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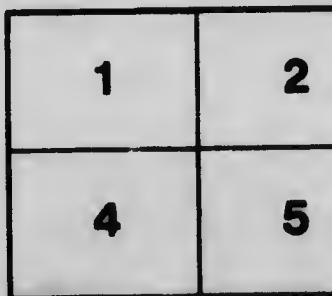
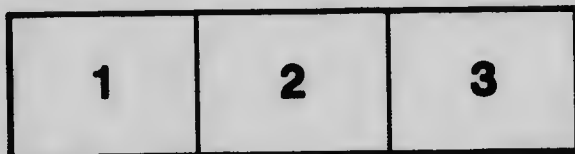
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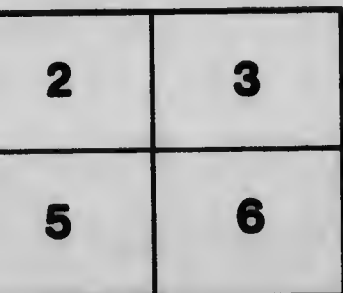
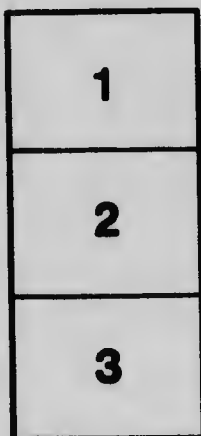
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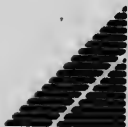
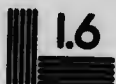
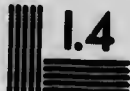
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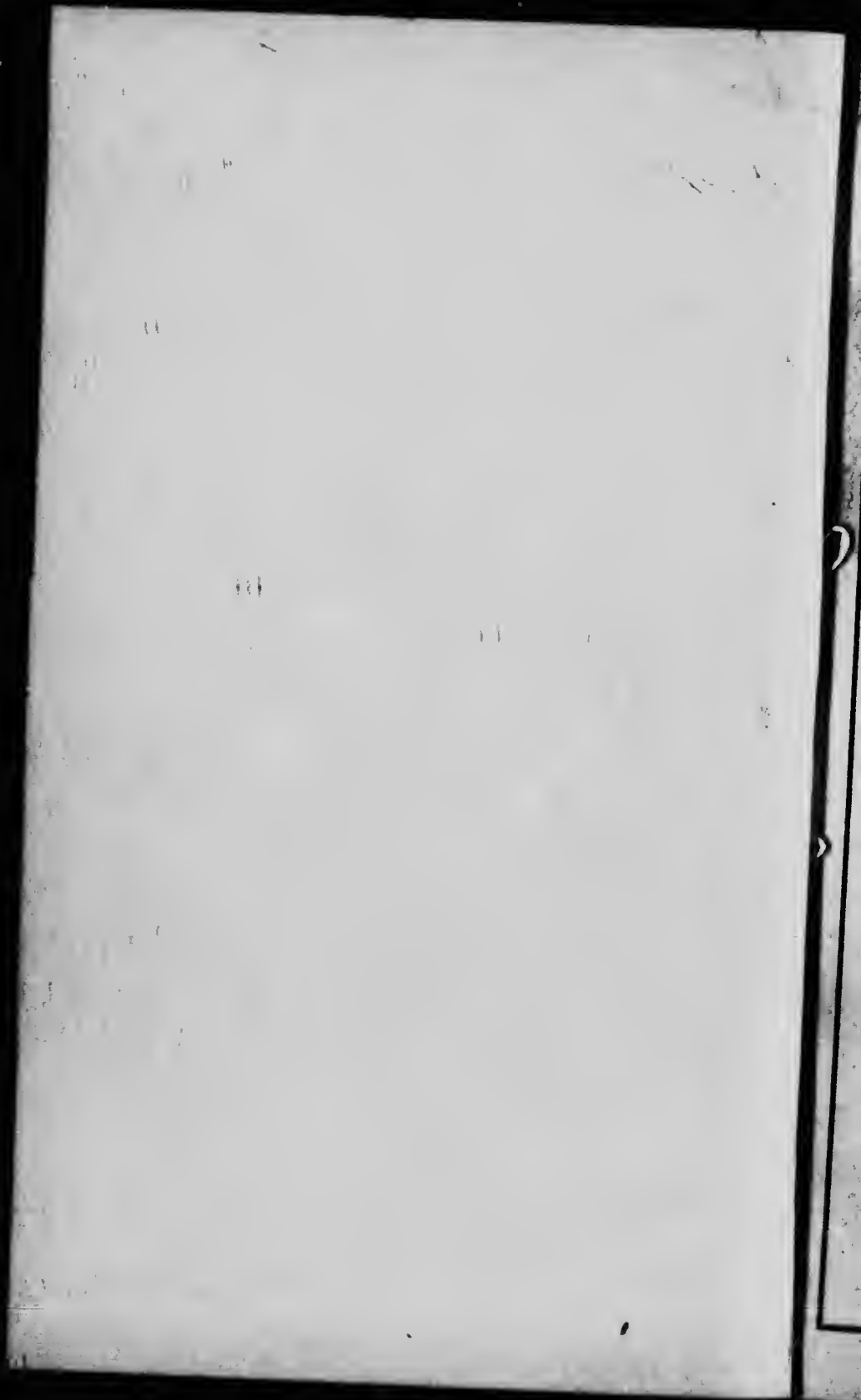
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in poetry 1410

THE
VESTAL VIRGIN

A DRAMATIC
POEM

BY

J. P. D. LLWYD



HALIFAX, N. S.

1920

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To
the best of comrades
MY WIFE AND CHILDREN;
MY SON
who gave his life for the great
cause

AND

My Friend
CHARLES E. SHEPARD

This offspring of my leisure
hours, chiefly written for
them, is dedicated.

C
N
L

DRAMTAIS PERSONAE

SCENE: Rome, in the early second century.

LEPIDUS: A Patrician of Rome.

HORACE: A Poet.

LUCIO: A Roman Military Officer.

OROS: An Egyptian Priest.

THE PONTIFEX MAXIMUS.

CITIZENS.

TWO SLAVES.

CENTURION, CLERK, AND TEMPLE GUARDS.

NYSIA: Daughter of Lepidus.

LUCINA: Nurse to Nysia.

THE VIRGO MAXIMA.

VESTAL VIRGINS.

WIDOW.

THE GRACES AND THE MUSES.

A ROUT OF MAENADS, SATYRS AND FAUNS.

VESTA THE GODDESS.

E
NY

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

ACT ONE.

SCENE I.

A room in the interior of the mansion of the patrician Lepidus at Rome. The patrician and his daughter Nysia sitting, he in his chair, she at his feet.

LEPIDUS. Hast heard from Lucio, child?

NYSIA. Not yet, my lord.
Thrice hath great Dian climbed the azure sky,
Rolling her silver round from crescent unto orb,
Since last he brake the silence.

LEPIDUS. It is strange.

NYSIA. And yet my mind misgives me not, the bloom

On each last message is so sweet, the next
Knocks like a suitor at my bosom's door,
Or e'er my heart-beat from the first hath ceased.
This campaign should subdue the Parthian
princess

Razing her citadels and pledging prosperous war.
His safety knows no danger if the kind gods
List to the breath of maiden's nightly prayer.
It is not strange.

LEPIDUS. I would thy mother were alive tonight.

NYSIA. My mother!

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

LEPIDUS. She was a paragon of virtue, Nysia!
Compact of all that best becomes Rome's mat-
ronhood,
Chaster than Lucrece, gracious as Brutus' Portia,
A porcelain filled with essences divine.
Her sister being a Vestal, nought would please
But the achieving of that high estate for thee,
With all the honors budding forth from thence.

NYSIA. My destiny a Vestal's!

LEPIDUS. So 'twas planned.
Two summers had scarce ripened in thy blood,
Thy gums but just the parent breast forsook,
(Filled with these laughing pearls) ere thou
wast laid
In Vesta's arms, her novice to become
Mongst yon bright crowd that tends the holy fire,
Lest dire extinction overwhelm old Rome.

