave
Some swift command? What means it all, ye saints?
What means it? This the husband of my love,
Upon whose breast I have lain night by night
For two sweet years—my husband whom my father
Loved as a son, whose every thought I knew,
Or deemed I did, lurking in ambush here
Upon the eve of our great festival,
Scheming some bloody treachery to take
Our Cherson in the toils? Oh, 'tis too much;
I cannot trust my senses! 'Twas a dream!

Ire. No dream, but dreadful truth!

Gycia. Thou cruel woman
How have I harmed thee, thou shouldst hate me thus?
But 'twas no dream. Why was it else that he,
But for some hateful treachery, devised
This festival? Why was it that he grew
So anxious to go hence and take me with him,
But that guilt made him coward, and he feared
To see his work? Oh, love for ever lost,
And with it faith gone out! what is't remains
But duty, though the path be rough and trod
By bruised and bleeding feet? Oh, what is it
Is left for me in life but death alone,
Which ends it?

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Ire. Gycia, duty bids thee banish
Thy love to his own State, and then disclose
The plot thou hast discovered. It may be
That thou mayst join him yet, and yet grow happy.

Gycia. Never! For duty treads another path
Than that thou knowest. I am my father's daughter.
It is not mine to pardon or condemn;
That is the State's alone. 'Tis for the State
To banish, not for me, and therefore surely
I must denounce these traitors to the Senate,
And leave the judgment theirs.

Ire. (kneeling). Nay, nay, I pray thee,
Do not this thing! Thou dost not know how cruel
Is State-craft, or what cold and stony hearts
Freeze in their politic breasts.

Gycia. *Thou* kneel'st to me
To spare my husband! Think'st thou I love him less
Than thou dost, wanton?

Ire. Gycia, they will kill him.
Get him away to-night to Bosphorus.
Thou dost not know these men!

Gycia. *I* know them not?
I who have lived in Cherson all my days,
And trust the State? Nay, I will get me hence,
And will denounce this treason to the Senate.
There lies my duty clear, and I will do it;
I fear not for the rest. The State is clement
To vanquished foes, and doubtless will find means
To send them hence in safety. For myself
I know not what may come—a broken heart,
Maybe, and death to mend it. But for thee,
Thou shameless wanton, if thou breathe a sound
Or make a sign to them, thou diest to-night
With torture.

Ire. Spare him! Do not this thing, Gycia!

[*Exit* GYCIA.]

O God, she is gone! he is lost! and I undone!

[*Swoons.*]

SCENE II.—*Room in LAMACHUS'S palace.*

LYSIMACHUS, MEGACLES, COURTIER; *afterwards* ASANDER.

Lys. Well, good Megacles, I hope you are prepared to carry out your function. It will be a busy and anxious day to-morrow, no doubt, and most of us will be glad when midnight strikes.

Meg. My Lord Lysimachus, I hope so. I have not closed an eye for the last two nights. As to the Procession, I flatter myself that no better-arranged pomp has ever defiled before Cæsar's Palace. It will be long, it will be splendid, it will be properly marshalled. There is no other man in the Empire who knows the distinctions of rank or the mysteries of marshalling better than I do. Look at the books I have studied. There is the treatise of the Learned and Respectable Symmachus on Processions. That is one. There is the late divine Emperor Theodosius on Dignities and Titles of Honour. That is two. There is our learned and illustrious Chamberlain Procopius's treatise on the office and duties of a Count of the Palace. That, as no doubt you know, is in six large volumes. That is three, or, nay, eight volumes. Oh, my poor head! And I have said nothing of the authorities on Costume—a library, I assure you, in themselves. Yes, it has been an anxious time, but a very happy one. I wish our young friends here would devote a little more time to such serious topics, and less to such frivolities as fighting and making love. The latter is a fine art, no doubt, and, when done according to rule, is well enough; but as for fighting, getting oneself grimed with dust and sweat, and very likely some vulgar churl's common blood to boot—pah! it is intolerable to think of it.

1st Court. Well, good Megacles, I am afraid that the world cannot spare its soldiers yet for many years to come. So long as there is evil in the world, and lust of power and savagery and barbarism, so long, depend upon it, there is room and need for the soldier.

Meg. Certainly, my lord, certainly; and besides, they are very highly decorative too. Nothing looks better to my mind at a banquet than bright gay faces and lithe young figures set in a shining framework of mail. By the way, my Lord Lysimachus, it was kind of you to provide our procession with a strong detachment of fine young soldiers from Bosphorus. I have secured a prominent place for them, and the effect will be perfect. I trust the Lady Melissa will like it.

Lys. My lord, you are mistaken; there are no soldiers from Bosphorus here.

Meg. But I was with the Prince last night, and saw them.

Lys. I tell you you are mistaken. There are none here. Do you understand me? There are none here.

2nd Court. Nay, indeed, my Lord Megacles. We were trying, with a view to the pageant, how a number of young men of Cherson would look in the array of Bosphorus; but we gave it up, since we feared that they would bear them so clumsily that they would mar the whole effect.

