

# **Titus Andronicus**

**by William Shakespeare**

Presented by Paul W. Collins

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## Chapter One

### Dominant in Dominion

Rome, after enduring a long war with the Goths, now suffers internal turmoil: the emperor—by tradition known as “Caesar”—has died, and his sons, each with a following of armed supporters, both seek to be named his successor by the Senate.

On the city’s highest hill, the wealthy, powerful senators and the tribunes who represent commoners have met at the marble-columned Capitol entrance this afternoon. They stand at the top of the wide steps to hear the brothers’ arguments—from behind high iron gates, now closed and guarded.

Saturninus, a coarse man of forty-one, glares up at the lawmakers. He is the elder of the sons, and has come here angrily, intending to seize control of the country by threat of force. “Noble patricians, patrons of *my right*, I *defend* the justice of my cause with *arms!*” He turns to his companions. “And countrymen, my loving followers, plead *my* successive title with your *swords!*”

“I am his *first*-born son that was the last who wore the imperial diadem of Rome; then let my father’s honours live in *me*—do not wrong mine age with this *indignity!*”

In the listening crowd, some citizens back away when the men with him, thumping their shields and pounding heavy spear-shafts on the stone pavement, voice encouragement—ominously.

By law, though, the Senate elects the republic’s ruler. Bassianus, a tall man of thirty-two, has brought his own supporters here to counter his disreputable brother’s demand.

“Romans, friends, followers, favorers of *my right*,” he cries, “if ever Bassianus, *Caesar’s* son, were gracious in the eyes of royal Rome, *hold thou this passage to the Capitol!*—and suffer not *dishonour* to approach the imperial seat—consecrated to *virtue!*—to *justice, continence* and *nobility!*”

“But let *deserving* in pure election shine!—and, Romans, fight for *freedom* in your choice!”

Above, the senators make way for one of the tribunes, coming from within the building; he brings the crown. Marcus Andronicus, a stately man of fifty, holds it aloft as he addresses the emperor’s sons.

“Princes, who strive by factions and by friends ambitiously for rule and empery, know that the *people* of Rome, for whom we stand as a special party, have, by common voice, in election for the Roman empery, chosen *Andronicus!*—surnamed ‘Pious’ for many good and great services to Rome!”

The people’s candidate is Titus Andronicus, sixty-six, Rome’s general commander of the army. He is also Marcus Andronicus’s older brother.

“A *nobler* man, a braver *warrior*, lives not this day within the city walls!” says Marcus. “He by the Senate is accited home from weary wars against the barbarous *Goths*—he that with his sons—a *terror* to our foes!—hath *yokèd* a nation strong, trained up in *arms!*”

“*Ten years* are spent since first he undertook this cause for Rome, and *chastised with arms* our enemies’ pride! *Five times* he hath returned, *bleeding*, to Rome, bearing his valiant sons in coffins from the field!”

“And now at last, laden with *honour’s* spoils, *returns* the good Andronicus to Rome—*renownèd Titus, flourishing in arms!*”

He faces the brothers. “Let us entreat, in honour of his name whom *worthily* you now would see succeeded in the Capitol,”—Caesar, “whom you profess to honour and adore, and *in the Senate’s right*, that you *withdraw you*, and abate your strength! *Dismiss* your followers,” he urges the emperor’s sons, “and, as suitors *should*, plead your deserving in peace and *humbleness!*”

Saturninus’s face shows his contempt. “How *fairly* the tribune speaks, *calming* my thoughts,” he says sourly. His men laugh.

But Bassianus tells the tribune, “Marcus Andronicus, I rely on thine uprightness and integrity; and so well do I love and honour thee and thine—thy noble brother *Titus* and his sons, and her to whom my thoughts are humbled, all-gracious *Lavinia*, Rome’s rich ornament,”—Bassianus is engaged to marry Titus’s daughter, twenty-two—“that I *will* here dismiss my loving friends, and to my fortunes and the people’s favor commit my cause in balance to be weighed.”

He speaks with his companions, and the young followers soon leave, heading down into the city.

Saturninus, sure that his imperious demand will prevail, turns to his supporters. “Friends that have been thus forward in my right, I thank you all, and here dismiss you all—and to the love and favor of my country commit myself, my person, and the cause.” His followers stamp away—grumbling.

Saturninus confronts the senators. “Rome, be as just and gracious unto *me* as I am confident—and *kind* to thee. Open the gates and let me in!”

“Tribunes, admit me, a poor competitor,” says Bassianus calmly.

The gates swing apart, and the brothers march up into the Capitol.

**I**n a shaded cemetery at the edge of the city, preparations have been made for a state funeral for Caesar. An elaborate wake is to follow, along with feasting in honor of the deceased sovereign.

Among the throng, which includes many senators, some have come here mainly in anticipation of the war hero’s arrival.

A flourish of trumpets is heard, and from the street a military officer comes through the gate, strides along a high stone wall, and stops near the dark opening into the massive tomb of the Andronici. “Romans, make way!” calls the captain to the many nobles, gentles and common citizens. “The good *Andronicus*—*pattern of virtue*, Rome’s best *champion*, *successful* in the battles that he fights!—with *honour* and with *fortune* is returned from where he *circumscribed with his sword!*—and brought to *yoke the enemies of Rome!*”

Accompanied by strident trumpets, then pounding drums, a procession comes slowly through the gate and into cemetery.

The proud general, riding a black stallion, leads several sullen prisoners. Walking, their hands bound, are Tamora, queen of the defeated Goths, her three sons, and her chief officer, Aaron, an Ethiopian. Soldiers guard the captives.

Martius and Mutius, the general’s younger sons, march in next; behind them are four foot-soldiers wheeling two carts, each bearing a black-draped coffin; following are Lucius and Quintus, Titus’s elder sons.

At the entrance to the crypt, Titus dismounts and steps forward to speak.

“*Hail*, Rome!—*victorious* in thy mourning attire! *Lo!*—as does the ship that hath discharged her freight return with *precious lading* to the bay from whence at first she weighed her anchor, now cometh Andronicus, bound with *laurel boughs*, to re-salute his country with his *tears*—tears of *true joy* for his return to *Rome!*”

The army’s commander can see that nearly the full Senate is gathered here. He invokes the city’s patron deity, Jupiter—supreme among the gods: “Thou, great defender of this capital, stand gracious to the rites that we intend!

“Romans, of my five-and-twenty valiant sons—half the number that King Priam”—Troy’s legendary patriarch—“had, behold the poor remains, alive and dead. These who *survive*, let Rome reward with *love*; these that I bring unto their last home, with burial amongst their ancestors.” Two of his sons, killed in recent fighting, lie in the coffins.

He adds, wryly, “Here, Goths have given me leave to sheathe my sword.” The defeated queen glares at the Romans, but her head is held high, even as the citizens stare.

The general chides himself: “Titus, unkind and careless of thine own, why suffer’st thou thy sons, yet unburièd, to hover on the dreadful shore of Styx? Make way to lay them by their

brethren.” Interment will free the two souls to cross the mythical river into the land of the dead. He tells his deceased sons, “There greet in *silence*, as the dead are wont; and sleep in *peace*, slain in your country’s wars.”

Titus steps back as soldiers lift the coffins, and he turns to the tomb. “O sacred receptacle of my joys, sweet cell of virtue and nobility, how many sons of mine hast thou storèd here, that thou wilt never render to me more?”

Lucius, Titus’s oldest son, calls for a ritual offering to the gods. “Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths, that we may hew his limbs, and on a pyre *ad manes fratrum*”—to our brothers’ spirits—“sacrifice his flesh, before this earthly prison of their bones, so that their shades be not unappeasèd, nor *we* disturbed by prodigies on earth!”—haunted.

Titus Andronicus points to Alarbus, who is twenty. “I give you *him*, the noblest that survives, the eldest son of this distressèd queen.”

Tamora, startled, cries out, “*Wait*, Roman brethren! Gracious *conqueror*, victorious *Titus*, *rue* the tears I shed!—a *mother’s* tears in passion for her son! And if *thy* sons were ever dear to thee, oh, think my son to be as dear to *me*!

“Sufficeth it not that *we* are brought to Rome, to beautify thy triumph and return, *captive* to thee and to thy Roman yoke?—but must my sons be slaughtered in the streets for *valiant* doings in their country’s cause? Oh, if to fight for *ruler and commonweal* were piety in *thine*, it is in *these*!

“Andronicus, *stain not thy tomb with blood!*

“Wilt thou draw near to the nature of the *gods*? Draw near them, then, in being *merciful*! Sweet mercy is *nobility’s* true badge! Thrice-noble Titus, *spare* my first-born son!”

Says Titus coldly, “Patient yourself, madam, and pardon me.” He regards his sons. “These are *brethren*, whom you Goths beheld alive and dead. And for brethren *slain*, these living ask, religiously, a sacrifice. For this your son is markèd—and die he must, to appease the groaning shadows of those who are gone.”

“*Away with him!*” commands Lucius, “and make a fire straight! With our swords let’s *hew* his *limbs*!—lay them upon a pyre of wood till they be consumèd clean!” The four brothers drag Alarbus, struggling futilely, behind the tomb.

Sobs Tamora, “Oh, *cruel, irreligious* piety!”

Her youngest son, Chiron, had shared the common belief that Romans disdain human sacrifice. “Was ever *Scythia* half so *barbarous*?” He gasps as they hear Alarbus’s echoing screams of pain and horror.

In the silence that follows, his brother Demetrius mutters with disgust, “Compare not *Scythia* to ambitious *Rome*! Alarbus goes to rest—but *we* survive to tremble under Titus’ threatening looks!

“Then, madam, stand *resolvèd*,” he tells his mother, “and hope withal the self-same gods that armed the Queen of Troy with opportunity for *sharp revenge* upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent may favor Tamora, Queen of the Goths—when Goths were *Goths* and Tamora was *queen*!—to *repay* among her foes their *bloody wrongs*!”

Lucius, Quintus, Martius and Mutius return, their swords and hands glistening with blood.

Says Lucius, raising his wet blade, “*See*, lord and father!—now we have performèd our Roman rites. Alarbus’ limbs are lopped, and his entrails *feed the sacrificing fire*!—whose smoke, like *incense*, doth *perfume the sky*!

“Nought remaineth but to inter our brethren, and with loud ’larums welcome them to Rome!”

Titus nods. “Let it be so; and let Andronicus make this, his last farewell to their souls.” Trumpets are sounded. “In *peace* and *honour* rest you here, my sons, Rome’s readiest champions. Repose you here at rest, secure from worldly chances and mishaps. *Here* lurks no treason; here no envy swells; here grow no damnèd grudges; here are no storms, no noise—only silence, and eternal sleep.

“In peace and honour rest you here, my sons.”

Lavinia comes before him. “*In peace and honour* live Lord Titus *long!*—my noble lord and father, *live in fame!*”

“*Lo*, at this tomb my tributary tears I render for my brethren’s obsequies; and at thy feet I kneel, with tears of *joy*, shed on the earth, for thy *return to Rome!* Oh, bless me here with thy victorious hand, whose fortunes Rome’s best citizens applaud!”

Titus Andronicus beams, taking her hand as she rises. “*Kind* Rome, that hast thus lovingly preservèd the cordial of mine age to gladden my heart! *Lavinia*, live!—outlive thy father’s days and Fame’s eternal date, for *Virtue’s* praise!”

The gentlewoman has upheld the family’s fierce dignity, and its pride in the Andronicus name, during the soldiers’ absence; she hopes that, with Prince Bassianus, she can foster a thriving civil society, through reason, rectitude, and the careful administration of justice.

With the other two tribunes, Marcus Andronicus has come to the mausoleum. “*Long* live Lord Titus, my belovèd brother, gracious triumpher, *in the sight of Rome!*”

“Thanks, gentle tribune, noble brother Marcus!” says the general, smiling.

Marcus greets Titus’s sons: “*And welcome*, nephews, from successful wars!—you that survive, and you that sleep in fame. Fair lords, your fortunes are alike: you all drew your swords *in your country’s service.*”

He touches a bier. “*But find safer* triumphs now, in this funeral pomp, you that hath aspirèd to Solon’s happiness,”—wise acceptance, “*and triumph over Chance*, in Honour’s bed,” he says solemnly.

At Titus’s nod, the soldiers carry the coffins into the tomb; they return, and its iron gates are closed.

Marcus now addresses his brother. “Titus Andronicus, the *people* of Rome, whose friend in *justice* thou hast ever been, send thee, by me, their *tribune* in their trust, this palliament of white and spotless hue,”—he offers a long coat, “*and name thee* in election for the empyr, with these our late-deceasèd emperor’s sons!”

Saturninus and Bassianus, each with his own attendants and cordon of guards, stand watching the Andronici—and each other. The older brother, who strongly resents this intrusion during the funeral of the man whose dignity he means to inherit, is now increasingly perturbed by a further challenge.

Marcus tells his brother, “*Be candidatus* then, and put it on—and help to set a head on headless Rome!”

The graying general demurs. “*A better* head her glorious body fits than his that shakes for *age* and *feebleness!* What?—should I don this robe, and trouble you—be chosen with *proclamations?*—today resign my life, and set abroad on new business for you all—then yield up rule *tomorrow?*”

“Rome, I have been thy soldier *forty years*, and led my country’s strength successfully—and burièd *one-and-twenty valiant sons*—knighted *in the field*, slain manfully *in arms*, in right and noble *service of their country*. Give me a staff of honour for mine age, but not a *sceptre* to control the world! Upright *he* held it, lords, who held it last!” he cries, in a loyal tribute to the dead emperor.

But Marcus urges his brother to stand for election: “Titus, thou *shalt* ask—and *obtain* the empyr!”

Saturninus is irked by his assurance. Glaring at Marcus, he challenges: “*Proud* and *ambitious* tribune!—canst thou *foretell?*”

Titus smiles at him. “Patience, Prince Saturninus,—”

“*Romans, do me right!*” cries that prince, red-faced, to his followers. “*Patricians, draw your swords!*—and sheathe them not till *Saturninus* be Rome’s *emperor!*”

“Andronicus,” he growls, “I would thou wert *shipped to hell*, rather than rob me of the people’s hearts!”

Lucius is indignant: “Proud *Saturnine!*—interrupter of the *good* that noble-minded Titus means to thee!”

“*Content* thee, prince!” pleads Titus; he is deeply respectful of rank and hereditary authority. “I will *restore* to thee the people’s hearts, and wean them from themselves,” he assures the blusterer.

But now Bassianus steps forward. “Andronicus, I do not *flatter* thee, but *honour* thee, and will do so till I die! If thou strengthen *my* faction with thy friends, I will most thankful be—and *thanks*, to men of *noble* minds, is honourable meed.”

Titus lifts his hands before the adoring crowd. “*People* of Rome—and people’s *tribunes* here—I ask your *voices* and your *suffrages*. Will you bestow them friendly for Andronicus?”

The tribunes look around at the cheering citizens, then at each other, and nod agreement. “To gratify the good Andronicus, and gratulate his safe return to Rome,” says the oldest, “the people will accept whom *he* admits.”

Titus nods. “Tribunes, I thank you! Then this request I make: that you create”—elect by acclamation—“the emperor’s elder son, *Saturninus*, your lord!—whose virtues will, I hope, reflect on Rome as Titan’s rays do on earth, and ripen justice in this commonweal!

“Then, if you will elect by *my* advice, *crown him!*—and say, ‘*Long live our emperor!*’”

Marcus proclaims it: “With voices and applause of *every* sort, patricians and plebeians, we create Lord Saturninus Rome’s great emperor!—and say, ‘*Long live our Emperor Saturninus!*’”

As the crowd shouts its approval, the trumpeters play an elaborate flourish.

Saturninus accedes with seeming grace; but he seethes at the old general’s temerity and presumption. “Titus Andronicus, for thy *favours* done to us in our election this day, I give thee thanks... in accord with thy *deserts*—and will with *deeds* requite thy gentleness.” His true meaning is dire. An underling family usurped his title merely to reject it; now the rightful heir has been *given* his *own*—power that he could, should, have *taken*.

He will be revenged—beginning now. “And, for an onset, Titus, to advance thy name and honourable family, *Lavinia* will I make my *empress*—Rome’s *royal* mistress, mistress of my heart!—and in the sacred Pantheon will her espouse!

“Tell me, Andronicus, doth this motion please thee?” He smirks, in bullying triumph, at Bassianus.

Says the dutiful general, “It *doth*, my worthy lord! And in this match I hold me highly *honoured* by Your Grace!” The gentleman sees it as the highest sign of favor: an ennobling alliance. “And here in sight of Rome, to Saturninus, emperor and commander of our commonweal—the wide *world’s* emperor!—do I consecrate my sword, my chariot, and my *prisoners*—presents well worthy Rome’s imperial lord!

“*Receive* them, then, as the tribute that I owe—*mine honour’s ensigns*, humbled at thy feet!”

Saturninus looks at the kneeling warrior, at Lavinia—who is clearly distressed, then at his own fuming brother, Bassianus. The emperor is calm—for now. “Thanks, noble Titus, father of *my life*,” he says, with deep sarcasm. “How proud I am of *thee*, and of thy *gifts*, Rome shall record,” he says—a thin smile masking his anger. He addresses the crowd: “And when I do forget the *least* of these... *unspeakable* deserts, Romans, forget your fealty *to me!*”

Titus goes to Tamora. “Now, madam, you are prisoner to an *emperor!*” He pulls her forward. “To him that, for your honour and your state, will use you and your followers nobly.”

Saturninus eyes the sultry beauty; her complexion has not been sheltered from the sun, and she is exotically tan; her arms are bare, wrists bound with leather. He stares intently. “A *goodly* lady, trust me—of the hue that I would choose, were I to choose anew!

“Clear up, fair queen, that cloudy countenance!” he says. “Though chance of war”—a deliberate diminution of Titus’s accomplishment—“hath wrought this change in cheer, thou comest not to be made a *scorn* in Rome. *Princely* shall be thy usage in every way! Rest on my word, and let not disconcert daunt all your hopes!”

Tamora, glad to be away from Titus Andronicus, looks up hopefully at the new ruler; she smiles, warmly, as their eyes meet.

“Madam,” says Saturninus, taking her hand, “he who comforts you can make you *greater* than the Queen of Goths!”

He notes with pleasure the pale countenance of his newly betrothed. “Lavinia, you are not *displeasèd* with this...?”

“Not I, my lord,” she claims, “sith *true nobility* warrants these words of princely *courtesy*.”

Saturninus is enjoying Tamora’s knowing look. “Thanks, sweet Lavinia,” he says, turning his back to her. “Romans, let us go!” he cries, elated. “*Ransomless* here, we set our prisoners free!” He, too, understands gesture; their easy release mocks Titus’s triumph.

He tells attendants, “Proclaim our honours, lords, with trumpet and drum!”

Martial music plays tribute to the new emperor, and the throng watches happily as the patrician lords congratulate each other and enjoy the celebration. The prisoners’ bonds are removed; the Goths and Ethiopian stand free.

Saturninus, dissolute and devoid of finesse, is speaking to Tamora—very closely. She smiles and nods; he slides an arm around her waist, and starts to lead her away.

Suddenly Bassianus steps forward and seizes Lavinia’s hand. “Lord Titus, by your leave,” he cries, “this maid is *mine!*”

Titus is taken aback. “*What*, sir?—are you in *earnest*, then, my lord?”

“*Aye*, noble Titus!—and withal *resolvèd*, myself to do this by *reason* and by *right!*”

Marcus Andronicus nods approval. “*Suum cuique*”—*unto each his own*—“is our Roman justice. This prince in justice seizeth but his own.”

Lucius, at thirty Titus’s eldest surviving son, also voices support: “And what he *would* do, that *shall*, if *Lucius* live!”

The affront to his new sovereign has stunned and appalled the aging, long-unchallenged general. “*Traitors, avaunt!*” he cries to his brother and eldest son. He looks around. “Where is the emperor’s *guard*? *Treason*, my lord!” he calls to Saturninus. “*Lavinia* is *seizèd!*”

Saturninus looks back. “*Seizèd?* By whom?”

