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Transcribed from the 1908 Chatto and Windus edition by David Price, email [ccx074@pglaf.org](mailto:ccx074@pglaf.org)

## THE DUKE OF GANDIA

BY  
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

LONDON  
CHATTO & WINDUS  
1908

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### PERSONS REPRESENTED.

POPE ALEXANDER VI.

FRANCESCO BORGIA, Duke of Gandia } his sons

CÆSAR BORGIA, Cardinal of Valencia }

DON MICHELE COREGLIA, called MICHELOTTO, agent for Cæsar Borgia.

GIORGIO SCHIAVONE, a Tiber waterman.

TWO ASSASSINS.

AN OFFICER of the Papal Household.

VANNOZZA CATANEI, surnamed LA ROSA, concubine to the Pope.

LUCREZIA BORGIA, daughter to Alexander and Vannozza.

SCENE: ROME.

## SCENE I

*The Vatican*

*Enter CÆSAR and VANNOZZA*

CÆSAR

Now, mother, though thou love my brother more,  
Am I not more thy son than he?

VANNOZZA

Not more.

CÆSAR

Have I more Spaniard in me—less of thee?  
Did our Most Holiest father thrill thy womb  
With more Italian passion than brought forth  
Me?

VANNOZZA

Child, thine elder never was as thou—  
Spake never thus.

CÆSAR

I doubt it not. But I,  
Mother, am not mine elder. He desires  
And he enjoys the life God gives him—God,  
The Pope our father, and thy sacred self,  
Mother beloved and hallowed. I desire  
More.

VANNOZZA

Thou wast ever sleepless as the wind—  
A child anhungered for thy time to be  
Man. See thy purple about thee. Art thou not  
Cardinal?

CÆSAR

Ay; my father's eminence  
Set so the stamp on mine. I will not die  
Cardinal.

VANNOZZA

Cæsar, wilt thou cleave my heart?  
Have I not loved thee?

CÆSAR

Ay, fair mother—ay.  
Thou hast loved my father likewise. Dost thou love  
Giulia—the sweet Farnese—called the Fair  
In all the Roman streets that call thee Rose?  
And that bright babe Giovanni, whom our sire,  
Thy holy lord and hers, hath stamped at birth  
As duke of Nepi?

VANNOZZA

When thy sire begat  
Thee, sinful though he ever was—fierce, fell,  
Spaniard—I fear me, Jesus for his sins  
Bade Satan pass into him.

CÆSAR

And fill thee full,  
Sweet sinless mother. Fear it not. Thou hast  
Children more loved of him and thee than me—  
Our bright Francesco, born to smile and sway,

And her whose face makes pale the sun in heaven,  
Whose eyes outlaugh the splendour of the sea,  
Whose hair has all noon's wonders in its weft,  
Whose mouth is God's and Italy's one rose,  
Lucrezia.

VANNOZZA

Dost thou love them then? My child,  
How should not I then love thee?

CÆSAR

God alone  
Knows. Was not God—the God of love, who bade  
His son be man because he hated man,  
And saw him scourged and hanging, and at last  
Forgave the sin wherewith he had stamped us, seeing  
So fair a full atonement—was not God  
Bridesman when Christ's crowned vicar took to bride  
My mother?

VANNOZZA

Speak not thou to me of God.  
I have sinned, I have sinned—I would I had died a nun,  
Cloistered!

CÆSAR

There too my sire had found thee. Priests  
Make way where warriors dare not—save when war  
Sets wide the floodgates of the weirs of hell.  
And what hast thou to do with sin? Hath he  
Whose sin was thine not given thee there and then  
God's actual absolution? Mary lived  
God's virgin, and God's mother: mine art thou,  
Who am Christlike even as thou art virginal.  
And if thou love me or love me not God knows,  
And God, who made me and my sire and thee,  
May take the charge upon him. I am I.  
Somewhat I think to do before my day  
Pass from me. Did I love thee not at all,  
I would not bid thee know it.

VANNOZZA

Alas, my son!