Meg. Ah, that explains it; quite right, quite right. Well, I see I was mistaken. But I wish I could have had soldiers from Bosphorus. They are the one thing wanting to make to-morrow a perfect success, as the Lady Melissa said. 148

Lys. They are indeed, as you say. But, my Lord Megacles, pray do not whisper abroad what you have said here; these people are so jealous. They would grow sullen, and spoil the pageant altogether.

Meg. Ah, my lord, you have a good head. I will not breathe a word of it till the day is done.

Lys. Thanks, my lord, and as I know you will be weary with the long day's work and your great anxieties, I am going to lay a little friendly compulsion upon you. You must leave the banquet to-morrow and go to rest by eleven o'clock at latest.

Meg. Well, my lord, I am not so young as I was, and if I have your permission to leave before all is over, well and good. No one knows what an anxious day is before me, and I have no doubt I shall have earned my night's rest by then. But I have much yet to do, so with your permission I will wish you good night. 149

[*Exit MEGACLES, bowing low to each with exaggerated gestures.*]

Lys. Poor soul, poor soul! If any fight comes, it would be as cruel to let him take his part with men as it would be if he were a woman or a child.

Enter ASANDER.

Welcome, my Lord Asander. Hast thou seen our men, and are they ready for to-morrow?

Asan. I have just come from them, and they are ready,
But I am not. I pray you, let this be;
Send back these men to-night. I am oppressed
By such o'ermastering presages of ill
As baffle all resolve.

Lys. My Lord Asander,
It is too late. Wouldst thou, then, break thy oath?
Wouldst thou live here a prisoner, nor behold
Thy father, though he die? Wouldst thou thy country
Should spurn thee as the traitor whose malignance
Blighted her hard-won gains? It is too late!
It is too late! 150

Asan. I am grown infirm of will
As any dotard. I will go on now
So that thou dost no murder.

Lys. Why was it
We came in such o'erwhelming force, but that
We sought to shed no blood?

Asan. I will be ready,
Though with a heavy heart. To-morrow night
At stroke of twelve, when all the feast is done,
And all asleep, we issue from the palace,
Seize the guards at their posts, and open wide
The gates to the strong force which from the ships
At the same hour shall land. The citizens,
Heavy with wine, will wake to find their city
Our own beyond recall. 151

Lys. Ay, that's the scheme,
And nought can mar it now. Good night, my lord.
Sleep well; there is much to do.

Asan. Good night, my lords!

[*Exit ASANDER.*]

Lys. No bloodshed! Why, what fools love makes of men!
I have seen this very lad dash through the ranks
Of hostile spearmen, cut and hack and thrust
As in sheer sport. There will be blood shed, surely,
Unless these dogs have lost their knack of war
As he has; but we have them unprepared,
And shall prevail, and thou shalt be avenged
My father slain, and thou, my murdered brother,
Shalt be avenged! My lords, you know what work
Is given each to do. Be not too chary
Of your men's swords; let them strike sudden terror. 152

Slay all who do resist, or if they do not,
Yet slay them still. My lords, give you good night.
To-morrow at midnight, at the stroke of twelve—
At the stroke of twelve!

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

SCENE III.—*The council chamber of the Senate of Cherson.*

ZETHO and Senators; afterwards GYCIA.

Zet. Most worthy brethren, Senators of Cherson,
In great perplexity of mind and will
I summon ye to-night. The Lady Gycia,
Our Lamachus's daughter, sends request,
Urgent as 'twere of instant life and death,
That I should call ye here. What care can move
Such anxious thought in her, on this the eve
Of the high festival herself has founded,
I know not, but 'twould seem the very air
Is full of floating rumours, vague alarms,
Formless suspicions which elude the grasp,
Unspoken presages of coming ill
Which take no shape. For whence should danger come?
We are at peace with all. Our former foe
Is now our dearest friend; the Prince Asander,
Though of a hasty spirit and high temper,
Dwells in such close, concordant harmony
With his loved wife that he is wholly ours;
And yet though thus at peace, rumours of war
And darkling plots beset us. Is it not thus?
Have ye heard aught?

153

1st Sen. Zetho, 'tis true. Last night, a citizen
Swore he heard clang of arms and ring of mail
At midnight by the house of Lamachus!

2nd Sen. My freedman, coming home at grey of dawn,
Saw a strange ship unload her merchandise,
And one bale chanced to fall, and from it came
Groanings and drops of blood!

154

3rd Sen. Two nights ago,
The ways being white with snow, I on the quay
Saw the thick-planted marks of armed feet;
But, rising with the dawn, I found the place
Swept clean with care!

Zet. Brethren, I know not what
These things portend.

Enter GYCIA.

But see, she comes! Good daughter,
Why is thy cheek so pale?