Bassianus is defiant: “By him that *justly* may bear his *betrothèd* from all the world away!” Taking Lavinia by the arm, he hurries out to the street, accompanied by his tribune-uncle Marcus.

Titus’s sons know of the sordid reputation Saturninus has earned—and they have just witnessed his blatant disrespect for their beloved sister. “*Brothers*, help to convey her hence! *Away!*” cries Mutius, at sixteen, the youngest, “and with my sword I’ll keep this door safe!” After Lucius, Quintus and Martius have followed Marcus, he stands blocking the path.

Titus, sword drawn, heads toward the entrance. He tells his son, “Follow, my lord, and I’ll soon bring her back!”

“My lord, you pass not here!” says Mutius.

“*What?*—*villain boy!*” cries Titus, instantly enraged. “Barr’st *me* my way in *Rome?*” He stabs Mutius, who stares for a moment, wide-eyed in disbelief. Then, as Titus roughly jerks the blade free, he falls.

The boy moans. “*Help... Lucius!*” He gasps, and breathes another feeble “*help...*” And then he dies.

During the fray, Demetrius, Chiron and Aaron have clustered around Tamora; she stands near Saturninus, now protected by a phalanx of guards, as the crowd edges back from Titus.

Lucius, returning, halts at the entrance and looks down, aghast. He sees the bloody sword. “My lord, you are *unjust!*” he tells his father, “and *more* than so!—in *wrongful quarrel* you have *slain your son!*”

Titus is furious. “Not *thou* nor *he* is any son of *mine!* My sons would never *so dishonour me!* *Traitor*, restore Lavinia to the emperor!”

Lucius stares at him angrily. “*Dead*, if you will; but not to be his wife, she who is *another’s* lawful promised love!” He turns, and strides away.



As the general starts after him, Saturninus laughs harshly. “No, Titus, *no!*”

“The emperor needs her not!—neither *her*, nor *thee*, nor *any* of thy stock! I’ll trust, at leisure, him that mocks me, once; *thee*, *never!*—nor thy *traitorous*, *haughty sons!*—confederates all, thus to *dishonour* me!

“Was there none *else* in Rome to make a *stale*”—to insult—“but *Saturninus?*” he shouts angrily. “Full well, Andronicus, agree these deeds with that proud *brag* of thine, that said’st I begged the empire at thy hands!”

Titus Andronicus blinks, astonished; he has not said—nor ever thought—such a thing. “Oh, *monstrous!* What reproachful words are *these?*”

“But go thy ways,” Saturninus tells Lavinia’s father. “Go, *give* that *exchanging-piece* to him that flourishes for her with his sword! A *valiant* son-in-law thou shalt enjoy!—one *fit* to bandy with *thy lawless sons!*—to *ruffian* in the *commonwealth* of Rome!”

The loyal, doughty general staggers. “These words are *razors* to my *wounded heart!*”

“And therefore, lovely Tamora,” says Saturninus, pulling her closer to his side, “Queen of Goths—who like the stately Phoebe ’mongst her nymphs dost outshine the gallant’st dames of Rome!—if thou be pleased with this, my sudden choice, *behold:* I choose *thee*, Tamora, for my bride!—and will create thee *Empress of Rome!*”

Tamora, her cheeks still streaked by tears for Alarbus, again smiles—a slow, odd smile.

“*Speak*, Queen of Goths!” says Saturninus. “Dost thou applaud my choice?” But her eyes are fixed on Titus; she simply nods.

“And here I swear by *all* the Roman gods,” says the profane potentate, “sith priest and holy water are so near, and tapers burn so bright, and everything in readiness for *Hymenaeus* stands,”—suits a wedding, “I will not re-salute the streets of Rome, nor climb to my palace, till from forth this place I lead, *espousèd*, my *bride* along *with* me!”

Says Tamora, kneeling, “And here, in sight of heaven, to Rome I swear: if Saturninus advance the Queen of Goths, she will be a handmaiden to his *desires*, a loving nurse and mother to his *youth!*”

Saturninus is pleased. “*Ascend*, fair queen!” he tells the dusky damsel.

He addresses the patricians: “*Pantheon* of lords, accompany your noble emperor and his lovely bride, sent by the heavens for Prince Saturninus, whose *wisdom* hath her fortune conquerèd!”

He points to an area before the tables set out for the funeral repast. “There shall we consummate our spousal rites!”

The voracious nobles follow their new sovereign, eager to partake of the arrogated feast, and to carouse at his nuptials.

## Chapter Two Protestations of Love

Titus Andronicus, sword still dripping his son’s blood, watches as the emperor leaves. *I am not bid to wait upon this bride*, he notes morosely. *Titus, when wert thou wont to walk alone, dishonoured thus, and challengèd?*

He looks up as his brother returns, with Lucius, Quintus and Martius.

Marcus stares down at the boy’s body. “Oh, Titus, *see!*—oh, *see* what thou hast *done!*—in a bad quarrel slain a virtuous *son!*”

“*No*, foolish tribune, *no!*—no *son* of *mine!*” cries the warrior. His sword rises to point at the others. “Nor *thou*,” he tells Lucius, “nor *these*, confederated in the deed that hath dishonoured *all our family!* Unworthy brother and unworthy sons!”

Tears run down Lucius’s face as he kneels beside the corpse. “But let us give him burial as becomes Mutius, give burial with our brethren.”

“*Traitors, away!*” cries Titus. “He rests not in *this* tomb! *Five hundred years* hath this monument stood, which *I* have sumptuously re-edified! Here none but *soldiers* and Rome’s servitors repose in fame—none *basely slain in brawls!* Bury him where you can; he comes not here.”

“My lord, this is *impiety* in you!” says Marcus. “My nephew Mutius’ *deeds* do plead for him!—he must be buried with his brethren!”

“And *shall!*” cries Martius, “or him we will *accompany!*”

Titus steps toward them, blade forward. “And ‘*shall!*’—what villain was it that spake *that* word?”

Says Quintus, “He that would *vouch* it in any place but *here!*”—before the family’s tomb.

“What?—would you bury him in my despite?”

“No, noble Titus,” says his brother gently, “only *entreat* of thee to pardon Mutius, and to bury him.”

“Marcus, even *thou* hast struck upon my crest!—and, with these boys, mine honour thou hast *wounded!* My *foes* I do count you, every one! So trouble me no more, but get you gone!”

Martius turns away. “He is not with himself; let us withdraw.”

Quintus shakes his head. “Not *I*, till Mutius’ bones be buried!”

But Marcus kneels—and at his urging, Titus’s sons slowly join him. He looks up at the general. “*Brother*, for in that name doth *Nature* plead—”

“*Father*,” says Quintus, “and in *that* name doth *Nature speak*—”

Titus interrupts: “Speak thou *no more*; that all the rest will speed!”—saving time.

His brother tries again: “Renowned Titus, more than half my soul—”

“Dear Father,” says Lucius, “soul and substance of us all—”

“Suffer thy brother Marcus to inter his noble nephew here in Virtue’s nest—one who died in *honour*, and *Lavinia’s* cause.” The tribune knows how to move Titus, despite his glaring. “Thou art a *Roman*—be not barbarous! The Greeks, upon advisement, did bury Ajax, who slew himself; and wise Laertes’ son”—Ulysses, who had fought Ajax—“did graciously plead for his funeral. Let not young Mutius, then, who was thy joy, be barred his entrance here.”

After a moment, Titus sheathes his sword. “Rise, Marcus, rise,” he says wearily. “The dismall’st day is this that e’er I saw, to be *dishonoured* by my sons in *Rome!*”

“Well, bury him—and bury *me* the next.”

Titus waits outside the mausoleum, as Marcus and his nephews lift the body. In the crypt they kneel beside him. “There lie thy bones, sweet Mutius, with thy friends,” says Lucius, “till we with trophies do adorn thy tomb.”

Says Marcus, “No man shed tears for noble Mutius. He died in a virtuous cause, and lives in *fame!*”

As they stand, heads bowed in silent mourning, sounds of revelry drift over from the wedding—which they can see taking place.

Marcus returns to Titus. “My lord, to step out of these dreary dirges: how comes it that the subtle Queen of *Goths* is of a sudden thus advanced in Rome?”

“I know not, Marcus, but I know she *is*; whether by device or no, the heavens can tell.” Titus ponders. “Is she not then beholden to the man that brought her so far for this high good turn?”

“*Yes!*—and will nobly him remunerate!”

To the career soldier, war has always been simply a business; the tribune is considerably less sanguine. But as they weigh Tamora’s obligations of honor, a trumpet flourish signals the emperor’s return.

Well guarded, Saturninus and his attendants are followed by Tamora, her sons, and Aaron. They pause as Bassianus and Lavinia, with many well-armed friends, return to the cemetery entrance, then come to stand, defiantly, beside Marcus Andronicus.

“So, Bassianus, you have *played* with your prize!” says the emperor with lewd contempt. “God give you joy, sir, of your *gallant bride.*”

“And you of yours, my lord,” retorts his brother, with obvious revulsion. “I say no more, nor wish no less; and so, I take my leave.”

“*Traitor!*” cries Saturninus. “If Rome have *law* or we have *power*, thou and thy faction shall *repent this rape!*”

“Rape, call you it, my lord?—to seize *my own!*—my *true-betrothèd love!*—and now my *wife!* But let the laws of Rome determine all; meanwhile I am possessèd of what is *mine!*”

“’Tis *good*, sir,” mutters the ruler resentfully. “You are very *short* with us—but, if we live, we’ll be as *sharp* with you!”

Retorts Bassianus, “My lord, for what I have done, as best I may I must answer—and *shall*—with my *life!*”

And he tries to defend his father-in-law. “Only thus much I give Your Grace to know, by all the duties that I owe to *Rome*: this noble gentleman, Lord *Titus* here, is in *opinion* and in *honour wrongèd!* In the rescue of Lavinia, with his own hand he did slay his youngest son *in zeal to you*, highly movèd to wrath!—but only to be *condemnèd* for what he freely *gave!*”

“Receive him, then, Saturninus, into *favor*, who hath expressed himself in all his deeds a *father* and a *friend* to thee and Rome!”

Titus, standing between the opponent factions, scorns the rebel’s help. “Prince Bassianus, give *me* leave to plead my deeds!” he demands, angrily. He motions toward his own brother and sons. “’Tis *thou* and *those* that have dishonoured me! Rome and the righteous heavens be my judges how I have loved and honoured Saturninus!” He kneels before the emperor, head bowed.

The sovereign’s new wife curtseys to her husband. “My worthy lord, if ever Tamora were gracious in those princely eyes of thine, then hear me speak, indifferently for all—and at my suit, sweet, *pardon* what is past.”

“*What*, madam?—be dishonoured *openly!*—and basely put it up without *revenge?*”

“*Not so*, my lord!—the gods of Rome fend I should be author of dishonour to you! But on mine honour dare I undertake for good Lord Titus’ innocence in all; his *fury*—not dissembled!—bespeaks his griefs!

“Then, at my suit, look *graciously* upon him!—lose not so noble a friend on vain *suppose*, nor with sour looks afflict his gentle heart!”

She touches his arm, and whispers; Saturninus alone can hear what she urges: “Be won, in the end—*dissemble* from all your grievous discontents! You are but newly planted on your throne; lest, then, the people, and patricians too, upon a just survey take Titus’ part, and so supplant you for *ingratitude*—which Rome repute to be a heinous sin—yield to *entreaty!*”

“And then let *me* alone; I’ll find a day to *massacre them all*, and *raze* their faction and their *family!*—the cruel father and his traitorous sons, to whom I suèd for my dear son’s life!—and make them know what ’tis to let a queen kneel in the street and beg for grace in vain!” She sees Saturninus’s nod.

Says Tamora, aloud, “Come, come, sweet emperor; come, Andronicus!” She faces Saturninus. “Take up this good old man, and *cheer* the heart that dies in the tempest of *thine* angry frown!”

Grumbles Saturninus, “Rise, Titus, rise; my empress hath prevailed.”

“I thank Your Majesty, and *her*, my lord!” says Titus, coming to his feet. “These words, these looks, infuse new life in me!” He bows, pleased with the gratitude he expected.

“Titus, I am incorporate, now, in Rome,” Tamora tells him, “a *Roman* happily adopted, and must advise the emperor for his good. This day all quarrels die, Andronicus.” She turns to Saturninus. “And let it be mine honour, good my lord, that I have reconciled your friends and you.

“As for you, Prince Bassianus, I have passed my word and promise to the emperor that you will be more mild and tractable.

“And fear not, lords—nor you, Lavinia. By my advice, all humbled on your knees, you shall ask *pardon* of his majesty.” Her smile seems kind and inviting.

The Andronici, members of a family that has fiercely devoted itself to serving Rome for generations, are loath to thwart its ruler, and eager to end the antagonism of imperial authority. They kneel.

“We do,” says Lucius, “and vow to heaven and to his highness that what we did was as mildly as we might, tendering our sister’s honour and our own.”

“That, on mine honour, here *I* do assert,” adds Marcus.

Saturninus is disgusted by what he sees as a display of weakness. “Away, and talk not; trouble us no more.” He starts to go.

“Nay, *nay*, sweet emperor, we must all be *friends!*” cries Tamora cheerfully. “The tribune and his nephews kneel for *grace!* I will not be denied!—sweet heart, look back!”

Saturninus stops. “Marcus, at my lovely Tamora’s entreaties, then, for thy sake and thy brother’s, here I do remit these young men’s heinous faults. Stand up.

“Lavinia, though like a *churl* you left me, I found a *friend*; and sure as death I swore I would not part a bachelor from the priest! Come, if the emperor’s court can feast *two* brides, you are my guest, Lavinia.” He regards the others sourly. “And your friends.”

He gives his wife a lustful smile. “This day *shall* be a *love-day*, Tamora!”

Titus is both relieved and happy. “Tomorrow, an it please Your Majesty to hunt the panther and the hart with me, with horn and hound we’ll give Your Grace *bon jour!*”

Saturninus always enjoys killing. “Be it so, Titus—and *grand merci*, too!”

Walking on a street just outside the imperial palace in Rome, Aaron, thirty-five, considers the former prisoners’ recent change in standing. Saturninus has been crowned by the Senate, and the clever queen’s party has joined his royal household.

*Now climbeth Tamora Olympus’ top, safe out of fortune’s shot, and sits aloft, secure from thunder’s crack or lightning flash!—advanced above pale Envy’s threatening reach!*

*As when the golden sun salutes the morn, and, having gilt the ocean with his beams, gallops round the zodiac in his glistering coach, and o’erlooks the highest-peering hills, so Tamora: upon her wit doth earthly Honour wait, and Virtue stoops and trembles at her frown!*

*Then, Aaron, arm thy heart, and fit thy thoughts to mount aloft with thy imperial mistress, and mount her pitch—he grins lasciviously—whom thou in triumph long hast prisoner held, fettered in amorous chains, and faster bound to Aaron’s charming eyes than is Prometheus tied to Caucasus!*

*Away with slavish clothes and servile thoughts! I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold, to wait upon this new-made empress!*

*To wait, said I?—to wanton with this queen, this goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph!—this siren who will charm Rome’s Saturninus—and see his ship’s wreck!—and his commonweal’s!*

He hears a clamor approaching. *Halloa! What storm is this?*

Tamora’s sons, Demetrius and Chiron, eighteen and sixteen, are again in a loud dispute:

“Chiron, thy years want *wit*, and thy wit wants edge and *manners*, to intrude where *I* am gracèd—and may, for aught thou know’st, *affected* be!”—might be fancied.

“Demetrius, thou dost *over-ween* in all—and so in *this*, bearing down on me with brave looks! ’Tis not as if the difference of a *year* or two makes me less gracious, or thee more fortunate! I am as able and as fit as *thou* to serve, and to deserve my mistress’ grace!

“And *that* my *sword* upon thee shall prove, and plead my passions for Lavinia’s love!”

Aaron is accustomed to the princes’ bickering. *Clubs, clubs!* he thinks wryly, as if summoning constables, *these lovers will not keep the peace!* Still, he wants no disturbance in their rich new domiciling.

Demetrius sneers at his brother. “Why, *boy*, although our mother ill-advisedly gave you a *dancing-rapier* for your side, are you so *desperate* grown as to threaten your friends? *Go to!*—leave your *lath*”—piece of wood—“glued within your sheath till you know better how to handle it!”

“Meanwhile, sir, with the little skill I have, full well shalt thou *perceive* how much I dare!” replies Chiron.

“*Ay, boy!*—grow ye so brave?” They draw their slender blades and square off.

Aaron steps between them, and they back away from his powerful form. “Why, how now, lords! So near the emperor’s palace dare you *draw*, and maintain such a quarrel openly?”

“Full well I perceive the ground of all this grudge! I would not for a million in gold that the cause were *known* to them it most concerns—nor for *much more* would your noble *mother* be so dishonoured in the court of Rome!

“For shame! *Put up!*”

Demetrius protests: “Not I, till I have sheathed my rapier *in his bosom*, and withal thrust these reproachful speeches *down his throat* that he hath breathèd in my dishonour here!”

“For thou I am prepared and full-resolvèd!” cries Chiron. “Foul-spoken *coward*, that thunder’st with thy *tongue*, and with thy weapon nothing darest *perform!*”

“*Away, I say!*” demands Aaron, waving down their weapons, and looking around to see if they are being observed. “Now, by the gods that warlike *Goths* adore, this petty brabble will *undo us all!*”

As the boys sheathe their rapiers, Aaron’s frown deepens. “Why, lords, know you not how dangerous it is to set upon a *prince’s* right? *What*, then?—is Lavinia become so loose, or Bassianus so degenerate, that for her love such quarrels may be broached without his *controlment, justice, or revenge?* Young lords, beware!

“And should the *empress* know of this *discord’s ground,*”—argument’s cause, with a play on *dissonant tune*, he warns, “the *music* would not please!”

“I care not if she and all the *world* knew!” insists Chiron. “I love Lavinia *more* than all the world!”

“Youngling, learn thou to make some lesser choice,” says Demetrius. “Lavinia is thine *elder brother’s* hope!”

Aaron stares at them. “Why, are ye *mad?* Or know ye not how furious and impatient they be in Rome, and cannot brook competitors in love? I tell you, lords, you do but *plot your deaths* by this device!”

“Aaron, a *thousand* deaths would I oppose, to achieve her whom I love!” proclaims Chiron.

“To *achieve* her!” laughs Aaron. “How?”

Demetrius defends the intended seduction. “Why makest thou it so strange? She is a woman, therefore may be wooed; she is a woman, therefore may be won; she is *Lavinia*, therefore must be *loved!*”

Aaron chuckles at the virgin’s swaggering assurance.

“*What*, man?” says Demetrius defensively. “More water glideth by the mill than the *miller* knows of; and easy it is to steal a slice from a *cut loaf*, we know! Though Bassianus be the *emperor’s* brother, better than he have worn *Vulcan’s* badge!”—horns, the mark of cuckoldry.

*Aye—and as good as Saturninus may!* thinks Aaron.

“Then why should he despair who knows how to court-it, with *words, fair looks, and gifts?*” asks Demetrius. He regards Aaron. “What?—hast not *thou* full often struck a doe, and borne her cleanly past the keeper’s nose?”—stolen a game-preserve deer.

The suitors “love” is clearly lust. Aaron regards them. “Why then it seems some *certain snatch* or so would serve your turns.”

“Aye, so long as the turn were *served!*” says Chiron hungrily.

Demetrius nods. “Aaron, thou hast hit it.”

Aaron laughs. “I would *you* had ‘hit it,’ too!”—had sex. “Then we should not be tried with this ado! Why, hark ye, *hark ye!*—are you such fools as to square off over *this?*” The Moor has an idea. “Would it offend you, then, if *both* should succeed?”

“Faith, not me,” Chiron admits.

Demetrius shrugs. “Nor me, if *I* were one.”

