

TILDA
OR
FORTITUDE REWARDED

A comedy in six acts

by

Tachybaptus

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ACT 1

SCENE 1

A Flowery Mead. Enter TILDA, with a Basket.

TILDA: Alack, how many long miles have I trod!
 My father bade me gather hazelnuts,
 Forgetting it is May. I did his bidding:
 He is an old man, and I love him much.
 Mayhap I'll find some nuts in the town market,
 'Tis only seven miles. But I am weary:
 I'll lay me down upon this mossy bank
 And rest awhile, ere I go on my way.
 (Enter SIR PERCY OF MALPRACTICE, unseen by TILDA.)

PERCY (aside): Aha, a sleeping maid! Let me draw closer:
 O, what a triumph nature hath achieved!
 Her raven hair tumbling in little ringlets,
 Framing a face as lovely as the day,
 The proud jut of her breast! What though her face
 Be sunburnt from hard labour in the fields,
 She is as fine as any of the wenches
 The king takes to his bed. I think I'll have her.
 (To TILDA) Ho there, sweet maid, I see that thou art tired:
 Hast thou walked many leagues?

TILDA: Aye, noble sir.
 I do seek hazelnuts, though it be May:
 It was my father's bidding.
 PERCY (aside): 'Twill be easy,
 She is a little simple. (To TILDA) Then, fair lass,
 Come thou with me: my steed is tied nearby.
 There is an inn a little way from here
 Where they sell nuts in little packages,
 And I shall buy thee some, and a quart o' malmsey
 As a refreshment for thee, that thou may
 Be strengthened on the way to thy father's house:
 Let us go.

TILDA: Sir, 'tis very kind of you,
 But my old father made me promise him
 That I should not take presents from strange men,
 Nor go to inns with them: I fear I cannot.

PERCY: Thy father is a prudent man, my dear,
 But thou art far from home, and very weary.
 I am a gentleman, I shall not hurt thee:
 What harm in a little drink?

TILDA: O sir, I must not.

PERCY: Nonsense, my pretty thing. (He seizes her.)

TILDA: Unhand me, sir!

Though I be young, yet I do know full well

The kind of thing thou hast in mind for me:
My father showed me in a little book.

Let go my hand, I say!

PERCY: Nay, I shall not:

Thy coy resistance makes the game the sweeter.

TILDA: O let me go, I pray thee! Leave me be!

Help! Help!

(Enter PRINCE FELIX, in the Guise of a Forester, bearing an Axe.)

FELIX: Ho, varlet, let that maiden loose!

I see i' thy countenance thou meanst her harm;

Thy straining codpiece tells what form 'twill take.

Lay off, vile recreant, or I'll strike thee down!

PERCY: Since when have peasants told me what to do?

The lass is my affair: begone, thou churl

Before I perforate thee with my brand.

(He draws his Sword. With one Blow of his Axe, FELIX cuts through the Blade.)

PERCY: Insolent rustic! Thou shalt pay for that:

'Twas a Toledo blade worth fifty guineas.

FELIX: A small price for a lesson in good manners:

'Twill last thee all thy life.

PERCY: Thou speak'st of manners,

Thou common labourer, thou filthy brute?

What knowest thou how gentlefolk behave?

FELIX: Not always well, I see by thine example.

Now run thou off, and trouble us no longer.

I'll count to ten, and then, if I do see thee,

My axe shall teach thee more than words can do.

(He brandishes his Axe. Exit PERCY in Haste.)

TILDA: O thank ye, sir, for ye have saved my honour,

Mayhap indeed my life.

FELIX: 'Twas nothing, child.

I know that man too well: he is the squire

Of Sebum village, and full many a maiden

Hath he enticed into his manor house,

But never hath a maid come out of it.

But now, my lass, I see thy dress is torn.

TILDA: O fie, I am undone. I blush for shame.

FELIX: I'll turn my back while thou dost rearrange it

And when thou'rt decent, I shall go with thee

To guard thee on the road to thine own house.

I know that 'tis against thy father's rule,

But th' way is dangerous. Say, wilt thou trust me?

TILDA (adjusting her Dress): Indeed, kind sir, for I have seen your actions

And know that I have naught to fear from you.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

FELIX (aside): Say, what a charming lass, so sweetly modest

And fair besides. 'Twill be indeed a pleasure

To walk beside her for a league or two.

TILDA: I am done up again, good woodcutter

And ready to depart.

FELIX: Come, take my arm

Lest thou should trip and fall upon the path.
 TILDA (aside): O what a handsome youth! If he'd been first
 To offer me some sack, I might have gone
 To th' inn with him, and very willingly.
 (Exeunt.)

SCENE 2

The Manor House in the Village of Sebum. Enter SIR PERCY OF MALPRACTICE and his Servant MUDGE.

PERCY: Mudge, throw another peasant on the fire:
 'Tis bitter chill in here. While we await
 The villagers t' assemble in the yard
 To pay their taxes, tell me if thou can:
 I met a pretty maid i' th' woods near here
 Some twenty summers old, with raven ringlets
 And eyes of deepest brown, and teeth of pearl,
 And ample bosom, among other charms.
 Dost thou know who she is, or where she lives?
 MUDGE: Ah, that I do, sir. No one in the village do be like to her: Tilda, the daughter of Hob and Jess, who
 lives in a cottage on the edge of the moor. They be outside in the yard already, I trow.
 PERCY: And why have I not seen this lass before?
 MUDGE: She do not come into the village, sir, having been warned by her old father of the, ahem, begging
 your pardon, sir.
 PERCY: Spit it out, man, this is no time for silence.
 MUDGE: The dangers attendant on a young female person coming into the
 village, by your leave, sir.
 PERCY: I'll show her danger. Send her parents in. (Exit MUDGE.)
 I have a way to net this tasty lass:
 I'll seize her parents' farm, so she be homeless
 And then I'll kindly offer her a post
 As maidservant in mine own manor house:
 She'll fall into my lap like a ripe peach.
 (Re-enter MUDGE, with HOB and JESS.)
 MUDGE: Here they be, sir: the couple from the cottage on the moor.
 PERCY (to MUDGE): What are the dues they pay to me at present?
 MUDGE: Twenty bushels of barley, sir, and six sides of bacon, and forty gallons of strong cider, and
 eighteenpence for use of the road to their cottage. They have paid it already, sir, aside from sixpence, and
 that they have promised this evening after they have taken their goods to market.
 HOB: We do be sorry for the sixpence, sir. It ha' been a hard year, that it have, we has hardly enough for
 ourselves. We'll make it up to 'ee next week, by my troth.
 PERCY (to MUDGE): What are my rules about the peasants' dues?
 MUDGE: One, that all dues be paid on time, on pain of eviction. Two, that extra dues may be required, at
 the discretion ...
 PERCY: That's enough, Mudge. Ye two, ye are evicted.
 JESS: O sir, these are my last six silver pennies, the which I had with me to buy a nanny goat at the market,
 so that we could make cheese to sell.
 (She holds out the Coins. SIR PERCY seizes them.)

MUDGE: Then that be the full amount, thank 'ee. Ye would have saved yourselves a nasty fright by giving it to me earlier.

PERCY: Ye would indeed. The rules are plain enough:
There's no exceptions can be made to them.

Ye have paid late, therefore ye lose your farm.

I give you four and twenty hours to leave.

Now go away, and trouble me no more.

HOB: But sir, we ha' paid ye the full amount when ye did ask. What wrong ha' we done, in the good Lord's name?

PERCY: Hold thy tongue, serf, lest a worse fate befall thee.

JESS: But where shall we go, sir, if we have no home?

PERCY: Go to the workhouse in Alluvium,

Where ye'll pick oakum. Go, make yourselves useful,

Ye worthless parasites, a burden on our village.

JESS (weeping): Lord have mercy on us, for we ha' lost all.

HOB: Bear up, me old cheese, we ha' lost our farm, but we ha' not yet lost our lives. It do be a long lane that have no turning, that I do always say.

(Exeunt HOB and JESS. SIR PERCY writes in his Rent Book.)

MUDGE (aside): I has served the old curmudgeon for nigh on twenty year, and I has seen him do some cruel things, aye, by my troth, and debauch many lasses. But that were the act of a very devil out of the pit, sure enough. I will visit the poor folk this night and see what I can do to ease their lot.

SIR PERCY: Mudge, go at once to those two wretches' cottage

And find that wench, and bring her here forthwith. (Exit MUDGE.)

I'll have that lass at any price, though I

Should have to hang th' entire village to get her.

Ha! When my lust is roused, I'm a hard man:

I'll stop at nothing to fulfil my plan.

(Exit.)

SCENE 3

The Cottage of HOB and JESS. Evening. Enter TILDA.

TILDA: Oh dear, what can the matter be? My parents

Are so long at the village, paying their dues.

I fear that foul Sir Percy may have snared them

By some vile subterfuge. We've known him

For many years as a hard and greedy landlord,

Taking two thirds of all we can produce;

And now I know his nature for myself.

'Tis almost dark. Ah, why are they not home?

But hark, I hear the lifting of the latch:

Mother, O father, is it truly you?

(Enter HOB and JESS.)

JESS: O daughter, we ha' had a dreadful day!

TILDA: Thank God ye are alive! O how I worried!

JESS: There's much to worry over, daughter mine:

Sir Percy, he ha' taken away our farm

And our poor home, and with it all our dues

And my last sixpence: now where shall we turn?

TILDA: Ah me, the wicked knave! I feared some such
After he did molest me in the wood.

JESS: He did molest thee? Daughter, what is this?
Art thou no more a ...

TILDA: Virgin? Trouble not:
A stalwart forester did rescue me
And bring me home. He is a lovely boy,
I wish that ye had met him, but he's gone.

JESS: No wonder, then, that he ha' thrown us out,
The stony-hearted villain that he be:
It be a plot to get thee in his power.

HOB: Aye, and it shall succeed an we stay here.
How can we stop him? He'll be sending men
Betimes, to drag thee to his manor house.
But where can we go now? We have no money,
Nor nothing but the ragged clothes we wear.

JESS: I mind me of my aunt, old Dorothy:
But she be far off, in Bulimia.
We'd have to beg our way along the road:

I ain't too proud to beg, if need arise.

HOB: Thou art a game old thing, my dearest Jess:
I fear the need hath risen now, i' sooth.

TILDA: Mayhap there are a few things we can save
To tide us on our way. I'll to the kitchen
And make a bundle of our last three onions
And half a loaf of bread. (A Knock at the Door.) Ah! Is it them?

(Another Knock. HOB goes to the Door and opens it. Enter MUDGE, bearing a Sack.)

HOB: Ah, God, 'tis the squire's man! Run, Tilda, run!

(Tilda tries to Escape through the door, but MUDGE holds out his Hand.)

MUDGE: Be not afeared, I will do naught to harm ye:
That blackguard squire knows not that I be here.
I saw what he done to the two of ye: 'twas wrong,
The foulest deed I ever seen him do,
And I be here to make th' amends I can.

I cannot save your farm, for that I'm sorry,
Nor your house neither. But ye shall not starve,
Nor shall ye go to th' workhouse in Alluvium.
See here what I can do. The bastard's rent book
Shows that ye were evicted for non-payment
O' thy yearly dues. So, since the book do say
That ye've not paid, I ha' taken from the coffer
The value of the dues as we all know
Ye paid in truth. Take it: it be not stealing,
I' sooth thou must, to balance out our records.
'Tis seven ducats by my reckoning.

(He gives HOB a Purse.)

HOB: Bless 'ee, my friend, for an honest and true man!
The first we have encountered all this day.

JESS: O sir, ye have saved us in our darkest hour!

TILDA: 'Tis ever darkest just before the dawn:
We thank ye, sir, for a good and noble act.

MUDGE: 'Tis no more than ye paid. 'Twill save your skins
 For a few months, and after that ye'd starve;
 But I do have a plan. My brother Hodge
 Works at the palace in Purdonium
 Where he be one o' th' cooks in the king's kitchen.
 If ye go to Purdonium and see him,
 Mayhap he'll get ye posts as palace servants.
 'Tain't much to offer, but as granny says,
 Beggars can ne'er be choosers. And I've heard
 There's pickings to be had for those who look for 'em.
 But I do warn thee, get ye on your way
 Afore the squire sends in his gang o' rogues:
 There ain't much time. Have ye got food for th' road?
 TILDA: We have a few last scraps, kind sir, 'twill serve us.
 We can afford to pass the night in an inn
 Like proper toffs.

MUDGE: Ye must be very careful.
 There ain't no inn within full fifteen miles
 That foul Sir Percy hath not visited:
 I've borne him home from a full score of 'em,
 Too drunk to walk, but not too drunk to harm.
 'Twere wise to pass the first night in a hedge
 As far from here as ye can get. Now, haste!
 I've a roast chicken in my haversack
 And a quart flagon of the squire's best cider:
 Take it, and now begone. (He gives the Sack to JESS.)

JESS: Thank 'ee again,
 What would we do without thee? We'll be off.
 (They gather their belongings. Exit HOB, JESS and TILDA.)

MUDGE: I hope I ha' not fouled my nest with this:
 The squire's a clever man, and he may notice
 My little trick. But what else could I do?
 I could not hold my head up otherwise.

(A loud Beating at the Door. Enter two RUFFIANS.)

FIRST RUFFIAN: What dost thou here, old man? Did the squire send thee?

MUDGE: Aye, he sent me for Tilda, but th' bird's flown.
 See for yourself, they left i' a tearing hurry.

SECOND RUFFIAN: The fire's still burning, they ain't been gone long.
 Which way went they?

MUDGE: And how should I know that?
 They ain't left us a map.

SECOND RUFFIAN (seizing MUDGE): Mess not with me,
 Dost know or dost not know? Tell me, thou dog!

MUDGE: I know not, they was gone when I came here,
 I only just arrived.

FIRST RUFFIAN: Let the wretch go,
 He is no more than an old harmless fool.
 We'll to the manor house and bring back bloodhounds.

(Turning to MUDGE) And thou, get back to the tasks set for thee:
 The squire takes a hard line with idle folk.
 (Exeunt.)

SCENE 4

A Forest with a Brook running through it. Night. Hounds begin to howl. Enter HOB, JESS and TILDA up the Brook, wet and shivering, carrying Bundles.

HOB: Now, that ha' thrown the bloodhounds off the scent.

We'll climb out on t'other bank o' the brook

And get us dry – would we could light a fire,

But 'tis too dangerous, the men would see us.

JESS: I'll be right glad to get out of this water:

I do be frozen stiff in every joint.

(They climb up the Bank and sit down. The Howls fade away.)

TILDA: 'Twas only yesterday that we were happy

In our small cottage and our struggling farm,

With naught more pressing than how we would pay

Our dues to ... Can I not stop thinking of him?

That raisin-hearted villain at the manor –

We did no harm to him: look what he's done!

Here we are, homeless on the long cold road:

'Tis many leagues yet to Purdonium

And we are weary to the very bone.

HOB: Cheer up, my lass, we be not finished yet.

I always had a mind when I were young

To wander through the world and seek my fortune,

And here I be, at a bare moment's notice

With seven ducats jingling in my pocket,

And here be ye, my dearest wife and daughter

To bear me company: I'll care for ye

And keep ye safe, the very best I can.

'Tis not so bad.

JESS: At least we be together,

And that do make up for a host of woes.

TILDA: Aye, mayhap ye are right. But our first night

Shall be a chill one. (A Pipe is heard.) Hark! What was that sound?

(Enter RADIO and his Company of PLAYERS.)

RADIO: Gadzooks, what have we here? Are ye three lost?

HOB: Nay, we be not, but we be on the run

And sheltering from that villain and his bloodhounds:

I beg thee, give us not away to them,

For pity's sake!

RADIO: Fear not, ye're safe with us.

What have ye done that ye were forced to flee?

HOB: Nothing of ill nor good. It be the squire

Of Sebum, bad Sir Percy of Malpractice,

Who got the hots for this my little lass,

And threw us out of house and home to get her.

So we be on the road, bound for Purdonium

To try our luck at King Vusillus' castle:

There's a man there who'll maybe give us work.

RADIO: I have good news for ye, for we do fare
Upon the selfsame road. We tried our luck
At th' town hall in Alluvium: they pelted us
With rancid veg'tables and antique eggs
And we have barely twelve sols from the door.
It was a fine play – 'twas too fine for them,
The lousy yokels. It was called Raimondo:
Say, do ye know the piece?
HOB: Nay, we be yokels
And we ha' never seen no kind of play.
RADIO: I crave thy pardon, sir, I meant no ill.
We players give ourselves such airs and graces:
Sometimes they're all we have when things go ill.
All folk are equal when they're on the road.
HOB: No offence taken, that I do assure thee.
RADIO: Since we are all bound for the selfsame place,
Will ye come with us? Safety lies in numbers.
I'll give ye small parts in our next performance;
The squire will never guess that ye are with us
When ye are garbed as camels for our play
The Sheikh of Araby – though it were a great pity
To hide thy daughter's lovely face in sackcloth.
Maybe, when we are farther off, ye can come out.
Say, what's the lass's name, and can she sing?
HOB: We thank 'ee for a very welcome offer
And shall come with ye to Purdonium
Even if we do have to dress like chickens.
RADIO: Only for Gran's Last Chance – we did that twice;
Nobody laughed. But we still have the costumes.
HOB: My daughter's name be Tilda, she's a good girl
But a mite innocent, and all these men ...
JESS: I'll guard her virtue like a porpentine.
But she do sing as fair as th' nightingale:
We'll earn our keep, worry thou not at that.
TILDA: I can sing My Way, Bridge over Troubled Waters,
Imagine, though I know not all the words ...
RADIO (hastily): I am glad to hear 't. I'll teach thee some more songs:
They may be a shade bawdy for thy taste.
TILDA: I know The Hairs upon Her Icky-Di-Do ...
HOB: Where did thou learn that filthy ditty, girl?
TILDA: The carter's son taught me when we were little.
HOB: Fie, fie, for shame! Yet now I do suppose
We've greater worries than a smutty song.
(To RADIO) Thou wilt not make her sing it?
RADIO: Never fear,
We've other songs writ special for our plays,
They're most artistic. Come, let's be away,
We'll find a barn and spend the night i' th' hay.
(Exeunt.)

SCENE 5

A Room at an Inn. RADIO and the PLAYERS are changing their Costumes. HOB, JESS and TILDA are disguised as Bears. A sound of Booming and Catcalling. Enter VIDEO, a PLAYER.

VIDEO: Another lousy audience, forsooth!
I did To Be or Not to Be. They booed me.
Th' immortal bard, and look at the reception!
What shall we do?

RADIO: Go back and do Once More
Into the Breach; they always lap that up.

VIDEO: I'll try, but can the bears come with me?

RADIO: No.

Quick, man, get on and do the bloody thing.

TILDA: Are all your audiences so obnoxious?

RADIO: Nay, usually they eat out of my hand:

'Tis a bad night. Hark at the way they jeer

At Video, the poor man's not that bad.

There's only one thing left to do – a song,

And thou must do it. They will really love thee.

HOB: Dost thou think we be far enough from th' village

For that t' be safe?

RADIO: Aye, we are three days from it:

Ye cannot spend your lives as bears and camels.

Come ye, do off those pelts. Tilda, my dear,

Sit beside me and listen carefully:

I'll teach thee a song will knock their little socks off.

(Sings) In hydraulis quondam Pythagora

Admirante melos, phthongitates

Malleorum, secutus aequora

Per ponderum inaequalitates

Adinvenit musae qualitates.

Epitritum ac emioliam,

Epogdoi duplam perducunt.

Nam tessaron pente convenientiam

Nec non phthongum et pason adducunt,

Monocordi dum genus conducunt.

– Can ye remember that?

TILDA: Why, certainly. (She sings the whole Song herself.)

JESS: Ah, that were lovely, Tilda my little pet,

Though I did understand no word of it.

RADIO: 'Tis th' Latin tongue – that always goes down well:

They cannot boo it, for it might be holy.

The meaning's thus: When, at the water organ

Pythagoras did wonder at the tunes

And thought upon the notes made by the hammers,

Seeking equality, through inequalities

He thus discovered th' virtues of the muse.

One and a third, and then one and a half,

And then one and an eighth lead to the double.

For thus the fourth and fifth comply together,
The note also, and the whole span of notes,
When they are used i' th' monochord kind.

TILDA: I see:

'Tis most enlightening.

RADIO: Truly, it will slay them.

(Louder Booming and Whistling. Enter VIDEO, flecked with Rubbish.)

VIDEO: 'Tis anarchy out there. I did my best
But they are in no mood for lofty thoughts.

– Still, we have got some useful vegetables.

RADIO: There's only one thing we can do. Tilda,
Go out and sing thy song, and make it good.

TILDA: O mother, I am afeared.

JESS: They be but folk:

They will not harm thee. Go and sing thy song.

(Exit TILDA. The Booming changes to Cheering and Applause.)

RADIO: There, do ye see? One pretty face is all

That is required to turn them sweet as honey.

We'll have no troubles for the rest o' th' night

As long as we keep off soliloquies.

Audio, now, the disappearing act. (Exit one of the PLAYERS.)

We'll end the show with th' Dance o' th' Seven Veils.

JESS: Thou be not thinking of unveiling th' lass?

'Twould not be decent.

RADIO: Nay, 'tis highly tasteful:

We douse the lamps as the last veil comes off.

HOB: Well, I suppose we do owe thee a favour.

JESS: But I must ask my Tilda if she'll do it.

(Loud Applause and Cheers. Re-enter TILDA.)

TILDA: They loved it, mother! O, 'tis so exciting:

Radio, please, may I go on again?

RADIO: Could ye perform the Dance o' th' Seven Veils?

TILDA: Pray, what is that?

RADIO: Ye wear these seven veils,

And then ye dance, and doff them one by one

And at the instant ye take off the seventh

We blow out all the lights.

TILDA: Why d'ye do that?

RADIO: Thou'rt wearing nothing underneath the veils.

TILDA: O my! O mother, may I do the dance?

JESS: Yes, if thou wilt. (To RADIO) And thou, keep thou thy word
About the lights, or I shall moither thee.

RADIO: I'll keep it to the letter. Tilda, thou'rt next:

Take off thy clothes and swathe thyself in veils.

Here, go behind this curtain. (Exit TILDA.) She's a natural:

I've never seen them clap that song so much,

Not even when I sang it in Damario

Before the king and all his courtiers.

(Re-enter TILDA, clad in Veils. Applause. Re-enter the PLAYER.)

Tilda, 'tis time. Go out and kill them, girl.

(Exit TILDA. Loud and prolonged Applause.)

The show is almost done: let's to the bar
 And drown our troubles in a foaming jar.
 (Exeunt.)

SCENE 6

A Street outside the Cellars of the Royal Palace at Purdonium. Below, the Royal Kitchen. HODGE and the COOKS are preparing a Repast for the King.

HODGE: Ho, numbskull, slowly with that chafing dish!
 Thou'lt burn the palace down about our heads.
 Border that pasty, undertranch that porpoise,
 Culpon that trout now, and untach that curlew.
 Timber the fire! Quick, lad, unjoint that bittern,
 Unlace that coney and allay that pheasant.
 Tire all the eggs, unbrace a brace o' mallard,
 And when thou'st tranced the sturgeon, spoil the hens!

FIRST COOK: What mean'st thou by these words?

HODGE: Fie, I care not:
 They are from Robert May's Th' Accomplisht Cook.
 They mean you cut them up. Get on with it!
 Ho, thou, make me a double bordered custard,
 An egg compounded big as twenty eggs,
 Two turkeys in stoffado, and a bisk.

Hast thou distilled the pig?

SECOND COOK: 'Tis nearly ready:
 It wanteth but an hour till it be clear.

HODGE: We'll have a spitchcock o' eels, and a tart royal,
 And puddings cheveridge and liveridge,
 And forty quail farced in th' Spanish fashion.

THIRD COOK: The sauce is curdled, master.

HODGE: Idiot boy!
 Make it again; see thou o'erheat it not.
 The carp boiled in carbolion is spoiled:
 We'll make do with some puddings o' heifer's udder.

(Enter HOB, JESS and TILDA in the Street above.)

JESS: Ah, I be glad that play-acting be over.
 'Twere mighty hot inside that camel's pelt,
 And when I think what they made Tilda do
 I do come over faint. 'Twere most indecent,
 That dance with all the scarves.

TILDA: Nay, 'twas artistic:
 Radio told me that, and he should know.
 I do confess I felt a mite exposed
 After the fifth, but th' applause made up for it.
 I'll miss those theatre folk.

HOB: Aye, so shall I,
 And thou'd ha' liked to stay with 'em, I know.
 'Tis an uncertain living, but a merry.
 Here be the door the porter told us of:
 Let's go inside and seek out Mudge's brother.

(They descend to the Cellar.)

SECOND COOK (to HOB): What do ye here, ye simple country folk?

This is the royal kitchen o' King Vusillus,

And we are busy making him a feast.

HOB: We be come here to speak to master Hodge:

His brother Mudge ha' sent us. We be homeless.

Mudge said that mayhap ye could find us work.

SECOND COOK: Ye'll have to speak to him, he's over there:

The one with th' red face, waving a cleaver.

JESS: He do look fierce.

SECOND COOK: Truly, he is a sweetie:

He likes to shout at us to ease his mind.

Be not afraid. (To HODGE) Master! Some folk to see ye,

They come fro' thy brother.

HODGE: What, thou poxy knave?

Attend to thy damned pig. Where are those collops?

SECOND COOK: Your brother Mudge hath sent these folk to you.

HODGE: Forsooth, that's diff'rent. (To HOB) Welcome to you, good folk.

So, were ye thrown out by that tinpot tyrant?

My brother hath sent folk to me before:

They were good workers, better 'n these town idlers.

HOB: Aye, that Sir Percy did pursue my daughter

And drove us from our farm, that he might have her.

HODGE: I can see why, the lass is some tomato.

JESS: She be a good girl, we did raise her proper.

Mudge do send love to ye, so do his wife;

She do be new delivered of twin boys,

Their names be Fudge and Bodge.

HODGE: Glad news indeed!

That do make twelve o' them in th' old cottage.

Do ye seek work?

HOB: We do, if work there be:

We're farming folk, we'll turn our hands to aught.