Gycia. This is the wont
Of women. Grief drives every drop of blood
Back to the breaking heart, which love calls forth
To mantle on the cheek. Sirs, I have come
On such an errand as might drive a woman
Stronger than I to madness; I have come
To tell you such a tale as well might fether
My tongue and leave me speechless. Pity me
If I do somewhat wander in my talk!
'Tis scarce an hour ago, that in my house,
Drawing some secret panel in the wall,
I saw the long hall filled with armed men
Of Bosphorus, and at their head—O Heaven,
I cannot say it!—at their head I saw
My husband, my Asander, my own love,

155

[*Senators rise with strong emotion.*]

Who ordered them and bade them all stand ready
To-morrow night at midnight. What means this?
What else than that these traitorous bands shall slay
Our Cherson's liberties, and give to murder
Our unsuspecting people, whom the feast
Leaves unprepared for war? I pray you, sirs,
Lose not one moment. Call the citizens
To arms while yet 'tis time! Defeat this plot!
Do justice on these traitors! Save the city,

156

Though I am lost!

Zet. Daughter, thy loyal love
To our dear city calls for grateful honour
From us who rule. In thy young veins the blood
Of patriot Lamachus flows to-day as strong
As once it did in his; nay, the warm tide
Which stirred the lips of bold Demosthenes
And all that dauntless band who of old time
Gave heart and life for Athens, still is thine.
In our Hellenic story, there is none
Who has done more than thou, who hast placed love,
Wedlock, and queenly rule, and all things dear
To a tender woman's heart, below the State—
A patriot before all. Is there no favour
A State preserved may grant thee?

Gycia. Noble Zetho,
I ask but this. I know my husband's heart,
How true it was and loyal. He is led,
I swear, by evil counsels to this crime;
And maybe, though I seek not to excuse him,
It was the son's love for his dying sire,
Whom he should see no more, that scheming men
Have worked on to his ruin. Banish him
To his own city, though it break my heart,
But harm him not; and for those wretched men
Whose duty 'tis to obey, shed not their blood,
But let the vengeance of our city fall
Upon the guilty only.

Zet. Brethren all,
Ye hear what 'tis she asks, and though to grant it
Is difficult indeed, yet her petition
Comes from the saviour of the State. I think
We well may grant her prayer. Though well I know
How great the danger, yet do I believe
It may be done. Is it so, worthy brethren?

Daughter, thy prayer is granted.

Gycia. Sirs, I thank you;
I love you for your mercy.

Zet. For the rest,
I counsel that we do not rouse the city.
'Twere of no use to-night to set our arms,
Blunt with long peace and rusted with disuse,
Against these banded levies. By to-morrow—
And we are safe till then—we shall have time
To league together such o'erwhelming force
As may make bloodshed needless, vain their plot,
And mercy possible. Meantime, dear lady,
Breathe not a word of what thine eyes have seen,
But bear thyself as though thou hadst seen nothing,
And had no care excepting to do honour
To thy dead sire; and when the weary day
Tends to its close, school thou thy heavy heart,
And wear what mask of joy thou canst, and sit
Smiling beside thy lord at the high feast,
Where all will meet. See that his cup is filled
To the brim; drink healths to Bosphorus and Cherson.
Seem thou to drink thyself, having a goblet
Of such a colour as makes water blush
Rosy as wine. When all the strangers' eyes
Grow heavy, then, some half an hour or more
From midnight, rise as if to go to rest,
Bid all good night, and thank them for their presence.
Then, issuing from the banquet-hall, lock fast
The great doors after thee, and bring the key
To us, who here await thee. Thus shalt thou
Save this thy State, and him thy love, and all.
For we will, ere the fateful midnight comes,
Send such o'erwhelming forces to surround them
That they must needs surrender, and ere dawn
Shall be long leagues away. We will not shed
A drop of blood, my daughter.

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[Senators *nod assent.*]

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Gycia. Noble Zetho
I thank you and these worthy senators.
I knew you would be merciful. I thank you,
And will obey in all things.

[Exit GYCIA.]

Bardanes, 1st Sen. She is gone;
I durst not speak before her. Dost thou know,
Good Zetho, how infirm for war our State
After long peace has grown? I doubt if all
The men whom we might arm before the hour
Are matched in numbers with those murderous hordes;
While in experience of arms, in training,
In everything that makes a soldier strong,
We are no match for them. Our paramount duty
Is to the State alone, not to these pirates
Who lie in wait to slay us; nor to one
Who, woman-like, knows not our strength or weakness,
Nor cares, if only she might wring a promise
To spare her traitorous love. But we have arts
Which these barbarians know not, quenchless fires
Which in one moment can enwrap their stronghold
In one red ring of ruin. My counsel is,
That ere the hour of midnight comes we place
Around the palace walls on every side
Such store of fuel and oils and cunning drugs
As at one sign may leap a wall of fire
Impassable, and burn these hateful traitors
Like hornets in their nest.