“For that same, be *friends*, and *join* for what you jar about!” says Aaron. “’Tis *policy* and *stratagem* that must do what you desire—and so you must resolve that what you cannot achieve as you *would*, you must perforce accomplish as you *may*.”

“Take this from me: *Lucrece* was not more chaste than this Lavinia, Bassianus’ love!” The fabled Roman lady’s suicide after her rape by a member of the royal family began the Tarquins’ demise. “A *speedier* course than lingering languishment must *ye* pursue—and I have found the path!

“My lords, a *hunt* is at hand; there will the lovely Roman ladies troop. The forest walks are wide and spacious—and many solemn, unfrequented spots there are, fitted by kind for *rape and villainy!* Thither single you out, then, this dainty doe—and strike her home *by force*, if not by words! This way, or not at all, stand you in hope.

“Come, *come!* Our empress—her sacred wit consecrated to *villainy* and *vengeance!*—will we acquaint with all that we intend! And she shall pile our engines with advice that will not suffer you to square each other, but advance you *both* to your wishes’ *height!*”

The Ethiopian warrior looks around warily. “The emperor’s court is like the house of Fame: a palace full of *ears, eyes, and tongues.*” He raises an eyebrow. “But the *woods* are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull; *there* speak—and *strike*, brave boys, then *take your turns!*—there serve your lusts, shadowed from heaven’s eye, and revel in Lavinia’s treasury!”

Chiron tells his brother, dryly, “This counsel, lad, smells of no *cowardice.*”

Demetrius is undaunted. “*Sit fas aut nefas,*”—right or wrong, “till I find the stream to cool this heat, a charm to calm these fits, *per Styga, per manes vehor!*”—I suffer the torments of Hell.

### Chapter Three In the Woods

**T**he hunt is up!” cries an exuberant Titus Andronicus, reigning in his horse before the tents of the royal encampment in a forest near Rome. “The morn is bright and dry, the fields are fragrant, and the woods are green!”

Dismounting, he smiles at the gentlemen who have ridden here with him: his brother Marcus and his sons Lucius, Quintus and Martius. “Uncouple the hounds, and let’s *make a bay!*”—a din of dogs’ barking—“to wake the emperor and his lovely bride, and rouse the princes! Ring a *hunter’s* peal, then, so that all the court may echo with the noise!

“Sons, let it be your charge, as it is ours, to attend the emperor’s person carefully,” he urges. “I have been troubled in my sleep this past night; but the dawning day new comfort hath inspired.”

At his signal to their attendants, the hounds are set free, howling, and the trumpets blare.

Soon the Andronici are joined by Saturninus and Tamora, then Bassianus and Lavinia, all with attendants. Demetrius and Chiron emerge from their own tent, yawning.

Titus is laughing. “Many good morrows to Your Majesty! Madam, to you as many and as good! I *promised* Your Grace a hunter’s peal!”

“And you have rung it lustily, my lord,” grumbles Saturninus, “somewhat too early for new-married ladies.” Tamara look tired.

Bassianus grins at that. “Lavinia, how say *you?*”

She laughs, blushing. “I say, *no*; I have been broad awake two hours and more!”

“Come on, then,” says Saturninus, “horse and chariots let us have, and to our sport.” He glances at Tamora. “Madam, now shall ye see our *Roman* hunting!”

“I have dogs, my lord, that will rouse the proudest *panther* before the chase!” boasts Marcus, “and climb the highest promontory top!”

Titus motions for more mounts to be brought forward. “And I have horses that will follow where the game makes way, and run like *swallows* o’er the *plain!*”

The hunters climb into their saddles, and, following the frantic pack, head off into the woods. The empress's sons watch Lavinia closely.

Says Chiron, "We who hunt not with horse nor hound, still hope to pluck a dainty doe to ground!"

Not far from the camp in a dim, shaded gully, Aaron, here alone, is kneeling; he has been digging, using his knife to loosen the loam, hands to move it aside—and back. *He that has wit would think that I had none, burying so much gold under a tree, though never after to inherit it!*

He finishes, and rises. *Let him that thinks of me so abjectly know that these coins must pay for a stratagem which, cunningly effected, will beget a very excellent piece of villainy! Here hides this gold for their unrest who'd have their alms from the emperess's chest!*

*And so, repose, sweet gold!* With a foot he scatters dead leaves over the cache's covering soil. He looks up and sees Tamora.

The royal hunters have all returned to the camp for the midday meal. After it, while her husband snores in his tent, she has crept away to meet her lover by the brook. "My lovely Aaron, wherefore look'st thou sad, when everything doth make a *gleeful* boast?

"The birds chant melody on every bush; the snake lies coiled in the cheerful sun; the green leaves quiver with the cooling wind, and make a checkered shadow on the ground. Under their sweet shade, Aaron, let us sit.

"And whilst a babbling echo masks the hounds' shrill replies to the well-tuned horns, as if a double hunt were heard at once, let us lie down and mock their yowling noise!"

Her eyes flash. "And, after such a conflict as it was supposed the wandering prince and *Dido*"—the Trojan hero Aeneas and his lover, the Queen of Carthage—"once enjoyed, when by a happy storm they were surprisèd, and curtained within a counsel-keeping cave, *we may*—our pastimes done, each wreathèd in the other's arms—possess a golden slumber, while hounds and horns and sweet, melodious birds be unto us as is a nurse's song of *lullaby*, to bring her babe asleep...."

Aaron is wiping dirt from his hands. "Madam, though Venus govern *your* desires, *Saturn* is dominator over mine! What signifies my deadly-standing eye, my silence, and my cloudy melancholy?—my fleece of woolly hair that now *uncurls*, even as doth an adder when it unrolls to do some fatal execution!"

She grins, picturing a rising serpent, but he shakes his head. "*No*, madam, these are no venereal signs!—*vengeance* is in my heart, *death* in my hand, blood and *revenge* are hammering in my head!"

Their meeting is not to be an interlude, but part of a scheme. "Hark, Tamora—the empress of my *soul*, which never hopes more heaven than rests in thee!—this is the *day of doom* for *Bassianus*! His Philomel"—a mythological victim of rape—"must lose her tongue today!—thy sons make pillage of her chastity, and wash their hands in Bassianus' *blood*!"

"Seest thou this letter?" He pulls a rolled sheet from a coat pocket. "Take it up, I pray thee, and give the emperor this fatal-plotted scroll."

He embraces Tamora and kisses her. "Now question me no more," he says, looking over her shoulder; his lure has worked. "We are espied! Here comes a parcel of our hoped-for booty—who dread not yet their lives' destruction!"

Tamora is delighted. "*Ah*, my sweet Moor, sweeter to me than life!" she says, touching his chest.

"No more, great empress!—Bassianus comes! Be *cross* with him, and I'll go fetch thy sons to *back* thy quarrels, whatso'er they be!" He hurries away toward the boy-princes' tent.

Lord Bassianus and Lady Lavinia slowly approach Tamora. "Who have we here?" says he, smiling politely. "Rome's royal empress, unfurnished of her well-beseeming troop? Or is it, *dressed* like her, *Diana*,"—virgin goddess of the hunt, "who hath abandoned her holy groves to see the general hunting in this forest?"

“Saucy observer of our private steps,” snaps Tamora, “had *I* the power that some say Diana had, thy temples should be planted presently with *horns*, as were Actaeon’s—and the hounds should thrive upon thy new-transformèd limbs, unmannerly *intruder* as thou art!” After the myth’s hunter saw Diana bathing, she turned him into a deer that was killed by his own dogs.

Lavinia retorts, “Under your patience, gentle empress, ’tis thought you *have* a goodly gift in *horning*—and ’tis suspected that your Moor and you have singled forth to *try* such experiments! Jove shield your *husband* from *his* hounds today!—’twere a pity if they should mistake him for a *stag*.”

They both saw Aaron, as he hurriedly left Tamora. “Believe me, queen,” says Bassianus, “your swarthy Cimmerian”—dark demon—“doth make Your Honour of *his* body’s hue: stainèd, detested, and *abominable!* Why are you sequestered from all your train, dismounted from your snow-white goodly steed, and wandered hither to an obscure plot, accompanied but with a barbarous Moor, if foul *desire* had not conducted you?”

“And is being interrupted in your great *sport* reason to berate my noble lord for *sauciness?*” asks Lavinia indignantly. She turns to Bassianus. “I pray you, let us hence, and let her enjoy her raven-coloured love; this *ravine* fits the purpose surpassingly well.”

Bassianus tells Tamora, “The emperor my brother shall have *notice* of this!”

Adds Lavinia, “*Aye*—for these slips have now made him regarded as a *good* emperor—being so mightily *abusèd!*”

As her sons come to her, Tamora demands angrily, “Why have I *patience* to *endure* all this?”

“How now, dear sovereign, and our gracious mother?” asks Demetrius. “Why doth Your Highness look so pale and wan?”

“Have I not *reason*, think you, to look pale? These two have *enticed* me hither to this place—a *barren, detested vale!* You see the *trees*, though it is yet summer, are *forlorn* and *lean*, o’ercome with moss and baleful shrub! Here never shines the sun; here nothing breeds, unless the nightly owl or fatal raven!

“And when they *showed* me this *abhorrent pit*, they told me that here, at the dead time of night, a *hundred fiends*, a thousand hissing *snakes*, *ten* thousand swelling *toads*, and as many *hedgehogs* would make such fearful and *appalling cries* that any mortal body hearing them should straight *fall mad!*—or else *suddenly die!*”

“No sooner had they told this hellish tale but they told me they would *bind* me here, unto the body of a dismal yew, and *leave me* to that *miserable death!*”

“And then they called me ‘*foul adulteress,*’ ‘*lascivious Goth,*’ and all the bitterest terms to such effect that ever ear did *hear!*”

Bassianus and Lavinia exchange looks, annoyed but amused by the extravagant lies.

Tamora continues: “And—had you not by wondrous fortune come!—this vengeance on me they had *executed!*”

“*Revenge* it, as you love your mother’s life, or be ye not henceforth callèd my children!”

Demetrius draws his rapier. “*This* is a witness that I am thy *son!*” he cries—and pierces Bassianus—who, surprised and shocked, staggers, then falls.

“And this for *me*, struck home to show my *strength!*” says Chiron, stabbing the downed man.

Lavinia gapes, aghast, as her husband lies dying. She turns to the older woman, expecting to be killed. “*Aye*, come, Semiramis—nay, *Tamora!*—for no name fits thy barbarous nature but thine *own!*”

“Give me thy poniard!” demands Tamora of Demetrius. “You shall know, my boys, that your mother’s hand shall right your mother’s wrong!”

But he pulls back the bloody knife. “Stay, madam; there is *more* that belongs to *her!* First *thrash* the wheat, then after burn the straw! This minion stood upon her *chastity*, upon her nuptial vow, her *loyalty*—and with that *painted* hope, *braved Your Mightiness!* And shall she *carry that on* unto her grave?”



“If she do, I would I were an *eunuch!*” cries Chiron. “Drag her husband hence, to some secret hole, and make his dead trunk pillow to our lust!” Aaron has shown them a deep pit, dug by the huntsmen to serve as a trap for wild beasts.

Tamora waves him on. “But when ye *have* the honey ye desire,” she warns, “let not this wasp *outlive* it, to sting us both!”

“I warrant you, madam, we will make that sure!” says Chiron. He grabs Lavinia by the arm. “Come, mistress! Now *perforce* we will enjoy that finely preservèd *decency* of yours!”

Lavinia cries out, “Oh, Tamora, thou bear’st a *woman’s* face—”

“I will not hear her speak; away with her!”

“Sweet lords, entreat her hear me but a word!”

Demetrius urges his mother. “Listen, fair madam—let it be your *glory* to see her *tears!* But be your heart to them as unrelenting as flint to drops of rain.”

Lavinia asks him, “When did the tiger’s *young* ones tutor the dam? Oh, do not teach her *wrath*—she taught it *thee!* The milk thou suckedst from her did turn to *marble*; even at thy teat thou hadst thy *tyranny!*”

“Yet every mother breeds not sons *alike.*” She turns to the younger boy. “Do *thou* entreat her show a woman’s pity!”

Chiron laughs. “*What?*—wouldst thou have me prove myself a *bastard?*”

“’Tis true the raven doth not hatch a lark,” Lavinia admits. “Yet have I heard—oh, could I find it *true!*—that the *lion*, moved by *pity*, did endure to have his princely claws parèd all away!

“Some say that ravens *foster* forlorn children, even whilst their own birds famish in their nests! Oh, be to me, though thy hard heart say no, nothing so *kind*, only somewhat *pitying!*”

The warrior queen only frowns at the civilian lady. “I know not what it means; away with her.”

“Oh, let me *teach* thee!” pleads Lavinia—trying to stall; help might yet come. “For my *father’s* sake, who gave *thee* life, when well he might have *slain* thee, be not obdurate!—open thy deaf ears!”

Tamora laughs. “Hadst thou in thy person ne’er offended me, even for *his* sake am I *pitiless!* Remember, boys?—I *poured* forth tears in vain, to save your brother from the sacrifice! But fierce *Andronicus* would not relent! Therefore, away with her—use her as you will!—and the *worse* for her, the better loved by *me!*”

Lavinia falls to her knees, grasping at the empress’s hand. “Oh, Tamora, be callèd a *gentle* queen, and with thine *own* hands kill me in this place! For ’tis not *life* that I have begged so long; poor *I* was slain when *Bassianus* died.”

“*What* begg’st thou, then? Foolish woman, let me go!”

Lavinia, her father’s proud daughter, dreads dishonor. “’Tis *immediate death* I beg!—and one thing more, that womanhood denies my tongue to tell.... Oh, keep me from their worse-than-killing *lust*, and tumble me into some loathsome pit, where never man’s eye may behold my body! *Do* this, and be a *charitable* murderer!”

With a scornful laugh, Tamora shoves her away. “So should I rob my sweet sons of their *fee!* *No!*—let them satisfy their lust on thee!”

From behind, Demetrius seizes both of Lavinia’s arms. “*Away!*—for thou hast stayed us here too long.”

“No *grace?*” cries Lavinia to Tamora. “No *womanhood?*” She sees Demetrius’s flushed face. “Ah, beastly *creature!*—the blot and enemy to our general name!”—humanity. “Let chaos fall—”

“Nay, then I’ll *stop* your mouth!” says Chiron, clamping a hand on her face. He pulls the struggling lady away, in among some brush and ferns, and looks down at a space beside him. “Bring thou her husband,” he tells his brother. “This is the hole where Aaron bid us hide him.”

Demetrius pulls the bloody body through the bramble; then, with a booted foot, he pushes Bassianus into the pit.

Together, he and Chiron drag Lavinia further into the woods.

“Fare well, my sons!” cries Tamora after them. “See that you make her *secure!* Ne’er let my heart know merry cheer indeed, till *all* the Andronici be made away!”—killed.

*Now will I hence to seek my lovely Moor, and let my spleenful sons this trull deflower!*

Aaron urges Quintus and Martius to hurry past him. “*Come on, my lords!—the better foot before!* Straight will I bring you to the loathsome pit where I espied the *panther* fast asleep!” Titus’s men have dug several traps for beasts the hunters might flush from hiding.

Having eaten little and drunk much—Aaron provided the wine—the two drowsy gentlemen stumble on ahead. “My sight is very dull, whate’er it bodes,” says Quintus thickly, trying to clear his head.

“And mine, I promise you,” says Martius. “Were’t not for shame, well could I leave our sport to *sleep* a while!” As they clump through the thick bushes, he tumbles heavily into a pit.

Quintus blinks. “What?—art thou fall’n?” He back away, unsteadily, and stares. “What subtle hole is this, whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briers—upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed *blood*, as fresh as morning dew distillèd on flowers? A very fatal place it seems to me!

“*Speak, brother!—hast thou hurt thee with the fall?*”

A wail comes from below. “*Oh, my brother!—hurt by the dimmest object that ever eye with sight made heart lament!*”

Quintus edges forward cautiously, trying to keep his balance.

Aaron quietly backs away. *Now will I fetch the emperor to find them here, so he thereby may give a likely guess that these were they who made away with his brother!* Hurrying, he makes his way through the woods.

Martius calls up again, stunned and scared. “Why dost not *comfort* me, and help me *out* from this *unhallowèd* and *blood-stained hole?*”

“I am seized by a strange *fear!*—a chilling sweat o’er-runs my trembling joints!—my heart *suspects* more than mine eye can see!”

“To prove thou hast a truly *divining* heart,” says Martius, “look thou and Aaron down into this den, and see a fearful sight of blood and death!”

Quintus peers around, blinking, and finds himself alone. “Aaron is *gone!*—and my consternate heart will not permit mine eyes at once to *behold* a thing whereat it *trembles* by *surmise!* Oh, tell me how it is!—for ne’er till *now* was I a child to fear *what I know not!*”

“*Lord Bassianus* lies here, bereaved of *blood*, all in a heap like a *slaughtered lamb*, in this dark, detested, blood-drinking pit!”

“If it be dark, how dost thou know ’tis he?”

In the muck below, Martius, his back pressed against the dank-earth wall, can see a narrow shaft of light reaching the corpse. “Upon his bloody finger he doth wear a precious *ring*, that lightens all the hole—which, like a taper in some tomb, doth shine upon the dead man’s earthy cheeks, and shows the ragged entrails of the pit!

“So pale did shine the moon on Pyramus when *he* saw night bathed in *maiden’s* blood!

“O brother, if fear hath made *thee* faint, as *me* it hath, *help* me with thy fainting hand!—*out* of this fell, devouring receptacle, as hateful as *Cocytus’* misty mouth!”—where that river flows into Hades.

Quintus kneels, perched at the edge. “Reach me thy *hand*, that I may help thee out, or, lacking strength to do *thee* so much good, *I* may be plucked into the swallowing womb of this deep pit, poor Bassianus’ grave!” They clasp hands, but Martius soon groans in frustration. “I have not strength to pluck thee to the brink!”

“Nor I the strength to climb *without* thy help!”

Grasping a large root beside a tree, Quintus leans further forward. “Thy hand once more! I will not loose it again till thou art here aloft, or I below!” As the brothers strain, he realizes he is slipping. “Thou canst not come to me—I come to thee!” He falls headlong into the animal trap.

Advised that a plot may be afoot, Saturninus comes to investigate. “Along with me!” he tells his attendants and Aaron, as they approach. “I’ll see what hole is here, and what he is that just now has leaped into it.

“Say!—who art thou that lately didst descend into this gaping hollow of the earth?”

“The unhappy son of old Andronicus!” cries Martius. “Brought hither in a most unfortunate hour, to find thy brother Bassianus—dead!”

“My brother dead? I know thou dost but *jest!*—he and his lady are both at the lodging upon the north side of this pleasant chase; ’tis not an hour since I left them there.”

“We know not when you left him all *alive*, but now, *alas*, here have *we* found him dead!”

Tamora and her attendants approach, apparently looking for Saturninus; following after are Titus Andronicus and his son Lucius. “Where is my lord the emperor?” she calls ahead.

“*Here*, Tamora, though grievèd with a *killing* grief!”

She rushes to him. “Where is thy brother Bassianus?”

“Now to the bottom dost thou search my wound!—poor Bassianus here lies *murderèd!*”

Tamora moans: “Then all too late I bring this fatal writing!—the *complot* of this timeless tragedy!—and wonder greatly that a man’s face can enfold in pleasing *smiles* such *murderous tyranny!*” She hands Saturninus a piece of parchment.

He examines it, then reads aloud: “...and if we miss meeting him handily, sweet huntsman—Bassianus ’tis we mean—do *thou* so much for him!—thou know’st our meaning.

“Look for thy *reward* among the nettles at the elder-tree which overshades the mouth of that same pit where we decreed to *bury* Bassianus.

“Do this, and you purchase us as thy lasting friends!”

As Aaron begins poking around at the base of the tree, Saturninus looks up, shaking his head angrily, “Oh, Tamora! Was ever heard the like? This is the pit, and this the elder-tree!”