NYSIA. This tidings stuns me with amazement,
though

It matches well with certain pictures dim
That much of late have crossed my memory,—
Starting anew from childhood's corridors
Where Nature's cunning art had made and hung
them.

I tremble to hear more—how loosed you Vesta's
bond?

How opened troth plight unto Lucio? Speak!

LEPIDUS. Twas sickness, child; whether thy weak-
ness pined,

Pent up in those chill walls, sick with the want
Of green fields and warm air and children's
laughing games

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

I know not; only—thy novitiate still green—
The Priestess brought thee, a mere waxen image,
Back to thy mother's breast, which strangely
filled again

With childhood's nutriment, and saved thy life.

Enter A SLAVE in Haste.

SLAVE. Lucina, my lord, with tidings from Prince
Lucio.

NYZIA. Ah! my prince!

Enter LUCINA, panting and downcast.

Quick with thy news!

LUCINA. Alas, lady, would that the goodness of my
tidings

Might show as fair as does your eagerness!

NYZIA.

What's that?

LUCINA. I come now from the priest Oros, who
reports

The advent of a messenger from Greece;
Who, on Rome's highway, journeying hither-
ward,

Found at the roadside, a near dying man,
Murdered by robbers, his poor body gashed
With twenty scarlet stabs; his wallet rifled;
Apparel, steed and housings, disappeared;
Save one old cloak, the robber's charity
To shield his nakedness. From this he drew
A bloodstained writing, and with gasping breath
Uttered two words—thy name and then the
priest's—

And so fell back and died. The messenger
Delivered it to Oros, and tis here.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

NYSIA. (*Snatches it from her hands, glances at*
Thou liest! (*Swoons*).

LUCINA. Alas! would it were but s

LEPIDUS. What would'st thou, woman, cease the
puling tears!

Yield up thy message without more delays.

LUCINA. (*Reads*)

*To the priest Oros from the General Lucio, greeting
When this shall reach thee, know that time and
place change all things. I did once affect Nysia
till my sight beheld a greater perfection. She
whom I have conquered hath already overcome me
victor by her charms and shall be a wife with
Lucio for her mate e'er this shall lie beneath thy
eyes. Thou wast Nysia's playfellow in your
childhood, be to her that thou canst in my defectio*

LUCINA

LEPIDUS. 'Tis false, incredible, he could not do
(*Seizes the paper*) His own hand-writing, his
self same subscription!

The heavens are falling, sure the deep-laid
foundations

Whose bosom bears all confidence and piety
Crumble beneath our feet, the solid earth
Sinks from before us in this strange misfortune

LUCINA. My lord! My lord!

LEPIDUS. Let every curse that blasphemous
The blood of lustful youth, and brings old age
In fell black wrinkles like the mummy, light
him!

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Ye gods, ye great destroyers, who hate men,
Infect his bones with all your lightnings, till
In the dear topmost hour of their delight
The power to joy shall vanish! What are these
words!

Alas! my bird, I fear thy destiny speaks
O'er strong for our arrangements. *That's the*
cause!

Tis Vesta claims her own. What! Nysia, dost
hear?

A greater fate than love has gripped thy life!
Twas pre-ordained that young heart should be
torn

Asunder from its choice.

NYSIA. (*Faintly*)

Tis true, I see my lot.

PIDUS. Wilt thou return to yon divinity;

Forget this light-o-love; tend the pure flame;

Passing chaste days in solemn hush and prayer;

Fulfilling that great dream of long ago?

NYSIA.

I will.

Curtain Falls.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

ACT ONE.

SCENE II.—*A Street Before the Temple.*

Enter TWO SLAVES.

FIRST SLAVE. A plague upon all augurs, say I. There's never a true man in the tribe—a pack of canting snufflers the whole of 'em, pinching a bit of incense upon the very holy altar of the gods, and then pinching their noses at each other, forsooth. Two of the thieving rascals passed down the Via Claudia but this minute with the smell of sacrifice still hanging on their clothes, and—by the wolf-teat that suckled Remus,—one came near chuckling himself into a fever over joking with his fellow at the fat-wittedness of the world. A plague upon all such false hearts, say I.

SECOND SLAVE. What! dost think that the gods do live?

FIRST SLAVE. Hast raised a hard question. This must be judged philosophically, and hast done well to propound it to me, for my master was once a philosopher. As for instance—if there be many—there will also be one—therefore the gods must be.

SECOND SLAVE. Thy reasoning may be good but thou hast a singular gift at wrapping it up in sugar-coated darkness.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

FIRST SLAVE. I marvel that thou art so benighted in thy wisdom—hast ever seen a tree?

SECOND SLAVE. Aye.

FIRST SLAVE. Well, there thou hast it—is not a tree many and yet it is one. So there is one god to each country and yet many towns and farms and forests in the land. I do wonder that he can spread himself over so much ground.

SECOND SLAVE. I see.

FIRST SLAVE. Thou wilt split thy wits if thou gazest too long at that thou seest. Wait until tomorrow and thou shalt see a sight rarer than the gods—a picture to make thy eyes run worse than an onion.

SECOND SLAVE. What meanest thou?

FIRST SLAVE. Why, the patrician Lepidus came to the temple today to make ready for the vowing of his daughter—a poor child white as a ghost—she trembled so my old heart went out to her with pity.

SECOND SLAVE. How comes she here?

FIRST SLAVE. Nay! I trow 'tis another of Cupid's castoffs. The priest Oros talked with the patrician in my hearing and I made out enough that the birdling's mate had given her the go-by—a gift to Vesta of the leavings of Venus, forsooth!

SECOND SLAVE. Thou hadst better clip thy glib tongue lest thou lose it altogether speaking thus loosely of the gods.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

FIRST SLAVE. The gods, bah! I do but speak according to their divinity—my tongue is ruled by the interest of their actions. It grieves me to see yon poor white lamb a victim to their fancy wills.

SECOND SLAVE. Hast been to Egypt for thy scoffing, I fear. To work, here comes the priest.

Enter OROS.

How now, you lazy knaves, get you to your labor. The sun dips low and still the preparations lag. Know you not tomorrow is a solemn festival?

Exeunt SLAVES.

OROS. The fires of love consume me; not Prometheus with the vulture preying upon his vitals endured such torments; sleeping and waking Nysia's image haunts me till every several sense cries after her. Some say love purifies, but that's mere babbling. I must have her. Existence is but the fever of possession, and what signifies the will that cannot triumph over obstacles. I have poisoned her mind 'gainst Lucio—that's the first step—the second is to make her Vestal and so fix adamantine bars 'twixt her and him. Then when leisure and opportunity agree I will find time and place to woo her or compel her despite her vows. 'Tis but the fulfilment of our childhood's comradeship, so sweet and dear 'till his unlawful stealth broke in and rifled my treasure from its casket. In yonder temple where the world's shut out must not her tender soul claim its old playmate? It must and shall. Whate'er the hazard, she is mine.

Exit.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

ACT ONE.

SCENE III.

SCENE III.—*Interior of the House of Lepidus, Room of Nysia.*

There is a colonnade back and broad steps leading up to it. Archway in the centre. Doors left and right. (Left is used by Nysia.) A shrine built in a niche between centre door and right under a painted serpent represented as about to take offerings from a round altar. In front is a square altar for domestic worship.

Enter NYSIA.