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Zetho. Good brethren all,
Is this your will? Is it faith? Is it honour, think you,
To one who has given all, for us to break
Our solemn plighted word?

2nd Sen. We will not break it;
We shed no drop of blood. The State demands it;
The safety of the State doth override
All other claim. The safety of the State
Is more than all!

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All the Senators, with uplifted arms. Ay, Zetho, more than all!

Zetho. Then, be it as you will. See, therefore, to it;
Take measures that your will be done, not mine.
Though I approve not, yet I may not set
My will against the universal voice.
Save us our Cherson. For the rest I care not,
Only I grieve to break our solemn promise
To Lamachus's child. Poor heart! poor heart!

ACT V.

163

SCENE I.—*Outside LAMACHUS'S palace.*

MEGACLES, LYSIMACHUS, Courtiers, and Citizens of Cherson.

Meg. Oh, this has been a happy day. All has gone admirably. Not a hitch in all the arrangements. Precedence kept, rank observed, dresses all they should be. I do not, I really do not think, though I say it who should not, that the Imperial Chamberlain at Constantinople could have conducted the matter better.

1st Court. Nay, that he could not, good Megacles. Let us hope that what remains to do will go as smoothly.

Meg. What remains? Doubtless you mean the banquet. That is all arranged long ago under three heads. First, the order of entering the hall; second, the order of the seats; third, the order of going forth.

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Lys. Doubtless the last will arrange itself. Remember, the only order of going to be observed is this, that thou get thyself gone, and all the guests from Cherson gone, fully half an hour before midnight.

Meg. But, my lord, that is impossible; you ask too much. How long do you suppose it will take, at a moderate computation, to get one hundred men of ill-defined rank out of a room with a decent regard for Precedence. Why, I have seen it take an hour at the Palace, where everybody knew his place, and here I cannot undertake to do it under two.

Lys. My friend, you will get it done; you will waive ceremony. None but the Prince and ourselves

must remain within half an hour of midnight, and the hall must be cleared.

165

Meg. Ah, well, my Lord Lysimachus, the responsibility rests with you; I will have none of it. It is as much as my reputation is worth. But if I do this, cannot you let me have a guard of honour of armed men to stand at intervals along the hall. I have been longing for them all day.

Lys. (angrily). Peace, fool! I have told you before we have no soldiers here.

[*People of Cherson overhearing him.*]

1st Cit. Didst hear that old man? He believes there are soldiers here. Whence do they come? and why did the other check him?

Meg. Well, my Lord Lysimachus, if not soldiers, men-at-arms, and these there certainly are, and highly decorative too.

2nd Cit. I hate these Bosphorians. What if the rumour should be true? Pass the word to the citizens that they sleep not to-night, but keep their arms ready for what may come. We are a match for them, whatever may be their design. To-morrow we will probe this matter to its depths.

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2nd Court. Depend upon it, there is no time to lose if we would forestall these fellows. But here comes the procession to the banqueting-hall.

[*Citizens going to banquet two and two.*]

Meg. (with a gold wand). This way, gentlemen; this way, masters and mistresses; this way, Respectables!

[*Accompanies them to the end of the stage towards the banqueting-hall in the distance. Returns to escort another party. Musicians, etc.*]

Enter Senators, two and two.

Meg. (bowing profoundly three times). Most Illustrious Senators! this way, your Highnesses; this way.

Enter MELISSA and other Ladies.

167

(*To MELISSA*) Fairest and loveliest of your adorable sex, your slave prostrates himself before your stainless and beatific feet (*bowing low and kissing his fingers*). Illustrious Ladies, I pray you to advance.

Lys. (with Courtiers standing apart). A good appetite, my friends. Enjoy yourselves while you may.

Bard. We are quite ready, my Lord Lysimachus. Are you not (*with a sneer*) for the banquet?

Lys. In good time, in good time. If they only knew.

[*Aside.*]

Bard. (overhearing). If you knew all, my friends.

Meg. (returning). I pray you, most Illustrious Senators, to excuse the absence of a guard of honour.

Bard. Nay, nay; we are peaceful people, and have no armed men nearer than Bosphorus, as my Lord Lysimachus knows. There are plenty in that favoured State, no doubt.

168

Lys. (confused). What does this insolence mean? I would the hour were come.

Enter ZETHO, with his retinue.

Meg. Your Gravity, Your Sincerity, Your Sublime and Wonderful Magnitude, Your Illustrious and Magnificent Highness, I prostrate myself before Your Altitude. Will You deign to walk this way?

Zetho. My lord, I am no Cæsar, but a simple citizen of Cherson, called by my fellows to preside over the State. Use not to me these terms, I pray of you, but lead on quickly.

Meg. I prostrate myself before Your Eminence.

Enter ASANDER and GYCIA.

Meg. (returning). Noble Prince, will your Illustrious Consort and yourself deign to follow me?

Asan. Nay, good Megacles, will you and these gentlemen go first? I have a word to say to the Lady Gycia. We will be with you before the guests are seated.

