

So I'm helping out; and why should I care?
I find him attractive; and intrigue is fun,
And a surrogate love affair's better than none.

(MELIBEA enters.)

MELIBEA: Who are you talking to, Elicia?
I thought I warned you to keep the door shut.

ELICIA: There's a gentleman, ma'am.
He's lying out here. On the ground,
Writhing and flailing in some kind of mortal agony,
Making terrible, terrible sounds.

MELIBEA: Oh, let me see. (*She looks.*)
There's no one here.

ELICIA: He's disappeared.

MELIBEA: Maybe he got better and went away.
Or maybe he crawled into a bush to die. We could
start beating the bushes, I suppose.

ELICIA: Spare the poor bushes. Wherever he's crawled,
we'll hear him moaning. He moaned very strangely,
the poor, poor man.

MELIBEA: Strangely?

ELICIA: Yes. Each moan sounded like someone's name.
Yours, in fact. Just like this:

"MMMMMMMelib-b-b-eeeeaaaahh!"
"MMMMMMMelib-b-b-eeeeeeeeaaaahhh!"

MELIBEA: Oh! Oh! Calisto! It was Calisto! He's found
yet another way to make a spectacle of himself! Another
way to drag my name through the mud! Calisto! That
troll! That fountain of dreadful metaphors! (*She kneels.*)
Please, Holy Father, please, Blessed Mother of God,
what crime did I commit that you should send this
demon to torture me? Make him go away! He frightens
me! I hate him! I hate him! I hate him, I hate him, I hate
him!

CALISTO: (*To ELICIA, from the bush*) It's going very well.
Congratulations. *Beji*

ELICIA: (*To CALISTO*) Back in the bush. I'm not done yet.
(*To MELIBEA*) I know just what you mean, ma'am. The
minute I saw him I said to myself, "I hate that man".
For one thing, he's so ugly.

MELIBEA: Isn't he?

ELICIA: Remarkably ugly. Warty like a squash. Greasy.
Fat. The ugliest man I ever saw.

MELIBEA: Well, not so ugly as that, but...

ELICIA: Ugly enough. And incredibly stupid!

MELIBEA: Stupid?

ELICIA: A veritable clod of earth; an ox could outsmart
him.

MELIBEA: I thought he spoke well.

ELICIA: Sure, if you like hearing gibberish.

MELIBEA: It wasn't all gibberish.

ELICIA: Oh, please, ma'am, your natural generosity
carries you away.

MELIBEA: I am not naturally generous; it's just that he....

ELICIA: All that hot air! (*Imitating CALISTO*) "Melibea!
So fair! Radiant! Divine! Beautiful Melibea! Little star
of the dawn!"

MELIBEA: Actually I liked the part about the little star of
the dawn.

ELICIA: You're far too sensible to fall for that stuff.
I mean obviously you aren't worthy of such intense,
passionate adoration.

MELIBEA: What do you mean by that?

ELICIA: Well, it's obvious.

MELIBEA: Oh, really?

ELICIA: I mean, you're perfectly nice and all, but you're not exactly the little star of the dawn.

MELIBEA: Well, he thought I am.

ELICIA: But he's a troll.

MELIBEA: No! I mean, yes, but...

ELICIA: But?

MELIBEA: But...

ELICIA: But there are worse things than trolls.

MELIBEA: Many worse things.

ELICIA: Trolls are...well, unusual!

MELIBEA: They are! And sweet.

ELICIA: Sweet, yes, maybe a little.

MELIBEA: Who? Calisto?

ELICIA: Maybe a little?

MELIBEA: Maybe...

ELICIA: A little?

MELIBEA: A little. Yes.

ELICIA: And he'd probably be better behaved and sweeter still if it weren't for that toothache.

MELIBEA: Toothache? He has a toothache?

ELICIA: Oh, yes, didn't you know, a horrible toothache, for eight days running.

MELIBEA: Oh, how dreadful. There's nothing worse than a toothache.

ELICIA: Nothing. His manservant tells me...

MELIBEA: Yes?

ELICIA: That to ease his terrible pain...

MELIBEA: The toothache...

ELICIA: The toothache.

MELIBEA: Yes?

ELICIA: He sings.

MELIBEA: Oh...

ELICIA: And plays the lute...

MELIBEA: I love the lute.

ELICIA: And that the countryside for miles around
Grows peaceful with the bright response of birds,
And, playing and singing, handsome as a god,
He isn't even Calisto anymore.
He is like Orpheus.

MELIBEA: He is Orpheus! And I am his Euridyce!
Rescue me from hell!

ELICIA: Pardon?

MELIBEA: I said I don't feel well. I'm going to my room.

ELICIA: If I see him again, maybe I could give him your handkerchief.

MELIBEA: My handkerchief?

ELICIA: He could use it to wipe his fevered brow. Or I could wipe it for him.

MELIBEA: DON'T YOU DARE! I mean, let him wipe his own brow. I mean, here.... *(Giving her the handkerchief)*
I have to go to my room, I can't breathe.... *(She exits.)*

CALISTO: *(Entering from the bush)* It's strange.

ELICIA: Very strange...I did better than I expected.
I nearly convinced myself.

CALISTO: It's destiny.
(Taking the handkerchief)
I'm the child of fortune, Elicia;

(HIPPOLYTA and CLARINA appear.)

