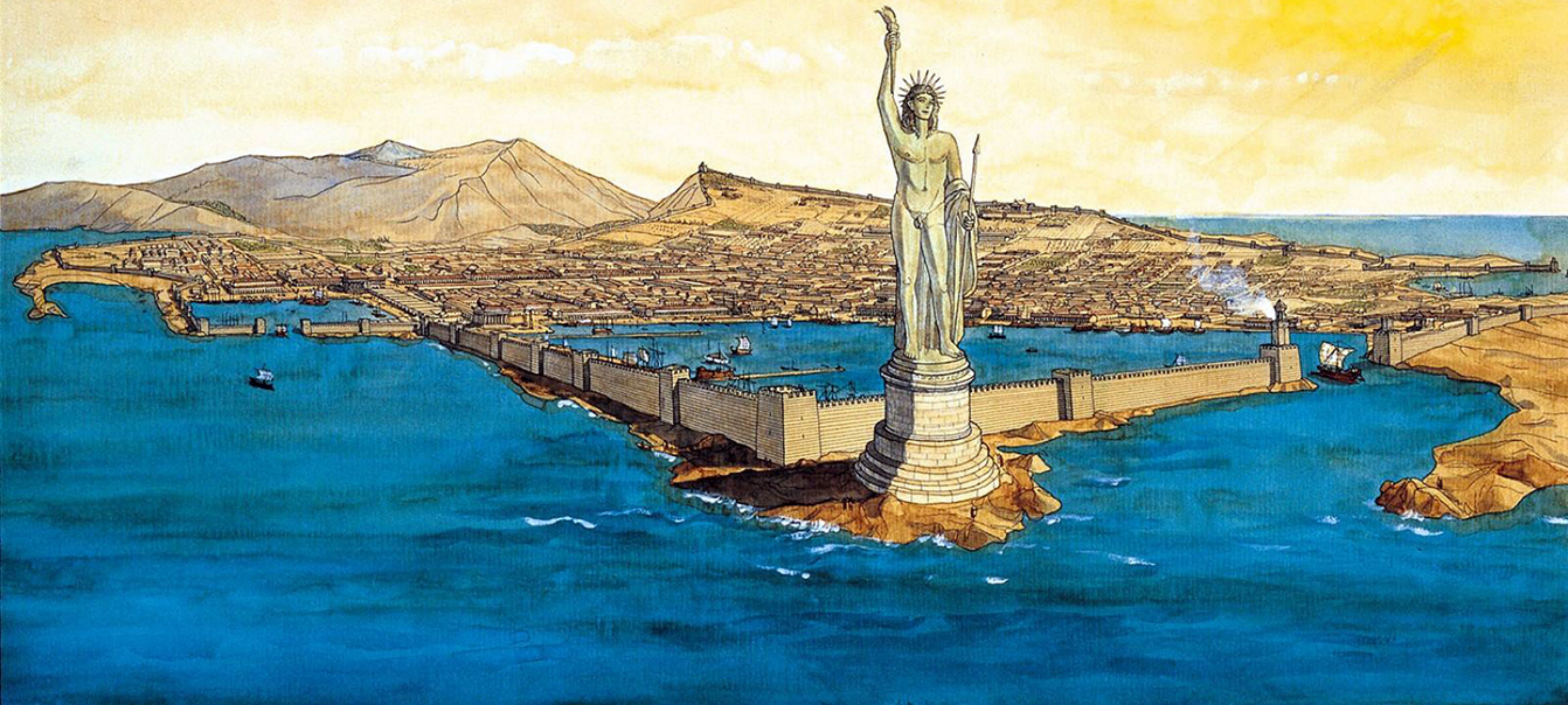


# *The Bride's Tragedy*





# *The Bride's Tragedy*

tragedy in five acts, after Francis Beaumont & John Fletcher

by Christian Lanciai (2008)

*Dramatis personae:*

King of Rhodes  
Lysippus, his brother  
Amyntor, and  
Melantius, his first knights  
Diphylus, Melantius' brother  
Evadne, their sister, married to Amyntor  
Aspasia  
Calianax, her father  
Cleon, and  
Straton, courtiers  
Dula, Evadne's maid  
  
Chorus of maids

The action is Rhodes in Hellenistic Antiquity

Copyright © C. Lanciai 2008

## *The Bride's Tragedy*

### Act I scene 1

*Diphylus* But can we accept it?  
*Lysippus* What else can we do? Is there any choice?  
*Diphylus* But it's an unjust indecency.  
*Lysippus* What can we do?  
*Diphylus* If we just let it be, such manners could find even worse expressions with time.  
*Lysippus* Let's hope it was just for this once, so that we'll have no more trouble.  
*Diphylus* But poor Aspasia...  
*Cleon* But look who's coming! At last!  
*Lysippus* Melantius! Welcome home from the war! The whole nation welcomes you by my person! Kings are like gods here on earth, he just wished you back home, and here you are!  
*Diphylus* My brother! Welcome! Whoever dares not to be happy about your safe return will be my enemy forever!  
*Melantius* Thank you, Lysippus, and thanks to you, Diphylus, but you are indebted to me. I summoned you to fight by my side in Parthia, but you never showed up. That was not a good show.  
*Diphylus* Brother, my excuse was the king's own wish, which you, Lysippus, can testify.  
*Lysippus* It's true, Melantius. He was not allowed to go until the festivities connected with the great wedding here were done with.  
*Diphylus* Have you heard about it?  
*Melantius* It's the only reason why I came back to Rhodes. Is it over already?  
*Diphylus* Yes. Amyntor is now married, and it was fulfilled this very morning.  
*Melantius* That gives me pleasure, for he is my friend and impeccable as such, and there is no one I wish more luck than him. I only regret that I didn't make it in time for his wedding.  
*Diphylus* But at least you came, and that is the main thing. (*enter Aspasia*)  
*Melantius* Hell, princess and happy bride! May the sacred liaison you have entered today remain as long and unassailable as the toughest and hardest olive tree of Rhodes! And I wish you the best of luck in bringing forth as many new healthy and stalwart Amyntors as your husband!  
*Aspasia* The last thing I deserve in my fate is sarcastic scorn, for I was never proud and presumptuous while it was still favourable. (*leaves in despair*)  
*Melantius* Whatever was the matter with her?  
*Lysippus* A platitude. It wasn't she who was married.  
*Melantius* But wasn't Amyntor supposed to marry her?  
*Diphylus* Yes, from the beginning, and that was written all the way, but your speedy return made me believe that you had heard about the change of program.

*Melantius* But he is married. Who is then the bride?

*Lysippus* One who always blinded everyone with her beauty and who by her superiority dumbfounded and made many suitors lose more than just their faces, Evadne herself, your so virtuous sister.

*Melantius* May they still be happy. But how is this possible? It was a solid engagement since several years, and suddenly in the last moment the bride is changed for another. What is the meaning?

*Lysippus* It was my brother the King who went between and ordered it most of all to honour you, and the entire wedding with all its dinners, receptions, arrangements and sumptuous solemnities are all on account of the King.

*Melantius* That is royal, I might say. But it pains me that I didn't know better when I met the fair Aspasia. How cruel she must have felt my words! And her father always kept a grudge against me. Now he will most likely realize it with a vengeance. But she must understand that I couldn't intentionally be so cruel. Is he still on good terms with our King?

*Lysippus* Yes, but this lady always keeps her looks to the ground, which she wets with constant tears. She often goes out into the woods alone to contemplate in distant arbours and unknown glades which she find suitable for burying grounds of thwarted lovers, where she plucks flowers to spread over herself in melancholy. She never partakes in any parties or social gatherings without recounting some sad and tragic story involving death, so that soon one after the other will drop off, leaving her alone remaining. She can't appear socially without affecting everyone with pain.

*Melantius* She also has another brother though, who is under my command with as softly female sensitivity as she and with a spirit making him much older than he is.

*Cleon* Here he is now, gentlemen – the bridegroom!

*(enter Amyntor)*

*Melantius (embracing him)* My affection for you is boundless, Amyntor, and it is for me the greatest pleasure to see to you again. You are my friend, but my words are not enough to express the full width of my affection.

*Amyntor* That says it all, and I am over-joyed that you are back again unharmed.

*Melantius* Nonetheless I cry for joy to find you unchanged.

*Amyntor* There is much for me to conceal, for example, that my wedding feast mostly brought me only tears.

*Melantius* Not only you, I understand, but also the jilted one, who mostly seems to walk about in suicidal thoughts.

*Amyntor* I was always faithful to her, there was no one else, but the King himself forbade it and gave me instead your sister with great generosity and paid for everything himself with greater pomp and glory than anyone of us had wished for nor was worthy of. There is nothing wrong with her, you know that yourself, she surpasses anyone in beauty, and I have nothing against her, but still I must regret it and keep Aspasia the more burning in my heart.

*Melantius* A strange story.

*Lysippus* Gentlemen, it's time to return to the festivities. Melantius, there is a banquet waiting for you with the bride and bridegroom and the King by his command.

*Amyntor* Let's return to order, Melantius. Let's keep each other carefully informed. There could be something else behind strange casting manoeuvres than anyone innocent could suspect. (*All break up.*)

## Scene 2.

*Calianax* What are you doing here, you arch knave?

*Melantius* The same as you, Calianax, invited by order of the King to this play staged to the glory of the wedding.

*Calianax* It's my life's greatest humiliation to be obliged to be present here and forced to meet all those traitors who took part in the rejection of my daughter. You have almost taken her life.

*Melantius* I am innocent. I didn't even know about it. I deeply regret that I congratulated her before getting to know about it.

*Calianax* But it is *your* sister who has been married to *him*!

*Melantius* I still must insist on my innocence. It's not my fault that she is my sister, and it's not my fault that she was married to him.

*Calianax* But he is your best friend! And the King invited you here! And he has arranged special festivities just for your sake, because you are the brother of the bride! You have to admit that it stinks!

*Melantius* The problem is that we don't know what is stinking. I haven't been able to identify the smell so far.

*Calianax* But it stinks, and that's enough!

*Melantius* You have a right to be furious, Calianax.

*Calianax* You almost killed her!

*Melantius* 'Almost' doesn't count as long as she lives, and she is quite intact.

*Calianax* But she is crying out her tears and herself to death!

*Melantius* Isn't that what all women do sooner or later? They say, that without money you can't give the bride a bed, but who manages without women will do both without quarrels and tears and clinging slaves.

*Calianax* Yes, you are fortunate to have slipped out of all problems with womanhood.

*Melantius* I still don't understand the complication. Didn't Aspasia and Amyntor truly love each other? Why then did the King interfere?

*Calianax* They loved each other tenderly and sincerely and still do. Why else do you think Aspasia is crying herself to death? And Amyntor doesn't look very happy either. Ask your sister. She should know more than we. She is even more guilty than you.

*Melantius* Here is the bridegroom himself. You should be even more cross with him.