169

Meg. I obey, my Lord Asander, and will await you at the door.

[*MEGACLES, LYSIMACHUS, and the rest, pass on.*]

Asan. Gycia, though we have passed from amity
And all our former love, yet would I pray you,
By our sweet years of wedded happiness,
Give ear to me a moment. It may be
That some great shock may come to set our lives
For evermore apart.

Gycia. Ah yes, Asander—
For evermore apart!

Asan. And I would fain,
If it must be, that thou shouldst know to-night

That never any woman on the earth
Held me one moment in the toils of love
Except my wife.

170

Gycia. What! not Irene's self?

Asan. Never, I swear by Heaven. She was a woman
In whom a hopeless passion burnt the springs
Of maiden modesty. I never gave her
The solace of a smile.

Gycia. Dost thou say this?
Is thy soul free from all offence with her,
If thou camest now to judgment?

Asan. Ay, indeed,
Free as a child's.

Gycia. Oh, my own love! my dear!
Ah no! too late, too late!

[*Embraces him.*]

Asan. I ask thee not
Counter assurance, since I know thy truth.

Gycia. Speakest thou of Theodorus? He loved me
Before I knew thee, but I loved no man
Before I met Asander. When he knelt
That day, it was in pity for my grief,
Thinking thee false, and all his buried love
Burst into passionate words, which on the instant
I as thy wife repelled.

171

Asan. Oh, perfect woman!

[*They embrace.*]

O God, it is too late! Come, let us go;
The guests are waiting for us. What can Fate
Devise to vanquish Love.

[*Exeunt.*]

Enter two drunken Labourers of Cherson, bearing faggots and straw.

1st Lab. Well, friend, what kind of day has it been with you?

2nd Lab. Oh, a white day, a happy day! Plenty of food, plenty of wine, raree shows without end,
such processions as were never seen—the very model of a democracy; nothing to pay, and
everybody made happy at the expense of the State. I have lived in Cherson, man and boy, for fifty
years, and I never saw anything to compare with it. Here's good luck to Lamachus's memory, say
I, and I should like to celebrate his lamented decease as often as his daughter likes.

172

1st Lab. Didst know him, citizen?

2nd Lab. No, not I. He has been dead these two years. Time he was forgotten, I should think.
They don't commemorate poor folk with all these fal-lals and follies.

1st Lab. Well, citizen, there is one comfort—the great people don't enjoy themselves as we do.
Did you ever see such a set of melancholy, frowning, anxious faces as the grandees carried with
them to-day? And as for the Prince and the Lady Gycia, I don't believe they spoke a word the
livelong day, though they walked together. That is the way with these grandees. When you and I
quarrel with our wives, it is hammer and tongs for five minutes, and then kiss and make friends.

173

2nd Lab. And fancy being drilled by that old fool from Bosphorus—"Most Illustrious, this is your
proper place;" "Respectable sir, get you back there" (*mimics MEGACLES*), and so forth.

1st Lab. Well, well, it is good to be content. But I warrant we are the only two unhappy creatures
in Cherson to-night, who have the ill fortune to be sober. And such wine too, and nothing to pay!

2nd Lab. Never mind, citizen, we shall be paid in meal or malt, I dare say, and we are bound to
keep sober. By the way, it is a curiously contrived bonfire this.

1st Lab. It will be the crowning triumph of the whole festival, the senator said.

2nd Lab. But who ever heard of a bonfire on a large scale like this, so close to an old building?
You know our orders: we are to place lines of faggots and straw close to the building on every
side, well soaked with oil, and certain sealed vessels full of a secret compound in the midst of
them. And just before midnight we are to run with torches and set light to the whole bonfire, to
amuse the noble guests at the banquet.

174

[*IRENE at a window, overhearing.*]

1st Lab. Ah! do you not see? It is a device of the Senate to startle our friends from Bosphorus.
The faggots and straw blaze up fiercely round the wall; then, when all is confusion, the substance
in the sealed vessels escapes and at once puts out the fire, and the laugh is with us. Our friends
from Bosphorus know what we can do in chemistry before now.

2nd Lab. Faith, a right merry device! Ha! ha! What a head thou hast, citizen! Well, we must go on

with our work. Lay the faggots evenly.

Ire. (at the window above). Great God! what is this?

We are doomed to die!

Good friends,

Know you my brother, the Lord Theodorus?

I have something urgent I would say to him.

I will write it down, and you shall give it him

When he comes forth from the banquet.

[*Disappears.*]

1st Lab. Good my lady. Her brother, too, she calls him. I go bail it is her lover, and this is an assignation. Well, well, we poor men must not be too particular.

2nd Lab. No, indeed; but let us get on with our work, or we shall never finish in time.

Ire. (reappearing). Here it is. Give it him, I pray, when he comes forth.

'Tis a thing of life and death.

1st Lab. So they all think,

Poor love-sick fools!

