

# Life Is A Dream

Pedro Calderon de la Barca

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LIFE IS A DREAM

by PEDRO CALDERON DE LA BARCA

Translated by  
Edward Fitzgerald

#### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Pedro Calderon de la Barca was born in Madrid, January 17, 1600, of good family. He was educated at the Jesuit College in Madrid and at the University of Salamanca; and a doubtful tradition says that he began to write plays at the age of thirteen. His literary activity was interrupted for ten years, 1625-1635, by military service in Italy and the Low Countries, and again for a year or more in Catalonia. In 1637 he became a Knight of the Order of Santiago, and in 1651 he entered the priesthood, rising to the dignity of Superior of the Brotherhood of San Pedro in Madrid. He held various offices in the court of Philip IV, who rewarded his services with pensions, and had his plays produced with great splendor. He died May 5, 1681.

At the time when Calderon began to compose for the stage, the Spanish drama was at its height. Lope de Vega, the most prolific and, with Calderon, the greatest, of Spanish dramatists, was still alive; and by his applause gave encouragement to the beginner whose fame was to rival his own. The national type of drama which Lope had established was maintained in its essential characteristics by Calderon, and he produced abundant specimens of all its varieties. Of regular plays he has left a hundred and twenty; of "Autos Sacramentales," the peculiar Spanish allegorical development of the medieval mystery, we have seventy-three; besides a considerable number of farces.

The dominant motives in Calderon's dramas are characteristically national: fervid loyalty to Church and King, and a sense of honor heightened almost to the point of the fantastic. Though his plays are laid in a great variety of scenes and ages, the sentiment and the characters remain essentially Spanish; and this intensely local quality has probably lessened the vogue of Calderon in other countries. In the construction and conduct of his plots he showed great skill, yet the ingenuity expended in the management of the story did not restrain the fiery emotion and opulent imagination which mark his finest speeches and give them a lyric quality which some critics regard as his greatest distinction.

Of all Calderon's works, "Life is a Dream" may be regarded as the most universal in its theme. It seeks to teach a lesson that may be learned from the philosophers and religious thinkers of many ages--that the world of our senses is a mere shadow, and that the only reality is to be found in the invisible and eternal. The story which forms its basis is Oriental in origin, and in the form of the legend of "Barlaam and Josaphat" was familiar in all the literatures of the Middle Ages. Combined with this in the plot is the tale of Abou Hassan from the "Arabian Nights," the main situations in which are turned to farcical purposes in the Induction to the Shakespearean "Taming of the Shrew." But with Calderon the theme is lifted altogether out of the atmosphere of comedy, and is worked up with poetic sentiment and a touch of mysticism into a symbolic drama of profound and universal philosophical significance.

## LIFE IS A DREAM

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Basilio	King of Poland.
Segismund	his Son.
Astolfo	his Nephew.
Estrella	his Niece.
Clotaldo	a General in Basilio's Service.
Rosaura	a Muscovite Lady.
Fife	her Attendant.

Chamberlain, Lords in Waiting, Officers, Soldiers, etc., in Basilio's Service.

The Scene of the first and third Acts lies on the Polish frontier: of the second Act, in Warsaw.

As this version of Calderon's drama is not for acting, a higher and wider mountain-scene than practicable may be imagined for Rosaura's descent in the first Act and the soldiers' ascent in the last. The bad watch kept by the sentinels who guarded their state-prisoner, together



with much else (not all!) that defies sober sense in this wild drama, I must leave Calderon to answer for; whose audience were not critical of detail and probability, so long as a good story, with strong, rapid, and picturesque action and situation, was set before them.

## ACT I

SCENE I--A pass of rocks, over which a storm is rolling away, and the sun setting: in the foreground, half-way down, a fortress.

(Enter first from the topmost rock Rosaura, as from horseback, in man's attire; and, after her, Fife.)

ROSAURA.

There, four-footed Fury, blast  
Engender'd brute, without the wit  
Of brute, or mouth to match the bit  
Of man--art satisfied at last?  
Who, when thunder roll'd aloof,  
Tow'rd the spheres of fire your ears  
Pricking, and the granite kicking  
Into lightning with your hoof,  
Among the tempest-shatter'd crags  
Shattering your luckless rider  
Back into the tempest pass'd?  
There then lie to starve and die,  
Or find another Phaeton  
Mad-mettled as yourself; for I,  
Wearied, worried, and for-done,  
Alone will down the mountain try,  
That knits his brows against the sun.

FIFE (as to his mule).

There, thou mis-begotten thing,  
Long-ear'd lightning, tail'd tornado,  
Griffin-hoof-in hurricano,  
(I might swear till I were almost  
Hoarse with roaring Asonante)  
Who forsooth because our betters  
Would begin to kick and fling  
You forthwith your noble mind  
Must prove, and kick me off behind,  
Tow'rd the very centre whither  
Gravity was most inclined.  
There where you have made your bed  
In it lie; for, wet or dry,  
Let what will for me betide you,  
Burning, blowing, freezing, hailing;  
Famine waste you: devil ride you:  
Tempest baste you black and blue:  
(To Rosaura.)  
There! I think in downright railing  
I can hold my own with you.

ROS.

Ah, my good Fife, whose merry loyal pipe,  
Come weal, come woe, is never out of tune  
What, you in the same plight too?

FIFE.

Ay; And madam--sir--hereby desire,  
When you your own adventures sing  
Another time in lofty rhyme,  
You don't forget the trusty squire  
Who went with you Don-quixoting.

ROS.

Well, my good fellow--to leave Pegasus  
Who scarce can serve us than our horses worse--  
They say no one should rob another of  
The single satisfaction he has left  
Of singing his own sorrows; one so great,  
So says some great philosopher, that trouble  
Were worth encount'ring only for the sake  
Of weeping over--what perhaps you know  
Some poet calls the 'luxury of woe.'

FIFE.

Had I the poet or philosopher  
In the place of her that kick'd me off to ride,  
I'd test his theory upon his hide.  
But no bones broken, madam--sir, I mean?--

ROS.

A scratch here that a handkerchief will heal--  
And you?--

FIFE.

A scratch in /quiddity/, or kind:  
But not in 'quo'--my wounds are all behind.  
But, as you say, to stop this strain,  
Which, somehow, once one's in the vein,  
Comes clattering after--there again!--  
What are we twain--deuce take't!--we two,  
I mean, to do--drench'd through and through--  
Oh, I shall choke of rhymes, which I believe  
Are all that we shall have to live on here.

ROS.

What, is our victual gone too?--

FIFE.

Ay, that brute  
Has carried all we had away with her,  
Clothing, and cate, and all.

ROS.

And now the sun,  
Our only friend and guide, about to sink  
Under the stage of earth.

FIFE.

And enter Night,  
With Capa y Espada--and--pray heaven!  
With but her lanthorn also.

ROS.

Ah, I doubt  
To-night, if any, with a dark one--or  
Almost burnt out after a month's consumption.  
Well! well or ill, on horseback or afoot,  
This is the gate that lets me into Poland;  
And, sorry welcome as she gives a guest  
Who writes his own arrival on her rocks  
In his own blood--  
Yet better on her stony threshold die,  
Than live on unrevenged in Muscovy.

FIFE.

Oh, what a soul some women have--I mean  
Some men--

ROS.

Oh, Fife, Fife, as you love me, Fife,  
Make yourself perfect in that little part,  
Or all will go to ruin!

FIFE.

Oh, I will,  
Please God we find some one to try it on.  
But, truly, would not any one believe  
Some fairy had exchanged us as we lay  
Two tiny foster-children in one cradle?

ROS.

Well, be that as it may, Fife, it reminds me  
Of what perhaps I should have thought before,  
But better late than never--You know I love you,  
As you, I know, love me, and loyally  
Have follow'd me thus far in my wild venture.  
Well! now then--having seen me safe thus far  
Safe if not wholly sound--over the rocks  
Into the country where my business lies  
Why should not you return the way we came,  
The storm all clear'd away, and, leaving me  
(Who now shall want you, though not thank you, less,  
Now that our horses gone) this side the ridge,  
Find your way back to dear old home again;  
While I--Come, come!--  
What, weeping my poor fellow?

FIFE.

Leave you here  
Alone--my Lady--Lord! I mean my Lord--  
In a strange country--among savages--  
Oh, now I know--you would be rid of me  
For fear my stumbling speech--

ROS.

Oh, no, no, no!--  
I want you with me for a thousand sakes  
To which that is as nothing--I myself  
More apt to let the secret out myself  
Without your help at all--Come, come, cheer up!  
And if you sing again, 'Come weal, come woe,'  
Let it be that; for we will never part  
Until you give the signal.

FIFE.  
'Tis a bargain.

ROS.  
Now to begin, then. 'Follow, follow me,  
'You fairy elves that be.'

FIFE.  
Ay, and go on--  
Something of 'following darkness like a dream,'  
For that we're after.

ROS.  
No, after the sun;  
Trying to catch hold of his glittering skirts  
That hang upon the mountain as he goes.

FIFE.  
Ah, he's himself past catching--as you spoke  
He heard what you were saying, and--just so--  
Like some scared water-bird,  
As we say in my country, /dove/ below.

ROS.  
Well, we must follow him as best we may.  
Poland is no great country, and, as rich  
In men and means, will but few acres spare  
To lie beneath her barrier mountains bare.  
We cannot, I believe, be very far  
From mankind or their dwellings.

FIFE.  
Send it so!  
And well provided for man, woman, and beast.  
No, not for beast. Ah, but my heart begins  
To yearn for her--

ROS.  
Keep close, and keep your feet  
From serving you as hers did.

FIFE.  
As for beasts,  
If in default of other entertainment,  
We should provide them with ourselves to eat--  
Bears, lions, wolves--

ROS.  
Oh, never fear.

FIFE.

Or else,  
Default of other beasts, beastlier men,  
Cannibals, Anthropophagi, bare Poles  
Who never knew a tailor but by taste.

ROS.

Look, look! Unless my fancy misconceive  
With twilight--down among the rocks there, Fife--  
Some human dwelling, surely--  
Or think you but a rock torn from the rocks  
In some convulsion like to-day's, and perch'd  
Quaintly among them in mock-masonry?

FIFE.

Most likely that, I doubt.

ROS.

No, no--for look!  
A square of darkness opening in it--

FIFE.

Oh, I don't half like such openings!--

ROS.

Like the loom  
Of night from which she spins her outer gloom--

FIFE.

Lord, Madam, pray forbear this tragic vein  
In such a time and place--

ROS.

And now again  
Within that square of darkness, look! a light  
That feels its way with hesitating pulse,  
As we do, through the darkness that it drives  
To blacken into deeper night beyond.

FIFE.

In which could we follow that light's example,  
As might some English Bardolph with his nose,  
We might defy the sunset--Hark, a chain!

ROS.

And now a lamp, a lamp! And now the hand  
That carries it.

FIFE.

Oh, Lord! that dreadful chain!

ROS.

And now the bearer of the lamp; indeed  
As strange as any in Arabian tale,  
So giant-like, and terrible, and grand,  
Spite of the skin he's wrapt in.

FIFE.

Why, 'tis his own:

Oh, 'tis some wild man of the woods; I've heard  
They build and carry torches--

ROS.

Never Ape

Bore such a brow before the heavens as that--

Chain'd as you say too!--

FIFE.

Oh, that dreadful chain!

ROS.

And now he sets the lamp down by his side,  
And with one hand clench'd in his tangled hair  
And with a sigh as if his heart would break--

(During this Segismund has entered from the fortress, with a torch.)

SEGISMUND.

Once more the storm has roar'd itself away,  
Splitting the crags of God as it retires;  
But sparing still what it should only blast,  
This guilty piece of human handiwork,  
And all that are within it. Oh, how oft,  
How oft, within or here abroad, have I  
Waited, and in the whisper of my heart  
Pray'd for the slanting hand of heaven to strike  
The blow myself I dared not, out of fear  
Of that Hereafter, worse, they say, than here,  
Plunged headlong in, but, till dismissal waited,  
To wipe at last all sorrow from men's eyes,  
And make this heavy dispensation clear.  
Thus have I borne till now, and still endure,  
Crouching in sullen impotence day by day,  
Till some such out-burst of the elements  
Like this rouses the sleeping fire within;  
And standing thus upon the threshold of  
Another night about to close the door  
Upon one wretched day to open it  
On one yet wretcheder because one more;--  
Once more, you savage heavens, I ask of you--  
I, looking up to those relentless eyes  
That, now the greater lamp is gone below,  
Begin to muster in the listening skies;  
In all the shining circuits you have gone  
About this theatre of human woe,  
What greater sorrow have you gazed upon  
Than down this narrow chink you witness still;  
And which, did you yourselves not fore-devise,  
You registered for others to fulfill!

