

Vent. I no error?
Ant. Emperor! Why, that's the style of victory.
 The conquering soldier, red with untold wounds,
 Shutes his general so: but never more
 Shall that sound reach my ears.

Vent. I want you.
Ant. Aetium, Aetium! Oh—
V. It sits too near you.
Ant. Here, here it lies; a lump of lead by day;
 And in my short, distracted nightly slumbers,
 The lag that rules my dreams—
Vent. Out with it; give it vent.

Ant. Urge not my shame—
 I lost a battle.
Vent. So has Julius done. I think'st;
Ant. Thou favour'st me, and speak'st not half thou
 For Julius fought it out, and lost it fairly;
 But Antony—

Vent. Nay, stop not.
Ant. Antony—
 Well, thou wilt have it—like a coward, fled
 Fled while his soldiers fought; fled first, Ventidius.
 Thou long'st to curse me, and I give thee leave:
 I know thou can'st prepare to rail.

Vent. I did.
Ant. I'll help thee—I have been a man, Ventidius.
Vent. Yes, and a brave one; but—
Ant. I know thy meaning.

But I have lost my reason, have disgraced
 The name of soldier with inglorious ease;
 In the full vantage of my flowing honours
 Sat still, and saw it pressed by other hands.
 Fortune came smiling to my youth, and wooed it,
 And purple greatness met my ripened years.
 When first I came to empire, I was borne
 On tides of people, crowding to my triumphs,
 The wish of nations, and the willing world,
 Received me as its pledge of future peace.
 I was so great, so happy, so beloved,
 Fate could not ruin me; till I took pains,
 And worked against my fortune, chid her from me,
 And turned her bosom: yet still she came again,
 My careless days and my luxurious nights
 At length have wearied her, and now she's gone;
 Gone, gone, divorced for ever. Help me, soldier,
 To curse this madman, this industrious fool,
 Who laboured to be wretched. Prythee, curse me.

Vent. No.
Ant. Why?
Vent. You are too sensible already
 Of what you have done; too conscious of your failings.
 And like a scorpion, whipt by others first
 To lay, sting yourself in mad revenge.
 I would bring balm, and pour it in your wounds,
 Cure your distempered mind, and heal your fortunes.

Ant. I know thou wouldst.
Vent. I will.
Ant. Ha, ha, ha, ha!
Vent. You laugh
Ant. I do, to see officious love
 Give cordials to the dead.

Vent. You would be lost, then?
Ant. I am.
Vent. I say you are not. Try your fortune.
Ant. I have to the utmost. Dost thou think me
 desperate

With—just cause? No; when I found all lost
 Beyond repair, I hid me from the world;
 And learned to scorn it here; which now I do
 So heartily, I think it is not worth
 The cost of keeping.

Vent. Caesar thinks not so;
 He'll thank you for the gift he could not take.
 You would be killed like Tully, would you? Do
 Hold out your throat to Caesar, and die tamely.
Ant. No, I can kill myself, and so resolve.
Vent. I can die with you, too, when time shall serve;
 But fortune calls upon us now to live,
 To fight, to conquer.

Vent. Since thou dream'st, Ventidius!
Vent. No; 'tis you dream; you sleep away your
 hours
 In desperate sloth, miscalled philosophy.

Up, up, for honour's sake; twelve legions wait you,
 And long to call you chief. By painful journeys
 I led 'em patient both of heat and hunger,
 Down from the Parthian marches to the Nile.
 'Twill do you good to see their sunburnt faces,
 Their scarred cheeks, and chapt hands; there's virtue in 'em;
 They'll sell those mangled limbs at dearer rates
 Than you trim hands can buy.

Ant. Where left you them?
Vent. I said in lower Syria.
Ant. Bring 'em hither;

There may be life in these.
Vent. They will not come.
Ant. Why dost thou mock my hopes with promised aids,
 To double my despair? They're mutinous.
Vent. Most firm and loyal.

Ant. Yet they will not march
 To succour me. Oh, trifle!
Vent. They petition
 You would make haste to head 'em.

Ant. I'm besieged.
Vent. There's but one way shut up. How came I hither?
Ant. I will not stir.
Vent. They would perhaps desire
 A better reason.

Ant. I have never used
 My soldiers to demand a reason of
 My actions. Why did they refuse to march?
Vent. They said they would not fight for Cleopatra.

Ant. What was't they said?
Vent. They said they would not fight for Cleopatra.
 Why should they fight, indeed, to make her conquer,
 And make you more a slave? To gain you kingdoms
 Which, for a kiss, at your next midnight feast
 You'll sell to her? Then she new-names her jewels,
 And calls this diamond such or such a tax;
 Each pendant in her ear shall be a province.

Ant. Ventidius, I allow your tongue free licence
 On all my other faults; but, on your life,
 No word of Cleopatra; she deserves
 More words than I can lose.

Vent. Behold, you powers,
 To whom you have intrusted humankind;
 See Europe, Afric, Asia put in balance,
 And all weighed down by one light worthless woman!
 I think the gods are Antonies, and give,
 Like prodigals this nether world away
 To none but wasteful hands.

Ant. You grow presumptuous.