Ire. See, here is gold for you—

'Tis all I have; but he will double it,

If you fail not.

1st Lab. Lady, we shall be here,

We must be here. Fear not, we shall not miss him.

SCENE II.—*The banquet hall.*

At a table, on a dais, ZETHO, ASANDER, GYCIA, and Senators; LYSIMACHUS, and Courtiers of Bosphorus. Magnates of Cherson at cross tables. ASANDER, LYSIMACHUS, the Courtiers, and Senators seem flushed with wine.

Zetho. I drink to him whose gracious memory
We celebrate to-day. In all our Cherson,
Which boasts descent from the Athenian race,
Who one time swayed the world, there was no man,
Nor ever had been, fired with deeper love
Of this our city, or more heartfelt pride
In our republican rule (*LYSIMACHUS sneers*), which free-born men
Prize more than life. I do not seek to bind
Those who, long nurtured under kingly rule,
Give to the Man the love we bear the State;
But never shall the name of King be heard
In this our Cherson.

Lys. Archon, 'twere unwise
To risk long prophecies.

Bard. Be silent, sir,
If you would not offend.

Zetho. I bid you all
Drink to the memory of Lamachus
And weal to our Republic.

Lys. Shall we drink
Its memory, for it has not long to live,
If it be still alive?

Bard. It will outlive thee.
Thou hast not long to live.

Lys. Longer than thou,
If swords be sharp.

Zetho. I pray you, gentlemen,
Bandy not angry words.

Gycia. My Lord Asander,
Thy cup is empty. Shall I fill it for thee?
Thou lovedst Lamachus?

Asan. Ay, that I did;
And I love thee. But I have drunk enough.
I must keep cool to-night.

Gycia. Nay; see, I fill
My glass to drink with thee.

Asan. Well, well, I drink,
But not to the Republic.

Gycia. Ah! my lord,

There is a gulf still yawns 'twixt thee and me
Which not the rapture of recovered love
Can ever wholly bridge. To my dead father
I drink, and the Republic!

Lys. Which is dead.

Bard. Nay, sir, but living, and shall live when thou
Liest rotting with thy schemes.

Enter MEGACLES.

Meg. My Lord Asander,
A messenger from Bosphorus, just landed,
Has bid me give thee this.

[*Gives* ASANDER *letter.*

Asan. (reading) "My Lord, the King
Is dead, asking for thee." Oh, wretched day!
Had I but gone to him, and left this place
Of sorrow ere he died!

Gycia. My love, my dear!
Thou wilt go hence too late. I would indeed
The law had let thee go. Sorrow like this
Draws parted lives in one, and knits anew
The rents which time has made.

Lys. The King is dead!
Ay, then long live the King of Bosphorus!
And more ere long!

Bard. Think you that he will live
To wear his crown?

Zetho. Brethren, the hour is late,
And draws to midnight, and 'tis time that all
Should rest for whom rest is. (*To* BARDANES *aside*) We must consider
What change of policy this weighty change
Which makes Asander King may work in us.

Bard. (aside). Nay, nay, no change! He is a murderer still,
And shall be punished were he thrice a king.

Asan. Good night to all. And thou, good Megacles,
Thou wert my father's servant, take thy rest.
Go hence with these.

Meg. I have no heart to marshal
These dignitaries forth. My King is dead;
I am growing old and spent.

Zetho. Daughter, remember
Thy duty to the State.

Gycia. I will, good Zetho.
I am my father's daughter. Gentle Sirs
And Ladies all, good night.

[*Exeunt omnes except* ASANDER *and* GYCIA; LYSIMACHUS *and* Courtiers *by one door, then the*
Chersonites by another opposite.

Asan. Dearest of women,
How well this fair head will become a crown!
I know not how it is, but now this blow
Has fallen, it does not move me as I thought.
I am as those who come in tottering age
Even to life's verge, whom loss of friend or child
Touches not deeply, since the dead they love
Precede them but a stage upon the road
Which they shall tread to-morrow. Yet am I
Young, and thou too, my Gycia; we should walk
The path of life together many years,
But that some strange foreboding troubles me.
For oh, my dear! now that the sun of love
Beams on our days again, my worthless life
Grows precious, and I tremble like a coward
At dangers I despised. Tell me, my Gycia,
Though I am true in love, wouldst thou forgive me
If I were false or seemed false to thy State?
Hast thou no word for me? May I not tell thee
My secret, which so soon all men shall know,
And ask thy pardon for it?

Gycia. Say on, Asander.

Asan. Know, then, that soldiers sent from Bosphorus
Have long time hid within our palace here—
Long time before I knew, or I had nipt
The treason in the bud; and in an hour
Or less from when we speak, they will go forth,
When all the citizens are wrapt in sleep
After the toilsome day, and seize the gate,
And open to the army which lies hid
On board the ships without. They will not shed
The blood of any, since the o'erwhelming force
Will make resistance vain. I never liked
The plot, I swear to thee; but, all being done,
And I a subject, dared not disavow
That which was done without me. But I have forced
A promise that no blood be spilt.