*Calianax* Aren't you?  
*Melantius* I would be, if he didn't look so innocent.  
*Calianax* Hey, traitor! Everyone is angry with you for the sake of your damned marriage.  
*Amyntor* Even you, my Melantius?  
*Melantius* I just can't understand it, Amyntor, and the mystery of it has raised a momentary wall between us.  
*Amyntor* I don't understand it either.  
*Calianax* Don't pretend innocence, you damned seducer!  
*Amyntor* I *am* innocent, and you know it, Calianax, my only true father-in-law, for I still love your daughter and would rather have remained true to her, although your sister is more beautiful, Melantius.  
*Calianax* To hell and Styx with both of you, you arrant and distracted knaves! You don't even see what you yourselves are causing!  
*Melantius* Keep me out of it.  
*Calianax* Do you deny your own sister and the way in which she has turned the head of this villain and used the king to have her will?  
*Melantius* Are you accusing my sister?  
*Calianax* Who else would I accuse? Isn't she perhaps the wrong and wronging bride?  
*Amyntor* Honestly speaking, she hasn't appeared very willing to this business.  
*Calianax* Why then didn't you say no at the altar, you heart-breaker? How do you think it feels for a bride in love to see her husband married to another on her wedding day?  
*Amyntor* Control your wrath for god's sake, Calianax. Don't make things worse. Here is the King with all his retinue and both my ladies. She has heard about the argument and has come here only for that reason.  
*King* There you are, whipper-snappers! Your taunts are heard all over Rhodes! What are you actually arguing about?  
*Melantius* No one actually knows really.  
*King* I know that you have taken this hard, Calianax, and with good reason, but then look at your daughter. She has been exalted to Evadne's closest chamber-maid and friend, so she isn't really as forsaken as you make it seem by dramatizing the adversity. Please stop arguing now. I want to see you shake hands with Amyntor.  
*Calianax* I refuse.  
*King* You can't do that, Calianax. I am fond of you, you are trusted, I promoted you to the highest office of your life, and I hold no friends dearer than the two of you, Amyntor and Melantius. So set aside all irrelevant feelings, so that we can start enjoying the play. I will not let it begin until you have shaken hands. (*Both Amyntor and Melantius offer one hand to Calianax while they let the other shake the other's.*)  
*Evadne* I promise you that you make peace in a good cause and that you will not regret it.  
*King* The bride herself has spoken. Well, what about it, Calianax?  
*Calianax* (*somewhat ashamed, to Aspasia*) Will you excuse me, Aspasia?

*Aspasia* What are we women for if not to allow and forbear with everything?

*King* Thus speaks a true woman. Please make peace now.

*Calianax* Very well, but the matter is not settled! (*accepts the friends' hands.*)

*King* That's more like it!

*Melantius (turning to Evadne)* My sister, you saw with my eyes when you accepted my best friend. I wish you all happiness with him.

*Evadne* O my dear brother, your return and presence is to me a much greater joy than this day has been.

*King (claps his hands)* Let the play begin! (*All take their seats.*)

Act II scene 1. Evadne's bridal chamber with Evadne and Aspasia.

*Dula* My lady, do you wish to be undressed naked for the war of the night? For the battles you have to fight are moments of the naked truth.

*Evadne* Your mirth is rather screwed up for being another's than my own.

*Dula* I would be even merrier if I was in your place.

*Evadne* With what right?

*Dula* If I were to go to bed with him with your advantages, I would be far better than myself.

*Evadne* You already are, since you appear to be drunk, to say the least. Is she drunk, Aspasia?

*Dula* Is there any more efficient intoxication than love? Its effect is to loosen all restrictions, so that nothing any longer can impede the personal power of expression.

*Evadne* Yes, you are drunk, and far more so than I.

*Dula* You just have to relax and lie still and let him do the rest.

*Evadne* You are mad, Dula.

*Dula* It's his task to get you going. Then the cooperation will result automatically.

*Evadne* You seem experienced enough.

*Dula* Only since I was fourteen. I know all the tricks. If you need any instructions, help or advice, just ask me.

*Evadne* I think you are too well practised to suit me.

*Dula* I am just rallying you, so that you may rightly rouse your master.

*Evadne* Would you take my place in bed?

*Dula* Take over the ablest most dashing and handsome gentleman on Rhodes on his very wedding night? Why not, if you insist.

*Evadne* Aspasia, she is out of her mind. You take her place instead.

*Dula* Would you then prefer depression, plaintiveness, tears and one to pity for your replacement on the wedding night?

*Evadne* Why not? Dula, I wish you could inspire some of your mirth in my Aspasia. She is too fixed on her mishap, which none of us is to blame for. You are too merry, and she is too sad. Why can't you make it more even between you and smoothe out the difference?

*Dula* Her love is too serious since she made the mistake of taking love too seriously from the beginning. That's why it went wrong. I escaped being married, but I never lacked lovers.

*Aspasia* I find it hard to find my joy in temporal connections with their fleeting superficiality, but instead I can find peace and satisfaction in serious altar service with solemn devotion to higher things than mortal matters.

*Evadne* Let's hear it, Aspasia. Tell us how you feel.

*Aspasia* This wedding night should have been mine, and your hands should have served me with graceful preparations for the highest night solemnity of life, like I now serve you. Pardon me, dearest Evadne, that I lack the rank and beauty and talent that is yours. My destiny is that the King or now your husband found it suitable to bypass me for your higher merits, and I can understand that Amyntor eventually preferred you. Maybe he found me worthless in comparison, but until my destiny shifted he was the most loyal and ideal of lovers, whose every word was honey in my soul, which I could only take dead serious. Perhaps it was wrong, as Dula says. I accepted it and don't complain any more. If he has been false, then may heaven forgive him. And if I now prefer my virtue and loneliness, forgive me, but I have taken no virtue from you, and all the virtue you have given is in good custody with me.

*Evadne* You transcend to a shy detachment in the virtue of virginity from having almost been a fulfilled bride. I cannot blame you, since you carry this complete and drastic change with heroic serenity. How did it go, that beautiful sad old song?

*Aspasia* Lay no garlands on my grave,  
gilded by the silver tears of dew,  
but cover me in willow branches  
as an explanation of my truth  
that I lived true and died in faith,  
while the only false one was my lover.  
Lie gently on my buried body,  
earth to cover me eternally,  
for my heart cannot bear more pressure  
than what it received from life's cruel love  
which was too painful and too much.

*Evadne* A sad dirge suitable indeed for my wedding night but hardly for anyone else's. Sing now something merrier, my hearty Dula.

*Dula* Never could I have a lover  
for much longer than an hour,  
since I always have to fly the higher,  
further on to find new love again;  
for it must never stop or rest  
and never lose its wings to fall to earth.



*Evadne* That was better. There was some truth in it. Now I can manage the rest by myself. Please leave me.

*Aspasia* My lady, good night. May all the joys of love that every maid is dreaming of come to your share. May there never be quarrels, cries and conflicts between you, but if they should occur all the same, then come to me, and I will teach you how to mourn and to keep your sorrow persistently alive. I beg you not to love him less or with less sincerity than I have done, but beware of displeasing him, which is what I must have done. This is probably the last time you will see me, but I ask you to visit me again when I am dead to contribute a tear to my coffin. And let it be carried by virgins dressed in white who may sing the truth about the virgin's faithfulness, sincerity and truth and about the eternal brutality and treachery of men.

*Evadne* We all agree with you with no reduction of our affection for you, Aspasia.

*Dula (to Evadne)* It's time for you to receive your bridegroom.

*Evadne* Let him enter. I will retire in the meantime. (*retires*)

*Dula* Here he comes.

*Amyntor (enters)* Where is she?

*Dula* You will find her in the darkness of intimacy.

*Amyntor* That's correct. No other senses should be mixed up with love and its feelings.

*Aspasia* Be happy with your wife, Amyntor. May all the harm you did to me be erased by my death. I will trouble you no more but only ask for a farewell kiss, which you can't refuse me. When it's time for my burial you shall come to see how virgins bewail a true virgin. I thank you for all the love you gave me, and I will keep it, although it ultimately was refused, as the only one, for I will never try to find it with another. Hereby I leave you, divine bridegroom, the best of men, with my prayers that they may always protect you and keep watch over you, while the altar service of my life from now on only will be to continue grieving to death.

*Amyntor* You give me for a farewell a disguised damnation.

*Aspasia* No, only truth and blessings. We both wished each other well, and that is how it must go on forever. (*lays her fingers on his lips as a farewell kiss and hurries out.*)

*Dula* Your wife is expecting you, Sir.

*Amyntor* So let her wait. Let me first pull myself together for a little while. (*exit Dula*)

I have been unjust to her, and everything feels wrong. Instead of a natural wedding joy, I only feel the tears of pain and remorse coming up, as if they wished to drown me as punishment for what I have done. But this is by the order of the King. Should I have protested and refused? Something tells me not to enter. But my guilt is not as heavy as the sensitivity of my conscience has grown. I have broken an engagement and my word and a lifetime vow because the King has forced me to. What can I do about it? Coward carcass, for what are you shaking and trembling so helplessly? This is the opposite of war, just enjoyment and ecstasy, and still it feels as a graver danger than the most fearsome battle.

(*enter Evadne dressed seductively to a maximum*)

And then all doubts and second thoughts vanish immediately the moment she appears in blinding beauty and intoxicating grace. – I beg you, my sweet, don't stay up dressed that lightly. You could catch a cold. I ask you to immediately return to your bed. Did you come out here to bring me to your bed?

*Evadne* No.

*Amyntor* What do you mean?

*Evadne* I am not feeling well.

*Amyntor* The greater reason to return to bed, where I shall warm you and so care for you that no illness ever more will dare to approach your vicinity.

*Evadne* I can't sleep.

*Amyntor* We don't need to sleep. We can lie still and just enjoy each other by our eyes in tenderness.

*Evadne* I will not go to bed.

*Amyntor* Still I ask you to.

*Evadne* I will not do it for all the world.

*Amyntor* Why, my love?

*Evadne* Because I have sworn not to do it.

*Amyntor* What is this? Some caprice or whim or new idea?

*Evadne* Yes, Amyntor, I have sworn not to go to bed with you. That's the simple truth.

*Amyntor* And to whom have you sworn this? Only to yourself, or to somebody else?

*Evadne* What does it matter? If I gave you his name, it would not make things any better.

*Amyntor* So there is another one?

*Evadne* No, another one knew me. I was not willing myself.

*Amyntor* Then tell me his name, and I will avenge you and give you correction.

*Evadne* You will if you love me all the way. Then you don't care about your future, honour, life, career, your happiness or anything else, but you will fulfil the prayer of the one you love, and she asks you to murder him.

*Amyntor* Tell me the whole truth.

*Evadne* You must not care about who he is. You will just kill him, if you love me.

*Amyntor* I must know more. Why did you give yourself to him? And how could anyone force you against your will? There is something here that doesn't make sense.

*Evadne* Is then my obvious hatred not enough? Isn't that too obvious? Only swear to me to kill him, whoever he is. The rest will be easy, since my wrath and hatred will be naturally transferred on you.

*Amyntor* Whoever could I suspect? I must know more.

*Evadne* Don't you believe me?

*Amyntor* How could I believe what I don't know?

*Evadne* You doubt a fallen woman and will not give her right just because she is fallen.

*Amyntor* Listen, dearest Evadne. Here you ask me to murder a completely unknown fellow man in blindness, yes, you demand this of me without even letting me know who he is. Have I no right to some kind of investigation? If I murder him, may I then afterwards know who he was? How could I murder anyone without knowing whom I am supposed to murder?

*Evadne* Can't you guess?

*Amyntor* So it's someone I know?

*Evadne* Yes.

*Amyntor* That makes it even worse. Don't trifle now, Evadne. We are married. We are not here to conspire or to stage a murder. We celebrated a wedding only to love.

*Evadne* I can't love you, Amyntor.

*Amyntor* Then why did you marry me?

*Evadne* You know very well the only reason why we were married.

*Amyntor* The King wished to honour me with someone better than Aspasia. Were you not in on it? Were you not willing?

*Evadne* No, I was not willing, although you were my brother's best friend and the best man here on Rhodes, for it didn't come naturally. The King rules, and we must obey him.

*Amyntor* If you had protested, I would probably also have done so.

*Evadne* I was not in a position to protest, and neither were you.

*Amyntor* Stop fiddling about now! Let's at least make love! Don't allow our wedding night to become a complete failure!

*Evadne* I don't want to lie with you, not on this night nor any other night.

*Amyntor* You are joking.

*Evadne* Do I look as if I was joking?

*Amyntor* You marry me and then afterwards demand to preserve your virginity. Is that reasonable?