HODGE: Ye'll have to start as scullions for a while,

And if ye work well, there's preferment for ye.

(To JESS) Say, canst thou sew? This day the queen's own seamstress

Hath perished of a griping of the guts.

JESS: My daughter, she do stitch a pretty seam:

Look at her dress, she sewed on all them sequins,

And done th' embroidery along the hem.

I be quite happy with my husband here,

Keeling the dishes, be they ne'er so foul:

'Tis nothing if ye've shoved your arm i' a cow.

– They would ha' sundered us two in the workhouse.

HODGE: 'Tis settled, then. The money's none too good,

Twopence a day, but there is food aplenty.

(To the SECOND COOK) Show them the scullery and the sluicing room.

(To TILDA) Come now, my lass, I'll bring thee to th' equerry,

And he'll arrange a time to see the queen.

(To the COOKS) Attend to th' quelque chose and calves-foot pie,

And quodling tarts. I'll see ye by and by.

(Exit HODGE and TILDA. The COOKS go to their Tasks.)

ACT 2

SCENE 1

The Bower of QUEEN VULPECULA in the Royal Palace of Purdonium. Enter VULPECULA in her Undergarments and ETTY, her Maidservant, bearing a Corset.

VULPECULA: Ah me, 'tis time to put that damned thing on!

Those bones do grind my ribs until they bleed,
My breasts are crammed into into outrageous shapes,
And I am squeezed till I can hardly breathe,
All to look shapely as a youthful maiden:

I am fifty-five, and the pretence wears thin.

Oh well, there's no help for 't. ETTY, get lacing.

ETTY (lacing the Corset): Ah madam, it be a bloody shame how us womenfolk do have to stuff ourselves into silly things, and all o' them thought up by men, I trow. Oo, me bunions do be aching like buggery from these heels, by your leave, madam.

(Enter TILDA.)

TILDA: Your majesty, I beg your royal pardon.

The equerry said ye needed a new seamstress,
The previous one being dead of the convulsions.

VULPECULA: And canst thou sew a seam as well as she?

She made this dress, and this: are they not fine?

Prithee, regard the working of this gusset.

TILDA: I think I could do that, your majesty.

The dress I wear is all of my own making:

I sewed on all these sequins by myself.

VULPECULA: 'Tis a bit tacky, but 'tis neat enough.

The purple fringe is rather a mistake,

Especially with th' ruchings o' apricot.

TILDA It wowed them at the Sebum farmers' ball.

VULPECULA: No offence meant, child, 'tis a striking garment.

TILDA: If I may be so bold, your majesty,

As to suggest something.

VULPECULA: Let us hear it, then.

TILDA: Your majesty, that corset looks most painful.

Ye have no need to crush yourself with it:

No one is looking.

VULPECULA: Thank you very much!

– 'Tis true, though, I am sadly past my prime.

I have won the hand o' a king, I need no more:

Why should I force myself into this object?

And yet I must wear something: my old bosom

Hath long since set off on the journey south.

TILDA: I'll show ye what we girls wear in the fields

At harvest time, when th' white-hot sun beats down

Upon our backs as we do reap the grain.

'Tis heavy work, and makes us sweat like pigs.

VULPECULA: How horrid.

TILDA: Nay, 'tis very elegant.
 'Twill shape your titties like a teenager's:
 My, how the lads did gawp at us i' th' fields.
 VULPECULA: I will try anything to ease my pain:
 Canst make it quickly? I must to the king
 Within the hour.
 TILDA: Surely, your majesty.
 I'll need a handkerchief and some silk ribbon,
 Needle and thread and scissors, and two minutes.
 VULPECULA: ETTY, fetch thou the lass what she doth ask. (Exit ETTY.)
 Now then, my girl, if thy confection please me,
 The post is thine. And thou canst call me madam. (Re-enter ETTY.)
 ETTY: I found some fine silk handkerchiefs given ye by the king of Bulimia,
 madam. (She shows them to TILDA.) Will one o' these do, then?
 TILDA: 'Twere pity to cut up so fine a thing.
 VULPECULA: Pish, I have hundreds more. Go to it, lass.
 TILDA: To start, I cut it from one corner to t'other,
 And next I sew the cut sides to the ribbon:
 I'll do it quickly, there's no time for neatness.
 There! Now I stitch two ribbons to the corners,
 And join the other ends to the first ribbon.
 'Tis done. Pray, madam, do ye remove your sark.
 VULPECULA: Think'st thou that bit of string will work? Ah well,
 I'll try aught once but incest and folk-dancing.
 (ETTY removes the Queen's Sark and TILDA attires her in the new Garment,
 tying the Ribbons around her Back.)
 TILDA: Ye can put back your sark on top of it.
 Now, madam, is that not more comfortable?
 Look in the mirror, and admire that bosom:
 'Twould be a wonder in a lass of twenty.
 (ETTY puts on the Queen's Sark and Dress.)
 VULPECULA: I' sooth, 'tis mighty shapely, and the comfort!
 Why have I suffered for these thirty years
 When this was to be had. What dost thou call it?
 TILDA: The village maids call it a brazier,
 Like to a bucket filled with burning charcoal:
 I see no sense in it, but 'tis its name.
 And by the way, madam, mine own is Tilda.
 VULPECULA: Tilda, thou'rt hired, at sevenpence a day.
 Pray make make me more of these new braziers:
 They please me much. ETTY will give thee ribbons
 And kerchiefs of exotic stuffs and hues.
 Now, let's avaunt, the king doth wait on me:
 His eyes shall light up at what he doth see.
 (Exeunt.)

SCENE 2

The Sewing Room in the Royal Palace. Enter TILDA and ETTY, bearing a Basket of Stuffs and Ribbons.

ETTY: By my troth, Tilda, thou didst make an impression on the old mistress, and no mistake. 'Tis grand to have thee with us: the late seamstress, God rest her soul, were a demon for the aqua vitae, and when she were drunk she did sew something horrible, and I had to unpick it all in the night and do it again. We shall finish these braziers in two shakes o' a bee's knee, with thy neat fingers.

TILDA: Why doth the queen want so many? She hath only two breasts, I trow, and none shall see the garment except thou and I, and maybe his majesty when he gets the urge.

ETTY: 'Tis what great queens do: i' sooth, she hath four thousand three hundred and sixteen pair o' shoon by the last count; they do have a whole room to themselves and she hath taken on a librarian for 'em.

TILDA: Indeed, I have much to learn about the ways of queens. Thinkst thou fifty will do for a beginning?

ETTY: Nay, twenty will serve for now; let's choose the prettiest stuffs and mayhap we shall content her. But if there be a fashion at court for these braziers, then shall our poor fingers be flying so fast that they shall not be seen, like to the poor owl i' the conservatory.

TILDA: We could sell them for a penny each, in divers sizes.

ETTY: A shilling: they'd pay that. We'd be rich, we could open a shop in the city and sell naught but braziers.

TILDA: Aye, cheap ones of linen for common folks, and fancy ones of silk and satin for the nobbs. We could call it Elda.

ETTY: Or Titty.

TILDA: Ah, Ety, thou'rt a one. But we must bend to this stitchery, or we shall fall from the queen's favour and mayhap get our heads chopped off.

ETTY: 'Twould not suit thee, no way.

(They start their Work. After a While, TILDA begins to muse.)

TILDA: Ah me, how life hath changed in a scant week!

A sennight since, I was a cotter's daughter
Who'd never ventured from the parish bounds.

But when that lecher leaped into my life,

In a bare instant everything was changed:

I and my parents roofless vagabonds,

Befriended by a company of players,

And rancid nights garbed in a camel's skin.

And now I sit upon a gilded stool

Sewing a silken seam in a king's palace.

Now I bethink me of my parents dear

Keeling the greasy pots from th' king's repast:

Though not as hard as ploughing, 'tis sad work.

ETTY: Ah, worry thee not. That Hodge may yell and scream, but he do have a good heart. An they work hard, he will promote them to the making o' furmity or some such. But say, who were the lecher, and who the players, and why the camel, forsooth?

TILDA: The lecher were Sir Percy of Malpractice,

The sable-hearted squire of Sebum village.

ETTY: Ah, the old story, I did guess as much.

TILDA: As to the players, they are in the city.

Did thou not see the broadsheet, Radio Players?

ETTY: Alack, I cannot read, though it shame me t' tell.

TILDA: 'Tis easy, I will teach thee if thou like:

We'll start when we have done these braziers,

And I have seen my parents in the kitchen.

ETTY: O wilt thou truly? 'Twould be a fine thing

To read of valiant knights and fluffy cats,

Why women are from Venus, and men from Mars.

Tell me, though, while we stitch, about the camel.

TILDA: 'Twas a disguise to hide us from the squire:
 Sometimes we dressed as bears, to make a change.
 Then, three days on the road, i' th' town o' Pallium,
 We had a troublous night of it: they jeered us,
 And Radio taught me how to sing a song,
 And when I sang it, they all clapped and cheered.
 Say, shall I sing it for thee?

ETTY: Aye, right gladly.

TILDA (sings): In hydraulis dum Pythagora, &c.
 (While she sings, enter PRINCE FELIX on the Balcony above.)

FELIX: What singing do I hear? Such a true note,
 And sweet as is the music of the spheres,
 Though I can barely guess at th' meaning of 't.
 But soft, it is the lass from the green wood
 Whom I did rescue from that loathsome squire,
 Garbed as a forester. She will not know me,
 Clad as I am in ruffled bombazine,
 A cap of maintenance upon my head.

I'll go down to the room and speak with her:
 I feel a faint sweet stirring in my loins.

(He goes down to the Room. ETTY does him a Courtesy, followed hastily by TILDA.)

FELIX: Greetings, good Ety. Wilt thou introduce me
 To thy companion, whom I have not met?

TILDA: Indeed we have, sir, in a forest glade,
 Where ye did save me from Sir Percy's clutches
 And very kindly brought me home again.

Ye told me not your name: pray, who are ye?

ETTY (to Tilda): This is the crown prince of Uraemia,
 His royal highness, Felix of the Marches.

TILDA: Your worship, I had not the least idea ...

FELIX: Nor need ye have, for I was in disguise.

I often go about my father's realm
 Garbed as a simple man, to hear the folk
 Talk as they please on th' way we govern them.

ETTY: And this is Tilda, newly the queen's seamstress.

FELIX: I'm glad that thou hast fallen on thy feet.
 Say, did the squire make trouble for thy folk?

TILDA: Aye, your high lordship, he did cast us out,
 And we came here in search o' a living wage:
 My parents work as scullions in the kitchen.

FELIX: Well, if they be thy parents, they are good folk:
 I'll find them work less foul, and better paid.

'Tis only fair to them: they have lost their farm
 Through th' act of one bad man, and it behoves me
 To right the balance.

TILDA: Ye are kind, my liege,
 To heal the wrongs of folk ye've never met.

FELIX: What boots it if one be a royal prince
 And cannot spend a coin from time to time?
 And pray stop calling me your liege and such:
 Prince is enough.

TILDA: Prince. I do like that sound.

FELIX: And what do ye with all those silken stuffs?

TILDA: We do make braziers for thy royal mother.

FELIX: What is a brazier, prithee?

TILDA: A thing for women:

It holds their titties up, begging your pardon.

The queen was sore constricted by her corset.

FELIX: Aye, she'd unlace it after dinner, and laugh

For very joy at getting out of it.

I do rejoice me at her new-found comfort:

She's getting on a bit, the old baboon.

I must be on my way: I'll see thee anon.

(He moves to the Door. As he goes, he remarks, aside)

I scarce could keep my eyes from off her charms

While we did talk of braziers and corsets

And other things t' inflame a young man's mind.

And yet, how can I speak my ardour to her?

I am a prince, and she a simple peasant.

I scorn t' inveigle her into bed with tricks –

And yet, I talk like an experienced lecher,

When I have no experience at all.

Still, I do fancy the lass something rotten. (Exit.)

ETTY: Stap me vitals, but thou didst speak boldly to him. Met him in the forest, eh? And did he get up to some hanky-panky at last, and not before time, him being nigh on twenty and never got his end away, poor lad? I'd ha' helped him, but he doth not fancy me. He were looking at thy titties like he were committing them to memory, i' faith, and blushing like a lobster in stoffado.

TILDA: Is he not stalwart as a young oak tree

And handsome as the purple eglantine?

I never have felt thus about a youth,

I feel my insides all a-churn, forsooth.

(Exeunt, bearing Braziers.)

SCENE 3

The Banqueting Hall at the Royal Palace. The Table is laden with rich Viands. A Sennet. Enter KING VUSILLUS, QUEEN VULPECULA and PRINCE FELIX with COURTIERS and ATTENDANTS.

VUSILLUS: At last, after that long and anxious council

We get our food. My dear, I always say

That dinner is the crowning of the day.

VULPECULA: Indeed thou dost, each day at th' dinner hour,

Thou mad old bat: and yet I do forgive thee.

Let's take our places, I am hungry too,

And now I do not need to wear my stays,

I'll eat my fill. O, what a blest relief!

(VUSILLUS and VULPECULA sit down. The COURTIERS take their Places at the Table.)

VUSILLUS: I saw that thou wert looking rather healthy.

Thy bosom swells like that of a young lass:

I fancy thee anew, my dear old witch.

Say, what's the cause, hast thou at last succeeded

In making that rejuvenating potion

Thou worked on for so long?

VULPECULA: Nay, 'tis a brazier:

My new girl Tilda made the thing for me.

VUSILLUS: A brazier, thou sayst? 'Tis full of coals?

What strange enchantment hath thy servant made?

Art thou then burnt like th' phoenix, and reborn?

VULPECULA: Nay, my old cheese, though I do feel that way:

'Tis but a garment to support my bosom

Without the aid of whales' bones or iron bars.

Is it not fine?

VUSILLUS: Indeed it is, my precious:

What sayst thou to a tumble after dinner?

VULPECULA: With all my heart. And do not drink too much:

I do not want thee getting brewer's droop.

My Tilda doth amaze: her fingers fly

As she makes braziers for the noble ladies.

She's done one for the Countess of Euphoria,

That mighty dame – look down the table at her:

'Tis lightly underwired for extra support.

And for the scrawny Lady Ermintrude

(Who's late again, we'll see her by and by)

She hath devised one farced with cotton wool;

She calls it th' wonder brazier.

(Enter LADY ERMINTRUDE, in Haste.)

LADY ERMINTRUDE: Halloo, boys,

Do ye like what ye see?

VULPECULA: Behave thyself,

And take thy seat. We have been waiting on thee.

VUSILLUS: Thou certainly art looking very well:

We will forgive thy spirits. Let's fall to.

(All begin to eat. VUSILLUS continues between Mouthfuls.)

I'll tell thee what our council was about.

Th' ambassador of the Permians was here:

War hath broke out 'twixt them and Aquilegia,

We have a treaty with the Permians

And we must send an army to their aid.

FELIX: O father dear, pray may I go with th' army?

VUSILLUS: I was about to ask thee, dearest son.

I am old, I trow my fighting days are over:

The last campaign against the Khan o' th' Tartars

Made my rheumatics act up something cruel,

Till I could hardly raise my battleaxe,

And the old king of Poland nearly had me.

I shall sit this one out in a warm palace.

Felix, I have a mind to make thee general:

I know that thou art young, but th' soldiers love thee,

And I'll appoint old General Dubio

As second in command; he shall advise thee.

And thou, do everything he tells thee to,

And do not rush into the bloody fray

Till thou hast listened to his sage advice.

FELIX: O father, I do thank thee a thousand times!

My first campaign, and I am to command it,

O joy! Father, I'll make thee proud of me.

VULPECULA: See that thou take thy flannel underwear,

And do not fight i' th' rain, thou'lt catch a chill,

But above all take care, my dearest boy:

We wish to see thee back here in one piece.

I'll make thee sundry charms to keep thee safe,

But thou shouldst not rely on them too much:

The other army hath its witches too.

One thing I'll give thee now: put on this ring.

'Tis one o' a pair I had the jeweller make:

Thine hath a sardine stone of sympathy,

And mine a diamond: and while thou art well

This diamond in my ring shall flash with fire.

If thou be sick, its lustre will be dulled,

But an it should turn black – I'll say no more.

FELIX (putting on the Ring): I thank thee, mother. Fret thou not for me:

'Twill be a little skirmish, and soon over.

VUSILLUS: Thy brother Viscus shall be here anon,

Down from the university of Goettingen:

He may be here to greet thee ere thou go.

FELIX: Glad news indeed! I have not seen my brother

For many a day; he must be near full grown.

VUSILLUS: He'll not win his theology degree

If what his tutor wrote to me be true:

He hath been idle, going about with lasses

And drinking till the small hours of the morn.

I shall have words with him when he arrives.

VULPECULA: Be not too hard on him, he is but young:

He is a good lad, though too easily swayed

By th' company he keeps, such as that Percy.

I'd hang that man from th' gibbet by the gate,

But all his crimes are done in his own parish

Where he is magistrate, and judge, and jury.

We cannot touch him till he shall commit

Some heinous act in other territory:

Let him do that: we'll have him by the bollocks.

VUSILLUS: They say that Percy hath gone back to Sebum.

VULPECULA: Then let him stay there till his liver rots

From all that metheglin that he doth swill.

Let him be slathered o'er with festering sores

Oozing black pus, crawling with noxious worms;

Let him have whooping cough and pleurisy

At th' selfsame time, aye, and Saint Vitus' dance

With compound fractures of his arms and legs.

May his brain turn to foetid watery sludge

And run out of his ears. Hast eaten enough?

VUSILLUS: Thank 'ee, my dear, my hunger is quite gone.

Now, let us rise, and quickly climb the stair:

I'll be the answer to a woman's prayer.

(A Sennet. Exit VUSILLUS and VULPECULA, followed by the Others.)

SCENE 4

A Chamber in the Royal Palace. Enter PRINCE FELIX and his Friend AMMONTILADO.

FELIX: Ammontilado, is it not grand news
That we are off to war 'gainst Aquilegia?
After six years of peace, at last a chance
To prove my prowess on the battlefield?
I scarce can wait to plunge my bloody brand
Into the body of a real live foeman.

AMMONTILADO: He'll be real dead when thou hast finished with him.
Thou know'st I was at the siege of Antirrhinum
When I was page to th' king of Salvia;
I saw more dead than thou hast had hot dinners.

FELIX: Aye, and I know that thou didst win a name
As a courageous soldier in that action:

Tell me, how doth it feel to kill thy man?

AMMONTILADO: We were within the walls of Antirrhinum;

The troops of King Melodeon did besiege us
With mighty engines and the sapper's art.

The army fast approached the city gate
While stones from trebuchets and mangonels
Rained down on us: we stood upon the rampart
Waiting until the first rank came within range
Of harquebuss or crossbow. O the surge
Of simple pleasure as we stood together!

When they approached, the colonel gave the order
To open fire: we made them drop like rabbits.

I felled three ere they started to retreat,
And thought no more than if I had been hunting;

Nor all the men with me. On the next day,
They rolled a tall siege engine to the wall:
A tower on wheels, shielded with iron plates
With ladders in it. We ran to the spot
Just as the first man came over the wall.

I struck him with my pike, and he fell back
Over the battlement, and as he fell

He looked into my eyes. I'll not forget
That look he gave me on the brink of death:

Thou'lt see it for thyself quite soon enough,
I'll say no more. When the next man came

Waving his sword, I could not bring myself
To strike him, and for th' first time I felt fear

Sapping my strength. But in that very instant
The man behind me shot him with a pistol,

And no more came, and they rolled back the tower,
Seeing they could not take us by surprise.

The next day came the army of King Lobo

And raised the siege, and thus the war did end.

But I do tell thee, I have lost my taste

For glorious battle and the clash of arms;

And I think thou wilt, an thou live t' come home.

FELIX: What is 't with all this gloom, Ammontilado?

Do men not praise the deeds of mighty heroes

Who killed and killed again without remorse?

Is it not fine to slay the enemy

Who, after all, is trying to slay thee?

AMMONTILADO: 'Tis necessary sometimes, there's an end on 't.

I'll go to war and do must what be done,

But do not speak to me o' th' joy of battle.

And mind thou heed thy father's wise advice,

Aye, and thy mother's: wars are nasty things,

Thou canst get killed in them, an thou be heedless.

Let's speak of happier things: a certain friend

Told me he's seen thee looking at a lass

With more than usual interest: he said

Her name was Tilda, seamstress to the queen.

FELIX: Who told thee that? I'll have his guts for garters.

AMMONTILADO: Then I'll not tell thee. But I see 'tis true:

Thou'rt blushing like a beetroot. Well, 'tis time

Thou lost thy cherry, thou art nearly twenty.

She is quite some tomato, by my halidom:

Dost thou not long to get her in the sack?

(Enter, above, TILDA and ETTY. The Others do not see them.)

FELIX: I wish thou wouldst not speak of Tilda thus.

Though born of peasants, she is well brought up,

Not like the rude girls thou dost oft consort with.

Yea, I am mighty fond of her, I'd not deny

That I do fancy her like anything;

But how can I plight my troth t' a common lass,

Fair as she be? For I must wed a princess:

I hope my father hath not chosen me

That Wilhelmina of Aschafnaburg:

Her face is not unlike the back o' a tumbril.

AMMONTILADO: What's all this talk of weddings, silly Felix?

Have her, she'll be right willing to have thee.

Thy father hath a score of concubines,

And none do think the worse of him for it

Except thy mother, and she seems to bear it.

FELIX: Nay, 'tis not right. She is an honest lass

And I've no right to filch her maidenhead;

Besides, I scarce know how.

AMMONTILADO: Then go and practise.

Ask thy old man to lend thee two o' his strumpets:

They'll put thee in the way of things i' a trice.

FELIX: What vile ideas thou hast, Ammontilado!

I'll hear no more. Come, let us to the chase.

(Exeunt FELIX and AMMONTILADO.)

ETTY: Didst thou hear that? He really fancies thee.

O what a stroke of luck for thee, my Tilda!
 The post of royal mistress is most pleasant,
 With all the clothes and shoes a girl could wish for
 And scarce an hour of duty in the day
 And that of an agreeable kind, forsooth;
 And when he tires of thee, he'll make thee countess
 And give thee a castle and a handsome pension.
 What more could a lass want? O were it I!
 TILDA: He is more scrupulous in his behaviour
 Than thou dost think. His feelings do him credit.
 He will not drag me to his bed and have me
 And then cast me away: he is a prince,
 Noble and fair. Thou know'st that I do love him,
 Yet I would not be treated by him thus.
 But I fear greatly that he spoke the truth
 About my humble origin, and his:
 How can I be more than a plaything for him?
 ETTY: There's hope yet, Tilda: if ye feel for each other
 As I believe – then, as my gran doth say,
 Where there's a will, there sure will be a way.
 (Exeunt.)

SCENE 5

The Garden of the Royal Palace at Purdonium. Enter KING VUSILLUS, QUEEN VULPECULA and PRINCE FELIX, attended by ETTY.

VUSILLUS: Felix, my lad, when I told thee o' th' council
 I did not tell thee all. I did bethink me
 That one surprise a day was quite enough
 For thy young wits. So now, here is the second.
 I think thou'lt find it welcome: thou'rt betrothed!
 FELIX: Not Wilhelmina of Aschafnaburg!
 VUSILLUS: Nay, lad, would I betrothe thee to that mare?
 My choice is far more pleasing to thy taste:
 Princess Gloxinia of the Permians,
 As fair a maid as e'er a man could wish,
 Eighteen years old, with curling golden hair
 And eyes of china blue; she's trusty, loyal,
 Helpful and sisterly, courteous and kind,
 Obedient, smiling, thrifty and quite clean.
 She'll strengthen our alliance with the Permians
 And be the queen of all Toxaemia
 When I drop off the twig; and before that
 She'll fortify our house with grandchildren,
 Little Vusillus and Vulpecula,
 The future rulers of Toxaemia:
 Her hips are wide: they'll pop out like green peas.
 Thou'lt be in love with her from the first glance,
 And, to make sure the two of ye agree,

I have invited her this very day:

She'll be here soon. What dost thou say to that?

FELIX: I know not what to say, my father dear:

I am astounded. I am only twenty:

Dost thou suppose me old enough to wed?

VUSILLUS: I was betrothed at six to thy dear mother,

And she was two. We wed when I was twelve.

Thy little sister Sheba, as thou know'st,

Hath been betrothed for seven months and more

To th' Palgrave of Gazunder-Pickelberg,

And they shall wed when she is seventeen.

I judge thee old enough, though thou art backward

In the pursuit of love, to put it mildly.

The only reason that I've not betrothed thee

Until this time is that thou lacked all interest

In th' palace maids. I told my concubines

To see if they could rouse thy flaccid will,

But they all failed.

FELIX: And not for want of trying:

Each night I climbed into my curtained bed

There was a woman in 't.

VUSILLUS: At last I thought

Thou rather did prefer the way of Sodom,

And made discreet enquiries through the palace;

But thou wast just as hopeless with the lads.

Well, now, 'tis time thou take the plunge at last,

And who to plunge in better than Gloxinia?

(A Sound of Flutes and Lutes.)

I hear her party: stiffen up, my boy,

Look like a prince that she might like to marry,

Not like thou hast been sentenced to be hanged.

VULPECULA: Aye, and tuck in thy shirt unto thy trews,

Pull up thine hose; thou look'st a proper sight.

(Enter PRINCESS GLOXINIA attended by her Maid, CLEMENTINE.)

VUSILLUS: Welcome, my dearest lady, to Purdonium!

Now, with thy leave, I wish to introduce thee

To my dear son, Prince Felix of the Marches.

FELIX: I am enchanted to make your acquaintance,

Princess. I have just learnt we are to wed.

GLOXINIA: The pleasure is entirely mine, dear prince.

I only found out yesterday myself:

Is 't not amazing?

FELIX: That it surely is.

My father said that ye were dazling fair:

I see he did say sooth.

GLOXINIA: My father told me

That ye were the most handsome of all princes:

I see he told no lie.

VUSILLUS: I am most glad

That ye two are so much in love so soon.

We'll leave ye twain to flirt with one another

So that your love may blossom without hindrance.

VULPECULA (aside, to FELIX): And take thy hands out of thy pockets, boy.

(Exeunt VULPECULA, FELIX and CLEMENTINE. ETTY pretends to go with them, but conceals herself behind a Hedge.)