183

Gycia. Asander,
I have known it all, and have discovered all

[ASANDER starts.

Thy secret to the Senate! But I knew not,
Save by the faith that is the twin with love,
That thou didst follow only in this plot,
And wert unwilling; and I do rejoice
Thy hands are free from blood. But oh, my love,
Break from these hateful men! Thou art now a King,
Thou canst command. Come, let us fly together;
There yet is time! I tell thee that this plot
Is doomed to ruin. Ere the morning dawns,
All but the guilty leaders will be sent
Prisoners to Bosphorus, and thou with them.
I have gained this on my knees; but for the guilty
The State has punishments.

184

Asan. Gycia, thou wouldst not
That I should break my faith? 'Tis a King's part
To keep faith, though he die. But when they have seized
The city, then, using my kingly office,
I will undo the deed, and make alliance
With Cherson, and this done I will depart,
Taking my Queen with me.

Gycia. Then must I go;
I cannot live without thee.

Asan. Now to rest,
If not to sleep.

185

Gycia. Good night, my love; farewell.

Asan. Nay, not farewell, my love!

Gycia. Ah yes, farewell!
Farewell! farewell for ever!

[Exeunt.

SCENE III.—*Outside the banquet hall. Darkness.*

GYCIA hurriedly descends the steps, closing the great doors of the banquet hall softly.

Gycia. I hear no sound within; the lights are gone,
And all the hall is dark. These doors alone
Of all the many outlets of the palace
Remain unlocked. There is not now a moment
To lose ere midnight comes, and here I hold
The safety of our Cherson. Oh, my love!
I could not tell thee all, nor recompense
Thy faith in me, since duty held me fast—
My duty which should also prove thy safety,
For now the solemn promise of the State
Is pledged to hold thee harmless, and defeat
The shameful plot I knew was never thine,
Without one drop of bloodshed. All my path
Shows clear as noonday, and I save our city
And those who with thee err in innocence,
Why do I hesitate? Yet does some dark
And dreadful presage of impending ill
So haunt me that I know not how to face it.

186

I dare not do it. I must stay with him,
Or bring him forth with me.

[Ascends the steps, throws open the doors, and finds all darkness and silence.

Asander! husband!

It is thy wife who calls! Come forth, Asander!

[Listens.

Nay, there is no one there. I cannot stay;
This is mere folly. I must keep my word;
There's not a moment's time, or all is lost.
Which is the key?

187

[Closes the doors and locks them with a clang.

I must go forth alone
To the Senate-chamber. I have saved our Cherson
And my Asander!

[Totters down the steps and exit hurriedly.

SCENE IV.—*The Senate-chamber.*

ZETHO and Senators; afterwards GYCIA.

Zetho. What is the hour?

Bardanes. It wants five minutes only
To midnight. Think you she will come?

Zetho. I know her.
She is the soul of honour, and would keep
Her word if 'twere her death.

188

Bard. But would she keep it
If 'twere her lover's?

Zetho. She thinks not that it is,
Nor should it be, indeed, were we but true
As I believe her.

Bard. True! There is no truth
In keeping faith with murderers; they must perish
In the same net which they laid privily
Against a faithful city.

Enter GYCIA, tottering in, with the keys.

Zetho. Hail, noble daughter! Thou hast saved the State.
I knew thou wouldst not fail us.

Gycia. See, good Zetho,
The proof that I have done my part to you.
There are the master keys of all the doors
Within the palace. When I closed the last,
A few brief minutes since, there was no sound
Nor light in hall or chamber; every court
Was silent as the grave.

189

Bard. Ay, as the grave
It is, or will be soon.

Gycia. What mean you, sir,
I pray you? I am but a timid woman,
Full of foreboding fears and dread of ill,
And such a doubt doth overspread my soul,
Hearing thy words, I think I shall go mad.
Nay, Zetho, he is safe; I have your promise
Thou wouldst not harm him. An o'erwhelming force,
Thou saidst, should so surround them that resistance
Were vain, and ere the dawn they should go hence
Without one drop of bloodshed.

Zetho. Ay, my daughter,
Such was the promise.

Bard. And it will be kept.

190

[Bell strikes midnight.

Hark, 'tis the hour! An overwhelming force

*[A red glare rising higher and higher is seen through the windows of the Senate-chamber.
Confused noises and shouts heard without.*

Surrounds them, but no drop of blood is shed.
All will go hence ere dawn.

Gycia. Oh, cruel man,
And most perfidious world! Oh, my Asander!

To die thus and through me!

[A violent knocking is heard at the door.

Enter THEODORUS *in great agitation, and* IRENE, *who throws herself on her knees, weeping.*
GYCIA *falls swooning in* ZETHO'S *arms.*

Zetho. Whence cam'st thou, Theodorus?

Theo. Straight, my lord,
From Gycia's palace.