NYSIA. It must be true—Lucina loves me well;
Too well to harrow up my heart with lies;
And yet—I know not—he too loved me well
Whose perfidy has plunged me in this woe.
If he is false then let all evidence,
All tales that claim conviction be but myths,
Such as the nursery babbles to our babes.
On that last eve his arms around me made
Love's guardian circlet, while my ravished ear
Drank in such murmurs ardent and aflame
With passionate worship that each several sense
Thrilled to his speech like air to eloquence.
He seemed a man of fire, but yet a fire
Tempered with holiest gentleness and respect.
"The soldier's duty to his Emperor,
His oath and country, reave me from thy side;

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

But neither space nor the alarms of horrid war
Have power to part my constant heart from thee
At each morn's dayspring—listen sweet,
Let thy soul listen while thy lover pays
His orisons in humble reverence at thy shrine—
Each hour that strikes shall waft a new perfume
Blent of love's odours to thy presence dear,
And night herself, drear separation's queen,
Shall speed me to thee on swift wings of dreams.
It cannot be! Alas, it must and can!
It is too late—e'en now the temple waits
To be my bosom's tomb, the last last tomb
Irrevocable of my love, Lucio, for thee. (*Sinks
down on couch*).

Enter LUCINA,

Lucina, oh what hast thou done to me?

LUCINA. What! weep'st thou, little one, thou
should'st have seen

That which but now hath fallen upon mine eyes
The sights and sounds Vesta hath planned for
thee.

The holy place, whose pavement is reserved
For steps as pure as thine, and in whose bower
Eyes bleared like these must shield their lawless
gaze,—

Snowy with lilies, midst whose innocent stalks
The ram for sacrifice stands with a fleece as
spotless

As, dipped therein, would turn old Tiber clean.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Nay, shed no tears my soul, thou'lt be a bride
anon
With braver pageant than could wed a queen.

NYSIA. A bride alas, without a bridegroom's clasp!
Why woman, what dost think me? Some cold
stone

That breathes not, feels not, pedestalled for aye!
Without warm blood, or human anything
That quickens at the kiss of lover's lips.
Pygmalion's model lacking woman's breath!
I love, Lucina, and I long to feel
The blessed twining of accepted arms
And the quick heart-leap of mine own to mine.
What means to me the pomp of Dian's shrine
With Lucio false, 'tis death, ah me, 'tis death!
The garlands mock me—the ram's a satyr vile—
The robes my shroud—the temple cell my grave—
All hangings gay—cerements of wintry death.
*Lucina goes to her comforting her. As they turn
Lepidus and Horace enter; they meet. Horace
gazes fixedly at Nysia, pauses on steps, then speaks.*

HORACE. Thou canst not suffer it! It is a crime—
A treason 'gainst all duty and philosophy
To pen a maidenhood so warm and fair,
So exquisite in fashion, and so ripe in mind,
Deep in those prison walls away from sight.
All wisdom, all affection as from parent unto
child
With whatsoever graces of respect
E'en a sire's sovereignty owes to sculptured
limbs.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

And beauties chiselled in so delicate wise
(As if Apollo's self had mixed in her begetting
Their voices 'all commingle in one cry
Of horror 'gainst so wicked a privation.
I have a vase, of right Pompeian tint,
Graceful in workmanship as in design,
Mirror of iris and of heavenliest dawn,
Rome's crystal miracle, the people's wonder;
Should that soft lustre in a cavern lie
Where never eye might see it nor the mind
Be gladdened by its glancings? Must the chill
death

That lurks in yonder marble prey on our young
maids

Mating his fleshless bones with bosoms warm
with sighs,

His icy clasp in horrid nuptials with red lips
And sighs of love, and eyes sparkling with
flames

Lit from the altar-fires of innocence?—

LEPIDUS. Peace, Roman poet, thou canst write an
ode,

But not defend a daughter, nor

A father's pride—an old patrician's pride.

The scoundrel traitor to deceive my girl!

Oros speaks true, his heart's as black as hell,
To woo my child with speeches, and then sink

Into the false embrace of barbarous arms

Although a queen's—let the clear rites proceed!

Like Virgil's daughter or famed Memnon's,

Nysia's fate

Demands her as a sacrifice to wounded pride.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

ACT TWO.

SCENE I.

PLACE—*The Temple of Vesta.*

A flourish of trumpets. Temple Guards, then Oros, then procession of Vestal Virgins robed in white; followed by slaves bearing image and shrine of the goddess, then more virgins leading ram for sacrifice, then high priestess leading Nysia.

CHORUS OF THE VESTALS.

In maiden innocence
And virgin youth,
In vowed intelligence
And plighted truth,
To Vesta's shrine we come,
To her high home
Of tranquil peace divine—
Of peace and love divine—
Her Vestals dear we come.

Hence all ye lower joys,
Delights of sense;
All Cupid's transports,
Bacchus' revels, hence!
The goddess of the bow and quiver,
From whose argent brows a river
Flows of dusky hair—
A night of dusky hair—
Charms you satyrs hence.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Lucina bids us bring
This offering meet,
A flower of purest spring,
To her unspotted feet.
Neath the magic of her crescent—
Emblem of her power all-present—
Power o'er moon and stars
The reverent silver stars—
To lay this treasure sweet.

PONTIFEX MAXIMUS. People of Rome and lovers
the State

Whose mighty bosom cradles half a world,
I bid you to no common festival
Such as unbridles all the revel rout
That makes night hideous with noise and win
High thoughts befit this pageant of high deed
Whoso still breathes the spirit of our sires—
Of Numa and the founders of our laws—
Will find this day its own best orator,
The secret of its mystery to impart.
Not in its legions stands a nation's power,
Nor wide domains, nor victories steeped in blood
But in the radiance of those altar-fires
Twinkling like stars upon ten thousand hearths
Whose holy place is Roman homes; their in
cense, love;
And their high priest, the babe in mother's arms
Whose heavenly patroness, above with smile
serene
Approving, sits, the object of our vows,
Our mild defender, Vesta, goddess-queen!

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

CITIZENS. All hail, great Vesta, Rome's protectress,
hail!

PONTIFEX. These powers domestic find their em-
blems high

By Vesta's knees and mongst her maidens pure;
And all that speaks chaste love—the loyal heart,
The yielding arms, and tender sigh of wedlock's
chivalry,

Dreams in the ritua! of this sacred flame.

To watch its burning the Eternal City brings

An offering of its richest, a young bird

Whose brooding wing shall fan the flame to life.

CITIZENS. All hail, great Vesta, Rome's protectress,
hail!

PONTIFEX. Bring forth the maid who dedicate
herself

In this dread ceremony.

High Priestess advances leading Nysia by the hand.

HIGH PRIESTESS.

This is the maid.

PONTIFEX. Comes she self-offered?

HIGH PRIESTESS.

Ay, my good lord,

And in this offering does fulfil the pledge

Whose sunrise shone within her childhood's face;

Sickness to death postponed that novitiate

Which now her ripened strength aspires to keep.

PONTIFEX. From the far past this order doth in-
herit

Laws and observances inviolate, on whose hinge

The safety of our State and households doth
depend.

THE VESTA. VIRGIN

How stands she toward them?

HIGH PRIESTESS.

As to the a

The echo,—or to the bird, its down;
A perfect fit, a correspondence rare.
The threshold suits not to the door more true
Than is she mated to prescribed condition
Her parents willing, her escutcheon pure,
Of free ancestry and unblemished form,
Immaculate comes she to th' immaculate shrine
(*Pontifex steps down from the throne and lays his
hand upon Nysia's head.*)

PONTIFEX. I receive thee, Nysia, as priestess
Vesta, to perform whatever sacred offices
may be right for a priestess of Vesta, of perfect
qualifications, to perform on behalf of the
Roman people of the Quirites. (*He then takes
her by the hand and seats her upon a stone place
toward the south of the temple. Veiling his head
in the manner of an augur he takes his seat on his
left, holding in his right hand a staff, without
knot and curved at the end, called a lituus. Pointing
this towards the altar, then towards the shrine
of the goddess, then circle-wise around the interior
he prays to the gods.*)

INVOCATION.

From all the gods on 'Lyons crownéd steep
Virtue and effluence on this shrine descend!
May Saturn's race
Celestial life and grace
Distil like dew, till in our spirits deep,
Apollo's light, Jove's power, Minerva's cab
shall blend.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

(The Pontifex then transfers his staff to his left hand, and placing his right upon the head of Nysia, offers the following prayer to Vesta.)