FELIX: Have ye e'er been to Prince's Risborough?

GLOXINIA: Nay, never in my life: tell me about it.

FELIX: 'Tis a fine town, but nothing like Purdonium.

GLOXINIA: Indeed, Purdonium is a fair city.

Have ye lived here for long?

FELIX: Aye, I was born here.

GLOXINIA: Of course, how stupid of me. But I wish

To know thee better ere we tie the knot.

Let's talk of what ye love and what ye hate,

And whisper secrets as true lovers do,

For otherwise how can we be betrothed?

FELIX: I scarce know how to start. My age is twenty,

My greatest pleasure is to hunt the deer,

I am not fond of herrings.

GLOXINIA: Nor am I.

FELIX: I think that I can hear my father calling,

'Twill be about the war, and most important.

I beg to take my leave of you, Princess:

We'll speak again, and soon, for I depart

Upon the morrow morn to fight the foes

Of both our lands. Farewell, for I must run.

GLOXINIA: Till then, sweet prince, I shall be thinking of you.

(Exit FELIX.)

Indeed I shall be thinking of the prince:

Sure he's a hunk, but is 't a hunk of lead?

He never looked directly in mine eyes

And muttered about Prince's Risborough.

Is he but shy, or is he such a dullard

That, faced by my fair charms, he doth not fall

Immediately in love with all his heart?

Who cares if he like herrings, by my troth?

I'll wait for our next tryst ere I decide,

But at first glance the boy's a nincompoop.

I'll call my servant: Ho there, Clementine!

Where are the king and queen, and all the others?

(Enter CLEMENTINE.)

CLEMENTINE: They be beside the river, taking wine.

GLOXINIA: And is Prince Felix with them?

CLEMENTINE: I did see him

Walking the other way, at a great pace.

Begging your pardon, lady, did ye like him?

GLOXINIA: He spoke to me of Prince's Risborough

And herrings. It did not go very well.

Mayhap it will be better when we wed,

But he is certainly no ball of fire.

CLEMENTINE: The queen's maid Ety hath told me of him:

He be no ladies' man, and that's the truth.

The king tried putting strumpets in his bed
 And all he done was tell 'em to get out.
 I've some good news: he runs not after lads:
 Ye'll light his fire, though it may take some kindling.
 GLOXINIA: Well, I suppose I could do worse than him:
 I think of my poor sister Araucaria,
 Married at ten to Kevin th' Terrible:
 I held my nose all throughout the ceremony,
 And now she doth live in a tent, with goats.
 One scarce can tell her children from the dogs.
 We'll make the best of it, there is no choice.
 CLEMENTINE: There, that's my precious. 'Twill not be so bad.
 GLOXINIA: Let's to the river, I must take a drink,
 And not from th' river either, by my troth.
 (Exeunt GLOXINIA and CLEMENTINE.)
 ETTY: Oo, I can hardly wait to tell Tilda of this tryst. A smasher like that, and he did barely give her a
 glance. I think our Tilda be in with a chance yet. (Sings) The king hath sent for a sex-kitten,
 With golden hair and tempting titty.
 But I don't think the fish hath bitten
 The bait she dangled – O, the pity.
 For Felix be already smitten,
 And he do want another kitty.
 Her plan shall have to be rewritten,
 And so I end my pretty ditty.
 (Exit)

SCENE 6

A Chamber in the Royal Palace. Enter KING VUSILLUS, QUEEN VULPECULA attended by ETTY, and PRINCE FELIX.

VUSILLUS: My son, 'tis nearly time for thee to leave.
 I wish thee glory in thy new career:
 May thou rampage through th' enemy, and knock
 The Aquilegians to kingdom come.
 VULPECULA: And may thou come safe home, my dearest son.
 Here are some charms I have for thee, i' a locket:
 Wear it around thy neck, under thy sark.
 This sapphire shall guard thee against enchantment
 By any but a witch of the first league;
 This amethyst against inebriation;
 A bezoar, from th' stomach of a goat
 To keep thee safe from poison; and bdellium,
 The aromatic gum o' an orient tree
 Which, if thou smear it well upon thy loins
 Shall guard thee scatheless from the foeman's blade.
 And for protection from the flying bullets,
 Here's powdered dung from the true unicorn:
 See how it glisters! Rub it on thine ears
 And th' cannonball shall hit somebody else.

VUSILLUS: Woman, that is a dirty, low-down trick.

VULPECULA: He is thy son as well; shall be then perish
Because I did not help him all I could?

VUSILLUS: Thou hast a point, my love, let th' boy take it.

FELIX: I thank thee, mother, for thy kind protection:
I shall not spare to use it in the fray.

Do thou not fret for me, my dearest mother:

I shall come out of it with a whole skin.

Look at my father, sixty years of age
And fighting all his life, with nothing worse
To show for it than a rheumatic back.

VUSILLUS: I'll have thee know that I was nearly killed
A score of times. See the wounds on my arm,
And on my leg – by God, I nearly lost it.

FELIX: I beg thy pardon, father. I shall take care,
As far as it be feasible at a time

When several thousand men essay to kill me.

VULPECULA: See that thou do. Now, my son, prithee tell me:
How went thy meeting with Gloxinia?

She is a sweet young lass, is she not indeed?
Thinkst thou that she will make a wife for thee,
Aye, and a queen, when we are dead and gone?

FELIX: I'm sure she will, mother. We have spoke twice:

The first time I knew hardly what to say
And I feared that she thought me a poor fish.

The second time it went a little better:

I told her how to spear a charging boar,
And how t' inflate a football.

VULPECULA: Idiot boy!

Didst thou not breathe sweet nothings in her ear?

FELIX: Nay. Dost thou think she might have liked some nothings?

VULPECULA: 'Tis like teaching a puppy to do calculus:
What can we hope for with a lad like this?

ETTY (aside): We can hope for better things than for the lad to wed that brassy-haired, feather-headed piece
of aristocratic trash, and that's no lie.

(A Sennet. Enter GLOXINIA, attended by CLEMENTINE.)

GLOXINIA: Your majesties, I beg t' intrude on you
To take leave of your son, my dear betrothed.

Good morning, Felix. This is the last time

That I shall see thee ere thou go to war.

Fight well. I'll see thee when thou dost come back.

FELIX: And I thee, sweet Gloxinia: so adieu.

VULPECULA (aside, to Felix): For pity's sake, boy, show some animation!
She'd get more action from a block of wood.

Embrace her, kiss her, shed some manly tears!

(FELIX kisses GLOXINIA in a tentative Manner.)

VULPECULA (aside): Well, I suppose that that will have to serve.
Maybe when they are married, he will warm t' her.

FELIX: Now, father mine, and thou my dearest mother,
I am away. My men wait at the door.

We sail this night for distant Permian.

VUSILLUS: God speed!

VULPECULA: Come safe to shore!

GLOXINIA: Have a nice day.

(Trumpets. The Doors open, revealing Soldiers. Exit FELIX.)

ETTY (aside, to CLEMENTINE): He ain't always like that.

CLEMENTINE (aside): Nay? Do tell.

ETTY: Sometimes he be worse. There do be tales that his old nurse Gorilla did drop him on his head on the castle flagstones when he were but a baby, and since then he ha' been one apple short of a barrel.

CLEMENTINE: He did seem a bit slow, like. My lady be not entirely enraptured with him, if thou take my sense, strictly between thee and me and the arras.

ETTY: He's very clean.

CLEMENTINE: Ay, and that be an advantage when thou dost consider the other choices for her. The best of them is that Prince Hamlet of Denmark, and you can hardly see his face for spots. As for the ones from Bulgaria, the less said about them, the better. Thinkst thou these twain could be king and queen after a fashion?

ETTY: Aye, till the family madness took him, and that might be ten year or more from now.

CLEMENTINE: I did hear naught of this. Nor did my lady, I trow, nor her good father the king.

ETTY: 'Tis from his mother: these witches are an inbred race. It doth not strike the women, but the men who are born of them do become lunatical after a space of years. Know'st thou of her father, the wizard Erysipelas? He do dress in a dog's skin and howl at the moon, forsooth, and will eat naught but grapes these seven year.

CLEMENTINE: This be terrible, i' faith. Why did no one tell my lady?

ETTY: They do keep him locked in the bell tower, and none can come nigh.

'Tis a royal secret, and to disclose it do be death. But I did think it right to warn thee.

CLEMENTINE: Aye, and I thank thee for it, ETTY. I must tell my lady of this when this royal shambles be over, but I'll see that thy name be not mentioned.

(Enter a SEWER, in Haste. He addresses VULPECULA.)

SEWER: Your majesty, I bear news from the watch:

Sir Percy of Malpractice is in town.

A man hath seen him in the lower city

Vomiting o'er the balcony o' a stew.

VULPECULA: Thou hast done well: here is a groat for thee. (Exit SEWER.)

So, that spawn of the devil's back again

To wreak his influence on little Viscus.

Well, if he step one fraction out of line

I'll turn him to a thing so horrible

That even I shall have bad dreams about it.

VUSILLUS: Why dost thou not do 't straight away, my love?

VULPECULA: Think'st thou we witches have no principles?

Besides, my spells work better when I'm angry.

Come, let's to th' walls and wave farewell

To our dear son. Ah, but my heart is sore

As he goes gaily off to his first war.

(Exeunt Omnes.)

ACT 3

SCENE 1

An Encampment outside the Walls of the City of Allium in Aquilegia. Enter PRINCE FELIX, GENERAL DUBIO, KING HAMFAST of the Permians, and SOLDIERS.

HAMFAST: Now, Felix, is it not a noble thing
To be i' th' field? I hear the clash of swords
As our men practise for the coming fray:
'Tis music to mine ears.

FELIX: As is the snort
O' th' fiery chargers stabled in their lines,
The twang of bows, the thump of harquebusses,
The clattering o' the cooks as they make dinner –
I hope 'twill not be stew with raspberries,
We've had it every day for near a week.

HAMFAST: Why, 'tis the national dish of Permia:
It makes us strong i' th' thew and fierce as tigers.
We'll eat it till the end of this campaign
Whether it be t' thy taste, or it be not:
Let's hear no more of this.

FELIX: Your pardon, sir.
HAMFAST: Granted, I'm sure. Doth all go well with thee?

FELIX: Aye, if it would stop raining. There's a stream
A foot in depth flowing right through my tent:
I had to spend the night upon the table.

HAMFAST: We soldiers laugh at inconvenience.
Why, when I was at th' siege of Vilnius
There was so little space inside our tent
We had to spend the night hanging on hooks.
My beard was frozen solid to my sark;
We'd naught to drink but ice thawed o'er a candle,
And naught to eat but mildewed cabbage leaves –
I can recall the smell t' this very day.
Ah, soldiering's a fine life for a man.

DUBIO: I mind me of the march to Quinoa
When we ran day and night for seven weeks
Living upon wild roots and the odd rat.
When we were young, what stalwart lads we were:
Nothing would daunt us. Once, at Myosotis
I took on forty men with pikes and muskets
And strangled every one with my bare hands.
The modern generation cannot match us:
They are soft lads, fresh from their feather beds,
Dreaming about their mistress, or their dinner.

FELIX: We'll see about that when the fight begins.
– And by the way, when it is due to start?

DUBIO: At any moment now: mark how our van

Drives on toward the main gate of the city.

There is the army of Prince Manticore,

Our ally from the isle of Tapioca.

They are in musket range o' th' Aquilegians:

Hear how they shriek defiance of the foe.

FELIX: Yet now they seem to fall away again

Leaving men lying on the bloody field.

I fear that shriek was not what thou didst think.

HAMFAST: They are regrouping for a fresh attack:

See how they run towards the enemy.

FELIX: And past them, and away along the valley:

I fear we'll see no more of them today.

Now look towards the gates of Allium:

They open, and a host of men come forth,

Running towards us with their pikes aloft.

Huzza! My first real battle! Let us smite them.

HAMFAST: I must go to my men. Prithee, engage

The enemy in my absence, while I marshal

My dauntless army for our next attack. (Exit.)

FELIX (to DUBIO): Could he not first attack th' advancing foe?

There seems to be rather a lot of them.

DUBIO: One thing thou'lt learn, prince, is that thou shouldst not

Rely upon the courage of thine allies:

I fear the king will not be seen on th' field.

Come let us do as well as e'er we can

To hold them off, and maybe when old Hamfast

Sees that we have turned back the enemy,

He'll kindly come and help us with the looting.

Ho, men, to arms: let fly the mangonel!

Take up the halberd and the harquebuss!

They come, and only we stand firm to stop 'em.

FELIX: Then let them come, and with my blazing brand

I'll spit them like so many ortolans.

(Enter ENEMY SOLDIERS. They fight, and FELIX's Men are driven back.)

FELIX: Is 't always thus in battle, Dubio?

'Tis rougher than I thought. I like it little:

'Tis fortunate I smeared that bdellium on

And put the powdered dung into mine ears:

'Twould be quite dangerous here otherwise.

DUBIO: They have the mastery of us, and our ranks

Can hold for little longer. Sound the retreat!

(The Retreat is sounded. As FELIX's Men fall back, an ENEMY SOLDIER strikes FELIX on the head with a Mace, and he falls senseless to the Ground.)

DUBIO: Fly, for the king is lost! Run for your lives!

However shall I tell poor King Vusillus

That I have carelessly mislaid his son? (Exit.)

FIRST SOLDIER: Here, do not kill this one. See th' gilded armour

And the Toledo blade with jewelled hilt.

SECOND SOLDIER: He is a royal prince, at the very least.

FIRST SOLDIER: We'll take him to the king, to hold for ransom,

Haply the king will pay us a reward.

SECOND SOLDIER: Let's take his arms: we'll get a good price for 'em.
(The ENEMY SOLDIERS lift FELIX and bear him away.)

SCENE 2

A Dungeon in the Citadel of Allium. PRISONERS in Chains, including RAUCUS, ELECTOR OF PIFFELBERG, are lying on the Floor. Enter PRINCE FELIX in Fetters, held by two SOLDIERS.

FIRST SOLDIER: There thou art, young feller. Fret not, thou'lt be out o' here in a few months an thy daddy's rich enough to ransom thee. An he be not, o' course, thou'lt be here till thou handest in thy dinner pail. Seest thou that old greybeard i' th' corner? He be King Morosus o' Catalpa, taken in the battle o' the Tiger's Gate nigh on forty year ago, and no one would raise a sol for the old bugger, so here he do stay.

FELIX: My father is a king, but not a rich one:

What kind of money are we talking of?

FIRST SOLDIER: 'Tis on a sliding scale, by a man's rank.

Emperors do cost fifty thousand ducats,

Kings thirty-six, crown princes twenty-four,

Other kings' sons eighteen; but be they dukes,

Twenty. We do not trouble wi' others:

Viscounts and earls and barons and that trash:

The ransom be not worth the cost o' their food,

And so we strangle them upon receipt.

Sometimes we keep the generals, if they're good;

They can be worth a bit. What rank hast thou?

SECOND SOLDIER: I would advise thee, lad, to tell the truth:

'Twill come out in the end, an thou be ransomed.

FELIX: My name is Felix, crown prince of Uraemia.

FIRST SOLDIER: Ha, we have got ourselves a twenty-four!

That is, if dad coughs up. Send for the clerk.

(Exit SECOND SOLDIER. Felix sits on the Floor.)

FELIX: Ah me, how my poor head doth smart like hell;

These fetters chafe my limbs; I scarce can bear 't.

O what a sorry thing is glorious war:

How could I think it would be glorious?

First I was sick upon that filthy ship

The whole way from Purdonium to Saint Trinian,

Then seven days tramping along a road,

Hungry and filthy, fed on horrid stew

With raspberries that made me sick at heart,

And when at last we get the call to arms

Our allies run away, the big girls' blouses!

We scarce had drawn our swords, when some fell knave

Cracks me upon the head wi' a bloody mace,

And here I am, cast in a stinking dungeon

Till God knows when. How can my father raise

Twenty-four thousand ducats from our people?

There scarce is that much in the breadth o' th' kingdom.

FIRST SOLDIER: Well, an ye be not ransomed in a month,

Ye may be sold on to another ruler.

We sent a package o' princes to Magnolia

Last month, though th' price was hardly worth the work.

We tried to sell Morosus several times:

No one would take his daft old majesty.

(Enter SECOND SOLDIER and a CLERK with Pen, Ink and Paper.)

CLERK: Who have we here? A crown prince, I have heard:

He looks a fine lad, shall we ask thirty for him?

FIRST SOLDIER: I doubt his dad will raise the twenty-four

From what he says. He's for the transfer list.

CLERK: Hear what the lad doth have to say himself.

(To FELIX) Now, royal highness, if I have that right,

Whence are ye, and what is the rank ye bear?

FELIX: I am Prince Felix, heir to th' Uraemian throne.

CLERK: Uraemia? A pity. 'Tis a poor land.

We'll ask for twenty-four; we might get twenty. (He writes.)

Now, sign this paper on the dotted line,

And then we'll send it off t' his majesty.

'Tis done: ye'll hear from us i' a fortnight

If ye have luck. Farewell, your royal muchness.

(Exeunt CLERK and SOLDIERS.)

FELIX: O, I shall pass my whole life in this place,

Living on rats and rotten mildewed crusts:

'Tis not to be endured. Ah, my sweet Tilda,

How I do miss the sight o' thy busy fingers

And thy clear voice i' th' Pythagorean song!

Haply I shall not see thee e'er again.

RAUCUS: Thou hast a sweetheart, friend? I had one once:

Now she is married to another noble.

My name is Raucus, Elector o' Piffelberg,

I have been here six months, since I was taken

By pirates and sold on to Aquilegia.

FELIX: 'Tis good to meet thee, worthy royal cousin,

If any good befall men in this plight.

'Tis true I love a lass, but also true

That I have hardly spoke a word to her:

I know not if she love me. O my Tilda!

RAUCUS: Bear up, it is not too bad in this place,

We have the pleasure of each other's company,

And no one tortures us if we behave.

The food is quite disgusting, but I wager

Thou wilt not see a raspberry in thy bowl.

(Enter the SOLDIERS with GENERAL DUBIO. They throw him down on the Floor and leave.)

FELIX: Poor Dubio, so they did take thee too!

And thou art wounded.

DUBIO: Nay, 'tis but a scratch.

I have been here before, when I was captured

On the sea coast of Calcaeolaria:

They rated me at thirteen thousand ducats

After my victory at Trivium:

'Twas long before thy time. The king paid up:

Those were the days, when I was worth a ransom.

FELIX: Then thou had best remember all thy victories

When th' clerk doth come. The prices have gone up:
 If thou do not rate highly, 'tis the chop.
 (Enter the SOLDIERS with the CLERK.)
 CLERK: Ho, General Dubio if I be right!
 I do remember thee from years gone by,
 They paid quite well for thee. But that was then,
 And this is now. Thy score sheet's none too good:
 I trow the king shall hardly wish thee home.
 We'll sell thee to the Tartars, if they'll have thee –
 Hey, soldiers, put this man i' th' transfer pen!
 (Exit the CLERK and the SOLDIERS with DUBIO.)
 FELIX: Farewell, old general, may the powers preserve thee!
 O, we are bought and sold like fruit i' th' market:
 How hideous 'tis to trade in human flesh!
 O Tilda, though thou art but a poor peasant
 I love thee more than any royal princess
 With sixty quarterings upon her shield.
 Ah, how I wish I were in thy dear arms,
 Taking my pleasure in thy luscious charms.

SCENE 3

A Chamber in the Royal Palace. Enter KING VUSILLUS, QUEEN VULPECULA, PRINCE VISCUS and PRINCESS GLOXINIA, attended by ETTY and CLEMENTINE.

VUSILLUS: No news hath come from Aquilegia
 For good or ill. But let us hope that Felix
 Hath won his spurs i' th' war and thrashed the foe:
 No news is good news, as I always say.
 VULPECULA: Thou sayst it far too often for my taste:
 O how I wish we know that he was safe!
 The diamond on my ring doth still shine bright,
 Though I perceive a little dimming of it
 The past few days; but mayhap 'tis my fancy.
 VISCUS: Perchance my brother hath a cold i' th' head;
 He often had them when we were but lads.
 GLOXINIA: He is not sickly? He seemed such a hunk.
 VULPECULA: Nay, he is strong as thirteen hundred bears
 And healthy as a hive of honeybees:
 Scorn not the fruit till thou have tasted it.
 (Enter a HERALD.)
 HERALD: Sire, I bear heavy tidings of Prince Felix.
 VULPECULA: Alas! I had a fell presentiment!
 TILDA (aside) Ah, God! What hath befallen my sweet prince!
 VUSILLUS: Come, man, speak out, thou'lt not be punished for 't.
 HERALD: A sailor came to th' palace from the dock;
 He had come here upon a corsair's xebec
 Wi' a letter from the King of Aquilegia.
 I have it here.
 VULPECULA: Quick, give it to me, man. (She reads.)

'To his most gracious majesty the King
Vusillus of Uraemia', et cetera ...
'We hold your elder son, the Crown Prince Felix,
Lawfully captured on the battlefield,
Unharm'd save for a slight bruise on the head.'
Alack! At least the dear lad is not wounded.
'We shall release him to you upon payment
Of four-and-twenty thousand golden ducats.
Prompt payment would be much appreciated;
Pray do not ask for credit, as a slap
I' th' face doth oft offend. Pistachio Rex.'
The barefaced bloody cheek o' th' little git!
I'll send a murrain on him, borne by a raven.
VUSILLUS: 'Tis an enormous sum: we could not raise it,
Not if we asked the people of Uraemia
To work for a year, and give us all their wages.
The last time that I had to pawn th' regalia
It barely raised five thousand, and the palace,
As thou well know'st, is mortgaged to the hilt
And we can scarce keep up the payments on it.
VISCUS: Could we not raid the King of Perineum?
His land is rich, and none too well defended.
VUSILLUS: Thou dost forget two things, Viscus, my boy:
First, old King Clitoris is my good friend;
And second, if the foe have taken Felix
That means our army's scattered to the wind.
I'll hear no more of thieving from our allies.
VISCUS: I have a cast-iron money-making scheme:
'Twas shown me by a clever friend of mine.
VULPECULA: Percy, I've not the slightest doubt of that.
VISCUS: Well, as it happens, aye, it was Sir Percy.
But he is full three times as rich as us:
What better proof o' the soundness of his plan?
Thou'lt have to pawn th' regalia again,
And I'll turn thy five thousand into thirty
Within a week.
VUSILLUS: And how wilt thou do that?
VISCUS: I shall invest it in a company
Sir Percy told me of: it cannot fail.
They make ice cream to sell to th' Eskimoes.
VUSILLUS: Who are the Eskimoes, when they're at home?
VISCUS: I know not, but he says their land is hot
And they are parched with thirst, and long for cooling.
'Twill be like taking candy from a baby.
VUSILLUS: I like this not; but what else can we do?
We are in a cleft stick, and no mistake.
Go, Viscus, take my treasures to the shop:
I hope the moths have not got to my robes.
On second thoughts, I'll go along with thee;
Old Stercus will not rook us if I'm there.
VULPECULA: I do not trust Sir Percy any farther

Than I could throw him. Take great care, my son.

VISCUS: Worry not, mother: he is my good friend,

He would not cheat me. 'Tis a sure-fire thing.

(Exeunt VUSILLUS and VISCUS.)

GLOXINIA (aside): My father did not say they were so poor.

(To VULPECULA) I beg your leave to go up to my room,

This grave news hath upset me grievously.

VULPECULA: As it hath all of us. Thou mayst withdraw.

(GLOXINIA moves away and speaks softly to CLEMENTINE.)

GLOXINIA: At first I did not credit what thou told'st me

That Etty had told thee about Prince Felix:

I thought it one o' th' usual palace rumours

Tattled about by an idle servant girl.

But now I feel there may be reason in it:

This talk of poverty is most distasteful.

(Exeunt GLOXINIA and CLEMENTINE.)

VULPECULA: O Etty, Tilda, what grave news is this!

Our darling Felix mouldering in chains,

And all we have to save him is a scheme

Hatched by my bird-brained son and th' evil squire

Whom I do loathe as much as I mistrust him.

I doubt the king will see his crown again –

But damn the crown and all th' regalia,

I want my son again, at any price!

O Felix, my poor boy, where art thou now,

Languishing in some dark, pestiferous cell!

How will he cope? He is not strong i' th' head,

He doth not know how to conduct himself

With brutal men; nor yet with anyone.

He will be buggered by a hundred Turks,

My diamond dims each time I look on it:

O, shall I ever see thy face again?

TILDA: He is the sweetest prince that ever breathed:

O, how I pray he will return to us!

But stay, my queen, he is not as thou think'st:

I have been watching him since I came here ...

ETTY: Indeed, we've noticed.

TILDA: ... And he is no fool.

He hunts all day, but so doth any prince:

What else to do, when ye earn not your bread?

But in the evening, in his private chamber

He doth read Aristotle, in the Greek:

The Knickerbocker Ethics, as I trow.

And ere he left upon his first campaign

He read a book by one Vegetius

On the successful conduct of an army,

Aye, and a man whose name began with X:

I think the book was called the Anaconda,

And when I asked him what it was about,

He discoursed on it for full half an hour:

'Twas how an expedition into Asia

Was forced to march for many hundred leagues
 Until they reached the sea, and when they got there,
 They all did shout 'The lassie' for sheer joy –
 I did not really understand that part:
 Mayhap they missed their sweethearts back at home.
 I hung upon his lips with bated breath,
 He did explain so well.

ETTY: I can imagine.

TILDA: And then you and Gloxinia came in,
 And he reverted to the tongue-tied ninny
 Ye take him for.

VULPECULA: Why, I had no idea,
 And I his mother. Maybe I have not paid
 Enough attention to him. Dost thou think
 My presence frightens him? Thou canst speak freely.

TILDA: He knows that ye do love him very much,
 But he is shy and ill at ease with folk.

A palace is no place to rear a boy,
 Far from the bustle of the living world,
 Talking with none but servile courtiers
 And pea-brained nobles, begging your pardon, ma'am.
 He should have grown up working on a farm,
 Ploughing the field, reaping the golden grain,
 Drinking at the old inn with th' village lads,
 Chasing the village maidens – O that he had!
 He would have grown up confident and bold,
 Not like a plant grown in a forcing house.
 But he is young, and there is time for him –
 Alas, how I do pray that there be time!