FIFE.

This is some Laureate at a birthday ode;  
No wonder we went rhyming.

ROS.

Hush! And now  
See, starting to his feet, he strides about  
Far as his tether'd steps--

SEG.

And if the chain  
You help'd to rivet round me did contract  
Since guiltless infancy from guilt in act;  
Of what in aspiration or in thought  
Guilty, but in resentment of the wrong  
That wrecks revenge on wrong I never wrought  
By excommunication from the free  
Inheritance that all created life,  
Beside myself, is born to--from the wings  
That range your own immeasurable blue,  
Down to the poor, mute, scale-imprison'd things,  
That yet are free to wander, glide, and pass  
About that under-sapphire, whereinto  
Yourselves transfusing you yourselves englass!

ROS.

What mystery is this?

FIFE.

Why, the man's mad:  
That's all the mystery. That's why he's chain'd--  
And why--

SEG.

Nor Nature's guiltless life alone--  
But that which lives on blood and rapine; nay,  
Charter'd with larger liberty to slay  
Their guiltless kind, the tyrants of the air  
Soar zenith-upward with their screaming prey,  
Making pure heaven drop blood upon the stage  
Of under earth, where lion, wolf, and bear,  
And they that on their treacherous velvet wear  
Figure and constellation like your own,  
With their still living slaughter bound away  
Over the barriers of the mountain cage,  
Against which one, blood-guiltless, and endued  
With aspiration and with aptitude  
Transcending other creatures, day by day  
Beats himself mad with unavailing rage!

FIFE.

Why, that must be the meaning of my mule's  
Rebellion--

ROS.

Hush!

SEG.

But then if murder be  
The law by which not only conscience-blind  
Creatures, but man too prospers with his kind;  
Who leaving all his guilty fellows free,  
Under your fatal auspice and divine

Compulsion, leagued in some mysterious ban  
Against one innocent and helpless man,  
Abuse their liberty to murder mine:  
And sworn to silence, like their masters mute  
In heaven, and like them twirling through the mask  
Of darkness, answering to all I ask,  
Point up to them whose work they execute!

ROS.

Ev'n as I thought, some poor unhappy wretch,  
By man wrong'd, wretched, unrevenged, as I!  
Nay, so much worse than I, as by those chains  
Cleft of the means of self-revenge on those  
Who lay on him what they deserve. And I,  
Who taunted Heaven a little while ago  
With pouring all its wrath upon my head--  
Alas! like him who caught the cast-off husk  
Of what another bragg'd of feeding on,  
Here's one that from the refuse of my sorrows  
Could gather all the banquet he desires!  
Poor soul, poor soul!

FIFE.

Speak lower--he will hear you.

ROS.

And if he should, what then? Why, if he would,  
He could not harm me--Nay, and if he could,  
Methinks I'd venture something of a life  
I care so little for--

SEG.

Who's that? Clotaldo? Who are you, I say,  
That, venturing in these forbidden rocks,  
Have lighted on my miserable life,  
And your own death?

ROS.

You would not hurt me, surely?

SEG.

Not I; but those that, iron as the chain  
In which they slay me with a lingering death,  
Will slay you with a sudden--Who are you?

ROS.

A stranger from across the mountain there,  
Who, having lost his way in this strange land  
And coming night, drew hither to what seem'd  
A human dwelling hidden in these rocks,  
And where the voice of human sorrow soon  
Told him it was so.

SEG.

Ay? But nearer--nearer--  
That by this smoky supplement of day  
But for a moment I may see who speaks  
So pitifully sweet.



FIFE.

Take care! take care!

ROS.

Alas, poor man, that I, myself so helpless,  
Could better help you than by barren pity,  
And my poor presence--

SEG.

Oh, might that be all!  
But that--a few poor moments--and, alas!  
The very bliss of having, and the dread  
Of losing, under such a penalty  
As every moment's having runs more near,  
Stifles the very utterance and resource  
They cry for quickest; till from sheer despair  
Of holding thee, methinks myself would tear  
To pieces--

FIFE.

There, his word's enough for it.

SEG.

Oh, think, if you who move about at will,  
And live in sweet communion with your kind,  
After an hour lost in these lonely rocks  
Hunger and thirst after some human voice  
To drink, and human face to feed upon;  
What must one do where all is mute, or harsh,  
And ev'n the naked face of cruelty  
Were better than the mask it works beneath?--  
Across the mountain then! Across the mountain!  
What if the next world which they tell one of  
Be only next across the mountain then,  
Though I must never see it till I die,  
And you one of its angels?

ROS.

Alas; alas!  
No angel! And the face you think so fair,  
'Tis but the dismal frame-work of these rocks  
That makes it seem so; and the world I come from--  
Alas, alas, too many faces there  
Are but fair vizors to black hearts below,  
Or only serve to bring the wearer woe!  
But to yourself--If haply the redress  
That I am here upon may help to yours.  
I heard you tax the heavens with ordering,  
And men for executing, what, alas!  
I now behold. But why, and who they are  
Who do, and you who suffer--

SEG. (pointing upwards).

Ask of them,  
Whom, as to-night, I have so often ask'd,  
And ask'd in vain.

ROS.  
But surely, surely--

SEG.  
Hark!  
The trumpet of the watch to shut us in.  
Oh, should they find you!--Quick! Behind the rocks!  
To-morrow--if to-morrow--

ROS. (flinging her sword toward him).  
Take my sword!

(Rosaura and Fife hide in the rocks; Enter Clotaldo)

CLOTALDO.  
These stormy days you like to see the last of  
Are but ill opiates, Segismund, I think,  
For night to follow: and to-night you seem  
More than your wont disorder'd. What! A sword?  
Within there!

(Enter Soldiers with black vizors and torches)

FIFE.  
Here's a pleasant masquerade!

CLO.  
Whosever watch this was  
Will have to pay head-reckoning. Meanwhile,  
This weapon had a wearer. Bring him here,  
Alive or dead.

SEG.  
Clotaldo! good Clotaldo!--

CLO. (to Soldiers who enclose Segismund; others searching the rocks).  
You know your duty.

SOLDIERS (bringing in Rosaura and Fife).  
Here are two of them,  
Whoever more to follow--

CLO.  
Who are you,  
That in defiance of known proclamation  
Are found, at night-fall too, about this place?

FIFE.  
Oh, my Lord, she--I mean he--

ROS.  
Silence, Fife,  
And let me speak for both.--Two foreign men,  
To whom your country and its proclamations  
Are equally unknown; and had we known,  
Ourselves not masters of our lawless beasts  
That, terrified by the storm among your rocks,  
Flung us upon them to our cost.

FIFE.  
My mule--

CLO.  
Foreigners? Of what country?

ROS.  
Muscovy.

CLO.  
And whither bound?

ROS.  
Hither--if this be Poland;  
But with no ill design on her, and therefore  
Taking it ill that we should thus be stopt  
Upon her threshold so uncivilly.

CLO.  
Whither in Poland?

ROS.  
To the capital.

CLO.  
And on what errand?

ROS.  
Set me on the road,  
And you shall be the nearer to my answer.

CLO. (aside).  
So resolute and ready to reply,  
And yet so young--and--  
(Aloud.)  
Well,--  
Your business was not surely with the man  
We found you with?

ROS.  
He was the first we saw,--  
And strangers and benighted, as we were,  
As you too would have done in a like case,  
Accosted him at once.

CLO.  
Ay, but this sword?

ROS.  
I flung it toward him.

CLO.  
Well, and why?

ROS.  
And why? But to revenge himself on those who thus  
Injuriouslly misuse him.

CLO.  
So--so--so!  
'Tis well such resolution wants a beard  
And, I suppose, is never to attain one.  
Well, I must take you both, you and your sword,  
Prisoners.

FIFE. (offering a cudgel).  
Pray take mine, and welcome, sir;  
I'm sure I gave it to that mule of mine  
To mighty little purpose.

ROS.  
Mine you have;  
And may it win us some more kindness  
Than we have met with yet.

CLO (examining the sword).  
More mystery!  
How came you by this weapon?

ROS.  
From my father.

CLO.  
And do you know whence he?

ROS.  
Oh, very well:  
From one of this same Polish realm of yours,  
Who promised a return, should come the chance,  
Of courtesies that he received himself  
In Muscovy, and left this pledge of it--  
Not likely yet, it seems, to be redeem'd.

CLO (aside).  
Oh, wondrous chance--or wondrous Providence!  
The sword that I myself in Muscovy,  
When these white hairs were black, for keepsake left  
Of obligation for a like return  
To him who saved me wounded as I lay  
Fighting against his country; took me home;  
Tended me like a brother till recover'd,  
Perchance to fight against him once again  
And now my sword put back into my hand  
By his--if not his son--still, as so seeming,  
By me, as first devoir of gratitude,  
To seem believing, till the wearer's self  
See fit to drop the ill-dissembling mask.  
(Aloud.)  
Well, a strange turn of fortune has arrested  
The sharp and sudden penalty that else  
Had visited your rashness or mischance:  
In part, your tender youth too--pardon me,  
And touch not where your sword is not to answer--  
Commends you to my care; not your life only,  
Else by this misadventure forfeited;

But ev'n your errand, which, by happy chance,  
Chimes with the very business I am on,  
And calls me to the very point you aim at.

ROS.  
The capital?

CLO.  
Ay, the capital; and ev'n  
That capital of capitals, the Court:  
Where you may plead, and, I may promise, win  
Pardon for this, you say unwilling, trespass,  
And prosecute what else you have at heart,  
With me to help you forward all I can;  
Provided all in loyalty to those  
To whom by natural allegiance  
I first am bound to.

ROS.  
As you make, I take  
Your offer: with like promise on my side  
Of loyalty to you and those you serve,  
Under like reservation for regards  
Nearer and dearer still.

CLO.  
Enough, enough;  
Your hand; a bargain on both sides. Meanwhile,  
Here shall you rest to-night. The break of day  
Shall see us both together on the way.

ROS.  
Thus then what I for misadventure blamed,  
Directly draws me where my wishes aim'd.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE II.  
The Palace at Warsaw

Enter on one side Astolfo, Duke of Muscovy, with his train: and, on  
the other, the Princess Estrella, with hers.

ASTOLFO.  
My royal cousin, if so near in blood,  
Till this auspicious meeting scarcely known,  
Till all that beauty promised in the bud  
Is now to its consummate blossom blown,  
Well met at last; and may--

ESTRELLA.  
Enough, my Lord,  
Of compliment devised for you by some  
Court tailor, and, believe me, still too short  
To cover the designful heart below.

AST.

Nay, but indeed, fair cousin--

EST.

Ay, let Deed

Measure your words, indeed your flowers of speech

Ill with your iron equipage atone;

Irony indeed, and wordy compliment.

AST.

Indeed, indeed, you wrong me, royal cousin,

And fair as royal, misinterpreting

What, even for the end you think I aim at,

If false to you, were fatal to myself.

EST.

Why, what else means the glittering steel, my Lord,

That bristles in the rear of these fine words?

What can it mean, but, failing to cajole,

To fight or force me from my just pretension?

AST.

Nay, might I not ask ev'n the same of you,

The nodding helmets of whose men-at-arms

Out-crest the plumage of your lady court?

EST.

But to defend what yours would force from me.

AST.

Might not I, lady, say the same of mine?

But not to come to battle, ev'n of words,

With a fair lady, and my kinswoman;

And as averse to stand before your face,

Defenceless, and condemn'd in your disgrace,

Till the good king be here to clear it all--

Will you vouchsafe to hear me?

EST.

As you will.

AST.

You know that, when about to leave this world,

Our royal grandsire, King Alfonso, left

Three children; one a son, Basilio,

Who wears--long may he wear! the crown of Poland;

And daughters twain: of whom the elder was

Your mother, Clorilena, now some while

Exalted to a more than mortal throne;

And Recisunda, mine, the younger sister,

Who, married to the Prince of Muscovy,

Gave me the light which may she live to see

Herself for many, many years to come.