*Evadne* Do you take me for a virgin at my age?

*Amyntor* So it went that far with that other one.

*Evadne* Do you now understand why I want you to kill him? Perhaps then that I could love you and build something up again. As long as the poison lingers in my soul, love is more dead than alive to me.

*Amyntor* You mean to say that he bound you by oath not to go to bed with anyone else?

*Evadne* Yes.

*Amyntor* And then, why didn't he marry you himself?

*Evadne* Because it was not possible.

*Amyntor* This is constantly getting worse. Has there ever been celebrated a wedding night like this? At least we must never let this come out. If you don't want sex with me, so let us at least adopt a child, so that we will seem normal! Or else the risk will be that I might force myself upon you. I feel like forcing you to retract that oath to the other one, since our oath by the altar is stronger and must be more valid



than any other, mustn't it? Have I no right to take you, as your husband? Can any law have a higher authority than love?

*Evadne* Only the King's.

*Amyntor* I still think you are just playing games with me and want to provoke me, and you sure have succeeded! Do you then have a company of warriors at your command for the defence of the maid's virtue and innocence, purely by virginal obstinacy, against all natural soundness?

*Evadne* That's not it, Amyntor. I would gladly have had you, but another stronger than you have taken me and sealed me by oath for his own use. Can't you guess who it is? There is only one man on Rhodes in a higher position than yourself.

*Amyntor* My goodness! Do you mean the King himself?

*Evadne* Who else?

*Amyntor* It's not possible! Anyone, but not he.

*Evadne* Don't you understand the intrigue? Why he had to see me married to someone else who was irreproachable in loyalty and nobility?

*Amyntor* But the King is sacred, he is the state, he stands for the entire order of society, no one can lift his hand against him. His word is the law.

*Evadne* Do you now see the dilemma?

*Amyntor* And what can we do? I could never murder him. He is the supreme impeccability. So we are sentenced for his crime. I was selected to conceal it, and I will then act as the father of his child. Is that how he figured it out?

*Evadne* I don't know how he thinks. We are only to obey his orders.

*Amyntor* So we have then nothing else to do but to keep up appearances in the foul play in which he has placed us as puppets in his hands. I will leave you in peace tonight, Evadne, and I am glad in spite of all that I learned about this before having touched you. Let's keep it up. What is done is done and cannot be undone. The King took you for his mistress, and for some compensation he married you to a man he could trust without bothering about what they would think themselves about it. We don't know where this could lead us. May we then play safely and keep up our image. I will lie calm in the second floor today, so that you will be left alone, and tomorrow we shall cheerfully warble to the world like after a consummate wedding night.

*Evadne* I am glad that you understand the situation.

*Amyntor* We must both play in the hands of the King's intrigues. He must not suspect that we one day might claim revenge for his having played the dirtiest of all tricks in gross violation of the sanctity of marriage. His crime is worse than if he had seduced you after we were married.

*Evadne* Let's go to rest now, Amyntor. We are tired after this upsetting marriage, a farce that wasn't very funny. Let's abide our time with patience. That's about all we can do.

*Amyntor* Yes, for the moment.

*(They kiss on their cheeks and leave separately.)*

Scene 2. Aspasia with the maids.

*Aspasia* Look, maids, am I fortunate who lost my husband before I was married?

*Chorus* Absolutely, o virtuous Aspasia, you got away cheaply and rid of all marriage problems before they had even started.

*Aspasia* Can you live then with love exchanged into cold frigidity and your heart petrified into a closed up clod and burden of suppressed sorrows?

*Chorus* Grieve not, sweet Aspasia, for the men are only good for violence, betrayal and cruel brutality. We women are not cold or cruel by nature, but we get metamorphosed, altered and corrupted by the men into the wrecks we usually become.

*Aspasia* And you, easy-going fleeting Dula, can you really find any meaning in just blindly getting consumed by supercilious vulgar pleasures in the consumption of a May-fly by herself?

*Dula* You have your life, Aspasia, and I have mine. Let us as women live with mutual respect for what we both are, you established as a virgin and a paragon of virtue, in which capacity you certainly can do a great amount of good, like other virgins such as Artemis and Athena, but I am also in a service for some good with Aphrodite, developing and furthering all men I can and making them to some degree more soft and human. Love is after all a better service than the war.

*Aspasia* So you don't envy me?

*Dula* As little as you envy me yourself.

*Aspasia* But still I loved and lost my love by shock just in the moment I would have received the best man in the world ensured for my possession in my bosom for all time. I can't stop loving him, but when he is taken by another, my love changes into the most unendurable and everlasting pain. My sisters, comfort me.

*Chorus* That's how they are, the men, cruel in their stupidity, incorrigible in their egoism of blindly breaking others' hearts, which more often than not leads to horrendous ruin and disaster and eternal grief for mainly their own part. Remember Jason and Medea and the consequences of that faithlessness – two children murdered and a horrible revenge on a whole family and bitterness enough for an eternal afterworld to shudder by. Remember Agamemnon's faithlessness – what was his wages for the Trojan war apart from dire consequences of his intimacy with Cassandra? Faithlessness will never pay but must end even worse for the perpetrator than for his victim.

*Aspasia* No, I wish no harm to Amyntor. On the contrary, I ever wished him only well. He is not the one I urge you to punish. I am the one I urge you to comfort.

*Chorus* A broken heart can not be comforted, only avenged.

*Aspasia* No, that is not how I want it.

*Chorus* Maybe Amyntor is innocent. We heard that he was commanded to his marriage by the King. Therefore he could not say no, and neither could Evadne.

Perhaps the blame is to be found in the manipulations of secret intrigues by someone else.

*Aspasia* You might be right.

*Chorus* All wrongs could be corrected, and all wrongs should be corrected.

*Aspasia* I will look into it how it all came actually about. Evadne must know all the details, and I am very close to her.

*Chorus* Investigate, consider, analyse carefully, and then take your stand. Let us know the result, and we shall help you by any means.

*Aspasia* Thank you, sisters. I must content myself with that until further. I really hope the results could confirm and acquit Amyntor as innocent.

*Chorus* We share that hope with you, Aspasia. Now examine carefully the matter.

*Calianax* What are you standing here miaowing for, you silly sluts? Go home and make yourselves useful, so that you don't have to prostitute yourselves for nothing!

*Dula* Is that all what we women are good for, old Calianax, to prostitute ourselves?

*Calianax* My daughter now has the chance to prove herself to be of better use, now as she was scrapped by the best man in the country, as she thought before she was married, but for the rest, women extremely seldom turn out anything else than old whores. Get lost! Let my daughter grieve in peace! Dress in black from top to toe, Aspasia, and your widow's grief will be more effective. All you need to do for the rest of your life is to grieve, since I will make sure that you never more will associate with any base and vulgar men!

*Dula* Poor comfort for a wounded heart does the sharp bitterness of age provide. She needs a new man, Calianax.

*Calianax* She almost had one too much already! Go to your new men, you strumpet, and leave my daughter in peace from them and such as you! She already learned the hard way to do without them.

*Dula (to Aspasia)* Come, Aspasia. He is only ridiculing us.

*Aspasia* He is sore because he understands the matter as little as anyone else, but when I know enough it will be a weapon in his hands. He means well after all.

*(The women disperse, Dula leaves with Aspasia.)*

*Calianax* Strumpets! Widows grieved to ghosts! Wailing hags and complaining cry-babies! Broken hearts and nymphomaniacs with sickly sex fixation only leading to hell! Tears and quarrels and lamentations! That's all what women are about!  
*(snorts, angry and embittered)*

### Act III scene 1.

*Cleon* Your sister hasn't risen yet.

*Diphylus* Leave them alone. No doubt, their night has probably been toilsome.

*Straton* But hardly tiresome.

*Cleon* The question is if he succeeded.

*Straton* With what?



*Cleon* Don't be so daft. What does a man do with his wife on his wedding night?

*Straton* Takes a drink?

*Cleon* Takes her virginity, of course!

*Straton* But they surely take other liberties as well.

*Cleon* Shall we bet?

*Straton* About what?

*Cleon* Has he taken her virginity or not?

*Diphylus* It's a matter of the odds.

*Straton* I don't think he will get it as long as he lives.

*Diphylus* Why do you think so?

*Straton* Both of them are too noble and fine to do anything vulgar. She would never agree to it, and he would never condescend to it.

*Cleon* It's about time to call them out. I bet on the contrary. I don't think Amyntor could resist any lady, least of all someone like Evadne, and especially not if he is married to her.

*Straton* I am on! I think you are mistaken.

*Diphylus* They have all the time in the world. Why would they hurry about it?

*Amyntor (enters)* Hallo there! My brother-in-law! Nowadays my brother! I am not ready yet, and your sister has hardly got out of bed.

*Diphylus* You look as if you lost your eyes tonight. I bet you hardly slept.

*Amyntor* Actually, I haven't.

*Diphylus* Then you have done well.

*Amyntor* We are hoping for a boy. When he gets twelve he will command the fleets of Rhodes.

*Diphylus* You are not in such a hurry. You also should sleep in between, you know.

*Amyntor* Very true. – But she slept as soundly as a log as if she never could be more satisfied.

*Diphylus* That would indicate that you've lost, Straton.

*Amyntor* Lost what?

*Diphylus* He thought you would never succeed in taking her virginity. Cleon thought you would take it at once.

*Cleon* You did as well as was proper, I trust, Amyntor?

*Amyntor* You don't speak openly about such things. It's too vulgar and totally private. We do our duty, and that is all. You may judge for yourselves from Evadne's reactions.

*Straton* Then I have lost.

*Amyntor (aside)* You would really have lost, if destiny hadn't interfered.

*Cleon* You really deserve her.

*Amyntor* I am not so sure. I think I got more than I deserved.

*Melantius (enters)* There you are, Amyntor! To me a brother is too alien an expression of our close friendship, which has brought us closer together than brothers.

*Amyntor* You ever was a friend, brother-in-law you are now and closer as a friend than ever. Enough! An embrace is unavoidable! (*They embrace.*)

*Melantius* How do you find my sister? Has she satisfied you properly enough?

*Amyntor* More properly than enough. We hardly knew each other before. Now we know too much about each other.

*Cleon* That's quite a normal result of the wedding night.

*Straton* Let us at least see the brave bride the day after! She couldn't be less beautiful than yesterday, could she?

*Amyntor* She could be irritable though, over-sensitive and somewhat touchy, so try to weigh your words to her with some consideration.

*Diphylus* We are delicacy itself.

*Melantius* Call on her, Amyntor!

*Amyntor* (*calling*) Evadne! Come out, my love! Your brothers wish to congratulate you!

*Evadne* (*from inside*) For what?

*Cleon* Yes, you won the bet, the highest prize!

*Evadne* You are just pulling my legs.

*Amyntor* No, they wish to congratulate you and me for what we have done.

(*enter Evadne*)

*Melantius* Good morning, sister! Anyone who knows whom you married has no need to congratulate you. He knows that you won the highest prize.

*Diphylus* O sister, did you really dispose of your innocence?

*Evadne* Could there be any doubt about it? I knew that you would tease me.

*Straton* No, we only wish to know the truth.

*Evadne* If the truth is to be divulged – if I were to marry again and go through what I have already been through, I think I would decline.

*Amyntor* (*aside*) Me too.

*Diphylus* Sister, Dula says she heard your sobs and cries two rooms away from you.

*Evadne* Nonsense!

*Amyntor* He is just pulling your legs. They are all happy here today for our sake.

*Evadne* I would be happier if the speculations weren't so wild about what we have done.

*Amyntor* We have nothing to be ashamed of.

*Evadne* No, only the loose talk of others.

*Cleon* Here comes the King himself!

*Straton* And his brother!

*Evadne* That was the only thing missing.