VULPECULA: 'Tis strongly spoken. Thou art a bold lass
 To speak so to a queen; but thou art right:
 He hath been kept from th' world all his young life,
 And now the world hath met him with a vengeance.
 Speak on, my girl. Hast thou the least idea
 Of anything that we might do to save him?

TILDA: Your majesty, ye are a powerful witch:
 Can ye not use your powers to bring him forth?

VULPECULA: Pistachio hath a strong witch, Macadamia:
 I fear I cannot overcome her powers.
 We witches are aware of one another:
 She'd sense my interference, and resist it.

ETTY: Could one who do not be a witch get by?

VULPECULA: Aye, but without all power, what could he do?

ETTY: He'd use some ruse to get into the castle,
 Dressed in a woman's clothes, and give the gaoler
 A pint of sack laced with a sleeping draught,
 And steal the gaoler's keys, let Felix out
 And gallop off on steeds as fleet as th' wind!

VULPECULA: Etty, my lass, since thou didst learn to read
 Thy head is filled with gaily coloured fluff.
 These things are never done in the real world –

Yet all that's left t' us now is such a trick,
 Some desp'rate stratagem born of despair.
 Let us all go away and muse awhile,
 Not to grieve over my poor captive Felix
 But to devise a plan to set him free:
 There is no time for sorrow, while he lives.
 (Exeunt severally.)

SCENE 4

An Inn in Purdonium. CITIZENS are being served by FLOSSIE, the Innkeeper's daughter. Enter HOB and JESS.

HOB (to Jess): Now, my old lass, let me buy thee a good dinner to celebrate my first payday as a sewer at the king's table. I trow it do feel grand to be able to afford it.

JESS: Aye, pet, and I'll buy thee a bottle of malmsey to celebrate my first payday as Princess Sheba's tiring-woman. She be a fine young thing, though dreadful wild. That Viscus ha' taken her to meet his low friends, and last night she came not home till four, and out of her pretty little head on cheap brandy. My, how she did puke this morning, I did think she'd never stop. But when I do get to know her, maybe I can give her a bit o' friendly advice, for she be not a bad lass at heart. HOB: That young flibbertigibbet will never listen to thee, love, unless thou turn her over thy knee and give her a right walloping wi' the back o' her gold hairbrush. Which would not be amiss, i' faith. (To FLOSSIE) Excuse me,

miss, can we have somewhat to eat and sup?

FLOSSIE: I ain't got eight hands, I'll be wi' ye presently.

(Enter SIR PERCY OF MALPRACTICE.)

JESS (aside, to Hob): Stap me, it be the squire! Quick, man, away!

HOB: We've naught to fear, we be the king's servants

And he be a long way from Sebum village.

Besides, 'tis dark in here, he shall not see us.

We'll stay and eat our meat, and see what he doth:

I trow he be up to no good again.

PERCY: Flossie, my lass, let's have a quart of sack

And we'll forget the cares o' th' rotten world;

How wouldst thou like a tumble in the hay?

FLOSSIE: Thou'lt get thy sack if thou do pay for it:

I'll see the colour of thy money first.

As for the tumble, go and fuck thyself.

PERCY: Come now, my sweet, that is no way to speak

Unto a gentleman of quality.

FLOSSIE: And if thou be a man of quality

What be thou doing in this poor men's inn?

PERCY: I have an assignation with a prince.

FLOSSIE: Ho, pull the other one, thou poxy sot.

Thou and a prince? Be the pope coming too?

(She serves HOB and JESS with Food and Drink. Enter PRINCE VISCUS.)

FLOSSIE: 'Tis Viscus! What do bring him to this place?

PERCY (to VISCUS): Well met, sweet prince: pray ye, draw up a seat,

And have a swig of this atrocious sack:

'Tis all that I could get in this low dive. (He lowers his Voice.)

So, have ye got the ducats from your father?

VISCUS: Aye, Percy, that I have. We raised six thousand.

PERCY: What, only six? Well, it will have to serve.

Give it me quickly, and I'll to my broker.

(VISCUS gives PERCY a Purse under the Table.)

VISCUS: And art thou sure the enterprise is sound

And that the Eskimoes yearn for ice cream

And we shall make our fortune in a week?

That purse is all the money that we have.

PERCY: 'Tis safe as houses: take my word on that:

Within a week I'll multiply it sixfold.

VISCUS: Well enough, then. I must return to th' palace:

'Tis in a rare commotion. Farewell, friend. (Exit.)

HOB (to FLOSSIE): That were Prince Viscus, I do know him well.

FLOSSIE: Aye, so do I, but what hath brought him here?

HOB: The man he spoke with be the squire of Sebum,

The cruel tyrant of a little village

Where we did live, till he evicted us.

He be a blackguard, rotten to the core,

Thieving our money while he rapes our daughters.

FLOSSIE: He hath come here about a dozen times

To drink his fill and trifle with a whore;

I knew not where he came from. Didst thou see

The prince did pass him money under th' table?

HOB: Alack, I be afraid 'twere Felix's ransom!

And if it were, it do be lost for ever.

How could the prince put trust i' th' stinking dog?

JESS: He do not know him as we twain do know him.

(Enter two RUFFIANS bearing Cudgels. They advance on SIR PERCY.)

FIRST RUFFIAN: Ho, Percy, what a lucky stroke that we should fall in wi' thee here. Thou be two days late wi' the interest, and Don Perfidio be not a happy bunny, not in no wise. Thou hast had thy warning: this time it be the number one mammocking. Art thou sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin.

SECOND RUFFIAN: Be it my turn to do the kneecaps? That do be my favourite part.

PERCY: Nay, hold, I have the money, all of it!

FIRST RUFFIAN: What, all six thousand? Do not mess with me:

Let's see the gold.

PERCY: 'Tis here, to the last ducat.

(He gives the Purse to the FIRST RUFFIAN, who seizes it and counts the money.)

FIRST RUFFIAN: Why, so it be, I scarce believe my eyes.

SECOND RUFFIAN: We do not get to whack him to a jelly?

FIRST RUFFIAN: Never thou mind, he'll owe six thousand more

Come Martinmas, and then we'll crush his bollocks.

Let's take the money to Perfidio;

He shall be mighty pleased to see it back.

Mayhap he'll let us have a twirl wi' his whores. (Exeunt RUFFIANS.)

PERCY: Ha! That was a near thing. Well, as I say,

Easy come, easy go, that is the way o' th' world.

Flossie, fill up my glass, there's a good girl.

JESS: We have to tell the king his gold be gone.

Hob, do thou think that he shall punish us?

HOB: Nay, lass, the king do be a moderate man,

He'll treat us justly if we do our duty.

Alack, I fear his heart shall be full sore,
 For how shall he ransom his Felix now?
 But there's no help. Let us be off and tell him.
 (Exeunt HOB and JESS.)

SCENE 5

A Chamber at the Royal Palace. Enter KING VUSILLUS, QUEEN VULPECULA, PRINCE VISCUS, PRINCESS GLOXINIA and COURTIERS, attended by TILDA, ETTY and CLEMENTINE.

VULPECULA: Viscus, my boy, dost thou have news o' our gold?

VISCUS: Sir Percy hath it, and it is invested.

He promised that within a sennight's space
 It would return sixfold; and that's enough
 To pay the ransom and redeem the crown.

VULPECULA: I shall believe that when I see the money.

If, as I fear, he hath taken it on th' lam,
 Then no blame doth attach to thee, my son:

'Twas we who did entrust it to the villain.

O Viscus, how I grieve for my dear son!

I'd give my life to have him back again.

VISCUS: Then thou wouldst never see him, mother mine.

But fret thou not about our little venture:

Sir Percy is my friend, he would not cheat me,

I'm sure his scheme is sound, and the gold safe.

(Enter HOB and JESS. They remain by the Door.)

VULPECULA (to TILDA): Tilda, are those thy parents by the door?

TILDA: Indeed they are madam. Shall they draw nigh?

VULPECULA (to HOB and JESS): Come in, good folk, be not afraid of us.
 What matter brings ye to the royal chambers?

HOB: Your majesty, I know not how to start:

It be a matter terrible to hear.

May we speak private-like to ye and th' king?

VULPECULA: Indeed ye may: come over to the window.

Princess, wilt thou excuse us for a space?

(VUSILLUS, VULPECULA, HOB and JESS go to the Window.)

VULPECULA: Now, my good man, begin at the beginning:

There's naught to fear if ye do tell the truth.

HOB: Yestreen we took our dinner at an inn,

The Dog and Mitre by Saint Quilda's church,

Good value, though the ale be a mite weak.

While we did sit there, in come that Sir Percy

Who were the cause for us leaving the village.

'Twere dark, he did not see us. And then, madam ...

'Tis hard to say.

VULPECULA: Come, there's no cause to fear:

I hate that villain near as much as ye do.

JESS: And after him, in come your son Prince Viscus,

And they did talk so quiet we could not hear,

But th' Prince gave him a purse under the table.

VUSILLUS: No harm in that: I gave the money to him
So that Sir Percy could invest it for us.

JESS: But after the prince left, there come two ruffians
And said Sir Percy owed six thousand ducats,
And were about t' give him a mammocking
Till he gave them the purse, with all the gold.
Alack, your majesties, I fear 'tis gone.

VULPECULA: Alack indeed, here is what I most feared,
For if the gold be gone, my son goes too.

O my poor Felix, lost to us for ever!

VUSILLUS: Did ye observe aught else while ye were there?

HOB: The men did speak of Don Perfidio;

I think he were their leader.

VULPECULA: Ah, that rogue!

He doth make loans to those who are fool enough
And uses any means to get them back.

He lives beyond the border o' Eczema
And sends his louts to do his dirty work:

The money will be in his chest by now,
And no way left for us to fetch it back.

Ye have done well to bring us this report:
When there's ill news to tell, someone must say 't.

Pray you, stay here a space, and we'll speak more.

(VUSILLUS and VULPECULA return to the Others.)

VUSILLUS: O Viscus, the affair hath not gone well:

Thy friend hath lost the money, and thy brother.

VISCUS: How could he lose it when it is invested?

He told me that it was as safe as houses.

VUSILLUS: No matter, it is gone. What shall we do?

VULPECULA: First, I shall find Sir Percy. When I have him

He'll pay his debt to us. He'll pay so well,

He'll wish he were in Don Perfidio's cellar

Having his eyes removed wi' a tablespoon.

VUSILLUS: Do it, my love, if but to soothe thy anger,

But that will not return our son to us.

GLOXINA: Well, if the prince be gone, I shall be too:

There is no reason now to hang about.

There's plenty more fish in the sea, I trow.

Your majesties, adieu. Come, Clementine.

(Exit GLOXINIA and CLEMENTINE.)

VULPECULA: Small loss, I'd little love to th' brassy bitch.

Far more important, who shall save my son?

Viscus, 'tis up to thee to rescue him:

Say thou wilt go.

VISCUS: How can I, mother?

Our army's scattered, and old Dubio

Is dead or captured; and thou know'st besides,

With Felix gone, I am thine only son:

How can I risk the throne by such a venture?

VUSILLUS: Viscus, thy heart is faint, but thy words are true.

E'en wert thou man enough to undertake it

– Which thou art not – I would not let thee go.

Is there no man here at my royal court
Who hath the stomach for this venture? Speak!
(The COURTIERS remain silent for a While.)

FIRST COURTIER: I'd go, your majesty, but I am sick
And could not brook the rigour of the journey.

SECOND COURTIER: And I, but my dear wife hath been delivered
O' a baby boy: I must look after her.

THIRD COURTIER: What would we do without the aid o' th' army?
I fear ...

VUSILLUS: Ye all do fear: that is the trouble.

TILDA: I'll go! I'll rescue dear Prince Felix for you.

Though I be but a simple peasant lass,
And Felix guarded by a thousand men,
I have a secret weapon in my breast:
It is my heart; 'tis filled with such great love
That though a regiment should bar my way
Its power would drive me past their useless swords
Until I reached the prince whom I adore
And brought him safe back to his native land.

ETTY: And I will go with thee, Tilda, my friend:

Sometimes a regiment takes two to beat.

Together we shall be a fighting band
That folk shall sing about: the two bold girls
Who rescued the fair prince from durance vile.
How can we fail, if love be on our side?

TILDA: God bless thee, ETTY, for a trusty friend:

I'll have thee by me gladly on my quest.

VULPECULA (to TILDA): So thou dost love my son; I had not known.

And thou dost love him truly, if thou risk

Thy life for him. Therefore I say to thee:

If thou canst rescue him, and he consent
To wed thee, ye shall do it with my blessing
And reign as queen over Uraemia.

VUSILLUS: And with my blessing also, my dear girl.

Yet, though folk say that love shall find a way,

Ye are but two young lasses 'gainst an army:

They'll throw thee back as I brush off this fly.

TILDA: We do not mean to battle with an army.

For women can do things that men can not:

There's places we can go where no men enter,
There's ways to win men's hearts, and bend their wills,
And to make warders look the other way.

And if the watch should find us in the street
Long after curfew, we'd flutter our eyelashes
And say we're sorry, we're from out of town,
And pray, what is the way to th' Golden Hind?

VULPECULA: 'Tis true: men look no farther than their noses,
Or possibly an organ lower down.

VUSILLUS: Ye have the makings of a scheme, my dears,
And I shall aid ye every way I can,

As shall the queen, with her most powerful charms.
 Tilda, what say thy parents of thy plan?
 For they stand here, although thou hast forgot.
 HOB: She shall go with my blessing. I be proud of her:
 She hath more courage in her than your courtiers.
 VUSILLUS: Well said: they are a sorry piece of work.
 (To the COURTIERS) This peasant lass hath shamed the whole of you:
 Away, and hang your heads for very shame!
 (Exeunt COURTIERS.)
 JESS: And though it break my heart, she hath my leave.
 Go Tilda, go and win thy handsome prince.
 But O my daughter, take good care o' thyself:
 The world do be a savage place, and thou
 Fresh from the cradle. ETTY, look after her.
 ETTY: O Jess, I'll do the best that I can do:
 She is my friend, and I would die for her.
 JESS: Let's have no talk of dying now, my lass.
 Ye shall be always in my daily prayers,
 And all God's angels shall watch over thee
 Lest thou should dash thy foot against a stone.
 VUSILLUS: Amen: and in the prayers of all of us.
 VULPECULA: Now I shall make ye charms that shall protect ye
 And give ye strength to walk the weary miles,
 And divers tricks to foil your enemies.
 O, how my heart is lifted by thy courage!
 I have a premonition 'twill go well:
 Come now with me unto my witch's cell.
 (Exeunt VULPECULA, TILDA and ETTY. Exeunt on the other Side VUSILLUS, HOB and JESS.)

SCENE 6

VULPECULA's Cell. Enter VULPECULA, TILDA and ETTY.

VULPECULA: Now that ye twain are ready to depart,
 See now, my girls, what I do have for thee:
 I had to beg cousin Crudelia
 To make me some of them. The most essential
 Is in this leathern case: it is a phial
 Holding a potion with a dual effect.
 If ye should add a drop to meat or drink
 And any man consume 't, he'll fall in love
 Quite helplessly with the first maid he sees
 – Which should be one of you, I need not say.
 TILDA: And what, madam, is th' other effect of it?
 VULPECULA: He shall become as feeble as a kitten:
 A light slap with thy hand shall throw him down.
 ETTY: I find that I can slap them hard enough
 To make them reconsider their intentions;
 But getting them to fall in love with me,
 That's the hard part.

TILDA: Etty, thou dost dissemble:
 There's half a hundred men within this palace
 And thou hast had the bulk of them, I trow.
 VULPECULA: Desist, my lasses, from this idle talk:
 Lose not a moment in our pressing task.
 TILDA: You pardon, majesty, we do attend.
 VULPECULA: I've made these lockets for ye both to wear.
 The charms I made for Felix – O my son! –
 Were little use, so I have asked Crudelia
 For some o' her best, which are contained within.
 This jasper guards against the bites of tigers
 And other fell beasts ye may meet on th' way;
 This serpentine, an ye drop it in your drink,
 Shall blacken should the beverage be poisoned.
 And here's a chalcedony of Etruria:
 If any hold it in his hand when speaking
 And he should tell a lie, it shall blaze up
 And burn as if he held a coal of fire.
 This is for use with th' greatest of discretion,
 And not when asking if the eggs be fresh,
 Or ye would leave a trail of innkeepers
 With serious burns wherever ye did go.
 TILDA: We'll use it sparingly. Say, what is that
 Among the gems? It seems the stone o' a fruit.
 VULPECULA: Disdain it not, it is the best of all.
 This peach stone hath a mighty charm on it:
 If ye do eat it, for the space o' an hour
 Ye shall be quite invisible. But mark:
 It doth work only once for each of ye.
 ETTY: 'Tis a relief, for I have no desire
 To get it back when previously eaten.
 VULPECULA: These rubies have no magic charm on them:
 They are the last ones from my private coffer.
 They'll fetch a tidy sum, should ye have need.
 TILDA: How can we take your gems, the last ye own?
 VULPECULA: These stones are naught beside my dearest son.
 Use them to win him back: they'll bribe an earl,
 Maybe a duke if he be not too choosy.
 Now hang this little thing around thy neck:
 It is a whistle for attracting attention.
 TILDA: Your majesty, what a divine device!
 VULPECULA: I've sent for Hob and Jess to bid farewell
 To thee, Tilda; and for thee, Etty, I summoned
 Young Paxo, for I think he is thy latest.
 ETTY: Madam, how did ye know? I have told no one,
 Nor yet hath he.
 VULPECULA: A little bird did tell me:
 I think he looked over the window sill
 While th' two of ye were at it in the gun room.
 But hark, I hear them coming. Here are your packs,
 Well stocked with hippocras and pemmican,

And here two purses with our last few ducats.
Would that I had more gold to give to you,
But we are down to our last drop of credit,
Even the milkman hath been getting stroppey.

(Enter HOB, JESS and PAXO.)

JESS: My little daughter, O how I do love thee!
How I shall miss ye when ye are away!

HOB: My bravest girl, be bold and win thy prince,
And be thou watchful of the wiles of strangers:
If any man should give thee wooden nickels,
Thou shouldst not take them, O my darling daughter,
For that be very much the safest plan.

TILDA: I shall not; but each hour that I am gone
I shall remember you, my own dear parents,
With fondest love. Adieu, father and mother!

PAXO: O ETTY, what shall I do when thou art gone?

ETTY: Have Ermintrude instead, as thou art wont:
I did not ask for constancy in thee,
Knowing fidelity was not on offer.

Mayhap when I return we'll get together:
Mayhap thou shalt have long forgotten me
And I put thee completely out of mind,
For that's the way the beetroot oft doth bounce.

PAXO: I'll ne'er forget thee.

ETTY: Yes, thou shalt, my lad;
But here I give thee a fond parting kiss
To cheer my spirits on the dusty road.

TILDA: And now we take our leave of all of you:
We'll bring him back, your majesty. Adieu!
(Exeunt TILDA and ETTY.)

ACT 4

SCENE 1

The Village of Album on the Road from Purdonium to the Coast. Evening. PEASANTS are disporting themselves. Enter TILDA and ETTY.

TILDA: So here we are at last. O, what a trudge!

Etty, art thou aright after so far?

ETTY: My walking boots have given me a blister,

And I shall be stiff as a board tomorrow,

I have no doubt. But otherwise, 'tis well.

TILDA: I'll tend thy blister when we find a room.

(To the FIRST PEASANT) Pray, comrade, can we find an inn i' th' village?

FIRST PEASANT: Hast thou no eyes within thy pretty head?

Thou standest right in front o' th' Golden Hands.

TILDA: Why, so we do: thanks for thy kind advice.

Come Etty, food and sleep are what we need.

(Strange Music. Enter a MOOR.)

MOOR: Hear ye, hear ye, good villagers of Album!

Signior Windoza comes to cure your ills.

He is the greatest doctor in the kingdom,

Nay, in the whole wide continent of Europe,

And in the world, and in the universe!

His potions have cured kings of leprosy,

Raised emperors three months dead, and e'en the pope

Doth take a draught of th' Esteemed Brain Tonic

Prepared from coca and from cola nuts

By the skilled hand o' th' infallible Signior.

Yet fear not, countrymen: Windoza's potions,

Though made of costly Asiatic herbs,

Are not beyond the reach of your light purses:

Ye can afford to cure all that doth ail you!

(Stranger Music.)

Hark ye, Windoza comes! Clear him a space!

ETTY (to Tilda): O what a man! He is as black as night:

I fain would have a piece of that sweet darkness.

Think'st thou he is a real live African?

TILDA: 'Twould not surprise me. Etty, thou art shameless.

(Stranger Music yet. Enter WINDOZA in a Carriage drawn by two Unicorns.)

WINDOZA: Ho, peasants, know ye that I am Windoza,

The court physician to the kings of Zinnia,

Mesembryanthemum, Opuntia,

Hedera, and the emperor of Delphinium.

My care hath left these potentates so well,

They have no further need of my attention,

And so, as a deed of Christian charity,

I make my skills available to all:

'Tis what I call my national health service.

(He holds aloft a Phial of green Liquid.)
 See now what I have for thee: my masterpiece!
 Within this little phial are precious extracts
 Of labdanum and nard and opoponax,
 Myrabalon and the oriental jujube
 Secured at vast price from Afghanistan,
 Distilled and mixed wi' the holiest of water
 Brought all the way from th' sea o' Galilee.
 What shall it do for ye? What can it not do?
 Why, it shall cure the griping of the guts,
 The iliac passion and the marthambles,
 The falling sickness, th' pox and th' embolism,
 Plague, leprosy, consumption, th' common cold,
 Boils, tumours, carbuncles and simple pimples;
 There's nothing 'twill not heal in a few days:
 It makes the blind to walk, the lame to see,
 The barren woman to conceive, the crone
 To win back the fresh beauty of her youth.
 'Tis the panacea, the ultimate medicine!
 Now, ye will ask yourself, what doth it cost,
 This potion that shall give ye th' strength o' giants,
 The thews of Hercules, the face of Helen,
 The intellectual might of Aristotle?
 Shall I ask ye a hundred ducats th' phial?
 Shall I ask fifty? Nay! Or twenty-five?
 'Twould be a steal at ten ducats apiece,
 But I'll not charge ye that; nor five, nor two,
 Nor even one! Friends, as a special favour
 Ye may have one of these for just five sols!
 'Twill be the wisest purchase of your life.
 (The MOOR takes up a Tray of Phials. The PEASANTS crowd around him. Enter MUCUS.)
 MUCUS: Windoza, I've a bone to pick with thee.
 My name is Mucus: I am a shopkeeper.
 Last month, at Frustum, thou sold'st me a bottle
 Of what thou called thy universal potion
 To cure me of a boil upon my arse –
 Excuse me, ladies, but I must speak plain.
 I took it for a week: my boil grew worse.
 My brother is the public alchemist
 I' th' town of Vacuum, and I did ask him
 To use his arts to analyse the dregs.
 And he told me 'twas naught but dirty water
 Mixed with a little tansy juice to tint it
 And give 't a bitter taste, so it seemed strong.
 Windoza, thou'rt a fraud, a charlatan,
 Thy potion's trash, and thou art trashier yet!
 (The PEASANTS move towards Windoza threateningly.)
 WINDOZA: And thou believ'st a simple alchemist
 (Though I do mean to speak no ill o' thy brother)
 When he doth tell thee that my sovran potion
 Is naught but tansy water? How can his arts,

Limited as they are, detect the herbs
I put into my wondrous remedies?
Sure, it may be a stubborn boil thou hast,
But all thou needst is my Egyptian Boil Cure
Devised by th' doctors of the mighty pharaoh
When the Almighty heard his servant Moses
And smote the land with boils in his great mercy.
Wait here a moment, 'tis within my carriage.
I'll charge thee only fifteen sols for it:
A special upgrade price for this week only.
MUCUS: Thou'lt give it to me free. An it work not,
I'll have the law on thee, and see thee swing.
(WINDOZA goes to his Carriage. As he enters it, TILDA accosts him.)
TILDA: I'll cure that boil for thee, if thou dost wish 't.
I doubt thy potions be much different
From what that poor man's brother said they were.
Here, take this salve, 'tis made of poppy juice:
'Twill soothe his pain before thou lance the boil.
WINDOZA: Thinkst thou I'll stick a knife in 's common bum?
I am no village barber: I am Windoza!
TILDA: Thou'lt do it, or the folk will string thee up.
Art thou not man enough to lance a boil?
Here, say that I am thy most skilled assistant,
I'll do 't myself. And that the boil shall heal,
I'll use a poultice o' thyme and rosemary:
'Twill banish all infection in a day.
WINDOZA: And will thy cures work any more than mine,
Or shall be both be strung up side by side?
TILDA: My mother hath the gentle art of healing:
She made me a pack o' simples for the road.
I can make more, should the need e'er arise.
WINDOZA: I have no choice, the mob is turning ugly.
I pray thy village remedies will work.
(He addresses the PEASANTS.)
Ho, churls, be silent for the great Windoza:
And for my beauteous assistant Balti,
A resident of farthest Taprobane,
Who, with her skilled hands and my powerful drugs,
Shall set this man's posterior to rights.
Ho, man, come over here, and doff thy trews.
(MUCUS complies with the Command. The Crowd gasps at his huge Boil.)
TILDA: Now, bend thee over th' bench, there's a good man.
I'll put a little of this salve on thee
To ease the pain – 'tis just a little prick.
ETTY: Aye, I can see it is: most disappointing.
(TILDA deftly lances the Boil.)
MUCUS: I hardly felt a thing; is 't done, i' sooth?
TILDA: Aye, it is done. Now I set on a poultice
Made of the common herbs o' th' local hills
Around my home, whose power is known to few.
I'll fasten it in place with strips of cloth

Coated upon one side with a cunning glue,
 My mother doth distil from Stockholm tar.
 Leave it in place until tomorrow night,
 And sit upon the other side o' thy arse,
 And thou'lt be right as rain. That is two sols.

MUCUS: I am much restored. Here is thy payment, lass,
 I'll say thy rates are much more reasonable.

Say, why wast thou not there the other day?