CÆSAR

Alas, my mother, sounds no sense for men—  
Rings but reverberate folly, whence resounds  
Returning laughter. Weep or smile on me,  
Thy sunshine or thy rainbow softens not  
The mortal earth wherein thou hast clad me. Nay,  
But rather would I see thee smile than weep,  
Mother. Thou art lovelier, smiling.

VANNOZZA

What is this  
Thou hast at heart to do? God's judgment hangs  
Above us. I that girdled thee in me  
As Mary girdled Jesus yet unborn  
—Thou dost believe it? A creedless heretic  
Thou art not?

CÆSAR

I? God's vicar's child?

VANNOZZA

Be God  
Praised! I, then, I, thy mother, bid thee, pray,  
Pray thee but say what hungers in thy heart,  
And whither thou wouldst hurl the strenuous life  
That works within thee.

CÆSAR

Whither? Am not I  
Hinge of the gate that opens heaven—that bids  
God open when my sire thrusts in the key—  
Cardinal? Canst thou dream I had rather be  
Duke?

*Enter* FRANCESCO

FRANCESCO

Wilt thou take mine office, Cæsar mine?  
I heard thy laugh deride it. Mother, whence  
Comes that sweet gift of grace from dawn to dawn  
That daily shows thee sweeter?

CÆSAR

Knowest thou none  
Lovelier?

VANNOZZA

My Cæsar finds me not so fair.  
Thou art over fond, Francesco.

CÆSAR

Nay, no whit.  
Our heavenly father on earth adores no less  
Our mother than our sister: and I hold  
His heart and eye, his spirit and his sense,  
Infallible.

*Enter the* POPE

ALEXANDER

Jest not with God. I heard  
A holy word, a hallowing epithet,  
Cardinal Cæsar, trip across thy tongue  
Lightly.

CÆSAR

Most holiest father, I desire  
Paternal absolution—when thy laugh  
Has waned from lip and eyelid.

ALEXANDER

Take it now,  
And Christ preserve thee, Cæsar, as thou art,  
To serve him as I serve him. Rose of mine,  
My rose of roses, whence has fallen this dew  
That dims the sweetest eyes love ever lit  
With light that mocks the morning?

VANNOZZA

Nay, my lord,  
I know not—nay, I knew not if I wept.

ALEXANDER

Our sons and Christ's and Peter's whom we praise,  
Are they—are these—fallen out?

FRANCESCO

Not I with him,  
Nor he, I think, with me.

CÆSAR

Forbid it, God!  
The God that set thee where thou art, and there  
Sustains thee, bids the love he kindles bind  
Brother to brother.

ALEXANDER

God or no God, man  
Must live and let man live—while one man's life  
Galls not another's. Fools and fiends are men

Who play the fiend that is not. Why shouldst thou,  
Girt with the girdle of the church, and given  
Power to preside on spirit and flesh—or thou,  
Clothed with the glad world's glory—priest or prince,  
Turn on thy brother an evil eye, or deem  
Your father God hath dealt his doom amiss  
Toward either or toward any? Hath not Rome,  
Hath not the Lord Christ's kingdom, where his will  
Is done on earth, enough of all that man  
Thirsts, hungers, lusts for—pleasure, pride, and power—  
To sate you and to share between you? Whence  
Should she, the godless heathen's goddess once,  
Discord, heave up her hissing head again  
Between love's Christian children—love's? Hath God  
Cut short the thrill that glorifies the flesh,  
Chilled the sharp rapturous pang that burns the blood,  
Because an hundred even as twain at once  
Partake it? Boys, my boys, be wise, and rest,  
Whatever fire take hold upon your flesh,  
Whatever dream set all your life on fire,  
Friends.

CÆSAR

Friends? Our father on earth, thy will be done.

FRANCESCO

Christ's body, Cæsar! dost thou mock?

CÆSAR

Not I.

Hast thou fallen out with me, then, that thy tongue  
Disclaims its lingering utterance?