*King* Good morning, everybody! Amyntor, you are a most fortunate fellow! And you, my lady, are now changed into another's. Tell me how your wedding night has pleased you.

*Evadne* Not at all, I am afraid.

*Amyntor* She went too tired too soon and then could only sleep and is still not refreshed at all.

*Lysippus* Let her rest some more, and it will go better.

*King* Amyntor, were you really a virgin and faithful to your intended wife until you married?

*Amyntor (honestly)* Yes, my lord.

*King* How does it feel then to have reached full maturity?

*Amyntor* You must know that yourself, who has made the experience.

*King* You mean, that you consummated the marriage at once?

*Amyntor* Why not?

*King* So you would gladly accept if I once more got the idea to give you a wife?

*Amyntor* Never.

*King* Was then my choice for you a bad one? Hasn't she satisfied you enough? Aren't you content? Would like to do without her?

*Amyntor* On the contrary, my King, I am so content with her that I will never want anyone else. I am satisfied with having her as my first and last. And if she for any reason would pass away before me, I would never want another. One marriage is enough for my part.

*King (aside)* This is too good. It has gone too well. I don't like it. – May I speak alone with Amyntor and Evadne. (*All the others leave.*)

I wish to speak more privately with you about what will come next, to protect your happiness and welfare.

*Amyntor (aside)* Will he then reveal that he is lying with Evadne himself? If so, may heaven then keep me from charging in righteous ire!

*King* Will you excuse me, Amyntor, if I have a private conversation with your Evadne? You will not grow jealous?

*Amyntor* Thank you, I will gladly go away. You may speak freely with her in perfect peace.

*King (privately with Evadne)* How do you like your husband?

*Evadne* As I should. I accepted him at your command, and he is good enough for me.

*King* Have you then forgotten my word to you?

*Evadne* I obeyed you. Was that not enough then?

*King* Don't be silly. The intention was that your fornication would be given legitimacy by his marriage to you if there would be children, not that you would love him more than me.

*Evadne* I have not promised you any fidelity, and even less could I have kept any when you gave me away.

*King* Nonsense! You swore me your fidelity! I demanded obeisance and loyalty of you, and you agreed on it! You were never to give yourself to any other man than me!

*Evadne* Then I can put you at ease. He has not taken me.

*King* Yet here you stand boasting to the world about your night of love!

*Evadne* He is only lying to keep up appearances.



*King* Such a valiant and rakish and adventurous man? And do you think I could believe it? You only resort to shuffling to get away!

*Evadne* My promise was only to never love anyone of lower rank and quality than you. If one day you will be deposed, I would gladly marry your successor. I love ambition and its power, that's what attracted me to you, nothing else, and if anyone shows higher proof of that than you, he will be mine with the same right as you. You raised Amyntor yourself to a status next to you, and you yourself married me to him. He hasn't stained me, though, as you have done with the right of might and power.

*King* You are only lying to get away. You allowed Amyntor to lie with you on your wedding night. The whole city knows it well by now.

*Evadne* And who spread rumours if not liars?

*King* You mean to say that he lies? The news is accepted by everyone as fact. How can you then claim that what everyone knows from Amyntor's own mouth is not true?

*Evadne* On the contrary, I swore to never let him know me.

*King* I know the man all too well. He would never in such a situation retreat and deny his right and lust to such a beauty as you. Nature herself proves that you lie. He would never accept such an utterly humiliating depravation as to be denied the bridal bed as a man. He is after all a man, is he not?

*Evadne* No, more than that, he is a gentleman and diplomat and can control himself, the highest of all human meritorious qualities.

*King* And you even defend him. That makes matters even worse. You are in love with him and would rather have him than me. That is obvious and is written in self-luminous star text in the night for the whole universe to understand as self-evident. So be then my enemy from now on. No reconciliation is possible.

*Evadne* Then listen yourself to what Amyntor has to tell about it! Amyntor!

*Amyntor* Yes, my love?

*Evadne* How could you spread the rumour that we consummated our wedding night?

*Amyntor* I didn't. People drew their own conclusions.

*Evadne* But you did nothing to stop them?

*Amyntor* What could I have done? People believe only what they want to believe.

*Evadne* But it has resulted in a division between the King and me and separated us as lovers!

*Amyntor* O gods!

*Evadne* Swear now to the King that you never lay with me!

*Amyntor* My only offence is the breach of promise to Aspasia, which I regret that was committed by the King's order. This misdeed has not yet been atoned for. I will not waste more words on this lascivious woman, whom you made my wife against my will only for the sake of her lewdness with you, of which I had no idea, but you, my lord and sovereign, has made yourself a tyrant! And you accuse me and us of the consequences of your arbitrary tyranny!

*Evadne* Well, my lord and King, you see yourself that the rumour is false.

*Amyntor* You who yourself are infallible should know how now and then you are forced to take the law arbitrarily into your own hands. What punishment is just for a man who before a wedding besmirched the bridegroom's bedchamber and corrupted with debauchery his marriage so that it never could become normal? Is not death the sentence for such a crime?

*King* Don't pull your sword. You know that I fear no subject, and it will only be the worse for you if you give free vent to your ire.

*Amyntor* Who am I to rise against the King, who my father and my forefathers with their tribes and families always served as the symbol of our country, its welfare and wealth and happiness as the leading harbour of the world? Your holiness and impeccability as the highest authority of the country keeps me from lifting my sword against you, which I would rather direct to my own heart for my love of my country. But why me? There must have been at least a hundred candidates who would rather have married Evadne than myself, who already was engaged to the one I truly loved?

*Evadne* The others were no good. The King thought only the best would suit me. He couldn't marry me to a fool.

*Amyntor* This is constantly getting worse. Surely there were more than I in the country who were better than most.

*King* I needed someone I could trust. I knew for certain that you if anyone was reliability itself. Evadne's honour was at stake and my own.

*Amyntor* I have had enough of this honour, which only serves to mask and hide your dishonour! What is it you really want from me?

*King* That we may continue meeting and in the shadow of your marriage go on loving as before.

*Amyntor* So I should serve you as your private pimp?

*King* You have no choice. You are married to her by law. Do you wish to ruin her and your own name? No, never, you are too noble for that. Just cooperate, and you will keep us all out of harm's way and remain yourself as free a man as I. There is nothing to worry about. Sleep well, and let Evadne sleep well with me, when I need her. I am grateful that you didn't lie with her. Thereby you saved us all from the start and our faces, which we can continue showing and bearing with honour.  
(*leaves*)

*Evadne* There you see the consequences of your talk. You shouldn't have boasted so.

*Amyntor (sighs)* They all believed the natural. I didn't even have to help them to it. Who wishes voluntarily to cause and spread scandals, when they touch yourself most of all? Woe, that a marriage with its false mirth and the superficial glory of its effects and affectations could drive an unsuspecting and blue-eyed bridegroom to such difficult abysses of extreme despair! I am now condemned to the fate of all my life having to bear the burden of being forced to bow and serve my personal self-humiliation and partake in the cruellest hypocrisy of all: a miscarried marriage.

*Evadne* We all love our lives, and that is all we have. I only wanted to keep mine.  
*Amyntor* I love you still anyway, but tell me, could any marriage have become more unhappy?  
*Evadne* We'll see. It isn't over yet.  
*Amyntor* What?  
*Evadne* Neither life, our marriage or this cruel game that made us victims to its whims.  
*Amyntor* Could anything good come of it?  
*Evadne* We'll see.

## Scene 2.

*Calianax* Cursed idiot, let me fight you!  
*Melantius* I am not the proper person to fight old men. What ails you?  
*Calianax* Just pull your sword! I can still fight!  
*Melantius* I do not doubt it, but you could hardly win. Age instead turns by its wisdom every defeat to victory, but you seem rather to prefer to do the contrary.  
*Calianax* You and your damned sister have by that unchanged Amyntor driven innocent Aspasia almost to death!  
*Melantius* I admit that it's a matter of concern, and we regret it, but the worst of all is that none of the three of us is guilty. We simply can't understand the matter. Amyntor is as depressed as Aspasia, and even the fair and gay Evadne seems to have fallen very far from her former radiant felicitous self.  
*Calianax* You just fake your innocence as hypocrites all three of you! To whom shall I then appeal for some exoneration of my grieved and forlorn daughter?  
*Melantius* I would gladly help you in whatever way I can. Let me just investigate the matter.  
*Calianax* But there is no one who knows anything! All keep quiet! No one wishes to reveal his secrets! All have everything to hide!  
*Melantius* Not me.  
*Calianax* I'll believe that when you can prove it by revealing the truth! (*leaves in anger*)  
*Melantius* I must speak out with Amyntor about this. What luck! There he is!  
*Amyntor*!  
*Amyntor* What is it, my best friend?  
*Melantius* Here you wander brooding, burdened by as heavy deadly worries as Aspasia herself! It will not do.  
*Amyntor* What do you want me then to do?  
*Melantius* Open at last your heart and your soul. What else are friends for?  
*Amyntor* My matrimony is locked, and I have lost the key from the beginning.  
*Melantius* Something grieves you most atrociously.  
*Amyntor* I cannot speak about it.



*Melantius* Then I am no more your friend but only an acquaintance.

*Amyntor* How can you say that, Melantius, we who have been closest friends all our lives?

*Melantius* I can't accept that you withhold secrets from me, least of all when they burden and worry you.

*Amyntor* Forbear with me, Melantius, for if you knew about it, you would only regret your curiosity.

*Melantius* Let's take one step at a time. First tell me what's it all about. Then we shall see what it could imply.

*Amyntor* I can't take it on my responsibility to initiate you in what touches us all, our nation, its order and future.

*Melantius (pulls his sword)* Pull your sword then, and let us fight about it! I will not be satisfied with less. Amyntor, I must insist!

*Amyntor* It's your funeral then. Before we married, our King made Evadne his mistress. She was taken before the wedding, ordered by the King himself to cover up and beautify the situation, by promptly giving Evadne a husband and thus get away himself, at the same time keeping Evadne for his mistress under cover of my legal marriage.

*Melantius* You are lying!

*Amyntor* Didn't I tell you that you would react negatively?

*Melantius* You are lying! It can't be true!

*Amyntor* You asked for it yourself.

*Melantius (pulls his sword again)* My most trusted friend, how could you dishonour our sister like that with such lies after having married her?

*Amyntor* If you don't believe me, ask her yourself. If you still don't believe me, kill me. I will not defend myself. You asked me to give you the reason for my utter despair. I gave it to you. Now you are contaminated by it. Be aware, though, that the hardest hit is none of us but Aspasia, who should have been my bride.

*Melantius* Whose case has driven old Calianax mad. (*calms down*) It pains me, Amyntor, that this should strike you straight into your heart and soul as an unpardonable violation and mortal insult of your manhood.

*Amyntor* Don't ask me about the sorrows of matrimony. After I was trapped I have only met with despair in every wedded husband I have met, suppressed and buried deeply and alive for the sake of peace at home. I now understand them all too well. If all the secret truths of marriages were let out, there would be no more marriages, at least no tenable ones.

*Melantius* Yet I see a way out of this. In spite of all I am glad that I got this out of you. Everything fits – the King's strange exchange of your wedding partner, your unfathomable and unreleased secret suffering, the exaggerated gaiety between you and our Evadne, and the secrets and mysteries which she herself has locked up herself with from fear that anything would show. This demands action, and I know precisely how to proceed.

*Amyntor* Can the problems be solved without bloodshed and without putting our city at risk?

*Melantius* That's the very question. Go in peace, Amyntor. Leave the rest to your friend and my brothers.

*Amyntor* Alas, Melantius, I fear that your friendship is the last thing I have left.

*Melantius* You can rely on it, though. (*They embrace.*) Go home now, brother, sleep and rest. That is what you need.