Now, mighty queen, thy secret will reveal;
Mortal ambition thence dares no appeal;
Omens august we ask on bended knee;
Attest our offering by thy dread decree.

(Silence follows, in the midst of which a white dove flutters down upon the head of Nysia.)

TIZENS. A sign, a sign! The deity approves,
And stamps assurance on the gift she loves.

PONTIFEX. 'Tis even so. Heaven hath declared
its will:

This offered life is sealed by powers Divine.
Now let the maid the holy raiment don,
That marks the priestess: let those tresses fair
Whose wavy fleece disports its gold around her
neck,

Feel the keen knife, and with solemnity
On yonder sacred bough be hung, as is our wont.
Rich fruit to spring from such a blackened stem.

Nysia is taken into the temple and robed in the white apparel of a Vestal. Her hair is cut off with the sacred shears and on her reentrance into the atrium a tress is laid upon the sacred branch near the Pontifex. Meanwhile the Vestals sing:

SONG.

Thou hast girt on thine armour our sister and
friend
The jewels of Latium to guard and defend;

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

In the dew of thy Maytime while fancy is free
Thy young heart was bound to great Heaven's
deceitful decree.

Through thy soul's deepest depth rang out
the deity's call,

To devote to her service thy life and thy all
From childhood she vouchsafed thee and fashioned
thee fair

Then drew to her temple thy innocence rare

We hail thee, our sister, our comrade, our friend

Her altar and hearth-fire in honor to tend;
From treason, from faithlessness, Vesta, we
pray

To secure the high vow thou hast taken today

*Exit Pontifex Maximus and train with Solemn
Ceremony.*

HIGH PRIESTESS. It is our custom at the close of
our ceremonies to admit all suppliants who
may have request to make of a new Vestal
Proclaim, centurion, that such have leave to
enter.

CENTURION. The highest Vestal bids me proclaim
that all petitioners and suppliants have leave
and grace now to enter and declare their grief.
*Enter A Woman in widow's weeds and weeping.
Addresses the high Priestess.*

WIDOW. Most gracious lady—

HIGH PRIESTESS. Nay, speak not unto me—there
is the arbiter of fate for thee. (*pointing to
Nysia.*)

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

DOW. So much the worse for me, for thou art old
But she a maid too young for sorrow's tooth.
(To Nysia) Oh, that thou wert a mother, I
would rend

Thy heart with the sharp dagger of my woe,
And make thee die for feeling of my grief
Within thy breast, throbbing like eating fire.

CENTURION. Woman, whate'er your pain, it is not
meet

You use such speeches to a holy maid.

NYZIA. Nay, let her speak. Her soul is all dis-
traught.

DOW. I had a son, I *had*,—nay, still I *have*,
A boy who was my all. Perchance I loved
His lissom form too well and the gods envied me
My bliss in him and his delight in me.

'Twas April-time with him—the down was young
Upon his ruddy cheek. He snared a fawn
To be his mother's pet—it was a little crime—

But the stern judges sentenced him to death:
By horses to be torn asunder in the games!

And if he die 'twill be my death I know
For life has left no being save in him.

I pray thee, priestess, give me back my son!

NYZIA. (To centurion) When must he suffer?

CENTURION. Even tomorrow, grace,
The circus opens by the will of Caesar.

NYZIA. Dry up thy tears, sad mother, happy in
thy son

Amidst thy pain; one who may never know

Either thy misery or thy happiness

Will plead for thee with Caesar.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

WIDOW. Now all the gods pour out within thy cell
A richer joy than mine, unpoisoned by my wrong.

Exeunt WOMAN.

Enter LUCIO—*disguised as a peasant.* NYSIA
starts on seeing him.

LUCIO. Justice, most holy virgin, justice
Against some friend whose name were better
fiend,

Who under mask of vows and protestations
Did by a slander black as his black heart
Dissolve the troth plight twixt a man and maid
Two souls in faith and honor dearly bound
As Juno unto Jove.

(Aside) Tis she—and life for
Has run its course, save that I find
Whose hellish treachery has come between
And then for a revenge to shake the world.

NYSIA. A man! a maid! a treacherous friend! Whom
that shoots lightning through my heart. If
were Lucio and true.

(Swoons)

HIGH PRIESTESS. People away, the rack of the
event,

With comprehension of such novel power,
Hath been too much for untried nerves to bear.
Forsake the temple—*(To Virgins)* Bear her
her cell.

Exeunt.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

ACT THREE.

SCENE I.—*The Garden of the Temple of Vesta.*

Enter LUCIO, climbing over the wall.

LUCIO. A desperate man pursues a hopeless quest,
A marsh-lure of the shaking bog of death,
A fairy ship to some enchanted isle
Strewn with a thousand dead men's bones.
And I *am* desperate with such a grief
As burns worse than a fever in my soul.
'Tis death to be found here! death to live else-
where!

Whate'er my state, where'er my foot shall stand
I have no life without her! Ah! alas!
That damnéd practice should have parted thus
Two trees that grew together as one stem.
But who comes here? Lucina? Let me hide!
Lucina walking in the near distance.

LUCINA. I know not how to content the poor chuck
Or how hunt roses back to her pale cheeks.
Nothing will medicine that fixed despair
That stony melancholy whose yellow frost
Holds every sense in immobility.
I never saw such sorrow. What I did
Was for her good but would 'twere all undone!

LUCIO. (*Appearing*) Then it was *thou*! I had not
thought of thee!
Thou monster garbed as woman, whose chief
joy

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Is to break hearts—to put eternal bars
'Twixt those whose ties were holy vows eternal
Why thou old hag, what mischief hast thou
wrought!

Thy witchcraft was it that did spell her mind
But that thou wear'st the shape of woman's sex
(Although I'm sure thou art not made like her)
I'd summon demons from the darkest Styx
To plague thee, ere my dagger end thy work!

LUCINA. The gods forgive!

LUCIO. Could not thy fell and hateful mind
Brew incantations 'gainst some wanton dire,
Some walker of the camp that fawns on purity
In hope to make her foulness white by contact
But that thou must thy philtres mix from hell
To poison innocence and snow-white thoughts
abuse?

LUCINA. Too much I fear me has my lamb derived
From my suggestion—but what then of thee,
Thou light o' love, of all men most untrue,
Who break'st a jewel as 'twere so much glass,
And feel'st no deeper than a shadow lies?

LUCIO. What mean'st thou, woman?

LUCINA. She trusted thee as doth the dove its mate
Her faith was thine past bounds of space or fear
When thou wast gone, thou didst not go alone
Her soul went with thee, and would all day long
Weave pretty fancies of thy absent doings,
As, "Now he decks himself in steel", and, "There
He leads the van and thinks of me," and often
times

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

From the purest bosom ever love enshrined
Would flutter bird-like prayers to the good gods
For thy protection. Then thy letters failed,
And then the news—

LUCIO. The news! What news! Speak, woman,
quick—

A flood of fears o'erwhelms me!

LUCINA. The news! What news? Why look you,
this is wit!

This speaks the humour of thy barbarous queen
Preferred to Nysia—

LUCIO. Preferred to Nysia! Woman, art thou mad,
Hast bitten of the weed that clouds the mind
And in the brain plays leap-frog?

LUCINA. Why, here's a coil! Tarquin repents, and
Nero,

All bloody with his slaughters, hopes the prayers
Of grisly victims whose pale phantoms haunt
him!

Here, then, since thou wilt hear thy abominable
deed

From other tongue, listen and see thyself!
Thou wooed'st and won her; then when gallant
Mars

Called for thy sword, did'st leave thy bird to
pine;

Though she was happy 'twixt remembrance fond
And fonder hopes—till all her airy castles
Crashed to the earth when Oros brought the
word

Of thy rank perfidy with the Parthian queen,
And drove her into Vesta's cold embrace.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

LUCIO. Oros! alas I see! *He* loved her and devised
This plot to blacken me in her fair eyes;
The cruel, cunning demon! Woman, hear me
speak.