WINDOZA: She is but newly come from Serendip,
 The daughter of the Mir of Gushtabay.

Are not her skills the wonder of the world?

FIRST PEASANT: I have a running sore upon my foot.

SECOND PEASANT: And I a festering abscess in my ear.

THIRD PEASANT: My back be broke.

FOURTH PEASANT: And I do have the scurvy.

TILDA: 'Tis growing dark, and we have walked the road

For many miles, and stand in need of rest.

Tomorrow, all ye sick, come to the inn

And we shall tend thee to th' best o' our skill.

We do not promise cures in every case:

We are not magicians.

WINDOZA: Yet we have magic skills:

The great Windoza and the spicy Balti

Shall bring ye all the priceless gift of health

And charge ye but a copper coin for it.

Come, ladies, with me to this humble inn:

I'll buy ye the best dinner they can serve.

TILDA: Thank ye, Windoza, we are both most grateful.

ETTY: We'll make short work of the most mighty plateful.

(Exeunt TILDA, ETTY, WINDOZA and the MOOR. Exeunt MUCUS and the PEASANTS on the other Side.)

SCENE 2

A Chamber in the Royal Palace at Purdonium. Enter KING VUSILLUS and QUEEN VULPECULA, with ATTENDANTS bearing a Crystal Ball and a weighty Book. The ATTENDANTS set the Crystal Ball and the Book on a Table.

VULPECULA: That will be all; pray send us Hob and Jess.

(Exit ATTENDANTS.)

(To VUSILLUS) My dear, I have a toy to show to thee.

It is a scrying glass o' th' latest mode

Cousin Crudelia hath dispatched to me.

'Twill see a person many leagues away,

But needs much practice to employ it right.

She gave me th' user's manual: here it is.

Come, let us see if we can fire it up:

Read me the manual, while I work the glass.

VUSILLUS: Page one, installation. Please insert the disc

From the back cover of this manual

And follow the instructions it shall give ye.

VULPECULA: 'Tis done.

VUSILLUS: But not much seems to be occurring.

VULPECULA: Give it a moment. Ah! I can see letters:

'Utter the user's name.' (She bends over the Crystal Ball.) Vulpecula!

And now it saith, 'Pray choose a word of power,

That ye may use for your security.

Warning, this word should not be written down

Lest those unauthorised should use the glass.'

What shall we choose?

VUSILLUS: My secret name for thee,

Which none knows in the world but thou and I.

VULPECULA: Thou fond old fart, so be it. (To the Crystal Ball) Bunnykins!

Now it doth read, 'Welcome, Vulpecula.'

Well, 'tis polite, at least. 'Pray utter th' name

O' th' chosen person whom ye wish to access.'

Tilda! Alack, look what the glass doth say:

'Invalid name. Pray give first name and surname.'

(Enter HOB and JESS. VULPECULA turns to them.)

Welcome, good folk, come ye and stand by us.

We try to trace the progress of your Tilda

With this new scrying glass. What is your surname?

HOB: We do be peasants, we don't have no surnames:

I be plain Hob, she be plain Jess, and Tilda

Be naught but Tilda from the farm on th' hill.

VUSILLUS (reading the Book): It saith here, 'If the person have no surname,

A name must be assigned by royal decree.'

How fortunate that I should be a king!

VULPECULA: Thou'rt some use for the first time in thy life,

Thou daft old nincompoop. Get on with it.

VUSILLUS: Hob, Jess and Tilda, by my royal command

I give you th' surname of ... Dodecagon.

JESS: Sire, thank 'ee kindly, 'tis a mighty name.

VULPECULA: I'll try it now: Tilda Dodecagon!

The glass is clearing: I can see a room.

Nay, it is moving: Lo! it is a carriage

And Tilda is therein, in a strange garb:

Methinks 'tis that of the mysterious east,

And at her side, a man in wizard's weeds.

What means this vision? Is 't for good or ill?

JESS: She do look well enough, and that's a mercy.

(Enter three GUARDS, holding SIR PERCY OF MALPRACTICE.)

VUSILLUS: What means this rude intrusion? We are busy.

Why, 'tis squire Percy! Wherefore is he here?

FIRST GUARD: Your majesty, pray pardon. 'Twas like this:

We found him skulking in the northern courtyard

Under the window of the Princess Sheba,

Bearing a ladder stolen from the garden.

VUSILLUS: Intolerable! Bring the wretch to me,

And one of you make haste and fetch my daughter. (Exit one

ATTENDANT.)

(To PERCY): Poisonous little man, what hast thou done?

If thou' st laid hands on Sheba, thou shalt die.

VULPECULA: I'll get the truth from him. (To SIR PERCY) Seest thou this ring?

Etrurian chalcedony, th' stone of truth.

Here, set it on thy hand. If thou do lie,

The gem shall burn thee to the very bone.

(She forces the Ring on to PERCY's Finger.)

Now, dirtbag, tell me, why was thou i' th' palace?

PERCY: Your majesty, I lost my way ... Gadzooks!

Mercy! This ring doth sear me like a glead.

VULPECULA: Then tell the truth, thou sorry heap of filth.

PERCY: I met the Princess at the Dog and Mitre:

His highness the Prince Viscus brought her there,

And she did look quite friendly towards me,

So afterwards I thought I'd try my chances.

I meant no harm ... O, how this ring doth burn!

(Enter the ATTENDANT with PRINCESS SHEBA.)

SHEBA: Mother, this man hath dragged me out of bed ...

Percy! What art thou doing in the palace?

I told thee in the inn to leave me be!

Mother, he is not here with my consent.

VULPECULA: Thou hast been very foolish, Sheba my lass.

Thy brother hath set thee a bad example,

And I'll forgive thee this time. But mark well:

Thou'lt go no more unto that filthy inn,

Nor to the hundred other noisome places

Where feckless Viscus likes to waste his time.

Go to thy room. I'll have words with thee later.

But ere thou go, bid farewell to Sir Percy:

Thou'lt never see him in this form again.

SHEBA: I do not care: turn him into a newt

And step on him. 'Tis all the same to me. (Exit.)

VULPECULA: Now, Percy, be afraid. I have thought well

Of all the things that I might do to thee.

Sheba suggests a newt: but even newts

Experience some pleasure now and then.

Nay, Percy thou shalt stay in human form,

And I shall give thee a most priceless gift.

PERCY: A gift, madam? I do not understand.

VULPECULA: I'll give the th' gift of immortality.

PERCY: What, shall I live for ever? O, what joy!

VULPECULA: But not eternal youth. Thou shalt grow old,

Older and older with each passing year

Till life shall be a burden past all bearing

And still thou shalt not die.

PERCY: Ah me, alack!

O heavy fate, the worst that time could hold!

Is there no way I can escape this fate?

VULPECULA: Nay, there is not. So give me back my ring.

Thou'rt banished from the kingdom. Now, avaunt:

Wander for aeons of decrepitude;

I'll put some thirty years on thee at once.
 (She turns SIR PERCY into an Old Man. He falls to the Ground.)
 Maybe, a thousand years from hence, when thou
 Hast understood the ill that thou hast done
 And thought upon it every sleepless night,
 Some kindly breeze may blow thy bones to dust;
 Though I should not much care to bet on it.
 Master Dodecagon, and thy good lady,
 Come ye with me, and let's talk of thy lass
 And down a quart of sack to wish her luck.
 (Exit ATTENDANTS dragging SIR PERCY. The Others leave on the other Side.)

SCENE 3

The Harbour of Opprobrium on the Coast of Uraemia, with Ships. CITIZENS, SAILORS and STALLHOLDERS are about their Business. Enter TILDA, ETTY and WINDOZA in ordinary Garments.

WINDOZA: See here, lasses, this is the harbour front,
 Where ye make take your passage on a ship
 If any one be bound for Aquilegia.
 Tilda, I thank thee for thy timely help
 And also for the simples thou hast shown me.
 From this time on, my remedies shall work
 – 'Tis more than one can say for most o' our doctors –
 And if Windoza's fame and reputation
 Be thus increased, what harm can come of that?
 TILDA: Indeed, thy reputation's most essential.
 My mother always says that if ye add
 A bit of mystic mummerly to your cure
 – A few strange gestures, Greek and Latin words,
 The potion taken at the hour of midnight,
 Tying a scarlet thread around your brow –
 It makes the drug full half as strong again.
 WINDOZA: Aye, many of my patients swore to me
 That they were cured, when all that I had given them
 Was coloured water with a mystic label
 Printed with images of pyramids.
 ETTY: My auntie Edna cured herself o' th' gout
 By sitting in a trough of melted cheese;
 Now what's the sense in that?
 WINDOZA: Lord only knows.
 O ETTY, I shall miss thy careless prattle,
 And Tilda's skill in tending to my patients,
 When ye are on your way to Allium.
 I'll leave you now: the Moor's minding the shop,
 He seems to be a touch distracted lately.
 TILDA: ETTY, what hast thou done to the poor Moor?
 ETTY: He is but slightly tired from his exertions:
 He was up late last night.
 TILDA: I bet he was.

WINDOZA: I'll set him grinding spices: that should wake him.

Adieu, good friends, I wish you a swift voyage

And may ye find your prince and rescue him.

TILDA: Farewell, Windoza: may we meet again.

ETTY: And tell the Moor that I shall miss him sadly:

He is a man of parts, and no mistake.

(Exit WINDOZA.)

TILDA: Let's ask this sailor if one of these ships

Be Aquilegia bound, and take passage on 't.

Say, friend, shall thy ship call at Aquilegia?

SAILOR: Aye, and our ship do sail on th' evening tide,

The only one i' th' harbour bound that way:

She's called the Cockroach of the Seven Seas,

And I be captain of her, for my sins.

Do ye want passage with us, bonny lasses?

TILDA: Indeed we do and, pray, what doth it cost?

SAILOR: 'Tis seven ducats each, including dinners,

If ye sleep on the deck: cabins is extra.

TILDA: Alas, we have but three between us twain.

SAILOR: Ye do sail free if ye can work your passage.

TILDA: And what work would that be?

SAILOR: Why, offering comfort,

As ye might say, to th' jolly sailor boys.

ETTY: I think we could do that. What say you, Tilda?

(TILDA draws ETTY aside.)

TILDA: Nay, Etty, we could not. And if thy lust

Doth still inflame thee, look at that old sailor

With draggled beard adorned with gravy stains

And noisome garments full of fleas and lice:

For sure he'd be included in thy contract.

ETTY: I see what thou dost mean. What shall we do?

TILDA: We shall disguise ourselves as sailor lads.

They would be glad o' able-bodied men:

Look at those pitiful old derelicts

They have to man their ship i' th' winter storms.

Here is a stall that sells old clothes. Let's see:

Those trews would fit thee, and that jerkin too.

I wonder if they have a larger size.

Ho, here's a doublet, much the worse for wear,

A pair of breeches of capacious nature

And cotton stockings, somewhat full of holes.

They'll serve, this is no time for vanity.

How much, good merchant, for the lot of them?

STALLHOLDER: Two ducats: there's a lot of wear in them.

TILDA: Two ducats? Art thou serious, forsooth?

Thy trews are shreds all cobbled up with string,

This doublet has been nested in by rats,

And I'd not wipe my arse wi' thy tatty stockings.

Thou shouldst pay me to take them off thy hands;

But since I am in a good mood today

I'll give thee half a ducat for thy rags.

STALLHOLDER: One ducat.

TILDA: Seven sols: that's my last word.

STALLHOLDER: 'Tis done. Thou bargain'st hard, my bonny lass. (He writes.)

Here's a receipt for thee, for seven sols.

But say, why do ye need this male attire?

TILDA: To work as sailors on the good ship Cockroach.

STALLHOLDER: Ye'll never get away with that, i' faith.

As for the Cockroach, 'tis a mighty wonder

That the old scow be still above the surface:

The planks be ate by worms, the keel be split,

The sails do much resemble thy new jerkin,

And when the press gang came t' Opprobrium

They took one look at th' crew and went away.

I'd rather take to sea i' a cardboard box.

TILDA: 'Tis th' only ship, and we must take our chance.

Say, where can we do on our new attire?

STALLHOLDER: Get ye behind the stall, no one shall see.

(TILDA and ETTY go behind the Stall. The STALLHOLDER applies his Eye to a Hole in the Canvas.)

STALLHOLDER (aside): Gadzooks, that be a sight for sore old eyes.

TILDA (behind the Stall): They'll be a good deal sorer in a moment.

(The STALLHOLDER leaps back with a Cry, revealing TILDA's Finger sticking through the Hole.)

TILDA: Now, keep thy poxy face out o' our business.

(TILDA and ETTY emerge from behind the Stall, dressed in Men's Raiment.)

STALLHOLDER: Well, ye do look a proper pair o' scoundrels

As do befit your conduct towards me.

But I'll give ye some sound advice, my girls:

Drop not thy guard for a moment wi' those sailors:

They may seem aged wrecks, but some o' them

Retain an appetite for rumpy-pumpy,

And if they do discover ye are lasses,

There are fourteen o' them, be they ne'er so old.

TILDA: We'll heed thy wisdom. Sorry for the finger,

But thou shouldst know better at thy great age.

(TILDA and ETTY go back to the SAILOR.)

TILDA: Ho, sailor, do ye stand in need of men?

My name is Julian, this is my friend Sandy,

Both able seamen, lately from the Badger,

And we can reef and haul like anything.

SAILOR: The Badger? I know no ship of that name.

TILDA: She sails 'twixt Bucharest and Vilnius:

'Tis a long haul, as thou dost surely know.

SAILOR: Indeed I do, I have sailed it many a time.

If ye be able seamen, where be your tickets?

TILDA: Here, for us both, signed by the captain's hand.

(She shows the SAILOR the Receipt.)

SAILOR: That be in order. Just one further test:

Run up the rigging to the top o' th' mast

And stand upon the cap. Ye have one minute.

ETTY (aside, to TILDA): O Lord, I have a dreadful fear of heights.

TILDA (aside, to ETTY): 'Tis now or never. Think of fluffy bunnies

And nothing else, while I do help thee up.

(TILDA and ETTY climb up the Rigging and disappear from Sight.)

SAILOR: They do seem quite a healthy pair of lads,

Though why they want to sail on this old tub

Do pass my understanding, that be sure.

(Loudly) 'Twill serve, ye may come down. What are ye doing?

Ye'll fall if ye do clown about like that.

(TILDA and ETTY climb down.)

ETTY (aside, to TILDA): O, that was terrifying when I slipped:

I thought I was a goner till thou grabbed me.

SAILOR: We'll sign ye on at seven sols a week

All found. Ye get a quart of rum a day

And four ounce o' tobacco every week.

Now, go below and find yourselves a berth.

(Exeunt TILDA and ETTY.)

SCENE 4

The Dungeon in the Citadel at Allium. PRISONERS, including PRINCE FELIX and RAUCUS, ELECTOR OF PIFFELBERG.

RAUCUS: And there stood I, in the midst of the foe, and nary a weapon in my hand but my little penknife, and they armed with halberds and pistols and crying for my blood.

FELIX: And what happened then?

RAUCUS: They killed me, of course.

PRISONER: Taunt not our little Felix, he's a lot to learn without thee stuffing his head with thy taradiddles.

FELIX: Ah, let him be. Old Piffelberg's tales may smack of the shaggy dog, yet they pass the time well enough. And I would fain hear of sieges and investments and bloody routs, and trolls and centaurs. For as ye well know, my glorious career endured barely an instant, and I must have somewhat to tell the folk at home ... if ever I do see them again.

PRISONER: Be not so downcast, young prince: we are still at life if not at liberty. Dost thou fancy a game at cards? Me and his sublime and exalted majesty the Elector of Piffelberg were about to deal a hand of bezique, and thou'rt welcome to join us.

FELIX: I thank thee, but thou hast already won six rats and my last piece of green cheese. I do fear I have no more skill at the table than I do at war; nor at love. Hand me the file, and I shall take a turn at the bar.

PRISONER: The file doth wear away faster than the bar, I trow. 'Tis not worth the half pound of tobacco I gave the gaoler for it, the black-avised lump of corruption.

RAUCUS: Well, he would not want thee to be getting out, would he?

(The PRISONERS begin to play at Cards. FELIX takes the File and begins to work on the Bar at the Window.)

FELIX: How my whole world is shrunken to this space!

But yet it is a world like any other,

And less constrained than some. We wake and sleep,

We eat our scanty viands day by day,

And I have friends, and pleasant conversation:

'Tis quite endurable. But O my Tilda!

If thou wert with me, the most noisome cell

Would be more grateful than a gilded palace.

I wonder where thou art, what thou art doing:

Perchance thy pretty fingers are at work

Shaping a brazier for some noble lady;

And mayhap, as thy thoughts flee idly past,
 Thou dost remember Felix, as he read thee
 The Anabasis and Vegetius,
 Probably boring thee almost to death.

RAUCUS: He's off again.

PRISONER: Take care! Here comes the warder.

(FELIX conceals the File in his ragged Sark.)

WARDER: Good morning, yer assorted majesties:

'Tis time to read ye the new transfer list.

There's only two this month, both to the Turks:

One be Prince Felix of Uraemia,

And t'other the Elector o' Piffelberg.

Pack up yer gear, we'll be back in a minute. (Exit.)

FELIX: Alack, for we are sold like cauliflowers!

One moment on the stall, the next borne off

I' a paper bag, and destined to be boiled.

Tell me, friend Piffelberg, dost thou know the Turks?

What manner o' men are they? Where will they keep us?

RAUCUS: My brother Pincus was the King of Munster,

And taken by the Turks at Parmesan.

His captors made him row t' Constantinople

Chained to his oar, and when they came to port

They threw him in the city's common gaol

With thieves and cutpurses, beggars and whores.

There's no chance of escape, my brother said:

The gates are manned by massive mamelukes

With yataghans and nasty attitudes.

FELIX: We have but one bare chance: we must try now.

The warder hath the keys: when he comes back

We'll leap on him and bear him to the ground

And I shall seize his keys, and we shall flee.

RAUCUS: And if we fail, they'll beat us to a pulp.

FELIX: 'Tis our last throw: what do we have to lose?

Who wants to fester in a Turkish gaol?

I'll climb above the door. When he comes in,

I'll drop on him, and thou take hold o' his legs.

Ye others, ye need take no part in this:

Lie on the straw, and feign to be asleep.

Quick, for I hear the warder coming back!

(Enter the WARDER. FELIX and RAUCUS assail him.)

FELIX: I have the keys! Come, Piffelberg, away!

(The WARDER seizes RAUCUS and holds a Knife to his Throat.)

WARDER: Run if ye will, but Piffelberg shall die!

FELIX: Old friend, I cannot leave thee thus to die,

Though it should cost my freedom, or my life.

Warder, take back thy keys, we yield to thee

And to the cruel fate that shall befall us.

(He returns the Keys.)

WARDER: Sadly, I cannot mammock thee at all,

Much as 'twould cheer me; for an thou be marked,

The Turks shall take ten ducats off thy price,

And we be men o' business, first and foremost.
 Now come, the agent do be waiting for thee.
 FELIX: Farewell, my friends, and may your ransoms come
 Ere ye be shipped to darkest Africa
 Or dragged in chains through barren Turkestan.
 We'll meet again in some far happier time
 And laugh at how we played bezique for rats.
 The galley waits, they have an oar for me:
 O for a life upon the rolling sea!
 (Exeunt FELIX, RAUCUS and the WARDER.)

SCENE 5

Outside the Gate of the Citadel of Allium. CITIZENS are passing in the STREET. Enter TILDA and ETTY, in their usual Attire.

TILDA: Meseems this is the gate o' th' citadel.
 O Felix, I am come to rescue thee,
 Though massy walls and iron bars yet part us.
 (To a CITIZEN): Good morrow to thee, citizen. Is this
 The entrance to the citadel of Allium?
 CITIZEN: Speak not so loud, my lass, lest the guards hear thee.
 This is a perilous place for such as us.
 Many go in through the broad gate thou see'st
 And few come out again. Get thee away
 And take thy friend with thee.
 TILDA: Nay, we must enter,
 Whatever be the danger of our action.
 We seek news of Prince Felix of Uraemia
 Held hostage since the siege of Allium.
 CITIZEN: And do ye have the gold to get him out?
 TILDA: Nay, do we look like women o' wealth, forsooth?
 CITIZEN: Indeed ye do not: there is mud on thy face.
 Ye seem t' have walked for many a dusty league,
 Falling in several ditches on the way.
 Come, let us sit outside this little inn:
 I'll buy ye a quart of ale, and we shall talk.
 TILDA: We thank thee, citizen: as thou dost see,
 We are a mite fatigued by our long journey.
 CITIZEN: Ho, landlord, bring us three quarts of thy best,
 And something for these hungry girls to eat.
 (Enter LANDLORD.)
 LANDLORD: I do not like the look o' them two lasses:
 They have a nasty foreign air to them,
 And they be filthy.
 CITIZEN: We're not coming in
 To mar the purity of thy sawdust floor.
 Here is thy money: bring us ale and food,
 And look alive!
 LANDLORD: I'll serve ye in a minute. (Exit.)

CITIZEN: I do apologise for his demeanour.

We live in troubled times in Allium:

I would not speak o' it in a public place.

But tell me of your journey: whence are ye come?

From far Uraemia? That is some step.

TILDA: Aye, we are come the whole long way from there.

First, we were carried to Opprobrium

I' th' carriage of a travelling quacksalver

For whom we worked as medical assistants

Robed in the flowing garb of Indians.

ETTY: Aye, and there was a very tasty Moor:

I do remember him most fondly ...

TILDA: Etty!

We do not wish to give a bad impression.

(To the CITIZEN): And when we reached the port, there was a ship

Bound for this city on the evening tide.

(Enter the LANDLORD, with Ale and Viands.)

CITIZEN: I thank thee, landlord. Say, wouldst earn a ducat?

LANDLORD: For doing what?

CITIZEN: For asking a few questions;

I know that thou art friendly with the gaolers.

LANDLORD: Who told thee that?

CITIZEN: Let's say, a mutual friend:

Doth the name Ermintrude mean aught to thee?

Now, dost thou want this ducat, yea or nay?

LANDLORD: Aye, I can find thee out a thing or two,

Strictly between thee and me and th' gatepost.

I'll not ask aught that might be perilous:

Say, what be it that ye do seek to know?

CITIZEN: These girls have travelled many a footsore mile

To seek news of Prince Felix of Uraemia,

Captured some months ago during the siege.

LANDLORD: I heard that he was taken: quite a young 'un

By all accounts. I'll see what they do say. (Exit.)

TILDA: 'Tis very kind of thee to take such trouble:

We shall repay thy ducat.

CITIZEN: Nay, forget it:

I see full well thou hast but little funds

And many a mile to go ere thou come home.

Now, tell me of your voyage from Opprobrium.

TILDA: We could not pay the sum they asked for passage,

And so we garbed ourselves as sailor lads

And were signed on aboard the good ship Cockroach,

A leaky tub manned by dirty old men.

We were the only two in the whole ship

With strength to raise the mainsail in rough weather,

And for a while we got on swimmingly.

ETTY: Then one o' them made, shall we say, advances,

Thinking I was a boy, and I shoved him off

But he took hold o' my sark, and ripped it open:

My, how the man did shriek at what he saw,

And started back. And then it all came out.

CITIZEN: And what came out, if I may be so bold?

ETTY: Why, all the crew were versed i' th' ways of Sodom:

They were right glad to have us on their ship,
Thinking us boys, and handsome ones at that,
To take their pleasure with. But when they found
That we were girls, they were as nice as pie
And treated us like orient porcelain:

We hardly touched a rope for th' rest o' th' way.

CITIZEN: Ye fell most lucky into that hive of queens.

And then how came ye here, in a winged chariot?

TILDA: Nay, on our feet: it took us near a week,

Our money almost gone, sleeping in hedges;

O, we were weary and our feet were sore.

Yet here we are, and feeling much restored

Thanks to thy kindly hospitality.

CITIZEN: And how plan ye to extricate thy prince

From that fell fortress, manned by many a guard?

TILDA: We do not have the foggiest idea,

But we shall think of something, mark my words.

CITIZEN: I'm sure thou shalt, for love will find a way.

TILDA: Who hath said anything of love to thee?

CITIZEN: Wouldst thou have travelled all this weary road

If thou wert not in love with thy Prince Felix?

Besides, 'tis written o'er thy pretty face:

Thy gaze is mimsy, and thy cheeks are flushed.

And who is it thy fair companion loves?

TILDA: Near enough any man she haps to meet.

ETTY: Tilda, thou bitch! I am a well-bred girl

And most particular of my companions.

TILDA: 'Tis true, I love the prince with all my heart,

Though I be but a peasant. Yet I trow

He hath some small scrap of regard for me.

But whether he do love me, or do not,

I'll follow him to the very end o' th' earth.

CITIZEN: God bless thee, lass, and guide thee in thy quest.

(Enter LANDLORD.)

LANDLORD: Bad news, I fear.

TILDA: Ah! Is my Felix dead?

O dreadful day!

LANDLORD: Nay, not as bad as that;

Cheer up, my lass, thy prince is yet at life.

But he is lately sold unto the Turks

As a job lot with th' Elector o' Piffelberg;

And at this instant he'll be on a galley,

Chained to an oar under the master's scourge ...

TILDA: O cease, no more, I cannot bear thy words!

LANDLORD: 'Tis only temporary for the passage.

They'll make Constantinople in a month,

And then he'll be clapped in the city gaol

Where the Turks keep their cheaper hostages.

He'll not be comfortable, but his price
 Will not be more 'n a couple o' thousand ducats:
 Ye might say that he had been relegated
 To th' second league, if ye do catch my drift.
 CITIZEN: My thanks to thee: thy news doth dash our hopes,
 But here's thy ducat; thou hast surely earned it. (Exit LANDLORD.)
 TILDA: At least he lives! Etty, we must depart:
 Which way is it towards Constantinople?
 CITIZEN: Nay, ye must rest before ye take that road;
 'Tis many hundred leagues by sea and land.
 First, ye shall pass the night in decent comfort:
 My wife hath a spare bed. And th' morrow morn
 We'll talk of how to undertake your journey.
 ETTY: I could sleep for a week, then eat a horse.
 TILDA: Good citizen, thy kindness passes measure.
 CITIZEN: Nay, 'tis a duty to look after strangers
 As thou wouldst be looked after in their land.
 My house is round the corner; follow me.
 (Exeunt.)