*Amyntor* Thank you, my friend. Perhaps it is time to at last sleep on it.  
(*leaves tired out*)

*Melantius* The old man Calianax has keys to the castle. He will be our key figure. Diphylus! The very man I need!

*Diphylus (stops)* What's on, Melantius?

*Melantius* Everything possible, and you must help us.

*Diphylus* I just come from the court. The King is laughing with our sister, and they almost laughed us all out.

*Melantius* They must cry, Diphylus.

*Diphylus* And why?

*Melantius* It will appear to you by and by. Just join my project, which is necessary for the welfare of Rhodes.

*Diphylus* Is there some coup of state or palace revolution going on?

*Melantius* Ask no questions. Just trust me. A gross injustice has been committed against us, which forces us to take measures.

*Diphylus* Perhaps then it's best not to ask any questions.

*Melantius* You will know everything in time.

*Diphylus* You seem determined and at the same time in control, as if you knew exactly what to do. Well then, I will trust you.

*Melantius* Collect weapons, mobilize all fighting men you can, but time is short. What we must do must be done at once.

*Diphylus* I love quick action whatever the matter is. Brother, I have already got started. (*disappears*)

*Melantius* I hope our cause is just, but my blood can't tell me otherwise, and I believe in the blood. To take revenge and perish yourself is meaningless, to escape is impossible, but if we could take control of the castle we could control the situation. Calianax! You must help us take revenge for your daughter's sufferings!

*Calianax* So that's how it sounds now? What is it now you will try to trick me into?

*Melantius* We need the fort. Can you give us the keys?

*Calianax* That would be high treason.

*Melantius* It already is. I am forced to take the life of our King, who has done your daughter and yourself so much wrong.

*Calianax* Get out, traitor!

*Melantius* I tell you how it is! If you don't cooperate, I must use force. You did wish to fight, didn't you? (*pulls his sword*)

*Calianax* Wait a moment! What did the King do to my daughter?

*Melantius* Nothing, but forced her husband to marry his violated mistress!  
*Calianax* Heavens! So all the wrong was with the King?  
*Melantius* Yes! Will you now give me the keys?  
*Calianax* Not only the keys, but the whole arsenal! For now there is no more time to think, complain, brood and grieve, but to act!  
*Melantius* Exactly, old man! It's all for your daughter!  
*Calianax* I will fetch the keys. (*leaves*)  
*Melantius* Two violated ladies demand revenge without having asked for it, why it becomes the more urgent. We will take it with a vengeance! It will be a refreshing and thorough revolution as a revenge for our seduced sister and a discarded bride!

*Intermission.*

Act IV scene 1. Evadne's salon.

*Melantius* (*enters*) Greetings, sister!  
*Evadne* To you as well, my brother.  
*Melantius* You are as lovely as you always have been and even lovelier.  
*Evadne* I thank you, my brother.  
*Melantius* Is it the joys of marriage that so have enhanced your striking beauty?  
*Evadne* Perhaps rather the conditions and agreements of my marriage and their results.  
*Melantius* Tell me, may I speak with you in private?  
*Evadne* Maidens, leave! (*All maids and servants leave.*)  
 What is on your mind, brother? We have seen too little of each other since you came home. Now at last we have a golden opportunity to speak.  
*Melantius* Let me first lock the door. (*locks the door*)  
*Evadne* Is it that serious?  
*Melantius* More serious than you think.  
*Evadne* I thought you would bring me some amusement.  
*Melantius* That's the last thing I came here for.  
*Evadne* It pleases you to play games with me, and you frighten me. Just don't make me sad, for then you must go.  
*Melantius* How could I possibly make you sad in the least?  
*Evadne* By flattery, praise and cringing to me and not being true, like all others in my vicinity that only stick to hypocrisy and pretences.  
*Melantius* Unfortunately I must make you sad just by being true.  
*Evadne* That sounds better. Come to the point.  
*Melantius* Sister, your special beauty is of such kind, that you with your spirituality and intelligent talents also with ease could cause an inflammation of an entire realm.  
*Evadne* Nonsense!

*Melantius* That's exactly what has happened. My friend Amyntor is not happily married. He married into a cuckold and wasn't appraised of it until afterwards. You must tell me his name.

*Evadne* Whose name?

*Melantius* Your lover's, to whom you belonged before Amyntor and still do.

*Evadne* You come with brutal insinuations. Go away. You know where the door is.

*Melantius* I really hope you didn't have more than one.

*Evadne* Your offensive is implacably obstinate. From where do you get your tall tales?

*Melantius* Everyone knows about it. Everyone speaks about it. The court is laughing at it. No one cares although everybody knows, since Amyntor carries his cross with bravery.

*Evadne* What has he been suggesting to you?

*Melantius* Nothing. I know it by myself. I can add, sister. I have seen what I have seen, and you can't lie to me, as little as you know that I never lied to you. (*takes a firm hold of her arm*) Who is he?

*Evadne* You are worse than Amyntor. Let me go! You are hurting me!

*Melantius* Not until you have told me who has brought you into his power and made you a strumpet and the worst whore here in Rhodes!

*Evadne* Brother! I beseech you! Spare me!

*Melantius* You didn't spare our family. You didn't spare Amyntor. You didn't even spare yourself. You have debased yourself and become a victim, and I must know to whom!

*Evadne* My brother, that's the only thing saving you, that you are after all my brother.

*Melantius* But as detached as your brother as you are yourself from your honour and virtue! Sister! If you don't tell me his name, you abuse yourself!

*Evadne* If you deign to resort to violence, you have come to the wrong place. Go to my soldiers. You may use violence and command, but you will get nothing out of any lady by violence.

*Melantius* There is no one here to defend you, and no one hears you if you cry out for help. I will not give in. What a glorious whore you have turned yourself into! What a perfect bait for a mighty pimp! Who was it that forced you to marriage with that poor perfectly honest and noble innocent Amyntor as the ideal reliable chaperon for his debauchery? You married him only to shield your affair from insight, didn't you?

*Evadne* No! It was just my only salvation!

*Melantius* From the dishonour you already had won and branded yourself forever with? Confess! Who has poisoned you, consumed your virginity and purity, ravished you, dishonoured you, altered your virtue into dirt and disgust and instead of your heart planted a cancer in your soul?

*Evadne* My brother, you go too fa!

*Melantius* I don't give in! All Greeks in Asia that warred against cursed Persians know, that it is always possible to go even further! Speak, before this sword will take the same course as your cursed lover! I only demand that you confess who he is! And when you at last have divulged it, I wouldn't anyway be able to give you what you deserve. (*lowers his sword*)

*Evadne* You don't want to kill me?

*Melantius* Is it too much of me to demand fair and pure justice? You have no reason to protect him. No, you couldn't have the least thinkable reason.

*Evadne* You can control yourself. That pleases me. There is nothing I can respect more in men than self control. The King lacks that capacity.

*Melantius* That's all I wanted: that you yourself stood up to who he was. (*sheathes his sword*) I knew all the time who he was. Amyntor gave me the name, but I had to force it out of him, like I had to use force to get it out of you.

*Evadne* I have trespassed against you, my family, and most of all against Amyntor. I know it, I have always been painfully aware of it. I ask of you your brotherly forgiveness. I didn't want it like that, but no subject can resist the temptations of power.

*Melantius* Has it been going on for long?

*Evadne* For too long.

*Melantius* And it still goes on? Regularly or only daily?

*Evadne* I would rather die with the secret than continue living with it if it was made public.

*Melantius* I am here, Evadne, to provide a solution to your problem.

*Evadne* There can be no solution, as long as the King lives.

*Melantius* Exactly. You must kill him.

*Evadne* The gods forbid!

*Melantius* No, even the gods demand it! Could you not hate him? Could you not condemn him? Even if you can't, it is your duty to kill him. Only you can do it. You have his heart, his intimacy and his confidence. He would never fear you and never bring his weapons into your bed. He is at your mercy, sister, in your bed.

*Evadne* You impose the hardest thinkable penitence on me. How could I do it? Do you have any suggestions?

*Melantius* You know best yourself how you could do it, perhaps with the cushion, so that he is suffocated. That would be the most painless method. You have completely free hands.

*Evadne* You command me to my life's most difficult task.

*Melantius* I know you can do it. You know you must do it.

*Evadne* It's not for women to take any life. You men have the force and the lack of conscience that is needed in the most critical moments. But we women are too soft and sensitive, more suited to tenderly care for little vulnerable babies than to brutally take the lives of others.

*Melantius* You have no choice. You must do it. Consider the alternative: to in humiliating shame continue living with your royal tyrant and your husband as his



pimp and cuckold. Could you endure such a life? That is what I have to refuse you and us. Which is the lesser of the two evils you have to choose between?

*Evadne* To kill him.

*Melantius* Can I trust you to do it?

*Evadne* Yes. But not one word more about this business. Let our pact now be a state secret of supreme confidential classification until the matter is closed.

*Melantius* As you wish. (*embraces her*) My sister, you can't imagine how it tortures me to have to expose you to this distress. Life must have its course, and now and then death is required as an operation for the existence of life. Nature must have its right. I think you understand me.

*Evadne* Not even Amyntor must know anything about our pact.

*Melantius* He is too good and honest to be able to do anything against the King. Only you as a woman could in this situation do justice and are also motivated enough.

*Evadne* Quiet, he comes! You must leave! You haven't been here! He must not suspect anything of our conference!

*Melantius* I am off. (*leaves at once*)

*Evadne (alone)* How lost I was in the labyrinth of love! I didn't want any harm to anyone but only good to all and thought that I by compromises could serve and please everyone. But love seems to always demand endless complications, why there is so much violence committed in the name of love. Now I am obliged to apply operations of violence myself against the sick results of only the mindlessness and carelessness of love.

*Amyntor (enters, observes that she has had a crisis)* How are things with you?

*Evadne (immediately falling on her knees to him)* You are my only lord and master. Believe me and forgive me! I have outrageously used you and allowed you to be humiliated and abused. Everything is my fault, but I believe I could get better.

*Amyntor* I have brought no allegations against you. We are the slaves of destiny. I accepted it as a man with patience in the assurance that it will pass. Don't cry, my dearest, and don't kneel to me. We are stranded on the same lonely cliff beset by storms, you and I, on the same level.

*Evadne* I will not rise until you have forgiven me.

*Amyntor* What is there to forgive? That my marriage like a cataclysm has annihilated everything I believed in? That I suddenly could not find a single faithful wife or husband in the world? That all virtue was only an illusion, that faith existed only to be cheated and betrayed, and that every form of love life was no more than a moral hell of pain, anguish and despair? No, Evadne, everything I went through was not our fault. You were completely innocent. Destiny just played a terrible trick on us. We were unlucky, and most unlucky of all was the desperately crying Aspasia. It is her you have to ask for forgiveness, if it is at all possible.

*Evadne* Is she dead?

*Amyntor* No, far from it, but her father is driven mad by the strain of her misfortune. He wants to fight at any price with whomever and imagines that he has suddenly become young again.

*Evadne* I will not rise until you have forgiven me. I know: there are a number I have to ask for forgiveness. You are the first one. When you have given it, I will go to the next one, not before.

*Amyntor* Then I give it. Now I see you as you used to be before a lousy king caught sight of you and got the idea to shamelessly take advantage of your position. Give me your hand and rise. Now I recognize you, and now I can give you my honour and respect.

*Evadne (rising)* Keep your distance though until I have remedied this ugly controversy to the fullest. I know, I have a penitence to make, and I have had instructions. Let's not see each other again until I have fulfilled the cleansing operation to the fullest.

*Amyntor* As you wish. I love you.

*Evadne* And you are now the only one I ever loved. (*kisses two fingers and lays them on his brow*) Let this be our farewell kiss until further.

*Amyntor* Then I will look forward to the sequel.