He turns to his attendants and points to the hole. “Look, sirs,” he growls, “to see if you can find the huntsmen out that have murdered Bassianus here.”

“My gracious lord, here is a *bag of gold!*” cries Aaron, kneeling beside the tree. He holds up the soiled sack.

Saturninus shouts at Titus: “Two of *thy* whelps, *fell curs* of *bloody breed*, have here bereft *my brother* of his *life!*”

“Sirs, drag them from the pit unto *prison!*” he orders his men, “There let them bide until we have devised some never-heard-of *torturing pain* for them!”

Tamora watches—apparently with surprise. “What, are *they* in this pit? Oh, wondrous thing! How easily *murder* is discoverèd!”

Titus, stung by this dreadful new family betrayal, kneels. “High Emperor, upon my feeble *knee* I beg this boon, with tears not lightly shed: that this deadly crime of my accursèd sons—accursèd if the fault be proven in them—”

“*If* it be *provèd!*” roars Saturninus. “You see it is *apparent!* Who found this letter? Tamora, was it you?”

“Andronicus himself did take it up.” She had carefully positioned it for him to find.

“I did, my lord,” Titus admits, “yet let me be their bail; for, by my *fathers’* reverend *tomb*, I vow they shall be ready at Your Highness’ will to answer your suspicion with their lives!”

Saturninus angrily brushes past him. “Thou shalt not bail them!”

“See thou follow me,” he tells his attendants. “Some bring the murdered body, some the murderers! *Let them not speak a word!*—for their guilt is plain! By my soul, were there a *worse* end than *death*, that end upon them should be executed!” He storms away, muttering.

As men bring rope to extract the living and the dead, Tamora moves toward the retired general. “Andronicus, I will *entreat* the emperor! Fear not for thy sons; they shall do well enough...”

Titus ignores her; two of his sons have further dishonored him. “Come, Lucius, come! Stay not to talk with them!”

Humiliated and angry, he follows Saturninus back to the hunters' camp.

## Chapter Four Bereft, Bereaved

The forest is still and dim. In a silent dell, two young men wipe their weapons. Beside them lies Lavinia, ashen and torn, bleeding. She has been raped, twice, and the assailants have cut off her hands with a sword, then attacked with a knife.

Demetrius laughs. "So, now go *tell*—if *thy* tongue can *speak*!—who 'twas that cut thy tongue and ravished thee!"

Chiron jeers, "*Write down* thy mind; bewray thy meaning *so*—if thy *stumps* will let thee play the scribe!"

Lavinia attempts to rise; she looks down, angrily, at her cruelly injured limbs.

Demetrius watches her agonized effort. "See how, with signs and tokens, she can *scowl*!"

Chiron tells her, as if chiding, "Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands."

"She hath no tongue to call, nor hands to wash; and so let's leave her to her silent walks."

As they stride away, Chiron looks back, disgusted. "If 'twere *my* case, I should go *hang* myself!"

"If thou hadst hands to help thee knot the cord!" laughs Demetrius.

Strolling from the quiet camp, Marcus hears a sound in the brush; he looks up and spots a fleeing figure. *Who is this?—my niece, that flies away so fast?* "Cousin, a word; where is your husband?" he calls, hurrying into the greenwood after her.

Lavinia has moved past the pit, now empty, and is seeking the shelter of her tent, and help from the women who attend her. Marcus finds her, gasping and benumbed, leaning back against the wide trunk of an ancient willow.

What he sees is appalling. *If I do dream, would all my wealth could wake me! If I be awake, may some planet strike me down, that I might slumber in eternal sleep!*

As she slides slowly down the bole, he kneels beside her. "*Speak*, gentle niece!" He has pulled off his cloak, and is cutting it into strips to stem the bleeding. *What stern, ungentle hands have lopped and hewed, and made thy body bare of her two branches—those sweet ornaments whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in, yet might not gain so great a happiness as have thy love!*

"Why dost not speak to me?" He gasps when she opens her mouth. *Alas!—a crimson river of warm blood, like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind, doth rise and fall between thy rosèd lips, coming and going with thy honey breath!* "Surely some *Tereus* hath deflowered thee—and, lest thou shouldst reveal him, cut thy tongue!" In the myth, the king who raped princess Philomela was turned into a bird.

Lavinia nods, and stares down at the dead brown leaves.

"Ah, now thou turn'st away thy face for shame." But she looks up at him—glaring.

He sees her anger. "Notwithstanding all this loss of blood, as from a conduit with three issuing spouts—yet do thy cheeks look red as the sun's face, flushing at being blemished by a cloud!

"Shall I speak *for* thee?—shall I say 'tis so?"

"Oh, that I knew thy heart!—and knew *the beast*, that I might *rail at him* to ease my mind!"

He has bandaged her injured arms, tying the cloth tightly.

*Sorrow concealèd, like an oven stopped up, doth burn the heart to cinders where it is! Fair Philomela, she lost but her tongue, and into a lengthy sampler sewed her mind!* The story's lady had thus revealed the culprit's name. *But, lovely niece, that means is cut from thee; a craftier*

*Tereus, cousin, hast thou met, and he hath cut off those pretty fingers that could have better sewed than Philomel!*

*Oh, had the monster seen those lily hands tremble like aspen-leaves upon a lute, and make the silken strings delight to kiss them, he would not then have touched them for his life! Or had he heard the heavenly harmony which that sweet tongue hath made, he would have dropped his knife, and fallen asleep as did Cerberus at the feet of Orpheus!*

Weeping, he gently lifts the lady, helping her to stand. “Come, let us go and make thy father blind; for such a sight will blind a father’s eye! One hour’s storm can drown the fragrant meads; what will *whole months of tears* from thy father’s eyes?”

She turns away, dreading further humiliation—yet determined to be revenged.

“Do not draw back, for we will mourn with thee!

“Oh, could our mourning ease thy misery!”

**A**s two Roman tribunes, who also serve as judges, lead shackled Martius and Quintus, both of them battered, gagged and guarded—and just now sentenced—back to the palace, and the site of their imminent public execution, the procession passes the waiting Titus Andronicus.

“Hear me, grave fathers!” cries the general as they go by. “Noble tribunes, *stay!*” He kneels. “For pity of mine *age*, whose youth was spent in dangerous wars, whilst you securely slept!—for all my *blood* in Rome’s great quarrel shed; for all the frosty nights that I have stood watch!—and for these bitter *tears*, which now you see filling the agèd wrinkles in my cheeks—be *pitiful* to my condemnèd sons, whose souls are not corrupted as ’tis thought!

“For *two and twenty sons* I never wept, because they died in *honour’s* lofty bed!”

But the passing tribunes, patricians, and citizens, all sternly silent, ignores his pleas.

Left behind, he is on his hands and knees now, and weeping. *For these—these tribunes!—in the dust I write my heart’s deep anguish with my soul’s sad tears!*

He stares down. *Let my tears stanch the dry earth’s appetite; my sons’ sweet blood would make it blush with shame!*

Sobbing, he sprawls on the pavement. *O earth, I will befriend thee with more rain, that shall distil from these two ancient urns, than youthful April shall, with all its showers! In summer’s drought, I’ll drop upon thee still; in winter, with warm tears I’ll melt the snow, and keep eternal spring-time on thy face!—if thou refuse to drink my dear sons’ blood!*

Lucius, looking around warily, sword in hand, comes to find him.

Titus cries out, to the distant judges. “*O reverend tribunes!—O gentle, agèd men!—unbind my sons!—reverse the doom of death!—and let me, who never wept before, say my tears are now prevailing orators!*”

Lucius kneels beside him. “Ah, noble father, you lament in vain; the tribunes hear you not. No man is by, and you recount your sorrows to stone.”

“Oh, Lucius, for thy *brothers* let me *plead!*” wails Titus. “Grave tribunes, once more I *entreat* of you—”

“My gracious lord, no tribune hears you speak.”

The old general goans, sits up, and wipes away tears with the heels of his dusty hands. “Well, ’tis no matter, man—if they *did* hear, they would not *mark* me; or if they did mark, they would not *pity* me—yet plead I *must!*”

“Therefore I tell my sorrows to the stones—who, though they cannot cure my distress, yet in some sort they are better than the tribunes, in that they will not interrupt my tale! When I do weep, they humbly, at my feet, *receive* my tears, and seem to weep *with* me. And, though they are in but grave attire, *Rome* could provide me no tribune like these; a stone is soft as *wax*—*tribunes* more hard than *stones!* A stone is silent, and offendeth not—but tribunes with their tongues *doom men to death!*”

Slowly, he rises to his feet. “But wherefore stand’st thou with thy weapon drawn?”

“To *rescue* my two brothers from their death,” says Lucius, of his failed effort before the brief trial. “For which attempt,” he adds sourly, “the judges have pronounced *my* everlasting doom—of *banishment*.”

“O happy man!” cries Titus. “They have *befriended* thee! Why, foolish Lucius, dost thou not perceive that Rome is but a *wilderness of tigers*? Tigers must *prey*, and Rome affords no prey but *me* and *mine*! How happy art *thou*, then, from these *devourers* to be banished!

“But who comes with our brother Marcus, here?” The lady, he sees, is wrapped in a dark cloak, and a black veil conceals her face; Marcus has brought Lavinia, whose bodily wounds have been treated.

“Titus, prepare thine aged eyes to *weep*,” warns Marcus, his own tears flowing, “and if not so, thy noble *heart* to *break*! I bring consuming sorrow to thine age....”

“Will it *consume* me?—*let me see it, then!*” Titus would welcome an escape from his pain.

Marcus lowers the veil from her pallid face, and lifts an edge of the cloak to reveal her severed limbs. “This was thy daughter.”

Titus is moved, mightily, by her face—tremulous, now, before her father. “Why, Marcus,” he says softly, “so she *is*.”

“*Ay me!*” cries Lucius, falling to his knees and pressing his head with his hands. “This object *kills me!*”

“Faint-hearted boy, *arise*,” demands Titus gruffly, “and *look* upon her.

“*Speak*, Lavinia!—what accursed hand hath made thee handless in thy father’s sight?—what fool hath added *water* to the *sea*, or brought a *torch* to bright-burning *Troy*? My grief was *at the height* before thou camest—and now like the Nile it *disdaineth bounds!*”

“Give me the sword,” he tells Lucius. “I’ll chop off *my* hands too!—for they have fought for Rome, but *all in vain!*—and, by *feeding* my life, they have *nursed this woe!* In *bootless prayer* have they been held up!—and they have served me to *effectless* use! *Now* all the service I require of them is that the one will help to cut off the other.

“’Tis *well*, Lavinia, that thou hast no hands—for hands to do *Rome* service act but *vainly!*”

Lucius, standing, wipes his eyes. “*Speak*, gentle sister!—who hath martyred thee?”

Marcus’s tears start again. “Ah, the delightful engine of her thoughts that *spoke them* with such pleasing eloquence is torn from forth that pretty hollow cage, where, like a melodious bird, it sung sweet varied notes, enchanting every ear.”

Lucius now sees, between her lips, an edge of red-stained linen. “Oh, say thou *for* her!—who hath *done* this deed?”

“Thus I found her, straying in the preserve,” Marcus tells them, “seeking to hide herself, as doth the deer that hath received some incurable wound.”

Titus groans “It was *my* dear! And he that wounded her hath hurt *me* more than had he *killed me dead!* For now I stand like one upon a rock environed by a wilderness of sea, who marks the waxing tide *grow*, wave by wave—hoping ever for some ambitious surge to *swallow him* in its brinish bowels!”

He says, motioning toward the palace, “This way to *death* my *wretched* sons are gone. Here stands my other son, a *banished* man—and here’s my brother, *weeping* for my woes!

“But that which gives my soul the *greatest* harm is dear *Lavinia*—*dearer* than my soul! Had I seen but thy *picture* in this plight it would have maddened me!—what shall I do now that I behold thy *living body* so? Thou hast no hands to wipe away thy tears, nor tongue to tell me who hath martyred thee!

“Thy *husband*, he is dead—and *for* his death thy *brothers* are *condemned!*—and *dead*, by now!”

He sees the change in her face: redoubled dismay. “Look, Marcus! Ah, son Lucius, *look* on her! When I did name her brothers, then fresh tears stood on her cheeks, as doth the lonely dew upon a gathered lily, almost withered.”

“Perchance she weeps because they killed her husband,” says Marcus. He sees her flash of fury. “Perchance because she knows them *innocent!*”

Says Titus, mordantly, “If they *did* kill thy husband, then be *joyful!*—because the law hath *taken revenge* on them.” Her sob makes him repent. “*No, no!*—they *would not* do so foul a deed! Witness the *sorrow* that their sister makes!

“Gentle Lavinia, let me kiss thy lips....” She backs away, crimson-bandaged wrists crossed before her face. “Or make some sign how I may do thee ease!

“Shall thy good uncle, and thy brother Lucius, and I sit round about some fountain pool, all looking downwards to behold our cheeks, how they are stained, like meadows yet not dry, with miry slime left on them by a flood? And in the fountain shall we gaze so long that the fresh taste be taken from that clearness, and make a *brine-pit* with our bitter *tears?*”

“Or shall we cut away *our* hands, like thine?”

“Or shall we bite *our* tongues, and in silent gesturing pass the remainder of our hateful days?”

“What shall we *do?*”

Anger overtakes him. “Let us that have our tongues *plot some device!*—of *such miseries* as to make us *wondered at* in time to come!” he cries in a desperate rage.

Lavinia, finally hearing what she needs to hear, is again moved.

“Sweet father, cease your tears,” says Lucius, “forsee how my wretched sister, at *your* grief, sobs and weeps!”

Marcus puts an arm around her shoulders. “*Patience*, dear niece! Good Titus, dry thine eyes.”

Titus nods. “Ah, Marcus, Marcus!—brother, well I wot thy kerchief cannot drink a tear of *mine*—for thou, poor man, hast drowned it with thine *own.*”

Lucius offers her his. “Ah, my Lavinia, I will wipe thy cheeks.” He starts to do so, but she backs away. The lady, suffering intense frustration, wants no more sympathy—she craves *vengeance.*

“Mark, Marcus, mark; I understand her signs,” says Titus—who does not. “Had she a tongue to speak, now would she say that to her brother which I said to thee: his kerchief, with *his* true tears all bewet, can do no service on her sorrowful cheeks.

“Oh, what a *symphony* of woe is this!—as far from help as Limbo is from *bliss!*”

They see a large man walking toward them from the palace.

Aaron approaches. “Titus Andronicus, my lord Saturninus sends thee this word: that if thou love thy sons, let Marcus, Lucius, or thyself, old Titus—or *any* one of you—*chop off your hand* and send it to the emperor. He, for the same, will send thee hither both thy sons alive, and that shall be the ransom for their offense.”

“Oh, *gracious* emperor! O *gentle* Aaron!” cries Titus gratefully. “Did ever raven sing so like a *lark* that gives sweet tidings of the *sun’s* uprise? *With all my heart*, I’ll send the emperor my *hand!* Good Aaron, wilt thou help to lop it off?”

“*Stay*, father!” cries Lucius, “for that noble hand of *thine*, that hath thrown down so many enemies, shall not be sent!—*my* hand will serve the turn! My youth can better spare my blood than you, and therefore *mine* shall save my brothers’ lives!”

But Marcus asks them, “Which of *your* hands hath not defended Rome, and reared aloft the bloody battle-axe, writing destruction on the enemy’s castle? Oh, not one of *both* but is of high deserving!

“*My* hand hath been but idle; let *it* serve to ransom my two nephews from their death! Then have I kept it to a worthy end!”

Aaron is impatient. “Nay, agree *whose* hand shall go along, for fear they *die* before their *pardon* come!”

“My hand shall go!” insists Marcus.

“By heaven, it shall *not* go!” says Lucius.

“Sirs, strive no more!” says Titus. He holds up his hands. “Such withered herbs as *these* are meet for plucking up—and therefore *mine!*”

“Sweet Father, if I shall be thought *thy* son, let me redeem my brothers both from death!”

“And, for *our* father’s sake—and *mother*’s care—now let *me* show a brother’s love to *thee*!”

Titus sighs. “Agree between you; I will *spare* my hand.”

“Then I’ll go fetch an axe!” says Lucius.

“But I will *use* the axe!” insists Marcus as they go.

“Come hither, Aaron,” says Titus. “Lend me thy hand, and I will *give* thee mine! I’ll deceive them both!”

Thinks Aaron, *If that be callèd deceit, I will be honest!—and never whilst I live deceive men so!*

*But I’ll deceive you in another sort—one that you’ll see ere half an hour pass!*

Lavinia turns away as Titus offers the other man his sword, hilt-first. With a quick downward stroke, Aaron severs the general’s left hand.

Marcus and Lucius return, and find Titus gripping his arm to slow the spurting. “Now stay your strife!—what shall be is dispatchèd!

“Good Aaron, give his majesty my hand! Tell him it was a hand that warded him from a thousand dangers! Bid him bury it—*more* hath it merited; *that* let it have!

“As for my sons, say I account of them as jewels purchased at an easy price!” *And yet dearly, too*, he thinks, *because I’ve bought what is mine own!*

Aaron drops the sword. “I go, Andronicus. And for thy hand, look by and by to have thy *sons* with thee.” *Their heads, I mean!* he thinks, gleefully. *Oh, how this villainy doth baste me with the very thought of it! Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace!—Aaron will have his soul black like his face!* With the bloody, severed hand dangling at his side by its thumb, he heads back to the palace.

Titus falls to his knees. “Oh, here I lift this one hand up to *heaven*, and bow this feeble ruin to the *earth*!” he moans, as the pain increases. “If any *power* pities wretched tears, to *that* I call!”

Lavinia sees that he, too, feels rising anger; she goes to him.

“What, wilt thou kneel with me? *Do*, then, dear heart!—for *Heaven* shall *hear* our prayers!—or with our sighs we’ll breathe the very *sky* dim, and stain the *sun* with fog!—as clouds sometimes do, when they hug it in their melting bosoms!”

The tribune ties the bleeding stump with a cord he has brought. “Oh, brother, speak of *possibilities*, and do not break into these deep extremes!” The once-powerful general has never before resorted to prayer.

“Are not my *sorrows* deep, having no bottom? Then be my *passions* bottomless with them!”

“But yet let *reason* govern thy lamenting.” Marcus dresses the wound with cloth.

“If there were reason *for* these miseries, then into *limits* could I bind my woes!”

Titus’s ire is growing. “When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth *o’erflow*? If the *winds* rage, doth not the *sea* wax mad, threatening the *sky* with its big-swol’n face?”

He nods toward Lavinia. “Hark, how her *sighs* do blow!—she is the weeping *firmament*, I the *earth*! Then must my sea be movèd by her sighs; then must *my* earth with her tears’ continual deluge be overflowed—and *drownèd*!

“If thou wilt have the *reason* for this broil: *I am the sea!*

“As for *why*: my guts cannot contain her woes!—like a drunkard I must *vomit* them!

“Then *give me leave!* For losers will have leave to ease their indignation with their *bitter tongues!*”

One of the tribunes’ men comes to them with a heavy basket. He says, sadly, “Worthy Andronicus, ill art thou repaid for that good hand thou sent’st the emperor.

“Here are the heads of thy two noble sons.” He places them, as he was ordered, on the pavement before Titus. Each has been ducked into a bucket of water to rinse off blood; sightless eyes, still open behind clinging wet hair, make the faces seem to gape. “And here’s thy hand, in scorn to thee sent back.”

Saturninus, who will not miss his troublesome brother, again asserts his churlish self.



The man shakes his head. “Thy griefs are their *sports*, thy resolution *mocked!*—so much that woe grips *me*, thinking upon thy woes!—more than remembrance of *my father’s death!*” He has long admired the distinguished officer; as he leaves them, he is weeping.

