

LYSE: A story of love...
 Very well,
 Once there was an orphan;
 His father had banished him;
 He was very poor;
 His lover was wealthy, and she had a maid.

ISABELLE: And through a strange twist of fortune,
 The ladies changed places,
 And the poor, poor orphan married the one with no
 money....

LYSE: And the poor, poor maid became very, very rich....

(As they exit, LYSE removes her cloak; she is dressed beautifully. ISABELLE opens her cloak; she is dressed plainly. They laugh, hold hands, and face CLINDOR, who is first bewildered, then dismayed; then he goes to ISABELLE and kisses her. CLINDOR and ISABELLE exit. LYSE is stunned and then runs after them as she hears the voice of GERONTE.)

GERONTE: Come back! Come back! I banish you forever!
 Forver! Forever! Return to me! My gold!
 My child! My gold! My child! My gold!
 Mine! Mine! All mine! All mine!

(The scene fades to black.)

PRIDAMANT: Thank God that's over. I can breathe again.
 Light? Hello?

(Again, the light on THE AMANUENSIS, who is ticking and tocking.)

PRIDAMANT: Yes, yes, I know, time's passing. No need
 for the reminder. *(Recognizes him)* Ah! It was you! Her
 father, heartless old Geronte, it was you! That was
 amazing, you...incarnated him, you did, I've known
 tight old bastards just like that, I found myself
 despising you.... Tell me about it, crossing over.
 Is it as bad as the old charlatan says it is?

Begin

AMANUENSIS: It's worse. He doesn't know. He's never
 been.

PRIDAMANT: He said he had.

AMANUENSIS: He lies.

PRIDAMANT: I thought as much. If you want to get the
 dirt on someone, make small talk with their servants.
 You probably never had your tongue cut out or your
 eardrums pierced, either....

AMANUENSIS: *(Hissing, furious, and very fast, as though
 pursued)* I did! I do! With a heated razor and bronze
 needles. You can't imagine what a fiend he really is.
 How I have to throw myself, again and again when he
 orders me to, into other lives, full of pain and twisted
 passion, how many demons are handed me in little
 bottles with the order, "Swallow this and be
 possessed!" While baby-fat men like you sit watching,
 devouring like pigs the agony I produce! Leech men,
 vampires, you smile, you're sated, you think blood
 won't call for blood, the crimes you commit are all
 shellacked, clean, and beautiful, while your refuse
 and sewage runs through me like a.... *(He stops in
 midsentence; his tongue is gone. He puts his hands over
 his ears; they're deaf.)* *end*

ALCANDRE: Has my servant been amusing? What did
 he say to you?

PRIDAMANT: I've no idea. He seemed upset about
 something.

ALCANDRE: Ah, well, he usually is—it's this back-and-
 forth business, it wears on the nerves. The last vision
 is ready.

PRIDAMANT: Proceed. The married life of Clindor
 my son, and Isabelle his wife. I wonder if I have
 grandchildren.

LYSE: More than remember: I'll worship you,
My patron saint; you catechize me:
To withdraw my poor heart from the lion's den,
To leave the blood sport of love to my betters.
Want, yes; but want less.
I see a way to a golden means,
By which I am revenged but nobody dies....
I have preparations to make
For an earthbound journey. And yet I will rise
Sky-high, even higher
Than if I followed this man to the moon. (*Exits*)

PRIDAMANT: Narrow the vision, this isn't what I've paid
for, you digress and I want to see Clindor, find out how
he's doing—I've visited prisons often enough, they're
terrible places, he's probably wretched. Show me that.

(ISABELLE *appears, kneeling. Behind her, THE
AMANUENSIS, dressed as GERONTE.*)

PRIDAMANT: No, no, not the girl, I...

ALCANDRE: Soon, your son, but
First this:
A handsome young woman,
At twilight prayers,
Watched over by her father—

PRIDAMANT: Her father! At last, the father arrives. And
now her entreaties will move him to free poor Clindor,
and he'll bring it all to a pleasant resolution.

(*The hawk's cry is heard again.*)

ALCANDRE: Beyond the window, a hawk, as it flies,
Traces in the skies
The jagged edges
Of her broken heart.

ISABELLE: Father, hear me...