*Evadne* Don't expect too much. (*leaves abruptly and hurries away.*)

*Amyntor* What will she do? Visit some temple for some purification? Ask Aspasia and her brother of forgiveness? We shall see. The only certain thing is that there must be some continuation of this spectacle.

## Scene 2. The court.

*King* Repeat that again.

*Calianax* It's absolutely true, my lord. I heard it with my own ears. He has gone completely mad.

*King* Or else you have yourself. By the way, that's what you've been since long.

*Calianax* Would I lie after forty years of service to the royal house?

*King* You should know after forty years of service to the royal house, that that's where you learn how to lie, or had you forgotten? Have you fallen for your own lies, like everyone else?

*Calianax* I swear that I am not lying.

*King* And would then my best warrior together with Amyntor, my most trusted servant, suddenly want to stage a coup, take over the castle, murder me and think they could get away with it?

*Calianax* That's what he told me.

*King* You must have heard wrong or got it wrong.

*Calianax* That's what I thought first as well.

*King* There you see!

*Calianax* No, I heard!

*King* You heard it in your mind.

*Calianax* No, I heard it in my ears.

*King* No witnesses?

*Calianax* Yes, I.

*King* Only one? That's not enough and doesn't count. You must have daydreamed or hallucinated. It's not unusual when you are gaga.

*Calianax* I am not gaga!

*King* Why then don't you do anything else than just demonstrate your gaga?

*Calianax* It is not gaga! I am reporting conspiracies!

*King* And what are all conspiracy theories if not taken from thin air which then gaga idiots make much noise about boasting it around in their demonstration of gaga?

*Calianax* At least I ask you to investigate the matter before it is too late!

*King* Very well. I will try the good Melantius and his family with the good Amyntor, all my best and closest friends. Summon them, Straton! I need them! I need better company than this fool, who just tries to make himself ridiculous by making me take conspiracy theories seriously!

*Straton* I have asked them to come.

*King* Still the wedding party isn't over, and I owe Evadne and her faithful husband a wedding dinner or two plus some banquets, for that I promised them, and I still remain deeply in debt to both of them.

*Calianax* You spoil those youths. You paid for the entire wedding and all its festivities for an entire week!

*King* Are you jealous that your daughter didn't get them?

*Calianax* She is only crying. She couldn't have celebrated anyway.

*King* What's the matter with her? Did it touch her so deeply?

*Calianax* Deeper than a bottomless well. She is a black hole of only sorrows. She was probably the one who turned Melantius' head and taunted him to revenge as Amyntor was lost anyway.

*King* Hem!

*Straton* Your friends, my lord and King.

*(enter Melantius, Diphylus, Amyntor, Evadne, Lysippus and others.)*

*King (rises with cup in his hand)* Welcome, my friends! Now we shall make merry! Sit here next to me, Melantius, and you, Amyntor, on my other side. Evadne, with the splendour of your beauty you have the honour of bestowing light and festive mood to the entire party.

*Evadne* I have nothing against serving as receptor of your homages, my lord.

*King* That's why I never tire of bestowing them. Fill the cups with wine! This is the definite party to the glory of Evadne and Amyntor! May they live long and happily ever after in their blessed marriage!

*Amyntor (to Evadne)* He is drunk.

*Evadne (back)* He always is.

*Melantius (to Diphylus)* Do you think Calianax has tattled to the King?

*Diphylus (back)* He has probably told all sorts of things that the King couldn't believe in.

*King (in a splendid humour)* Cheers, my friends, to Amyntor and Evadne!

*All (raising their cups)* To Amyntor and Evadne!

(All drink, some with second thoughts.)

*King (sits down)* Replenish the chalices!

*Calianax (imitating)* Replenish the chalices!

*King* You already had too much, old man.

*Calianax* As if you hadn't yourself.

*King* I can never have enough.

*Calianax* So why do you pick holes in me?

*King* Because you befuddle my thoughts by your own muddled suspicions. I don't want to believe anything bad about anyone. I don't want your paranoia.

*Calianax* Are you accusing me of being mentally unsound?

*King* No, only old enough to be unsound, which is bad and serious enough. But we shall see. If it is as I think, that you only suffer from delusions, I will take care of your keys to the fort, and you will henceforth remain at home under constant surveillance.

*Calianax* Are you locking me up with my mad daughter?

*King* No, she will have to lock *you* up.

*Evadne (to Amyntor)* The King is in a good humour tonight. That worries me.

*Amyntor (back)* Why?

*Evadne* He always gets screwed up to higher gaiety when he is preparing some mischief.

*Amyntor* Could he do anything worse than what he has already done?

*Evadne* Just you wait!

*King* Melantius, you look sad.

*Melantius* Unfortunately I have no amusement to present.

*King* Do you then have something of the opposite? It suddenly strikes me how easy it would be for anyone of you on an occasion like this to mix poison in my chalice.

*Amyntor (protests at once)* We don't mix any poisons here!

*Melantius* Why would anyone wish to do something like that?

*King* Ask the old man Calianax. He has been doing it all day. He has got the idea that you all are conspiring against me. Where did he get such an idea? From his lovesick daughter? Hardly. She if anyone would gladly conspire herself and alone if she could. From you, Melantius? Do you know something?

*Melantius* I know nothing more than yourself, my lord.

*King* What about you, Amyntor? Do you still hold any grudge against me, or have I restituted you enough? The gods know, that I did try.

*Amyntor* I find it difficult to believe that anyone would have had reason to conspire against you, except, as you admit yourself, poor little Aspasia.

*King* And why isn't *she* here? She also belongs to the family!

*Straton* She didn't want to come.

*Calianax* She wanted to stay at home and cry instead.

*King* And you, Evadne, could you have any objection against me? I gave you the best man I knew on all Rhodes. He hasn't complained about receiving the highest beauty and female talent on all Rhodes. Could you have conspired?

*Evadne* I haven't even started yet.

*King* Ha-ha-ha! An ambiguous reply, so typical of a superior woman!

*Evadne* Women don't conspire. Only cowards conspire. Women manipulate or act. At best they manipulate so cleverly that they don't have to act. At worst they must act when men don't.

*Melantius* Cowardly men conspire, and brave women act. It would be better for brave men to act and women to concentrate on manipulating them to act right. Is that what you mean, sister?

*Evadne* Something in that way.

*Amyntor* It would be best if all men tried to act right, so that women didn't have to manipulate them. Then we would also need no conspiracies.

*Diphylus* Of course. Amyntor is right as always.

*Amyntor* For all that women really are good for is love, which is their only right element, the only one where they are wholly to their advantage.

*Evadne* Thanks for that word, Amyntor.

*King* And would such a good company conspire? Go to blazes, you old fogey, whining wreck of a pathetic fool, and go to bed with your demented daughter, to perhaps make her a little happier. All she needs is any man! Ha-ha-ha!

*Melantius (to Calianax)* How about the keys, Calianax?

*Calianax (to the King)* Here he goes setting on me again!

*King* With what? Is he squeezing your testicles to test your potency? Ha-ha-ha!

*Calianax* I don't know who is the maddest around here, he, who refuses to believe me, or you, who wants to depose him.

*Melantius* How much have you told him?

*Calianax* Everything.

*Melantius* No wonder then that he doesn't believe you.

*Calianax* Do you mean that you are all pulling my legs?

*Melantius* Just give me the keys, and I promise you that you will never be locked up at home.

*Calianax* At least you don't threaten me. I have the keys here. (*shuffles them under the table to Melantius*)

*Melantius* Many thanks. Regard it as your life insurance now being secured with your entire old age.

*Calianax* Just keep me out of it whatever you do, and I am satisfied.

*Melantius* I promise you that all will be satisfied.

*Calianax* Even the King?

*Melantius* He most of all. (*to Evadne*) Do your utmost to please the King next time.

*Evadne* I will indeed.

*King* In brief, Melantius, to be honest, our old faithful servant Calianax here has claimed, that you asked him about the keys to the fortress and that you intend to kill me. What do you think about that?

*Melantius* I say nothing, for I know nothing about the old man's condition and do not wish to speculate in his mental condition.



*King* And what do you say to that, you old mad Calianax, poisoned by your deranged daughter?

*Calianax* I don't wish to be locked up, neither at home nor anywhere else. I just say, that during my forty years as commandant of the fort, no enemy force has ever taken it or even reached it.

*Melantius* No one had any reason to, for there was nothing but cobwebs and dust and other trash like that collected by you during your forty years.

*Calianax* The fort controls the entire harbour, though. Who has the fort controls Rhodes.

*King* You controlled Rhodes well in all your days, good Calianax, but shouldn't you occasionally have cleaned it up? Of course no one will even try to enter if there is only dirt and crap and cobwebs! Such a fort is too easily accessible to offer any attraction, but fortunately also for forty years no other power has competed with us as the dominating sea power. It's time, Calianax, for you to be pensioned, so that we could clean up your fort now after your forty years of collecting dust. No, it's time for me to go home to bed. Remain seated, my good friends, and carry on drinking and pocolating as long as you still think it's funny! It is all my pleasure!

*(breaks up. Most guests break up with him.)*

*Lysippus* He has been drinking and partying heavily and non stop practically the whole day, as if he was plagued by unpleasant forebodings. I had better bring him home.

*Straton* Take well care of him. He is the only king we have.

*Amyntor* I will go home in advance, Evadne.

*Evadne* I will soon follow. I hope you are asleep when I arrive.

*Amyntor* I probably will. Come, my dear old would-be father-in-law, let's tenderly support each other like two old fallen and disappointed, disgraced and redundant veterans.

*Calianax* I thank you, my lost son-in-law. We have too much in common. *(They leave together.)*

*Melantius* Do your best, sister, if he desires you.

*Evadne* He certainly will, as drunk as he is.

*Diphylus* I will follow and see if the King needs anything. *(leaves)*

*Evadne* Then I go home to my virgin cage to wait for my only regular customer.

*Melantius* If he fails to appear, and there will be no service, just go ahead and sleep well.

*Evadne* You can bet on it. *(leaves)*

*Melantius* It should be done this very night when he is at his greatest pleasure in the blissfulness of his drunkenness. All is well prepared, and we have the arsenal in our hands. All that is needed is for the King to call on his concubine.

*Diphylus (returning eagerly)* It has happened.

*Melantius* What has happened?

*Diphylus* The King has called for her.

*Melantius* Bravo! At last! Now the time has come for the hour to strike the moment of truth!

*Diphylus* But Amyntor is out of his mind, upset by fury.

*Melantius* Why?

*Diphylus* In his inebriated state the King sent him the order by word to refrain from his wife to him for the night.

*Melantius* The King doesn't care about etiquette and ignores all good manners.

*Diphylus* Here is the poor horned Amyntor now. He is so angry that you can almost see his horns in his front. You'll have to manage him. The risk is he will wake up all Rhodes. (*escapes when Amyntor in a fury crashes the door*)

*Amyntor* The royal villain must die!

*Melantius* Don't ruin our plans now by losing your self-control, Amyntor!

*Amyntor* It has gone too far! He sent me word to send my wife to him for a night of love and immediately after our final wedding banquet!

*Melantius* He paid for it all and probably thought that he also had paid for your wife.

*Amyntor* I can't stand this any more! What have you planned?

*Melantius* Everything. We just wait for the signal. The arsenal, the fleet and the castle are in our control, and we have all the troops in our hands.

*Amyntor* Let me then give the signal. Let me go and murder him at once.

*Melantius* No, Amyntor, that would ruin everything! You would only wake up the guards, and you would immediately be killed or imprisoned to be executed. We need you. You must not sacrifice yourself in vain.

*Amyntor* I can't endure having him alive in the same world as I! One of us must die!

*Melantius* And it must not be you, and it must not be your hand taking revenge on him. You are the purest of all of us, keep clean outside, and let us handle more efficient and smoother weapons. Only one must die and no one else.