Meanwhile, good King Basilio, as you know,

Deep in abstruser studies than this world,

And busier with the stars than lady's eyes,

Has never by a second marriage yet

Replaced, as Poland ask'd of him, the heir  
An early marriage brought and took away;  
His young queen dying with the son she bore him;  
And in such alienation grown so old  
As leaves no other hope of heir to Poland  
Than his two sisters' children; you, fair cousin,  
And me; for whom the Commons of the realm  
Divide themselves into two several factions;  
Whether for you, the elder sister's child;  
Or me, born of the younger, but, they say,  
My natural prerogative of man  
Outweighing your priority of birth.  
Which discord growing loud and dangerous,  
Our uncle, King Basilio, doubly sage  
In prophesying and providing for  
The future, as to deal with it when come,  
Bids us here meet to-day in solemn council  
Our several pretensions to compose.  
And, but the martial out-burst that proclaims  
His coming, makes all further parley vain,  
Unless my bosom, by which only wise  
I prophesy, now wrongly prophesies,  
By such a happy compact as I dare  
But glance at till the Royal Sage declare.

(Trumpets, etc. Enter King Basilio with his Council.)

ALL.

The King! God save the King!

ESTRELLA (Kneeling.)

Oh, Royal Sir!--

ASTOLFO (Kneeling.)

God save your Majesty--

KING.

Rise both of you,  
Rise to my arms, Astolfo and Estrella;  
As my two sisters' children always mine,  
Now more than ever, since myself and Poland  
Solely to you for our succession look'd.  
And now give ear, you and your several factions,  
And you, the Peers and Princes of this realm,  
While I reveal the purport of this meeting  
In words whose necessary length I trust  
No unsuccessful issue shall excuse.  
You and the world who have surnamed me "Sage"  
Know that I owe that title, if my due,  
To my long meditation on the book  
Which ever lying open overhead--  
The book of heaven, I mean--so few have read;  
Whose golden letters on whose sapphire leaf,  
Distinguishing the page of day and night,  
And all the revolution of the year;  
So with the turning volume where they lie  
Still changing their prophetic syllables,  
They register the destinies of men:

Until with eyes that, dim with years indeed,  
Are quicker to pursue the stars than rule them,  
I get the start of Time, and from his hand  
The wand of tardy revelation draw.  
Oh, had the self-same heaven upon his page  
Inscribed my death ere I should read my life  
And, by fore-casting of my own mischance,  
Play not the victim but the suicide  
In my own tragedy!--But you shall hear.  
You know how once, as kings must for their people,  
And only once, as wise men for themselves,  
I woo'd and wedded: know too that my Queen  
In childing died; but not, as you believe,  
With her, the son she died in giving life to.  
For, as the hour of birth was on the stroke,  
Her brain conceiving with her womb, she dream'd  
A serpent tore her entrail. And too surely  
(For evil omen seldom speaks in vain)  
The man-child breaking from that living tomb  
That makes our birth the antitype of death,  
Man-grateful, for the life she gave him paid  
By killing her: and with such circumstance  
As suited such unnatural tragedy;  
He coming into light, if light it were  
That darken'd at his very horoscope,  
When heaven's two champions--sun and moon I mean--  
Suffused in blood upon each other fell  
In such a raging duel of eclipse  
As hath not terrified the universe  
Since that which wept in blood the death of Christ:  
When the dead walk'd, the waters turn'd to blood,  
Earth and her cities totter'd, and the world  
Seem'd shaken to its last paralysis.  
In such a paroxysm of dissolution  
That son of mine was born; by that first act  
Heading the monstrous catalogue of crime,  
I found fore-written in his horoscope;  
As great a monster in man's history  
As was in nature his nativity;  
So savage, bloody, terrible, and impious,  
Who, should he live, would tear his country's entrails,  
As by his birth his mother's; with which crime  
Beginning, he should clench the dreadful tale  
By trampling on his father's silver head.  
All which fore-reading, and his act of birth  
Fate's warrant that I read his life aright;  
To save his country from his mother's fate,  
I gave abroad that he had died with her  
His being slew; with midnight secrecy  
I had him carried to a lonely tower  
Hewn from the mountain-barriers of the realm,  
And under strict anathema of death  
Guarded from men's inquisitive approach,  
Save from the trusty few one needs must trust;  
Who while his fasten'd body they provide  
With salutary garb and nourishment,  
Instruct his soul in what no soul may miss  
Of holy faith, and in such other lore



As may solace his life-imprisonment,  
And tame perhaps the Savage prophesied  
Toward such a trial as I aim at now,  
And now demand your special hearing to.  
What in this fearful business I have done,  
Judge whether lightly or maliciously,--  
I, with my own and only flesh and blood,  
And proper lineal inheritor!  
I swear, had his foretold atrocities  
Touch'd me alone. I had not saved myself  
At such a cost to him; but as a king,--  
A Christian king,--I say, advisedly,  
Who would devote his people to a tyrant  
Worse than Caligula fore-chronicled?  
But even this not without grave mis-giving,  
Lest by some chance mis-reading of the stars,  
Or mis-direction of what rightly read,  
I wrong my son of his prerogative,  
And Poland of her rightful sovereign.  
For, sure and certain prophets as the stars,  
Although they err not, he who reads them may;  
Or rightly reading--seeing there is One  
Who governs them, as, under Him, they us,  
We are not sure if the rough diagram  
They draw in heaven and we interpret here,  
Be sure of operation, if the Will  
Supreme, that sometimes for some special end  
The course of providential nature breaks  
By miracle, may not of these same stars  
Cancel his own first draft, or overrule  
What else fore-written all else overrules.  
As, for example, should the Will Almighty  
Permit the Free-will of particular man  
To break the meshes of else strangling fate--  
Which Free-will, fearful of foretold abuse,  
I have myself from my own son fore-closed  
From ever possible self-extrication;  
A terrible responsibility,  
Not to the conscience to be reconciled  
Unless opposing almost certain evil  
Against so slight contingency of good.  
Well--thus perplex'd, I have resolved at last  
To bring the thing to trial: whereunto  
Here have I summon'd you, my Peers, and you  
Whom I more dearly look to, failing him,  
As witnesses to that which I propose;  
And thus propose the doing it. Clotaldo,  
Who guards my son with old fidelity,  
Shall bring him hither from his tower by night  
Lockt in a sleep so fast as by my art  
I rivet to within a link of death,  
But yet from death so far, that next day's dawn  
Shall wake him up upon the royal bed,  
Complete in consciousness and faculty,  
When with all princely pomp and retinue  
My loyal Peers with due obeisance  
Shall hail him Segismund, the Prince of Poland.  
Then if with any show of human kindness

He fling discredit, not upon the stars,  
But upon me, their misinterpreter,  
With all apology mistaken age  
Can make to youth it never meant to harm,  
To my son's forehead will I shift the crown  
I long have wish'd upon a younger brow;  
And in religious humiliation,  
For what of worn-out age remains to me,  
Entreat my pardon both of Heaven and him  
For tempting destinies beyond my reach.  
But if, as I misdoubt, at his first step  
The hoof of the predicted savage shows;  
Before predicted mischief can be done,  
The self-same sleep that loosed him from the chain  
Shall re-consign him, not to loose again.  
Then shall I, having lost that heir direct,  
Look solely to my sisters' children twain  
Each of a claim so equal as divides  
The voice of Poland to their several sides,  
But, as I trust, to be entwined ere long  
Into one single wreath so fair and strong  
As shall at once all difference atone,  
And cease the realm's division with their own.  
Cousins and Princes, Peers and Councillors,  
Such is the purport of this invitation,  
And such is my design. Whose furtherance  
If not as Sovereign, if not as Seer,  
Yet one whom these white locks, if nothing else,  
to patient acquiescence consecrate,  
I now demand and even supplicate.

AST.

Such news, and from such lips, may well suspend  
The tongue to loyal answer most attuned;  
But if to me as spokesman of my faction  
Your Highness looks for answer; I reply  
For one and all--Let Segismund, whom now  
We first hear tell of as your living heir,  
Appear, and but in your sufficient eye  
Approve himself worthy to be your son,  
Then we will hail him Poland's rightful heir.  
What says my cousin?

EST.

Ay, with all my heart.  
But if my youth and sex upbraid me not  
That I should dare ask of so wise a king--

KING.

Ask, ask, fair cousin! Nothing, I am sure,  
Not well consider'd; nay, if 'twere, yet nothing  
But pardonable from such lips as those.

EST.

Then, with your pardon, Sir--if Segismund,  
My cousin, whom I shall rejoice to hail  
As Prince of Poland too, as you propose,  
Be to a trial coming upon which

More, as I think, than life itself depends,  
Why, Sir, with sleep-disorder'd senses brought  
To this uncertain contest with his stars?

KING.

Well ask'd indeed! As wisely be it answer'd!  
/Because/ it is uncertain, see you not?  
For as I think I can discern between  
The sudden flaws of a sleep-startled man,  
And of the savage thing we have to dread;  
If but bewilder'd, dazzled, and uncouth,  
As might the sanest and the civilest  
In circumstance so strange--nay, more than that,  
If moved to any out-break short of blood,  
All shall be well with him; and how much more,  
If 'mid the magic turmoil of the change,  
He shall so calm a resolution show  
As scarce to reel beneath so great a blow!  
But if with savage passion uncontrol'd  
He lay about him like the brute foretold,  
And must as suddenly be caged again;  
Then what redoubled anguish and despair,  
From that brief flash of blissful liberty  
Remitted--and for ever--to his chain!  
Which so much less, if on the stage of glory  
Enter'd and exited through such a door  
Of sleep as makes a dream of all between.

EST.

Oh kindly answer, Sir, to question that  
To charitable courtesy less wise  
Might call for pardon rather! I shall now  
Gladly, what, uninstructed, loyally  
I should have waited.

AST.

Your Highness doubts not me,  
Nor how my heart follows my cousin's lips,  
Whatever way the doubtful balance fall,  
Still loyal to your bidding.

OMNES.

So say all.

KING.

I hoped, and did expect, of all no less--  
And sure no sovereign ever needed more  
From all who owe him love or loyalty.  
For what a strait of time I stand upon,  
When to this issue not alone I bring  
My son your Prince, but e'en myself your King:  
And, whichsoever way for him it turn,  
Of less than little honour to myself.  
For if this coming trial justify  
My thus withholding from my son his right,  
Is not the judge himself justified in  
The father's shame? And if the judge proved wrong,  
My son withholding from his right thus long,

Shame and remorse to judge and father both:  
Unless remorse and shame together drown'd  
In having what I flung for worthless found.  
But come--already weary with your travel,  
And ill refresh'd by this strange history,  
Until the hours that draw the sun from heaven  
Unite us at the customary board,  
Each to his several chamber: you to rest;  
I to contrive with old Clotaldo best  
The method of a stranger thing than old  
Time has a yet among his records told.

Exeunt.

## ACT II

SCENE I--A Throne-room in the Palace. Music within.

(Enter King and Clotaldo, meeting a Lord in waiting)

KING.  
You, for a moment beckon'd from your office,  
Tell me thus far how goes it. In due time  
The potion left him?

LORD.  
At the very hour  
To which your Highness temper'd it. Yet not  
So wholly but some lingering mist still hung  
About his dawning senses--which to clear,  
We fill'd and handed him a morning drink  
With sleep's specific antidote suffused;  
And while with princely raiment we invested  
What nature surely modell'd for a Prince--  
All but the sword--as you directed--

KING.  
Ay--

LORD.  
If not too loudly, yet emphatically  
Still with the title of a Prince address'd him.

KING.  
How bore he that?

LORD.  
With all the rest, my liege,  
I will not say so like one in a dream  
As one himself misdoubting that he dream'd.

KING.  
So far so well, Clotaldo, either way,

And best of all if tow'rd the worse I dread.  
But yet no violence?

LORD.

At most, impatience;  
Wearied perhaps with importunities  
We yet were bound to offer.

KING.

Oh, Clotaldo!  
Though thus far well, yet would myself had drunk  
The potion he revives from! such suspense  
Crowds all the pulses of life's residue  
Into the present moment; and, I think,  
Whichever way the trembling scale may turn,  
Will leave the crown of Poland for some one  
To wait no longer than the setting sun!

CLO.

Courage, my liege! The curtain is undrawn,  
And each must play his part out manfully,  
Leaving the rest to heaven.