ALEXANDER

Now, by nought,  
As nought abides to swear by, folly seen  
So plain and heard so loud might well nigh make  
Wise men believe in even the devil and God.  
What ails you? Whence comes lightning in your eyes,  
With hissing hints of thunder on your lips?  
Fools! and the fools I thought to make for men  
Gods. Is it love or hate divides you—turns  
Tooth, fang, or claw, when time provides them prey,  
To nip, rip, rend each other?

CÆSAR

Hate or love,  
Francesco?

FRANCESCO

Why, I hate thee not—thou knowest  
I hate thee not, my Cæsar.

CÆSAR

I believe  
Thou dost not hate or love or envy me;  
Even as I know, and knowing believe, we all—  
Our father, thou and I—triune in heart—  
Hold loveliest of all living things to love  
This.

*Enter* LUCREZIA

LUCREZIA

Mother! What do tears and thou for once  
Together? Rain in sunshine?

VANNOZZA

Ask thy sire,  
Am I not now the moon? Saint Anna bore  
Saint Mary Virgin—did not God prefer  
The child, and thrust behind with scarce a smile  
The mother?

ALEXANDER

Thrust not out thy thorns at heaven,  
Rose.

LUCREZIA

But what ailed her? And she will not say.

CÆSAR

Sister, I sinned—sin must be mine. A word  
Fell out askance between us, and she wept  
Because our father chid us.

LUCREZIA

How should strife  
Find here a tongue to hiss with? Are not we,  
Brothers and sire and sister, sealed of God  
Lovers—made one in love?

ALEXANDER

Deride not God,  
Lucrezia.

LUCREZIA

Father, dost thou fear him, then?

ALEXANDER

I say not and I know not if I fear.

FRANCESCO

Thou canst not. Father, were he terrible,  
How long wouldst thou live—thou, his mask on earth?

ALEXANDER

Boy, art thou all a child? What knew they more,  
The men that loved and feared and died for God,  
Than I and thou who know him not? We know  
This life is ours, and sweet, if shame and fear  
Make us not less than man: and less were they  
Who crawled and writhed and cowered and called on God  
To save them from him. Here I stand as he,  
God, or God's very figure wrought in flesh,  
More godlike than was Jesus. Dare I fear  
Whipping and hanging? Thou, my cardinal,  
Canst think not to be scourged and crucified—  
Ha?

CÆSAR

Nay: there lurks no God in me. And thou,  
Father, dost thou fear?

ALEXANDER

I? Nought less than God.  
But if we take him lightly on our lips  
Too light his name will sound in all men's ears  
Till earth and air, when man says God, respond  
Laughter. Forbear him.

CÆSAR

Wisdom lives in thee,  
And cries not out along the streets as when  
None of God's folk that heard regarded her,  
As all that hear thy word regard—or die,  
Being not outside God's eyeshot. Dost thou sleep  
Here in his special keeping—here—to-night,  
Brother?

FRANCESCO

What bids thee care to know?

CÆSAR

They say

These holy streets of heaven's most holiest choice  
Lie dangerous now in darkness if a man  
Walk not on holiest errands. Thou, they say,  
Wert scarce a Christlike sacrifice if slain.  
Too many dead flow down the Tiber's flow  
Nightly. They say it.

FRANCESCO

I never called thee yet  
Fool.

CÆSAR

Ah, my lord and brother, didst thou now,  
Were this not thankless? God—our father's God—  
Guide thee!

[*Exit* FRANCESCO.]

He goes, and thanks me not. Our sire,  
What says the God that lives upon thy lips  
And withers in thy silence?

LUCREZIA

Vex him not,  
Cæsar. Thou seest he is weary.

ALEXANDER

Yea. Come ye  
With me. Bethink thee, Cæsar. Vex me not.

*Exeunt* ALEXANDER, VANNOZZA, *and* LUCREZIA.

CÆSAR

Thou wilt not bid me this, I think, again,  
Father.

*Enter* MICHELOTTO

Thou art swift of speed at need. I bade thee  
Abide my bidding.

MICHELOTTO

Till my lord were left  
Alone.