Those letters breathing falseness were not mine
Never did stylus grave such messages
By hand of mine, or let my fingers rot
And my brain too, beneath the deepest curse
That Phlegethon exhales; bear witness, heaven
I am as true to Nysia as when first I wooed her
As free and spotless from all blushful arms
As she or any deity she serves.

I love her and have always loved her, yes, and
shall

Until this compound of weird flesh and fire,
Quenched and dissolved, sink into dreamless
night.

LUCINA. Can this be so? Such oaths bring fearful
guilt

Save for the guiltless!

LUCIO. Ay, woman, it is so

LUCINA. Then where is Nysia? Let me fetch her
here

Swift as the feet of Mercury himself.

LUCIO. Thou canst not, woman—'tis beyond thy
power;

The world conspires 'gainst hands that touch
a Vestal:

For her there's nought but mourning—such a
comes

In tender hearts when love's march ceases never

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

From pacing the blind alley of despair. As for
me—

But that's not to be spoke in words. Go to
her, nurse,

Thou must be husband, mother, sister—all. Ah!
happy care

To me denied! If there be fates that sport with
human hearts

Mocking like fiends our helpless, writhing tor-
ment,

As Nero with his torches—then be their recom-
pense our curse!

UCINA. Oh madman, stop! What would'st thou
say?

I go to find thy Nysia, and if chance afford
To bring her to thee.

UCIO.

Nay, I have no hope.

Exeunt.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

ACT THREE.

SCENE II.—*Another Part of the Gardens of the Temple of Vesta.*

Enter THE THREE GRACES AND THE NINE MUSES.

SONG.

Tread lightly, sister Graces,
And you, ye Muses nine,
Chill Vesta's sacred places
Where virgin mortals pine.
These bowers have banished beauty,
No love may soil this shrine,
Where vows of aught but duty
Meet penalty condign.
Whence Cupid's bow and Venus' smile
For ever banished keep a far exile.

But breathe a gentle blessing
O'er star-crossed lovers here
In anguish keen professing
A luckless flame sincere.
Their star of hope is setting
In black eclipse and drear,
The chain of fate is fretting
Each aspiration dear.
And Cupid's shaft and Venus' smile
In tears are passing to remote exile.

Enter a rout of MAENADS, SATYRS, FAUNS, &c.

They dance and sing.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

SONG.

We live by the day when the day is gay
And the roses laugh in the summer sun;
The birds and the bees make our minstrelsies,
We dance out their song till the light is done.
Ha, Ha-Ha, good children of Pan,
We dance as long as dance we can
We follow, we follow, through dell and through
hollow

The jolly god, winebibbing, goat-footed Pan.

With frolicsome shout the forest about
We chase each nymph as she turns to flee,
In some greenwood grot hides her pantings hot,
And she shrieks at our frenzied glee.

Ha, Ha-Ha, we're children of Pan,
The jolly god, winebibbing, goat-footed Pan.
We follow, we follow, through dell and through
hollow

The god of the grapes and the garland, great Pan.

Whoso wander as lovers near our leafy covers,
We ring them around with a giddy maze
Till they feel the trance of our maddening dance
And their senses reel along deadly ways.

Ha, Ha, Ha, to our father Pan,
We'll sing a rouse and we'll drink a carouse,
Till the wild beasts gaze at our reckless praise
The jolly god, winebibbing, goat-footed Pan.

Enter VESTA. Frowning, she waves her wand.

Rout slowly vanishes. Vesta remains standing. Enter Christ, bearing his Cross. Vesta gazes scornfully at first, then changes, kneels, and vanishes. Lucio seen, stealing along the glade under scteen of the forest.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

CHANT OF THE MUSES AND GRACES.

When Apollo, the artist of all things, began
To fashion a world for the dwelling of man,
 He took of our spirit
 So Nature might share it,
And down midst the surges of primitive strife,
He planted it deep in the fountains of life.

From Clio's gay lips the rose tint he had caught
Into the blood of the tulip was wrought.
 That heavenly azure,
 The sky's sweetest treasure,
Was stolen one dawning from Aglaia's eyes
Ere the light-flash could herald the first sunrise.

At the nightingale's birth he set her song
To the melody flowing our souls among;
 Terpsichore's feet
 Lent their rhythmic beat
To the wavelet's laughter on sunshine seas,
And the thistle-down's dance on the flying breeze.

Then the mighty Artificer smiled and said,
The crown of this love-deed shall be a maid;
 A goddess divine,
 From creation's wine
And the flowers distilled; while her motions free
Of the Muses sing, and the Graces Three.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

HYMN TO APOLLO.

Child of the sun,
Whose chariot is the day,
All Glorious One,
Mad in the Lightning's ray;
To Thee, Apollo, be our song outpoured,
Of earth and heaven, triumphant sovereign Lord.

Thy silver bow
 Dreadful with life and death,
 Mortals below
 Severe with trembling breath.
 Thy flooding shower of radiant arrows bright
 Draws shouts of praise from all, thou god of light.

But greater far
 When e'en thy blissful lute;
 Than noontide's car
 Or Delphi's magic fruit,
 The benediction falling from thy breast
 In Vesta's dazzling brows, and temple-blest.

Exeunt all except Lucio.

LUCIO.

These songs have shot a fever through my veins
That weakens honor, melts the heart to passion,
And sets the nobler self beneath the heel of
impulse:
This is music's witchcraft, with strange spells
to shape
The wavering mind to evil or to good;
A bugle-blast can make the coward brave,

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

A satyr's ballad-kill cold honesty.
I must await her here—I cannot bear
If she be long arriving! Will she come?
Will Vestal reverence shut the door on love?
Perchance espial limes those fairy feet
That I would kiss, or household rules unknown
Will keep her caged, like creatures of rich hue
Brought by some sailor from the Chersonese
As gifts unto his mistress: then let all the gods
Who give success to desperate enterprise
By men more desperate still attempted far
Stand on my side, for if she come not,
Whate'er the hazard, even life itself
With tortures, burnings, woes unspeakable,
I'll scale those white walls for a sight of her,
And count all anguish, peace.

*In the distance Nysia approaches fearfully
leaning on Lucina. Behind Oros stealing unper-
ceived.*

What's that
A fluttering garment or a leaf that stirred
With the wind's breath! It is a leaf,
But from the tree of life blown by the breath of
heaven!

'Tis Nysia—now, ye woodland gods away!
Hence, all ye pale sprites of the tree and stream
Ye starry sparks, and thou cold Dian's orb;
A lovelier light beams from this maidenhood
Clinging, all trembling, to her soldier's arms.

They embrace.

Now, powers, I thank for this, though 'twere
the last.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

ESIA. I am terribly afraid.

UCIO. And wherefore, sweet?

ESIA. Wherefore? I am a Vestal! ah, that fate-
ful word

Whose flaming sword bars us from Paradise!
The world's a mockery to me—a monstrous
mother

That lays the starving child's lips to the breast
In sport malignant, only to withdraw it.

I loved, yes, love thee still, my Lucio—
But bootlessly. Dost thou remember how as
boy and girl,

Our one companion a Nubian slave,
We sported hand in hand among these hills,
Gazing with awe upon their hoary fanes,
The ruins of Rome that was, foundations of
Rome to be;

Blowing our innocent bubble prophecies
That thou should'st fight for Rome and me thy
wife?

Thou didst pick up an old wrecked helmet once,
Perchance a relic of far Sabine days,
Battered, and green with rust; and with a sword
Fashioned from lath, didst strut and rage
around

Shaking thy head and stamping, flinging forth
mannish dares,

That I did fear and think there never was so
wonderful

A hero as my child-lover. But all that is
changed;

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Our sweethearting is past like a blown flower.
We stand in mortal peril: if 'twere known
That Vesta's maiden out of sacred bonds
Gave love an audience, dungeons are none
Of depth and blackness meet to sink her head
The monitor within my soul finds slight excuse
for me,

Lucina's story and thy misery have lured me
forth.