*Amyntor* Who will do it then? You? No, let's do it together and at once!

*Melantius* Pull yourself together, man! Let not passion run amuck with you and leave all sense behind beyond control! The last thing politics needs is impetuosity! Make your plans first, think it over and prepare, and then to action! That's the only way to ensure optimal results.

*Amyntor* Bind me then and fence me in! Or else my righteous fury will get more than the better of me!

*Melantius* I understand you. But you are too honest, Amyntor. Even if you tried you would never be able to kill the king of your country.

*Amyntor* Your words disarm me. Your realism is too convincing and overwhelming. The sword falls out of my hand and without battle. I give in. You have won. But I will not be patient forever! You must let it happen! If not, I will take the law into my own hands and personally kill the king, even if I must die myself in the bargain!

*Melantius* Just give us this night. Tomorrow you may act freely at large.

*Amyntor* That's fair. I will endure one more night of cuckold torture, but that's the end of it! Your hand on it! (*Melantius takes his hand.*) This is an oath of friendship more firm and solid than any sacred oath!

*Melantius* I am aware of it, and therefore I agree to swear on it.

*Amyntor* I take your word for serious, and you are my friend and more than ever if you also stick to it.

*Melantius* I wouldn't swear it otherwise.

*Amyntor* Your ice cold assuredness is almost frightening. There is no evil foul play at hand, I trust?

*Melantius* We know nothing as yet about the eventual consequences of this night.

*Amyntor* You are ambiguous like a woman and know more than I. Very well, you are Evadne's brother, and I must adapt myself, like unto her so also to you.

*Melantius* That's the wisest thing you can do. Good night, my best friend.

*Amyntor* Good night, my brother, (*embraces him*) if you can sleep.

*Melantius* Even a sleepless night could turn out a good night.

*Amyntor* We shall see. Myself I know of no other nights any more than the endless tribulations of sleeplessness. (*leaves*)

*Melantius* It must be tonight. If it fails, woe betide us all!

Act V scene 1. The King's bedchamber.

Enter Evadne in the antichamber.

*Evadne* Is the King asleep?

*Straton* I am sorry. Yes, he is asleep already.

*Evadne* He has called for me.

*Straton* I tried to keep him awake, but it was impossible. He was too drunk. But I am sure he will want you when he wakes up.

*Evadne* Yes, I think so too.

*Straton* Some good advice: he has been drinking plenty, so let him sleep off the worst of it. Or else he might easily turn nasty.

*Evadne* I know him well. Give me the key to the room, and let no one come near to it. That's always his desire when he is drunk – as alone with me as possible in as complete security as possible.

*Straton* Of course. I wish I was in his place. I may not wish you any good rest.

*Evadne* Nonsense!

*Straton* That's all I can do, but when the King wakes up he will be sure to do some more...

*Evadne* Spare me your fantasies. Good night, good Sir.

*Straton* And may it be a long night for you. (*retires*)

*Evadne* (*enters the King's bedchamber, locks the door behind. The King is snoring lustfully.*)

He sleeps. That's good, and it will hardly be easy to wake him up. Shall I now cut the process short and immediately pass him over from this world to the next?

No, that would be too simple. I still loved him, he has been good to me, and he has the right of his defence before I send him on, if I will go through with it. (*takes carefully his hands, one at a time, and bind them with black leather stripes to the bed behind and above his head.*) Still he can sleep and as soundly as any pig. It would almost be a pity to wake him up. Shouldn't I just spare him and strike at once and make it as painless as possible for all of us? No, I must speak with him. I am also to blame in the loss of my integrity and honour, and I want to hear if he has anything to say at all for his defence in his treatment of me and his best friends and the sacrificed Aspasia. (*wakes him up*) My lord and king! Wake up! (*He doesn't wake up.*) Stop snoring! I am here!

*King (dead sleepy)* What is this? Have I awakened in a dream? What have you prepared for? Do you wish to vary the games with more advanced exercises?

*Evadne* For one time's sake I wished to have us more on the same level.

*King* I thank you. I could never stand the boredom of constantly having to be superior. And what is your next step? Will you mount me and ride me until I give up and break down like a horse?

*Evadne* My friend, you are already down to earth.

*King* I am looking forward to your new games. You were always so inventive. Therefore I always preferred you to anyone else.

*Evadne* Is sex all you can think of?

*King* What else is there to think of in the company of ladies?

*Evadne* Their welfare. Consideration of their families. Tact and courtesy and delicacy to avoid hurting them.

*King* I didn't hurt you, did I? You had all you wanted, and I gave you the best man in Rhodes as a generous compensation for what possible harm you could have felt for the loss of your virginity. You never cried in my company or quarrelled, you were only gay and entertaining. What is it now?

*Evadne* I am not thinking of myself but of Aspasia.

*King* And what does she have to complain of? She could keep her virginity and has nothing to regret. She was granted to keep her integrity intact in peace.

*Evadne* She loved her Amyntor, and he was truly in love with her. For them there was no one else but each other. Amyntor is now an angry deceived cuckold lured into that trap before he was married and without even being informed about it.

*King* And that is why I have compensated him. Didn't he have the most beautiful and glorious woman in Rhodes for his own wife? Has he filed any complaint against her? No. Didn't I pay for your sumptuous wedding with banquets without end? What more do you want? Tell me, and I will give you everything you might wish.

*Evadne* All we wish is our own life, my virginity back and Aspasia her husband.

*King* Ha-ha-ha! You must know, that nothing ever can be turned back in history? Don't be foolish now, be wise and realistic, take me out of your snare, and let's make love for real.

*Evadne* Have you no conscience?

*King* For Amyntor? He should be content. For the cry-baby Aspasia? She should learn to accept life as it is and make the best of it. I am sorry, my loveliest Evadne, but that is all we can do. That's what I did myself when I fell hopelessly in love with you. Was it wrong? Do you wish to punish me for it?

*Evadne* I must. My brothers demand it.

*King* Melantius. So there was something all the same behind the old man's gaga about conspiracies. How far has it gone?

*Evadne* So far that as the law of history says it can't be turned back any more.

*King* So you are serious. No, I can't believe it. You are pulling my legs. No woman can ever be taken seriously, and you are but a woman, made for caresses and love, softness and pleasures and grace and goodness without measures. Women are too tender to ever be able to use force even against their most beastly lovers.

*Evadne* But you are the King, and that makes a difference. Instead of living up to your responsibility you have abused it by abusing your friends and subjects and played foul with them instead of serving them.

*King* So you have taken on yourself to act as my judge?

*Evadne* And executor.

*King* Is love then not a human factor and alleviating circumstance? Have I not loved you, and do I not still love you? You just turn me on. Come and ride me and laugh and be happy and run me down, and let's go on until dawn and longer still, until we stifle, pass out and are overwrought by the pleasures of our lust! You still have some lust left in your body, haven't you? You were never frigid and calculating, like other women.

*Evadne* I am sorry, my King, but you have too loyal subjects and too loyal friends. None of them, especially not Amyntor and Melantius, could direct any weapon against your crown for the sake of their love and duty to their country. But you actually took everything away from me by the liquidation of my virginhood and condemned me without right to a failed, false, faked and unhappy marriage, since Amyntor was already sacredly betrothed to another. Still my revenge is not for myself but only for the innocent Aspasia. (*raises her dagger*)

*King* Could then the power of a virgin be so fatally superior to the power of this world, that it could in your hand place a deadly weapon to commit a royal murder?

*Evadne* My innocence is done for, but hers is almighty, and I am a woman like herself and as her sister obliged to punish you now when I am in a position to do so.

*King* I can't fathom it. So a love offence is then worse and more fatal than any political mistake?

*Evadne* Exactly! (*thrusts the dagger directly into his heart. The King only reacts with a few spasms and is dead.*)

Only a few drops of blood. I must have made a perfect hit at the heart. Alas, what have I done? He was still my lover! But it is over and done with. As he said, the law of history is that it can never move backwards, only forwards. It's just to continue right ahead. Lets' get quickly out of here. My brothers are waiting for the



signal. (*puts herself in order, liberates and covers the naked king and retires into the antichamber, where Straton sits asleep.*)

Straton, wake up! (*Straton awakes dead sleepy.*) The King has had his share, he is content and asleep. When he wakes up, tell him I have gone home.

Straton I will do so. I hope he was satisfied. I hope that also of course for your own part.

Evadne More than satisfied. Now I can start living. (*leaves*)

Straton There couldn't be a better mistress for a King! (*goes to sleep again*)  
(*after a while*)

Cleon (*entering suddenly*) Are you sitting here shamefully asleep, you lazybones!

Straton (*disturbed*) What else should I do?

Cleon Where is the King?

Straton Quiet! He sleeps! He is not to be disturbed! He has screwed his head off and been drinking all night! If we disturb him now he will only turn nasty and difficult.

Cleon We have no choice. There is a rebellion broke loose. The castle is taken by Melantius and his friends who are crying the King is dead! What do you know about it?

Straton Melantius was rather mad already earlier in the evening, if we are to believe the old demented Calianax.

Cleon Idiot! It is he who has given over the castle to the wild young ones! Wake up the King immediately!

Straton I can't understand it. (*They go to the door, Cleon breaks in, pulls the blanket from the King and finds a dead naked man with a dagger in his breast.*)

Cleon Dead!

Straton It's not possible! No one has been here except Evadne!

Cleon And you. Are you part of the conspiracy?

Straton How can you believe such a thing! I have only been sleeping!

Cleon And you heard no cries for help? No death rattles or strange sounds?

Straton Nothing of the sort, only passionate conversation. They were very agitated, and he must have been extremely well turned on. I tried to listen at the keyhole, but I couldn't make sense of the heated discussion. The King preached interminably, and he was very drunk. So I went to sleep instead and let them have their fun by themselves. After a few hours Evadne came out and ordered me not to disturb him. She asked me to tell him that she had gone home.

Cleon So he was still alive when she left. And you were sleeping and did not notice that someone else came stealing by, went in and killed him!

Straton It's absolutely impossible. No one else could have been let in. The guard had orders to only let one person pass, and that was Evadne.

Cleon And if anyone of the lifeguards was a traitor and hired as a murderer?

Straton Impossible. I don't sleep so heavily, that I wouldn't have been awakened by a soldier in armour clamping around. You can't move quietly with the armour of a guard with weapons. They will rattle, and you will squeak.

*Cleon* Then it could only be she who has given the signal for a rebellion after having murdered him! But why? How could anyone wish to conspire against our King?

*Straton* I can't understand it either. It makes no sense.

*Lysippus (appearing suddenly)* The whole city is in uproar crying for revenge for the King's abuse of his power. Where is he?

*Cleon* Dead.

*Lysippus* And who was the night watch?

*Straton* Only me, for it has only been Evadne visiting him by his own order.

*Lysippus* Has she killed him then?

*Straton* Look for yourself.

*Lysippus* O slaughtered king, is that the wages for your merry life and your felicitous indulgences? There are rumours that he ravished every virgin on our island.

*Straton* It is Evadne's brothers who have taken revenge for the violation of their sister and her marriage to the wrong man.

*Lysippus* This is a mess all right. He loved a lady once too much and got too much of it into the bargain. Well, I am now king and assume power as his brother by legal right.

*Melantius (outside)* Ohoy!

*Cleon* It is Melantius.

*Lysippus (goes to the antichamber and calls from the terrace)* Melantius! Diphylus! What is the matter? What do you want?

*Melantius* Justice has been done! We have had our revenge for the ruin of our sister's honour! That's all we wanted. We hold the castle, and we have taken control of the entire fleet and army!

*Lysippus* According to the law I am now your King! You can't defy the law! If you do, there will be civil war and anarchy!

*Diphylus* We have no desire to defy the law. All we wanted was justice for our sister and Aspasia, and they got it.