CÆSAR

Thou knewest it?

MICHELOTTO

Where my lord may be  
And what beseems his thrall to know of him  
I were not worthy, knew I not, to know.

CÆSAR

I do not ask thee where my brother sleeps.  
And where to-morrow sees him yet asleep—

MICHELOTTO

Ask of the fishers' nets on Tiber.

CÆSAR

Nay—  
Not I but Rome shall ask it. Pass in peace.  
The benediction of my sire be thine.

[*Exeunt.*]

## SCENE II

*A narrow street opening on the Tiber*

*Enter MICHELOTTO and ASSASSINS*

MICHELOTTO

Ye know the lordlier harlot's house—there?

FIRST ASSASSIN

Ay,  
Surely.

MICHELOTTO

The first whose foot comes forth is he.

SECOND ASSASSIN

How know we this?

MICHELOTTO

I know it. Ye need but slay.

[*Exit.*

*Enter* FRANCESCO

FRANCESCO (*singing*)

Love and night are life and light;  
Sleep and wine and song  
Speed and slay the halting day  
Ere it live too long.

FIRST ASSASSIN

That shalt not thou. Sing, whosoe'er thou be,  
Thy next of songs to Satan.

[*They stab him.*

FRANCESCO

Dogs! Ye dare?  
God! Pity me! God!

[*Dies.*

SECOND ASSASSIN

God receive his soul!  
This was a Christian: many a man I have slain  
Died with all hell between his lips.

FIRST ASSASSIN

Be thine  
Dumb. Lift his feet as I the head.

SECOND ASSASSIN

A boy!  
And fair of face as angels

FIRST ASSASSIN

If the nets  
Snare not this fish betimes ere others feed,  
None that shall heave it airward for the sun  
To mock and mar shall say so. Bring him down.  
Tiber hath fed on choicer fare than we  
May think to feed his throat with ere we die.

[*Exeunt with the body.*

### SCENE III

*The Vatican*

ALEXANDER and LUCREZIA

ALEXANDER



The day burns high. Thou hast not seen them—thou?

LUCREZIA

My brethren, sire? Nay, not since yesternight.

ALEXANDER

The night is newly dead. Since yestereven?

LUCREZIA

Nor then. I saw them when we parted here  
Last.

ALEXANDER

I believe thou liest not. Girl, the day  
Looks pale before thy glory. Brow, cheek, eye,  
Lips, throat, and bosom, thou dost overshadow  
All womanhood man ever worshipped. Once  
I held thy mother fairest born of all  
That ever turned old Rome to heaven. Thou hast read  
Her golden Horace?

LUCREZIA

Else were I cast out  
From all their choir who serve the Muses.

ALEXANDER

Ay.  
'Fair mother's fairer daughter,' dost thou deem  
That praise was ever merited as by thee?  
I cannot.

LUCREZIA

I concern myself no whit  
If so it were or were not.

ALEXANDER

Thou dost well.  
Thou hast not seen, thou sayest, Francesco?

LUCREZIA

Nay—  
Give me some reliquary to swear it on—  
Some rosary—crucifix or amulet,  
Sorcerous or sacred.

ALEXANDER

Never twins were born  
More like than thou and he—nor lovelier: yet  
No twins were ye.

LUCREZIA

What ails thy Holiness?

ALEXANDER

I am ill at ease: my heart is sick. Last night  
No revel here was held, and yet the day  
Strikes heavier on me wearier, body and soul,  
Than though we had rioted out with raging mirth  
The lifelong length of darkness.

LUCREZIA

Evil hours  
Fret somewhiles all folk living; none sees why:  
No child sleeps always all night long.

ALEXANDER

Wast thou  
Wakeful? No trouble clung about thee? Nought  
Made the air of night heavier with presage felt  
As joy feels fear and withers? I am not  
Afraid: methinks I am very fear itself.

*Enter an Officer of the household*

OFFICER

His holiness be gracious towards me.

ALEXANDER

Speak.  
Thy face is death's: let death upon thy lips  
Live.