LUCIO. Angel of tenderness and truth!

NYSIA. I do not know myself
I came to upbraid thee, but the sight of thee
Has so o'ercome me, I am quite dissolved in love
And spare reproach—

LUCIO. Curst be the tongue
That poured its venom in those gentle veins
Branching in azure from a gentler heart.
My life is crushed: thou knowest I was true:
I could not be aught else; the conquered Parthian
Found me austere—an iceberg to her hope.
A virtue more than Roman dwells within me,
Thy radiant face is my heart's sentinel.
But I must meet him—meet that villain priest
Whose holocaust of truth and honor to his god
Works such undoing. Nysia, fly with me!

NYSIA. (*Shakes her head mournfully*) Fly with
thee, Lucio! Thou'rt indeed distraught!

LUCIO. Yes, fly with me! There are barbarian
lands

Hidden 'neath Afric's sun or Asia's snows,
Where Roman eagles never wing their way.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

There are grand forests where the pigmy dwells,
To the far southward, mixed with rolling plains
And sapphire lakes, o'erhung with rarest bowers
Of wild rose and soft moss, bowers where the
ocean's breath

Is ever fragrant, and no wedded hearts
Need fear the thrilling bugle-call of war—

LYSIA *interrupts*. Oh no! it cannot be!

Shut out the rapturous dream—it cannot be!

UCIO. Where morning is the eye of happy
work,

And eventide the ease of hard fatigue.

LYSIA. Ah! tempt me not—alas, I am but
woman!

UCIO. And therefore planned for love!

LYSIA. Nay more, for honor!

UCIO. For honor, yes, but there's no honor dwells
In fanning altar fires to dying gods—

To gods and goddesses of man's own making.

LYSIA (*recoiling*) Of what?

UCIO. To deities that speak and feel and hear
No more than does the marble that enshrines
them!

Mere phantoms born of sculptor's fantasies;
As unsubstantial as yon wreath of creeping mist
That comes and perishes.

LYSIA *preparing to flee*. Lucina, this is blasphemy,
Lucio is mad:

Let us begone, he is beside himself! Love's
magic philter

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Has crazed the best brain that e'er held
seeds of thought:

LUCIO. Not mad, beloved, but sane as reason's se
Freed by the light from darkness and from fea
Oh! Nysia, in that Parthian land afar
A new light did indeed break on my soul,
That taught me all these vestal vows were win
Since made to beings who are nothing!
"Your Roman gods cower with blanching fa
Before a new King's advent. Lo! the Christ
So spake the greybeard seer with the strang
eyes,
Near the Euphrates! Sweetheart, mistake m
not!
I am not yet a Christian, but I would be.

NYSIA. My vows are nothing because made
nothing!
And thou almost a follower of that fanatic sec
This makes the brain reel and the senses numb
The air is thick with shadows of black fate.

LUCIO *supports her*. Be brave, my sweet one, vow
can never bind
Save as fixed firm upon the rock of truth; th
oath
Was Oros' treason—the priest's scarlet lie—
Thy heart and spirit always were with mine
Thy lips at Vesta's altar were no more
Than a mere reed to pipe forth his false voice

LUCINA. Tis time ye parted; e'en this instant
yon shade
Methought I heard a rustling, and descrie

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

A dark form stealing like a spy, whose lineaments

Seen through the gloom did dimly shadow forth
Those of perfidious Oros;—

NYSIA.

Ah! then we are observed!
And if observéd, lost! Flee, Lucio, my beloved!
The fates o'erpower us—e'en thine own new God
Will not work miracles to ward away
The consequence that waits upon the act;—
Bid me farewell and go! Farewell, farewell for
ever.

LUCIO.

Tomorrow midnight at the Claudian gate
Will I await thee, ready for escape;
That which thou callest fate bows every day
To firm resolve achieved by ready hand;
Treason rides high, but breaks across the fence
Of a strong soul opposed; my flight with thee
Is neither sin nor sacrilege, but rescue—
Rescue of innocence from practice foul,
By stratagems from Tartarus made success—
Rescue for honor's sake no less than passion
To thwart calamity and set up justice.
Tomorrow midnight will I wait thee there!
Now all just Gods look on and prosper justice!

*They embrace and separate. Oros comes forth from
his hiding-place:*

OROS.

A faithless Vestal—and a Roman General,
the betrayer of such an one against her oath to
heaven and the people—that shall make good
matter for the Pontiff. 'Twas pretty arguing—
to reason one into breaking a vow or principle

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

and so to gain one's wish. Faith, I was almost myself a convert: yes, quite a convert, for what may not the selfsame sophistry plead later on my behalf. If their heart's vow may override a Vestal's, why then not mine—Quintilian's logic could carry it no further! But, oh! the power of a little dissimulation. Hypocrisy be thou my deity! Thou art the ruler of the world; the juggler of consciences; the confounder of beliefs; the spirit of cross-eyed vision, to whom black is white and white is black; the comedian who kills virtue by turning it into laughter, and whose cunning is more deadly with the innocent in their ignorance. I know myself a hypocrite, and work as such; but these two lambs are snared therein unawares. Deliver me from such deceiving of myself—it makes the greatest mischief of the world. Our worst harms are not deliberate but stumbled into. I would meet my punishment with eyes open to my guilt. Now to the high priestess with the word of their meeting place. Then let chance work. It shall go hard but from this swirl of circumstance cleverness plucks the prize.

Exit.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

ACT THREE.

SCENE III.—*Part of the Temple Gardens near the Claudian gate. Midnight. Lucio in the background. In the distance hidden, the forms of the Virgo Maxima, Oros, and a detachment of the temple guards.*

LUCIO. The night is soft with summer; yon faint arch

Of mystic silver heralds the moonrise;
And all the air is spiced with rich breath
From shrubs and flowers unnumbered; as if
earth

A mighty mother conscious of her children
Sent forth her soul in sympathy with lovers:
It is a night for all high things to prosper—
A night when faith soars higher, and the creed
Of Pagan gods gives place to noble dreams:
A night for hearts to cleave in tenderness,
But more for hearts to spill with sacrifice.
I cannot hold a base thought in this hour—
If from the dungeons of the mind the rabble
crew—

Held captive in the chainéd, sooty dark—
Should break to perilous freedom, yet the charm
Of this night's magic, and of Nysia's face
Would drive them smitten with strange pain to
duress—

Like wild beasts skulking to their dens at dawn.
But soft, now comes the top of life for me!
She comes in raiment like her maidenhood,

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Not in a Vestal's, hurrying through the gloom;
Princess of love and of the night and me;
Methinks her light step keeps a rhythmic pulse
With the world's heart-beat as it does with mine.

Enter NYSIA dressed as a Roman maiden, accompanied by LUCINA.

While she is speaking the guards silently surround them.

NYSIA. I come, beloved, though with a heavy heart
Fearful of doom and presaging disaster,
But leaning on thy greater mind, I come.
Now let the speed of light be ours
Let us not rest, nor eat, nor drink, nor sleep,
Till first our eyes have feasted on the land
Which thou didst speak of, o'er the sapphire sea
(Virgo Maxima steps forward)

VIRGO MAXIMA. Forbear!

NYSIA *(Screams)* Lucio, we are lost!

LUCIO. Surrounded!
And by a force too powerful to gainsay.

VIRGO MAXIMA. I claim this maiden for a Vestal
loose thy hands,
Accurst blasphemer of Rome's holiest rite!
Guards, seize them quick and bear them
their cells.
The Pontiff must be warned of such a crime,
And sentence give of horrid penalty.
(Guards seize them and lead them away)

Exeunt.

END OF ACT THREE.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

ACT FOUR.

SCENE I.