SCENE 6

A Turkish Galley at Sea. PRISONERS, among them PRINCE FELIX and RAUCUS, ELECTOR OF PIFFELBERG, are at the Oars.

FELIX: There's no doubt we do travel with economy.
 Think of the money we have saved on th' fare:
 'Twould be a hundred ducats at the least.
 RAUCUS: Aye, and they kindly throw in food and drink,
 Which doth save forty; though I must observe
 That if I had the choice, I would not go
 For mouldy bread and water green with slime.
 FELIX: And I would rather have a feather bed
 Than a hard bench and a set of rusty fetters.
 As for the conduct of the staff, it sucks.
 (Enter the OVERSEER, bearing a Whip.)
 OVERSEER: No talking there on th' benches, Christian dogs!
 (He lashes FELIX and RAUCUS with his Whip.)
 FELIX (aside): See what I mean? Really, the service these days!
 RAUCUS (aside): Be quiet, my friend, save thyself a sore back.
 'Tis only five days to Constantinople,
 And I shall be right glad to be on land,
 However foul the cell they throw us in.
 VOICE OF LOOKOUT (from above): Sail ho! A ship upon the larboard quarter!
 (Enter the TURKISH CAPTAIN.)
 TURKISH CAPTAIN: Masthead! Canst thou see anything o' th' ship?
 VOICE OF LOOKOUT: Aye, she be headed t' get the wind-gage of us.
 I think she be a brig, her sails be red.
 CAPTAIN: By Allah, 'tis the pirate Vindalo!
 He carries heavy metal on that brig.

Men, clear the decks for action, run out th' guns!

(Enter SAILORS to carry out his Orders.)

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Though we be nimble, we have not th' legs o' her,
As long as she can stay upwind of us,

And her long guns outrange our own by far.

One well aimed broadside would stave in our side.

Now, listen, slaves. 'Twill be a chancy action,

And ye must row to th' last ounce o' your strength.

But, on my word as a good Mussulman,

I warrant ye, that if ye serve me right,

When we reach port, I shall do what I can

To ease the terms of your imprisonment,

Mayhap negotiate a lower ransom.

I'll promise ye no more: 'tis all too likely

That in the space o' an hour we shall be dead.

If Vindalo should have ye, there's no mercy:

I'd not advise ye to go o'er to him.

At best ye would be sold to the Algerines,

Which makes a Turkish gaol look quite inviting;

At worst, he'd feed ye to the little fish.

Now, as an earnest of my word, I unchain thee.

Ho, overseer, take off these men's fetters!

OVERSEER: Unchain them, sir? They do outnumber us.

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Unchain them, and do not dispute my orders!

They know full well that I do speak the truth.

Belay that whip. They row for their own lives,

And thine, and mine, and those of all us sailors.

(The OVERSEER unchains the PRISONERS.)

VOICE OF LOOKOUT: Ahoy on deck! She closes on us fast!

Ye'll see her from the deck.

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Aye, there she is:

We'll head upwind and pass astern of her.

'Vast rowing on the larboard side, ye men!

Helmsman, hard o'er to larboard ... now, ease off,

Ye larboard rowers, start on my command:

Ready, steady, row! Pull ye for your dear lives!

Helsman, now hold a course north by northwest!

VOICE OF LOOKOUT: She goes about!

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Hell, that was smartly done.

She'll cut us off whatever we should try.

We'll ne'er outrun her while she hath the wind;

She'll have us in her range at any moment.

There's no choice, men, we'll close and grapple with her:

If we are lucky we can dodge her broadside

And come up on the lee side under th' guns.

Helmsman, steer north by east! Bring up the ladders!

Break out the cutlasses, arm every man!

OVERSEER: What, e'en the slaves?

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Shut up and do it, man,

Or thou shalt be among them, if we live.

(SAILORS distribute Weapons.)

FELIX: Well, Raucus, I was being over-cautious
In saying that my military career

Had ended. Mayhap this time I'll do better.

RAUCUS: I hope so, Felix. Things do not look good.

I've heard some horrid tales of Vindalo:

He boiled my cousin, Lupus of Dunderstadt,

When th' ransom was delivered a day late,

And sent his body back i' a paper parcel;

Ye should have smelt the thing when it arrived.

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Helmsman, two points to port; aim at her lee.

We close! Rowers, avast! Take up your arms!

Throw up the grapnels and set up the ladders!

Now, up and at 'em! Look ye lively, now!

(The Brig's Guns fire, but the Balls pass over the low Deck of the Galley. Enter PIRATES, above, bearing

Cutlasses and Pistols. SAILORS and PRISONERS, including FELIX and RAUCUS, climb up to them.)

FIRST PIRATE: Die, Turkish dogs! (He shoots a Sailor.)

FELIX: Die, brigand, in thy turn!

(He kills the FIRST PIRATE with his Cutlass. A SECOND PIRATE attacks RAUCUS with a Cutlass, and wounds him. Enter more PIRATES below.)

RAUCUS: Ah, help me Felix!

FELIX: I come, Raucus, my friend.

(He kills the SECOND PIRATE, pulls RAUCUS out of Danger and returns to the Battle. The other

SAILORS and PRISONERS begin to overcome the PIRATES.)

TURKISH CAPTAIN: We have them! Sailors, all aboard the brig!

Clean out the last o' th' filthy thieving curs!

(To FELIX) Ho, lad, I saw what thou didst do anon.

I'll not forget thee when we come to port.

FELIX: 'Twas them or me.

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Aye, that's the way of it.

(The Fighting abates. Felix goes over to RAUCUS.)

FELIX: Art thou sore hurt, Raucus my poor old friend?

RAUCUS: Nay, for my leather jerkin turned the blade.

It wounded but my arm; methinks I'll live.

What didst thou think of some real fighting, Felix?

FELIX: 'Twas most confusing, it all went so fast.

I'd not expected killing to be so easy,

Nor to feel unconcerned at doing it.

RAUCUS: Thou may'st feel different in a little while.

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Take thou that man below, to the ship's surgeon,

He'll need some sewing on that arm of his.

(Exeunt FELIX and RAUCUS.)

Men, ye fought well. I am mindful of my oath,

And shall endeavour to improve your lot.

Rowers, ye still must pull to get us home,

So take your benches and your oars again.

Helmsman, steer east for fair Constantinople.

(Exit TURKISH CAPTAIN.)

ACT 5

SCENE 1

The Harbour of Saint Trinian on the Coast of Aquilegia. SAILORS, including the CAPTAIN of the Ship Cockroach of the Seven Seas. Enter TILDA and ETTY.

ETTY: Four weeks on th' road, and here we are again,
Back in Saint Trinian, looking for a ship,
And not an inch nearer to thy poor Felix.

Dost think we'll pull that sailor trick again?
We barely got away with it before.

TILDA: We'll do it if it be the only way
To get a passage to Constantinople.

But see, there is the captain of the Cockroach:
What ho, captain, back so soon again?

CAPTAIN: Ho, Tilda, Etty! Good to see you lasses!
I've been twice to Opprobrium since ye left.

How went your quest? What news have ye of Felix?

TILDA: He lives, but we have sad news of his fate:
He's sold to th' Turks, chained to a galley bench

Bound for Constantinople, as I trow,
And we must go there with the utmost speed.

CAPTAIN: I've heard a tale about a Turkish galley
That tangled with the pirate Vindalo

And took his ship, and slew him and his scoundrels.
Would that be anything to do with him?

TILDA: I know not; yet if my dear prince were there
He would have fought like the Nemean lion.

O that he be not hurt, my dearest Felix!

CAPTAIN: I heard the galley's casualties were light:
Two sailors killed, and a score of cutlass wounds.

She came up under th' guns o' th' pirate brig
– Ye will appreciate, she is low built –

And thus escaped destruction from their broadside,
Thou it fair mammocked all the masts and rigging.

The brig came here to port, with a prize crew:

See, there's one of the men: ho, Suleiman!

Here be two lasses, seeking news of thee.

SAILOR: And how may I assist ye lovely girls?

'Tis a great pleasure to address such beauty,
If I may make so bold.

ETTY: Ye may indeed.

Say, what hast thou in mind when thy watch be over?

TILDA: Etty, this is no time for pulling men.

(To the SAILOR) We seek news of a rower on thy galley

By name of Felix: know'st thou aught of him?

SAILOR: Aye, Felix! He slew two o' th' pirate dogs
And drove their first assault back up the ladders;

Indeed, without him we should not have won,
We owe him all a debt of gratitude.

The captain cannot grant him liberty,
Which is th' prerogative o' th' Sublime Porte;
But he hath promised to do all he can
To ease his burden in Constantinople.

TILDA: And would that gratitude extend, think ye,
To giving us a passage to the city?

We can reef topsails in a howling gale,
And haul the mainsheet well as any man.

ETTY (sings): Worm and parcel with the lay,
Away, aye, O;

But always serve the other way,
Haul, my bonny boys, smartly.

TILDA: Aye, and my friend here can sing silly songs.

CAPTAIN: 'Tis true, they sailed with us aboard the Cockroach,
And made themselves quite useful, in a way.

ETTY: What meanst thou, in a way? We were amazing:
Ye would have foundered twice were 't not for us.

Remember when the lashings of the mainmast
Parted off Salvia, on a lee shore,

And all thy sailors stood about like dimbos
While we knitted it up in a brace of shakes?

In a way? We were the best men on thy vessel.

CAPTAIN: 'Tis true, ye girls made us feel very old.

TILDA (to the SAILOR): Forgive my friend, she is not right i' th' head.
Say, wilt thou sign us on aboard thy ship?

SAILOR: Indeed, 'twould be my pleasure t' welcome you,
For we are sadly short of able seamen.

The brig is new repaired after the battle,
And sails at sunset for Constantinople
Where we shall sell her: these Christian ships are tubs,
Completely at the mercy of the wind.

Give me a galley any time, with oars
Manned by strong Christian slaves – I beg your pardon,
Fair ladies, I meant no offence to ye.

TILDA: None taken, 'tis not thy fault that the world
Is as it is. But I do warn thee now:

When we make landfall in Constantinople
We'll do our level best to rescue Felix
Whate'er thy captain may intend for him.

SAILOR: That is not my affair. I do not know ye,
And did not hear what ye did say just then.
Strictly between ourselves, I wish ye well.

Now come, we'll speak to th' captain of the prize,
I'm sure he'll take ye. Mind now, hold your peace
About your plans at t'other end o' th' voyage.

TILDA (to the CAPTAIN): Farewell, good captain, may we meet again.

ETTY: And if ye ever feel like a bit o' the other,
Just for a change, ye know who ye may ask.

CAPTAIN: Etty, this leopard shall not change his spots,

But I do thank thee for thy kindly offer.
 Farewell, good lasses, and a happy voyage!
 (Exeunt SAILOR, TILDA and ETTY. Exeunt the CAPTAIN and the other SAILORS the other Way.)

SCENE 2

A House in Constantinople. Enter PRINCE FELIX, RAUCUS, ELECTOR OF PIFFELBERG with his Arm in a Sling, and the TURKISH CAPTAIN, who stand before the Door.

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Friends, here we are at th' house of my friend Selim.

Now pray remember what I said to you
 When we were at the janissaries' office:
 Ye stay here on parole, as ye gave your word;
 Ye can go i' th' street within the city limits,
 But not a foot beyond the gates, on pain
 Of being thrown back into th' city gaol.

FELIX: We hear thy words, captain, and shall obey them;
 And thank thee for thy kindly offices
 In keeping us from gaol till we be ransomed.

RAUCUS: Aye, and since we are in Constantinople,
 The ancient city of a thousand charms,
 What boots it to range further for a while?

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Thou'lt find much pleasure in our noble city,
 Mayhap a little more than thou canst bear:

I do advise thee to go carefully
 And to avoid strange men i' th' bagnio
 Who offer thee illegal substances
 And more unlawful pleasures o' every kind.

Now, let's go in, for Selim doth await us.

(He knocks on the Door. It is opened by ZULEIKA, a Maidservant.)

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Peace be on thee and on this house, Zuleika:
 Thy master is expecting us, I trow.

ZULEIKA: And on you too, sir captain. Pray ye, enter;
 And whom have I the pleasure of announcing?

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Here I have Raucus, Elector o' Piffelberg,
 And here Prince Felix of Uraemia.

ZULEIKA: I am honoured, noble sirs, to meet with ye.
 Are ye the prince of whom I have heard tell,
 Who fought so boldly on the pirate brig?

FELIX: Aye, I was there, but 'tis exaggerated:
 I did what seemed right in the heat o' th' moment.

ZULEIKA: Mayhap ye'll tell me of your gallant actions
 When we have time. Now, I must fetch the master. (Exit.)

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Felix, thou art the talk of the bazaar,
 And that fair maid was coming on to thee:
 I think thou'lt have a merry month or two.

FELIX: I saw it not, but thanks for warning me;
 My heart is pledged to a simple peasant maid
 And I would not betray her for the world.

TURKISH CAPTAIN: We take a different view of things in Turkey:

When a man enters marriage, it behoves him
 T' have learnt the art of pleasuring a maid;
 How would he win her love if he knew 't not?

(Enter SELIM, attended by ZULEIKA.)

SELIM: Welcome, good captain and my honoured guests:
 All that our poor house hath to offer is yours.

Pray seat yourselves: Zuleika, make us coffee. (Exit ZULEIKA.)

I see that one of you hath a wounded arm;

I'll call for salves and soothing poultices:

Zuleika, bring the chest of medicines!

Captain, pray introduce me to thy friends.

CAPTAIN: Raucus, Elector o' Piffelberg, allow me

To introduce Abu Selim bin Laina,

High Coffee Grinder to the Sublime Porte.

SELIM: Your royal presence honours my poor dwelling.

RAUCUS: Your hospitality is more than welcome.

TURKISH CAPTAIN: And this is Felix, Prince o' Uraemia.

SELIM: Aha, the hero of the naval action!

I am most honoured t' welcome ye as a guest.

FELIX: And I equally honoured by this meeting.

I hope ye do not credit all that gossip:

I am no warrior. Yet here I stand

In Asia, where in past times Xenophon

And all his army wandered many months

And reached the coast, not very far from here,

Shouting Thalassa; or is it Thalatta?

SELIM: I always did incline towards the latter.

Yet who knows how the ancients uttered it?

I see ye are well read i' th' antique authors:

We shall have much to speak about anon.

(Re-enter ZULEIKA, with Coffee and Medicines. She attends to RAUCUS's Arm. SELIM pours Coffee for his Guests.)

FELIX: Pray tell me, sir, what is this darksome drink

Brewed in a little pot? Is 't medicine?

SELIM: Aye, 'tis a medicine for melancholy:

It doth restore the mind, and lift the spirits,

But not intoxicate: we are forbidden

All sprituous drink by command o' th' Prophet,

Peace be on him. Not that we take much notice.

FELIX: The taste is strange, at one time sweet and bitter.

'Tis good, but I believe the Europeans

Would never take to any kind of drink

That did not make them bosko absoluto.

SELIM: Pray, gentlemen, accept a second cup

As is your duty as my honoured guests.

Now, Felix, tell us of your part i' th' action:

There's no need to be modest among friends.

FELIX: There's naught to tell: the gallant captain here

Brought up our ship beside the pirate brig,

Using uncommon skill to keep us clear

Of the ship's broadside as she came about;

And we climbed up, and th' battle went our way.
 ZULEIKA: But did ye not kill twelve men with thy sword?
 FELIX: Nay, only two, whatever folk may tell.
 SELIM: Folk may say what they will, but one thing's clear:
 The pirate Vindalo was th' scourge o' the seas
 For many a year, and took a hundred ships,
 Most of whom yielded to him on the spot
 For fear of his ferocious reputation:
 Everyone knows pirates cannot be beaten.
 Not that it did the poor souls any good:
 Those that he did not kill, he sold as slaves.
 And then a galley rowed by prisoners
 – An easy victim, Vindalo would deem –
 Puts up an unexpected fight, and wins:
 Ye cannot contradict the truth of that.
 ZULEIKA (to Felix): Your modesty is the true grace of princes.
 Now that your friend's arm is newly bound up,
 He needs to rest lest his wound grow inflamed.
 Meanwhile, if th' master grant me his permission,
 I'd like to show you something of our city:
 Say, will ye come with me?
 SELIM: Take him, Zuleika,
 But guard him well, for he is new to th' city
 And likely to buy all kinds of old rubbish
 Offered him by the draggles of the souk:
 False sundials claimed as Swiss, and cotton scarves
 Said t' be silk, and pornographic pictures.
 FELIX: No danger there: I do not have a sol.
 I'll go most willingly with thee, Zuleika:
 Thou dost remind me of my own true love
 Who languishes in far Uraemia.
 O Tilda! Shall I see thy gentle face again?
 ZULEIKA: Bear up, my prince, we'll find ourselves amusements
 Shall make you cry with the sheer wonder of them.
 (Exeunt FELIX and ZULEIKA.)
 TURKISH CAPTAIN: That lass hath really sunk her hooks in him;
 She'll cure him of virginity i' a trice.
 SELIM: 'Tis what he needs after a spell in gaol.
 I've never known her stratagems to fail.
 (Exeunt the TURKISH CAPTAIN and SELIM.)

SCENE 3

The Witch's Cell of VULPECULA at the Royal Palace at Purdonium. Enter KING VUSILLUS with QUEEN VULPECULA, bearing her Crystal Ball.

VULPECULA: My dear, the glass hath not worked as I hoped:
 One fleeting glimpse of Tilda, that was all;
 And sorry failure to find our Felix.
 My ring is brighter than of late: he's well,

But that is all we know. Mayhap the glass
 Failed in not having a sufficient power
 To reach far Allium. So I went t' th market
 And had more memory installed in it.
 Let's try again. I'll use the words of power:
 Vulpecula! Bunnykins! Felix, Prince of Uraemia!
 VUSILLUS: I can see nothing.
 VULPECULA: Give the thing a moment.
 Behold, an image forms within the glass:
 'Tis Felix, with a lass in baggy trews.
 VUSILLUS: Can it be Tilda, in another guise?
 The last time she was garbed in gaudy robes.
 VULPECULA: I cannot see, the image is too small;
 Meseems I need a larger glass as well,
 Or possibly some stronger spectacles.
 She hath dark hair, and a most shapely form,
 And Felix seems right glad o' her company.
 My children! Come and see your brother Felix.
 VUSILLUS: He hath his arm around her: good for th' lad!
 I never thought he'd have the nerve to do 't.
 But say, I know that dome behind the twain:
 It is the lofty Church of Holy Wisdom
 In far Constantinople. What is this?
 First Tilda dressed as an Indian, now as a Turk,
 Felix in Constantinople! 'Tis too much:
 I cannot credit these strange images,
 I think the glass doth have a virus in 't.
 (Enter PRINCE VISCUS and PRINCESS SHEBA.)
 VULPECULA: Come to the glass, my children: there he is,
 Walking the shore of far Constantinople.
 O how my heart doth lift to see him well!
 VISCUS: Ye called us here to see that feeble picture?
 How do we know if it be true or no?
 'Tis naught but a poor image in a glass.
 It may be Felix, or a mere illusion.
 SHEBA: That's never Tilda, mark how she doth walk,
 Swaying her hips like a great dromedary.
 I think our brother's woken up at last
 To frolic with a bit of eastern totty.
 O, Tilda will be mad if she doth find him!
 VULPECULA: Thou'rt right, my daughter: that is not our Tilda,
 And Felix is behaving rather badly.
 VISCUS: I think doth quite well, by th' looks of it:
 He'll be at first base in a brace of shakes.
 VULPECULA: Viscus, wash out thy mouth with soap and water!
 However, thy first words were all too true:
 Why should my son be in Constantinople,
 Seeming at liberty, when we know full well
 That he lies in a gaol at Allium?
 And why was Tilda clad in eastern robes,
 Cavorting in a carriage with a wizard?

VUSILLUS: Let's look for Tilda: if she's at Allium
Perchance we'll see into the castle dungeon.

Doth this machine find places, or just names?

VULPECULA: I know not. Where's the blasted manual?

I had it in my hand but yesterday.

O, never mind. We'll do a search for Tilda:

Tilda Dodecagon!

SHEBA: What didst thou say?

Dodecagon is little Tilda's name?

'Tis silly.

VULPECULA: Well, thy father thought of it.

I think 'tis rather pretty, in a way.

See now, another image starts to form:

Tilda and ETTY! What are those girls doing?

Garbed in old rags like a pair o' barefoot lads,

And climbing in the branches of a tree.

VISCUS: Nay, that is not a tree, it is the yard

On a ship's mast: see how they furl the sail

And lash it to the yard. No land in sight,

Naught but the ocean stretching far away.

VUSILLUS: Our girls are sailor boys, would ye believe?

I really think thy glass is out of order.

VULPECULA: Suppose it be not, say, what is their course?

VUSILLUS: I learned about this long ago i' th' scouts;

Now, if I only can remember it ...

The sun is on their right, and it is noon;

So they sail east. Mayhap they make their way

Towards Constantinople, and our Felix.

I hope the lad doth see them, ere they see him.

VULPECULA: I scarcely know what I am to believe.

Felix, if it be he, is greatly changed,

Though Tilda as a sailor I can credit:

That lass doth have more fighting spirit in her

Than fifty of your run-o'-th'-mill princesses;

I'm not excepting present company.

SHEBA: Mother, be not so foul to thy dear daughter!

I have most ladylike accomplishments.

VULPECULA: Thy tutor beat a few things into thee.

Thou canst play chopsticks on the psaltery;

But canst thou furl the mainsail of a ship?

SHEBA: Why should I wish to? I am a princess,

And she is but a bit of peasant totty.

VULPECULA: And had not furled a sail in her whole life.

If thou wert on that ship, thou wouldst be weeping

Because thou chipped thy nail on th' binnacle

Or caught thy heel i' th' scuppers, worthless girl.

VISCUS (to VUSILLUS): Suppose our Felix come not home again

– He doth look very happy where he is –

Can I be king, when thou hast bought the farm?

VISCUS: Nay, son, not even over my dead body.

I have the power to choose my own successor,

So why should I pick thee, thou nincompoop?

I trust our Felix shall come safely home

And reign with Tilda as his loving queen.

What boots it if he toy wi' a Turkish tart?

I sowed my wild oats when I was a lad,

And then I wed thy mother.

VULPECULA: And went on

Sowing them fast as any man could sow.

I know about the Countess of Magnesium,

And little Maisie in the laundry room,

And Lady Rumen's African maidservant,

The Duchess o' Kelp, and Bess, the grocer's daughter,

And dirty Dot ...

VUSILLUS: Spare us the rest of them,

I have been true to thee in mine own way.

VULPECULA: We'll say no more. Thou art but a mere man

Who cannot keep his trews buttoned for long.

Men are such weak-willed creatures; they do change

With every phase of the inconstant moon.

I'm sure that even if our dearest Felix

Should fall for a tasty bit o' eastern promise,

He will come back to Tilda, who loves him

Like life itself, and will not let him go;

As I will not let thee, thou daft old sod.

Let's to the garden, for a game of bowls:

I'll give thee two, and still I'll whip thine arse.

(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 4

The Harbour at Constantinople. Enter PRINCE FELIX and ZULEIKA.

ZULEIKA: The Golden Horn, my prince! Is it not fine?

FELIX: I sure have never seen so fair a place.

My father's city of Purdonium

Hath many beauties – the old church o' St Quilda,

The Rope Exchange, the Costermongers' Hall –

But they are naught beside the myriad wonders

That thou hast shown me in Constantinople.

And prithee, call me Felix, I'm but a man.

ZULEIKA: And what a man, Felix. Thou must have lasses

Crowding round thee like wasps about a jampot.

FELIX: Well, no, indeed, Zuleika, not that many.

ZULEIKA: How many?

FELIX: None at all, I must confess.

But I do love one lass, though she know 't not,

For I have never spoken to her of it.

ZULEIKA: O Felix, thou'rt so shy. I like that well:

Modesty's most becoming in a man.

But hast thou taken her into thy bed?

FELIX: Certainly not, she is a virtuous girl:

Dost think that I would take advantage of her?

ZULEIKA: But how then, Felix, dost thou get thy jollies?

FELIX: What means that word, Zuleika, is it Turkish?

ZULEIKA: O Felix, thou dost have so much to learn!

Come, let us sit upon this bale of rags

In the dark privacy of this little arch,

And I shall teach thee all the pleasant arts

Of what a man and a maid can do together.

FELIX: But I must not betray my dearest Tilda:

I wish to keep my body pure for her.

ZULEIKA: Pure? O, ye make me laugh, my pretty Felix.

So when ye get together, thou'lt be pure,

And inexperienced, awkward and clumsy,

And ye will have a miserable time

And probably put her off thee for life.

I tell thee, maids expect their lads to know

More than a little of the arts of love,

Otherwise, how would their lovers ever please them?

Now, let's have no more argument, sweet lad:

Put thine arms round me, so, and kiss my mouth.

(A Xebec pulls rapidly up to the Quay. Enter four CORSAIRS, who seize FELIX.)

FELIX: What dastard deed is this? Who are these men?

ZULEIKA: O help! O murder! Let my Felix go!

(FELIX struggles free, seizes a piece of Timber and fights with the

CORSAIRS, striking two of them down. ZULEIKA draws a Dagger and stabs them. The other two

CORSAIRS overcome FELIX and drag him on to the Xebec, which begins to move.)

FELIX: Send for the janissaries and the coastguard!

I'll be all right, I am quite used to this.

ZULEIKA: O Felix, this was nothing of my doing.

FELIX: I know 'tis true, Zuleika, do not fret:

I'll see thee in a happier time and place.

(The Xebec disappears from Sight. Enter two POLICEMEN.)

FIRST POLICEMAN: Halloo, halloo, and what do we have here?

Two dead men, and a lass wi' a bloody dagger.

ZULEIKA: My prince is taken, he is on that xebec:

Send to the harbourmaster to arrest them!

FIRST POLICEMAN: I saw them do no wrong. But here 'tis different,

And I do have no choice but to detain thee.

Now I shall caution thee, if thou say aught

It may be used in evidence against thee.