OFFICER

Sire, the humblest hireling knave in Rome—  
A waterman that plies his craft all night—  
Craves audience even of thee.

ALEXANDER

A Roman?

OFFICER

Nay.  
Some outlander—some Greek—they call the knave  
George the Slavonian.

ALEXANDER

They?

OFFICER

The fisherfolk  
On Tiber.

ALEXANDER

Bid him in: bid God himself  
Come in with doom upon me.

*[Exit Officer.]*

Hear'st thou, child—  
Daughter?

LUCREZIA

What horror hangs on thee?

ALEXANDER

Abide,  
And thou shalt know as I know.

*Enter* GIORGIO SCHIAVONE

Speak. I say,  
Speak. What thou art I know: and what I am  
Thou knowest—and yet thou knowest not.

GIORGIO

Holiest sire,  
Last night I kept my boat on Tiber—Sire,  
The thing I saw was nothing of my deed—  
It shook me out of sleep to see it—Lord,  
Have mercy: look not so upon me.

ALEXANDER

Dog,  
Speak, while thy tongue is thine.

GIORGIO

Two men came down  
And peered along the water-side: and two  
Came after—men whose eyes raked all the night,  
Searching the shore—I lay beneath my boat—  
Beside it on the darkling side—and saw.  
Then came a horseman—Sire, his horse was white—  
The moonshine made his mane like dull white fire—  
And on his crupper heavily hung a corpse,  
Arms held from swaying on this side, legs on that,

I know not which on either—but the men  
Held fast that held: and hard on Tiber side  
They swung the crupper towards the water—sharp  
And swift as man may steer a horse—and caught  
And slung their dead into the stream: and he  
Drifted, and caught the moon across his face  
That shone like life against it: and the chief  
Till then sat silent as the moon at watch,  
And then bade hurl stones on the drifting dead  
And sink him out of sight; and seeing this done,  
Rode thence, and they strode after.

ALEXANDER

Man, and thou—  
Thou?

GIORGIO

Sire, I set my heart again to sleep:  
I turned and slept under my boatside.

ALEXANDER

Man—  
Dog—devil, if this be truth, and if my fear  
Lie not—how hadst thou heart to hold thy peace?  
How comes it that the warders of the shore  
Knew not of thee, while yet the crime was hot,  
What crime had made night hell?

GIORGIO

A thousand times  
I have seen such sights, but never till this hour  
Seen him who cared to hear of them.

ALEXANDER

Till now,  
Never. He looks in God's mute face and mine,  
And says it. God be good to me! But God  
Will not—or is not. Where is then thy dead,  
Devil, called of God from hell to smite—to scourge—  
Me?

GIORGIO

Sire, at hand I left him.

ALEXANDER

Stir not. Bid  
Thy fellows bring my dead before me.

[*Exit Officer.*]

Nay,  
But mine it is not yet—it may not be  
Mine—while it may not be, it is not. Child,  
It shall not be thy brother. Pray no prayer.  
Prayer never yet brought profit. Be not pale.  
Fear strikes more deep into the fearful heart  
The wound it heals not.

Enter Officers with the body of FRANCESCO

What is he they bring?  
O God! Thou livest! And my child is dead!

[*Falls.*]

## SCENE IV

*The Vatican*

ALEXANDER *and* CÆSAR

ALEXANDER

Thou hast done this deed.

CÆSAR

Thou hast said it.

ALEXANDER

Dost thou think  
To live, and look upon me?

CÆSAR

Some while yet.

ALEXANDER

I would there were a God—that he might hear.

CÆSAR

'Tis pity there should be—for thy sake—none.

ALEXANDER

Wilt thou slay me?

CÆSAR

Why?

ALEXANDER

Am not I thy sire?

CÆSAR

And Christendom's to boot.

ALEXANDER

I pray thee, man,  
Slay me.

CÆSAR

And then myself? Thou art crazed, but I  
Sane.

ALEXANDER

Art thou very flesh and blood?

CÆSAR

They say,  
Thine.

ALEXANDER

If the heaven stand still and smite thee not,  
There is no God indeed.