GERONTE: Get off your knees.

ISABELLE: If you'll listen, I'll rise.

GERONTE: I cannot hear. I'm deaf as a stone.

ISABELLE: When I was a child, and sick,
My mother used to keep vigil by my bed
All night long.

GERONTE: Yes she did, I remember that. I resented you
for it,
Her preoccupation. You always were a troublesome
child.

ISABELLE: I'm keeping a vigil
For his deliverance; hear my prayer...

GERONTE: **It's very odd; you look like me;**
There's a distinct family resemblance, and yet
I can't seem to place you. At times you call to mind
A daughter I once had, sprung from the same
Flinty soil as I, made of fine, tight-woven stuff—
The goblins, I think, stole her away one wild night
And left a changeling in her place, a simpering,
Weeping girl, who throws herself at serving-men,
Whose tears are selective, reserved for paupers,
For little ragtag orphan boys....
But she's got no grief to spare, oh no,
For the grotesque murder of a noble young man
Who loved her dearly,
For whose destruction she is not, I'm ashamed to say,
Entirely free of guilt.

ISABELLE: Punish me, then, let me die in Clindor's place.

GERONTE: Oh, you'd like that. Whore and martyr, now
there's distinction.

ISABELLE: I am your daughter; if you love me at all....

GERONTE: Love, love, what does love mean?
Nothing! Anything can be called love,
Any ugly emotion—Love, that illusion,

That hydra-headed gargoyle into whose foul maw
 Everyone tumbles, giddily, each
 With the same insipid look
 Of sheeplike expectation.
 Love, that sarcophagus,
 Love, that disease,
 That demonic, black misery,
 That catastrophe, love—do I love you?
 Oh, yes. My daughter. Oh, yes I do,
 But not like your pauper does, tender and moist,
 Not with sweet, wet kisses
 Tasting faintly of decay....
 I love you, Isabelle,
 With a heart of ice, drained and dry,
 Bred of denial, restraint, and control,
 A love whose flesh has been boiled off —
 A clean cold hard white bonelike love.
 I am the law. Come shiver in my arms.
 No? You prefer, of course, your paramour,
 His lawless extravagance, his oily heat.

ISABELLE: I'll show you, Father,
 How true a daughter of yours I am;
 I will become a deadly adversary;
 A coiled viper as venomous as you.
 I'll give you a hundred hidden reasons to fear me....

GERONTE: Be careful how you threaten:

My patience has its limits. — *end*

ISABELLE: Your worst threats hold no terror;
 I'd rather you cut my throat
 Than kiss my forehead, rather feel
 The point of your knife
 Than the touch of your hand.

GERONTE: Ludicrous bravado and wasted breath—
 Here, my pampered patricide, here:
 (He throws his dagger at her feet.)
 Murder your father, astonish him,

Show him he was wrong to think you
 Feckless, inconstant, weak-willed, and flighty....
 (He waits for ISABELLE to pick up the knife.)
 Before his blood's dried on the chopping-block, Isabelle,
 You'll have found someone new to amuse yourself....

ISABELLE: Father. Hear me, hear what I pray.
 Tomorrow when my lover dies
 The world will see your hate triumphant,
 A victory of arrant hatred, rank, and wealth,
 Of sterile men and faceless law;
 I congratulate you for this.
 But, Father, please know,
 The arm that raises the axe tomorrow
 Is your arm; the neck on which it falls—
 Not Clindor's neck, but mine.
 When Clindor dies, I die.
 In Paradise we'll be together;
 And if you ever loved me,
 And my dying brings you grief,
 Know, Father, that I mock your sorrow,
 That your tears and anguish will bring me
 Joy. While you still live, the ghost of me will breathe
 An icy cemetery wind through your bones every day,
 And in the dark you'll hear me walking about, looking
 for you.
 Every day and every night;
 You'll weep with relief when your last day dawns,
 And till you die, I promise, you will envy me my death.

GERONTE: So be it. My daughter. My only child.
 His sentence holds. It is the law. When the sun appears,
 He dies. (Exits)

PRIDAMANT: It's abominable, isn't it, the way some
 people treat their children?

LYSE: (Entering) What are you doing there
 Down on your knees?