191

Zetho. Say, what didst thou there?
And what of horror has befallen thee
That makes thine eyes stare thus?

Theo. Most noble Zetho,
When from the banquet scarce an hour ago
I passed, came one who offered me a letter
And bade me read. 'Twas from this woman here,
My sister, and it told of some great peril
By fire, which she, within the prison locked,
Expected with the night. Wherefore I sped
With one I trusted, and did set a ladder
Against her casement, calling her by name,
And bidding her descend. But no voice came,
And all was dark and silent as the grave;
And when I called again, the Prince Asander,
From an adjacent casement looking, cried,
"I had forgot thy sister. Take her hence;
She should go free!" And then, at her own casement

192

[GYCIA *revives and listens.*

Appearing, he came forth, and in his arms
A woman's senseless form. As they descended
And now were in mid-air, there came the sound
Of the bell striking midnight, and forthwith
In a moment, like a serpent winged with fire,
There rose from wall to wall a sheet of flame,
Which in one instant mounted to the roof
With forked red tongues. Then every casement teemed
With strange armed men, who leapt into the flames
And perished. Those who, maimed and burnt, escaped,
Ere they could gain their feet, a little band
Of citizens, who sprang from out the night,
Slew as they lay. The Prince, who bore my sister
Unhurt to ground, stood for a moment mute.
Then, seeing all was lost, he with a groan
Stabbed himself where we stood. I fear his hurt
Is mortal, since in vain I tried to staunch
The rushing blood; then bade them on a litter
Carry him hither gently. Here he comes.

193

Enter Citizens, *bearing* ASANDER *on a litter, wounded.*

Gycia. Oh, my love, thou art hurt! Canst thou forgive me?
I thought to save thee and the rest. I knew not,
I did not know! Oh, God!

Asan. I do believe thee.
The fates have led our feet by luckless ways
Which only lead to death. I loved but thee.
I wished thy State no wrong, but I am dying.
Farewell! my love, farewell!

[Dies.

Gycia. Oh, my lost love!

[Throws herself on the body and kisses it passionately.

Zetho. Poor souls! Mysterious are the ways of Heaven,
And these have suffered deeply in the fortune
That bound their lives together.

194

Bard. That dead man
Would have betrayed our State, and thou dost pity!
So perish all the enemies of Cherson!

Gycia (*rising*). Nay, sir, be silent. 'Tis a coward's part
To vilify the dead. You, my Lord Zetho,
I had your promise that you would hurt none
Except the guilty only, and I thought
That to your word I might entrust my life
And one more dear than mine; but now it seems

That in some coward and unreasoning panic
This worthy Senator has moved his colleagues—
Since cruelty is close akin to fear—
To break your faith to me, and to confuse
The innocent and guilty, those who led
And those who followed, in one dreadful death!
I pray you pardon me if, being a woman,
Too rashly taking part in things of State,
I have known nought of State-craft or the wisdom
Which breaks a plighted word.

195

Zetho. Daughter, I would
Our promise had been kept, and I had kept it
But that the safety of the State to some
Seemed to demand its breach.

Gycia. Farewell, good Zetho,
And all who were my friends. I am going hence;
I can no longer stay. There lies my love.
There flames my father's house. I go far off,
A long, long journey. If you see me not
In life again, I humbly pray the State
May, if it think me worthy—for indeed
I have given it all—bury me, when I die,
Within the city, in a fair white tomb,
As did our Grecian forefathers of old
For him who saved the State; and, if it may be,
Lay my love by my side.

Zetho and Sens. Daughter, we swear
That thou shalt have thy wish.

196

Gycia. I thank you, sirs.
Then, I may go. Kiss me, good Theodorus:
I am no more a wife. I know thy love,
And thank thee for it. For that wretch whose lie
Has wrecked our life and love, I bless the gods
That I am childless, lest my daughter grew
As vile a thing as she; and yet I know not.
She loved him in some sort, poor wretch, poor wretch!
But now I must be going. 'Tis past midnight;

[*Snatches dagger from THEODORUS'S side.*

I must go hence. I have lost my life and love.
But I have saved the State.

[*Stabs herself and falls on ASANDER'S body.*

Citizens of Cherson bursting in.

Cits. The State is saved! Long may our Cherson flourish!
The State is saved! Long live our Lady Gycia,
Who saved the State!

197

Gycia (rising a little). Yes, I have saved the State!

[*Falls back dead.*

Citizens (without). Long live the Lady Gycia!

Curtain.

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SELECTIONS FROM THE NOTICES
OF THE
POETICAL WORKS
OF
LEWIS MORRIS.

SONGS OF TWO WORLDS.

These poems were originally published in three volumes, issued in the years 1872, 1874, and 1875. The following are a few selections from the Press notices which appeared as they were issued.

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THE EPIC OF HADES.

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[*] Book II. was issued as a separate volume prior to the publication of Books I. and III. and of the complete work.

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