KING.

Whose written words  
If I should misinterpret or transgress!  
But as you say--  
(To the Lord, who exit.)  
You, back to him at once;  
Clotaldo, you, when he is somewhat used  
To the new world of which they call him Prince,  
Where place and face, and all, is strange to him,  
With your known features and familiar garb  
Shall then, as chorus to the scene, accost him,  
And by such earnest of that old and too  
Familiar world, assure him of the new.  
Last in the strange procession, I myself  
Will by one full and last development  
Complete the plot for that catastrophe  
That he must put to all; God grant it be  
The crown of Poland on his brows!--Hark! hark!--  
Was that his voice within!--Now louder--Oh,  
Clotaldo, what! so soon begun to roar!--  
Again! above the music-- But betide  
What may, until the moment, we must hide.

(Exeunt King and Clotaldo.)

SEGISMUND (within).

Forbear! I stifle with your perfume! Cease  
Your crazy salutations! peace, I say  
Begone, or let me go, ere I go mad  
With all this babble, mummery, and glare,  
For I am growing dangerous--Air! room! air!--  
(He rushes in. Music ceases.)  
Oh but to save the reeling brain from wreck  
With its bewilder'd senses!  
(He covers his eyes for a while.)

What! E'en now  
That Babel left behind me, but my eyes  
Pursued by the same glamour, that--unless  
Alike bewitch'd too--the confederate sense  
Vouches for palpable: bright-shining floors  
That ring hard answer back to the stamp'd heel,  
And shoot up airy columns marble-cold,  
That, as they climb, break into golden leaf  
And capital, till they embrace aloft  
In clustering flower and fruitage over walls  
Hung with such purple curtain as the West  
Fringes with such a gold; or over-laid  
With sanguine-glowing semblances of men,  
Each in his all but living action busied,  
Or from the wall they look from, with fix'd eyes  
Pursuing me; and one most strange of all  
That, as I pass'd the crystal on the wall,  
Look'd from it--left it--and as I return,  
Returns, and looks me face to face again--  
Unless some false reflection of my brain,  
The outward semblance of myself--Myself?  
How know that tawdry shadow for myself,  
But that it moves as I move; lifts his hand  
With mine; each motion echoing so close  
The immediate suggestion of the will  
In which myself I recognize--Myself!--  
What, this fantastic Segismund the same  
Who last night, as for all his nights before,  
Lay down to sleep in wolf-skin on the ground  
In a black turret which the wolf howl'd round,  
And woke again upon a golden bed,  
Round which as clouds about a rising sun,  
In scarce less glittering caparison,  
Gather'd gay shapes that, underneath a breeze  
Of music, handed him upon their knees  
The wine of heaven in a cup of gold,  
And still in soft melodious under-song  
Hailing me Prince of Poland!--'Segismund,'  
They said, 'Our Prince! The Prince of Poland!' and  
Again, 'Oh, welcome, welcome, to his own,  
'Our own Prince Segismund--'  
Oh, but a blast--  
One blast of the rough mountain air! one look  
At the grim features--  
(He goes to the window.)  
What they disvizard also! shatter'd chaos  
Cast into stately shape and masonry,  
Between whose channel'd and perspective sides  
Compact with rooted towers, and flourishing  
To heaven with gilded pinnacle and spire,  
Flows the live current ever to and fro  
With open aspect and free step!--Clotaldo!  
Clotaldo!--calling as one scarce dares call  
For him who suddenly might break the spell  
One fears to walk without him--Why, that I,  
With unencumber'd step as any there,  
Go stumbling through my glory--feeling for  
That iron leading-string--ay, for myself--

For that fast-anchor'd self of yesterday,  
Of yesterday, and all my life before,  
Ere drifted clean from self-identity  
Upon the fluctuation of to-day's  
Mad whirling circumstance!--And, fool, why not?  
If reason, sense, and self-identity  
Obliterated from a worn-out brain,  
Art thou not maddest striving to be sane,  
And catching at that Self of yesterday  
That, like a leper's rags, best flung away!  
Or if not mad, then dreaming--dreaming?--well--  
Dreaming then--Or, if self to self be true,  
Not mock'd by that, but as poor souls have been  
By those who wrong'd them, to give wrong new relish?  
Or have those stars indeed they told me of  
As masters of my wretched life of old,  
Into some happier constellation roll'd,  
And brought my better fortune out on earth  
Clear as themselves in heaven!--Prince Segismund  
They call'd me--and at will I shook them off--  
Will they return again at my command  
Again to call me so?--Within there! You!  
Segismund calls--Prince Segismund--

(He has seated himself on the throne. Enter Chamberlain, with lords in waiting.)

CHAMB.  
I rejoice  
That unadvised of any but the voice  
Of royal instinct in the blood, your Highness  
Has ta'en the chair that you were born to fill.

SEG.  
The chair?

CHAMB.  
The royal throne of Poland, Sir,  
Which may your Royal Highness keep as long  
As he that now rules from it shall have ruled  
When heaven has call'd him to itself.

SEG.  
When he?--

CHAMB.  
Your royal father, King Basilio, Sir.

SEG.  
My royal father--King Basilio.  
You see I answer but as Echo does,  
Not knowing what she listens or repeats.  
This is my throne--this is my palace--Oh,  
But this out of the window?--

CHAMB.  
Warsaw, Sir,  
Your capital--

SEG.

And all the moving people?

CHAMB.

Your subjects and your vassals like ourselves.

SEG.

Ay, ay--my subjects--in my capital--  
Warsaw--and I am Prince of it--You see  
It needs much iteration to strike sense  
Into the human echo.

CHAMB.

Left awhile  
In the quick brain, the word will quickly to  
Full meaning blow.

SEG.

You think so?

CHAMB.

And meanwhile  
Lest our obsequiousness, which means no worse  
Than customary honour to the Prince  
We most rejoice to welcome, trouble you,  
Should we retire again? or stand apart?  
Or would your Highness have the music play  
Again, which meditation, as they say,  
So often loves to float upon?

SEG.

The music?  
No--yes--perhaps the trumpet--  
(Aside)  
Yet if that  
Brought back the troop!

A LORD.

The trumpet! There again  
How trumpet-like spoke out the blood of Poland!

CHAMB.

Before the morning is far up, your Highness  
Will have the trumpet marshalling your soldiers  
Under the Palace windows.

SEG.

Ah, my soldiers--  
My soldiers--not black-vizor'd?--

CHAMB.

Sir?

SEG.

No matter.  
But--one thing--for a moment--in your ear--  
Do you know one Clotaldo?



CHAMB.

Oh, my Lord,  
He and myself together, I may say,  
Although in different vocations,  
Have silver'd in your royal father's service;  
And, as I trust, with both of us a few  
White hairs to fall in yours.

SEG.

Well said, well said!  
Basilio, my father--well--Clotaldo  
Is he my kinsman too?

CHAMB.

Oh, my good Lord,  
A General simply in your Highness' service,  
Than whom your Highness has no trustier.

SEG.

Ay, so you said before, I think. And you  
With that white wand of yours--  
Why, now I think on't, I have read of such  
A silver-hair'd magician with a wand,  
Who in a moment, with a wave of it,  
Turn'd rags to jewels, clowns to emperors,  
By some benigner magic than the stars  
Spirited poor good people out of hand  
From all their woes; in some enchanted sleep  
Carried them off on cloud or dragon-back  
Over the mountains, over the wide Deep,  
And set them down to wake in Fairyland.

CHAMB.

Oh, my good Lord, you laugh at me--and I  
Right glad to make you laugh at such a price:  
You know me no enchanter: if I were,  
I and my wand as much as your Highness',  
As now your chamberlain--

SEG.

My chamberlain?--  
And these that follow you?--

CHAMB.

On you, my Lord,  
Your Highness' lords in waiting.

SEG.

Lords in waiting.  
Well, I have now learn'd to repeat, I think,  
If only but by rote--This is my palace,  
And this my throne--which unadvised--And that  
Out of the window there my Capital;  
And all the people moving up and down  
My subjects and my vassals like yourselves,  
My chamberlain--and lords in waiting--and  
Clotaldo--and Clotaldo?--

You are an aged, and seem a reverend man--  
You do not--though his fellow-officer--  
You do not mean to mock me?

CHAMB.  
Oh, my Lord!

SEG.  
Well then--If no magician, as you say,  
Yet setting me a riddle, that my brain,  
With all its senses whirling, cannot solve,  
Yourself or one of these with you must answer--  
How I--that only last night fell asleep  
Not knowing that the very soil of earth  
I lay down--chain'd--to sleep upon was Poland--  
Awake to find myself the Lord of it,  
With Lords, and Generals, and Chamberlains,  
And ev'n my very Gaoler, for my vassals!

Enter suddenly Clotaldo

CLOTALDO.  
Stand all aside  
That I may put into his hand the clue  
To lead him out of this amazement. Sir,  
Vouchsafe your Highness from my bended knee  
Receive my homage first.

SEG.  
Clotaldo! What,  
At last--his old self--undisguised where all  
Is masquerade--to end it!--You kneeling too!  
What! have the stars you told me long ago  
Laid that old work upon you, added this,  
That, having chain'd your prisoner so long,  
You loose his body now to slay his wits,  
Dragging him--how I know not--whither scarce  
I understand--dressing him up in all  
This frippery, with your dumb familiars  
Disvizzor'd, and their lips unlock'd to lie,  
Calling him Prince and King, and, madman-like,  
Setting a crown of straw upon his head?

CLO.  
Would but your Highness, as indeed I now  
Must call you--and upon his bended knee  
Never bent Subject more devotedly--  
However all about you, and perhaps  
You to yourself incomprehensiblest,  
But rest in the assurance of your own  
Sane waking senses, by these witnesses  
Attested, till the story of it all,  
Of which I bring a chapter, be reveal'd,  
Assured of all you see and hear as neither  
Madness nor mockery--

SEG.  
What then?

CLO.

All it seems:

This palace with its royal garniture;  
This capital of which it is the eye,  
With all its temples, marts, and arsenals;  
This realm of which this city is the head,  
With all its cities, villages, and tilth,  
Its armies, fleets, and commerce; all your own;  
And all the living souls that make them up,  
From those who now, and those who shall, salute you,  
Down to the poorest peasant of the realm,  
Your subjects--Who, though now their mighty voice  
Sleeps in the general body unapprized,  
Wait but a word from those about you now  
To hail you Prince of Poland, Segismund.

SEG.

All this is so?

CLO.

As sure as anything  
Is, or can be.

SEG.

You swear it on the faith  
You taught me--elsewhere?--

CLO (kissing the hilt of his sword).

Swear it upon this Symbol,  
and champion of the holy faith  
I wear it to defend.

SEG (to himself).

My eyes have not deceived me, nor my ears,  
With this transfiguration, nor the strain  
Of royal welcome that arose and blew,  
Breathed from no lying lips, along with it.  
For here Clotaldo comes, his own old self,  
Who, if not Lie and phantom with the rest--  
(Aloud)

Well, then, all this is thus.

For have not these fine people told me so,  
And you, Clotaldo, sworn it? And the Why  
And Wherefore are to follow by and bye!  
And yet--and yet--why wait for that which you  
Who take your oath on it can answer--and  
Indeed it presses hard upon my brain--  
What I was asking of these gentlemen  
When you came in upon us; how it is  
That I--the Segismund you know so long  
No longer than the sun that rose to-day  
Rose--and from what you know--  
Rose to be Prince of Poland?

CLO.

So to be  
Acknowledged and entreated, Sir.

SEG.

So be

Acknowledged and entreated--

Well--But if now by all, by some at least

So known--if not entreated--heretofore--

Though not by you--For, now I think again,

Of what should be your attestation worth,

You that of all my questionable subjects

Who knowing what, yet left me where I was,

You least of all, Clotaldo, till the dawn

Of this first day that told it to myself?

CLO.

Oh, let your Highness draw the line across

Fore-written sorrow, and in this new dawn

Bury that long sad night.

SEG.

Not ev'n the Dead,

Call'd to the resurrection of the blest,

Shall so directly drop all memory

Of woes and wrongs foregone!

CLO.

But not resent--

Purged by the trial of that sorrow past

For full fruition of their present bliss.

SEG.