The Basilica Julia in the Forum. A flourish of trumpets in the distance. Enter men with torches. Citizens swarm in, then procession. The Temple guards in armor—the Vestals with the Virgo Maxima at their head—the civic officials—the officials of the Empire—the Imperial guards in full armor—then guards escorting Nysia and Lucio. The Emperor as Summus Pontifex robed in magnificent apparel. Acclamation. Flourish of trumpets.

Enter A HERALD and sounds a call.

In the name of the most august Caesar, ruler of the world, emperor of the Romans, dispenser of justice to the nations of the earth, there is here proclaimed a court of judgment for the trial of all offences against the State. Let those who seek justice and those who answer, alike stand forth and make their plea.

Clerk steps forth, bows low to the Pontifex, and begins to read the indictment.

To the most high and reverend Caesar, sitting as Pontifex Maximus, greeting:

Inasmuch as the laws and usages of the Roman people hold in sacred reverence the name of Vestal, threatening with death all dividers of the tie between a holy maiden and the divinity whose flame she tends, therefore from thee, August Judge, do we call for instant punishment on these arraigned before thee, who plotted unfaithfulness to the Vestal vow;

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

she as a traitor to her oath, and he as a most dastardly betrayer of a holy priestess and as an enemy of the greatest blackness to the State. The two who labour under which accusation are these; Nysia and Lucio stand forth!

Nysia and Lucio are brought by the jailers and set before the judgment seat.

PONTIFEX. The penal sword swings in the hand
right;

Of all offence the executioner is reason;
Therefore, 'fore punishment let the whole
cause be heard.

Who stands accuser?

CLERK.

A priest of Egypt, Oros

OROS. Princes and Senators, and thou illustrious
lord

Who art the sun from whom authority
Flows to us lesser men, as from its fount
High where heaven's azure bathes the loftiest
peak

Of Alp or Apennine, the crystal flood
Rushes to spread fertility and grace
O'er Latium's forests, dells, and lovely meads
In your aspects revered I venerate
The bodied form of something more divine,
Before whose image all my being trembles
In everlasting service consecrate:

'Tis of the Roman State my tongue would speak
The State whose power and glory poets sing.

CITIZEN I. He loves the State of Rome, let's hear
his words!

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

OS. Since first my foot the bank of Tiber trod,
And my poor lips the air of Numa's hills,
Fragrant with odors mixed in Horace's song
And Virgil's, drew in sweet draughts like nectar,
I have forgotten Egypt and its mysteries
And do profess myself a citizen
Only of Rome, a man intoxicate
With all the wonders of that mighty past
Whose pageant fills the whole round world
with glory.

ORACE. 'Tis a true soul, methinks, perhaps he
has some justice.

OS. Crown of our civic peace is yonder temple
Where the hushed maidens wait on Vesta's flame;
Beacon of wedded love, torch of the spirit-life,
The star of home, of virgin innocence,
Of all high thought that helps to make us men.
He slays the commonwealth who kills that fire.
Answer, Quirites, does he not merit vengeance?
Yea, vengeance most swift, who dares pollute
the source

To which we owe our laws, our wealth, our hopes,
And all we have achieved! Then, hearken,
friends,

This is the very guilt that must of you be judged;
The crime of these in chains—for yesternight,
Pacing in thought the gardens of the fane,
I saw their meeting—their embraces—I drew
near

In ambush, struck with amaze to note
Such manners in a priestess—heard them coo
Like doves in spring, and burst their hearts
with sighs,

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Till at the last his treason did prevail—
Their parting but till time for easy flight.
Faithless, dishonored, stained with unholy
I do impeach them to the Pontiff of the State

CITIZENS. The punishment is death. Turn down
your thumbs!

WOMAN. Poor thing, she trembles. She's too
young and sweet for death.

LUCIO. (*making as if to spring at Oros, but held
back by the guards.*)

O, smooth-tongued traitor, double-dyed in lies

CLERK. Peace, fellow, you do injure your own cause
Thus to profane the majesty of justice.

HORACE. (*aside*) I like not that priest in spite
of his praise; his words are soapbubbles; beautiful
air, but the spirit is not in them. He is
an enemy, and jealous; his black brow and flashing
eye disclose him. 'Tis a bad combination
in a man. Would that Lepidus had hearkened
to my counsel. But soft, the maiden speaks

NYSIA. How may I speak, whose cause stands now
prejudged,

And my path shadowed with the sword of death
Through breach of old inviolable laws!

Whichever way I turn, whatever plead,

Still lies that icy shadow just before,

Chill herald of the doomsman standing there

And the swift shiver of his falling blow.

I have no plea but one you dare not heed—

The plea of love, of love most rare and tender

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Most innocent, too; no last year's blossom
Killed with the breath of an October wind;
Rather a flower grown out of my deepest being
So that I could not think or speak or move
But all was Lucio.

OMAN.

Poor child, 'tis pitiful!

YSIA. I cannot tell the time when love began.

There was no first or last, 'twas as the tide
Swells up in silence 'round some sleeper on a
rock,

Some tired child weary with summer play,
That knows not, feels not, till she wakes to find
The sea her cradle, and the mighty flood
Sweeping her past resistance to new shores

And worlds undreamt of. So it came to me,
Came and remained, a dawn from Paradise:

We never spoke, we simply looked and trembled
And we knew. Henceforth there were no clouds
To frown upon our trust. A royal pride

Thrilled through my soul when Rome,
Like a still greater mistress, armed him for war.
Then came my fall. A forked tongue shouted
treason,

And I believed it. My faith was questionless
That one, my childhood's playmate, could not
wrong me.

The cause why I stand here nakes me no sorrow;
The gods have not proclaimed it sin to love—
But for that fault which brings us here as vic-
tims

Whelmed in one doom, Lucio, my love, forgive!
(*Commotion in the court. Order restored.*)

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

The viper whose fell venom blinded me
Was yonder smiling priest, the accuser Oros

OROS. (*starting up in excitement*)

I beg you, Majesty, to stop her lips.
She speaks of things aside from the indictment

PONTIFEX. Peace, shaveling, though she stand
within her doom

And law can find no proper hold on thee,
Thy scorpion sting may yet thrust on its own
A fate more hideous than's reserved for her

LUCIO. Nobles of Rome, and thou, oh sovereign
Lord,

For whose dominion my body wears these scars
A willing victim for a cause beloved—
How shall I plead against a sentence cast,
Or fit a soldier's tongue t'extenuate
A breach of law that soldiers swear defend.
Under the shadow of your judgment doom
Whose clouds are black with sudden break
thunder,

I know no answer, but—we are unfortunate
Thrust on our ruin, as the shipmen say
The fatal whirlpool of the north sucks un-
pious crafts

Into the vortex of its gruesome bowels
Where grinning death usurps pale Neptune's
trident.

Our lives set forth upon a summer sea
Like those frail barks, aglow with happiness
Till damnéd practice, like an undertow,
Bore us unseen into uncharted zones

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

A-thunder with the roar of huge catastrophe.
He who accuses me of treason speaks from a
throat

Black with disloyalty, as if a murderer
Should blame his crime upon his victim
E'en while the wounds gush forth anew with
blood

From his most guilty touch. I loved this maid,
I gave her all that mortal heart could give,
Faith, wonder, adoration; a man's richest
tribute

To matchless worth, shrined in so perfect form;
While from the crystal well-spring of her soul,
As from a lucid mirror, she flashed back
A love that made me richer for my gift.
Our days were wizards bringing happy spells
To bind betrothal; in her company
The scented flowers breathed forth a rarer
odour,

The birds in spring made pretty descants flow
On Nysia's name, and e'en the silver leaves
Could not keep out their voices from the chorus,
But in their rustling sweetened Nature's music.

TIZEN I. Pretty i'faith.

TIZEN II. He minds me o' the Maytime
Ere Jule and I were wed.