Marcus is livid. “Now let hot Aetna”—a volcano—“*cool* in Sicily, and be my *heart* an ever-burning *hell!* These miseries are more than may be *borne!* To weep with those who weep doth deal some *ease!*—but sorrow *flouted* is *death doubled!*”

Lucius is devastated. “Oh, that this *sight* should make *so deep a wound*, and yet *detested life* not *shrink* thereat!—that ever Death should let *life* bear the *name*, when life hath share in no more than *breathing!*”

Lavinia, though, is even more grimly determined. She kisses her father’s cheek.

“Alas, poor heart,” Marcus tells her, “that kiss is comfortless as *frozen water* to a *starvèd* snake!”

Titus groans. “When will this fearful slumber”—*nightmare!*—“have an *end?*”

Cries Marcus, “*No!*—*farewell*, false *hope!*—*die!* Andronicus, thou dost *not* slumber! *Look* at thy two sons’ *heads!*—thy warlike *hand!*—thy mangled *daughter* here!—thine other, *banished* son, by this dire sight struck pale and bloodless! And thy brother—even *I!*—like a *stone* image, cold and numb!

“Now no more would I *restrain* thy griefs! *Rend off* thy silver hair!—thine *other* hand *gnaw* free with thy *teeth!*—and let *that* dismal sight be the *closing up* of our most-wretched eyes!”

But the general, he sees, is standing silent, transfixed in thought. “Now is a time to *storm!* *Why art thou still?*”

After a moment, Titus Andronicus looks up—and *laughs*, in a harsh spasm.

Marcus stares. “Why dost thou laugh? It fits not with *this* hour!”

“I have not another tear to shed.”

The old soldier is very tired; but he straightens. “Besides, this watery *sorrow!*—that would *usurp* my eyes, make them *blind* with tributary tears—is an *enemy!* Then which way shall I find *Revenge’s* cave?” He looks down at the grotesque remains. “For these two heads do seem to *speak* to me, and warn me that I shall never come to bliss till all these mischiefs *be returned* again, even in *their throats* who have committed them!”

He thinks. “Come, let me see what tasks I have to do.

“You heavy-hearted people, circle me about, so that I may turn me to each one of you, and swear *unto my soul* to *right* your wrongs!” They stand around him, and Titus faces each, and listens, grasping a shoulder. “The vow is made.

“Come, brother, take a head; and in this hand the other I will bear.

“These arms...” he begins—and realizes that force will no longer serve him. He looks down at his storied sword, lying on the pavement and smeared with his own blood. Marcus picks it up.

The lady steps forward expectantly. Says Titus, “Lavinia, thou shalt be employed. Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth.” She nods; he gives it to her.

As Titus and Marcus lift each head, gently, by the hair, the general tells Lucius, “As for thee, boy, *go*, get thee from my sight!—thou art an *exile*, and thou must not stay! Hie thee to the Goths—and *raise an army there!* And, if you love me, as I think you do, let’s kiss and part, for we have much to do!”

The father embraces his last living son. Then Titus, Marcus and Lavinia, each with a horrid burden, start toward the warrior’s house.

Lucius watches as they go. *Farewell Andronicus, my noble father—the woeful’st man that ever lived in Rome!*

*Farewell, proud Rome. Till Lucius come again, he leaves his pledges!—valued more than his life!*

*Farewell, Lavinia, my noble sister—oh, would thou wert as thou heretofore hast been! But now neither Lucius nor Lavinia lives but in oblivion and hateful grief!*

*If Lucius live, he will requite your wrongs!—and make proud Saturninus and his empress beg at the gates, like Tarquin and his queen!*

*Now will I to the Goths and raise a power, to be revengèd on Rome and Saturninus!*

## Chapter Five Discoveries

In a small room of Titus Andronicus's huge, darkened home, a scant noon meal has been set out, for him and Marcus, and for Lavinia and a boy of ten, Lucius's only son.

"So, so. Now sit," Titus tells them. "And look you eat no more than will preserve just so much strength in us as will revenge these bitter woes of ours."

But as the others take seats, the distraught tribune continues pacing, head bowed, arms crossed.

"Marcus, *unknit* that sorrow-wreathen knot," Titus tells him. "Thy niece and I, poor creatures, *lack* our hands, and cannot personate our tenfold grief with folded arms.

"This poor right hand of mine is left to tyrannize upon my breast! When, mad with misery, my heart *beats* in this hollow prison of my flesh, then thus I thump it down!"

His grandson watches, not eating, as he pounds his own chest angrily, again and again. Martius and Quintus were interred beside Martius months ago, but Titus has shown deepening depression—and festering rage. Marcus, watching the sullen soldier, thinks his brother left more of himself at the tomb than one of his hands. The intensely proud warrior seems to have aged; vacillating from sorrow to fury, he speaks more slowly now, in late autumn, most often of revenge.

Lavinia frowns, and motions for him to stop striking himself; others have inflicted enough pain.

Titus stops. "Thou map of woe, who thus dost talk in signs, when *thy* poor heart beats with outragèd berating, thou *canst* not strike it thus to make it still.

"*Wound* it with *sighing*, girl—*kill it with groans!* Or get some little knife between thy teeth, and just against thy heart make thou a *hole*—so that all the tears that thy poor eyes let fall may run into that sink, and, soaking in, *drown* the lamenting fool in seeing's salt tears!"

"*Fie*, brother, *fie!*" says Marcus. He can see his sister's suffering, but not the deadly resolve it has engendered. "Teach her not thus to lay such violent hands upon her tender life!"

Titus replies with scorn. "How now?—has sorrow made thee *dote* already? Why, Marcus, *no* man should be reckless if not *I!*

"And what violent hands can *she* lay on her life?"

"Wherefore dost thou urge the name of *hands?*—bid *Aeneas* tell the tale *twice o'er* how Troy was burnt, and *he* was made miserable! Oh, *handle* not thy theme by talking of *hands*, lest we remember that *we two* still have but *one!*"

Titus sees Marcus's stricken look. "Fie, fie, how frantically I square in my talk!" he says to Lavinia. "As if we could *forget* we had no hands, if Marcus did not name the *word* hands.

"Come, let's fall to; and, gentle girl, eat this." He spoons up some gruel, which Lavinia chews, then swallows, but only with difficulty. She shakes her head at his offer of wine.

Says Titus, as his brother takes a seat, "Hark, Marcus, what she says: 'Here is *no drinking.*' I can interpret all her martyred signs; she says she drinks no other drink but *tears*, brewed with her sorrow, markèd down upon her cheeks!

"Speechless complainant, I will learn thy *thought!*—to thy silent action will I be as perfected as are begging *hermits* in their *holy prayers!* Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven, nor blink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign, but I from these will wrest an *alphabet*, and by continual practise, learn to know thy *meaning!*"

Her obvious frustration upsets young Lucius. “Good grandsire, leave these bitter deep laments!” he says tearfully. “Make my aunt *merry*, with some *pleasing* tale!”

Marcus, cutting bread, smiles kindly. “Alas, the tender boy, in passion movèd, doth weep to see his grandsire’s heaviness.”

“Peace, tender sapling,” the warrior tells the lad sourly. “Thou art *made* of tears—and tears will quickly melt thy life away.”

Marcus, irked by the cynical comment to a child, smacks the haft down onto the table.

Titus sees his glare. “What dost thou *strike at*, Marcus, with thy knife?”

“At that which I have killed, my lord. A fly.” But his irritation is still apparent.

“*Out on thee, murderer!*—thou kill’st my *heart!*—mine eyes are cloyèd with *views of tyranny!* A deed of death done on the *innocent* becomes not *Titus’* brother! Get thee gone! I see thou art not for my company!”

“Alas, my lord, I have but killed a fly.”

Titus’s gaze is steady, but whatever he sees—or remembers, now—is far away. “But what if that fly had a *mother?*—and *father!*”

He says, softly, “How he would hang his from slender, gilded wings, and buzz in the air, lamenting our doings....”

“Poor harmless fly, that, with his pretty buzzing melody, came here to make us *merry!* And...”—his voice cracks, “thou hast *killed him!*”

“Pardon me, sir; it was a black, *ill-favored* fly,” says Marcus carefully, “like the empress’ Moor; *therefore* I killed him.” He wants to call Titus back from maudlin musing.

“*Oh, oh, oh*, then *pardon* me for reprehending thee, for thou hast done a *charitable* deed!” says Titus with sarcasm; he has never before been patronized. “Give *me* thy knife!—I will assault him—flattering myself that the Moor come hither purposely to *poison* me, as it were!” He grabs the knife and stabs at the air. “*There’s* for thyself, and *that’s* for *Tamora!* *Hah! sirrah!*”

He drops the knife to the table. “I think we are not yet brought so low but that, between us, we cannot kill a *fly* that comes in *likeness* of a coal-black Moor.”

*Alas, poor man!* thinks Marcus, watching him. *Grief has so wrought on him that he takes false shadows for true substances!*

Titus soon summons the servants to the table. “Come, take away.

“Lavinia, walk with me. I’ll go to thy room, and read with thee sad stories of what chanced in the times of old.” He smiles at his grandson. “Come, boy, and go with me! Thy sight is young, and thou shalt read when mine begin to dazzle.”

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Outside, in the formal garden behind the tall building, young Lucius runs, still clutching three books, from the mansion—with Lavinia chasing him. He dashes, gasping for breath, up to Titus.

“*Help*, Grandsire, *help!* My Aunt Lavinia follows me everywhere, I know not why! Good Uncle Marcus, see how swiftly she comes!” He ducks behind the men. “*Alas*, sweet aunt, I know not what you *mean!*”

Marcus smiles. “Stand by me, Lucius; do not fear thine aunt.”

“She *loves* thee, boy!—too well to do thee harm,” Titus assures him.

“Aye,” says the banished lord’s son, “when my father was in *Rome* she did.”

Marcus sees the lady’s frantic demeanor, her rapid gestures toward the boy. “What means my niece Lavinia by these signs?”

“Fear her not, Lucius,” says Titus, as she draws her stumps toward herself, repeatedly, pleading for a book. “*Something* doth she mean—see, Lucius, see how much she makes of thee! Some whither would she have thee go with her.

“Ah, boy,” he says, remembering better times, “*Cornelia* never with more care read to her sons”—the Roman lady’s boys became famous as outspoken reformers, “sweet poetry, and Tully’s *Orator*, than Lavinia hath read to *thee.*”

But now she cannot speak, and Marcus thinks she wants someone to aloud read to her. He asks Lucius, "Canst thou not guess wherefore she plies thee thus?"

"My lord, I know *not*, I, nor can I *guess!*—unless some fit of *frenzy* do possess her!" says the child, setting the books on the grass. "For I have heard my grandsire say full oft that *extremity of grief* would make men *mad*; and I have read that Hecuba of Troy ran mad through *sorrow!* Although, my lord, I know my noble aunt loves me as dear as e'er my *mother* did, and would not, but in a fury, fright my youth, that which made me to throw down my books and *fly* made me to *fear!*

"Causeless, perhaps; but *pardon* me, sweet aunt! And, madam, if my *Uncle Marcus* do, I will most willingly attend Your Ladyship," he says, tentatively coming forward.

Marcus kindly puts a hand on his shoulder. "Lucius, I will."

But Lavinia is on her knees, now, beside them, jostling the volumes with the bandaged ends of her arms.

"How now, Lavinia?" says Titus. "Marcus, what means this? Some book is there that she desires to see...." He kneels and spreads them before her. "Which is it, girl, of these? Open them, boy." He sees that two are children's stories.

He rises, and tells Lavinia, "But thou art *deeper* read and better *skilled!* Come and take choice of *all* my library—and so beguile thy sorrow, till the heavens reveal the damnèd contriver of this deed!"

Titus frowns. "Why lifts she up her arms in sequence thus?"

Marcus watches her vigorous movements. "I think she means that there was *more than one* confederate in the crime! *Aye*, more there *was*... or else she heaves them for revenge!"

Lavinia nods to confirm both readings.

Titus watches her push open one volume and scrape aside some pages. "Lucius, what book is that she tosseth so?"

"Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; my *mother* gave it me."

"Perhaps she culled it from among the rest for love of her that's gone," says Marcus; the gentlewoman died two years ago.

"Soft! See how busily she turns the leaves! What would she find?" Titus helps her, turning the pages, and soon she taps the one she wants. "Lavinia, shall I read?"

"This is the tragic tale of Philomel, and treats of Tereus' treason and his rape—and *rape*, I fear, was root of *thine* anguish."

"See, brother, *see!*" cries Marcus, as Lavinia jabs at the pages. "Note how she *quotes* the leaves!"

Titus asks: "Lavinia, wert *thou* thus seizèd, sweet girl?—ravished and wronged as Philomela was—*forcèd* in a ruthless, vast and gloomy woods?" He looks at the book's picture. "See, *see!* *Aye*, there is such a place where *we* did hunt—oh, would we had never, never hunted *there*, patterned as was that which the poet here describes by nature: *made for murders* and for *rapes!*"

"Oh, why should Nature *build* so foul a den, unless the *gods* delight in *tragedies?*" murmurs Marcus, as Lavinia rises.

"Give signs, sweet girl," pleads Titus, "for here are none but friends, what Roman lord it was durst do the deed! If slunk not *Saturninus*, as did erstwhile Tarquin to sin in Lucrece's bed, *who left the camp?*"

Marcus moves to a stone bench. "Sit down, sweet niece. Brother, sit down by me. Apollo, Pallas, Jove or Mercury, *inspire* me, that I may this *treason find!*

"My lord, look here. Look here, Lavinia." He points to bare ground in front of the bench. "This sandy plot is plain; guide, if thou canst, *this*, after me." Holding one end of a slender garden pole in his mouth, he scratches on the ground by moving the other end, clamped between his boots. "I have writ my name—without the help of any hand at all!"

“Cursèd be that heart that forced us to *this* shift,” he mutters, carefully positioning the pole for her. “*Write* thou, good niece!—and here display, *at last*, what God will have *revealed* for *revenge!*”

“Heaven guide thy pen to print thy sorrows plain, that we may know the *traitors* and the *truth!*”

With the bare wood gripped between her teeth, she guides the stick’s far end with her feet.

Marcus stares. “Oh, do ye read, my lord, what she hath writ! ‘*Stuprum, Chiron Demetrius.*’” *Stuprum* is a Latin word for *rape*.

“*What?*” cries Titus. “*What?*—the lustful sons of *Tamora* performers of this *heinous, bloody deed!*” He shouts to the sky: “*Magni Dominator poli, tam lentus audis scelera, tam lentus vides?*”—*Great God of all, are you so slow to see wrongs, so slow to hear?*”

“Oh, *calm* thee, gentle lord!” says Marcus, “although I know enough is written there upon this earth to stir a *mutiny* in the *mildest* thoughts, and arm the minds of *infants* to exclaim!

“My lord, kneel down with me!” says the tribune. “Lavinia, kneel—and kneel, sweet boy, thou hero of Roman *hope!*—and *swear* with me!—as the woeful *Lucius Junius Brutus,*”—founder of Rome, “and the father of that chaste, dishonourèd dame swore for *Lucrece’s* rape—that with as good counsel we will *prosecute mortal revenge* upon these *traitorous Goths!*—and *see their blood,* or die with his reproach!”

Brutus led the revenge taken by Lucrece’s family, bringing about the Tarquin king’s expulsion and the founding the Roman Republic—deteriorated, now, into empire. Marcus wants the Andronici to rid their country of dictatorship and foreign infection.

But Titus shrugs. “’Tis sure enough—if you know *how*. But if you hunt these bear-whelps, their *dam* will wake—and if she once get wind of you, then *beware!* She’s with the *lion* still deeply in league, and lulls him whilst she playeth on her back”—calms him with sex. “Then, when he sleeps, she will do whatever she list! You are a *young* huntsman, Marcus. Let it alone.”

Says Titus, looking again at the scratched indictment, “Then come. I will go get a leaf of brass, and with a gad of steel will write these words, then lay it by. The angry northern wind will blow these sands abroad, like *Sibyl’s* leaves,”—the oracle’s spoken words, “and where’s your lesson, *then?*” He will make a lasting record of his family’s reason for revenge.

He smiles. “Boy, what say *you?*”

Lucius’s young son replies sternly: “I say, my lord, that if *I* were a man, *their mother’s bed-chamber* should not be safe for those *bad bondman* to the yoke of Rome!”—evil serfs.

Marcus is pleased. “*Aye,* that’s my boy! Thy *father* hath full oft for this ungrateful country *done the like!*”

“And, Uncle, so will *I,* an if I live!”

Titus motions them toward a door. “Come, go with me into mine armoury, Lucius. I’ll fit thee withal. My boy, you shalt carry from me to the empress’ sons *presents* that I intend to send them both. Come, come—thou’lt do thy message, wilt thou not?”

“*Aye—with my dagger in their bosoms,* Grandsire!”

“*No,* boy, not *so.* I’ll teach thee *another* course.” Once again himself, and a master of stratagem, he already has the beginning of a scheme. “Lavinia, come. Marcus, look to my house. Lucius and I’ll go brave it at the court.” He sees Marcus’s disapproval. “*Aye,* marry, *we will,* sir!—and we’ll be *waited on!*”

With the lady and the boy, the old gentleman goes to select weapons—for *gifts*.

Marcus fears that the soldier, in his proud fealty, is again yielding to Saturninus. He looks skyward. *O heavens, can you hear the good man groan, and not relent?—or not impassion him?*

*Marcus, attend him in his reverie!—one who hath more scars of sorrow in his heart than foemen’s marks upon his battered shield!—but yet is so just that he will not revenge!*

*Revenge, ye heavens, for old Andronicus!*

## Chapter Six Messages

Within the palace, Aaron sits on a stone bench by a window, whetting the long, curved blade of his scimitar, and listening to Tamara's sons squabble.

A servant enters, and speaks to Chiron, who tells his brother, "Demetrius, here's the son of Lucius; he hath some message to deliver us."

Aaron looks up. "Aye—some mad message from his mad grandfather!" It is widely reported in Rome that the old man now spends most of his days mired in impotent incoherence.

Lucius approaches the brothers and bows. "My lords, with all the humbleness I may, I greet Your Honours from Andronicus." *And pray the Roman gods confound you both!*

"Gramercy, lovely Lucius," says Demetrius. "What's the news?"

The child is thinking, *That you are both deciphered as villains!—marked with rape!—that's the news!* But he says: "May it please you, my grandsire, well advisèd, hath sent by me the goodliest weapons of his armoury to gratify your honourable *youth*—the hope of Rome!—for so he bade me say." He sets two costly, polished-silver scabbards on a table.

"And so I *do*, and present Your Lordships with his gifts so that, whenever you have need, you may be armèd and appointed well! And so I'll leave you both." *Like bloody villains!* Young Lucius again bows, and he goes to tell Titus that his offering was accepted.

The princes extract the elegant swords, and examine their excellent steel.

Demetrius, slashing a blade through the air, stops to look again at its fine scabbard. "What's here? A scroll and writing round about. Let's see." He unwraps it and reads aloud: "*Integer vitae, scelerisque purus, non eget Mauri jaculis, nec arcus.*"

"Oh, 'tis a verse in Horace. I know it well," says Chiron glibly. "I read it in a grammar long ago." He does not offer its meaning, nor does his brother ask.

"Aye, just," says Aaron dryly. "A verse in Horace; right, you have it!" The poet's Latin line, he knows, is: "Righteous life, free of crime, needs not the Moor's javelin or bow."

He thinks, watching the two foppish ruffians, *Now what a thing it is to be an ass! Here's found no jest! The old man hath sounded their guilt!—and sends them weapons wrapped about with lines that, beyond their feeling, wound to the quick!*

*Were our witty empress well and afoot, she would applaud Andronicus's gibe! But let her rest in her unrest awhile.* Tamora has been indisposed for a week.

"And now, young lords, was't not a *happy* star led us to Rome?—strangers, and more than so, *captives*—to be advancèd to this height!" He well remembers Lucius's demand for sacrifice. "It did me good to *brave* the tribune!—in his *brother's* hearing—before the palace gate!"