But leaving with the Judge what, till this earth

Be cancell'd in the burning heavens, He leaves

His earthly delegates to execute,

Of retribution in reward to them

And woe to those who wrong'd them--Not as you,

Not you, Clotaldo, knowing not--And yet

Ev'n to the guiltiest wretch in all the realm,

Of any treason guilty short of that,

Stern usage--but assuredly not knowing,

Not knowing 'twas your sovereign lord, Clotaldo,

You used so sternly.

CLO.

Ay, sir; with the same

Devotion and fidelity that now

Does homage to him for my sovereign.

SEG.

Fidelity that held his Prince in chains!

CLO.

Fidelity more fast than had it loosed him--

SEG.

Ev'n from the very dawn of consciousness

Down at the bottom of the barren rocks,

Where scarce a ray of sunshine found him out,

In which the poorest beggar of my realm

At least to human-full proportion grows--  
Me! Me--whose station was the kingdom's top  
To flourish in, reaching my head to heaven,  
And with my branches overshadowing  
The meaner growth below!

CLO.  
Still with the same  
Fidelity--

SEG.  
To me!--

CLO.  
Ay, sir, to you,  
Through that divine allegiance upon which  
All Order and Authority is based;  
Which to revolt against--

SEG.  
Were to revolt  
Against the stars, belike!

CLO.  
And him who reads them;  
And by that right, and by the sovereignty  
He wears as you shall wear it after him;  
Ay, one to whom yourself--  
Yourself, ev'n more than any subject here,  
Are bound by yet another and more strong  
Allegiance--King Basilio--your Father--

SEG.  
Basilio--King--my father!--

CLO.  
Oh, my Lord,  
Let me beseech you on my bended knee,  
For your own sake--for Poland's--and for his,  
Who, looking up for counsel to the skies,  
Did what he did under authority  
To which the kings of earth themselves are subject,  
And whose behest not only he that suffers,  
But he that executes, not comprehends,  
But only He that orders it--

SEG.  
The King--  
My father!--Either I am mad already,  
Or that way driving fast--or I should know  
That fathers do not use their children so,  
Or men were loosed from all allegiance  
To fathers, kings, and heaven that order'd all.  
But, mad or not, my hour is come, and I  
Will have my reckoning--Either you lie,  
Under the skirt of sinless majesty  
Shrouding your treason; or if /that/ indeed,  
Guilty itself, take refuge in the stars

That cannot hear the charge, or disavow--  
You, whether doer or deviser, who  
Come first to hand, shall pay the penalty  
By the same hand you owe it to--  
(Seizing Clotaldo's sword and about to strike him.)

(Enter Rosaura suddenly.)

ROSAURA.  
Fie, my Lord--forbear,  
What! a young hand raised against silver hair!--

(She retreats through the crowd.)

SEG.  
Stay! stay! What come and vanish'd as before--  
I scarce remember how--but--

(Voices within. Room for Astolfo, Duke of Muscovy!)

(Enter Astolfo)

ASTOLFO.  
Welcome, thrice welcome, the auspicious day,  
When from the mountain where he darkling lay,  
The Polish sun into the firmament  
Sprung all the brighter for his late ascent,  
And in meridian glory--

SEG.  
Where is he?  
Why must I ask this twice?--

A LORD.  
The Page, my Lord?  
I wonder at his boldness--

SEG.  
But I tell you  
He came with Angel written in his face  
As now it is, when all was black as hell  
About, and none of you who now--he came,  
And Angel-like flung me a shining sword  
To cut my way through darkness; and again  
Angel-like wrests it from me in behalf  
Of one--whom I will spare for sparing him:  
But he must come and plead with that same voice  
That pray'd for me--in vain.

CHAMB.  
He is gone for,  
And shall attend your pleasure, sir. Meanwhile,  
Will not your Highness, as in courtesy,  
Return your royal cousin's greeting?

SEG.  
Whose?

CHAMB.

Astolfo, Duke of Muscovy, my Lord,  
Saluted, and with gallant compliment  
Welcomed you to your royal title.

SEG. (to Astolfo).

Oh--

You knew of this then?

AST.

Knew of what, my Lord?

SEG.

That I was Prince of Poland all the while,  
And you my subject?

AST.

Pardon me, my Lord,  
But some few hours ago myself I learn'd  
Your dignity; but, knowing it, no more  
Than when I knew it not, your subject.

SEG.

What then?

AST.

Your Highness' chamberlain ev'n now has told you;  
Astolfo, Duke of Muscovy,  
Your father's sister's son; your cousin, sir:  
And who as such, and in his own right Prince,  
Expects from you the courtesy he shows.

CHAMB.

His Highness is as yet unused to Court,  
And to the ceremonious interchange  
Of compliment, especially to those  
Who draw their blood from the same royal fountain.

SEG.

Where is the lad? I weary of all this--  
Prince, cousins, chamberlains, and compliments--  
Where are my soldiers? Blow the trumpet, and  
With one sharp blast scatter these butterflies  
And bring the men of iron to my side,  
With whom a king feels like a king indeed!

(Voices within. Within there! room for the Princess Estrella!)

(Enter Estrella with Ladies.)

ESTRELLA.

Welcome, my Lord, right welcome to the throne  
That much too long has waited for your coming:  
And, in the general voice of Poland, hear  
A kinswoman and cousin's no less sincere.

SEG.

Ay, this is welcome-worth indeed,

And cousin cousin-worth! Oh, I have thus  
Over the threshold of the mountain seen,  
Leading a bevy of fair stars, the moon  
Enter the court of heaven--My kinswoman!  
My cousin! But my subject?--

EST.

If you please  
To count your cousin for your subject, sir,  
You shall not find her a disloyal.

SEG.

Oh,  
But there are twin stars in that heavenly face,  
That now I know for having over-ruled  
Those evil ones that darken'd all my past  
And brought me forth from that captivity  
To be the slave of her who set me free.

EST.

Indeed, my Lord, these eyes have no such power  
Over the past or present: but perhaps  
They brighten at your welcome to supply  
The little that a lady's speech commends;  
And in the hope that, let whichever be  
The other's subject, we may both be friends.

SEG.

Your hand to that--But why does this warm hand  
Shoot a cold shudder through me?

EST.

In revenge  
For likening me to that cold moon, perhaps.

SEG.

Oh, but the lip whose music tells me so  
Breathes of a warmer planet, and that lip  
Shall remedy the treason of the hand!  
(He catches to embrace her.)

EST.

Release me, sir!

CHAMB.

And pardon me, my Lord.  
This lady is a Princess absolute,  
As Prince he is who just saluted you,  
And claims her by affiance.

SEG.

Hence, old fool,  
For ever thrusting that white stick of yours  
Between me and my pleasure!

AST.

This cause is mine.  
Forbear, sir--



SEG.

What, sir mouth-piece, you again?

AST.

My Lord, I waive your insult to myself  
In recognition of the dignity  
You yet are new to, and that greater still  
You look in time to wear. But for this lady--  
Whom, if my cousin now, I hope to claim  
Henceforth by yet a nearer, dearer name--

SEG.

And what care I? She is my cousin too:  
And if you be a Prince--well, am not I  
Lord of the very soil you stand upon?  
By that, and by that right beside of blood  
That like a fiery fountain hitherto  
Pent in the rock leaps toward her at her touch,  
Mine, before all the cousins in Muscovy!  
You call me Prince of Poland, and yourselves  
My subjects--traitors therefore to this hour,  
Who let me perish all my youth away  
Chain'd there among the mountains; till, forsooth,  
Terrified at your treachery foregone,  
You spirit me up here, I know not how,  
Popinjay-like invest me like yourselves,  
Choke me with scent and music that I loathe,  
And, worse than all the music and the scent,  
With false, long-winded, fulsome compliment,  
That 'Oh, you are my subjects!' and in word  
Reiterating still obedience,  
Thwart me in deed at every step I take:  
When just about to wreak a just revenge  
Upon that old arch-traitor of you all,  
Filch from my vengeance him I hate; and him  
I loved--the first and only face--till this--  
I cared to look on in your ugly court--  
And now when palpably I grasp at last  
What hitherto but shadow'd in my dreams--  
Affiances and interferences,  
The first who dares to meddle with me more--  
Princes and chamberlains and counsellors,  
Touch her who dares!--

AST.

That dare I--

SEG. (seizing him by the throat).

You dare!

CHAMB.

My Lord!--

A LORD.

His strength's a lion's--

(Voices within. The King! The King!--)

(Enter King.)

A LORD.

And on a sudden how he stands at gaze  
As might a wolf just fasten'd on his prey,  
Glaring at a suddenly encounter'd lion.

KING.

And I that hither flew with open arms  
To fold them round my son, must now return  
To press them to an empty heart again!  
(He sits on the throne.)

SEG.

That is the King?--My father?

(After a long pause.)

I have heard

That sometimes some blind instinct has been known  
To draw to mutual recognition those  
Of the same blood, beyond all memory  
Divided, or ev'n never met before.

I know not how this is--perhaps in brutes  
That live by kindlier instincts--but I know  
That looking now upon that head whose crown  
Pronounces him a sovereign king, I feel  
No setting of the current in my blood  
Tow'rd him as sire. How is't with you, old man,  
Tow'rd him they call your son?--

KING.

Alas! Alas!

SEG.

Your sorrow, then?

KING.

Beholding what I do.

SEG.

Ay, but how know this sorrow that has grown  
And moulded to this present shape of man,  
As of your own creation?

KING.

Ev'n from birth.

SEG.

But from that hour to this, near, as I think,  
Some twenty such renewals of the year  
As trace themselves upon the barren rocks,  
I never saw you, nor you me--unless,  
Unless, indeed, through one of those dark masks  
Through which a son might fail to recognize  
The best of fathers.

KING.

Be that as you will:

But, now we see each other face to face,  
Know me as you I know; which did I not,  
By whatsoever signs, assuredly  
You were not here to prove it at my risk.

SEG.

You are my father.  
And is it true then, as Clotaldo swears,  
'Twas you that from the dawning birth of one  
Yourself brought into being,--you, I say,  
Who stole his very birthright; not alone  
That secondary and peculiar right  
Of sovereignty, but even that prime  
Inheritance that all men share alike,  
And chain'd him--chain'd him!--like a wild beast's whelp.  
Among as savage mountains, to this hour?  
Answer if this be thus.

KING.

Oh, Segismund,  
In all that I have done that seems to you,  
And, without further hearing, fairly seems,  
Unnatural and cruel--'twas not I,  
But One who writes His order in the sky  
I dared not misinterpret nor neglect,  
Who knows with what reluctance--

SEG.

Oh, those stars,  
Those stars, that too far up from human blame  
To clear themselves, or careless of the charge,  
Still bear upon their shining shoulders all  
The guilt men shift upon them!

KING.

Nay, but think:  
Not only on the common score of kind,  
But that peculiar count of sovereignty--  
If not behind the beast in brain as heart,  
How should I thus deal with my innocent child,  
Doubly desired, and doubly dear when come,  
As that sweet second-self that all desire,  
And princes more than all, to root themselves  
By that succession in their people's hearts,  
Unless at that superior Will, to which  
Not kings alone, but sovereign nature bows?

SEG.

And what had those same stars to tell of me  
That should compel a father and a king  
So much against that double instinct?

KING.

That,  
Which I have brought you hither, at my peril,  
Against their written warning, to disprove,  
By justice, mercy, human kindness.

SEG.

And therefore made yourself their instrument  
To make your son the savage and the brute  
They only prophesied?--Are you not afraid,  
Lest, irrespective as such creatures are  
Of such relationship, the brute you made  
Revenge the man you marr'd--like sire, like son.  
To do by you as you by me have done?

KING.

You never had a savage heart from me;  
I may appeal to Poland.

SEG.

Then from whom?  
If pure in fountain, poison'd by yourself  
When scarce begun to flow.--To make a man  
Not, as I see, degraded from the mould  
I came from, nor compared to those about,  
And then to throw your own flesh to the dogs!--  
Why not at once, I say, if terrified  
At the prophetic omens of my birth,  
Have drown'd or stifled me, as they do whelps  
Too costly or too dangerous to keep?

KING.

That, living, you might learn to live, and rule  
Yourself and Poland.

SEG.

By the means you took  
To spoil for either?

KING.