Thou mayst send for thy lawyer; if thou have none,

A public lawyer shall be found for thee.

ZULEIKA: Listen to me: those men have snatched a prince

Held as a hostage of the Sublime Porte.

My master is Abu Selim bin Laina,

A court official, pray ye, send for him,

He lives nearby i' th' street of the knife sharpeners;

And he will tell ye I do speak the truth.

FIRST POLICEMAN (to SECOND POLICEMAN): Go thou and fetch him, and the janissaries.

(Exit SECOND POLICEMAN.)

(To ZULEIKA): He'll not be long. Tell me, my pretty lass,
Didst thou account for both those men thyself?

ZULEIKA: Nay, Felix felled them with a plank of wood
And I made sure they'd not get up again.

Who are those men? Why did they take my Felix?

FIRST POLICEMAN: My guess is that they be Tangerine slavers:

See'st thou their turbans tied i' th' Moorish fashion?

They seize young men and girls, and bear them off

To sell them in the market at Sebastopol.

Their xebecs are the swiftest on the seas,

There's none can catch them.

ZULEIKA: Why did they take him,

And let me be?

FIRST POLICEMAN: Sometimes they do take lasses,

And sometimes men, but never both at once:

It makes for easier packing of the cargo.

ZULEIKA: O Felix, what shall be thy unhappy fate?

Stuffed in the filthy hold o' a Tangerine xebec,

Sold at Sebastopol to Lord knows who,

And all because I took thee for a walk.

Ah, Felix, one brief moment, and I lose thee!

What have I done? What will my master say?

He'll have me whipped upon the soles o' the' feet.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Not if we hang thee first: cheer up, my lass.

(Enter SELIM and a JANISSARY, with the SECOND POLICEMAN.)

SELIM: What hast thou done, Zuleika? Where is Felix?

(ZULEIKA throws herself at his Feet.)

ZULEIKA: O master, O forgive thy unworthy slave!

The corsairs came and dragged him to their ship.

It was my fault, I brought him to this place,

I should have known that it was perilous.

SELIM: Stand up, poor lass. I lay no blame on thee:

How couldst thou influence the course of fate?

It was the will of God that this occurred,

Whose ways are not for mortal men to know.

(He turns one of the dead CORSAIRS over with his foot.)

I know this man, his name is Abu Nasti,

One of the foulest pirates of these shores,

Zuleika, thou didst well to rid us of him.

JANISSARY: Aye, and the other is his henchman Bulbul.

Officer, let the lass go free at once:

'Tis not a crime to rid the world of trash.

(Enter the TURKISH CAPTAIN with TILDA and ETTY.)

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Selim, we heard that there had been a fight:

But where is Felix? Th' girls are come for him

Upon the pirate brig we took as a prize.

SELIM: Felix is taken by the Tangerines.

TILDA: My Felix taken? Have they wounded him?

O Felix, thou wast almost in my arms,

Then snatched away once more by cruel fate!

SELIM: Art thou then Tilda, whom the prince spoke of?

It breaks my heart to bring thee heavy news,
 But he is taken by a slaving ship
 Sailing t' Sebastopol on the Euxine Sea.

TILDA: Then we shall sail straight to Sebastopol
 And fetch him back again. Come along, ETTY,
 We have not come so far to give up now.

Where is Sebastopol? Is it in Turkey?

SELIM: Tilda, forgive me. I have lost thy prince,
 Whose safety was entrusted to my care:

I am much to blame, and I must make amends.

Captain, is thy galley ready to sail?

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Aye, we have got new rowers from the prison
 And leave for Corinth at first light tomorrow.

SELIM: Then change thy plans. Here is a hundred ducats:

I charter thee to carry these two lasses

With utmost speed unto Sebastopol.

And here's a hundred more to buy him back,

And if ye bring him safely home again

Thou'lt have another hundred for thy trouble.

TILDA: O sir, I do not even know your name,

But we are overwhelmed by your great kindness.

SELIM: My name is Selim. Felix spoke often of thee:

I know he loves thee dearly.

ZULEIKA: As do I:

For though I tempted him with all my charms,

He thought of none but thee.

TILDA: O Felix mine!

Is it then possible that thou lov'st me?

ZULEIKA: There's not a shadow of a doubt of it:

How else could he resist Turkish delight?

Now run and get him back, and God go with thee.

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Away, my girls, there is no time to lose.

TILDA: Adieu, Selim, may we all meet again.

SELIM: Farewell, Tilda, and may thou find thy Felix.

ETTY (aside, to the TURKISH CAPTAIN): How many days is it t' Sebastopol?

TURKISH CAPTAIN: Ten days, or more if the wind be contrary.

ETTY: We'll find a way to pass the time, old captain.

(Exeunt the TURKISH CAPTAIN with TILDA and ETTY. The POLICEMEN gather up the dead
 CORSAIRS. Exeunt with the JANISSARY, SELIM and ZULEIKA.)

SCENE 5

The Slave Market at Sebastopol. CITIZENS of many Nations are going about their Business. Enter a
 SLAVEMASTER leading chained SLAVES, including PRINCE FELIX and GINFIZ, a Mongolian
 Tribesman.

SLAVEMASTER: Halt, slaves! Ye shall stand here until ye be sold every one. And I think not that I shall
 get much of a price for ye, for ye be a sorry mulch o' men. Stand up and look lively, lest ye be bought by a
 Bulgarian, or a Hun, to live on raw goat i' th' mire.

FELIX (to GINFIZ): So are the Huns the very worst of all?

SLAVEMASTER: No talking in the ranks, ye shower of scum!
GINFIZ (aside, to FELIX): Aye, they are more like beasts than human folk,
Squat and thickset, their cheeks all scarred with gashes;
They do eat naught but th' roots o' some wild plants
And meat from any creature they can kill,
Which they set underneath their horses' saddles
Till it be warm; they know not th' art of cooking.
Their garments are made out o' th' skins of fieldmice,
And houses have they none, not e'en a shelter,
But travel constantly, sleeping i' their carts
Amid the northern winter's killing frosts.
They are the filthiest of any folk
That I have seen, surpassing e'en the Goths,
And the most violent, for one golden piece
Or a hot word will start a fight t' th' death.
FELIX: O, how I pray we be not bought by one!
GINFIZ: I too. Remember, Felix, not a word
Of how thou art a prince, or thou'lt be taken
And held for ransom for a second time.
Better to be a slave, whoe'er thy master,
And to await thy chance to run away.
SLAVEMASTER: Roll up, good folk, 'tis time to buy your slaves:
O what a fine batch I have got for ye!
See this Cimmerian, his massy thews,
He'll toil for ye as strongly as an ox,
Day in, day out, for many years to come.
Who'll bid two hundred ducats for this prize?
Do I hear two?
FIRST CITIZEN: I will bid fifty ducats.
SLAVEMASTER: Fifty? For this prime hunk of rippling muscle?
SECOND CITIZEN: Sixty, and there's an end on 't.
THIRD CITIZEN: Seventy.
SLAVEMASTER: Can I hear eighty? Ninety?
SECOND CITIZEN: Seventy-five.
SLAVEMASTER: Any more bids? Brace up, good gentlemen.
O, very well then: going, going, gone!
Sold to the gentleman in the dogskin hat.
Another ducat buys ye th' fetters for him.
SECOND CITIZEN: An evil price for a bit of rusty iron:
I brought my own, ye grasping son o' a bitch.
SLAVEMASTER: No need to talk like that: here is thy slave.
(He unchains a SLAVE. The SECOND CITIZEN applies his own Chains.)
GINFIZ (aside, to FELIX): He was right lucky to be bought by a Pole;
They're not too cruel, and wash when they remember.
Look at the evil faces in the crowd:
They augur ill for us. (Enter GROBAG, a Tartar.)
FELIX: He's the worst yet:
I wot he is a Hun, or a Bulgarian.
GINFIZ: Nay, 'tis a Tartar from far Astrakhan;
See ye the snow still clinging to his boots
I' th' heat of summer? One can always tell.

FELIX: Once I did see an African hyaena;
 This man doth put me much in mind of it.
 (Exeunt SECOND CITIZEN and SLAVE.)

SLAVEMASTER (pointing to FELIX): Now, second of this wondrous batch of slaves,
 Here is a young lad from Uraemia,
 Tall and well built; he'll grow to his full strength
 Within a year or two. Is he not handsome?

Will any of ye dames have him 's a toy
 To pleasure ye, and all your friends besides?

GINFIZ (aside, to FELIX): That is the worst of all: quickly, look ugly!

SLAVEMASTER: Or would ye have him serve ye at your table?

He'd be an ornament to any house.

Now, let me hear some proper bids for him:

Who'll give a hundred ducats for this lad?

FIRST CITIZEN: Fifty.

SLAVEMASTER: Fifty? Is that the only word ye know?

This lad will fetch two hundred when he's older.

THIRD CITIZEN: Sixty.

FIRST CITIZEN: And sixty-five; that's my top price.

THIRD CITIZEN: Seventy.

FIRST CITIZEN: 'Tis too steep for me, I'm out.

SLAVEMASTER: Will anyone top seventy?

GROBAG: A hundred,

If ye throw in the little one next to him.

SLAVEMASTER: And will there be no better bids than that?

Nay? Going, going, gone! Sold to the gent

I' th' sheepskin cloak that I can smell from here.

Did ye bring fetters?

GROBAG: Would I buy thy junk?

Unchain them quick, before I change my mind.

(The SLAVEMASTER unchains FELIX and GINFIZ, and GROBAG puts his Fetters on them.)

GINFIZ (aside, to FELIX): Alas, this is the worst that could befall!

FELIX: Cheer up, at least we two are still together,

And he is not a Hun, at th' very least.

Though he should chain us in far Tartary,

We'll find a way to slip out of his grasp,

And I shall see my Tilda once again,

And thou thy pretty lass, that I do promise.

SLAVEMASTER: This is the meanest crowd I e'er did see:

I'll come back in the evening when they're drunk

And see if I can get some better prices.

Ho, slaves, get moving, back to th' holding pen!

(Exit SLAVEMASTER, with SLAVES.)

GROBAG (to FELIX and GINFIZ): My name is Grobag, and I am your master.

Obey my orders to the very letter:

One false move and I'll flog you to the bone.

Ye can sleep in the stables at my inn;

We leave for Tartary the morrow morn.

(Exeunt GROBAG, pulling FELIX and GINFIZ by their Chains.)

SCENE 6

The Slave Market at Sebastopol, the following Day. CITIZENS, as before. Enter the SLAVEMASTER with two SLAVES.

SLAVEMASTER: Now here's the cream o' th' crop, good citizens!
(Enter, from opposite Sides, TILDA with ETTY, and SHOBIZ, a Mongolian Chieftain, with his MEN.)

A mighty Nubian as black as night,
He'd make thy neighbours green as grass with envy;
And this fair lad from Lithuania
Captured from off the beach at Trebizond,
Of lofty stature and with golden hair;
Could ye resist him, ladies and gentlemen?

TILDA: Excuse me, sir, I crave a word with you.

SLAVEMASTER: And which o' th' two shall ye be bidding for?

TILDA: For neither: I seek tidings of Prince Felix.

SLAVEMASTER: If ye wish not to buy ... What's that ye said?

Felix a prince? A curse upon my luck!
Blizzards and thunderclaps beat on my brain!
Why did the lad not tell me for himself?

I could have held him for a mighty ransom.

ETTY: No doubt that's why he did not tell ye of it.

SLAVEMASTER: Then I shall make the best of a bad bargain.

If ye want news, ye'll have to pay for it:

Ten ducats is the sum I have in mind.

ETTY: And one is more than we have in our pockets.

SLAVEMASTER: Avaunt, ye brace of pestilential serfs!

(SHOBIZ steps forward and seizes the SLAVEMASTER.)

SHOBIZ: Thou dog, that is no way to treat a lady!

Now, as it happens, I am also come
To seek for news of a Mongolian lad,
Ginfiz, my younger son; and ye shall give us
A full account of both of them, for nothing,
Or we shall make thee sorry thou wert born.

SLAVEMASTER: I sold them as a pair yesterday morn:

Wait, I will find the contract of their sale ...

'Tis here: Felix and Ginfiz, sold to one Grobag,

A Tartar gentleman, no address given,
But surely he was come from out of town;
The sum o' a hundred ducats, received with thanks.

TILDA: A hundred ducats for my lovely Felix!

He's worth a million.

SLAVEMASTER: Do not rub it in.

SHOBIZ (to TILDA): It seems, my lass, we have a common interest.

(To the SLAVEMASTER) And hast thou any notion where he came from?

SLAVEMASTER: He did not have the accent o' a Crimean:

I'd guess his place of birth as Astrakhan;
His robes were greasy, and he smelt of cheese.

That's all that I can tell; pray, let me go.

(SHOBIZ releases the SLAVEMASTER and turns again to TILDA and ETTY.)

Exit the SLAVEMASTER with the SLAVES, running.)

SHOBIZ: We'll ride to Astrakhan with utmost haste:

Perchance we shall o'ertake them on the road.

Will ye ride with us, ladies? 'Twill be hard

For such as you upon our half-wild steeds.

TILDA: I have been on a horse out of the cradle:

I could show you some feats of fancy riding

Would make your eyes pop.

SHOBIZ (to his MEN): Gentlemen, a challenge!

This little lass thinks to outride a Mongol.

We'll show her some fine sport. Go, my friend Geewiz,

And do one of thy party tricks for us. (Exit one of the MEN.)

ETTY: There he goes, pounding through the open square:

He stands upon the saddle!

TILDA: I can do that.

ETTY: And flings an apple up into the air,

And throws his knife at it – and splits it through!

'Tis marvellous; I start to fancy him.

TILDA: What marvel there? Thou dost that twice a day.

(Re-enter the MAN.)

SHOBIZ: And canst thou match that feat, my pretty lass?

TILDA: Sure, I can beat it: give me an apricot. (Exit, borrowing the MAN's Knife.)

ETTY: I never knew Tilda could ride like that:

See, she gets up – she stands upon her head,

Her skirts demurely clasped between her knees,

And throws the apricot up twenty feet

And cleaves it! But what is she doing now?

She slides under the belly of the horse

And clambers up again on t'other side!

SHOBIZ: I eat my words, she's good as any of us.

Are ye as skilled i' th' saddle as thy friend?

ETTY: I can stay on, I'll say no more than that.

(Re-enter TILDA.)

SHOBIZ: My lass, thou ridest like a free-born Mongol;

'Twill be a privilege to travel with thee.

TILDA: And we are honoured to accept your offer:

I'd ride a thousand leagues to save my Felix.

SHOBIZ: And ye may have to: 'tis a tricky matter.

There are two ways to go to Astrakhan:

By land, through Krasnodar and Stavropol

Or sea to Rostov and the Volga river.

We'll take the first, and if they go that way

We'll surely catch them with our speedy horses.

But if they take a ship, we'll have to search

All through the city and the neighbouring land.

How shall we do it? We have men and horses,

But Ginfiz may be pent in some dark cell

And we could go straight past him without seeing.

ETTY (to TILDA): I know how thou canst find thy precious Felix.

TILDA: How, say?

ETTY: I read it in a history book,

Of how Blondel, King Richard's faithful minstrel
 Went round the fortresses of Austria
 Singing the monarch's favourite roundelay
 Until at last he heard his master's voice.

Sing the Pythagoras song!

SHOBIZ: Pray, what is that?

TILDA (sings): In hydraulis dum Pythagora, etc.

SHOBIZ: A most exotic lay, but bravely sung.

But we waste time: to horse, my merry men!

And thou shalt teach thy song t' us as we ride,

And I'll teach thee a song o' our folk for Ginfiz.

(Exeunt SHOBIZ with his MEN, TILDA and ETTY. As they go, SHOBIZ sings a Mongol Song.)

Câr el la komunaj

Posedajôj

De la ômaro,

Neniu estas tiel

Vere gênerala

Kaj internacia,

Neniu estas, kiel

La Esperanto.

ACT 6

SCENE 1

A Tartar Settlement – the House of Gulag. Evening. Enter TILDA and ETTY.

ETTY: This is the sixth place that we've tried today,
And we have been through scarce a hundreth part
Of the wide territory of Astrakhan,
And I am dropping, and thy voice is hoarse
From singing of Pythagoras and his organ.

TILDA: Let's give it one last try, and then I promise
We'll find some farmer's barn and hit the hay. (She sings)
In hydraulis dum Pythagora, etc.

(Enter GULAG, from within.)

GULAG: Who's there, singing strange songs without the door?
Why, 'tis two lasses! What are ye about
At this late hour?

TILDA: I beg your pardon, sir.
We needs must sing this lay at every gate
To find my lover, brought here as a slave,
But where we know not. 'Tis our special song,
And if he hear it, surely he will join in.

GULAG: A pretty story: it doth touch my heart.
I have no slaves, my last one died on me
A month ago, and I must buy some more.
But there's a neighbour o' mine, by name of Toerag,
Hath lately visited Sebastopol:

I know he bought some fresh slaves in the market.

TILDA: And pray, how would we find your neighbour Toerag?

GULAG: Neighbour is not the word I should have used:
He lives some seven leagues from here, by th' Volga.

I see you are fatigued: come in and rest,
And in the morn I'll set you on your way.

TILDA: I thank you, sir, we have walked since th' crack of dawn.
(They go within.)

ETTY (aside): I have a nasty feeling about him.

TILDA (aside): What, dost not fancy him one little bit?

ETTY: I mean not that, though surely he is foul.

GULAG: Here, ladies, eat and drink. May I recommend
The leg of goat aged for three weeks i' a dunghill?
'Tis very tasty. This is our local brew:

We make it out of dandelion and burdock.

TILDA: 'Tis very interesting; Etty, what think'st thou?

ETTY: I cannot say, I feel quite overcome. (She falls down in a Swoon.)

TILDA: Forgive my friend, for she is very weary,
And as for me ... (She also falls down.)

GULAG: O what a stroke of luck!
Two strong young women fall into my lap,

And not a penny paid for either of them.
 When I have had my fill o' them, they shall toil
 Chained to the sorghum mill both night and day.
 I'll have the dark one first, I rather think.
 (He drags them out, reappearing above carrying them one at a Time.)
 'Twas only a small dose, they'll wake anon,
 And then I'll have some pleasant sport with them.
 'Twere well to tie them up ere they awake.
 (He binds them with Cords. TILDA begins to stir.)
 Aha, she wakes! Girl, thou art in my power.
 Wilt thou be easy, or have I to hurt thee?
 TILDA: What is this place? What hast thou done to me?
 My hands and feet are tied. Loose me at once!
 This is an outrage: I am a free woman,
 I am thy guest! Thou hast transgressed the laws
 Of hospitality beyond all reason.
 I say, unbind me!
 GULAG: Ah, a lass with spirit,
 I like that well. But I may have to whip thee
 Before thou wilt comply with my desires.
 TILDA: O whip me not! Come over here to me
 And I'll do anything thou dost require.
 (GULAG embraces TILDA. She strikes him in the Privy Parts with her Knee. He falls.)
 GULAG: Zounds! I am mammoocked in the privy parts:
 'Tis like a red-hot poker in my loins.
 Thou bitch from hell, thou shalt be sorry anon:
 I'll flog thee till thy ribs stick through thy flesh.
 Where is my whip? O how my bollocks smart!
 (Exit. ETTY wakes.)
 ETTY: What happened? I recall a dirty Tartar.
 O, I am bound! Tilda, are thou still here?
 TILDA: Aye: we were given a drug in that dark drink,
 And this foul heathen hath us in his power:
 He tried to violate me, but I kneed him
 Where thou didst tell me to. It made him angry,
 And presently he's gone to get his whip:
 O my dear Ety, what shall we do now?
 ETTY: Pretend to faint again: he will not whip thee
 If thou art in a swoon and cannot feel it.
 I will divert him with my usual arts
 And mayhap I can get him to untie me.
 TILDA: O Ety, he is filthier than a toad:
 How wilt thou bear it?
 ETTY: He is not the worst
 That I have known. When I was very drunk
 I once slept with an African gorilla.
 In fact the ape was quite considerate,
 Though sadly not too well endowed.
 TILDA: O Ety!
 My friend, I know full well thou meanst to cheer me,
 But this is serious. Alack, he comes!

(She pretends to be in a Swoon. Enter GULAG, bearing a Whip.)

GULAG: What, in a swoon again? I'll flog her later.

What about thee? Wouldst like a bit of sport,
Or art thou just as stubborn as thy sister?

ETTY: Nay, not at all, I like a spot of fun:

I'll sport with thee as often as thou like,
Thou pretty boy. Truly, thou art in luck,
For I am highly skilled i' th' arts of love
From reading that great work, the Kama Sutra.

Lik'st thou the Congress of the Elephant Woman?

GULAG: Say, what is that? I never heard of it.

ETTY: It is an Indian book, and it doth show
The way to reach the pinnacle of pleasure
In several hundred modes: come, and I'll teach thee.

Thou, put thy leg like this, and t'other one thus,
While I do this ... Alas, I cannot manage

While I am tied. Wilt thou unloose my bonds?

I promise thee that I'll be a good girl,

So good thou never couldst imagine it.

GULAG: I will unloose thee, for I cannot wait

To see what treats thou hast in store for me.

(He unties her and they lie on the Floor.)

ETTY: Now I shall show thee just what I can do.

(She seizes a piece of Wood and belabours him.)

ETTY: Take that, and that, for what thou didst to Tilda!

Thou stinking scum o' th' earth, with thy tiny member!

(GULAG retreats under her Blows, runs bleeding through the Door, and locks it behind him.)

ETTY: Alas, I meant to kill the evil cur,

But 'tis not easy with a bit of wood.

Still, we have won ourselves a breathing space.

(She unties TILDA.)

TILDA: The window's far too high for us to leap:

The only way we can get out of here

Is through the door. We must think of a plan.

ETTY: I read in one of my adventure books

About a hero in just such a plight

And how he got away.

TILDA: What did he do?

ETTY: 'Twas not described in detail. What it said

Was no more than, 'With one bound Jack was free.'

TILDA: We could bound till we drop, and still be here.

Let's set the furniture against the door

So that we'll hear if he tries to come in,

And we must get some sleep. Mayhap i' th' morning

We'll think of somewhat. Etty, I am sorry

That I persuaded thee to join my quest

And thou art stuck in this sad place with me.

What thou didst with that man, I did admire,

And I regret my past disdain o' thy actions.

ETTY: Thou art my dearest friend, and where thou goest,

I shall go too, while thou hast need of me.

Sleep well, dear Tilda, and the morning light
 Shall bring new hope to us, I trow. Good night.
 (They sleep.)

SCENE 2

A Tower in the State Treasury at Kamysyak, near Astrakhan. Enter GROBAG with FELIX, GINFIZ and two SOLDIERS.

GROBAG: Here ye shall spend the rest o' your earthly days,
 Though they shall not be long, I warrant you,
 Coining gold thalers for our treasury.
 Your quota is five thousand coins a day:
 Make them, and ye shall eat; fail and go hungry.
 The soldiers shall show ye the way o' th' press:
 I care not if ye live, or if ye die. (Exit.)

FELIX (to the SOLDIERS): Is he like that always? He's a proper Tartar.

FIRST SOLDIER: Aye, and he leadeth us a dismal dance.

We twain be Kalmucks from Siberia
 And have no special liking for his people
 Though we be all descended from the Hordes.

GINFIZ: I am Mongolian: ye are my cousins,
 Far closer than these grubby Tartar folk.

FIRST SOLDIER: Then welcome, kinsman, to our gloomy dwelling;
 We cannot offer thee a restful stay.

I fear we may not ease thy sorry lot:
 We have our orders, and 'tis death to break them.
 Come, we shall show ye how to work the press.

Ye take a metal disc out of this box
 And place it, so, upon the lower die,
 And spin the weights, and th' press comes crashing down,
 And there ye have 't, a fine new-minted thaler.

FELIX: It looks not hard.

FIRST SOLDIER: Nay, not for the first time,
 Nor yet the hundredth. But to make five thousand
 Will take ye eighteen hours at th' very least,
 And ye shall strike the last more dead than alive;
 And then ye have to pack the coins in rolls.

GINFIZ (taking the Coin out of the Press): This thaler is too light to be of gold. (He bites it.)
 Nay, 'tis half copper. What a scurvy trick!

I have seen such coins palmed off on our own folk.

FELIX: And I've seen men strung up for passing them.

FIRST SOLDIER: I see ye have the way of 't. Master Grobag,
 For every ounce of gold sent him by th' king
 Doth steal three hundred grains for his own use,
 And foists this worthless coinage on the people.
 He is the richest man in the whole region.

SECOND SOLDIER: Aye, and the meanest.

FELIX: Then why not denounce him?
 If the king knew o' the' fraud, he would be wroth.

FIRST SOLDIER: When kings wax wroth, woe to us little folk!
I'd rather not be in the midst of it.

Now, we shall leave ye to your pressing task.

SECOND SOLDIER: It always breaks me up when thou sayst that.

(Exeunt SOLDIERS.)

FELIX: This is a sorry work we must perform,
Stamping bad thalers for a Tartar fraud;
Still, we shall not get fed until we do 't.
I'll start swinging the weights, thou place the coins;
And mind thy fingers as the press comes down.

(They start to stamp Coins.)

O Ginfiz, think'st thou we shall e'er be free,
And I shall see my Tilda once again?

GINFIZ: And shall I breathe the rushing wind o' th' plains,
Riding beside my trusty countrymen,
Or shall we perish in this hideous place,
Unknown, unmourned, and probably unburied?

Ah me, how I bemoan my wretched lot. (He stops working.)

FELIX: We shall if thou dost mope; aye, of starvation.
Brace thyself up, we have some coins to make,
And while we toil, let us plan our escape:

I promise thee we shall get out of here,
And thou shalt ride thy horse across the steppes
And I shall hold my Tilda in my arms.

GINFIZ: But how? Dost think we'll saunter past the guards?

FELIX: Nay, we'll cut through the iron bars of the window.

GINFIZ: With what? We have no saw, nor yet a file.

FELIX: See'st thou these packages full of new coins?

GINFIZ: Aye, but what of it? Simple rolls of paper.

FELIX: And sealed with glue, and parcelled up with string.

Now, if we put some glue upon this cord
And roll it in the sand, and let it set ...