Demetrius is still waving a bright sword about. "But me *more* good, to see so great a lord basely obsequious, and sending us *gifts!*"

Aaron laughs. "Had he not *reason*, Lord Demetrius?—did you not use his daughter very *friendly?*"

Demetrius nods. "I would we had a *thousand* Roman dames at such a bay, to serve our lust by *turns!*"

His brother concurs heartily. "A *charitable* wish!—and full of *love!*"

"Here lacks but your mother, for to say *Amen!*"

"And that would *she* for *twenty* thousand *more!*" says Chiron.

"Come, let us go," says Demetrius, "and pray to all the gods for our belovèd mother in her pains."

Aaron returns to sharpening. *Pray to the devils; the gods have given up on us.*

Echoing down a long corridor comes a brief, triumphant sounding of horns. "Why do the emperor's trumpets flourish thus?" asks Demetrius.

“Belike for joy the emperor hath a *son*,” says Chiron sourly; they would not relish the advent of a preferred rival.

“Soft! Who comes here?” says Demetrius.

A plump, middle-aged woman holding a small bundle rushes into the room. “Good morrow, lords!” She asks urgently, “Oh, tell me, did you see Aaron the Moor?”

He stands and comes to them. “Well, *more or less*,” he says, playing on Moor, “or ne’er a whit at all—here *Aaron* is! Then what with Aaron, now?”

“Oh, gentle Aaron, ye are *all undone!*” wails the nurse. “Now *help!*—or *woe* betide thee ever more!”

He frowns “Why, what a caterwauling dost thou keep! What dost thou wrap and fumble in thine arms?”

The nurse angrily shifts the wriggling blanket. “Oh, that which I would hide from *heaven’s* eye!—our empress’ *shame*, and stately Rome’s *disgrace!* She is delivered, lords; she is *delivered!*”

“To whom?”

“I mean, she is brought *a-bed!*”

“Well, God give her good rest! What hath He sent her?”

“A devil!”

He laughs. “Why then she is the *Devil’s dam*—a *royal* issue!” He has ruminated on the character of a child born to surly Saturninus and his wily empress.

“A joyless, dismal, bleak, and *sorrowful* issue!” cries the nurse. “Here is the babe—as *loathsome as a toad* amongst the fairest breeders of *our* clime! The empress sends it to thee—with *thy* stamp, *thy seal!*—and bids thee christen it with *thy dagger’s* point!”

“*Zounds*, ye *whore!* Is *black* so *base* a hue? Sweet blowse, *you* are a beauteous blossom, sure!”

“*Villain*, what hast thou *done?*” demands Demetrius.

“That which thou canst not *undo!*” retorts Aaron.

Chiron stares. “Thou hast undone *our mother!*”

Aaron grins. “*Villain*, I have *done* thy mother.”

But Demetrius is frantic: “And therein, hellish dog, thou hast *undone!* Woe is her luck—and *damnèd* her loathèd *choice!* Accursèd be the offspring of so foul a *fiend!*”

“It shall not *live!*” cries Chiron.

Aaron is glaring. “It shall not die.”

“Aaron, it *must*,” says the nurse, “the mother *wills* it so!”

“What, must it, nurse?” he murmurs. “Then let no man but *I* do execution on my flesh and blood.”

“*I’ll* broach the tadpole on my *rapier’s* point!” cries Demetrius. “Nurse, give it me; my sword shall soon dispatch it!”

Aaron brandishes his scimitar. “Sooner shall *this* sword *plough up thy bowels!*”

He takes the child from the nurse, steps away, and—watching the others carefully—unwraps the top of the blanket. He smiles at the child’s face, then looks up. “*Stay*, murderous villains!—will you kill *your brother?*”

“Now, by the burning tapers of the sky, that shone so brightly when this boy was *begot*, he *dies* upon my scimitar’s sharp point who *touches* this, my first-born *son and heir!*”

“I tell you, younglings, not *Enceladus*, with all his threatening band of Typhon’s brood,”—the giant and his hundred-headed monsters, “nor great *Hercules*, nor the *god of war*, shall seize *this* prey out of his father’s hands!

“What, *what?*—*unsanguine*, *shallow-hearted boys!* Ye *white-limed walls!*—ye painted *alehouse signs!* *Coal black* is *better* than any other hue, in that it scorns to *bear* another hue!—for all the water in the *ocean* can never turn the swan’s black legs to white, though she lave them hourly in the flood!

“Tell the empress from me, I am *of age to keep mine own!* Excuse it how she *can!*”

Demetrius’s new sword is back in its sheath, but he is very perturbed. “Wilt thou *betray* thy noble mistress thus?”

Aaron shrugs. “My mistress is my mistress; *this,*” he says, holding up the infant, “*myself!*—the vigour and the picture of my youth! *This* before all the *world* do I prefer; *this despite* all the world will I keep *safe*—or some of you in Rome shall smoke for it!”—lose steaming blood.

“By this our mother is forever *shamed!*” moans Demetrius.

“Rome will *despise* her for this foul departure!” says Chiron.

“The emperor in his rage will pronounce her *death!*” cries the nurse.

“I *blush* to *think* upon this ignominy!” groans Chiron.

“Well, *there’s* a privilege *your* beauty bears!” says Aaron. “*Fie, treacherous* hue, that will betray with blushing the secret acts and counsels of the heart!” He regards the baby. “Here’s a young lad framed of *another* leer! Look how the black slave smiles upon the father, as if to say, ‘Old lad, I am *thine own!*’

“He is your *brother*, lords—senses fed with that self-same blood that first gave life to *you*; and from that womb where you imprisoned were, he is enfranchisèd and come to light! Aye, although my seal be stampèd in his face, he is your *brother* by the *surer* side!”—the maternal.

The nurse is worried. “Aaron, what shall I say unto the empress?”

Demetrius now pleads. “Advise thee, Aaron, *what is to be done*, and we will all subscribe to thy advice! Save thou the child—so long as we may *all* be safe!”

“Then sit we down,” says Aaron, nodding, “and let us consult. My son and I will have the wind of you”—watch warily, he says still holding the scimitar. He waits until the other three have taken seats opposite him at the heavy table. “Keep there. Now talk at pleasure about *your* safety.”

Demetrius asks the nurse, “How many women saw this ‘*child*’ of his?”

Growls Aaron, “Why *so*, brave lord? When we join *in league*, I am a lamb—but if you *brave* the Moor, the *chafèd* boar, the mountain *lioness*, the *ocean* swells not so as *Aaron storms!*”

“But *say*: again, how many *saw* the child?”

The nurse knows: “Cornelia the midwife and myself; and no one else but the deliverèd empress.”

“The empress, the midwife and yourself,” says Aaron, frowning. “Two may keep counsel—when the third’s *away*”—to tell, as is the nurse. “Go to the empress; tell her I said *this....*” He swings his blade up in a short arc, deftly cutting the startled nurse’s throat. He laughs, mimicking her dying gasps as she falls to the floor: “*Wheak, wheak!*—so cries a pig preparèd for the spit!”

Demetrius clammers away from the squirting blood—and the weapon. “What *mean’s*t thou, Aaron! Wherefore didst thou *this*?”

“Oh, *Lord*, sir!”—a menial’s standard non-reply. Carefully wiping the blade clean on the nurse’s apron, the Moor explains: “’Tis a deed of *policy*. Shall she live to betray this ‘*guilt*’ of ours?—a long-tongued, babbling *gossip*? No, lords, *no!*”

“And now be it known to you my full intent. Not far lives one Muliteus, my countryman. His wife but yesternight was brought to bed; his child is like to *her*—fair as *you* are!

“Go compact with him, and give the mother gold; tell them both the circumstance of all—and how by this *their child* shall be substituted in the place of *mine!*—be receivèd for the emperor’s heir and be advancèd, to keep this tempest from whirling in the court.

“Then let the emperor dandle him for *his own!*”

“Hark ye, lords.” His blade points at the nurse. “Ye see I have given her the *purgative*—but *you* must needs bestow her *funeral*. The fields are near, and you are gallant grooms”—*stable hands*.

The princes smart at the insult, but dare make no reply.

“That done,” says Aaron, “see that you take no long delay, but immediately send the *midwife* to me! The midwife and the nurse well made away, then let the *ladies* tattle what they please.”

Chiron does admire ruthlessness. “Aaron, I see thou wilt not trust the *air* with secrets!”



Says Demetrius, "For this care of Tamora, herself and hers are highly bound to thee!"

He and Chiron carry the corpse out to the wooded grounds for the first hasty burial.

Aaron holds his son, and thinks ahead.

*Now secretly to the Goths, as swift as swallow flies!—there to repose this treasure in mine arms, and to greet the empress' friends.*

*Come on, you thick-lipped slave, I'll bear you hence.*

*Because it is you that puts us to our shifts, —compel flight from wealth— I'll cabin you in a cave, make you food of berries and roots, feed you curds and whey, and suckle you on the goat— and bring you up to be a warrior, and to command a camp!*

Standing at a scarred-pine table outside the back of his huge house this evening, Titus has been writing small notes that plead for help from the gods. At the general's request, Marcus's grown son Publius has brought here several other gentlemen, all relatives.

Marcus and his nephew's boy Lucius carry bows made of tough yew, and on the table are arrows—the shaft of each wrapped with a message, a strip of paper fastened on with wax.

"Come, Marcus; come, kinsmen! This is the way!" calls Titus. He claps young Lucius on the shoulder. "Sir Boy, now let me see your archery! Look ye, draw back far enough, and 'tis there straight!"—soon delivered. "*Terras Astraea reliquit!*"—*Astraea*, goddess of justice, *has relinquished the earth*. "Be you remembered, Marcus: she's *gone*, she's *fled!*" he cries.

The tribune and Publius exchange looks; lately Titus has raved on to any who will listen about his search, conspicuous but futile, for Justice.

"Sirs, take you to your tools!" calls Titus, to those conscripted as archers.

"You, cousins," he tells the other visitors, "shall go *sound the ocean* and *cast your nets!*—haply you may catch her in the sea!" He frowns. "Yet *there* is as little justice as on *land*...."

"No, Publius and Sempronius, *you* must do it: 'tis you must dig with mattock and with spade, and pierce the *inmost centre of the earth!*"

"Then when you come to *Pluto's* region,"—the underworld, "I pray you deliver him this petition," he says, handing Publius one of his longer notes. "Tell him it is to *Justice*—and for *aid*—and that it comes from old Andronicus, shaken with sorrows in ungrateful Rome!"

Titus looks around, sadly. "*Ah, Rome.*" *Well, well; I made thee miserable when I threw the people's suffrages on him that thus doth tyrannize o'er me.*

Accusing the state is a capital offense; praying to a goddess is an act of piety. And if the gods don't receive his notes, mortals on the ground can read them—and will talk about them. Some retribution has already begun: under Saturninus's vicious dominion, Romans have come to realize that the old soldier's strident pleas, though lawful, are hopeless. Ever more fearful, citizens avoid being seen with Titus.

"Go, get you gone," he tells those who are to seek out *Astraea* at sea, "and pray take care, all, to leave not a man-of-war unsearchèd!" He whispers conspiratorially: "This wicked emperor may have *shipped her hence*—and, kinsmen, there we may go *pipe* for Justice!"

He goes to sit at the table; again he writes, as the others watch and wait.

"Oh, Publius," says Marcus quietly, "is not this a heavy case?—to see thy noble uncle thus distract!"

His son nods. "And therefore, my lord, it highly concerns us to attend him *carefully*, by day and night, and feed his mood kindly as we may, till careful time beget some remedy!"

Now the tribune tells them, "Kinsmen, his sorrows are *past* remedy. *Join with the Goths*, and *wreak revengeful war* upon Rome for its ingratitude!—and *vengeance* on the traitor *Saturninus!*"

Titus returns to them with more notes. "Publius, how now? How now, my masters?" He looks eagerly from face to face. "What—have you *met with her?*"

"No, my good lord," says Publius. "But *Pluto* sends you word: if you will have revenge from *Hell*, you shall!"

“Marry, as for *Justice*,” he says, with a side glance at Marcus, “she is so employèd, he thinks, with Jove in heaven, or somewhere else, that perforce you must needs wait a while....”

Titus frowns. “He doth me *wrong* to feed me with *delays*! I’ll dive into the burning lake below, and *pull her out of Acheron by the heels*!”

He wags his head in frustration. “Marcus, we are but *shrubs*, no *cedars* we, no big-bonèd men framed of the Cyclops’ size...

“—but *mettle*, Marcus: *steel* at the very back!...

“—yet wrung with more wrongs than our backs can *bear*.

“And, sith there’s no justice on earth nor in hell, we will solicit *heaven*, and move the gods to send down *Justice* to wreak for our wrongs!

“Come, to this gear!” He gives the men message-laden arrows. “*You* are a good archer, Marcus! *Ad Jovem*,” he says, noting how the first is addressed, “that’s for you! Here, *Ad Apollinem*.” He finds the one for Mars, god of war. “*Ad Martem*—that’s for myself!

“Here, boy, to Pallas; here, to Mercury! To Saturn, Caius—not to *Saturninus*!—you were as good to shoot against the wind!

“*To* it, boy! Marcus, loose when I bid! On my word, I have written *to effect*!—there’s not a god left unsolicited!” He steps away to watch the arrows’ upward flight.

- Marcus privately advises the others: “Kinsmen, shoot all your shafts into the *court*! We will afflict the emperor in his *pride*!”

“Now, masters, *draw*!” commands Titus. They notch the arrows, tug back the strings, and, at his command, send the messages aloft—arcing toward the palace. “Oh, well *said*, Lucius! Good boy!—in Virgo’s lap! Give it to *Pallas*!”—Athena is also the goddess of war.

Marcus, knowing where the messages are falling, hears *palace*, but he assures the old man: “My lord, I aimed a mile beyond the moon! Your letter is with *Jupiter* by now!” Jupiter rules the gods of Rome.

Titus watches as the arrows fall. “Publius, Publius!” he cries, “what hast thou *done*? See, *see*!—thou hast shot off one of *Taurus*’s horns!”—a star in the bull-shaped constellation. The notes were meant to inflame the city’s populace, and they have; but now the court will be alerted—and provoked.

Marcus, indulging delirium, seems jocund. “That was the *sport*, my lord! When Publius shot, the bull, being gallèd, gave nearby *Aries* such a knock that both of the *ram*’s horns fell down into the court!

“And who should find them but the *villain empress*! She laughed!—and told the Moor he could not choose but give them to his *master* as a *present*!”

“Well, there it goes,” says Titus. “God give his lordship joy in them.” The game he hunts is being flushed from cover.

A man is coming up the lane from the general’s stable; he carries a wicker cage containing two pigeons.

“*News*, news from *heaven*!” cries Titus upon seeing the birds—the kind, he seems to be thinking, that when released from afar, carry home small, rolled messages tied to their legs. “Marcus, the *post* is come!

“Sirrah, what tidings?” asks Titus, running to meet the fellow. “Have you any letters? Shall I have justice? What says *Jupiter*?”

The unfamiliar name puzzles the groom for a moment. “Oh, the *gibbet-maker*!—he says that he hath taken them down again, for a man must not be hanged ’till ‘the next week’”—a legal phrase cited, wryly, by the condemned: *next week* is always a week away.

“But what says *Jupiter*, I ask thee!”

“Alas, sir, I know not *Jubider*. I never drank with *him* in all my life.”

Titus stares, blinking. “Why, villain, art not thou the *carrier*?”

“Aye, of my *pigeons*, sir; nothing else.”

Titus seems surprised. “Why—didst thou not come from *heaven*?”

“From *heaven!* Alas, sir, I never went *there!*—God forbid I should be so bold as to press on to heaven in *my* young days!

“Why, I am going with my pigeons to the *tribunal* plebes,”—the tribunes, commoners who serve as magistrates, “to take up the matter of a brawl betwixt my uncle and one of the emperial’s men.” The tasty birds are to be delivered as the customary bribe.

Marcus offers Titus an idea: “Why, sir, that is *as fit as can be* to serve for *your* oration! Let him deliver the pigeons to the emperor from *you!*” He hopes to keep the enfeebled gentleman from confronting Saturninus.

Titus looks at the stable hand dubiously. “Tell me, can you deliver an oration to the emperor with *grace?*”

“Nay, truly, sir, I could never say grace in all my life!” The man’s meager diet is eaten without ceremony.

Titus has decided. “Sirrah, come hither! Make no more ado, but give your pigeons *to the emperor!* Through me, thou shalt have *justice* at his hands!

“Hold, hold,” he says, before any question arises. “Meanwhile, here’s *money* for these duties!” The silver coins equal the man’s wages for about two years. “Give me pen and ink!” At the table, Titus writes. He asks the servant, “Sirrah, can you with grace deliver a *supplication?*”

“*Aye, sir!*” says he, staring at the money in his hand; whatever the thing may be, he will carry it to the ruler.

“Then here is a supplication for you. And when you come to him, at the first approach you must *kneel*, then *kiss his foot!* Then deliver up your pigeons, and look for your reward.

“I’ll be at hand, sir. See that you do it bravely!”

“I warrant you, sir!” the man tells the general.

“Sirrah, hast thou a knife? Come, let me see it. Here, Marcus, fold it within the oration.” He tells the lowly courier, “For thou must make it like an *humble* supplicant! And when thou hast given it to the emperor,” he tells the man, “knock at my door, and tell me what he says.”

“God be with you, sir; I *will!*”

Titus heads inside to make some preparations; he expects to hear from Saturninus—soon. “Come, Marcus, let us go. Publius, follow me.”

With the caged pigeons slung on his back, the delighted messenger hurries toward the palace, eager to gain further riches.

## Chapter Seven Her Sons Discovered

Saturninus rages to his courtiers. “Why, lords, what *wrongs* are *these!*” he cries, shaking a fistful of Titus’s little notes. “Was ever seen an *emperor* in *Rome* thus overborne, troubled—*confronted* thus?—and, for extending equal justice, *used with such contempt?*” He knows that similar missives have been found throughout the capital.

He had welcomed his contentious brother’s death, and he quickly used the opportunity to execute, in apparent indignation, two of the proud Andronici; he hadn’t even waited to enjoy seeing them tortured much.

“My lords, you know—the righteous *gods* know!—however these disturbers of our peace may buzz in *the people’s* ears, there hath passèd nought but what was *even* with *law* against the willful sons of old Andronicus!

“And what if his sorrows *have* so overwhelmed his wits?—shall *we* be thus afflicted in his wreck—his fits, his frenzy, and his bitterness?

“And now he writes to *heaven* for his redress! See!—here’s to *Jove*, and this to Mercury, this to Apollo, this to the god of war—*sweet* scrolls to fly about the streets of *Rome!*” he says angrily. “What’s this but *libelling* against the *Senate*, blazoning out ‘*injustice*’ everywhere?”

“A *goodly* notion, is it not, my lords?” he snarls, flinging away the notes. “As if to say in Rome were *no justice!*” That argument, he knows—as do the legislators—now rings true with many. “But if I live, his feignèd fantasies shall be no shelter to these outrages, and he and his shall know that justice *lives*—in Saturninus’ *hell!*—which, if asleep, he’ll *awake*, and in fury shall *cut off* the proud’st conspirator that lives!”

Tamora puts down the arrow she has been examining, and strokes his arm. “My gracious lord—my lovely Saturninus, lord of my life, commander of my thoughts!—*calm* thee, and *bear* the faults of Titus’ age, the effects of sorrow over his valiant sons, whose loss hath *pierced him deep*, and *scarred his heart!* And, rather than *prosecute* as thou meanest for these contempts, best *comfort his distressed plight!*”

The empress thinks her husband’s response, typically abrupt and harsh, would make matters even worse, politically, among the nobility. *Thus shall it well become high-witted Tamora to gloss over withal. But, Titus, I have touched thee to the quick!—spilled thy life-blood out!* she thinks, gloating.

*If Aaron now be wise, then all is safe! The anchor’s in the port!* The palace, celebrating the substitute infant’s arrival, was surprised to learn that Aaron had departed—probably, it is thought, to return to his home land.