Nay, but, Segismund!  
You know not--cannot know--happily wanting  
The sad experience on which knowledge grows,  
How the too early consciousness of power  
Spoils the best blood; nor whether for your long  
Constrain'd disinheritance (which, but for me,  
Remember, and for my relenting love  
Bursting the bond of fate, had been eternal)  
You have not now a full indemnity;  
Wearing the blossom of your youth unspent  
In the voluptuous sunshine of a court,  
That often, by too early blossoming,  
Too soon deflowers the rose of royalty.

SEG.

Ay, but what some precocious warmth may spill,  
May not an early frost as surely kill?

KING.

But, Segismund, my son, whose quick discourse  
Proves I have not extinguish'd and destroy'd  
The Man you charge me with extinguishing,  
However it condemn me for the fault  
Of keeping a good light so long eclipsed,

Reflect! This is the moment upon which  
Those stars, whose eyes, although we see them not,  
By day as well as night are on us still,  
Hang watching up in the meridian heaven  
Which way the balance turns; and if to you--  
As by your dealing God decide it may,  
To my confusion!--let me answer it  
Unto yourself alone, who shall at once  
Approve yourself to be your father's judge,  
And sovereign of Poland in his stead,  
By justice, mercy, self-sobriety,  
And all the reasonable attributes  
Without which, impotent to rule himself,  
Others one cannot, and one must not rule;  
But which if you but show the blossom of--  
All that is past we shall but look upon  
As the first out-fling of a generous nature  
Rioting in first liberty; and if  
This blossom do but promise such a flower  
As promises in turn its kindly fruit:  
Forthwith upon your brows the royal crown,  
That now weighs heavy on my aged brows,  
I will devolve; and while I pass away  
Into some cloister, with my Maker there  
To make my peace in penitence and prayer,  
Happily settle the disorder'd realm  
That now cries loudly for a lineal heir.

SEG.

And so--

When the crown falters on your shaking head,  
And slips the sceptre from your palsied hand,  
And Poland for her rightful heir cries out;  
When not only your stol'n monopoly  
Fails you of earthly power, but 'cross the grave  
The judgment-trumpet of another world  
Calls you to count for your abuse of this;  
Then, oh then, terrified by the double danger,  
You drag me from my den--  
Boast not of giving up at last the power  
You can no longer hold, and never rightly  
Held, but in fee for him you robb'd it from;  
And be assured your Savage, once let loose,  
Will not be caged again so quickly; not  
By threat or adulation to be tamed,  
Till he have had his quarrel out with those  
Who made him what he is.

KING.

Beware! Beware!

Subdue the kindled Tiger in your eye,  
Nor dream that it was sheer necessity  
Made me thus far relax the bond of fate,  
And, with far more of terror than of hope  
Threaten myself, my people, and the State.  
Know that, if old, I yet have vigour left  
To wield the sword as well as wear the crown;  
And if my more immediate issue fail,

Not wanting scions of collateral blood,  
Whose wholesome growth shall more than compensate  
For all the loss of a distorted stem.

SEG.

That will I straightway bring to trial--Oh,  
After a revelation such as this,  
The Last Day shall have little left to show  
Of righted wrong and villainy requited!  
Nay, Judgment now beginning upon earth,  
Myself, methinks, in sight of all my wrongs,  
Appointed heaven's avenging minister,  
Accuser, judge, and executioner  
Sword in hand, cite the guilty--First, as worst,  
The usurper of his son's inheritance;  
Him and his old accomplice, time and crime  
Inveterate, and unable to repay  
The golden years of life they stole away.  
What, does he yet maintain his state, and keep  
The throne he should be judged from? Down with him,  
That I may trample on the false white head  
So long has worn my crown! Where are my soldiers?  
Of all my subjects and my vassals here  
Not one to do my bidding? Hark! A trumpet!  
The trumpet--

(He pauses as the trumpet sounds as in Act I., and masked Soldiers gradually fill in behind the Throne.)

KING (rising before his throne).

Ay, indeed, the trumpet blows  
A memorable note, to summon those  
Who, if forthwith you fall not at the feet  
Of him whose head you threaten with the dust,  
Forthwith shall draw the curtain of the Past  
About you; and this momentary gleam  
Of glory that you think to hold life-fast,  
So coming, so shall vanish, as a dream.

SEG.

He prophesies; the old man prophesies;  
And, at his trumpet's summons, from the tower  
The leash-bound shadows loosen'd after me  
My rising glory reach and over-lour--  
But, reach not I my height, he shall not hold,  
But with me back to his own darkness!  
(He dashes toward the throne and is enclosed by the soldiers.)  
Traitors!  
Hold off! Unhand me!--Am not I your king?  
And you would strangle him!--  
But I am breaking with an inward Fire  
Shall scorch you off, and wrap me on the wings  
Of conflagration from a kindled pyre  
Of lying prophecies and prophet-kings  
Above the extinguish'd stars--Reach me the sword  
He flung me--Fill me such a bowl of wine  
As that you woke the day with--

KING.  
And shall close,--  
But of the vintage that Clotaldo knows.

(Exeunt.)

ACT III.

SCENE I.--The Tower, etc., as in Act I. Scene I.  
Segismund, as at first, and Clotaldo

CLOTALDO.  
Princes and princesses, and counsellors  
Fluster'd to right and left--my life made at--  
But that was nothing  
Even the white-hair'd, venerable King  
Seized on--Indeed, you made wild work of it;  
And so discover'd in your outward action,  
Flinging your arms about you in your sleep,  
Grinding your teeth--and, as I now remember,  
Woke mouthing out judgment and execution,  
On those about you.

SEG.  
Ay, I did indeed.

CLO.  
Ev'n now your eyes stare wild; your hair stands up--  
Your pulses throb and flutter, reeling still  
Under the storm of such a dream--

SEG.  
A dream!  
That seem'd as swearable reality  
As what I wake in now.

CLO.  
Ay--wondrous how  
Imagination in a sleeping brain  
Out of the uncontingent senses draws  
Sensations strong as from the real touch;  
That we not only laugh aloud, and drench  
With tears our pillow; but in the agony  
Of some imaginary conflict, fight  
And struggle--ev'n as you did; some, 'tis thought,  
Under the dreamt-of stroke of death have died.

SEG.  
And what so very strange too--In that world  
Where place as well as people all was strange,  
Ev'n I almost as strange unto myself,  
You only, you, Clotaldo--you, as much  
And palpably yourself as now you are,

Came in this very garb you ever wore,  
By such a token of the past, you said,  
To assure me of that seeming present.

CLO.  
Ay?

SEG.  
Ay; and even told me of the very stars  
You tell me here of--how in spite of them,  
I was enlarged to all that glory.

CLO.  
Ay, By the false spirits' nice contrivance thus  
A little truth oft leavens all the false,  
The better to delude us.

SEG.  
For you know  
'Tis nothing but a dream?

CLO.  
Nay, you yourself  
Know best how lately you awoke from that  
You know you went to sleep on?--  
Why, have you never dreamt the like before?

SEG.  
Never, to such reality.

CLO.  
Such dreams  
Are oftentimes the sleeping exhalations  
Of that ambition that lies smouldering  
Under the ashes of the lowest fortune;  
By which, when reason slumbers, or has lost  
The reins of sensible comparison,  
We fly at something higher than we are--  
Scarce ever dive to lower--to be kings,  
Or conquerors, crown'd with laurel or with gold,  
Nay, mounting heaven itself on eagle wings.  
Which, by the way, now that I think of it,  
May furnish us the key to this high flight  
That royal Eagle we were watching, and  
Talking of as you went to sleep last night.

SEG.  
Last night? Last night?

CLO.  
Ay, do you not remember  
Envyng his immunity of flight,  
As, rising from his throne of rock, he sail'd  
Above the mountains far into the West,  
That burn'd about him, while with poisoning wings  
He darkled in it as a burning brand  
Is seen to smoulder in the fire it feeds?



SEG.

Last night--last night--Oh, what a day was that  
Between that last night and this sad To-day!

CLO.

And yet, perhaps,  
Only some few dark moments, into which  
Imagination, once lit up within  
And unconditional of time and space,  
Can pour infinities.

SEG.

And I remember  
How the old man they call'd the King, who wore  
The crown of gold about his silver hair,  
And a mysterious girdle round his waist,  
Just when my rage was roaring at its height,  
And after which it all was dark again,  
Bid me beware lest all should be a dream.

CLO.

Ay--there another specialty of dreams,  
That once the dreamer 'gins to dream he dreams,  
His foot is on the very verge of waking.

SEG.

Would it had been upon the verge of death  
That knows no waking--  
Lifting me up to glory, to fall back,  
Stunn'd, crippled--wretcheder than ev'n before.

CLO.

Yet not so glorious, Segismund, if you  
Your visionary honour wore so ill  
As to work murder and revenge on those  
Who meant you well.

SEG.

Who meant me!--me! their Prince  
Chain'd like a felon--

CLO.

Stay, stay--Not so fast,  
You dream'd the Prince, remember.

SEG.

Then in dream  
Revenge'd it only.

CLO.

True. But as they say  
Dreams are rough copies of the waking soul  
Yet uncorrected of the higher Will,  
So that men sometimes in their dreams confess  
An unsuspected, or forgotten, self;  
One must beware to check--ay, if one may,  
Stifle ere born, such passion in ourselves  
As makes, we see, such havoc with our sleep,

And ill reacts upon the waking day.  
And, by the bye, for one test, Segismund,  
Between such swearable realities--  
Since Dreaming, Madness, Passion, are akin  
In missing each that salutary rein  
Of reason, and the guiding will of man:  
One test, I think, of waking sanity  
Shall be that conscious power of self-control,  
To curb all passion, but much most of all  
That evil and vindictive, that ill squares  
With human, and with holy canon less,  
Which bids us pardon ev'n our enemies,  
And much more those who, out of no ill will,  
Mistakenly have taken up the rod  
Which heaven, they think, has put into their hands.

SEG.

I think I soon shall have to try again--  
Sleep has not yet done with me.

CLO.

Such a sleep.  
Take my advice--'tis early yet--the sun  
Scarce up above the mountain; go within,  
And if the night deceived you, try anew  
With morning; morning dreams they say come true.

SEG.

Oh, rather pray for me a sleep so fast  
As shall obliterate dream and waking too.

(Exit into the tower.)

CLO.

So sleep; sleep fast: and sleep away those two  
Night-potions, and the waking dream between  
Which dream thou must believe; and, if to see  
Again, poor Segismund! that dream must be.--  
And yet, and yet, in these our ghostly lives,  
Half night, half day, half sleeping, half awake,  
How if our waking life, like that of sleep,  
Be all a dream in that eternal life  
To which we wake not till we sleep in death?  
How if, I say, the senses we now trust  
For date of sensible comparison,--  
Ay, ev'n the Reason's self that dates with them,  
Should be in essence or intensity  
Hereafter so transcended, and awake  
To a perceptive subtlety so keen  
As to confess themselves befooled before,  
In all that now they will avouch for most?  
One man--like this--but only so much longer  
As life is longer than a summer's day,  
Believed himself a king upon his throne,  
And play'd at hazard with his fellows' lives,  
Who cheaply dream'd away their lives to him.  
The sailor dream'd of tossing on the flood:  
The soldier of his laurels grown in blood:

The lover of the beauty that he knew  
Must yet dissolve to dusty residue:  
The merchant and the miser of his bags  
Of finger'd gold; the beggar of his rags:  
And all this stage of earth on which we seem  
Such busy actors, and the parts we play'd,  
Substantial as the shadow of a shade,  
And Dreaming but a dream within a dream!

FIFE.

Was it not said, sir,  
By some philosopher as yet unborn,  
That any chimney-sweep who for twelve hours  
Dreams himself king is happy as the king  
Who dreams himself twelve hours a chimney-sweep?

CLO.

A theme indeed for wiser heads than yours  
To moralize upon--How came you here?--

FIFE.

Not of my own will, I assure you, sir.  
No matter for myself: but I would know  
About my mistress--I mean, master--

CLO.

Oh, Now I remember--Well, your master-mistress  
Is well, and deftly on its errand speeds,  
As you shall--if you can but hold your tongue.  
Can you?

FIFE.

I'd rather be at home again.

CLO.

Where you shall be the quicker if while here  
You can keep silence.

FIFE.

I may whistle, then?  
Which by the virtue of my name I do,  
And also as a reasonable test  
Of waking sanity--

CLO.

Well, whistle then;  
And for another reason you forgot,  
That while you whistle, you can chatter not.  
Only remember--if you quit this pass--

FIFE.