CLARINA: This is an endless walk, Hippolyta. It's taken half the day.

HIPPOLYTA: I need the exercise and air, Clarina; this grove is
A popular place. There's the Palace of Prince
Florilame....

PRIDAMANT: I see they've changed the names again.
This time I won't let it upset me. It's pleasant to see
they've become friends. I had a maid once came into
some money; she packed and left without so much as a
thank-you-goodbye.

CLARINA: The Prince is away, at sea.

HIPPOLYTA: He's at sea and so am I.
While he's off with his cargo and his ships,
My equally enterprising spouse has been plying
The Prince's wife with merchandise of his own,
Offering her his inimitable protestations of love,
Which she buys wholesale, eager customer that she is.
This forest is their trading post;
They meet here every day and barter.
I'll walk until that merchant of adultery comes
And then...we'll haggle over prices.
Now you know why I'm here. Keep silent.

CLARINA: I can't. It's you who should keep silent.
Do you think your anger will alter him?
He's had a dozen affairs, and he'll have more,
The more you show him how you're hurt
The more he'll seek them out.

HIPPOLYTA: No, that can't be true.
There must be at least some little soul in him,
Some kernel of human shame he hasn't killed.

CLARINA: I think there was once. He got older.
None of the changes have been for the better.

There's a gradual wearing-down of things.
Accept it. Spare yourself this humiliation.

HIPPOLYTA: Humiliation's all I have, Clarina. I revel in
it.

CLARINA: You do. The two of you quarrel until you're
both hoarse;
You may not have a life together, but this dragon duet
Is only a way of driving each other mad.

HIPPOLYTA: We'll both rave, then. At least I won't be
alone.

CLARINA: Well, here he comes to keep you company.

HIPPOLYTA: Does he see me? He does. I can't....
Talk to him, please, tell him...

CLARINA: No, this game's best played, I think,
By two, not three, a thing I realized
Years ago. I leave you to your torture;
I've lost my appetite for injury
Through watching how you mull it over.
I'd rather live alone, and so should you,
But you, my poor, poor friend,
Like a beggar, linger outside the almshouse,
Waiting for either a kick or a coin.
Long ago this orphan lost his charm for me,
And I can't bear to watch the way
You beg for the wounds he inflicts.

(CLARINA and HIPPOLYTA run upstage to different corners.
THEOGENES enters.)

THEOGENES: Rosine, my own adored, *- Begin*
There's little time for pranks and teasing;
Our tryst today will have to be quick.
My wife's asleep, but she'll expect me home....

HIPPOLYTA: (*Turning around*) She knows where to
expect you, Theogenes.

And she's wide awake, though
She seems to be having a very bad dream.

THEOGENES: Oh, God...

HIPPOLYTA: In all the worst moments of your life
You make that little gesture and say
"Oh, God..." You are the filthiest liar
I've ever met; you can't possibly believe
That God would ever listen to you.

THEOGENES: You're mistaken, Hippolyta, I...

HIPPOLYTA: I was mistaken once; I remember the day,
Though you, I'm sure, don't.
You said you loved me.

I believed you.

I've become wiser,

And now I'm so rarely mistaken

I want to kill myself.

I gave up all the comforts of my father's house

To flee into poverty with you, a common soldier,

Incurred his wrath and broke his heart

And all for what? To stand here trading broken hearts

And tawdry lies with you? If you cannot love me,

Why did you abduct me? And if you will not love me,

And me alone, return me to my father. I'd rather bear

His gloating and contempt and live alone and without love

Than drink this foul-tasting gall of yours. *-end*

THEOGENES: You know as well as I your father's doors
are barred,

You know his flinty heart won't melt,

Or else you'd have returned a hundred times before,

If your threats mean anything at all.

Go! Live on his doorstep! He may relent, although

If he's a whit like his child, he won't.

Like her he has no talent for forgiveness.

HIPPOLYTA: Forgiveness is for people who
Admit that they've transgressed.

How can I forgive you when you swear
You're guilty of nothing at all?

PRIDAMANT: Oh, this isn't at all how it should be!
They're wrangling like fish peddlers! Surely after all
they've been through they've become more elevated
and ennobled!

ALCANDRE: They seem instead to have gotten rather
tarnished in the process.

PRIDAMANT: Well, I don't like this dissolution. That first
vision was the best by far. I'll see if I can remember that
and forget the rest of it.

ALCANDRE: Considering what they'll cost, I can't
believe you won't try to retain them all....

PRIDAMANT: I came to you to launder the fabric of my
recollected life.

You haven't lived up to your promises.

ALCANDRE: I gave you back your son.

THEOGENES: And what have I done? Abducted you?

I abducted you? That's a lie; you know, Hippolyta,

You came willingly enough; your desire for me

Made you accomplice if not mastermind

Of your abduction; you're no victim.

I learned the art of murder for your sake,

And for your sake, I honed my skills

And built a bloody fortune up in service to the prince

To compensate you for your loss of wealth.

HIPPOLYTA: And the prince has amply rewarded your
bloody deeds,

And you, in gratitude, no doubt,

Have rendered service to his wife, and she,

Displaying the same fine fealty to the prince

As you her paramour have shown, accepts your