Still, she knows that Andronicus must be dealt with, soon.

The royal attendants have admitted a laborer who brings a request for the emperor.

“How now, good fellow,” says Tamora. “Wouldst thou speak with us?”

“Yea, forsooth, if Your Mistress-ship be *emperial.*”

“Empress I am, but yonder sits the emperor.”

“’Tis *he!*” says the stable man in awe. “God and Saint Stephen give you ‘*Good-day!*’” he tells Saturninus. “I have brought you a letter, and a couple of pigeons, here!”

Saturninus unfolds the paper—and finds a knife. “*Go,*” he tells the guards, “take him away, and *hang* him instantly!”

The servant is confused. “How much money am I to have?”

Tamora tells him coldly, “Come, sirrah, you must be hanged.”

“*Hanged!* By’r Lady, then I have brought up a-neck at the far end!”—finished his race.

Saturninus is again stewing about Titus. “*Despiteful* and intolerable *wrongs!* Shall I *endure* this monstrous *villainy?* May this be *borne?*—as if his traitorous sons, who died *by law* for *murder of our brother*, have by my means been butchered *wrongfully!* Neither age nor honour shall shield *license!*”

“I know from whence *this* same device proceeds! *Go!*—drag the villain thither *by the hair!*” Two of the emperor’s guards haul away the poor man and his shaken birds.

Tamora listens, prudently silent, as Saturninus fulminates against Andronicus.

“For this proud mock I’ll be thy *slaughterman*, sly, frantic *wretch!*—who helped to make me great in hope *thymself* should govern Rome—and *me!*”

He is still ruminating darkly when an agitated old nobleman hurries to him, and bows. “What news with thee, Emillius?”

“*Arm, arm,* my lord!—Rome never had more *cause!*” cries the silver-haired senator. “The *Goths* have *gathered head!*—and with a power of high-resolvèd men bent to *despoil* they *hither march amain!*—under conduct of *Lucius*, son to old Andronicus!—and who in the course of this revenge bids to *do* as much as ever Coriolanus did *threaten!*” That arrogant general of old, banished by Rome, joined an enemy to return, seize territory, and besiege the capital.

Saturninus is stunned. “Is warlike *Lucius* general of the *Goths?*” He paces. “These tidings nip me, and hang the head as flowers’ bitten with frost, or grass beat down by *storms!* *Ay,* now begin our *sorrows* to approach!”

“’Tis *he* the common people *love* so much! Myself hath often overheard them say, when I have walkèd like a private man,”—in disguise, “that his banishment was wrongful—and they have wished that *Lucius* were their emperor!”

“Why should you fear?” asks Tamora. “Is not your city *strong*?”

“Aye, but the *citizens* favor *Lucius*!—and will *revolt* from me to succor *him*!”

Tamora faces him. “Emperor, be thy *thoughts* imperious like thy *name*!

“Is the *sun* dimmed, that *gnats* do fly in its light? The *eagle* suffers *little* birds to sing—and cares not what they *mean* thereby, knowing that with the *shadow* of his wings he can at pleasure stint their melody! Even so mayst *thou* the giddy men of Rome!”

He is ready to listen.

“Then *cheer* thy spirit!” she tells him, smiling confidently. “For know thou, emperor, I will *enchant* the old Andronicus with words most sweet—and yet more *dangerous* than baits to *fish* or honey-stalks”—clover—“to *sheep*, when the one is *wounded* by the hook, the other *fatted* with delicious feed!”—readied for slaughter.

Saturninus scowls. “But he will not *entreat his son* for us!” Lucius—an excellent, experienced commander, and one who knows Rome’s weaknesses—is the greater threat.

“If *Tamora* entreat him, then *he will*! For I can soothe—and fill his aged ears with such golden promises that, were his heart almost *impregnable*, his old ears *deaf*, yet should both ear and heart *obey my tongue*!”

She turns to Lord Emillius. “Go thou before; be our ambassador. Say that the emperor requests a *parley* with warlike Lucius, and appoint the meeting even at his *father’s* house, old Andronicus’s estate.”

The emperor agrees. “Emillius, do this message honourably. And if he insist on a hostage for his safety, bid him demand what pledge will please him best.”

Emillius bows. “Your bidding shall I do effectually.” He goes to meet with the banished Lord Lucius, who is returning with a fierce army of new allies.

Tamora assures Saturninus, smoothly, “And *I* will go to old Andronicus and temper him, with all the art I have, to *pluck* proud Lucius from the warlike Goths!

“And now, sweet emperor, be blithe again!—and bury all thy fear in my devices....”

But the burly man, worried, disdains the sensual offer. He turns away. “Then go and plead—*suck-cessfully*—to *him*!”

**T**o the environs of Rome, Lord Lucius has lead an army combined under the colors of several Goth factions. This morning their trumpets sound, and the captains meet with him in preparation for besieging the capital.

“Approved *warriors*—and my faithful *friends*,” he tells them, “I have received letters from great Romans which signify what *hate* they bear their emperor, and how desirous of our sight they are! Therefore, great lords, be, as your titles witness, *imperious*, and adamant about your *wrongs*! And wherein Rome hath done you any scath, let him”—Saturninus—“make *treble satisfaction*!”

The Goths’ chief, a massive, grizzled warrior, respects the younger man. “Brave slip!—sprung from the great *Andronicus*, whose name was once our *terror*, now our *comfort*—whose high exploits and honourable deeds ingrateful Rome requites with foul contempt—*be bold in us*!

“We’ll follow where thou lead’st like *swarming bees*, led by their master to the flowered fields on summer’s hottest day, and be *avenged* on cursèd *Tamora*!”

The other officers well remember wrongs inflicted upon them by their queen; and, further aggrieved by the losses they suffered while following her, they concur—loudly. “As *he* saith, so say we *all with him*!” cries the eldest.

“I humbly *thank* him, and I thank you *all*!” says Lucius. Their assault against a city already verging on revolt may well succeed. “But who comes *here*, led by a lusty Goth?” he asks, as a tall warrior, with his sword drawn, prods forward an Ethiopian. Aaron is carrying his infant son.

“Renownèd Lucius,” says the soldier, “from our troop I strayed, to gaze upon a ruinous monastery; and, as I earnestly did fix mine eye upon the wasted building, suddenly I heard a *child* cry beyond a wall!

“I made unto the noise, and soon I heard the crying babe, controllèd with this discourse:  
‘Peace, tawny slave, half me and half thy dam! Did not thy *hue* bewray whose brat thou art—had Nature lent thee but thy *mother’s* look—villain, thou mightst have been an *emperor!*”

“But where the bull and cow are both milk-white, they never do beget a coal-black calf!

“‘Peace, villain, *peace!*’—even thus he berated the babe—‘for I must bear thee to a trusty Goth who, when he knows thou art the *empress’s* babe, will hold thee *dearly* for thy mother’s sake.’

“With this my weapon drawn, I rushed upon him suddenly, seized him, and brought him hither—to use as you think needful of the man.”

“O *worthy* Goth!” cries Lucius. “This is the *incarnate devil* that robbed Andronicus of his good hand! This is the *pearl* that pleased your empress’ eye!—and *here’s* the base fruit of his burning *lust!*”

“Say, wall-eyed slave: whither wouldst thou convey this growing image of thy fiend-like face?” But Aaron stands silent. “Why dost not speak? What, *deaf?* Not a *word?*”

“A *halter*, soldiers!—*hang him on this tree!*—and by his side this *fruit of bastardy!*”

“Touch not the boy,” demands Aaron, “he is of *royal* blood!”

Lucius sneers. “Too like the sire ever to be good! First hang the *child*, so that he may see it *sprawled!*—a sight to vex a father’s soul withal! Get me a ladder!”

A rope is tied around Aaron’s neck, and its other end is thrown over a limb of the tree. At sword-point he is compelled to ascend the soldiers’ scaling ladder. The line is pulled taut over a limb above him, then tied below.

“Lucius, *save* the child, and bear it from me to the empress,” says Aaron. “If thou do that, I’ll show thee wondrous things it may *advantage* thee *highly* to hear! If thou wilt not, befall what may befall, I’ll say no more than ‘*Vengeance rot you all!*’”

Lucius considers; the empress will not welcome *this* infant. “Say on. And if it please me which thou speak’st, thy child shall live, and I will see it nourished.”

Aaron laughs. “If it *please* thee!—I assure thee, Lucius, ’twill *vex thy soul* to hear what *I* shall speak!—for I must talk of *murders, rapes* and *massacres*, acts of black *night, abominable* deeds, complots of *mischiefs, treason!*—villainies rueful to *hear*, yet pitilessly *performed!*”

“But this shall all be *buried* by my death, unless thou swear to me my child shall live!”

“*Tell on* thy mind—I say thy child shall live.”

“*Swear* that he shall, and then I will begin.”

Now Lucius laughs. “Whom should I swear by? Thou believest in no *god!* That granted, how canst thou believe an oath?”

“What if *I* do not?—as, indeed, I do not. Yet, because I know *thou* art religious, and hast a thing within thee callèd *conscience*—along with twenty *popish emblems*, and ceremonies which I have seen thee careful to observe—*therefore* I urge thine oath. I know an *idiot* holds his bauble”—fetish—“for a *god*—and *keeps* the oath which by that god he swears; to that I’ll urge him.

“Therefore thou shalt vow by that same god—what god soe’er it be, that *thou* adorest and hast in reverence—to save my boy, to nourish and bring him up!—or else I will reveal *nought* to thee!”

Lucius already knows or suspects what evils have been done; but, influenced by the words of a Nazarene prophet, he thinks for a moment. He looks up at the helpless man, a prisoner of vengeance, and chooses to free *himself*. “Even by my God, I swear to thee I will.”

Aaron regards him with confirmed contempt. “First know thou, I begot him on the *empress!*”

Lucius is disgusted. “Oh, most *insatiate* and *sybaritic* woman!”

“Lucius, that was but a deed of *charity*, compared to that which thou shalt hear of me anon!

“’Twas *her two sons* that murdered Bassianus! *They* cut thy sister’s tongue, and *ravished* her, then cut her hands—trimmed her as thou saw’st!”

For a moment, Lucius gapes. “O *detestable villain!*—call’st thou that *trimming?*”

“Well, she was *washed* and *cut* and *trimmed!*”—as in dressing fish for cooking. “And ’twas *trim sport* for them that had the *doing* of it!”

“*Oh, barbarous, beastly villains—like thyself!*”

Aaron looks down on him. “*Indeed!*—I was their *tutor, instructing* them! That *cocking* spirit they had from their mother—as sure a card as ever won a hand! That *bloody mind*, I think, they learned from *me*, as true a dog as ever fought with ’s *head!*”

“Why, let my *deeds* be witness to my worth: *I* tricked thy brethren to that guileful hole where the corpse of dead Bassianus lay! *I* wrote the letter that thy father found, and hid the gold cited within the letter, confederated with the queen and her two sons!”

Aaron laughs, despite the tight noose’s chafing. “Then what is it wherein thou hast *cause to rue* that *I* had no stroke of mischief in?”

“I played the *cheater* for *thy father’s hand!* And when I *had* it, drew myself apart and almost broke my heart—with *extreme laughter!*”

“I *pride* me that, when for his hand he got his two sons’ *heads*, I through the crevice of a wall *beheld his tears!*—and laughed so *heartily* that both *mine* eyes were rainy like his!”

“And when I told the *empress* of this sport, she almost swoonèd at my *pleasing tale!*—and for my tidings gave me *twenty kisses!*”

Even the tough old Goth is sickened. “*What?*—canst thou say all this and never *blush?*”

Aaron spits at his former ally. “*Aye!*—like a *black dog*, as the saying goes!”

Lucius asks, “Art thou not *sorry* for these heinous deeds?”

“*Aye!*—that I had not done *a thousand more!* Even now I curse any day—although I think, few come within the compass of my curse!—wherein I *did not* some notorious ill—such as *kill* a man, or else *devise* his death; *ravish* a maid, or *plot* the way to do it; accuse some *innocent*, and *forswear* myself; set deadly *enmity* between two *friends*; make poor men’s cattle *break their necks*; *set fire to barns* and *hay-stacks* in the night!—and bid the owners quench them with *their tears!*”

“Oft have I diggèd up dead men from their graves, and set them upright at their dear friends’ doors, just when their sorrows were almost forgot!—and on their *skins*, as on the bark of trees, have with my knife carvèd in Roman letters, ‘Let not your *sorrow* die, though *I* am dead!’”

“I have done a thousand dreadful things as willingly as one would kill a *fly*, and indeed nothing *grieves me heartily* but that I cannot do *ten thousand more!*”

Lucius realizes that Aaron is trying to provoke a swift execution. “Bring down the devil; for he must not die so sweet a death as hanging immediately.”

Aaron is furious: “If there *be* devils, would *I* were a devil, *living* and *burning* in *everlasting fire*, if only I might have *your* company in *hell!*—to *torment you* with my bitter tongue!”

Lucius motions to the soldiers bringing him down. “Sirs, stop his mouth, and let him speak no more.” They untie the noose, and gag the prisoner. Aaron is led away in shackles.

A Goth captain comes to Lucius. “My lord, there is a messenger from Rome desires to be admitted to your presence.”

“Let him come near.” He sees a nobleman he knows. “*Welcome*, Emillius! What’s the news from Rome?”

The emissary bows. “Lord Lucius, and you princes of the Goths, the Roman *emperor* greets you all by me! And, as he understands you are in arms, he craves a parley at your father’s house, willing you to demand your hostages; they shall be immediately deliverèd.”

The big Goth looks to the exile. “What says our general?”

Slowly, Lucius nods. “Emillius, let the emperor give his pledges unto my father and my uncle Marcus, and we will come.”

He speaks to the captains, and they return to their troops, already encamped in positions facing the city, to wait for word.

Lucius specifies terms to Lord Emillius for the meeting at Rome between potentate and avenger.

Visitors have crept up to one side of Titus Andronicus's mansion this afternoon—a woman and two young men, their faces darkened with stain, and all in outlandish black clothes and hats. They have heard much about the retired general's distraction, and the eccentric manifestations of his anger and pain.

"Thus—in this *strange* and *sad* habiliment—I will encounter with Andronicus," Tamora tells her sons, "and say I am *Revenge!*—sent from below to *join* with him, and right his heinous wrongs!" She almost laughs at the old man—and intends to torture and dement him further.

"Knock at his study," she says, "where they say he keeps to ruminare strange plots of dire revenge; tell him *Revenge* is come to join with him, and work destruction on his enemies!"

Demetrius raps, slowly and loudly, three times.

After a moment, Titus comes to open a second-story window. "Who doth molest my contemplation?" He looks down, eyes searching the shadows below. "Is it your trick to make me *ope the door?*—so that my sad decrees may fly away, and all my study be to no effect! You are *deceivèd!*—for see *here*: what I mean to do, in *bloody lines* I have set down!" He shakes several sheets in his one hand. "And what is *written* shall be *executed!*"

The female speaks gravely: "*Titus*, I am come to talk with *thee*—"

"*No*, not a *word!* How can I grace my talk, lacking a *hand* to give it *action?* Thou hast the odds on me," he tells the three. "Therefore no more!"

"If thou didst *know* me, thou wouldst *talk* with me!"

"I am not *mad*; I know *thee* well enough!" He raises an arm. "Witness: this wretched *stump!* Witness: these *crimson lines!*"—the notes written with blood. He points to his wrinkled face. "These *trenches* made by grief and care witness the tiring *day* and heavy *night!*

"Witness *all sorrows* that I know thee well for our proud *empress*, mighty *Tamora!*

"Is not thy coming for my *other* hand?" he wails.

"Know, thou sad man, I am *not* Tamora!—she is thine *enemy*, and I thy *friend!*

"I am *Revenge!*—sent from the *infernal kingdom* to ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind by working *wreakful vengeance* on thy *foes!*

"Come down, and *welcome* me to *this* world's light; *confer* with me on *murder* and *death!*

"There's not a hollow cave or lurking-place, no vast obscurity or misty vale, where *bloody Murder* or *detested Rape* can crouch in fear but *I* will *find them out!*—and in their ears tell them my dreadful name—*Revenge!*—which makes the foul offender *quake!*"

The old man peers down at the fell figures—considering, now, it seems. "Art thou *Revenge?*" he asks, hopefully. "And art thou sent to me to be a torment to mine *enemies?*"

"I *am!* Therefore come down and *welcome* me!"

Titus studies the three. "Do me some service, ere I come to thee," he tells the speaker. "*Lo*, where Rape and Murder stand by thy side; now give me some assurance that thou *art* *Revenge*: *stab them!* Or *tear them on thy chariot wheels!*—and *then* I'll come and be thy *waggoner*, and *whirl* along with thee about the globe!

"Provide thee with two proper palfreys,"—horses, "black as jet, to pull thy vengeful waggon swift away, and seek out murderers in their guilty caves! And when thy cart is *loaden with their heads*, I will dismount, and by the waggon-wheel trot like a servile footman *all day long*, even from Hyperion's rising in the east until his very downfall in the sea!

"And day by day I'll do this heavy task!—if thou destroy *Rapine* and *Murder*, there."

The demoniac female protests: "These are my *ministers*, and come with *me!*"

"Are these thy ministers? What are they called?"

"Rapine and Murder—therefore callèd because they take *vengeance* on such kind of men!"

Titus stares, blinking, and rubs his forehead. "Good Lord, how like the empress' sons they are!—and you the empress...."

He whimpers, "But we worldly men have miserable, mad, mistaking eyes...."



He appears to decide. "O sweet Revenge, now do I *come* to thee!—and if *one* arm's embracement will content thee, I will embrace thee in it by and by!" With that he hurries away from the window.

Tamora laughs. "Thus closing with him fits his *lunacy!* Whate'er I forge to feed his brain-sick fits," she tells the boys, "do *you* uphold and maintain in your speeches!

"For now he firmly takes me for Revenge; and I'll make him, being credulous in this mad thought, send for *Lucius*, his *son!* Then, whilst I at the banquet hold *him* sure, out of hand I'll find some cunning practise to scatter and *disperse* the giddy *Goths!*—or, at the least, make them *his* enemies!

"See, here he comes!—and I must ply my theme...."

Titus opens the door, and gleefully joins the grim-looking trio. "Long have I been forlorn—and all for *thee!* *Well come*, dread Fury, to my woeful house! Rapine and Murder, you are well come too!

"How *like* the empress and her sons you are; well were you fitted had you but a *Moor!*—could not all Hell afford you such a devil? For, well I know, the empress never wags but in her company there is a Moor—and, would you represent our queen *aright*, it were appropriate you had such a devil.

"But *welcome* as you *are!* What shall we do?"

"What wouldst *thou* have us do, Andronicus?" asks Tamora.

Says Demetrius eagerly, "Show me a *murderer!* I'll deal with *him!*"

"And show me a villain that hath done a *rape,*" says Chiron. "I am sent to be *revenged* on him!"

"Show me a *thousand* that have done thee wrong," cries Tamora, "and I will be *revenged* on them all!"

Titus rubs his hands together happily in anticipation. "Look round about the wicked streets of Rome; and when thou find'st a man that's like *thyself*, good Murder, *stab him!*—he's a *murderer!*

"Go thou with him," he tells the other specter, "and when it is thy hap to find another that is like to *thee*, good Rapine, *stab him!*—he's a *ravisher!*

"Go thou with them, then," he tells Tamora. "In the emperor's court there is a *queen* attended by a *Moor*; well mayst thou know her by thine own proportion, for up and down she doth resemble thee! I pray thee, do on them some *violent death!* They have been violent to me and mine."

She nods. "Well hast thou lessoned us; this shall we do!" Her smile is charming. "But would it please thee, good Andronicus, to send for Lucius, thy thrice-valiant son, who leads towards Rome a band of warlike Goths, and bid him come and banquet at thy house?"

"When *he* is *here*, even at thy solemn feast I will bring in *the empress and her sons*, the *emperor* himself, and all thy *foes!*—and *at thy mercy* shalt they *stoop* and *kneel!*—and on them shalt thou ease thine angry heart!