UCIO. The word rang "On to Parthia." Our
legions swept

To the world's frontier past the Euxine Sea
Beyond the rocky crags of Caucasus.
The sands of Parthia, blown about with winds,
Hold yet one jewel, shining Ispahan

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Gay with the pride of Eastern merchandise,
Smoking with blood and sweat, we thrust our
way

Into the palace, seized the vanquished queen
Whose beauty took quick vengeance—not of
me,

But on a namesake, Lucio of Tarentum;
Who wooed and won her with the frank consent
Of his superior, subject to the will
Of power's dread, yet merciful well spring,
Our august sovereign. I could not sleep—
Oppressed with dreams and phantoms bodiless
ill,

Urging return to Nysia; mazed at my gloom
And fearing some disease, our generous chief
Granted me space for this most wished journey
Till, nearing Rome, rumour with monstrous
bludgeon,

Struck but one blow and shattered all my life
Citizens murmur as if in sympathy.

CITIZEN I. 'Tis as black a deed as ever cursed the
earth! They should have justice!

CITIZEN II. The priest Oros grew pale when our
Pontiff set him down. He frowned at first like
Vesuvius before eruption, now 'twould scarce
need the smell of incense to make him faint.

CITIZEN III. Hush, Lucio speaks again.

LUCIO. The clutch of circumstance and villainous
treason

Was at the throat of all our happiness,—
But not for ever. Only fools set up

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

The fetish Fate to screen their cowardice
From men and from themselves, when Con-
science calls on will,

And Hercules resumes his human labours.
Mighty debate stirred in me. I seemed to
stand

With all respect, before a holier judgment
The tribunal where but to stand condemned,
Gnaws the soul's vitals with a direr torment
Than scorch of fagot, or the hideous jaws
Of famished leopards, rushing on their victims.
Self was the judge, and Self the questioner,
The issue—lawful Love 'gainst antique ordin-
ance,

Love planted first, nor spited in its growth
From root to blossom, till a dastard's envy
Snapt its sweet flower asunder from the stem,
And set the bleeding root in unkind soil
By barriers of custom, cloistered rule,
Locked as in prison, with the dead hand to tend
it.

One verdict—one—resounded through my being;
"If thou abandonest her, never again
Call thyself man, nor speak of Roman faith:
He is a man who for his heart's desire,
With conscience smiling, so whips into order
Fortune and accident, or e'en a prosperous evil,
That like performing dogs they sit around him
Watching their master's eye. Approve thy
act

The equal of thy thought; thou hast abjured
Gods, who are no gods."—

Commotion and Cries.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Now forswear also
Custom and superstition sprung from Time,
And Time's long wedlock, unto use and wont
In rites of worship. Thus here stand I, Romans,
mans,

Scarred with your service but yet inly free
From Saturn's brood of deities, and the chain
Hardening from silk to most unyielding steel
With which their serpent coils crush out our
life.

For my allegiance, 'tis fore all to Christ, the
unto Nysia,

Last to the Roman people and the State.

*Cries of Down with him! He is a Christian
To the lions! The lictors pass to and fro among the
populace in effort to tranquillize the tumult. When
quiet is restored the Pontiff speaks.*

PONTIFF. He hath pronounced his sentence, and
she hers!

There needs no further witness. Their joint
crime

Stabs at our laws, our customs, and religion
The very heart o' the State; while to be part
Of the promiscuous spawn of that impostor
Whom Pilate slew for tumult raised in Jewry
Is guilt too deep and damnable for speech.
Their penalty is death, to be so executed
As is prescribed! Immurement in the walls
The living burial, whose slow consuming horror
Turns bold presumption pale and quells cold
treason!

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

Away! Let Folly feel the edge of Justice!
*Prisoners led away. Nysia holds out her arms
Lucio as she passes. He gazes at her with infinite
sadness.*

Procession and Exeunt.

SCENE II.—*Vaults Beneath the Temple.*

Oros moving around with torch.

Oros. The process answered to my hope, and
nought remains but rescue for Nysia. All is
well planned, the temple guards corrupted by
a few tinkling sestertii; the opportunity for my
work follows, on the heels of the interment; the
ship waits to bear us to Libya; a priest of my
ancient creed will unite us ere the far southland
makes our home. Friendless, and condemned,
she cannot deny my suit, nor refuse to vanish
into the background of the world. Yet 'tis
strange my mind should be so shadowed. When
Fortune sits high in the sun, it is not meet for
the sly wolf, Conscience, to steal up behind.
I must resist it. Success says not "There is a
lion in the way" but "there is a prize in pros-
pect." Soft, out with the light. I hear the
laborers yonder.

*Enter SLAVES with picks and crowbars, also
torches. They fall to work upon the masonry of the
wall.*

FIRST SLAVE. These mutterings from the highland
seem to portend mischief. A countryman
yesterday spoke of it after the trial, saying that
the dwellers on the slopes are prophesying

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

danger. One said that the earth had cracked on his master's farm. Some say that 'tis to a judgment on us for the trial and the work we do. Fine justice when master escapes and man suffers. Fall to thy labor. The aedile comes anon with the birds for our cages. Pluck 'tis as black as thy kingdom!

SECOND SLAVE. Ay, and smacks of clay, and newts, and lizards, and dead men's bones, and what not!

FIRST SLAVE. 'Twere fit company for that Egyptian priest. I would he were prisoner and the poor lamb free! To leer at her, as one may say, with the death rattling in her throat! Heigh ho! 'tis an odd day when treachery goes and justice reckes not.

SECOND SLAVE. There again with thy thoughts 'Tis beyond me. An the pot boils o' the heart and the suckling squeals i' the shed, 'tis no well for poverty to squint at master's doings or addle its wits over why the tide loves the moon.

FIRST SLAVE. Thou dost most wittily make denial of thine own wit. But voices are near us. To work, 'tis the badge of our calling!

Enter AEDILE, with followers, and guard leading prisoners.

AEDILE. *(To slaves)* Stand aside! *(To guard)* Lead forth the erring Vestal to her doom.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

LUCIO. Not her first, my good lord, 'tis the man's part to lead in suffering (*Aedile makes a sign*)
O thou great God!

NYZIA. Lucio, my love, farewell! or, if thy faith be true, to our new meeting!

Slaves wall up the masonry.

LUCIO. To our new meeting, Nysia, farewell!

Slaves wall up second cell.

Exeunt.

SCENE III.—*Same, 24 hours later.*

Oros, stealing into Temple vault armed with pick and crowbar.

OROS. The air is murky and the smoke grows thick.

Hades doth growl, and belches from his jaws
A dust that chokes the breath; speed is the word;
The vulgar mob, aghast, crowds through the streets

In headlong flood, which answers to my thought,
Lending this enterprise the mantle dark
Of throngéd solitude. A prize so rich
As that I rescue, takes away all fear.
Midnight most black! The spot was here.

What's that?

The earth reels; 'tis drunk! Ah! Vengeance slits the thread!

Earthquake shatters walls and kills Oros. Nysia closed apparently lifeless. Lucio alive, but in a swoon.

THE VESTAL VIRGIN

LUCIO. (*Awaking*).

What voice was that which broke forgetfulness
Calling poor fortune's fool from deathlike sleep
To death in life. Methought 'twas Nysia's
shriek

Piercing the realms of dim unconsciousness
To urge me back to life. Breathing is hard
The air is poison. How's this, 'tis moving air
The wall's in ruins! What strange hap is here
Some finer torture? Lies that villain here,
And dead! Then grim despair, farewell,
Thou vendor of the drug, the rope, the knife
The gods have ta'en revenge. (*sees Nysia*
Nysia, awake!

There's hope, beloved; all is not lost to us.

The air grows heavier. Nysia, awake!

*Nysia slowly awakes, casts a heavenly glance at
Lucio, rises, and feebly passes forth supported by him*

THE END.

ERRATA

- Fly leaf: line 1, change "Dramtais" into "Dramatis"
Page 16: line 14, change "cough" into "couch".
Page 22: line 22, change "aroundt" into "around".
Page 35: line 14, change "then" into "than".
Pages 34 and 35: The Chant of the Muses and the
Hymn to Apollo should follow immediately
after the Song on page 32.