*Lysippus* So it was for Aspasia old Calianax gave over the fort?

*Amyntor* There was no wedding, so he gave us his castle for a bridal gift instead.

*Lysippus* Then tell me what you want.

*Melantius* Only one thing: a royal pardon for your brother's death in blank for all of us to attach our names to. Only Evadne did it, but she was the most innocent of all of us as his victim, while we all wish to share the blame.

*Lysippus* The pardon is granted forthwith. Nothing else?

*Melantius* Being pardoned we unanimously acclaim you as king. We don't wish to disturb the law and order of the country more than it already was by the murdered tyrant's violations.

*Lysippus* Pardon him, for he is dead.

*Amyntor* We have pardoned him. Nothing bad can ever be said about the dead, since death atones for everything. Let's now sign our pardon.

*Lysippus* Cleon? Have you drafted it?

*Cleon* It's a provisional document, but it will have to do. (*hands over the document*)

*Lysippus* (*reads*) "Hereby all the undersigned are absolved from the murder of the former King of Rhodes." Is that all right?

*Diphylus* It will do. Throw it down to us.

*Lysippus* Will it be signed by the whole country? Are all citizens of Rhodes happy about the King's death and wish to have part in it?

*Melantius* Let whoever wants to share the responsibility for his death. After all, he didn't take any responsibility himself.

*Diphylus* First write our sister and yourself, Melantius.

*Melantius* You write next and turn it over to Amyntor, the most wronged of all.

*Calianax* I also want to sign for the sake of my daughter.

*Melantius* You may. – Do you as the one and only acknowledged king of Rhodes grant legal immunity to all who sign this document?

*Lysippus* I do.

*Melantius* Good. Then we lay down our weapons and return to you the castle, so that each and everyone calmly can go home to his own without fear of any further repercussions.

*Lysippus* You have nothing to fear, since I know that you are honest men. As you were faithful to my reckless brother, I only ask you to be equally faithful to me, for the sake of your country and our law and order.

*Amyntor* We all swear loyalty to you without further.

*Lysippus* Then everyone is satisfied. There is no daylight yet in sight, and dark is the night. Go in peace, and let your coup be just a parenthesis, a quick and efficient surgical operation without further consequences than that his scandals may now be over and forgiven.

*Calianax* But my daughter is still crying! They are not forgotten!

*Lysippus* May nothing of the ever continuously written book of the annals of man's history ever be forgotten or ignored, for every human experience is useful, especially the tragic ones.

*Melantius* We are leaving. Thank you for the superb flexibility of your diplomacy of compromise and that you understand the meaning of justice. Your brother's only wrong was that he didn't. But to be a King, you must have that qualification.

*Lysippus* I agree and will try to be a better king.

*Diphylus* We thank you for it.

*Melantius* Our night manoeuvre is completed and fulfilled. Let now normality take over.

*Amyntor* I think we managed to minimise the bloodshed.

*Melantius* Evadne used her weapon for only once in her life, and she directed it with a finer precision than any professional warrior could. She really accomplished her right, and hers is the highest honour. (*The rebels leave.*)

*Cleon* What shall we do with the body?

*Lysippus* State funeral. Royal ceremonies. Everything that pertains to royal obsequies. He was after all a King and as such true in every way except in bed, which only therefore became his bane. (*They retire.*)

Scene 2. At Aspasia's.

*Aspasia* What matters all the meaningless hysteria and noise of revolutions? Any kind of overthrow will only lead to catastrophic tragedies, misfortunes and traumatic misery for the surviving victims as a thankless harvest. There is never crueller a plough than the one that just runs blindly over everything that happens to stand in the way with only future prospects and results in sight without the slightest mindfulness, consideration and regard for what is driven over, and thus innocence is victimised and butchered just by thoughtlessness, but that is how man is. (*There is a knock.*) Who visits anyone like me, notorious for being drowned in sorrows? (*opens*)  
*Evadne!* (*lets her in immediately*)

*Evadne* It is done, Aspasia. I have avenged you.

*Aspasia* What have you done? What do you mean?

*Evadne* I have killed the king.

*Aspasia* I heard people crying about such a rumour, but you must not trust them until they prove true. So it is true? People also cry about a revolution. Is it you then that have started it? But why?

*Evadne* Did I not do right? Has woman no right to react when male brutality goes too far?

*Aspasia* Why then do you come to me?

*Evadne* To return the man you lent me without willing.

*Aspasia* But you are married.

*Evadne* Yes, that was the King's last mistake.

*Aspasia* Did you murder him for that?

*Evadne* He dug his grave himself. He went too far and didn't watch his step.

*Aspasia* But you can't give me a man whom you have married.

*Evadne* Can't I? Can you stop me?

*Aspasia* I can't accept him since he belongs to you. A marriage is sacred no matter how it is committed. Such a bond cannot be solved except by force, since religion sanctified it and the law confirmed it. There is no natural divorce, and no divorce can even be defended. I am sorry, dearest Evadne. You have turned a murderess in vain.

*Evadne* Am I then not aware of it? I never thought I could go through with it, but when the crucial moment came, it suddenly turned strangely easy, while the only difficulty afterwards turned out to be to live with it. A murder is unpardonable and forever unforgivable, especially if you are a woman.

*Aspasia* And how will you atone for it?

*Evadne* Like this! (*has a new dagger, which she strikes straight into her bosom.*)

*Aspasia* No! (*tries to stop her but too late, taken by surprise.*) You must not do that! Suicide is the most condemnable violence of all!

*Evadne* No, in this case it condones me. I had time enough to fall in love with Amyntor, Aspasia, but for that very reason I could never look him in the eyes again, since I know that he is yours and always was and will remain so. Now I finally can give him back to you. Look at it this way, that I willingly die for him and you. Now you are avenged. Don't cry for me, but you are free to honour my life's last commitment as the ultimate self-sacrifice for love and for your right of it, which truly you deserved, while I have only sacrificed my vanity in a woman's simple duty of restoring order. (*dies*)

*Aspasia (kneeling by her side)* Noble sister, this is more than just too much. We will honour you as virgin more than any king was ever honoured. We will never cease to bring you honours for this unprecedented supreme nobility. I will gather every virgin here on Rhodes to honour and adorn your funeral. Alas, you cannot hear me! You finally became much more than just a sister to me, and now when you're gone I realize that I have not lost any rival but my best and dearest friend. (*kisses her tenderly on her front*) Pass out in darkness, waning sun, for night will now envelop life in veils of sorrow, thus removing all hysteric joy around the King's death, turning it to serious moderating sadness of some lasting and imperishable beauty.

### Scene 3. Evadne's funeral.

Aspasia and the maids.

*Aspasia* Cover her with flowers, so that she may sleep accompanied by sweetest perfumes, dreaming in eternity of her own glory and heroic deeds, far nobler and more self-effacing than what all Hellenic heroes ever could accomplish!

*Chorus* Let's all adorn her obsequies with songs without an end, the beauty of which never more will be forgotten.

*Aspasia* I invoke thee, Evadne, for I know you are still here and permanent in your existence. You would never have committed your last crime against your own life to atone for it, as if it needed atonement, if you hadn't known that death is not an end but no more than an open door to our eternity, which always is there to be opened and to liberate us from a sorry burdensome existence to give us the possibility for just another fresh beginning; and you probably can hear us now and always for as long as we can still remember you and will continue honouring your memory.

*Chorus* Evadne is now the goddess and the patron saint of Rhodes, who liberated Rhodes from a most irresponsible and arbitrary tyrant, and assumed herself all the responsibility and punishment by taking on herself the consequences of her matchless heroism, which never more can be forgotten.

*Melantius (enter with attendants)* What funeral procession is this?

*Cleon* It's Evadne's funeral. Every virgin here on Rhodes has been asked to partake to celebrate her with all the beauty of songs and adornment that can be mobilized by women.

*Diphylus* Are we men not allowed to join?

*Cleon* Only as followers, spectators and escorts, but the ceremonies and the rituals are reserved for the virgins of Rhodes.

*Melantius* Still we are her brothers.

*Amyntor* And I am still her husband.

*Cleon* I am sorry. You have to turn your issue to Aspasia.

*Amyntor* Aspasia, my own beloved, thus she has sacrificed herself to us and alone taken on the responsibility and consequences for the murder of our king. We are free now and can start all over again from the beginning to make it right this time.

*Aspasia* How could you after what has happened any more make demands on me and think of love? Rhodes is buried in national sorrow, and you imagine it could be ignored and brushed aside as if Evadne's sacrifice never had taken place! Show then some decency and respect for the one who actually was your wife!

*Amyntor* You know very well that the grotesque marriage was all wrong and a mistake which could have no legal or human justification. Religion had nothing to do with it.

*Aspasia* Still she loved you.

*Lysippus* Aspasia, don't keep on nourishing the pain of your sorrow, and don't cultivate your fixed attachment to the dead! There is no life in sorrow, death, loss, melancholy and memories except pain. Let the dead remain dead, and it's more important to take care of those that still are living.

*Melantius* You made a great example of yourself in elevating our sister to a martyr for love and a saint to our country, but give some thought to your own life as well. Your lover has never left you in his heart, and he is here now waiting for you. You can't refuse him out of sheer egoistic prudence.

*Aspasia* How could I accept any man of another's when she herself took her life for her love of that man?

*Amyntor* Listen to me, Aspasia. We respected each other and never came by each other. Even during her wedding night she swore never to lie with me ever, and I had to accept it. The only one who came by her was the King, who was too careless to marry her. That's why he gave her to me for her husband, to keep her out of damages. That king's love for Evadne was a shameful error, he used his position to force her to what she was unwilling to, it was not a natural loving engagement but a one-sided tyranny, and thus my false marriage with her became equally unnatural. I saved myself for you, and even my consort Evadne did all she could to save me for you.

*Calianax* (*when no one says anything*) So what are we waiting for? Let this funeral and this celebration of this super virgin be carried through with all the necessary ceremonies, but let's then at last celebrate some real wedding!

*Amyntor* What do you say, Aspasia? Do you still want me?



*Aspasia* My dearest love, I thought you would never come to me. You were lost to me, and I had given up. But since the events now have led to some most unexpected outcomes, who am I to be able to turn down the one I love?

*Amyntor* My dearest beloved! *(They embrace at last.)*

*Many* Hurray!

*Lysippus* Allow me as royal heir of an irresponsible brother to pay for the wedding!

*Melantius* I will be your best man, if I may.

*Diphylus* We shall mobilize the entire revolutionary guard for your celebration with plays and festivities!

*Calianax* Don't forget me! Remember, I made the revolution possible by giving over the keys of the fort to you wild savages! And only I have the right to give away my daughter as a bride!

*Amyntor* Then I may at last accept you as my father-in-law.

*Calianax* I thought it would all reach some proper end by and by, but dear me how love sometimes can cause the most awful complications!

*Amyntor* It's worth it after all.

*Aspasia* I hope so.

*Chorus* So dry your tears now, *Aspasia*, and dress yourself up instead in the joyous mirth and more durable light of comedy, for humanity will always need light and harmony more than its contrary.

*Aspasia* I give you right, my intimate sisters, and let therefore our funeral train to the honour of *Evadne* no more be accompanied by sorrowful tears and painful wailings but rather a light mood of solemnity, since she more than anyone now and forever is a sister to us ever to be proud of.

*Melantius* Amen.

*Lysippus* She if anyone should have been our Queen.

*Cleon* The King was not enough.

*Lysippus* And therefore she is now the more our Queen. Let the funeral procession turn into a triumph for *Rhodes* and to something of an eternal celebration of true love!

*Melantius* Our King has now spoken.

*(In a lighter mood of solemnity, the funeral procession passes on,  
Amyntor with his arm around Aspasia.)*

*Kausani, 6.11.2008.  
translated 2.3.2019.*