"What says Andronicus to *this* device?"

Exuberant with delight, he turns back to the open door. "*Marcus*, my brother!—'tis sad Titus calls! Go, gentle Marcus, to thy nephew *Lucius!*—thou shalt inquire him out among the Goths. Bid him repair to me, and bring with him some of the chiefest princes of the Goths!

"Bid him encamp his soldiers where they are. Tell him the *emperor*, and the *empress*, too, *feast at my house!*—and *he* shall feast *with* them!

"This do thou for my love—and so let *him*, as he regards his aged father's life!"

They can hear, from inside, the reply: "This will I do, and soon return again!"

"Now will I hence *about thy business,*" Tamora tells Titus, "and take my ministers along with me."

But the old gentleman craves company. "Nay, nay, let Rape and Murder stay with me!" He pouts: "Or else I'll call my brother *back* again, and cleave to no revenge but by *Lucius.*"

Tamora moves aside to confer with her sons in whispers. “What say you, boys? Will you bide with him while I go tell my lord the emperor how I have governed our determinèd jest? Yield to his mood, smooth and speak him fair, and tarry with him till I return.”

Titus watches, smiling benignly; but he is thinking. *I know them all, though they suppose me mad, and will o’erreach them in their own device!—a pair of cursèd hell-hounds and their dam!*

Says Demetrius, with his customary cockiness, “Madam, depart at pleasure; leave us here.”

Tamora waves gaily. “Farewell, Andronicus! Revenge now goes to lay a complot to betray thy foes!”

Calls Titus as she goes, “I know thou *dost*—and, sweet Revenge, *fare well!*”

His mother has gone, and Chiron is already bored with the prank. “Tell us, old man: how shall we be employed?”

“I have work enough for *you* to do,” Titus tells him, and calls into the house: “Publius! Come hither, Caius, and Valentine!” Three men immediately emerge from the house—swords drawn.

“What is your will?” asks Publius, as they surround the dark duo.

“Know you these two?”

“The empress’ sons, I take them,” says Publius. “Chiron and Demetrius.”

Titus laughs. “Fie, Publius, *fie!* Thou art too much *deceivèd*—the one is *Murder*; *Rape* is the other’s name—and therefore *bind* them, gentle Publius!” As Caius and Valentine hold rapier-points to the scoundrels’ throats, Publius ties their hands behind them.

“Oft have you heard me *wish* for such an hour, and now I *find* it,” Titus tells his kinsmen. “Therefore bind them *sure*—and stop their mouths, if they begin to cry out.” He goes into the house to arrange for Tamora’s banquet.

“*Villains, forbear!*” demands Chiron indignantly. “We are the *empress’* sons!”

“And therefore do we what we are commanded,” says Publius. “Stop close their mouths!—let them not speak a word,” he tells the others, who cram in cloths. “Is he sure-bound? Look that you bind them fast!”

After a moment, Titus returns, bearing a long knife. His daughter comes with him; cradled in her truncated arms she carries a basin. He stands beside the two. “Come, come, Lavinia! *Look!*—thy foes are bound!”

The youths’ cries are muffled as they stare, wide-eyed in horror, at their victim.

Titus frowns. “Sirs, *stop their mouths!* Let them not speak to me—but let them *hear* what fearful words I utter!”

Publius knocks off their black hats, and with his left hand steadies each head while his right fist rams the clumps of cloth further into mouths left bloody.

Titus move before them. “O *villains!* Chiron and Demetrius, here stands the *spring* whom you have stained with *mud*, this goodly summer with your *winter* mixèd! You *killed her husband*, and for that vile crime, two of her *brothers* were condemned to *death!*—my *hand cut off* and made a merry *jest!*

“Both *her* sweet hands, her *tongue*—and more dear than hands or tongue, her spotless *chastity!*—inhuman traitors, *that* you constrained and *forcèd!*”

He watches them struggling, terrified—and he laughs, angrily. “What *would* you say, if I should let you speak? *Villains in shame*, you could not *beg* for grace!

“Hark, *wretches*, how I mean to murder you.” He holds the gleaming blade before their faces. “This *one* hand yet is left to *cut your throats*, whilst Lavinia ’tween her stumps doth hold the basin that receives your *guilty blood!*”

At his nod, the criminals are forced to their knees.

“You know your mother means to *feast* with me—calls herself ‘Revenge,’ and thinks me *mad!* Hark, villains: I will *grind your bones* into *dust!*—and with it and your *blood* I’ll make a *pastry!*—and of the pastry, a *crust* I will shape to make *two pies* of your shameful *heads!*—and bid that *strumpet* your unhallowèd dam to *swallow*, like the earth, *her own increase!*

“*This* is the feast that *I* have bidden her to, and this the banquet she shall *surfeit* on! For you used my daughter worse than Philomel! Then worse than *Procne*”—Philomela’s sister—“will *I* be *revengèd*!”

“And now prepare your throats!” The captives, stiffening futilely as their heads are forced back, groan and gulp. “Lavinia, come, receive the blood. And when they are dead, let me go *grind their bones small*, to *powder*, and with this hateful liquor temper it; and in that dough let their vile heads be baked!”

Chiron watches, sweating, as Titus, slowly, almost delicately, draws the gleaming blade across Demetrius’s neck, and blood spurts forth.

When the flow from Demetrius stops, the knife slides again, and Chiron’s lifeblood gushes into the basin. Soon, both lie, pale behind their garish red wounds, dead.

Titus urges the others, “Come, come!—be every one helpful in preparing this banquet, which I wish may prove more stern and bloody than the *Centaurs’* feast!”—an irony: *Chiron* was the name of the only wise and kindly centaur among those creatures.

Carefully steadying the basin, Titus helps Lavinia to rise.

He looks down at the dead Goth youths. “So now bring them in, for I’ll play the *cook*—and see them *ready* before their mother comes!”

The corpses are dragged inside at the back of the building—then into the big kitchen, and to its butcher table.

## Chapter Eight Well Served

**B**eside the tall mansion of Titus Andronicus tonight, torches light the terrace, where tables and chairs have been brought out, and servants hurry from within, bringing baskets of bread and flagons of wine to accompany a supper. The retired officer will host a parley between the Emperor of Rome and the commanding general of a besieging army—Titus’s banished son.

Lucius Andronicus is first to arrive, with several Goth lords from their encampment, and he brings a shackled prisoner. “Uncle Marcus, since it is my *father’s* mind that I repair to Rome, mine is content.”

“And ours with thine,” says the Goths’ chief, “befall what Fortune will.” He and the captains from the northern land are indeed thinking of fortune: even a successful siege in winter would prove long and costly, but a negotiated settlement could soon mean vast wealth. And Rome’s willingness to talk implies weakness.

Lucius pushes Aaron forward. “Good uncle, take you in this barbarous Moor—this ravenous *tiger*, this *accursèd devil*! Let him receive no sustenance; *fetter* him till he be brought unto the empress’ face, for testimony on her foul proceedings.

“And see that our friends’ ambush be *strong*!” he urges. “I fear the emperor means no good to us,” he adds, wryly.

“Some devil whisper *curses* in mine ear,” mutters Aaron, “and prompt me, that my tongue may utter forth the venomous malice of my swelling heart!”

“*Away, inhuman dog!—unhallowèd slave!*” growls Lucius. “Sirs, help our uncle to convey him in!” Two Goths roughly seize Aaron by the arms and drag him away.

As Marcus returns, a party of noblemen arrives, just after their heralds, with senators and tribunes.

“The trumpets show the emperor is at hand,” says Lucius, and Saturninus’ own horns soon blare out a long flourish.

Lord Emillius is among those following the Roman ruler and his empress, who is no longer disguised.

The haughty emperor greets Lucius with contempt: “What?—hath the firmament *more* suns than one?”

Lucius’s laugh is defiant. “What boots it thee to *call* thyself the sun?”

Marcus chides both: “Rome’s emperor, and nephew, you break the *parole!* These quarrels must be *quietly* debated. The *feast* is ready!—which the careful Titus hath ordained to an *honourable* end: for peace, for love, for league—and good to *Rome!*”

“Please you, therefore, draw nigh and take your places.”

“Marcus, *we will!*” says Saturninus—taking the seat at the head of the front table.

As the company sits down to eat, soft and airy music of hautboys and lutes begins.

A jovial Titus, dressed as a cook, joins them. “*Welcome*, my gracious lord!—*welcome*, dread queen!—*welcome*, ye warlike Goths! Welcome, *Lucius!*” He waves forward a kitchen helper who is supporting, on his shoulder, a tray with two large, brown-crustèd dishes. “And welcome, *all!*”

“Although the cheer be poor, ’twill fill your stomachs! Please you, eat all of it!”

A serving-man ladles savory brown stew and pastry from the steaming pies onto two trenchers, which another then carries to the royal guests. Household servants begin taking various foods to the other visitors.

Saturninus grabs a spoon and eats. He glances up, chewing. “Why art thou thus attirèd, Andronicus?” The old fool, he sees, has surrendered all dignity.

“Because I would be *sure to have all well*, entertaining Your Highness, and your empress!”

A lady wearing a long cloak and dark veil comes to stand near him.

Saturninus and his wife are enjoying wine with the spicy meat dish. Tamora pauses and smiles, raising a cup. “We are beholden to you, good Andronicus!”

Titus bows, slowly, not taking his eyes from her. “If Your Highness knew my heart... you *were.*”

He moves closer to the emperor’s table, and stands just across from him; the lady follows closely. The old general seems thoughtful; he poses a question about a legendary Roman centurion’s act, committed in the name of love and honor. “My lord the emperor, resolve me this: was it *well done* of rash Virginius to slay his daughter with his own right hand, because she was enforced, stained and deflowered?”

Saturninus nods, his mouth full; he swallows. “It was, Andronicus.” He quaffs more wine.

“Your reason, mighty lord?”

The emperor shrugs. “Because the girl should not survive her shame, and by her presence ever renew his sorrows.”

“A reason mighty, strong and *effectual,*” says Titus, “a pattern, precedent, and lively *warrant*, for me, most wretched, to perform the like.”

Tears run down his cheeks as the waiting lady now beside him removes her veil, but she seems beatified.

He stabs her through the heart. “Die, *die*, Lavinia—and thy shame *with* thee!” sobs Titus. “And, with thy shame, die thy father’s sorrow!”

She falls; her relief has finally come.

Saturninus has risen, and he stares, aghast. “*What hast thou done?—unfatherly and unnatural!*”

“Killed her for whom my *tears* have made me *blind!* I am as woeful as Virginius was—and have a *thousand times* more cause than *he* to do this outrage! And now it is done.”

Saturninus is perplexed. “What?—was *she* ravishèd? Tell who *did* the deed!”

Titus turns to Tamora. “Will’t please you eat more? Will’t please Your Highness feed?”

She frowns. “Why hast thou slain thine only daughter thus?”

“*Not I!*—’twas Chiron and Demetrius! *They* ravished her, and cut away her tongue—and *they* ’twas *they* that did her *all* this wrong!”

Saturninus signals to his guards. “Go fetch them hither to us immediately!”

Titus laughs. “Why, *there* they are, *both!*—bakèd in that *pie!*—whereof their mother daintily hath fed, eating *the flesh that she herself hath bred!*”

The nearby tables are jarred as guests suddenly rise, and Tamora staggers up, a hand covering her mouth.

“’Tis true, ’tis *true!*” cries Titus angrily. “*Witness: my knife’s sharp point!*” He stabs Tamora in the stomach, and twists the blade upward before pulling it free. She gasps and cries out, reaching down, but falling forward. Blood runs down at the front of the table’s white cloth as she gapes up at him, shocked and choking.

Then her head drops, and she is dead.

Saturninus shouts, drawing his sword, “*Die, frantic wretch, for this accursèd deed!*” With a powerful thrust he kills Titus Andronicus.

“Can the son’s eye behold his father bleed?” cries Lord Lucius. He slashes the emperor’s arm with a sword-stroke, then pierces him with another. “There’s meed for *meed: death* for a deadly *deed!*”

Saturninus, eyes bulging in pain and fury, crumples to the ground, where he soon perishes, his teeth still bared in an angry scowl.

During the ensuing tumult and clamor, Lucius and his son, with Marcus and the others of their family, rush into the house. They emerge, above, onto a wide balcony in front of the eaves one story higher.

Marcus steps forward and addresses the crowd below. “You sad-faced men—people and sons of Rome, by uproar scattered like a flight of fowl by winds and high, tempestuous gusts!—oh, let me teach you how to *knit again* this divided wheat into one mutual *sheaf!*—these broken *limbs* again into one *body!*”

Below, Lord Emillius, turning to those milling around him, raises his arms and calls, loudly, “Lest *Rome* herself be *bane unto herself*, and she to whom mighty *kingdoms* court’sy do shameful execution *upon herself*, like a forlorn and desperate castaway, *listen!*”

“If my frosty hair and beard—signs of *age*, grave witnesses of true *experience*—cannot induce you to attend *my words*,” he says, and looks up at the tribune, “let speak Rome’s *dear friend!*—as erst did our *ancestor*,”—Aeneas, “when with solemn tongue he discoursèd to love-sick Dido’s sad, attending ear the story of that baleful, burning night when subtle Greeks overcame King Priam’s *Troy!*”

“Tell us what traitor hath bewitchèd *our ears*, or who hath brought in the fatal engine,”—like the wooden horse, “that gives *our Troy*, our *Rome*, this civil *wound!*”

All now watch Marcus, who is wiping his eyes. “My heart is not compacted of flint nor steel,”—to generate fire, “nor can I utter *all* our bitter grief but that floods of tears will *drown* my oratory—break off my utterance even at the time when it should move you to attend me most, lending your kind commiseration!

“Here is a *captain*—let *him* speak the tale; your hearts will throb and *weep* to hear him!”

He motions Lucius forward.

The warrior looks down. “Then, noble auditory, be it known to you that cursèd *Chiron* and *Demetrius* were they that *murdered our emperor’s brother!*—and they it were that *ravished our sister!*”

“For *their* deadly deeds, *our brothers* were *beheaded!*—our *father’s* tears *despisèd!*—and he basely *cozened out of that true hand* that fought Rome’s quarrels, and *sent her enemies unto the grave!*”

“Lastly, *myself*—unkindly *banishèd*, the gates *shut* on me, and turnèd out, weeping, to beg relief among Rome’s *enemies!*—who drowned their enmity in my true tears, and oped their arms to embrace me as a *friend!*”

“Be it known to you of *Rome*, I am the *spurned-forth* who have *preservèd* her welfare with *my blood!*—and from her bosom took the enemy’s point by sheathing the steel in *my adventurous*

*body!* You know I am no braggart—alas, my *scars* can witness, silent although they are, that my report is *just*, and full of *truth!*

“But, soft—methinks I do digress too much, citing my worthless praise. Ah, pardon me; for when no friends are by, men praise *themselves.*”

Marcus steps to the balustered stone rail. “*Now* is my turn to speak.” At his nod, an attendant brings Aaron’s infant son. “Behold this child! Of *this* was Tamora deliverèd—the issue of an *irreligious Moor*, chief architect and plotter of these woes! The villain is alive, in Titus’ house, and he is *witness* to this as *true!*

“Now judge what *cause* had Titus to *revenge* these wrongs!—*unspeakable, beyond enduring!*—more than any *living* man could *bear!*

“Now that you have heard the *truth*, what *say* you, Romans?”

The dazed patricians look around at each other; their ruler has been slain, but the intemperate tyrant will hardly be mourned. And the senators are well aware that their leaderless nation’s capital faces imminent siege.

Standing with the outcast general, his brother, the tribune, now asks: “Have *we* done aught amiss?”

“Show us *wherein*—and, from this place where you behold us now, the poor remainder of Andronici will all *cast us down*, and headlong on the ragged stones beat forth our brains, to make a mutual closure of our family!

“Speak, Romans, *speak!* And if you say we *shall, lo*, hand in hand, Lucius and I will fall!”

But below, Lord Emillius moves to the front, looking up happily, one arm lifted. “Come, come, thou *reverèd man of Rome!* Bring our emperor *gently* by thy hand—*Lucius*—our *emperor!*

“For well I know, the common voice do cry *it shall be so!*”

The Romans, free of the despot and his minions, cheer and shout. “*Lucius!* All hail *Rome’s royal emperor!*”

Marcus and Lucius smile in acknowledgement. Marcus tells his attendants as they move toward the stairs, “Go, go into old Titus’ sorrowful house, and hither hale that misbelieving Moor, to be adjudgèd unto some direful, slaughtering *death* as punishment for his most wicked *life!*”

On the terrace, the crowd’s acclamation is loud and enthusiastic. Cries a senator, as the others press in around the acclaimed ruler, “*Lucius!* All hail, *Rome’s gracious governor!*”

Lucius bows deeply. “Thanks, gentle Romans! May I govern *so!*—to *heal* Rome’s harms, and wipe away her *woe!*

“But, gentle people, give me air awhile, for nature puts me to a heavy task.” As a space clears, he approaches the body of Titus Andronicus.

“Stand all aloof,” he asks, “but, Uncle, draw *you* near, to shed obsequious tears upon this trunk.” He kneels at his father’s side. “Oh, take this warm kiss on thy pale cold lips, these sorrowful drops upon thy blood-stained face—the last true duties of thy noble son.”

The tribune comes to the body. “Tear for tear, and loving kiss for kiss, thy brother Marcus tenders on thy lips! Oh, were the sum of these that I should pay *countless* and *infinite*, yet would I pay them!”

Lucius calls his son. “Come hither, boy; come. Come and learn from us to melt in showers!” He puts a hand on the tearful lad’s shoulder. “Thy grandsire loved thee well! Many a time he danced thee on his knee, sang thee asleep, his loving breast thy pillow! Many a matter hath he told to thee, meet and agreeing with thine infancy! Then in respect for that, like a loving child shed ye some small drops from thy tender spring, because kindred nature doth require it so.”

Their new ruler rises, and regards the Romans. “Friends should associate with friends, in grief and woe. Bid him farewell; commit him to the grave; do him that kindness, and take leave of him.”

“O Grandsire, Grandsire!” cries young Lucius. “Even with all my heart would *I* were dead, so *you* did live again!” He looks up at his father. “Oh, my lord, I cannot speak to him for weeping; my tears will choke me, if I ope my mouth!”

Lucius’s soldiers have brought Aaron to him.

Lord Emillius steps forward. “You sad Andronici, *have done* with woes,” he urges kindly. “Give *sentence* on this execrable wretch, that hath been breeder of these dire events.”

Lucius has been considering the man—one who craves control, and who detests delay.

“This doom we pronounce: set him breast-deep in earth, and *famish* him; there let him stand, and *rave*, and *cry* for food! If any one relieves or pities him, for that offence he dies.

“Some stay to see him fastened into the earth,” Lucius tells his soldiers.

As he is taken away, Aaron calls back, over his shoulder, “Oh, why should wrath be *mute*, and *fury silent*? I am no *baby*, that with base prayers I should *repent* the evils I have done! *Ten thousand worse* than ever yet I did would I perform, if *I* might have my will! If one *good* deed in all my life I did, I do *repent it—from my very soul!*” He is dragged away to be buried, nearly to the neck, and to begin, with flies buzzing about his head, the long wait for an ignominious death.

The new sovereign takes full command. “Some loving friends convey the emperor hence, and give him burial in his father’s grave.

“My father and Lavinia shall forthwith be enclosed in our household’s monument.

“As for that heinous tiger Tamora, no funeral rite, no man in mourning clothes! No mournful bell shall ring her burial—but *throw her forth to beasts and birds of prey!* Her life was beast-like, and devoid of pity; and, being so, she shall have like want of pity.

“See *justice* done on Aaron, that damnèd Moor, by whom our heavy sorrows had their beginning.”

Emperor Lucius Andronicus tells the Romans, “Then, afterwards, on to ordering well the state, so that like events may ne’er it ruinate!”