CÆSAR

Nor thou nor I  
Know.

ALEXANDER

I could pray to God that God might be,  
Were I but mad. Thou sayest I am mad: thou liest:  
I do not pray.

CÆSAR

Most holiest father, no.  
Thy brain is not so sick yet. Thou and God  
Friends? Man, how long would God have let thee live—  
Thee?

ALEXANDER

Long enough he hath kept me, to behold  
His face as fire—if his it be—and earth  
As hell—and thee, begotten of my loins,  
Satan.

CÆSAR

The firstfruits of thy fatherhood  
Were something less than Satan. Man of God,  
Vaunt not thyself.

ALEXANDER

I would I had died in the womb.

CÆSAR

Thou shalt do better, dying in Peter's chair:  
Thou shalt die famous.

ALEXANDER

Ay: no screen from that,  
No shelter, no forgetfulness on earth.  
We shall be famed for ever. Hell and night,  
Cover me!

CÆSAR

Hast thou heard that prayers are heard?  
Or hast thou known earth, for a man's cry's sake,  
Cleave, and devour him?

ALEXANDER

I have done this thing.  
Thou hast not done it: thy deed is none of thine:  
Upon my hand, upon my head, the blood  
Rests.

CÆSAR

Wilt thou sleep the worse for this next year?

ALEXANDER

I will not live a seven days' space beyond  
This.

CÆSAR

Thou hast lived thy seven days' space in hell,  
Father: they say thou hast fasted even from sleep.

ALEXANDER

Ay.

CÆSAR

What they say and what thou sayest I hold  
False. Though thou hast wept as woman, howled as wolf,  
Above our dead, thou art hale and whole. And now  
Behoves thee rise again as Christ our God,  
Vicarious Christ, and cast as flesh away  
This grief from off thy godhead. I and thou,  
One, will set hand as never God hath set  
To the empire and the steerage of the world.  
Do thou forget but him who is dead, and was  
Nought, and bethink thee what a world to wield  
The eternal God hath given into thine hands  
Which daily mould him out of bread, and give  
His kneaded flesh to feed on. Thou and I  
Will make this rent and ruinous Italy  
One. Ours it shall be, body and soul, and great  
Above all power and glory given of God  
To them that died to set thee where thou art—  
Throned on the dust of Cæsar and of Christ,  
Imperial. Earth shall quail again, and rise  
Again the higher because she trembled. Rome  
So bade it be: it was, and shall be.

ALEXANDER

Son,  
Art thou my son?

CÆSAR

Whom should thy radiant Rose  
Have found so fit to ingraff with, and bring forth  
So strong a scion as I am?

ALEXANDER

By my faith—  
Wherein, I know not—by my soul, if that  
Be—I believe it. God forgot his doom  
When he thou hast slain drew breath before thee

CÆSAR

God  
Must needs forget—if God remember. Now  
This thing thou hast loved, and I that swept him hence  
Held never fit for hate of mine, is dead,  
Wilt thou be one with me—one God? No less,  
Lord Christ of Rome, thou wilt be.

ALEXANDER

Ay? The Dove?

CÆSAR

What dove, though lovelier than the swan that lured  
Leda to love of God on earth, might match  
Lucrezia?

ALEXANDER

None. Thou art subtle of soul and strong.  
I would thou hadst spared him—couldst have spared him.

CÆSAR

Sire,  
I would so too. Our sire, his sire and mine,  
I slew not him for lust of slaying, or hate,  
Or aught less like thy wiser spirit and mine.

ALEXANDER

Not for the dove's sake?

CÆSAR

Not for hate or love.  
Death was the lot God bade him draw, if God  
Be more than what we make him.

ALEXANDER

Bread and wine  
Could hardly turn so bitter. Canst thou sleep?

CÆSAR

Dost thou not? Flesh must sleep to live. Am I  
No son of thine?

ALEXANDER

I would I saw thine end,  
And mine: and yet I would not.

CÆSAR

Sire, good night.

[*Exeunt*

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