(His rhymes are out, or he had call'd it spot)--

CLO.

A bullet brings you to.  
I must forthwith to court to tell the King  
The issue of this lamentable day,  
That buries all his hope in night.

(To FIFE.)  
Farewell. Remember.

FIFE.  
But a moment--but a word!  
When shall I see my mis--mas--

CLO.  
Be content:  
All in good time; and then, and not before,  
Never to miss your master any more.  
(Exit.)

FIFE.  
Such talk of dreaming--dreaming--I begin  
To doubt if I be dreaming I am Fife,  
Who with a lad who call'd herself a boy  
Because--I doubt there's some confusion here--  
He wore no petticoat, came on a time  
Riding from Muscovy on half a horse,  
Who must have dreamt she was a horse entire,  
To cant me off upon my hinder face  
Under this tower, wall-eyed and musket-tongued,  
With sentinels a-pacing up and down,  
Crying All's well when all is far from well,  
All the day long, and all the night, until  
I dream--if what is dreaming be not waking--  
Of bells a-tolling and processions rolling  
With candles, crosses, banners, San-benitos,  
Of which I wear the flamy-finingest,  
Through streets and places throng'd with fiery faces  
To some back platform--  
Oh, I shall take a fire into my hand  
With thinking of my own dear Muscovy--  
Only just over that Sierra there,  
By which we tumbled headlong into--No-land.  
Now, if without a bullet after me,  
I could but get a peep of my old home  
Perhaps of my own mule to take me there--  
All's still--perhaps the gentlemen within  
Are dreaming it is night behind their masks--  
God send 'em a good nightmare!--Now then--Hark!  
Voices--and up the rocks--and armed men  
Climbing like cats--Puss in the corner then.

(He hides.)

(Enter Soldiers cautiously up the rocks.)

CAPTAIN.  
This is the frontier pass, at any rate,  
Where Poland ends and Muscovy begins.

SOLDIER.  
We must be close upon the tower, I know,  
That half way up the mountain lies ensconced.

CAPT.

How know you that?

SOL.

He told me so--the Page  
Who put us on the scent.

SOL. 2.

And, as I think,  
Will soon be here to run it down with us.

CAPT.

Meantime, our horses on these ugly rocks  
Useless, and worse than useless with their clatter--  
Leave them behind, with one or two in charge,  
And softly, softly, softly.

SOLDIERS.

--There it is!  
--There what?  
--The tower--the fortress--  
--That the tower!--  
--That mouse-trap! We could pitch it down the rocks  
With our own hands.  
--The rocks it hangs among  
Dwarf its proportions and conceal its strength;  
Larger and stronger than you think.  
--No matter;  
No place for Poland's Prince to be shut up in.  
At it at once!

CAPT.

No--no--I tell you wait--  
Till those within give signal. For as yet  
We know not who side with us, and the fort  
Is strong in man and musket.

SOL.

Shame to wait  
For odds with such a cause at stake.

CAPT.

Because  
Of such a cause at stake we wait for odds--  
For if not won at once, for ever lost:  
For any long resistance on their part  
Would bring Basilio's force to succour them  
Ere we had rescued him we come to rescue.  
So softly, softly, softly, still--

A SOLDIER (discovering Fife).  
Hilloa!

SOLDIERS.

--Hilloa! Here's some one skulking--  
--Seize and gag him!  
--Stab him at once, say I: the only way  
To make all sure.  
--Hold, every man of you!

And down upon your knees!--Why, 'tis the Prince!  
--The Prince!--  
--Oh, I should know him anywhere,  
And anyhow disguised.  
--But the Prince is chain'd.  
--And of a loftier presence--  
--'Tis he, I tell you;  
Only bewilder'd as he was before.  
God save your Royal Highness! On our knees  
Beseech you answer us!

FIFE.  
Just as you please.  
Well--'tis this country's custom, I suppose,  
To take a poor man every now and then  
And set him ON the throne; just for the fun  
Of tumbling him again into the dirt.  
And now my turn is come. 'Tis very pretty.

SOL.  
His wits have been distemper'd with their drugs.  
But do you ask him, Captain.

CAPT.  
On my knees,  
And in the name of all who kneel with me,  
I do beseech your Highness answer to  
Your royal title.

FIFE.  
Still, just as you please.  
In my own poor opinion of myself--  
But that may all be dreaming, which it seems  
Is very much the fashion in this country  
No Polish prince at all, but a poor lad  
From Muscovy; where only help me back,  
I promise never to contest the crown  
Of Poland with whatever gentleman  
You fancy to set up.

SOLDIERS.  
--From Muscovy?  
--A spy then--  
--Of Astolfo's--  
--Spy! a spy  
--Hang him at once!

FIFE.  
No, pray don't dream of that!

SOL.  
How dared you then set yourself up for our Prince Segismund?

FIFE.  
// set up!--// like that  
When 'twas yourselves be-siegesminded me.

CAPT.

No matter--Look!--The signal from the tower.  
Prince Segismund!

SOL. (from the tower).  
Prince Segismund!

CAPT.  
All's well. Clotaldo safe secured?--

SOL. (from the tower).  
No--by ill luck,  
Instead of coming in, as we had look'd for,  
He sprang on horse at once, and off at gallop.

CAPT.  
To Court, no doubt--a blunder that--And yet  
Perchance a blunder that may work as well  
As better forethought. Having no suspicion  
So will he carry none where his not going  
Were of itself suspicious. But of those  
Within, who side with us?

SOL.  
Oh, one and all  
To the last man, persuaded or compell'd.

CAPT.  
Enough: whatever be to be retrieved  
No moment to be lost. For though Clotaldo  
Have no revolt to tell of in the tower,  
The capital will soon awake to ours,  
And the King's force come blazing after us.  
Where is the Prince?

SOL.  
Within; so fast asleep  
We woke him not ev'n striking off the chain  
We had so cursedly help bind him with,  
Not knowing what we did; but too ashamed  
Not to undo ourselves what we had done.

CAPT.  
No matter, nor by whosoever hands,  
Provided done. Come; we will bring him forth  
Out of that stony darkness here abroad,  
Where air and sunshine sooner shall disperse  
The sleepy fume which they have drugg'd him with.

(They enter the tower, and thence bring out Segismund asleep on a  
pallet, and set him in the middle of the stage.)

CAPT.  
Still, still so dead asleep, the very noise  
And motion that we make in carrying him  
Stirs not a leaf in all the living tree.

SOLDIERS.  
If living--But if by some inward blow

For ever and irrevocably fell'd  
By what strikes deeper to the root than sleep?  
--He's dead! He's dead! They've kill'd him--  
--No--he breathes--  
And the heart beats--and now he breathes again  
Deeply, as one about to shake away  
The load of sleep.

CAPT.

Come, let us all kneel round,  
And with a blast of warlike instruments,  
And acclamation of all loyal hearts,  
Rouse and restore him to his royal right,  
From which no royal wrong shall drive him more.

(They all kneel round his bed: trumpets, drums, etc.)

SOLDIERS.

--Segismund! Segismund! Prince Segismund!  
--King Segismund! Down with Basilio!  
--Down with Astolfo! Segismund our King! etc.  
--He stares upon us wildly. He cannot speak.  
--I said so--driv'n him mad.  
--Speak to him, Captain.

CAPTAIN.

Oh Royal Segismund, our Prince and King,  
Look on us--listen to us--answer us,  
Your faithful soldiery and subjects, now  
About you kneeling, but on fire to rise  
And cleave a passage through your enemies,  
Until we seat you on your lawful throne.  
For though your father, King Basilio,  
Now King of Poland, jealous of the stars  
That prophesy his setting with your rise,  
Here holds you ignominiously eclipsed,  
And would Astolfo, Duke of Muscovy,  
Mount to the throne of Poland after him;  
So will not we, your loyal soldiery  
And subjects; neither those of us now first  
Apprised of your existence and your right:  
Nor those that hitherto deluded by  
Allegiance false, their vizors now fling down,  
And craving pardon on their knees with us  
For that unconscious disloyalty,  
Offer with us the service of their blood;  
Not only we and they; but at our heels  
The heart, if not the bulk, of Poland follows  
To join their voices and their arms with ours,  
In vindicating with our lives our own  
Prince Segismund to Poland and her throne.

SOLDIERS.

--Segismund, Segismund, Prince Segismund!  
--Our own King Segismund, etc.  
(They all rise.)

SEG.



Again? So soon?--What, not yet done with me?  
The sun is little higher up, I think,  
Than when I last lay down,  
To bury in the depth of your own sea  
You that infest its shallows.

CAPT.  
Sir!

SEG.  
And now,  
Not in a palace, not in the fine clothes  
We all were in; but here, in the old place,  
And in our old accoutrement--  
Only your vizors off, and lips unlock'd  
To mock me with that idle title--

CAPT.  
Nay,  
Indeed no idle title, but your own,  
Then, now, and now for ever. For, behold,  
Ev'n as I speak, the mountain passes fill  
And bristle with the advancing soldiery  
That glitters in your rising glory, sir;  
And, at our signal, echo to our cry,  
'Segismund, King of Poland!' etc.

(Shouts, trumpets, etc.)

SEG.  
Oh, how cheap  
The muster of a countless host of shadows,  
As impotent to do with as to keep!  
All this they said before--to softer music.

CAPT.  
Soft music, sir, to what indeed were shadows,  
That, following the sunshine of a Court,  
Shall back be brought with it--if shadows still,  
Yet to substantial reckoning.

SEG.  
They shall?  
The white-hair'd and white-wanded chamberlain,  
So busy with his wand too--the old King  
That I was somewhat hard on--he had been  
Hard upon me--and the fine feather'd Prince  
Who crow'd so loud--my cousin,--and another,  
Another cousin, we will not bear hard on--  
And--But Clotaldo?

CAPT.  
Fled, my lord, but close  
Pursued; and then--

SEG.  
Then, as he fled before,  
And after he had sworn it on his knees,

Came back to take me--where I am!--No more,  
No more of this! Away with you! Begone!  
Whether but visions of ambitious night  
That morning ought to scatter, or grown out  
Of night's proportions you invade the day  
To scare me from my little wits yet left,  
Begone! I know I must be near awake,  
Knowing I dream; or, if not at my voice,  
Then vanish at the clapping of my hands,  
Or take this foolish fellow for your sport:  
Dressing me up in visionary glories,  
Which the first air of waking consciousness  
Scatters as fast as from the almander--  
That, waking one fine morning in full flower,  
One rougher insurrection of the breeze  
Of all her sudden honour disadorns  
To the last blossom, and she stands again  
The winter-naked scare-crow that she was!

CAPT.

I know not what to do, nor what to say,  
With all this dreaming; I begin to doubt  
They have driv'n him mad indeed, and he and we  
Are lost together.

A SOLDIER (to Captain).

Stay, stay; I remember--  
Hark in your ear a moment.  
(Whispers.)

CAPT.

So--so--so?--  
Oh, now indeed I do not wonder, sir,  
Your senses dazzle under practices  
Which treason, shrinking from its own device,  
Would now persuade you only was a dream;  
But waking was as absolute as this  
You wake in now, as some who saw you then,  
Prince as you were and are, can testify:  
Not only saw, but under false allegiance  
Laid hands upon--

SOLDIER 1.

I, to my shame!

SOLDIER 2.

And I!

CAPT.

Who, to wipe out that shame, have been the first  
To stir and lead us--Hark!  
(Shouts, trumpets, etc.)

A SOLDIER.

Our forces, sir,  
Challenging King Basilio's, now in sight,  
And bearing down upon us.

CAPT.

Sir, you hear;  
A little hesitation and delay,  
And all is lost--your own right, and the lives  
Of those who now maintain it at that cost;  
With you all saved and won; without, all lost.  
That former recognition of your right  
Grant but a dream, if you will have it so;  
Great things forecast themselves by shadows great:  
Or will you have it, this like that dream too,  
People, and place, and time itself, all dream  
Yet, being in't, and as the shadows come  
Quicker and thicker than you can escape,  
Adopt your visionary soldiery,  
Who, having struck a solid chain away,  
Now put an airy sword into your hand,  
And harnessing you piece-meal till you stand  
Amidst us all complete in glittering,  
If unsubstantial, steel--

ROSAURA (without).

The Prince! The Prince!

CAPT.

Who calls for him?

SOL.