GINFIZ: What use is that? A piece of sandy string?

FELIX: And wrap it round the bar, lo and behold,

We have a saw! I'll tie the cord t' the press
So we can stamp the coins and saw the bar
At th' selfsame time.

GINFIZ: 'Tis most ingenious;
But even if we cut out both the bars
How shall we climb down sixty feet of wall?

FELIX: We must start stealing master Grobag's string
Until we have enough to make a rope.

'Twill take a while, but one thing we've aplenty
Is time, the last wealth of the prisoner.

I did not say that we would leave today;
But we have hope, and we shall find a way.

(They continue working.)

SCENE 3

The House of Gulag. The following morning. TILDA and ETTY are sleeping. TILDA awakes.

TILDA: Awake, dear Etty, for the light of day
Shall see the resolution of our ills:

Whether we live or die is in our hands.

ETTY: 'Tis morning, is it? Well, the filthy Tartar
Will try another visit soon enough.

Think you he'll bring more men to force the door?
O, I am hungry.

TILDA: Let us look around:
There's not a crumb But what do we have here?

ETTY: It seems to be a cannon of some sort,
Hardly ideal for combat at close quarters.

TILDA: See, here's the cannonballs and powder for 't,
And wads, and flint and steel to set it off.

Let's aim it at the door, and when he comes,
Blow him and his foul crew to smithereens.

ETTY: I saw the sailors load them on the ship:
First, you put in about this much of powder –
We'll have a double charge, just to make sure –
And then a wad to seal it, then the ball,
And ram it down – where in hell is the rammer?

TILDA: We'll use this broom; there, that serves very well.

ETTY: Now turn it round and point it at the door.
A little powder sprinkled round the touch hole;
And now to light the tinder ... there it goes ...
Hand me the slow match. Now we'll welcome thee
As thou deserv'st, thou basest scum o' th' earth.

TILDA: O Etty, do not stand behind the thing,
Or when it fires 'twill surely mammock thee –
If it doth fire.

ETTY: And why should it not fire?
I loaded it in quite the proper way.

TILDA: I did not mean to doubt thee, dearest Etty:
This wait is getting on my nerves.

ETTY: And mine.
I read a book – how long ago it seems! –
Describing war as periods of boredom
Relieved by intense fear.

TILDA: I do feel both.
O to be in Purdonium, with my Felix
Reading the story of the expedition,
And as we sat in safety in his room,
It was so far away in place and time,
An entertainment for a rainy day.
But now the story hath caught up with us,
And here we stand, hundreds of leagues from home
With just one chance to 'scape an ugly death.

Listen! I hear a footstep on the stair.
Aye, here he is. Wait till they try the door,
And then a little, till they all be there.

(A Beating at the Door. The Barricade begins to tremble.)

A moment, Etty, I hear distant music:

'Tis the Mongolian song! Our friends are here!

(She goes over to the window and sings)

Câr el la komunaj, etc.

(As she finishes the Song, the Barricade starts to fall. ETTY fires the Cannon, with a deafening Roar. The Room fills with Smoke.)

TILDA: Die, ye foul Tartars, like the dogs ye are!

(She seizes the broken Leg of a Table and runs towards the Door.)

ETTY: Dear Tilda, do put down that table leg:

They are reduced to their component parts.

TILDA: Indeed they are, the staircase is awash;

'Tis most disgusting. I feel rather sick.

ETTY: Not half as sick as if they had got in.

(Enter SHOBIZ and his MEN through the Remains of the Door.)

SHOBIZ: Good heavens, girls, what have ye done in here?

There's seven Tartars dead upon the stairs,

Or near about, to judge from various bits.

Even our Mongol women are less fierce.

And was that an explosion that I heard?

TILDA: Aye, that it was: we shot them with a cannon.

SHOBIZ: Which ye did have concealed about your persons?

ETTY: Nay, it was in the room, thou silly man.

He locked us in, to have his way with us.

TILDA: But we had other plans, as ye may see.

SHOBIZ: And did perform them to the very letter.

He though he had caught lambs, but in his snare

He found twin tigresses, Tilda and Etty,

Who tore him limb from limb, and all his men.

'Twill be a pretty tale to tell your children.

Come, let's to horse, our quest doth call us back:

Today we ride towards Kamysyak.

(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 4

Outside the State Treasury at Kamysyak. Enter TILDA, ETTY, and two MEN of the Mongolians, one of them bearing a Horn.

FIRST MAN: This is the treasury of the Tartar State:

We'd best avoid it, for it is well guarded

And there be none but soldiers there, I trow.

TILDA: Yet I am loath to leave this tower untried.

I learned my lesson with the other Tartar:

If they accost me, I need but feign madness.

Ye others, hide i' th' shadows while I sing.

(Sings) In hydraulis quondam Pythagora

Admirante melos, phthongitates

Malleorum, secutus aequora

Per ponderum inaequalitates

Adinvenit musae qualitates.
 Epitritum ac emioliam,
 Epogdoi duplam perducunt.
 Nam tessaron pente convenientiam
 Nec non phthongum et pason adducunt,
 Monocordi dum genus conducunt.

(The Voice of FELIX joins in from above.)

Haec Okeghem, qui cunctis praecinis
 Galliarum in regis aula,

Practicum tuae propaginis
 Arma cernens quondam patria,
 Burgundiae ducis in patria,

Pro me, Busnois, illustris comitis
 De Chaulois indignum musicum,

Saluteris tuis pro meritis
 Tamquam summum cephas tropidicum,

Vale, verum instar Orpheicum!

(FELIX appears above. They sing the last Line again, as)

Ave, verum instar Uraemicum!

TILDA: O Felix, O my love, O I have found thee!

FELIX: O Tilda, I thought ne'er to see thee more!

(Enter from within a SOLDIER.)

TILDA: I shall be back ere long, my dearest love.

(She begins to mop and mow.)

Now here's a pretty berry, and another,

Why, it is fit for the great unicorn.

Hast thou spare change on thee, by any chance?

SOLDIER: Be off with thee, thou crazy beggar bitch!

(Exit TILDA, in Haste. The SOLDIER retreats within. When he is gone, re-enter TILDA, who goes to the others.)

TILDA: He's here! My own true love! Let's get him out.

FIRST MAN: Let's think awhile before we all rush in.

We dare not sing our Mongol song, to try

If Ginfiz be with Felix in the tower,

But we'll assume he is. Kitiz, to horse,

And ride to a safe distance from this place

And sound thy horn to summon all our men.

(Exit SECOND MAN.)

TILDA: Think'st thou to take the treasury by storm?

FIRST MAN: What other way is there?

TILDA: I have a plan;

But 'tis a perilous scheme for one of us.

The queen gave us a pair of magic charms:

Two peach stones which, if put into the mouth,

Confer invisibility. Howbeit,

They work but once, and we have only two,

And so we cannot simply swagger in

And come away with Felix and his comrade.

This is what we must do: I'll call that soldier

And flirt with him as long as is required

Till he unbar the door and let me in.

Etty, thou put one o' th' stones in thy mouth,
 Carry the other, and slip in behind me.
 When we are safely in, I'll tell the man
 That Felix is a prince, and worth a fortune
 In ransom money, and the man will go
 To ask him if he be one, and thou follow.
 ETTY: He thinks thee mad, he will not speak with thee.
 Yet it is a fine plan in other ways;
 I'll go to him instead.
 TILDA: O Etty!
 He's foul! I could not ask thee to seduce him:
 It is my duty, for dear Felix's sake.
 ETTY: Dear Felix might take quite a different view:
 Men are like that. Nay, Tilda, let me do it:
 I have known worse than Tartars in my time.
 TILDA: Etty, thou art a friend like no one else!
 I cannot speak my gratitude to thee.
 ETTY: Then do not. What's the next part of thy scheme?
 Thou art invisible, but the other two
 Are plain as pikestaffs, and there's one stone left.
 TILDA: I give the stone to Ginfiz, then ...
 ETTY: What then?
 TILDA: I kiss my Felix on his dearest mouth,
 And he will disappear, while the kiss lasts;
 Then, still entwined, we'll slip out of the cell,
 Follow the warder as he goes for aid,
 And creep out of the front door whene'er we can.
 Etty, thou'lt have to make thine own way out,
 But I expect there will be much confusion.
 ETTY: Aye, 'twill be possible, as I believe;
 And thy kiss shall go down i' th' book of records:
 Ye cannot stop! Why, it might last for hours.
 TILDA: O that it would!
 ETTY: Why, Tilda, thou art shameless.
 FIRST MAN: A perilous plan indeed, yet it might serve.
 I've seen the mettle of you dauntless pair,
 One with a horse, the other with a man.
 The Mongols shall assemble in this alley;
 We'll have four horses for ye. If we hear
 That things go pear-shaped in the treasury,
 We shall come in mob-handed, by my troth.
 TILDA: Yet stay thy hand until we call for thee:
 Things might go ill for Ginfiz and my Felix
 If there were fighting, with them still within.
 FIRST MAN: And ill for ye. We'll come if we are called.
 Now, my bold girls, the best of luck to ye.
 (TILDA puts a Peach Stone into her Mouth and vanishes.)
 ETTY: It works! Thou art invisible as air.
 Then let us go before our courage fails.
 (ETTY goes over to the Door, followed by the invisible TILDA.)
 ETTY: Ho, anyone within, a word with ye!

(Re-enter the SOLDIER.)

ETTY: I seek news of a mad girl, hast thou seen her?

SOLDIER: Indeed I have, my pretty little lass:

She passed this way less than an hour ago.

She asked for alms, and so I sent her packing.

Thou art a tasty piece, fancy a fuck?

ETTY: I might say yes, if thou did ask politely.

SOLDIER: Please.

ETTY: That's enough. Shall we go to your place?

SOLDIER: We'll to the cells, a few of them are empty.

ETTY: Show me the way, thou hunk of steak tartare.

(ETTY and the SOLDIER go within, followed by TILDA.)

FIRST MAN: I wonder how the lass can bear that slob.

However drunk I get, the Tartar girls

Remain as unattractive as dead sheep.

(Enter, stealthily, SHOBIZ and the rest of his MEN.)

SHOBIZ: Why are we waiting before going in?

Let's storm the place without further delay.

FIRST MAN: Nay, Tilda hath gone in, and Etty too:

They reckon they can get them out by stealth.

They have a magic charm that makes them vanish.

If they call out, we go; but not before.

SHOBIZ: If it were anyone but Tilda and Etty,

I'd say the plan was doomed; but those two lasses

Do have a way of coming out on top.

Back to the alley, and we'll wait for them.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE 5

A Passage in the State Treasury at Kamysyak. On the Wall is a Rack of Yataghans. Behind a closed Door, the Coining Room, occupied by FELIX and GINFIZ. Next to it, another Door. Enter the SOLDIER with ETTY, followed by the invisible TILDA.

SOLDIER: And thou sayst truly that he is a prince?

How then did he come to the slave market?

If they had known his worth, they would have held him

To ransom for a sack of golden thalers –

And not the kind we make here, which are brass.

ETTY: He must have chosen to keep mum about it,

And hoped he could escape his slavery,

For princes held to ransom are well guarded.

SOLDIER: But not as well as here at th' treasury:

That was a sad misfortune for the lad,

Though haply I shall turn it to my gain.

ETTY: What dost thou aim to do, now that thou know'st?

If I were thou, I should keep quiet about it,

Send for the ransom, let Prince Felix go,

And run with th' gold before thou art discovered.

SOLDIER: Or keep the ransom and keep Felix in:

'Tis simpler thus.

ETTY: I praise thy enterprise.
Now, let's see Felix and full soon thou'lt find
That I have spoken true.

SOLDIER: This is his cell.

(He unbolts the Door, and all go in.)

SOLDIER: Ho, Felix, here's a pretty lass to see thee:
She says thou art a prince.

FELIX: Why, it is Etty!

What a surprise! And didst thou come with ...

ETTY (loudly, to the SOLDIER): There!

Did I not tell thee that he'd recognise me?

Your royal highness, tell him who I am.

FELIX: I see the truth is out. I am a prince,

And this lass is a servant of my mother

Vulpecula, the Queen of fair Uraemia.

O Etty, 'tis divine to see thy face,

But how I wish that thou hadst held thy tongue.

SOLDIER: What kind of ransom would they pay for thee?

(Behind the SOLDIER's Back, ETTY gestures to indicate great Size.)

FELIX: A million ducats: I am the crown prince

And shall inherit the high throne o' my father.

SOLDIER: Then we shall see what we can do for thee.

I leave the room wi' thy highness's permission.

(He makes a mocking Bow and leaves the Room, followed by ETTY and the invisible TILDA, and draws the Bolt on the Outside of the Door.)

SOLDIER: Etty, so that's thy name! Let's to a cell,

And I shall shag thee till thou cry for mercy,

And then some.

ETTY: O, what an enticing prospect.

(The SOLDIER and ETTY go into a Cell within, closing the Door behind them. The invisible TILDA unbolts the Door of the Coining Room and enters it.)

FELIX: Who's there? Who was it did unbolt the door?

I see no man.

TILDA: 'Tis I, my dearest prince:

I am invisible.

GINFIZ: Ye gods, a ghost!

FELIX: Hush, 'tis my Tilda in a cloak of darkness.

O Tilda, my sweet love, thou cam'st for me

Where none but thou did dare, my own true lass!

Each morn of my captivity, I thought

Of thy dear face the moment I awoke.

TILDA: Keep thy voice down! the soldier is next door.

Etty will keep him there while we escape.

FELIX: And shall we all be made invisible?

The place is stiff with guards, as ye well know.

TILDA: Aye, but the charm hath limits to its power.

I placed a magic peach stone in my mouth

To make me vanish, and I've but one more;

But with it I can save both thee and Ginfiz.

I give the stone to him, and I kiss thee,

And we're invisible while we embrace.

We'll have to walk out thus.

FELIX: A joyful scheme!

O Tilda, make me invisible with a kiss!

(TILDA puts the other Peach Stone into the hand of GINFIZ, who starts at her Touch.)

TILDA: One moment yet, for I do have to warn ye:

The charm works only once. If thou leave off

From kissing me, thou canst not vanish more.

FELIX: Would I leave off from kissing thee, my Tilda?

(From next door, ETTY is heard uttering loud Screams.)

Alack! 'Tis Etty: run, we must assist her!

No time for caution!

TILDA: Etty, we are coming!

(FELIX, and GINFIZ run out of the Coining Room, followed by the invisible TILDA. They fling open the Door of the Cell, and go within. FELIX seizes the SOLDIER.)

FELIX: Thou filthy Tartar dog, to hurt poor Etty!

(They fight. The SOLDIER draws a Dagger and tries to stab FELIX. A Chair, wielded by the invisible TILDA, rises up and smites the SOLDIER on the Head. He falls.)

FELIX: Dear Tilda, was that thou? I'm in thy debt.

(All, including ETTY, her Dress torn, come out. Enter more SOLDIERS in Haste.)

TILDA: Quick, take these yataghans from off the wall!

(They arm themselves. GINFIZ seizes ETTY and forces the Peach Stone into her Mouth. She vanishes.)

GINFIZ: There, do not spit it out, 'twould be a waste.

We'll fight the Tartars: run for it, my girls!

ETTY: Think'st thou we'd run?

TILDA: We'll stand and fight with ye!

(They fight with the SOLDIERS. TILDA and ETTY, aided by their Invisibility, account for many of them. All the SOLDIERS fall.)

FELIX: Well, that takes care of them. Thank you, my dears:

Ye fought like Trojans of the antique kind.

Tilda, I love thee more, the more I know thee:

Thy courage is stupendous as thy beauty.

(Enter GROBAG.)

GROBAG: What is this din? Turn out the guard at once!

Ah! What is this? My soldiers are all dead!

Did ye do this, ye brace of poxy slaves?

FELIX: Halt, slavedriver, or I will spit thee through.

'Tis time to leave thy guesthouse, without thanks.

(Enter SHOBIZ.)

SHOBIZ: We heard a fair commotion, and we thought

That possibly ye needed some assistance.

GINFIZ: Nay, father, we have done it by ourselves:

It is the Mongol way.

SHOBIZ: My dearest son,

'Tis grand to see thee! And I also see

That thou art a true chip off the old block.

(They embrace.)

GINFIZ: I have to mention that we had some help

From two bold lasses of uncommon valour.

(He indicates a pair of bloody Yataghans held by the invisible TILDA and ETTY.)

SHOBIZ: Aye, I've no doubt of that, I know them well:

They fight like tigresses o' th' eastern steppe.

Ladies, pray you appear and take a bow.

(TILDA and ETTY become visible, still holding their Weapons.)

ETTY: O Ginfiz, that was a fine act of thine:

I owe my life to thee, beyond a doubt.

GINFIZ: Think nothing of it: 'twas a simple choice

To save so fair a maiden from the Tartars.

I wish that I could offer thee my hand,

But I'm betrothed to a fine lass o' my people;

Her name is Doliz, and I love her dearly.

ETTY: 'Tis well, for I have lost my appetite

For t'other sex. But I am greatly honoured.

GINFIZ: I understand, after thy sore ordeal.

But come, let's quit this fortress and its dead,

And talk of merrier things upon the way.

(Enter one of SHOBIZ'S MEN, bearing a Sack, and followed by GENERAL DUBIO.)

MAN: We found this old man in another cell.

FELIX: 'Tis Dubio! Well met, my general!

DUBIO: Well met, my prince! I have grieved much o'er ye.

FELIX: No time for grief, for we are free again.

MAN: All ye, draw nigh and look within this sack.

GROBAG: Nay, it is mine: take thy vile hands off it!

MAN: What shall we do with th' dirty bugger?

SHOBIZ: Kill him.

(The MAN breaks GROBAG's Neck, then holds the Sack open. It is full of vast Jewels.)

FELIX: Why, 'tis enough to pay the national debt!

A soldier told us he was on the take:

He stole the gold sent him to make new coins

And issued coins of brass to th' poor people.

It was a righteous act to wring his neck.

SHOBIZ: Dost thou desire these trinkets? They are thine.

FELIX: Nay, let us share them out among us all:

'Tis only fair that all should gain by this.

SHOBIZ: Nay, we are Mongols, we've no use for wealth:

We value it as nothing, next our freedom

To ride the steppes upon our shaggy steeds.

Also, thy Tilda told us of thy kingdom,

How e'en the king and queen did scrimp and save,

And how he sold his royal crown to buy thee.

FELIX: O my good father! I am not surprised

To find his crown too light to pay my ransom:

Long since the jewels were all replaced with glass.

SHOBIZ: But these are real; and, Felix, they are thine:

Go and restore thy realm to fiscal health.

FELIX: I thank thee, Shobiz, for thy shining goodness.

Our people shall be friends of thine for ever,

If e'er they meet, which is not very likely.

SHOBIZ: O, I may raise a horde in a few years;

But if I do, I'll halt it at thy border,

And we shall have a laugh about old times.

Come, let's to horse before the watch doth come.

FELIX: Aye, we have killed enough men for today:

'Tis time for liberty, and mirth, and love.

Sweet Tilda, we have missed our magic kiss,

But we shall have another, and another,

And yet some more, and never tire of them.

TILDA: Felix, my prince, how I have longed for thee!

(They embrace. All cheer. Exeunt Omnes, with FELIX and TILDA Hand in Hand.)

SCENE 6

The Throne Room in the Royal Palace at Purdonium. Enter KING VUSILLUS, QUEEN VULPECULA, PRINCE VISCUS and PRINCESS SHEBA.

VULPECULA: I've tried the scrying glass another time:

Nothing. I think the wretched thing is broken.

'Twould cost a sorry sum to have it mended;

O that I'd bought th' extended warranty!

At least my ring is bright: Felix is well.

Indeed, it brightens with each passing day.

VISCUS: And how canst thou be sure 'tis on his finger?

Mayhap it is on that o' a healthy thief.

VULPECULA: Viscus, how canst thou say such dreadful things?

VUSILLUS: Be silent, son, and do not taunt thy mother.

SHEBA: How do we know that anything we saw

I' th' scrying glass was true?

VULPECULA: We do not know.

But I am sure my son is still at life:

I am his mother, and I am a witch:

How could I fail to feel it in my bones?

VUSILLUS: Hark to your mother: never give up hope.

(Enter a HERALD in Haste. followed by COURTIERS.)

HERALD: I bring glad tidings to your majesty:

The prince is home! He's past the harbour bar

In a Venetian carrack: folk do say

That he hath wrought havoc among the Tartars

And seized the jewels from their treasury.

VULPECULA: Felix is safe! O happiest of days!

O, how my heart is eased by thy glad news.

VUSILLUS: And he's a hero, if the tale be sooth.

Come to mine arms, my queen, my dear old cheese!

(They embrace.)

And is our Tilda with him, and little Etty?

HERALD: Ay, sire, they stood beside him on the deck.

A sailor came ashore i' th' jolly boat

And said his highness had slain seven Tartars

And two Circassian pirates, but that Tilda

Had beaten him: she scored ten and a half.

VUSILLUS: How could a person slaughter half a Tartar?

HERALD: Etty accounted for the other half:

They blew five Tartars up with a great cannon.

Etty slew four beside, wi' a yataghan,
 And Tilda eight within the Tartar tower.
 VUSILLUS: Ha, that's my girls: I knew they would do well.
 VULPECULA: Call'st thou that well? I know not what to think,
 Tallying corpses like shot partridges.
 But O, my heart is glad!
 VUSILLUS: And my heart too.
 (To the HERALD) Go, summon Hob and Jess without delay.
 (Exit HERALD.)
 VISCUS (aside, to SHEBA): I'll not believe a single word of it:
 Our feeble brother with his moping ways
 Mammocking Tartars? Pull the other one.
 SHEBA: But if 'tis true, he'll be unbearable.
 (A Sennet. Enter PRINCE FELIX, TILDA and ETTY.)
 VULPECULA: Felix!
 FELIX: Mother! Father!
 VUSILLUS: My dearest son!
 (They embrace.)
 FELIX: I feared I'd never see ye twain again
 In all those months of dull captivity.
 'Twas not my doing that I did escape:
 Tilda and Etty have wrought miracles,
 Finding me in a tower by th' Euxine sea,
 Rescuing me at th' head o' a Mongol horde,
 And tearing Tartars into little bits.
 I owe my life to them.
 VULPECULA: O valiant girls,
 Ye saved my son for me!
 VUSILLUS: Tilda and Etty:
 We have heard tell of all your doughty deeds.
 I and my queen, and all the land o' Uraemia
 Stand in your debt. How then shall we repay ye?
 To make ye duchesses is no great matter,
 And gifts of lands are easy for us kings;
 But what ye did outstrips these little trinkets.
 Say what is in your heart, and ye shall have it.
 TILDA: Your majesty, the honour is too much.
 And yet I ask ... Alack, how can I say it?
 It is too much for a poor peasant girl.
 FELIX: I'll say it for thee. Father, may I wed Tilda?
 We love each other more than life itself.
 VUSILLUS: Indeed thou may'st, and that with all my heart.
 VULPECULA: And with my blessing and my mother's love.
 (FELIX and TILDA embrace.)
 TILDA: O Felix! Shall I be a real princess?
 FELIX: Of course thou shalt, in a great golden coach.
 VUSILLUS: Steady on with the gold, my dearest boy.
 We spent our last sol on that futile war;
 And even pawned the crown to pay thy ransom.
 FELIX: Thou sold thy crown to save me? O my father!
 VUSILLUS: 'Twas naught, the gems were glass. In any case,

Sir Percy of Malpractice stole the money.

TILDA: Sir Percy! Ah, the cur!

VULPECULA: I've dealt with him.

Let's turn to merrier things, weddings for instance.

FELIX: A moment, mother. Come, Tilda and ETTY.

(ETTY brings forward a Sack. She stands beside TILDA and FELIX.)

FELIX: We found these in the tower. From all of us,

And from the Mongol horde, our noble allies,

Here is a present for Uraemia.

(ETTY opens the Sack, and all gasp at the Jewels it contains.)

VUSILLUS: Why, it would buy our country three times over!

My son, dear girls, I know not what to say.

We shall devote it to the public good,

But I am sure the public would forgive us

If we dispensed a little on thy wedding.

VULPECULA: I'm sure they would. And maybe we could stop

Living on radishes from th' kitchen garden.

(Enter HOB and JESS.)

JESS: My daughter, be it thou, my little lass?

O how I missed thee!

HOB: Welcome home, my Tilda!

(They embrace.)

TILDA: O mother, father! We are safe returned,

And dearest Felix says he'll marry me,

I am the happiest girl in all the world.

HOB: My lass, be thou run mad from all that sun?

FELIX: Nay, it is true. Pray, may I have your Tilda,

To be my princess and beloved wife?

HOB: Well, stap me vitals. Yes, of course ye can,

Yer royal highness.

FELIX: Pray you, call me son.

JESS: Cripes, we've a royal king for pa-in-law,

What shall we do? I've not a thing to wear.

TILDA: Dear mother, I shall sew thee such a dress

As shall make thee the envy of the court.

And fret ye not about royal dignity.

In all my travels I have learnt this lesson:

The worth of men depends not on their rank,

A ploughboy may be nobler than a king.

Loyalty, love and friendship count for more

Than all the trappings of an emperor.

VUSILLUS: Tilda, thou hast thy wish: my dear son's hand,

To be a princess, aye, and queen thereafter.

But ETTY, we have not yet heard from thee.

Titles and lands are thine, thou needst but say.

ETTY: I thank you for your generosity.

Riches and vast estates I will decline,

If it offend you not; I was not born

To be a noble. Pray you, majesty,

Let me remain at court among my friends.

Tilda, my faithful friend, gave me a gift

Surpassing even diamonds in its worth,
When she did teach me how to read and write.
I read of the adventures of great kings
And valiant knights, and never once did think
That I should witness them with mine own eyes,
And even take a part in them myself.
Now, with your leave, I'll write all in a book,
In verse – I have forgot how to speak prose.
VUSILLUS: Etty, it shall be done. I do appoint thee
The poet laureate to th' court of Uraemia.
But I shall not require thee to write odes,
Except, mayhap, upon a royal birth.
ETTY: Thank you, your majesty. My work shall tell
Of all our doings, faithfully recorded;
Titled: Tilda – or Fortitude Rewarded.
(Music. Exeunt Omnes.)

THE END