

Titus Andronicus

2.1

[Enter Aaron alone]

AARON

Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top,
Safe out of fortune's shot, and sits aloft,
Secure of thunder's crack or lightning flash,
Advanced above pale envy's threat'ning reach.

As when the golden sun salutes the morn
And, having gilt the ocean with his beams,
Gallops the zodiac in his glistening coach
And overlooks the highest-peering hills,
So Tamora.

5

Upon her wit doth earthly honour wait,
And virtue stoops and trembles at her frown.
Then, Aaron, arm thy heart and fit thy thoughts
To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress,
And mount her pitch whom thou in triumph long
Hast prisoner held fettered in amorous chains,
And faster bound to Aaron's charming eyes
Than is Prometheus tied to Caucasus.

10

Away with slavish weeds and servile thoughts!
I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold
To wait upon this new-made empress.

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To wait, said I?±±to wanton with this queen,
This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph,
This siren that will charm Rome's Saturnine
And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's.
Hollo, what storm is this?

25

Enter Chiron and Demetrius, braving

DEMETRIUS

Chiron, thy years wants wit, thy wits wants edge
And manners to intrude where I am graced
And may, for aught thou knowest, affected be.

CHIRON

Demetrius, thou dost overween in all,
And so in this, to bear me down with braves.
'Tis not the difference of a year or two

30

Makes me less gracious, or thee more fortunate.
I am as able and as fit as thou
To serve, and to deserve my mistress' grace,
And that my sword upon thee shall approve, 35
And plead my passions for Lavinia's love.

AARON (*aside*)

Clubs, clubs! These lovers will not keep the peace.

DEMETRIUS

Why, boy, although our mother, unadvised,
Gave you a dancing-rapier by your side,
Are you so desperate grown to threat your friends? 40
Go to, have your lath glued within your sheath
Till you know better how to handle it.

CHIRON

Meanwhile, sir, with the little skill I have
Full well shalt thou perceive how much I dare.

DEMETRIUS

Ay, boy, grow ye so brave?
They draw

AARON

Why, how now, lords? 45

So near the Emperor's palace dare ye draw
And maintain such a quarrel openly?
Full well I wot the ground of all this grudge.
I would not for a million of gold
The cause were known to them it most concerns, 50
Nor would your noble mother for much more
Be so dishonoured in the court of Rome.
For shame, put up.

DEMETRIUS Not I, till I have sheathed

My rapier in his bosom, and withal
Thrust those reproachful speeches down his throat 55
That he hath breathed in my dishonour here.

CHIRON

For that I am prepared and full resolved,
Foul-spoken coward, that thund'rest with thy tongue,
And with thy weapon nothing dar'st perform.

AARON Away, I say. 60

Now, by the gods that warlike Goths adore,
This petty brabble will undo us all.
Why, lords, and think you not how dangerous

It is to jet upon a prince's right?
What, is Lavinia then become so loose, 65
Or Bassianus so degenerate,
That for her love such quarrels may be broached
Without controlment, justice, or revenge?
Young lords, beware; and should the Empress know
This discord's ground, the music would not please. 70

CHIRON

I care not, I, knew she and all the world,
I love Lavinia more than all the world.

DEMETRIUS

Youngling, learn thou to make some meaner choice.
Lavinia is thine elder brother's hope.

AARON

Why, are ye mad? Or know ye not in Rome 75
How furious and impatient they be,
And cannot brook competitors in love?
I tell you, lords, you do but plot your deaths
By this device.

CHIRON Aaron, a thousand deaths

Would I propose to achieve her whom I love. 80

AARON

To achieve her how?

DEMETRIUS Why makes thou it so strange?

She is a woman, therefore may be wooed;
She is a woman, therefore may be won;
She is Lavinia, therefore must be loved.
What, man, more water glideth by the mill 85
Than wots the miller of, and easy it is
Of a cut loaf to steal a shive, we know.
Though Bassianus be the Emperor's brother,
Better than he have worn Vulcan's badge.

AARON (*aside*)

Ay, and as good as Saturninus may. 90

DEMETRIUS

Then why should he despair that knows to court it
With words, fair looks, and liberality?
What, hast not thou full often struck a doe
And borne her cleanly by the keeper's nose?

AARON

Why then, it seems some certain snatch or so 95

Would serve your turns.

CHIRON Ay, so the turn were served.

DEMETRIUS

Aaron, thou hast hit it.

AARON Would you had hit it too,

Then should not we be tired with this ado.

Why, hark ye, hark ye, and are you such fools

To square for this? Would it offend you then 100

That both should speed?

CHIRON Faith, not me.

DEMETRIUS Nor me, so I were one.

AARON

For shame, be friends, and join for that you jar.

'Tis policy and stratagem must do 105

That you affect, and so must you resolve

That what you cannot as you would achieve,

You must perforce accomplish as you may.

Take this of me: Lucrece was not more chaste

Than this Lavinia, Bassianus' love. 110

A speedier course than ling'ring languishment

Must we pursue, and I have found the path.

My lords, a solemn hunting is in hand;

There will the lovely Roman ladies troop.

The forest walks are wide and spacious, 115

And many unfrequented plots there are,

Fitted by kind for rape and villainy.

Single you thither then this dainty doe,

And strike her home by force, if not by words,

This way or not at all stand you in hope. 120

Come, come; our Empress, with her sacred wit

To villainy and vengeance consecrate,

Will we acquaint with all what we intend,

And she shall file our engines with advice

That will not suffer you to square yourselves, 125

But to your wishes' height advance you both.

The Emperor's court is like the house of Fame,

The palace full of tongues, of eyes and ears,

The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull.

There speak and strike, brave boys, and take your

turns. 130

There serve your lust, shadowed from heaven's eye,
And revel in Lavinia's treasury.

CHIRON

Thy counsel, lad, smells of no cowardice.

DEMETRIUS

Sit fas aut nefas, till I find the stream
To cool this heat, a charm to calm these fits,
Per Styga, per manes vehor.
Exeunt

135