The Page who spurr'd us hither,  
And now, dismounted from a foaming horse--

(Enter Rosaura)

ROSAURA.

Where is--but where I need no further ask  
Where the majestic presence, all in arms,  
Mutely proclaims and vindicates himself.

FIFE.

My darling Lady-lord--

ROS.

My own good Fife,  
Keep to my side--and silence!--Oh, my Lord,  
For the third time behold me here where first  
You saw me, by a happy misadventure  
Losing my own way here to find it out  
For you to follow with these loyal men,  
Adding the moment of my little cause  
To yours; which, so much mightier as it is,  
By a strange chance runs hand in hand with mine;  
The self-same foe who now pretends your right,  
Withholding mine--that, of itself alone,  
I know the royal blood that runs in you  
Would vindicate, regardless of your own:  
The right of injured innocence; and, more,  
Spite of this epicene attire, a woman's;  
And of a noble stock I will not name  
Till I, who brought it, have retrieved the shame.

Whom Duke Astolfo, Prince of Muscovy,  
With all the solemn vows of wedlock won,  
And would have wedded, as I do believe,  
Had not the cry of Poland for a Prince  
Call'd him from Muscovy to join the prize  
Of Poland with the fair Estrella's eyes.  
I, following him hither, as you saw,  
Was cast upon these rocks; arrested by  
Clotaldo: who, for an old debt of love  
He owes my family, with all his might  
Served, and had served me further, till my cause  
Clash'd with his duty to his sovereign,  
Which, as became a loyal subject, sir,  
(And never sovereign had a loyaller,)  
Was still his first. He carried me to Court,  
Where, for the second time, I crossed your path;  
Where, as I watch'd my opportunity,  
Suddenly broke this public passion out;  
Which, drowning private into public wrong,  
Yet swiffler sweeps it to revenge along.

SEG.

Oh God, if this be dreaming, charge it not  
To burst the channel of enclosing sleep  
And drown the waking reason! Not to dream  
Only what dreamt shall once or twice again  
Return to buzz about the sleeping brain  
Till shaken off for ever--  
But reassailing one so quick, so thick--  
The very figure and the circumstance  
Of sense-confess'd reality foregone  
In so-call'd dream so palpably repeated,  
The copy so like the original,  
We know not which is which; and dream so-call'd  
Itself inweaving so inextricably  
Into the tissue of acknowledged truth;  
The very figures that empeople it  
Returning to assert themselves no phantoms  
In something so much like meridian day,  
And in the very place that not my worst  
And veriest disenchanter shall deny  
For the too well-remember'd theatre  
Of my long tragedy--Strike up the drums!  
If this be Truth, and all of us awake,  
Indeed a famous quarrel is at stake:  
If but a Vision I will see it out,  
And, drive the Dream, I can but join the rout.

CAPT.

And in good time, sir, for a palpable  
Touchstone of truth and rightful vengeance too,  
Here is Clotaldo taken.

SOLDIERS.

In with him!  
In with the traitor!

(Clotaldo brought in.)

SEG.

Ay, Clotaldo, indeed--  
Himself--in his old habit--his old self--  
What! back again, Clotaldo, for a while  
To swear me this for truth, and afterwards  
All for a dreaming lie?

CLO.

Awake or dreaming,  
Down with that sword, and down these traitors theirs,  
Drawn in rebellion 'gainst their Sovereign.

SEG. (about to strike).

Traitor! Traitor yourself!--  
But soft--soft--soft!--  
You told me, not so very long ago,  
Awake or dreaming--I forget--my brain  
Is not so clear about it--but I know  
One test you gave me to discern between,  
Which mad and dreaming people cannot master;  
Or if the dreamer could, so best secure  
A comfortable waking--Was't not so?  
(To Rosaura).

Needs not your intercession now, you see,  
As in the dream before--  
Clotaldo, rough old nurse and tutor too  
That only traitor wert, to me if true--  
Give him his sword; set him on a fresh horse;  
Conduct him safely through my rebel force;  
And so God speed him to his sovereign's side!  
Give me your hand; and whether all awake  
Or all a-dreaming, ride, Clotaldo, ride--  
Dream-swift--for fear we dreams should overtake.

(A Battle may be supposed to take place; after which)

ACT III.

Scene I.--A wooded pass near the field of battle: drums, trumpets,  
firing, etc. Cries of 'God save Basilio! Segismund,' etc.

(Enter Fife, running.)

FIFE.

God save them both, and save them all! say !!--  
Oh--what hot work!--Whichever way one turns  
The whistling bullet at one's ears--I've drifted  
Far from my mad young--master--whom I saw  
Tossing upon the very crest of battle,  
Beside the Prince--God save her first of all!  
With all my heart I say and pray--and so  
Commend her to His keeping--bang!--bang!--bang!

And for myself--scarce worth His thinking of--  
I'll see what I can do to save myself  
Behind this rock, until the storm blows over.

(Skirmishes, shouts, firing, etc. After some time enter King Basilio,  
Astolfo, and Clotaldo)

KING.  
The day is lost!

AST.  
Do not despair--the rebels--

KING.  
Alas! the vanquish'd only are the rebels.

CLOTALDO.  
Ev'n if this battle lost us, 'tis but one  
Gain'd on their side, if you not lost in it;  
Another moment and too late: at once  
Take horse, and to the capital, my liege,  
Where in some safe and holy sanctuary  
Save Poland in your person.

AST.  
Be persuaded:  
You know your son: have tasted of his temper;  
At his first onset threatening unprovoked  
The crime predicted for his last and worst.  
How whetted now with such a taste of blood,  
And thus far conquest!

KING.  
Ay, and how he fought!  
Oh how he fought, Astolfo; ranks of men  
Falling as swathes of grass before the mower;  
I could but pause to gaze at him, although,  
Like the pale horseman of the Apocalypse,  
Each moment brought him nearer--Yet I say,  
I could but pause and gaze on him, and pray  
Poland had such a warrior for her king.

AST.  
The cry of triumph on the other side  
Gains ground upon us here--there's but a moment  
For you, my liege, to do, for me to speak,  
Who back must to the field, and what man may  
Do, to retrieve the fortune of the day.  
(Firing.)

FIFE (falling forward, shot).  
Oh, Lord, have mercy on me.

KING.  
What a shriek--  
Oh, some poor creature wounded in a cause  
Perhaps not worth the loss of one poor life!--  
So young too--and no soldier--

FIFE.

A poor lad,  
Who choosing play at hide and seek with death,  
Just hid where death just came to look for him;  
For there's no place, I think, can keep him out,  
Once he's his eye upon you. All grows dark--  
You glitter finely too--Well--we are dreaming  
But when the bullet's off--Heaven save the mark!  
So tell my mister--mastress--  
(Dies.)

KING.

Oh God! How this poor creature's ignorance  
Confounds our so-call'd wisdom! Even now  
When death has stopt his lips, the wound through which  
His soul went out, still with its bloody tongue  
Preaching how vain our struggle against fate!

(Voices within).

After them! After them! This way! This way!  
The day is ours--Down with Basilio, etc.

AST.

Fly, sir--

KING.

And slave-like flying not out-ride  
The fate which better like a King abide!

(Enter Segismund, Rosaura, Soldiers, etc.)

SEG.

Where is the King?

KING (prostrating himself).

Behold him,--by this late  
Anticipation of resistless fate,  
Thus underneath your feet his golden crown,  
And the white head that wears it, laying down,  
His fond resistance hope to expiate.

SEG.

Princes and warriors of Poland--you  
That stare on this unnatural sight aghast,  
Listen to one who, Heaven-inspired to do  
What in its secret wisdom Heaven forecast,  
By that same Heaven instructed prophet-wise  
To justify the present in the past.  
What in the sapphire volume of the skies  
Is writ by God's own finger misleads none,  
But him whose vain and misinstructed eyes,  
They mock with misinterpretation,  
Or who, mistaking what he rightly read,  
Ill commentary makes, or misapplies  
Thinking to shirk or thwart it. Which has done  
The wisdom of this venerable head;  
Who, well provided with the secret key

To that gold alphabet, himself made me,  
Himself, I say, the savage he fore-read  
Fate somehow should be charged with; nipp'd the growth  
Of better nature in constraint and sloth,  
That only bring to bear the seed of wrong  
And turn'd the stream to fury whose out-burst  
Had kept his lawful channel uncoerced,  
And fertilized the land he flow'd along.  
Then like to some unskilful duellist,  
Who having over-reached himself pushing too hard  
His foe, or but a moment off his guard--  
What odds, when Fate is one's antagonist!--  
Nay, more, this royal father, self-dismay'd  
At having Fate against himself array'd,  
Upon himself the very sword he knew  
Should wound him, down upon his bosom drew,  
That might well handled, well have wrought; or, kept  
Undrawn, have harmless in the scabbard slept.  
But Fate shall not by human force be broke,  
Nor foil'd by human feint; the Secret learn'd  
Against the scholar by that master turn'd  
Who to himself reserves the master-stroke.  
Witness whereof this venerable Age,  
Thrice crown'd as Sire, and Sovereign, and Sage,  
Down to the very dust dishonour'd by  
The very means he tempted to defy  
The irresistible. And shall not I,  
Till now the mere dumb instrument that wrought  
The battle Fate has with my father fought,  
Now the mere mouth-piece of its victory  
Oh, shall not I, the champions' sword laid down,  
Be yet more shamed to wear the teacher's gown,  
And, blushing at the part I had to play,  
Down where that honour'd head I was to lay  
By this more just submission of my own,  
The treason Fate has forced on me atone?

KING.

Oh, Segismund, in whom I see indeed,  
Out of the ashes of my self-extinction  
A better self revive; if not beneath  
Your feet, beneath your better wisdom bow'd,  
The Sovereignty of Poland I resign,  
With this its golden symbol; which if thus  
Saved with its silver head inviolate,  
Shall nevermore be subject to decline;  
But when the head that it alights on now  
Falls honour'd by the very foe that must,  
As all things mortal, lay it in the dust,  
Shall star-like shift to his successor's brow.

(Shouts, trumpets, etc. God save King Segismund!)

SEG.

For what remains--  
As for my own, so for my people's peace,  
Astolfo's and Estrella's plighted hands  
I disunite, and taking hers to mine,



His to one yet more dearly his resign.

(Shouts, etc. God save Estrella, Queen of Poland!)

SEG (to Clotaldo).

You

That with unflinching duty to your King,  
Till countermanded by the mightier Power,  
Have held your Prince a captive in the tower,  
Henceforth as strictly guard him on the throne  
No less my people's keeper than my own.  
You stare upon me all, amazed to hear  
The word of civil justice from such lips  
As never yet seem'd tuned to such discourse.  
But listen--In that same enchanted tower,  
Not long ago I learn'd it from a dream  
Expounded by this ancient prophet here;  
And which he told me, should it come again,  
How I should bear myself beneath it; not  
As then with angry passion all on fire,  
Arguing and making a distemper'd soul;  
But ev'n with justice, mercy, self-control,  
As if the dream I walk'd in were no dream,  
And conscience one day to account for it.  
A dream it was in which I thought myself,  
And you that hail'd me now then hail'd me King,  
In a brave palace that was all my own,  
Within, and all without it, mine; until,  
Drunk with excess of majesty and pride,  
Methought I tower'd so high and swell'd so wide,  
That of myself I burst the glittering bubble,  
That my ambition had about me blown,  
And all again was darkness. Such a dream  
As this in which I may be walking now;  
Dispensing solemn justice to you shadows,  
Who make believe to listen; but anon,  
With all your glittering arms and equipage,  
King, princes, captains, warriors, plume and steel,  
Ay, ev'n with all your airy theatre,  
May flit into the air you seem to rend  
With acclamation, leaving me to wake  
In the dark tower; or dreaming that I wake  
From this that waking is; or this and that  
Both waking or both dreaming; such a doubt  
Confounds and clouds our mortal life about.  
And, whether wake or dreaming, this I know,  
How dream-wise human glories come and go;  
Whose momentary tenure not to break,  
Walking as one who knows he soon may wake,  
So fairly carry the full cup, so well  
Disorder'd insolence and passion quell,  
That there be nothing after to upbraid  
Dreamer or doer in the part he play'd,  
Whether To-morrow's dawn shall break the spell,  
Or the Last Trumpet of the eternal Day,  
When Dreaming with the Night shall pass away.  
(Exeunt.)

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